

GREAT OFFERS!

Scan to Subscribe

PAGE 6 NATION

Uddhav demands cancellation of 68 unopposed civic wins

PAGE 7 LAW & JUSTICE

CJI's new mandate on timeline hearing to be tested

PAGE 10: BUSINESS

Back to oil, the new data

PAGE 12 GLOBAL

Mamdani terms US military action in Venezuela 'act of war'

PAGE 15 SPORTS

Jay Shah hopes to host 2036 Olympics in Gujarat

PIONEER IN SHORT

INDIA EYEING 2036 OLYMPICS: PM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said India is preparing "with full strength" to host the 2036 Olympic Games, underscoring the Government's commitment to expanding opportunities for athletes by bringing major sporting events to the country. Addressing the inauguration of the 72nd Senior National Volleyball Championship via video conference, Modi highlighted the role of initiatives such as Khelo India and the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) in transforming India's sports ecosystem through talent identification, funding, infrastructure development and global exposure. He noted that India will host the 2030 Commonwealth Games and has already staged more than 20 major international events in the past decade, reflecting its growing global sporting stature. The Prime Minister said sports governance reforms, including the National Sports Governance Act and Khelo Bharat Policy 2025, aim to enhance transparency while enabling youth to balance sports and education. He also praised Varanasi's emergence as a sporting hub, hosting the national volleyball tournament with over 1,000 players from 58 teams.

Maduro to face trial in US

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Washington

Secretary of State Marco Rubio suggested Sunday that the United States would not take a day-to-day role in governing Venezuela other than enforcing an existing "oil quarantine" on the country, a turnaround after President Donald Trump announced a day earlier that the US would be running Venezuela following its ouster of leader Nicolás Maduro.

Rubio's statements on TV talk shows seemed designed to temper concerns about whether the assertive American action to achieve regime change might again produce a prolonged foreign intervention or failed attempt at nation-building. They stood in contrast to Trump's broad but vague claims that the US would at least temporarily "run" the oil-rich nation, comments that suggested some sort of governing structure under which Caracas would be controlled by Washington.

But Rubio offered a more nuanced take, saying the US would continue to enforce an oil quarantine that was already in place on sanctioned tankers before Maduro



A supporter of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro displays a sign reading in Spanish "We want our Nicolás" during a rally in Caracas, Venezuela

was removed from power early Saturday and using that leverage as a means to press policy changes in Venezuela.

"And so that's the sort of control the president is pointing to when he says that," Rubio said on CBS' "Face the Nation." "We continue with that quarantine, and we expect to see that there will be changes, not just in the way the oil industry is run for the benefit of the people, but also so that they stop the drug trafficking."

The blockade on sanctioned oil tankers - some of which have been seized by the US - "remains in place, and that's a tremendous amount of leverage that will continue to be in place until we see changes that not just further the national interest of the United States, which is number one, but also that lead to a better future for the people of Venezuela," he added. Trump's vow to "run" Venezuela, repeated more than half a dozen times at a news conference in Florida on Saturday, sparked concerns among some Democrats.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

India concerned over events in Venezuela

ASHOKE RAJ
■ New Delhi

India on Sunday expressed "deep concern" over rapidly unfolding developments in Venezuela following the dramatic capture of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, in a US military operation, and said it is closely monitoring the situation, according to an official statement issued on January 4, 2026.

"Recent developments in Venezuela are a matter of deep concern. We are closely monitoring the evolving situation," India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said, urging all parties to pursue dialogue and diplomacy to ensure peace and stability in the region.

The statement came hours after Maduro arrived in Caracas early Saturday. Maduro and Flores were flown to New York to face drug trafficking-related charges, accusations the Venezuelan leader has long denied. Speaking at a news conference, Trump said the US would effectively administer Venezuela until a political transition is completed.

CONTINUED ON >> P4
GLOBAL REACTIONS ON >> P12

BCB UNWILLING TO TRAVEL TO INDIA FOR T20 WC

KUSHAN SARKAR
■ New Delhi

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Sunday decided against sending its national team to India for the T20 World Cup next month citing security concerns and Government advice, following IPL franchise KKR's decision to release pacer Mustafizur Rahman on BCCI's instruction.

Although the BCCI did not explicitly cite reasons for its decision to seek Rahman's release, it did say that the move was triggered by what's been happening all around.

Rahman's ouster from the IPL prompted the BCB to call an emergency meeting on Saturday night and a day later, it decided that the national team will not travel to India for the T20 World Cup beginning February 7.

FULL REPORT ON >> P16

The Bystander

MAMATA TARGETS ECI OVER SIR

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has strongly criticised the Election Commission of India (ECI), urging Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar to immediately halt the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in the state. In a sharply worded letter dated December 3, Banerjee termed the exercise "arbitrary, flawed and compromised," warning that its continuation could lead to mass disenfranchisement and undermine democratic foundations. She alleged the process was being conducted with undue haste, without proper planning, training or clear objectives, despite her earlier letters raising similar concerns. The CM accused the ECI of procedural violations, inconsistent and informal instructions across states.

MAN DIES BY SUICIDE AT LE MERIDIEN

ABHINAV KUMAR JHA
■ New Delhi

A 50-year-old man died after jumping from the upper floors of a five-star hotel in central Delhi's Connaught Place area on Sunday afternoon. The incident took place at Le Meridien Hotel. The man, identified as Parvinder Singh Juneja, a resident of southeast Delhi's Lajpat Nagar, allegedly jumped from the 12th floor of the building. Police said the man died on the spot due to the impact of the fall.

Police received information about the incident at around 12.30 pm, following which teams from the local police station rushed to the hotel. The area around the hotel was immediately cordoned off to ensure public safety and to facilitate the investigation, officials said.

According to preliminary findings, Juneja entered the hotel on Sunday afternoon and took an elevator to the 12th floor, where a restaurant is located. Shortly thereafter, he jumped from the building. Police clarified that the man was not staying at the hotel at the time of the incident. Investigators said Juneja had previously stayed at the hotel during the Christmas period and had checked out earlier.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Shivraj Chouhan attacks Congress over MNREGA protests

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Terming the Congress' over its proposed "MNREGA Bachao Sangram" from January 10, the Centre on Sunday slammed the Opposition for attempting to shield corruption rather than protect rural workers. Defending VB G RAM G law, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Chouhan said corruption was rampant under the MGNREGA and accused the Congress of spreading misinformation on the VB-

THE CONGRESS IS A FACTORY OF LIES. IT IS NOW SAYING THAT WORKERS WILL NOT GET WORK. THE CONGRESS HAS ANNOUNCED A MGNREGA BACHAO SANGRAM. IT IS ACTUALLY A SAVE CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN

UNION AGRICULTURE MINISTER, SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN

ed worker rolls to elderly individuals being falsely shown as labourers.

"MGNREGA has become synonymous with corruption. Under social audits done by gram sabhas, there were more than 10,51,000 complaints. The same work was repeated, work was done by machines, money was siphoned off in the name of cleaning canals, roads, 30 per cent workers were above the age of 60," Chouhan said. "An amount of more than ₹8,48,000 crore has been given under the (Narendra) Modi Government, while over ₹2 lakh crore were given during the (Congress-led) UPA (regime). Were permanent assets created? Could the money be used for development?" he asked.

To counter the Congress' proposed "Save MGNREGA" movement scheduled to begin on January 5, the BJP brass is set to launch a nationwide outreach campaign including door to door campaign in support of the G-RAM-G scheme.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

NDA will form TN Govt, says Shah

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Pudukkottai

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday launched a scathing attack against the DMK regime in Tamil Nadu, calling it the most corrupt in the country where a "20 per cent cut money" norm prevailed. He expressed confidence that the NDA would emerge victorious in the Assembly polls due this year in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Addressing a mega rally here to mark the culmination of a padayatra undertaken by the party's state president Nainar Nagenthran, Shah listed out BJP-NDA's wins since 2024 including a third consecutive victory in Haryana and the wins in Delhi and Bihar, and said it was now the turn of Tamil Nadu and West Bengal to join the list.

By way of a robust alliance of AIADMK, BJP and others, the NDA will emerge victorious, he said, alleging that the DMK government has failed on all fronts.

The BJP's grand public meeting here marked the culmination Nagenthran's state-

Anger mounts in Ankita murder case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Dehradun

Members of Opposition parties and various organisations rallied on Sunday to the Chief Minister's residence demanding the disclosure of the name of the "VIP" allegedly involved in the Ankita Bhandari murder case and an investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the case. A large number of people participated in the protest which began at the Parade Ground and continued to Hathibadkala, where the protesters were stopped by the police from marching further towards the CM residence.

A day ago on Saturday, the



Scene from a protest march demanding a CBI probe into the Ankita Bhandari murder case, in Dehradun

Uttarakhand police had stated that a businessman Dharmendra Kumar alias Pradhan from Noida spent about three hours in the Vanantara resort, where Bhandari worked, on September 16, 2022 and left soon after. This man is being misconstrued as the 'VIP' involved in the Ankita Bhandari murder case, the police had said.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

THACKERAY COUSINS UNVEIL BMC PROMISES

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) president Raj Thackeray on Sunday unveiled their joint manifesto for the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections, marking Raj Thackeray's first visit to Shiv Sena Bhavan in 20 years. The manifesto focuses strongly on welfare, infrastructure and women-centric schemes. Targeting women voters, the alliance promised a monthly allowance of Rs 1,500 for house helps and women from the Koli community under the 'Swabhiman Nidhi' scheme, along with free electricity up to 100 units for households. Key pledges include affordable housing with a dedicated BMC housing authority, waiver of property tax for homes up to 700 sq ft, cheaper public transport, and expanded health and education facilities.

Moo-t court: A buffalo dispute ends with a dental exam in Rajasthan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kota

Authorities in Kota found themselves in a unique situation when two men laid claim to the same buffalo and her calf, and the situation was resolved only after a medical board was constituted and the animals were taken to a veterinary hospital for examination.

According to police, Ram Lal, a resident of Narayan Vihar, reported that his buffalo and calf had gone missing about a month ago. He had been searching for them continuously until two days ago, when he spotted the animals tied in the enclosure of one Indrajit Kewat at the Ramchandrapura Margiya Basti in the same area. Lal immediately approached Kewat and claimed that the bovines belonged to him.

However, Indrajit denied the claim, stating that he had purchased the buffalo from Badi village two years ago and that the animal was around 7-years-old.

The disagreement escalated, following which both parties reached Kunhadi police station on Saturday.

"In preliminary inquiry, both sides produced arguments and attempted to establish



ownership. Ram Lal asserted that the buffalo was about four to five years old and had given birth recently, while Indrajit insisted the animal was around 7-year-old.

"Since the dispute could not be resolved through mutual understanding, police decided to seek a veterinary expert opinion," Circle Inspector Koshalya, Kunhadi police station, said on Sunday.

A veterinary medical board was constituted, and the buffalo was taken to a Government veterinary hospital in Kota's Mokhapada area for examination.

After examining the teeth and physical condition of the animal, the veterinary doctors concluded that the buffalo was approximately four to five years old, and not seven years as claimed by Indrajit, she said.

Based on the medical report and supporting evidence, police confirmed Lal's claim and handed over the buffalo and calf to him on Saturday late evening, she further said.

The other claimant, Indrajit, however, was not satisfied with the decision, upon which he was asked to produce evidence, but he failed, and the buffalo was finally handed over to Ram Lal, the CI said.

Government to declare human rabies as notifiable disease

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Delhi Government is all set to declare human rabies as a notifiable disease in the national Capital under the Epidemic Diseases Act in an effort to strengthen surveillance and ensure timely treatment.

"This is an important step toward our goal of zero human deaths from rabies in Delhi," said Delhi Health Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh. On notification, all Government and private health facilities, including medical colleges and individual practitioners, will be required to report suspected, probable, and confirmed cases of human rabies to the concerned health authorities, said an official statement.

The move aims to strengthen disease surveillance, ensure timely reporting of cases, and enable swift public health action to prevent the spread of rabies, it said, adding the government is also further strengthening rabies vaccination facilities for humans as well as dogs and other animals.



The Delhi Government is in the process of finalising the State Action Plan for Rabies Elimination (SAPRE) in coordination with local bodies, the Animal Husbandry Department and other stakeholders. The move comes amid a row over the Supreme Court's order on handling stray dogs after it took cognisance of reports on stray dog attacks on people and rabies-related deaths.

The apex court in November directed the removal of all stray dogs from railway stations, schools, hospitals, bus stops and other public areas, and their relocation to "designated shelters"

after due sterilisation and vaccination in accordance with the Animal Birth Control Rules.

However, dog lovers, experts and activists are opposing it, saying the "unscientific" approach will weaken rabies-control efforts, destabilise urban ecosystems and disproportionately affect low-income and underserved communities.

"Declaring rabies as a notifiable disease is a key step toward achieving the goal of zero human deaths due to dog-mediated rabies. The Government is also further strengthening rabies vaccination facilities for humans as

well as dogs and other animals," the official statement said.

To ensure accessible treatment across the city, anti-rabies vaccine (ARV) is currently being provided at 59 health facilities across all 11 districts of Delhi, while anti-rabies serum (RIG) is available at 33 designated health facilities and hospitals in the national Capital.

Mandatory notification will help authorities track disease trends, improve coordination between human and animal health systems, and implement targeted preventive measures in high-risk areas.

"Rabies is a preventable disease, and no death due to rabies is acceptable. Declaring human rabies as a notifiable disease will strengthen surveillance, improve early detection, and ensure timely treatment," Singh said.

The proposed notification will come into force immediately after issuance and will remain applicable until further orders. Detailed guidelines for reporting and coordination will be shared with all concerned departments and health institutions.

Activists protest over SC's order on street dogs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Dog lovers, experts and activists gathered for a demonstration at the Jantar Mantar over the Supreme Court's recent order to remove street dogs from public spaces, demanding an evidence-based, lawful and humane policy on stray dogs.

Ahead of the apex court's next hearing on the matter on January 7, the protesters, gathered under the banner 'Do or Die', called for an immediate stay on the mass removal and confinement orders of community dogs.

The demonstrators held placards saying "Pollution hatao, pashu nahi," "jeev nahi toh jeevan nahi," and "Stop the massacre, every life matters".

Simultaneously, demonstrations took place in over 50 cities across the country, including in Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Hyderabad and Trivandrum, the statement read.

On November 7, 2025, the Supreme Court ordered to remove all stray dogs from railway stations, schools, hospitals, bus stops and other public areas and relocate them to a "designated shelter" after due sterilisa-



Animal rights activists and dog lovers hold placards during a protest against Supreme Court order on stray dog relocation at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi

tion and vaccination in accordance with the Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules.

The protesters, in a statement, asserted that public-health experts, veterinarians and scientists have expressed concern over the unscientific approach to mass removal and confinement of stray dogs. These actions will weaken rabies-control efforts, destabilise urban ecosystems, and disproportionately affect low-income and underserved communities, they said. The mobilisation follows weeks of misinformation and alarmist media reporting that influenced public narrative and policy response

before verified facts were examined, the statement read.

"A media report that led to the current suo motu proceedings incorrectly attributed a child's tragic death to rabies, a claim later contradicted by official records. Despite the correction, the initial misinformation became the emotional and political foundation for sweeping directions affecting millions of animals and people," it read.

According to experts, Animal Birth Control with Anti-Rabies Vaccination (ABC-ARV/CNVR) has never been implemented at the scale required for epidemiological

impact in most states.

Affidavits submitted by state governments show coverage levels far below global benchmarks. Characterising this as "failure of ABC" is therefore misleading; what has failed is implementation, not the policy or the science behind it, the experts said in the statement. The demonstration at Jantar Mantar in Delhi saw a broad spectrum of key speakers from public health, animal welfare and civil society, including Ambika Shukla, Gauri Maulekhi, Manavi Rai, Gauri Puri, Yogita Bhayana and Maha Singh Sharma.

Local feeders, RWA presidents and animal lovers turned out in numbers, while musicians Mohit Chauhan and Rahul Ram performed in solidarity.

"It is not a protest against public safety, but a call to protect it through science, accountability and compassion," a protester said.

The protesters called for an immediate halt to the mass removal and confinement of community dogs and "meaningful hearings before the Supreme Court with veterinarians, epidemiologists, public-health experts, ecologists and animal-behaviour scientists."

Faridabad gangrape: Haryana women commission takes cognisance

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Faridabad

The Haryana State Commission for Women on Sunday has taken cognisance of the gang rape of a 25-year-old woman in Faridabad, officials said.

The commission chairperson, Renu Bhatia, asked the Faridabad police commissioner, Satender Kumar Gupta, about a detailed report on the incident and action taken till now by the police, they said.

"I have spoken to the victim's family, and we will provide all necessary assistance to her," Bhatia said. Meanwhile, Dr Amit Yadav,



who is treating the victim at his private hospital, said that the victim's condition is stable.

"A surgery of her face was carried out on Saturday to fix the deep wounds sustained

on her face. After the consent of the woman, the surgery of her fractured right shoulder will be carried out," Dr Yadav added. According to the police details, the woman

went to her friend's house in Sector 23, Faridabad, on Monday evening. While returning home, she took an auto-rickshaw to the NIT 2 Chowk and then walked to the Metro Chowk.

As she stood there around midnight to take an auto to get to her home, the two accused, the driver of a private hospital's ambulance, allegedly offered the woman a lift, they said. However, instead of taking the 25-year-old to her destination, they allegedly drove towards Gurugram and allegedly raped her inside the moving vehicle, they added.

She was driven around through the night and

thrown out of the vehicle near Raja Chowk in Faridabad around 3 am on Tuesday. The survivor was later admitted to a private hospital, police said.

The two accused, one from Mathura and the other from Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh, have since been arrested and sent to judicial custody. Six days after the incident, the woman remains hospitalised.

Once the woman gets better, an identification parade of the accused will be held before a magistrate. They will then take on a production warrant from the jail for further questioning, the officer added.

Elderly couple found dead

ABHINAV KUMAR JHA ■ New Delhi

An elderly couple was found dead inside their residence in East Delhi's Shahdara in the early hours of Saturday. The incident prompted police to launch a murder investigation amid suspicions of foul play and a possible robbery attempt.

The bodies of Virendra Kumar Bansal (75), a retired teacher, and his wife, Parvash Bansal (65), were discovered on the third floor of their house. Their son had alerted the police shortly after midnight. The couple were found lying unconscious in separate rooms, police said. According to officials, a PCR call was received around 12.30 am from the couple's son. He told the control room that his parents were not responding and appeared to be dead. A police team rushed to the spot and found both victims lifeless.

Preliminary examination raised serious concerns. Police noticed visible injuries on Virendra Bansal's face, strengthening suspicion that the deaths may not have been natural. "Injuries on the body, especially on the face of the male victim, indicate possible violence," a senior police officer said.

A crime team and forensic science laboratory (FSL) experts were immediately called to the scene. The entire



third floor of the house was cordoned off. Investigators carried out a detailed inspection. The rooms where the bodies were found were photographed. Physical evidence was collected to help reconstruct the sequence of events.

Police said the exact cause of death would be known only after post-mortem examinations, which have been scheduled. The bodies were later shifted to a Government mortuary for autopsy. Investigators are probing the case from multiple angles, including murder and robbery.

Officials said the possibility of theft cannot be ruled out at this stage, although it remains unclear whether any valuables were missing from the house. The layout of the residence and access points are being closely examined. "The circumstances are suspicious. We are investigating whether the couple was attacked by someone known to them or by outsiders," the officer said, adding that no conclusion has been drawn yet.

Police teams have begun questioning family members, including the son who made the emergency call, as well as neighbours and domestic help, to piece together the couple's recent movements and interactions. Officers are also trying to establish when the couple was last seen alive.

CCTV footage from the surrounding area is being scanned to track any unusual movement near the house before or after the suspected time of death. Call detail records of the victims and their close contacts are also being analysed to identify any potential leads.

Local residents told police that the Bansals were a quiet couple and had lived in the area for several years. Virendra Bansal had retired from teaching some years ago, and the couple largely kept to themselves, neighbours said.

Police said they are also examining whether the house showed signs of forced entry or struggle. Forensic teams are checking for fingerprints, footprints, and other trace evidence that could point to the involvement of an outsider.

Senior officers visited the spot to supervise the investigation. A case is likely to be registered once preliminary findings are assessed and the post-mortem reports are received, police said.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER PHE (WATER), ASSAM
CUM
ADDITIONAL MISSION DIRECTOR, JAL JEEVAN MISSION, ASSAM
HENGRABARI, GUWAHATI - 781036
SHORT e-PROCUREMENT RE-INVITATION NOTICE / REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP) No. 17 of 2025-26
e-Tenders are re-invited from eligible agencies for "EMANELMENT OF AGENCIES FOR MAINTENANCE SERVICES OF IT PERIPHERALS AND THIRD-PARTY SOFTWARE SERVICES FOR MISSION DIRECTORATE, JAL JEEVAN MISSION, ASSAM". An amount of Rs 75,000.00 (Rupees Seventy Five Thousand only) is to be submitted as Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) / Bid Security. The tender documents can be downloaded from www.assamtenders.gov.in from 01.01.2026 (10:00 hours).
a) A pre-bid meeting is scheduled on 07.01.2026 at 16:00 hours. Address for the meeting is O/o the Chief Engineer (PHE) Water Assam, Hengrabari, Guwahati-36.
b) The last date of submission of tender document is 19.01.2026 at 16:00 hrs.
c) The bid will be opened online on the e-procurement portal on 20.01.2026 at 15:00 hrs.
The tender inviting authority reserves the right to accept or reject any bid/tender, and to cancel/annul the bidding process and reject all bids at any time prior to contract award.
Chief Engineer (PHE), Water, Assam, Cum
Addl. Mission Director, JJM Assam
Hengrabari, Guwahati - 36.
DIPRC/PIO/735/4-Jan-26

Public Notice
This is to inform general public that Mrs. Sunita Gautam has acquired a portion of unit No. 1, FF, Property No. 82/A/2, area measuring 67.50 Sq. Yds., Kharsa no. 116/2 Min. situated in ward No. 8, abadi of old dora village Mehrauli, Delhi 110050 by way of Sale Deed dated 16.12.2022 registered as Document No. 11084.
Documents related to the above said property has been misplaced in the Original Sale Deed dated 10.11.2017, Document No. 6744. If anyone who find the above said documents shall handover the same to the Manager of Shubham Housing Development Finance Co. Ltd.
Now, Mrs. Sunita Gautam intends to sell above said property to Mrs. Tarannum Khan who Mr. Fazal Khan and availing a loan on above said property from Shubham Housing Development Finance Co. Ltd. in case anyone has any objection, the same may be raised within 7 days of this publication to Mr. Ajit Sharma (Advocate), Partner of Acculaw Source LLP, Unit No. S-2/4, 2nd Floor, built on Plot no. 4 and 5, Arsal Utility Commercial Center, Paschim Vihar, New Delhi-110063 or contact +91 9560309909(M)

PUBLIC NOTICE
Share certificate No. 5311884 with Distinctive Numbers 1326516291 to 1326517190. With respect to Folio No. HL3019582 for Hindustan Unilever Limited, Registered in the name of Late Sh. Om Prakash Khanna jointly with Ms. Aparna Khanna is reported to be lost and the company has received an application for the issue of duplicate share certificates. If no objection from any interested person is received by the company/registrar KFin Technologies Limited, Selemion Tower B, Plot 31-32, District, Financial District, Nanakramguda, Serilingampally, Hyderabad - 500032 within 15 days from the publication hereof the company will proceed to issue duplicate share certificates to the applicant.

PUBLIC NOTICE
This is to inform general public that Mr. Rakesh Sharma has acquired Built-up Property Bearing Plot No. R2-A/3, Plot No. 3, adjoining Plot No. 4, area measuring 22.54 Yards, out of total land area 50.50 Yards, out of Kharsa No. 571, Situated at Gali 30 Feet Village Bindapur, colony known as Pratap Garden, Bindapur, New Delhi-110059 by way of Notarized GPA dated 12.07.2024, AT5 & WLL.
Now, Mr. Rakesh Sharma intends to sell above said property to Mr. Dilip Kumar and availing a loan on above said property from Shubham Housing Development Finance Company Ltd. in case anyone has any objection, the same may be raised within 7 days of this publication to Mr. Ajit Sharma (Advocate), Partner of Acculaw Source LLP, Unit No. S-2/4, 2nd Floor, built on Plot no. 4 and 5, Arsal Utility Commercial Center, Paschim Vihar, New Delhi-110063 or contact +91 9560309909(M)

AFFORDABLE GROUP HOUSING
Sriflex City
SECTOR 4, SOHNA, GURUGRAM
PUBLIC NOTICE
HRERA Reg. No.: 41 of 2024 dated 15/04/2024 | Licence No.: 133 of 2023 dated 26/06/2023
Building Plans Approved via Memo No.: ZP-1852/D/RAI/2024/10267 dated 19/03/2024
Sriflex Projects Private Limited hereby informs the undermentioned allottees of Sriflex City to deposit their outstanding dues in full within 15 (fifteen) days from the date of publication of this notice.
In case of failure to comply within the stipulated period, the respective allotment shall be liable to cancellation in accordance with the Affordable Housing Policy, 2013 of the Government of Haryana, without any further notice or intimation.

Sr. No.	App. No.	Unit No.	Customer Name	Sr. No.	App. No.	Unit No.	Customer Name
1	143958	T3-608	Mr. Gaurav	4	144384	T4-210	Mr. Ravindra Singh
2	144944	T2-1064	Mrs. Himani Srivastava	5	143857	T4-1102	Ms. Kanika Sharma
3	144625	T3-904	Mr. Bipinder Sharma				

Disclaimer: In case any of the above-mentioned applicants have already cleared their outstanding dues and their names are still reflected herein, kindly ignore this notice.
Sriflex Projects Private Limited
Corporate Address: TF-03, Third Floor, Ninea City Mart, Sector 49, Gurugram, Haryana-122018
Tel: +91-97178-32424 | Email: info@sriflex.com | Web: www.sriflex.com

CHANGE OF NAME
I, Minal Goyal D/O Deepak Goel, Minal Goel R/O D-39, Rana Paritap Road, Adarsh Nagar, N.S. Mandi, North West Delhi-110033, have changed my name to Minal Goel for all purposes.
PD(37)C

PUBLIC NOTICE
It is for general information that, I Amit Kumar S/o Purshotam Dass R/o H-1403, 13th floor, Tower H, Prateek Wisteria, Sector-77, Noida, Gautam Buddha Nagar, U.P. 201301, declare that my name and my wife's name has been wrongly written as Amit Kumar Singhla and Jyoti Singhla in my minor son namely Rudra Singla aged 15 years in his Birth Certificate No.GHANN2010-002817. My actual name and my Wife's names are Amit Kumar and Jyoti respectively, which may be amended accordingly.
PUBLIC NOTICE
Share certificate nos. 5311883, with Distinctive Numbers 1326515391 to 1326516290. With respect to Folio No. HL3019581 for Hindustan Unilever Limited, Registered in the name of Late Sh. Om Prakash Khanna jointly with Dr. Meenaxi Khanna is reported to be lost and the company has received an application for the issue of duplicate share certificates. If no objection from any interested person is received by the company/registrar KFin Technologies Limited, Selemion Tower B, Plot 31-32, District, Financial District, Nanakramguda, Serilingampally, Hyderabad - 500032 within 15 days from the publication hereof the company will proceed to issue duplicate share certificates to the applicant.
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CHANGE OF NAME
I, Hari Kishan, S/o Sh. Surender Kumar, R/o House No. 338/A, Gali No. 10, Near Vivekanand School, Sector-7 Extn., Gurugram, Haryana-122001, hereby declare that the name of my son has been corrected from "Vedit" to "Vedit Dang". Both names refer to one and the same person.
PD(36)C

AXIS BANK Branch Office - Axis Bank Limited, SBB Loan Center SCO-221, 2nd Floor, Paramjeet Tower, Sector-12, Kamal-132001 Corporate Office: 3rd Floor, Block-B, Bombay Dyeing Mills Compound, Pandurang Budhakar Marg, Worli, Mumbai-400 025 Registered Office: Trishul, 3rd floor, Opposite Samartheswar Temple, Law Garden, Ellisbridge, Ahmedabad-380005
Demand Notice u/s 13(2) of Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002
Whereas the borrowers/co-borrowers/guarantors/mortgagors mentioned hereunder had availed the financial assistance from Axis Bank Ltd. We state that despite having availed the financial assistance, the borrowers/guarantors/mortgagors have committed various defaults in repayment of interest and principal amounts as per due dates. The account has been classified as Non-Performing Asset on the respective dates mentioned hereunder in accordance with the directives/guidelines issued by Reserve Bank of India, consequent to the Authorized Officer of Axis Bank Ltd. under Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 & in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(2) read with Rule 3 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued Demand Notices on respective dates mentioned hereunder in accordance with the directives/guidelines issued by Reserve Bank of India, consequent to the Authorized Officer of Axis Bank Ltd. under Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 & in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(2) read with Rule 3 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 calling upon the following borrowers/guarantors/mortgagors to repay the amount mentioned in the notices together with further interest at the contractual rate on the amount mentioned in the notices and incidental expenses, cost, charges etc. until the date of payment within 60 days from the date of receipt of the notices. The notices issued to them on their last known addresses have returned un-served and as such they are hereby informed by way of public notice about the same.

Name of Co-borrower and Guarantor Name / Address	NPA Date / Date of Demand Notice / Outstanding Amount / Loan Amount
1. Mr. Mohd Taqmeel S/o Mr. Abdul Mateen R/o #524, Life Care Polyclinic, Mata Ji Mandir, Shivaji Nagar, Jaipur-302016 Rajasthan Mr. Abdul Mateen S/o Mr. Mohd Ishaque R/o Rehpa, Near Choti Wali Masjid, Pignwan, Punhania, Nuh, Meerk-122502 Haryana Property Address of Secured Assets: All Piece & Parcels of Non-Agri Property Measuring 10 Marla, 1/4 Share out of land 0 Kanal 18 marla comprised in Khewal/Khata no- 102/106, Kharsa no- 145(0-18), e 4 marla 5 Sarsai And 1/4 Share pot of land 1 Kanal 0 Marla Comprised in Khewal/Khata No- 164/171, Kharsa no- 144(1-0) i.e. 0 Kanal 5 Marla And 1/4 Share out of land 0 Kanal 2 Marla Comprised in Khewal/Khata No- 303/319, Must. No- 38, Killa no- 411(0-2) i.e. 0 Kanal 0 Marla 5 Sarsai i.e. Total land 0 Kanal 0 Marla, Situated At -Vijay, Rehpa, Tehsil- Punhania, Distt- Nuh Haryana Owned By Mr. Mohd Taqmeel Vide Transfer Deed No. 2135 Dated 09-SEP-2022. Boundaries: East: Part of Borrower's house & Property of Jalajuddin West: H/o Abdul Jalien North: Road South: Own's Property	01/11/2025 19/11/2025 Rs. 65,78,779.41/- Lakhs Sixty Five Eight Thousand Seven Hundred Seventy Nine And Forty One Paise Only Rs. 58,80,000/- (Rupees Fifty Eight Lakhs Eighty Thousand Only)

In the circumstances as aforesaid, the notice is hereby given to the above borrowers, co-borrowers and/or their guarantors (where ever applicable) to pay the outstanding dues as mentioned above along with future interest and applicable charges within 60 days from the date of the publication of this notice failing which further steps will be taken after the expiry of 60 days of the date of this notice against the secured assets including taking possession of the secured assets of the borrowers and the mortgagors under Section 13(4) of Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and the applicable rules thereunder. Please note that under Section 13 (13) of the said Act, no Borrower shall, transfer by way of sale, lease or otherwise any of his secured assets referred to in the notice, without prior written consent of the secured creditor.
Place: Karnal Date: 05/01/2026 -SDI- Authorized Officer, Axis Bank Ltd.

AXIS BANK Branch Office - Axis Bank Limited, SBB LOAN CENTER SCO-221, 2nd Floor, Paramjeet Tower, Sector-12, Kamal-132001 Corporate Office: 3rd Floor, Block-B, Bombay Dyeing Mills Compound, Pandurang Budhakar Marg, Worli, Mumbai-400 025 Registered Office: Trishul, 3rd floor, opposite Samartheswar Temple, Law Garden, Ellisbridge, Ahmedabad-380005
Demand Notice u/s 13(2) of Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002
Whereas the borrowers/co-borrowers/guarantors/mortgagors mentioned hereunder had availed the financial assistance from Axis Bank Ltd. We state that despite having availed the financial assistance, the borrowers/guarantors/mortgagors have committed various defaults in repayment of interest and principal amounts as per due dates. The account has been classified as Non-Performing Asset on the respective dates mentioned hereunder in accordance with the directives/guidelines issued by Reserve Bank of India, consequent to the Authorized Officer of Axis Bank Ltd. under Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 & in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(2) read with Rule 3 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 calling upon the following borrowers/guarantors/mortgagors to repay the amount mentioned in the notices together with further interest at the contractual rate on the amount mentioned in the notices and incidental expenses, cost, charges etc. until the date of payment within 60 days from the date of receipt of the notices. The notices issued to them on their last known addresses have returned un-served and as such they are hereby informed by way of public notice about the same.

Name of the Borrower / Address	NPA Date / Date of Demand Notice / Outstanding Amount / Loan Amount
NAME OF THE BORROWER / ADDRESS : M/s Mohan Logistics Through Its Prop. Mr. Avnish Singh Bhadorya Co Mr. Anil Singh Bhadorya Running At Plot No- Aw 474, 1st Floor, Sanjay Gandhi Transport Nagar North Delhi-110028 Delhi	05/01/2026 Rs. 35,38,417.58/- (RS. Thirty Five Lakhs Thirty Eight Thousand Four Hundred Seventeen And Fifty Eight Paise Only)

PROPERTY ADDRESS OF SECURED ASSETS : All Piece & Parcels of Property Bearing No- 19, Entire 1st Floor without Roof Rights, Measuring- 80 Sq. Mtrs., in Block No-B, Pocket No-2, Sec-16, Robin- 110059 New Delhi Owned By Mr. Avnish Singh Bhadorya Co Mr. Anil Singh Bhadorya R/o B-2/19, Sec-16, Robin, Rohini Sec-15, North West Delhi-110089 Delhi
OUTSTANDING AMOUNT : Rs. 35,38,417.58/- (RS. Thirty Five Lakhs Thirty Eight Thousand Four Hundred Seventeen And Fifty Eight Paise Only)
NPA DATE : 19-SEP-2025
DATE OF DEMAND NOTICE : 06-NOV-2025
LOAN AMOUNT : Rs. 40,00,000/- (Rs. Forty Lakhs Only)
In the circumstances as aforesaid, the notice is hereby given to the above borrowers, co-borrowers and/or their guarantors (where ever applicable) to pay the outstanding dues as mentioned above along with future interest and applicable charges within 60 days from the date of the publication of this notice failing which further steps will be taken after the expiry of 60 days of the date of this notice against the secured assets including taking possession of the secured assets of the borrowers and the mortgagors under Section 13(4) of Securitization and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and the applicable rules thereunder. Please note that under Section 13 (13) of the said Act, no Borrower shall, transfer by way of sale, lease or otherwise any of his secured assets referred to in the notice, without prior written consent of the secured creditor.
Dated: 05-JAN-2026, Place: Karnal Authorized Officer, Axis Bank Ltd.

CHANGE OF NAME
I, Atik S/o Mohd Farid R/O E-521-522, Jahangir Puri, Delhi-110033 hereby declare that my father's name appearing in my 10th and 12th mark sheets as Mohd Farid Chohan and his true name Mohd Farid refer to one and same person.
PD(38)C

CHANGE OF NAME
I, Hari Kishan, S/o Sh. Surender Kumar, R/o House No. 338/A, Gali No. 10, Near Vivekanand School, Sector-7 Extn., Gurugram, Haryana-122001, hereby declare that the name of my son has been corrected from "Vedit" to "Vedit Dang". Both names refer to one and the same person.
PD(36)C

Govt announces ₹6,000 monthly aid for PwD

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Delhi Government is strengthening financial assistance, residential facilities and support systems for persons with disabilities. Social Welfare Minister Ravinder Indraj on Saturday announced key welfare measures, including a ₹6,000 monthly assistance scheme for individuals with high support needs. He said these initiatives are part of the government push toward inclusive development for persons with disabilities.

Speaking at events organised on the occasion of World Braille Day and the birth anniversary of Louis Braille, the minister said the government was committed at every level to the empowerment of children and students with disabilities. The programmes were held at Braille Bhawan in Rohini and at Seva Kutir Hostel in Kingsway Camp, which houses visually impaired college students. At the events, Indraj honoured talented visually impaired students for their achievements and paid a tribute to Louis Braille, whose invention revolu-



tioned education and access to knowledge for visually impaired persons worldwide. The minister said physical limitations do not define a person's potential. "What truly determines how high one can rise is determination, discipline and mindset," he said, noting that the performances by students reflected exceptional confidence and resilience despite limited resources.

The Minister announced that the Delhi Government has implemented a scheme providing ₹6,000 per month to support the care of persons with disabilities who require high levels of assistance. He said the initiative was aimed at easing the financial burden on families and caregivers, while ensuring dignity and a better quality of life for beneficiaries.



Migratory bird numbers decline at Yamuna, NCR wetlands: AWC 2026

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The number of migratory birds at the River Yamuna and wetlands in NCR has declined due to global climate change and growing human intervention in the natural habitats, according to Wetlands International's annual Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) 2026. The AWC supports conservation of wetland and water birds globally, and it is an important supportive tool that generates the data for the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC), Govt of India's "National Action Plan for conservation of Migratory Birds & their habitats along the Central Asian Flyway".

The latest census of AWC was conducted here on Saturday, and it recorded decreased water bird species diversity, i.e., 20 species in total with a total population of 1,564, including 20 resident species and 20 migratory species, in comparison to AWC 2025, i.e., 2,123, which includes 16 resident species and 9 migratory species, and 2024, i.e., 22 species with a total population of 2,037, which includes 8 resident species and 14 migratory species.

In 2026, among 10 migratory species, including largely Black-headed Gulls (1,275) and Great Cormorants (63), and among 10 resident species, largely Black-winged Stilts (124) and Red-wattled



Lapwings (39), in comparison to AWC 2025, among 09 migratory species, including largely Black-headed Gulls (1,636), and among 16 resident species, largely Little Cormorants (104). Gulls cannot stay longer in

the most degraded, polluted riverine habitat due to a lack of food and keep moving in search of food, according to ecologist T K Roy, who is the Delhi co-ordinator of AWC. He said among the winter migratory duck species



recorded, there was only a flock of 16 Gadwall and other smaller species in small numbers. Common Sandpipers 15, Common Redshanks 04, four species of wagtails 42, Great Cormorants 63 and resident birds Grey

Heron 17, Red-wattled Lapwing 39, Little Cormorants 12 and the IUCN Red-listed Near Threatened (NT) resident species River Lapwing 02 were recorded in 2026. Among these major resident species, a decrease in

number was recorded as follows: Black-winged Stilt decreased. Red-wattled Lapwing decreased. Grey Heron decreased. Little Cormorant decreased. River Lapwing decreased. Among the major winter migratory species recorded, the decrease in number was as follows: The Great Cormorant, which migrates from East & Southeast Asia, decreased, and the Black-headed Gull, which migrates from Central Asia & Siberia, decreased. In 2026, the census recorded only 20 species of waterbirds along the Delhi stretch of the Yamuna — a total count of 1,564 birds, down from 2,123 in 2025 and 2,037 in 2024. Wetlands International's annual Asian Waterbird

Census (AWC), part of the International Waterbird Census (IWC), is carried out in January together across 27 countries of Asia and Australasia. This year is the 40th year of AWC and the 60th year of IWC. The two-week period of AWC 2026 starts today (03 January, 2026) and is carried out at the River Yamuna in Delhi in partly foggy & cloudy weather. The River Yamuna, passing through Delhi for 22 km in length, a riverine wetland and one of the famous rivers in India, is converted into the most polluted, degraded and disturbed wetland habitat for aquatic biodiversity, especially for water birds, Roy said.

Yamuna clean-up now people's movement: CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Sunday said the ongoing clean-up of the Yamuna river has moved beyond a government programme and is steadily taking the shape of a people's movement. She said this after the inspection of the river-cleaning drive at the Chhath Ghat near ITO.

The Chief Minister reviewed the work being carried out along the riverbank and interacted with volunteers, officials and members of the Yamuna Task Force. She said the scale of public participation showed a growing sense of responsibility among citizens for restoring the health of the river, which remains one of Delhi's biggest environmental challenges.

"This campaign is no longer limited to files and offices. Citizens, especially the youth, have joined in large numbers. That is what gives this effort strength and credibility," the Chief Minister said during the inspection.

The clean-up drive at the ITO Chhath Ghat was organised by the Culture Youth Foundation, with active participation from volunteers and personnel of the Yamuna



Task Force of the 137 CETF Battalion of the Territorial Army. Despite being a Sunday, a large number of people turned up to take part in the drive, collecting waste, removing silt and assisting authorities in clearing the riverbank.

The Chief Minister described the Yamuna as an integral part of India's faith, culture and civilisation, and said its protection could not be left to the government alone. "Maa Yamuna is not just a river. It is a living symbol of our civilisation. Keeping it clean and flowing is our shared moral duty towards future generations," she said.

The Chief Minister said the Delhi government was carrying out the Yamuna rejuvena-

tion programme on a "war footing", following a phased and scientific approach. She said efforts were underway to strengthen waste management systems, improve sewage treatment, and ensure proper disposal of silt and other materials being removed from the river and its floodplains.

Officials accompanying the Chief Minister briefed her on the use of biological treatment methods, monitoring mechanisms and coordination between departments involved in river cleaning and pollution control. The Chief Minister stressed that the work would continue in a planned manner, with regular monitoring to ensure visible and lasting improve-

ment. She reiterated that the government would fully support initiatives driven by public participation, saying lasting environmental change was possible only when society and the state worked together. "Sustainable change cannot be imposed. It has to grow from awareness and participation," she said.

The Chief Minister also highlighted the role of young people in the campaign, calling their involvement the biggest strength behind social and environmental transformation. She urged citizens to maintain discipline and long-term commitment, rather than treating cleanliness drives as one-day events.

Appealing to the people of Delhi, she said consistent awareness and responsible behaviour were essential to protect the Yamuna from pollution. "A clean Yamuna will become the symbol of a clean, healthy and empowered Delhi," she said.

The Delhi Government has been facing sustained pressure from environmental groups and courts to show measurable improvement in the condition of the Yamuna, which remains heavily polluted despite multiple action plans over the years.

IMD forecasts cold wave till January 6

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi residents woke up to gloomy skies on Sunday as clouds hung over the capital, obscuring the sun and bringing down day temperatures.

A cold wave is expected to affect isolated places in the city till January 6, the IMD forecast. A cold wave is declared when the minimum temperature drops by 4.5 - 6.5 degrees Celsius below the normal.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the maximum temperatures remained appreciably below normal (3.1 to 5.0 degrees Celsius) at isolated places and below normal (1.6 to 3.0 degrees Celsius) in most parts of Delhi.

The national Capital on Sunday logged a maximum temperature of 17.3 degrees Celsius, two degrees below the seasonal average, the IMD said. The minimum temperature settled at 7.4 degrees Celsius, 0.5 notches above the season's average, it added. The weather office has predicted maximum and minimum temperatures to settle at 18 degrees Celsius and 8 degrees Celsius on Monday.

Station-wise data on maximum temperatures



People warm themselves near a makeshift fire on a cold winter morning at Kashmere Gate area in New Delhi

showed that Palam recorded 16.3 degrees Celsius, Lodhi Road 17 degrees Celsius, the Ridge 17.8 degrees Celsius, and Ayanagar 16.7 degrees Celsius. Safdarjung recorded a minimum temperature of 7.4 degrees Celsius; Palam 6.8 degrees Celsius, 0.2 notches below the seasonal average; Lodhi Road 7.6 degrees Celsius, 1.6 notches above normal; the Ridge 8.9 degrees Celsius, 1.2 notches above normal; and Ayanagar 6.6 degrees Celsius, 0.4 notches below normal, the IMD data showed. Safdarjung and Palam reported the lowest visibility of 1,300 m at 8 am. Relative humidity was recorded at 73 per cent at 5.30 pm. The sky is likely to be partly

cloudy during the next 24 hours and mainly clear for the subsequent four days and partly cloudy thereafter, the weather officer said, predicting shallow fog during the night on January 4. Shallow to moderate fog would prevail over most parts of the city during morning hours thereafter, it added.

Many parts of Delhi continued to breathe very poor air quality on Sunday morning, even as the weather remained windy.

Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 307, in the 'very poor' category, at 4 pm, Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data showed. According to official data visible at CCB recorded at 9

am, several monitoring stations reported very poor Air Quality Index (AQI) levels. Rohini recorded an AQI of 361, Anand Vihar 351, Chandni Chowk 357, Wazirpur 343, Punjabi Bagh 327, R K Puram 320 and ITO 309.

An AQI between 301 and 400 falls under the very poor category and can cause respiratory discomfort. Despite the windy conditions, air quality remained poor across many areas of the national Capital. Morning winds helped reduce pollution slightly, but not enough to bring AQI levels into the moderate range. With 13,628, the transport sector was the main contributor to Delhi pollution, followed by Delhi and peripheral industries.

According to the Air Quality Early Warning System for Delhi, the ventilation index lower than 6000 m²/s with an average wind speed less than 10 kmph is unfavourable for the dispersion of pollutants.

"A partly cloudy sky, with a predominant surface wind from the southwest direction, and a wind speed of up to 11 kmph, prevailed during the past 24 hours. The predominant surface wind is likely to be from the west direction with wind speed less than 10 kmph during the morning hours," it said.

Noida authority lifts ban on SC-02 Sports City project after SC order

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Noida

After the Supreme Court's recent order, the Noida authority has lifted the ban on the SC-02 Sports City project here in Sector 150, signalling the beginning of the next phase of revival of one of the largest mixed-use developments in Uttar Pradesh.

The decision was taken on Saturday at the authority's 221st board meeting chaired by Infrastructure and Industrial Development Commissioner and the authority's chairman Deepak Kumar.

The ban was imposed in the 201st board meeting of the authority in January 2021.

According to an official press release, the authority said the board reviewed the conditional occupancy certificate already issued for Sports City SC-02 and



instructed that all subsequent steps be taken strictly in accordance with the directions laid down by the apex court.

"In compliance with the orders passed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court, the authority's board has directed that further necessary action be taken in the matter of the Sports City project SC-02 in Sector 150, Noida," the Noida authority said in a statement.

The Sports City project, spread across a vast tract of land in Sector 150, was envisaged as a flagship development combining international-standard sports infrastruc-

ture with residential and commercial components.

Thousands of homebuyers invested in the project, which promised sports academies, training facilities and allied sports amenities alongside housing and retail spaces. Work, however, came to a halt after regulatory action in January 2021, imposing ban on all four sports cities in Noida, leaving around 20,000 buyers awaiting possession or registration.

In its November 24 order, the Supreme Court approved a structured revival framework for the project being developed by Lotus Green Constructions and its consortium partners.

The court allowed construction activity to resume after nearly three years and directed the Noida authority to lift the ban on the developer within 30 to 45 days, subject to compliance with stipulated conditions.

Assembly Winter Session likely to see heated debates

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The four-day winter session of the Delhi Assembly beginning on Monday is likely to see heated debates on pollution and three CAG reports that will be tabled by the Government.

Besides discussing the root causes of the perennial problem of air pollution and assessing past measures, the Rekha Gupta dispensation will table three CAG reports — on the luxuriously renovated bungalow of Arvind Kejriwal when he was the chief minister, the functioning of the Delhi Jal Board, and Delhi Government-run universities during AAP rule.

The Delhi Assembly Secretariat said that as the first Assembly engagement of the new year, the session carries added significance. Issues of development delivery, administrative efficiency and financial discipline are likely to dominate proceedings, offering early signals on

how effectively the state machinery is responding to civic challenges. With limited time and heightened expectations, the Winter Session is poised to unfold as a concentrated exercise in legislative scrutiny rather than extended debate.

The session will formally commence with the address of the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, Vinai Kumar Saxena, at 11 am, following which the regular sitting of the House will begin.

The Winter Session is scheduled to run until January 8, with sittings on the opening day starting in the morning and subsequent sittings beginning at 2 pm.

In a statement, Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta said, "The Winter Session of the Delhi Legislative Assembly will reflect the principles of orderly deliberation, transparency, and responsible legislative conduct."

Gupta has underlined the importance of constructive



engagement during the Winter Session, noting that legislative scrutiny and meaningful debate are central to strengthening democratic governance.

Emphasising discipline, preparedness and adherence to procedure, the Speaker expressed hope that the House would use the sittings effectively to raise issues of public importance, seek clarity from the government and contribute to informed decision-making

in the interest of the people of Delhi.

Special Mentions under Rule 280 are also likely to play an important role during the session. With strict limits on both number and length, these interventions are expected to be used as precision tools to highlight governance gaps and pressing public issues. The choice of matters raised is likely to signal legislative priorities for the year ahead. A key feature of the session

will be the emphasis on Question Hour, scheduled on three consecutive days.

Several major service-delivery departments, including health, education, power, water, transport, finance and urban development, will be taken up for questioning, creating space for legislators to raise governance concerns and seek time-bound responses from the Government.

Beyond procedure, the Winter Session is expected to offer early signals on the direction of Delhi's development in the coming year. Questions and floor interventions related to infrastructure, public services and welfare delivery are likely to reflect whether policy intent is translating into on-ground outcomes. For a city grappling with rapid urbanisation and service pressures, the nature of answers placed on record may indicate how prepared the administration is to meet developmental challenges in 2026.

Red Fort blast: Accused used ghost SIM cards to communicate with Pakistani handlers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Srinagar/New Delhi

Investigations into the "white-collar" terror module linked to the blast near Delhi's Red Fort on November 10 last year show that highly educated doctors used a sophisticated web of "ghost" SIM cards and encrypted apps to coordinate with Pakistani handlers, officials claimed on Sunday.

The outcome of the investigations essentially formed the basis for the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) to issue a sweeping directive on November 28 last year, mandating that app-based communication services like WhatsApp, Telegram and Signal must be continuously linked to an active, physical SIM card within the device.

The officials said the probe into the "white-collar" terror module and the blast led to a web of "ghost" SIM cards being used by the arrested doctors, including Muzammil Ganaie, Adeel Rather and others, as part of a tactical "dual-phone" protocol to evade security agencies.

Each accused, including Dr Umar-un-Nabi, who was killed while driving the explosives-laden vehicle near the Red Fort, carried two to three mobile handsets, they said.

The accused carried one "clean" phone registered in their own names for routine personal and professional use to avoid suspicion and one was the "terror phone" used exclusively for WhatsApp and Telegram communication with their handlers in Pakistan (identi-

fied by codenames 'Ukasa', 'Faizan', and 'Hashmi').

The SIM cards for these secondary devices were issued in the names of unsuspecting civilians whose Aadhaar details were misused, the officials said. Jammu and Kashmir Police further unearthed a separate racket where SIMs were issued using fake Aadhaar cards, they added.

According to the officials, the security agencies noted a disturbing trend where these compromised SIMs remained active on messaging platforms across the border in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) or Pakistan.

By exploiting features that allow messaging apps to run without a physical SIM in the device, the handlers were able to direct the module to



learn IED assembly via YouTube and plot "hinterland" attacks, despite the recruits initially wanting to join conflict zones in Syria or Afghanistan. To plug these security gaps, the Centre has invoked the

Telecommunications Act, 2023, and Telecom Cyber Security Rules to "safeguard the integrity of the telecom ecosystem", which includes a rule that within 90 days, all Telecommunication Identifier User Entities (TIUEs) must

ensure their apps function only if an active SIM is installed in the device.

The order further directs the telecom operators to automatically log out users from apps like WhatsApp, Telegram and Signal in case of the absence of an active SIM, the officials said, adding that all service providers, including Snapchat, Sharechat and Jiochat, must submit compliance reports to the DoT.

This feature of using apps without a SIM is posing a challenge to telecom cybersecurity, as it is being misused from outside the country to commit cyber frauds and terror activities, the DoT statement had said while explaining the reasoning behind the move.

The directive is being fast-tracked in the Jammu and

Kashmir telecom circle. While officials admit it will take time to deactivate all expired or fraudulent SIMs, the move is seen as a critical blow to the digital infrastructure used by terror networks to radicalise and manage "white-collar" operatives.

Failure to comply with these norms will attract stringent action under the Telecom Cyber Security Rules and other applicable laws, the officials said.

The "white-collar" terror module began to unravel on the intervening night of October 18-19, 2025, when posters of the banned Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) surfaced on walls just outside Srinagar city. The posters warned of attacks on police and security forces in the valley. Treating it as a serious matter,

Senior Superintendent of Police, Srinagar, G V Sundeeep Chakravarthy formed several teams to conduct an in-depth investigation into the case.

After piecing together the statements of the arrested accused, the probe led the Srinagar police to Al Falah University in Haryana's Faridabad, where two doctors — Ganaie, a resident of Koil in south Kashmir's Pulwama and Shaheen Sayeed from Lucknow — were arrested.

A huge quantity of arms and ammunition, including 2,900 kg of ammonium nitrate, potassium nitrate and sulphur, was also seized. The car explosion case near the Red Fort claimed 15 lives and is being investigated by the National Investigation Agency.



IN FOCUS



Artists perform traditional folk dance during Patha Utsav celebration, in Bhubaneswar Odisha PTT

ICG Samudra Pratap to be commissioned by Rajnath

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Indian Coast Guard's (ICG) first indigenously designed and built pollution control vessel 'Samudra Pratap' will be commissioned into the ICG by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on January 5, officials said on Sunday.

The 114.5-m vessel has over 60 per cent of indigenous content. The 4,200-tonne vessel boasts a speed of more than 22 knots and an endurance of 6,000 nautical miles, they said.

The vessel will serve as a critical platform for enforcing marine pollution control regulations, maritime law enforcement, search and rescue operations, and safeguarding India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

The vessel was formally delivered in December to the Coast Guard at Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL).

"@IndiaCoastGuard Ship Samudra Pratap, the first of two Pollution Control Vessels, will be commis-



sioned by Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh at @goashipyardLtd, #Goa on January 5, 2026," the ICG said in a post on X. It also shared a small video clip on the vessel, billed as the largest and the most advanced PCV of the ICG.

"Built by #GSL with over 60 per cent indigenous content, the 114.5 Mtr, 4,200 ton vessel boasts a speed of more than 22 knots and an endurance of 6,000 nm, significantly enhancing the #ICG's pollution response, fire-fighting,

and maritime safety and security capabilities. #AatmanirbharBharat #MaritimeSafety #WeProtect," the Coast Guard said. The PCV is equipped with oil finger printing machine, gyro stabilised stand off active chemical detector and other equipment, the ICG earlier said. "The vessel is equipped with State-of-the-art technology, including a 30mm CRN-91 gun, two 12.7mm stabilised remote-controlled guns with integrated fire

control systems, an indigenously developed Integrated Bridge System, Integrated Platform Management System, Automated Power Management System, shaft generator, Sea boat davit, PR boat with davit, and a high-capacity external firefighting system," it said.

The vessel will strengthen India's maritime pollution response capabilities and reinforce the nation's commitment to self-reliance in defence manufacturing, the officials said.

₹1,464-crore interstate fake invoice cartel busted



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bengaluru

The Enforcement Wing (South Zone) of the Commercial Taxes Department, Government of Karnataka, has unearthed and dismantled a major interstate fake invoicing cartel operating across Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, involving fraudulent transactions amounting to ₹1,464 crore.

The racket primarily dealt with cement, iron and steel, and other building materials, and was used to generate fake inward and outward supply invoices. Officials said the cartel wrongfully availed and passed on Input Tax Credit (ITC) of approximately ₹355 crore without any corresponding movement of goods, causing significant loss to Government revenue.

The detection was made possible through advanced GST system analytics. The department's in-house developed Non-Genuine Taxpayer (NGTP) module, along with IP address trail analysis from the GST back office, identified abnormal invoicing patterns and circular ITC flows among multiple entities. These red flags led to focused, intelligence-driven and coordinated enforcement action across several locations in both states. Investigations revealed that numerous GST registrations had been fraudulently obtained using forged and fabricated documents. These included stamp papers sourced from online platforms, fake rental agreements, forged signatures of landlords and tenants, false tax-paid receipts and forged notarial attestations. Such registrations were used to create layers of shell entities that issued and circulated fake

invoices while giving an appearance of legitimate commercial activity.

Officials also observed that after availing and passing on substantial ITC, several entities voluntarily cancelled their GST registrations, apparently to obscure audit trails and evade scrutiny. The Enforcement Wing noted this as an emerging modus operandi, wherein cancellation of registration itself is misused to camouflage large-scale tax fraud, and said systemic safeguards are being examined to counter this risk. Coordinated search and seizure operations were conducted simultaneously in Bengaluru, Chennai, Vellore and Pernampattu.

These materials are expected to yield crucial digital, financial and documentary evidence regarding the scale and interstate spread of the cartel. In a first-of-its-kind coordinated interstate operation by the Commercial Taxes Department, four key accused were arrested with the active cooperation of the Commercial Taxes Department, Government of Tamil Nadu. Two brothers from Tamil Nadu, Sri Irbaz Ahmed and Sri Nafiz Ahmed, were apprehended from Pernampattu for allegedly floating fake firms such as Triion Traders, Wonder Traders, Royal Traders and Galaxy Enterprises.

Sri Eddala Pratap and Revati, who allegedly floated shell entities including Power Steel and Cement, PR Construction, SV Traders and SRS Cement Steel Traders, were arrested in Bengaluru. All four accused were produced before the Hon'ble Special Court for Economic Offences, Bengaluru, and have been remanded to judicial custody for 14 days.

Manohar Lal reviews NHPC hydroelectric projects in J&K

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jammu

Union Minister of Power and Housing & Urban Affairs, Manohar Lal, on Sunday, reviewed the working of the NHPC-run hydroelectric projects in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Union Minister was accompanied by Secretary (Power), Pankaj Agarwal.

On his arrival, CMD, NHPC Bhubendra Gupta, briefed the Minister on the progress of various NHPC Hydroelectric projects located in Jammu & Kashmir.

During his two-day-long visit, the Union Minister is scheduled to carry out a physical inspection of projects located in Reasi, Ramban and Kishtwar districts.



On Sunday, the Union Minister first of all inspected NHPC's Salal Power Project, where he was apprised of the ongoing works. He directed NHPC to expedite the sediment removal operations of the Salal reservoir. The Salal Power Station, located on the Chenab River in Reasi district, is undertaking sediment

removal works following the termination of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT). During the visit to the Salal Power Station, the Minister also held discussions with the local administration and senior officials of various concerned departments to ensure coordinated efforts for the timely execution of works.

Pilgrims congregate at Sangam for holy dip in icy Ganga

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Prayagraj

Braving the bitter cold, devotees thronged the Sangam on Sunday for a holy dip in the Ganga during the ongoing Magh Mela.

Amid rows of tents, fluttering saffron pennants, and devotional music emanating from loudspeakers, devotees streamed into the Mela ground. Some arrived on two-wheelers, taking their vehicles up to the waterfront before they descended into the river for a dip. Others arrived from far and wide, lugging their bags with one hand while they clutched their children with the other.

The Akshayvat Marg on the Mela premises, one of the major thoroughfares leading to the holy river, saw a steady stream of pilgrims. Ashutosh Varshney, who had set up his camp near the Sangam, said there has been a rush of devotees since early morning.

While the devotees took a dip in frigid Ganga waters and offered prayer, security personnel and divers kept a close watch.

Safety announcements constantly emanated from the public address system.



'Kalpavasi' also took the ritual dips on Sunday. During the month-long 'kalpavas', devotees bathe in the Ganga twice daily and eat one meal a day, spending their time in meditation and worship of their chosen deity. 'Kalpavas', believed to absolve people of their sins, began on 'Paush Purnima'.

Acharya Rajendra Mishra, president of the Triveni Sangam Aarti Seva Samiti, said approximately 5 lakh devotees are observing 'kalpavas'. Chanting hymns and carrying their belongings in small bundles, pilgrims walked towards the Sangam for the holy dip, while others were seen performing ritual worship in the tents where they were put up.

FROM PAGE - 1

Shivraj Chouhan attacks Congress over MNREGA...

The BJP leader, including president J P Nadda, newly appointed working president Nitin Nabin, and general secretary (organisation) B L Santhosh, held a video conference on Saturday evening with the party's Union Ministers, MPs from both Houses, Chief Ministers, Deputy Chief Ministers, state presidents, and state general secretaries for organisation. As part of the campaign, the party plans to organise interactions with farmers and labourers, along with press conferences, seminars and public meetings across the country especially poll bound states — West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Union Agriculture Minister addressed the media on Sunday to expose the Congress' narratives on "Save MGNREGA."

"The Congress is a factory of lies. It is now saying that workers will not get work," the Union minister said, while asserting that the interests of workers would be better protected under VB-G RAM G. He asked why Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi was not present in the Lok Sabha during a debate on the issue. "The Congress has announced a MGNREGA Bachao Sangram. It is actually a save corruption campaign," he said.

Chouhan said in the next financial year, an amount of ₹1,51,282 crore would be allocated for the scheme, of which, the Centre's share would be more than ₹95,600 crore. "There is enough money for 125 days. It will also ensure the development of villages," he added.

Asserting that "VB-G RAM G is a better scheme than MGNREGA", he said, "My appeal to the Congress is that it should not spread misinformation and lies. Instead, it should thank Prime Minister Narendra Modi for making this scheme better." Rejecting Congress' criticism that the scheme burdens states and undermines employment guarantees, Bharatiya Janata Party leaders said that funding ratios — 60:40 for most states, 90:10 for hill and North-eastern states, and 100 per cent for Union Territories — are consistent with other Centrally sponsored programmes.

Chouhan said under the new scheme, concrete work for rural development would be undertaken in the form of projects on water conservation, roads, schools, anganwadi buildings, hospitals, ponds, check dams, FPO (farmer-producer organisation) structures and natural-disaster management. "This plan is a blueprint for making villages self-reliant and independent," he said.

The Congress on Saturday announced a nationwide "MGNREGA Bachao Sangram" from January 10 to February 25 to demand the withdrawal of the VB-G-RAM-G Act, restoration of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) as a rights-based law, the right to work and the authority of panchayats. The Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission Bill, or VB-G RAM G, was passed

with a voice vote amid protests in the Rajya Sabha on December 18, 2025, hours after the Lok Sabha cleared it.

On December 21, President Droupadi Murmu gave her assent to the Bill, making it an Act, which replaces the rural employment law, MGNREGA, guaranteeing 125 days of wage employment per rural household every financial year.

The move was met with protests from opposition parties as well as activists, who have argued that the rights-based approach under the earlier law has been changed and also opposed Mahatma Gandhi's name being removed from the name of the scheme.

Anger mounts in Ankita murder case

However, opposition parties and some organisations are not satisfied with this explanation and carried out a protest march demanding information on the 'VIP'.

It will be recalled that in the recent past, audio recordings of phone conversations between former BJP MLA Suresh Rathore and his alleged second wife Urmila Sanawar had gone viral on social media. In one of the recordings, Rathore can be purportedly heard stating that the BJP national general secretary Dushyant Kumar Gautam was the 'VIP' involved in the case.

However, both Gautam and the BJP have strongly rejected the claims. Cabinet minister Subodh Uniyal has stressed that the State government is ready for any type of investigation if it gets credible evidence. However, both the persons involved in the audio recordings have not come forward to cooperate in the police investigation so far, he said. Meanwhile, members of the Congress, Uttarakhand Kranti Dal, Left parties and various organisations protested in support of the demands for a CBI probe and the disclosure of the name of the 'VIP' allegedly involved in the murder case. Congress leaders also staged similar protests in different parts of Garhwal and Kumaon on the same day.

Man dies by suicide at Le Meridien

On Sunday, he reportedly entered the premises without drawing attention and moved directly towards the elevators.

"A man identified as Parvinder Singh Juneja, around 50 years of age, died after jumping from Le Meridien Hotel. The matter is under investigation and all aspects are being examined," a Delhi Police officer said.

No suicide note has been recovered so far, police said, adding that the exact reason behind the extreme step remains unclear. The body has been sent for post-mortem examination to ascertain the precise cause of death and to rule

out any other possibility.

Senior police officers said multiple teams have been deployed to investigate the case from all possible angles. "We are examining whether there was any financial distress, personal or professional dispute, or any form of pressure that could have driven him to take this step," a police source said.

Police are also questioning family members, acquaintances and others who may have had recent contact with Juneja to piece together his mental state and movements prior to the incident. CCTV footage from inside the hotel and its surroundings is being thoroughly scanned to trace his movements from the moment he entered the premises. Investigators are reviewing footage from the entrance, lobby, elevators and the 12th floor to establish a clear timeline.

The hotel management has extended full cooperation to the police, officials said. Statements of hotel staff, including front desk personnel, security staff and employees stationed near the elevators and upper floors, are being recorded to determine whether there were any unusual interactions or observations.

Police are also examining hotel entry logs and access records to verify how Juneja entered the building and whether any security protocols were breached. Forensic experts have inspected the scene and collected samples from the impact site as well as from the floor from which the man allegedly jumped.

"A comprehensive investigation is underway. We are leaving no stone unturned to establish the sequence of events and the reasons behind the incident," a senior police officer said.

The incident has once again highlighted concerns over mental health and access control in high-rise buildings, though police stressed that conclusions would be drawn only after the investigation is complete. Further details are awaited as the probe continues.

NDA will form TN Govt, says Shah

Slamming the ruling DMK over alleged graft and claiming that it was "synonymous" with corruption, he asked if the state can progress with an "army of corrupt ministers."

"A DMK leader's name has come up in cash-for-jobs scam, that of another leader in money laundering," he said. Another leader was named in "coal scam" he said without naming anyone. "Can Tamil Nadu's progress happen with such an army of corrupt ministers. There is 20 per cent corruption cut money. The state economy is running on debts and liquor sales," Shah charged.

The DMK regime's sole motive is to make Chief Minister M K Stalin's son Udhayanidhi the CM and the dream to perpetuate dynasty rule would not come true and the time has come to put an end

to family politics in Tamil Nadu, Shah said. He pointed out that while late DMK president was CM, his son M K Stalin also came to the post and that plans were there to elevate Udhayanidhi also. He also targeted the ruling party on a number of other issues.

"There is no security for women in Tamil Nadu," he said while criticising the ruling party and expressed confidence that the NDA will form the government in Tamil Nadu by April, 2026 following a win in Assembly polls. The BJP-AIADMK alliance was a "natural" one and the two had fought the 1998 and 2019 parliamentary polls, besides the 2021 state elections.

The BJP veteran also slammed the Stalin government over "atrocities" on Hindus. He alleged Hindu forms of worship were being "insulted," and claimed that during the Ayodhya Ram Temple bhoomi puja, an "unannounced curfew was imposed" in TN. "Their senior leaders call Sanatan Dharma dengue, malaria. Hindu processions and visarjan (immersion of idols of Hindu deities) have been stayed. I want to tell Stalin: you have broken the constitutional ethos by committing atrocities against Hindus," he said.

BJP leaders Piyush Goyal, L Murugan, Tamilisai Soundararajan and Pon Radhakrishnan were among the leaders present.

BJP's key alliance partner AIADMK's chief Edappadi K Palaniswami addressed a rally in Salem district almost coinciding with Shah's public meeting time.

India concerned over events in Venezuela

"We are going to run the country until such time as we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition," he said, adding that the operation should serve as a warning to those who threaten American lives or sovereignty.

Venezuela has denounced the US action as a violation of its sovereignty and announced a nationwide state of emergency. The country's Supreme Court has asked Vice-President Delcy Rodriguez to assume charge as interim president. Rodriguez visited New Delhi in February last year to attend India Energy Week.

In its response, India reaffirmed its support for the well-being of the Venezuelan people and called upon "all concerned to address issues peacefully through dialogue, ensuring peace and stability of the region." The MEA also said the Indian embassy in Caracas remains in close contact with members of the Indian community and is providing all possible assistance.

As a precautionary measure, India advised its nationals to avoid all non-essential travel to Venezuela and urged those currently in the country to exercise extreme caution, restrict their movements, and remain in touch with the Indian embassy.

Maduro to face trial in US

It also drew unease from parts of his own Republican coalition, including an "America First" base that is opposed to foreign interventions, and also from observers who recalled past nation-building efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Rubio dismissed such criticism, saying that Trump's intent had been misunderstood by a "foreign policy establishment" that was fixated on the Middle East. "The whole foreign policy apparatus thinks everything is Libya, everything is Iraq, everything is Afghanistan," Rubio said. "This is not the Middle East. And our mission here is very different. This is the Western Hemisphere."

Rubio also suggested that the US would give Maduro's subordinates who are now in charge time to govern, saying, "We're going to judge everything by what they do, and we're going to see what they do." And though he did not rule out a US military presence in Venezuela, Rubio said the current US "force posture" was capable of stopping drug boats and sanctioned tankers.

A day earlier, Trump told reporters, "We're going to run the country until such time as we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition." He later pointed to his national security team with him, including Rubio and Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, and said it would be done for a period of time by "the people that are standing right behind me. We're gonna be running it we're gonna be bringing it back." The White House declined to comment beyond what Trump said Saturday.

Maduro landed late Saturday afternoon at a small airport in New York City's northern suburbs following the middle-of-the-night operation that extracted him and his wife, Cilia Flores, from their home in a military base in the capital, Caracas — an act that Maduro's government called "imperialist." The couple faces US charges of participating in a narco-terrorism conspiracy.

The dramatic seizure of the Maduros capped an intensive Trump administration pressure campaign on Venezuela's autocratic leader and months of secret planning, resulting in the most assertive American action to achieve regime change since the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Legal experts raised questions about the lawfulness of the operation, which was done without congressional approval.

Venezuela's vice president, Delcy Rodriguez, meanwhile, demanded that the US free Maduro and called him the country's rightful leader as her nation's high court named her interim president.

After arriving at the airport, Maduro was flown by helicopter to Manhattan, where a convoy of law enforcement vehicles, including an armoured car, was waiting to whisk him to a nearby US Drug Enforcement Administration office. A video posted on social media by a White House account showed Maduro, smiling, as he was escorted through that office by two DEA agents grasping his arms. He is due to make his first appearance Monday in Manhattan's federal court.

PM to inaugurate Commonwealth presiding officers conference



PM Narendra Modi is likely to inaugurate the conference of presiding officers of Commonwealth nations here on January 15, an official said on Sunday. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla will host the four-day Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of Parliaments of Commonwealth Countries (CSPOC) at the Central Hall of the Samvidhan Sadan from January 14-17.

Veteran leader L Ganesan passes away; leaders pay tribute

Dravidian stalwart L Ganesan passed away at his residence in Thanjavur due to age-related ailments on Sunday. He was 92 and is survived by his wife. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin condoled his death and said Ganesan dedicated his life to the DMK and the cause of Tamil identity. Expressing profound grief, the DMK President highlighted Ganesan's role as a key leader of the student force during historic protests against the imposition of Hindi.



Army chief Upendra Dwivedi to visit UAE, Sri Lanka



Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi, has proceeded on a visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Sri Lanka from January 5-8, as part of India's continued engagement to strengthen defence cooperation and military-to-military ties with friendly foreign countries, defence ministry said here on Sunday.

Telugu is a living civilisation, says Mauritius President

President of Mauritius Dharam Gokhool on Sunday said Telugu is not merely a language but a living civilisation with deep spiritual legacy. Addressing the Third World Telugu Conference here in Guntur district, Gokhool described it as a landmark event uniting Telugu diaspora from around the world. "Telugu is more than just a language; it embodies a living civilisation and carries a profound spiritual legacy," said Gokhool, addressing the gathering.



International law can't be violated unilaterally: Congress on Venezuela

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

The Congress on Sunday expressed "grave concern" over the US action in Venezuela and said settled principles of international law cannot be violated unilaterally.

Congress general secretary communications Jai Ram Ramesh said, "The INC expresses very grave concern on US actions relating to Venezuela in the past 24 hours."

"Settled principles of international law cannot be violated unilaterally," Ramesh said in a post on X.

India has voiced "deep concern" over the US capturing Venezuela's President



Nicolas Maduro and his wife in a military operation, and said it is closely monitoring the unfolding situation in the oil-rich South American country.

In its first reaction to the unprecedented American action in Venezuela's capital, Caracas, early on Saturday,

New Delhi also called for a peaceful resolution of the situation through dialogue to ensure stability in the region and reaffirmed its support for the well-being of the people of that country.

The United States brought Maduro and his wife, Lady Cilia Flores, to New York to face drug trafficking-related charges.

Venezuela, denouncing the US action, has announced a State of national emergency.

President Donald Trump has said that the United States would run Venezuela until "we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition", and American companies will help tap the vast oil reserves.

Congress forms committee to lead 45-day MGNREGA Bachao Sangram agitation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Congress set up a coordination committee on Sunday to oversee and monitor the "MGNREGA Bachao Sangram", a 45-day agitational plan of the Opposition party beginning January 10, with Ajay Maken as its convener. "Congress president has constituted a coordination committee to oversee, guide, and monitor the implementation of the MGNREGA Bachao Sangram, with immediate effect," AICC general secretary KC Venugopal said in a communication.

While party treasurer Maken will be its convener, senior leaders Jai Ram Ramesh, Sandeep Dikshit,

CONGRESS LAUNCHES NATIONWIDE "MGNREGA BACHAO SANGRAM" (JAN 10-FEB 25) TO DEMAND VB G-RAM-G ACT WITHDRAWAL

Udit Raj and Priyank Kharge will be members of the panel. Other leaders also nominated on the panel by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge include D Anasuya Seethakka, Deepika Pandey Singh, Sunil Panwar and Manish Sharma.

The heads of all front organisations, along with the chairpersons of the All India Congress Committee's (AICC) OBC, SC, Minority, Adivasi departments and the Kisan Congress, will also be

members of the coordination committee, the communication said.

The Congress has announced the nationwide "MGNREGA Bachao Sangram" from January 10 to February 25 to demand the withdrawal of the VB G-RAM-G Act, and restoration of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) as a rights-based law, the right to work and the authority of panchayats.

The Opposition party has alleged that through the new VB-G RAM G Act, the BJP-led Centre has ensured complete centralisation as employment will no longer be a right under the new Act, which will be challenged in court.

Himachal Govt to bring major changes in education policy: CM Sukhu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Hamirpur (HP)

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Sunday said the state Government is set to bring major changes in the education policy, with special instructors for English and Mathematics to be appointed in Government schools which are being brought under the CBSE curriculum.

"The recruitment process to appoint these instructors will begin soon" he said.

Sukhu was addressing a public meeting after inaugurating the Gugga Dham and park, built at a cost of around Rs 60 lakh, in his ancestral village Bhawan under Amlehar Gram Panchayat, amid his one-day visit to the Nadaun Assembly in Hamirpur.

Speaking on the occasion, he said Amlehar school has also been granted CBSE status. "The work on the Rajiv Gandhi Day Boarding School is progressing rapidly and classes will begin from next year. Multiple subjects will be introduced in four selected schools of the state, including Amlehar, so that children can choose subjects of their interest" he said.

Additionally, Sukhu appealed to farmers to adopt natural farming, saying the state Government is providing high prices for crops grown using such methods.

Mamata urges CEC to halt SIR in Bengal, warns of mass disenfranchisement

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Kolkata

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee wrote to Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, urging him to immediately halt the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in the State, and warned that it could cause "mass disenfranchisement" and "irreparable damage" to India's democratic foundations.

In a letter to the CEC dated December 3, Banerjee expressed "grave concern"

over alleged irregularities, procedural violations and administrative lapses in the conduct of the SIR in the State, asserting that the process had been undertaken in an "unplanned, ill-prepared and ad hoc manner".

"The SIR process is deeply compromised and strikes at the basic structural framework of our democracy and the spirit of the Constitution," the chief minister claimed.

She alleged that the "undue haste" and "lack of adequate groundwork" had



resulted in serious defects, including faulty IT systems, inconsistent instructions and inadequate training of officials entrusted with the exercise.

"If allowed to continue in its present form, the SIR will cause irreparable damage, mass disenfranchisement of voters and assault democratic foundations," Banerjee said in her letter to CEC.

The chief minister urged the Election Commission of India to carry out immediate corrective measures, failing which, she said, the "arbitrary and unplanned exer-

cise must be halted".

Banerjee also flagged the alleged denial of booth-level agents (BLAs) during the hearing process, stating that it raised "serious questions about the fairness, transparency and credibility" of the SIR.

Holding the poll panel responsible for the conduct of the exercise, Banerjee said the Election Commission of India must be "held fully accountable for any illegal, arbitrary or biased actions carried out under its supervision or direction".

Modi, Shah likely to visit Assam this month: Assam CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Guwahati

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah are likely to visit the State later the month.

"Honourable prime minister might come on January 17-18. The Union home minister has been invited on January 29. Both the invitations are in the preliminary stage," Sarma told reporters on the sidelines of a programme at Changsari in Kamrup district.

"Both of them are likely to come, though the programmes have not been confirmed yet," he added.

Sarma had said earlier that Modi will lay the foundation stones of the 32-km Kaziranga Elevated Corridor project, Tivru Tube underwater tunnel from Gohpur to Numaligarh, and a new railway line between Kokrajhar and Gelephu in Bhutan, during his likely January visit.

Northern Railway's Jammu Division completes first year

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Jammu

As Northern Railway's Jammu Division approaches the first anniversary of its inauguration, the year 2025 stands out as a period of remarkable progress and historic breakthroughs.

Established as India's 70th railway division and virtually inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 6, 2025, the division has played a crucial role in seamlessly integrating the Kashmir Valley with the national rail network, fostering renewed hope, connectivity, and economic growth across Jammu and Kashmir.

In 2025, the Jammu Division delivered groundbreaking advancements in infrastructure, passenger services, and freight operations.

Reflecting on the division's inaugural year, Senior Divisional Commercial Manager Uchit Singhal the key highlights included the full commissioning of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL),



Division, yet Indian Railways spared no effort in prioritizing passenger convenience, safety, and seamless travel. These accomplishments are propelling us toward excellence, ushering in enhanced connectivity and prosperity for the people of Kashmir. In 2026, we will script the next chapter with ambitious new projects and continued innovation."

According to Senior Divisional Commercial Manager Uchit Singhal the key highlights included the full commissioning of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL),

the dedication of the iconic Chenab and Anji bridges, the rollout of Vande Bharat Express services, enhanced religious tourism, and a surge in goods transportation — all contributing to accelerated regional development and prosperity.

Referring to the launch of the Vande Bharat Express, the senior Railway officer said the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra-Srinagar Vande Bharat Express has transported over 3.75 lakh passengers since its launch, significantly reducing travel time and enhancing comfort for commuters and pilgrims.

Kerala vigilance recommends CBI probe against LoP Satheesan over FCRA violation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Thiruvananthapuram

The Kerala VACB has recommended a CBI probe against Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly VD Satheesan over alleged irregularities in the collection of funds from abroad for a rehabilitation project titled 'Punarjani', said officials on Saturday. The vigilance report containing the recommendation has been submitted to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, they said.

According to the report, the Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau has sought a CBI investigation, citing alleged violations of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA). It is alleged that Satheesan had travelled abroad after obtaining permission from the central Government for a private visit and collected funds overseas, which were later transferred to accounts in Kerala.

The report recommends a CBI probe under Section

3(2)(a) of the FCRA Act, 2010, which prohibits any person residing in India or any Indian citizen residing abroad from accepting foreign contributions on behalf of a political party, sources said.

It has also recommended

foundation named Manappattu Foundation for the 'Punarjani' project.

The report said GBP 22,500 (around ₹19.95 lakh) was collected from various individuals in the UK and transferred to the foundation's account.



Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly VD Satheesan

that the Assembly Speaker initiate action against Satheesan under Rule 41 of Appendix II of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly, citing alleged legal violations committed in his capacity as a legislator.

As per the findings of the VACB, funds were mobilised from abroad by forming a

The money was allegedly routed to the foundation's FCRA account through a UK-based NGO, Midland International Aid Trust (MIAT), the VACB said.

The vigilance department has also examined a video in which Satheesan was allegedly seen requesting participants at an event in

the UK to contribute GBP 500 each for purchasing weaving machines as part of the rehabilitation of flood-affected women, sources added.

Reacting to the development, Satheesan said he would fight the matter both personally and politically.

He said he had no objection to a CBI probe and was confident the case would not stand legal scrutiny. "I do not need any special consideration or favour. I am confident that the case will not stand legally. If the intention is to file a case against me when elections are around the corner, I will face it politically and legally," he told reporters in Wayanad.

He said the vigilance had earlier dropped the case after a detailed probe, claiming that investigators could not find any evidence against him. "There are several reports submitted by investigating officers. What they told me during the probe is something I still hold with pride," he added.

IAF chief urges Aeronautical Development Agency to stick to timelines for operational readiness

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Bengaluru

Air Chief Marshal AP Singh on Sunday said the Aeronautical Development Agency must strictly adhere to delivery timelines to keep the Indian Air Force operationally ready in a rapidly evolving security environment.

He was speaking after inaugurating the two-day national seminar 'Aeronautics 2047', organised by ADA at the Centre for Airborne Systems (CABS). The seminar marked 25 years of the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas flight programme, and the Chief of the Air Staff congratulated ADA on

achieving the milestone, according to a statement.

Emphasising the urgency of timely inductions, Singh said there was a need to adhere to delivery schedules to ensure the IAF remains operationally prepared in constantly evolving times.

Secretary, Department of Defence Research and Development, and Chairman of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Samir V Kamat, underscored the importance of developing indigenous cutting-edge technologies to reduce import dependence and realise the vision of Viksit Bharat (Developed

India) by 2047.

The seminar has brought together domain experts, industrial partners, academia, aviation enthusiasts and speakers from across the aerospace ecosystem to deliberate on the evolution of aeronautics, design innovation, manufacturing and future frontiers, the statement said.

Discussions are focused on next-generation aircraft manufacturing and assembly, digital manufacturing, aerodynamics for future combat aircraft, propulsion technologies, flight testing techniques, digital twin technology, certification challenges, flight control systems and avionics,



maintainability issues, artificial intelligence in aircraft design, and precision manufacturing of actuators.

According to the statement, the event will also trace the journey of the LCA Tejas from concept to squadron. Designed and developed by ADA, the aircraft has completed over 5,600 successful flight trials, with more than 100 Government laboratories, academic institutions and industries contributing to the programme.

Several niche technologies, including carbon composites, lightweight materials, fly-by-wire flight control systems, digital utility management

systems and a glass cockpit, were developed to make the LCA a fourth-generation fighter, it said.

The LCA Mk-1A, an advanced variant of the indigenously designed and manufactured fighter aircraft, is expected to meet the operational requirements of the IAF, while the LCA Mk-II and LCA Navy variants are currently under development.

A series of technical talks by distinguished speakers associated with the Tejas programme will be delivered during the seminar.

"India has benefited enormously from the development of the LCA Tejas, having acquired both the capability

and capacity to build fighter aircraft indigenously," the statement said. "The LCA programme is one of the most successful indigenous defence programmes, through which the IAF has been equipped with an exceptional air-superiority fighter. So far, 38 aircraft—32 fighters and six trainers—have been inducted into two IAF squadrons," it added.

As part of the seminar, several public sector undertakings, defence PSUs, industries and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are showcasing indigenously designed and developed products for airborne applications, it further said.

States Focus

People's mandate will prevail even if Opposition moves court: CM Fadnavis

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Chandrapur

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday said that people's mandate will prevail even if Opposition parties move court to challenge the unopposed election of Mahayuti candidates in the civic polls.

The BJP and its Mahayuti allies have won 68 seats unopposed in the polls to municipal corporations scheduled for January 15 across the state, even as Opposition parties alleged that the ruling combine used threats and money to force candidates to withdraw from the fray. The Maharashtra Navnirman Sena on Saturday said it would challenge the unopposed election of Mahayuti candidates in court.

Talking to reporters during a roadshow in Chandrapur, Fadnavis said, "They can certainly go to court, but the people's court has elected us. Even if they (opposition parties) move



the court, people's mandate will prevail in court."

He pointed out that several independents and Muslim candidates have also been elected unopposed. "Why are they (Opposition parties) not

talking about them? It is because they can see their defeat clearly and are now trying to find excuses," the chief minister said.

Fadnavis, along with senior BJP leader Sudhir Mungantiwar, former Union

Minister Hansraj Ahir, Maharashtra Minister Ashok Uikey and MLA Kishore Jorgewar, took out a roadshow in Chandrapur, canvassing for BJP and Shiv Sena candidates. Addressing a gathering, the

chief minister said that no party other than the BJP-Shiv Sena had undertaken development works in Chandrapur. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has allocated ₹50,000 crore for the development of cities, and the Government will provide funds for the development of Chandrapur, he said. He further urged voters not to elect corrupt people to the Chandrapur Municipal Corporation if they wanted funds to be utilised properly for the city's development.

Fadnavis appealed to people to vote the Mahayuti to power, assuring that the Government would focus on transparent governance and development while taking care of people for the next five years.

The chief minister visited the ancient Mahakali temple in Chandrapur in the morning and participated in a roadshow from Anchleshwar Gate, passing through Gandhi Chowk and culminating at Jatpura Gate.

Gurmeet Ram Rahim gets 40-day parole for 15th time



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ CHANDIGARH

Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, who is serving a 20-year jail term for raping two of his disciples and is currently lodged in the Sunaria jail in Haryana's Rohtak, was again granted a 40-day parole, said sources on Sunday. His latest parole comes months after he was granted a similar parole in August last year. Singh will come out of prison for the 15th time since he was convicted in 2017.

The Dera Sacha Sauda head is serving a 20-year sentence given in 2017 for raping two of his disciples.



NITISH ATTENDS 90TH BIRTHDAY OF SHAKUNI CHOUDHARY

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Sunday attended the 90th birthday celebrations of veteran politician Shakuni Choudhary at his residence. Shakuni Choudhary is the father of Deputy CM Samrat Choudhary and has a three-decade-long political career. The former Bihar minister also served in the Indian Army before entering politics. Kumar and many other ministers participated in the birthday celebrations of Shakuni Choudhary. Talking to reporters, Samrat Choudhary said, "My father worked in politics for a long time. He also served in the Indian Army and worked to bring society in Bihar into the mainstream. From the streets to Parliament, he has worked at every level.



CM FLAGS SAFETY OF STATE-RUN BUSES ORDER DRIVER TRAINING

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Sunday expressed serious concern over frequent accidents caused by State-run 'Ama Bus' and directed the authorities to provide training to drivers for skill development and instil a sensitive attitude among them. The chief minister issued this directive a day after the death of an autorickshaw driver in an accident caused by a 'Ama Bus' on Saturday.

Uddhav demands cancellation of 68 unopposed civic wins

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday urged the State Election Commission to cancel results in 68 civic wards where ruling Mahayuti nominees were declared winners unopposed, saying uncontested victories effectively rob 'Gen Z' and first-time voters of their voting right.

Sharing the stage with MNS chief Raj Thackeray to unveil their joint manifesto for the upcoming polls to the Mumbai civic body,



Uddhav warned that democracy must not be overrun by "mobocracy."

The former chief minister launched a scathing attack on the Mahayuti Government, saying that since his Government was dislodged and Eknath Shinde helmed the state (in June 2022), the wealth of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation is being splurged on contractors. He claimed that after vote-stealing, the ruling parties are now stealing candidates. Accusing the BJP of double standards, Raj Thackeray said the BJP had

approached the Supreme Court in similar instances in West Bengal, where ruling party candidates were chosen unopposed in local body polls, and asked the ruling party to clarify this issue. Incidentally, the BJP has gone on the offensive on the issue of unopposed victories as 68 candidates from the Mahayuti, including 44 from the BJP, have won without contest in Maharashtra, mainly due to the withdrawal of contestants from other parties or rebels. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, at a road show in Chandrapur

during the day, said the people's mandate would prevail even if opposition parties approach the court.

"They can certainly go to court, but the people's court has elected us. Even if they (opposition parties) move the court, people's mandate will prevail in court," Fadnavis said while questioning the Opposition's silence on unopposed wins of independents and Muslim candidates.

"It is because they can see their defeat clearly and are now trying to find excuses," said the cm" he added.

Two killed after rocks collapse in Dhenkanal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bhubaneswar

At least two persons were killed after rocks collapsed at an unauthorised stone quarry in Odisha's Dhenkanal district, officials said on Sunday. The incident took place on Saturday evening when some workers were engaged in drilling and exploration of stone from the quarry located near Gopalpur village under Motanga police station limits in the district, they said.

The exact cause behind the incident is not yet clear. Teams of local fire service, Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force (ODRAF), along with dog squad were engaged in rescue operations, an officer said. Dhenkanal Collector Ashish Ishwar Patil and SP Abhinav Sonkar have reached the spot to supervise the rescue operation.

"As per available information, only two persons were there, and two bodies were



Rescue operation underway after rock collapse on Saturday at an unauthorised stone quarry in Odisha's Dhenkanal district. PTI

recovered. One person belonged to Balasore district, while another deceased was from either Keonjhar or Mayurbhanj district.

Their identities have not yet been established," Patil told reporters. Blasting permission at the stone quarry expired in September while

its lease period ended in December 2025, he said.

"We will take legal action against the mine lease holder as blasting and mining continued at the quarry after expiry of the lease period," Patil said. The collector said that enforcement drives against illegal mining in the

district will be strengthened in the coming days. The stone quarry was sealed following the incident. Local Tahsildar Manoj Majhi said police personnel will be deployed at the quarry so that no one can enter the area. Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik, in a social media post said, "I am deeply saddened to learn that workers lost their lives due to a rockfall following an explosion in a stone quarry in Dhenkanal. At this sorrowful time, I convey my deepest condolences to the family members, along with prayers for the eternal peace of the departed souls."

"Let appropriate investigations be conducted into the circumstances under which this incident occurred and the state of the workers' safety measures, and let the Government direct its attention toward immediately expediting rescue operations."

Jharkhand Govt diluted PESA Act's core spirit in new rules, says Arjun Munda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ranchi

BJP leader Arjun Munda on Sunday alleged that the Jharkhand Government has diluted the core spirit of the PESA Act, 1996 in the notified PESA rules. He said that the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act specifies that the self-governing system — based on customary laws, religious practices, and traditions that have existed since ancient times — shall be called the 'gram sabha', whereas the PESA rules notified by the Jharkhand Government mention only "traditions" while defining gram sabhas.

"Rules are made to implement the Act in order to strengthen and mature the system. But in the notified PESA rules, the exact definition of gram sabhas in the



Act has been sidelined like a 'cold-blooded murder,'" the former Jharkhand chief minister told reporters here. Every rule has its own definition or preamble that explains in detail what is covered under it. But when one reads the newly approved PESA rules, one will find that the points mentioned in the PESA Act, 1996, are missing from the notified rules, he claimed.

"There are around 10 states that have Fifth Schedule areas where PESA rules under the provisions of the PESA Act, 1996, have already been implemented. In most of these states, the gram sabha has been defined in conformity with the spirit of the Act," the former Union tribal affairs minister said.

However, upon examining the PESA rules in Jharkhand, one finds that the State Government has subtly omitted certain core phrases — such as "customary laws" and "social and religious practices" — from the provisions related to the gram sabha and village governance, he claimed.

When the core spirit of the Act is thus diluted, the potential consequences in the future can well be imagined, Munda added.

Indore water deaths a system-created disaster, says Rajendra Singh



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Indore

Renowned water conservationist Rajendra Singh on Sunday described the death of at least six persons due to contaminated drinking water in Indore as a "system-created disaster" and alleged that corruption lay at the root of the tragedy.

If such a tragedy can occur in the country's cleanest city, it shows how serious would the condition of drinking water supply systems in other cities, Singh, a Ramon Magsaysay Award winner and widely hailed as 'waterman of India', told PTI.

Civic officials have said a leakage was found in the main drinking water supply pipeline near a police outpost in the Bhagirthura area, at a spot over which a toilet has been constructed. They claimed that the drinking water got contaminated due to this leakage.

"Indore's contaminated drinking water crisis is a system-created disaster. To save money, contractors lay drinking water pipelines close to drainage lines. Corruption has ruined the entire system. The Indore tragedy is the result of this corrupt system," Singh claimed.

Indore depends on the Narmada river for its water needs. Through pipelines laid by the municipal corporation, water from the Narmada is brought to Indore from Jalud in neighbouring Khargone district, located 80 km away, and supplied to households.

Over 1,700 acres of reserve forest land cleared of encroachments: CM Himanta

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

Over 1,700 acres of reserve forest land in Assam's Hojai district have been cleared of encroachments, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

He asserted that no encroachment will be tolerated. "Game over for illegal encroachment at Jamuna-Moudanga RF Mission completed as 5,250 bighas reclaimed through peaceful, lawful and decisive action," Sarma said in a post on X on Saturday, referring to an eviction drive on 1,732.5 acres in the area. "No cheat codes needed. Consider this your warning: Illegal encroachment will not be tolerated," said Sarma. Since the Himanta-led Government came to power in 2021, it has carried out a series of evictions to clear land from alleged encroachments, mostly affecting the Bengali-speaking Muslim population.

Sarma had said during his



press interaction on New Year's Day that so far, eviction drives have been carried out to clear 1,45,000 bighas (47,850 acres) of land.

On November 3 last year, the chief minister asserted that eviction drives to clear encroachments will continue

and "illegal Miyas" cannot have peace under his Government. 'Miya' is originally a pejorative term used for Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam, and the non-Bengali speaking people generally identify them as Bangladeshi immigrants.

Gehlot slams BJP Govt's Barmer-Balotra boundary reorganisation as Tughlaqi order

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jaipur

Former Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot on Sunday criticised the BJP-led State Government over the late-night reorganisation of boundaries between Barmer and Balotra districts, terming the move a "Tughlaqi order" taken in haste and against public interest.

In a statement, Gehlot said the decision to include Baytu in Barmer district and Gudamalani-Dhorimanna in Balotra was "completely illogical" from an administrative point of view.

He alleged that instead of reducing the distance to the district headquarters, the reorganisation has increased hardship for residents of the Gudamalani region. "This is a grave injustice to the common people. It is clear that the decision was not taken for public convenience but to serve political interests,



especially keeping in mind the upcoming delimitation and political equations," Gehlot said. The former chief minister said that his Government had created new districts with the objective of taking administration closer to the people, but the present Government was ignoring public sentiment. "The BJP

Government is busy only in serving its political agenda, disregarding the needs and aspirations of the people," he alleged.

Gehlot said the boundary changes carried out at midnight on December 31 reflected the Government's insensitivity towards the people of the region. He added that such decisions

should be taken after due consultation and assessment of ground realities.

He condemned the move in "strongest terms" and demanded that the Government reconsider the decision in the interest of the affected population. Panchayat and urban body elections are due in the state in coming months.

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Order Order

IRCTC case: Delhi HC to hear Lalu Prasad's petition against framing of charges



The Delhi High Court is likely to hear on Monday the petition of RJD leader Lalu Prasad Yadav against a special court's order framing charges against him and his wife Rabri Devi, son Tejashwi Prasad Yadav, and 11 others in the alleged IRCTC scam case. The former Railway Minister had recently moved the High Court assailing the order. The matter is listed before Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma. Earlier on October 13, the court had framed charges of cheating, criminal conspiracy, and sections of the Prevention of Corruption Act against the accused persons.

It had made a scathing observation that the land and share transactions in the case were "possibly an instance of crony capitalism fostered in the garb of eliciting private participation in the Railways' hotels at Ranchi and Puri." Besides Lalu Yadav, the court had framed charges against Pradeep Kumar Goel, Rakesh Sakseena, Bhupendra Kumar Agarwal, Rakesh Kumar Gogia and Vinod Kumar Asthana under Section 13(2) read with Section 13(1)(d)(ii) and (iii) of the Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act. Section 13(2) deals with the punishment for criminal misconduct by a public servant, and Section 13(1)(d)(ii) and (iii) with abuse of position by a public servant to obtain favours. The court had also directed that the charge be framed under IPC Section 420 (cheating) against Lalu Prasad, Rabri Devi, Tejashwi, M/s LARA Projects LLP, Vijay Kochhar, Vinay Kochhar, Sarla Gupta, and Prem Chand Gupta.

"A common charge is directed to be framed against all (14) accused under section 120B (criminal conspiracy) IPC read with section 420 IPC and section 13(2) read with section 13(1)(d)(ii) and (iii) PC Act," the court had said. The maximum punishment under the PC Act is 10 years, while for cheating is seven years.

Delhi HC orders blocking of websites illegally streaming Stranger Things, Friends



The Delhi High Court recently ordered the blocking of several websites which were found to be illegally hosting pirated films and television shows like Stranger Things, Friends, Batman, The Squid Game, The Jungle Book and others. Justice Tejas Karia passed order in favour of Warner Bros, Netflix, Apple, Disney and Crunchyroll to stop the piracy of their copyrighted content. The Court said that their copyrighted work should be protected as soon as they are created, and they can claim any mirror / redirect / alphanumeric variations of the websites named in the suit.

"To keep up with the hydra-headed nature of the infringement actions of such infringing domains / websites, this Court finds it fit to grant a 'Dynamic+injunction' to protect the Plaintiffs' Copyrighted Works as soon as they are created, to ensure that no irreparable loss is caused to the owners of Copyrighted Works, as there is an imminent possibility of the Plaintiffs' Copyrighted Works being uploaded on Infringing Websites or their newer versions immediately thereafter," the Court said.

The order was passed after Netflix, Warner Bros, Apple, Disney and Crunchyroll - members of the Motion Picture Association - approached the High Court stating that they are global entertainment companies and owners of the copyrights in several movies and series. The Court further directed Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to block access to the infringing websites identified by the plaintiffs within 72 hours.

NIA files chargesheet in Neemrana hotel firing case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has filed a chargesheet against two main shooters allegedly involved in the 2024 Neemrana hotel firing case linked with Khalistani terrorist Arsh Dala, officials said on Sunday.

The arrested accused, Puneet and Narinder Lalli, have been named in a charge sheet filed before a court in Jaipur, Rajasthan, on Saturday for various offences under the Bhartiya Nyay Sanhita, the Arms Act and



NIA Headquarters

the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, they said. The Punjab-based shoot-



CJI's new mandate on timeline hearing to be tested



RANJIT KUMAR SINHA

In a significant move to reduce judicial delays and manage court time more efficiently, the Supreme Court recently issued a formal Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) regarding timelines for oral arguments and written submissions.

The new rules, directed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, take effect immediately for all post-notice and regular hearing matters. "In order to facilitate effective Court Management and equitable distribution of Court working hours and to ensure speedy and proper administration of justice, as directed by Hon'ble the Chief Justice of India and all the Judges, there shall be a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for adhering to timelines for submission of oral arguments in all cases, with immediate effect," read the December 29, 2025 circular.

It said Senior Advocates, Arguing counsel and/or Advocate-on-record, shall submit the timelines for making oral arguments in all post-notice and Regular Hearing matters, at least a day prior to the commencement of the hearing of the case. The same shall be submitted to the Court through the online portal for submitting Appearance Slips already provided to the Advocate-on-record.

Further, Arguing counsel and/or Senior Advocates, through their Advocate-on-record or Nodal Counsel/s nominated by Court, if any, shall file a brief Note/ written submission not exceeding five (5) pages, after serving its copy on the other side, at least three (3) days prior to the date of hearing, in order to ensure compliance of such timeline.

Lastly, the circular stated that all counsel shall strictly adhere to the timelines fixed and conclude their oral arguments. The core objectives of the new SOP are to ensure an equitable distribution of court working hours across the heavy daily docket and to prevent endless hearings that delay outcomes for ordinary litigants. The CJ specifically noted in the past that prolonged arguments by senior counsel often deprive "poor and ordinary litigants" of their day in court.

Further, the SOP is likely to encourage crispness in thought and articulation and move away from the practice of reading long passages from books or voluminous pleadings. Till now, self-regulation has been the model where counsel honestly estimate their time needs.



CJI Surya Kant

However, the Court reserves the right to intervene if requested durations are deemed excessive. The responsibility for compliance lies jointly with the Senior Advocate, the arguing counsel, and the Advocate-on-Record (AoR).

A separate circular issued on the same day prioritises cases for specially-abled persons, acid attack victims, senior citizens (over 80), and those below the poverty line to further streamline the cause list. This SOP marks a decisive shift toward the procedural discipline seen in many foreign jurisdictions, where time is strictly allocated before the hearing.

Another significant aspect concerning the justice delivery mechanism, according to recent media reports, is that the CJ has affirmed that citizens facing legal emergencies or the threat of arrest by probe agencies at "unearthly hours" may seek urgent hearings from constitutional courts. This ensures that protection for fundamental rights and personal liberties remains accessible even in the "dead of night."

The bedrock of this proposition is Article 21 of the Constitution, which states: "No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law." The Supreme Court has interpreted this to mean that if a "procedure" (like an arrest) appears arbitrary or malicious, the court must be available to intervene immediately. Since an arrest can happen at any time, the remedy must also be available at any time.

While courts typically operate between fixed hours every day, a protocol exists for "after-hours" intervention. Even at night, a designated judicial officer (the Registrar) is reachable. If a lawyer can prove

"extreme urgency," the Registrar contacts the Chief Justice. The CJ (or the Chief Justice of a High Court) decides if the matter warrants waking up a bench. If approved, judges may hear the matter at their residence or via video conferencing. The CJ's comment, as reported, specifically targets a tactic sometimes used by probe agencies, arresting a person late on a Friday night or a holiday eve. This is often done to ensure the person remains in custody for 24-48 hours before they can be produced before a Magistrate.

By allowing "dead of night" hearings, the court prevents agencies from using the "weekend gap" to bypass judicial scrutiny. The Court views a single night of "illegal" or "unjustified" detention as a permanent scar on a citizen's rights.

India has a history of such emergency hearings. In the Yakub Memon Case (2015), the Supreme Court opened its doors at 3:00 am to hear a final plea against a death warrant. In the Karnataka Assembly Case (2018), a midnight hearing was held to decide on the formation of the State Government.

In the AmabGoswami Case (2020), the Court emphasised that "High Courts must exercise their jurisdiction to protect personal liberty." A large team of Mumbai Police officers arrived at his residence early in the morning without prior summons, which his lawyers argued was intended to intimidate and prevent him from seeking immediate legal counsel.

By publicly stating that courts are open 24/7, the CJ sends a clear message to investigating agencies (like the CBI, ED, or Police). It serves as a deterrent, signaling that any attempt to overstep legal bounds

under the cover of darkness can be met with an immediate judicial stay or an order of protection.

The year-end circular on SOP regarding timelines for oral arguments and written submissions did not emerge in a vacuum. It was the culmination of a deliberate reform agenda led by the CJI Surya Kant, who has been speaking on different platforms to address a growing "crisis of time" in the judiciary.

By late 2025, according to the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) and confirmed in statements by CJI and the Union Ministry of Law and Justice, the Supreme Court was facing its highest-ever pendency, crossing 88,000 to 91,000 cases.

On December 4, 2025, Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal informed the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) in a written reply that the pendency in the Supreme Court stood at 90,694 cases as of December 1, 2025. This was highlighted as a significant jump from the 70,239 cases recorded in 2021.

This looming pendency crisis provided the immediate administrative justification for the December 29, 2025, Circular, as the Court realized that traditional "self-regulation" of argument timelines was no longer sufficient to keep pace with the 7,000 plus new cases being filed every month.

In the new year, it is hoped that the circular on timeline acts as a structural reset for how the Supreme Court utilises its most precious resource, "judicial time." By moving from an unregulated model to a disciplined SOP, it is likely to improve the justice delivery system in several specific ways.

Historically, high-profile "luxury litigation" often consumed several

days of a Bench's schedule, leaving "ordinary" matters (like pension disputes, bail, or accident claims) unheard.

By fixing timelines for senior counsel, the Supreme Court ensures that a single case doesn't hijack the day's cause list. When lawyers commit to a timeline argument, the Court can accurately predict how many cases it will complete that day, reducing the frustrating outcome of adjournments due to a lack of time for later litigants.

Some of the Supreme Court advocates said the mandatory five-page cap on written submissions (filed 3 days in advance) transforms the quality of justice. Lawyers can no longer file voluminous "written notes" that judges struggle to digest. They must stick to the case in its absolute legal essence. Further, judges receive these concise notes 72 hours before the hearing, which will help them to enter the courtroom already briefed on the critical points. The SOP discourages the practice of reading long passages from books or case laws as "fillers" and prevents the repetition and tendency of lawyers to impress the clients by speaking more.

The timeline circular works in tandem with the Case Prioritisation Circular issued the same day. By saving time through stricter timelines, the Supreme Court creates "slots" in the schedule specifically for Senior citizens (80+) and BPL (Below Poverty Line) individuals, Specially-abled persons, and acid attack victims, and Legal aid matters that otherwise wait years for a hearing.

The SOP introduced by the Supreme Court will help the High Court to follow the suit and overcome the shortcomings. This holds good for some High Courts where matters of civil liberty take months to reach the Bench.

The December 29, 2025, circular and the CJ's affirmations on emergency hearings represent more than just a change in rules; they signal a fundamental evolution in the judicial system. This ensures that the Court's most finite resource—judicial time—is no longer monopolised by a few, but is distributed equitably among all seekers of justice, from the senior advocate in a corporate dispute to the victim of an acid attack, civil liberty or a pensioner waiting for their due.

Ultimately, the success of this reform hinges on its implementation. Whether the SOP can truly dismantle the culture of "luxury litigation" will be tested by the Bar's discipline and the Bench's resolve to enforce the new clock.

The writer is senior journalist covering legal affairs

2025 JEE: Delhi HC upholds order dismissing plea against NTA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A division bench of the Delhi High Court has upheld a single judge's order dismissing a writ petition of two JEE aspirants against the National Testing Agency (NTA), alleging discrepancies in the response sheets of the 2025 entrance exam.

The bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela, however, modified the order that imposed costs on the two aspirants and directed them to instead perform community service for one month.

The two judges were hearing the appeal filed by the aspirants challenging a single judge's September 22 order rejecting their claims after holding that the response sheets relied upon by them were not genuine.

The judge had considered the report submitted by the



National Cyber Forensic Laboratory (NFCL) and imposed a cost of ₹30,000 on each of the two aspirants. In a December 22 order, the High Court division bench directed one of the appellants to render community service at an old age home for one month, from May 15 to June 15, "on all days between 11 am and 1 pm".

The other appellant has been directed to render community service at a child care centre in Ghaziabad for the same period. The division bench noted that the previous order relied on the forensic report, which found that crucial browser logs corresponding to the time of downloading the alleged scorecards were

missing from the appellants' devices. "We find no infirmity in the reasoning or conclusions arrived at by the single judge," the bench said. It also said the claims made by the students were "mathematically inconsistent and contrary to established examination procedures", and the issues raised by them pertained to "disputed questions of fact and allegations of manipulation", which could not be adjudicated by a constitutional court in its writ jurisdiction.

The bench noted the submissions of the NTA's counsel that although the two aspirants had been barred from appearing in the JEE examinations for 2025 and 2026, there was no bar on them from appearing in any other examinations.

The court, however, clarified that the debarment would not be "treated as a stigma for their future academic pursuits."

Year after SC nod, no ad-hoc judges appointed in HCs to tackle pendency

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

No ad-hoc judges have been appointed in High Courts so far to tackle pending criminal cases, nearly a year after the Supreme Court cleared the decks for it, as the High Courts have not evinced interest. According to people aware of the procedure to appoint Supreme Court and High Court judges, none of the 25 High Courts have recommended names for appointment as ad-hoc judges.

Concerned over the pendency of over 18 lakh criminal cases, the Supreme Court had on January 30, 2025, allowed the High Courts to appoint ad-hoc judges, not exceeding 10 per cent of the court's total sanctioned strength.

However, the Union law ministry is yet to get any recommendation from any of the High Court collegiums to appoint retired judges on an ad hoc basis. Article 224A of the Constitution allows the appointment of retired judges as ad-hoc judges in High Courts to help manage case backlog.

According to the laid-down procedure, the respective High Court collegiums send recommendations or names of candidates to be appointed as HC judges to the Department of Justice in the law ministry. The department then adds inputs and details on the candidates before forwarding them to the Supreme Court Collegium.

The SC Collegium then takes a final call and recommends to the Government the appointment of the selected persons as judges. The President signs the



'warrant of appointment' of the newly-appointed judge.

The procedure to appoint ad-hoc judges will be the same except that the President will not sign the warrant of appointment.

But the assent of the President will be sought for appointing ad-hoc judges. Except in one case, there is no precedent of appointing retired judges as ad-hoc HC judges, officials said.

In a judgment on April 20, 2021, on the appointment of ad-hoc judges in the High Courts, the top court had imposed certain conditions. However, later a special Supreme Court bench comprising then Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices BR Gavai (another former CJI) and Surya Kant (incumbent CJI) had relaxed certain conditions and kept some in abeyance.

The verdict, which was authored by former Chief Justice S A Bobde, directed retired High Court judges to be appointed as ad-hoc ones for a period of two to three years to clear the backlog.

While one condition said that the ad-hoc judges

couldn't be appointed if a High Court is working with 80 per cent of its sanctioned strength, the other said ad-hoc judges could sit separately on benches to deal with cases.

Relaxing the conditions, the court said that for the time being, the first condition shall be kept in abeyance.

The bench said each High Court should keep the appointment to two to five ad-hoc judges and not exceed 10 per cent of the total sanctioned strength.

"The ad-hoc judges will sit in a bench presided over by a sitting judge of the High Court and decide pending criminal appeals," said the Supreme Court's order.

The rarely used Article 224A of the Constitution deals with the appointment of ad-hoc judges in High Courts.

"The Chief Justice of a High Court for any state may at any time, with the previous consent of the President, request any person who has held the office of a Judge of that Court or of any other High Court to sit and act as a Judge of the High Court for that State".



Editor's TAKE

Venezuela and the return of naked imperialism

The US attack on Venezuela on pretext of combating narco terrorism revives concerns over imperial overreach and the violation of national sovereignty

In the world of realpolitik, nothing is sacrosanct-not even the sovereignty of nations. When the United States attacked Venezuela without any provocation or immediate threat to its own existence, it became clear that little has changed over the years. Power, and the pursuit of self-interest, continues to dictate the conduct of nations. When that power belongs to a superpower, it often feels no obligation to heed global opinion or institutions such as the United Nations.

The United States' attack on Venezuela and the capture of its president, Nicolás Maduro, cannot be justified on any grounds. Under the guise of combating "narco-terrorism" and authoritarianism, the intervention represents a blatant violation of international norms and civilised conduct-particularly ironic for a nation that prides itself on being a global custodian of democracy. In truth, the United States has a long and ignominious history of meddling in the affairs of sovereign nations. Far from defending democracy or regional stability, this action appears driven less by principle than by strategic and economic interests, most notably Venezuela's vast oil reserves. While the US has engaged in such tactics before, this assault is unprecedented in one crucial respect: it marks the first direct US military attack on a South American country.

Uncle Sam has long played the role of the bully in the Americas. From Mexico in the 1840s to Cuba, Haiti, Brazil, Chile, Panama, and beyond, the region has borne the heavy cost of US interventions. The pretexts may change, but the underlying rationale remains the same. Such actions have been justified in the name of saving democracy from communism, stabilising nations, countering narcotics, or addressing human rights violations. The ultimate sufferer has always been the violated nation-its institutions weakened, instability prolonged, civilians subjected to hardship, and puppet regimes installed to serve American interests rather than the will of their own people. This time, however, there may be an additional factor: the erosion of US President Donald Trump's credibility following the surfacing of his name in the Epstein files, which has further damaged his standing and stature. This intervention is not about the rule of law or human rights; it is about reasserting hegemony. Such naked aggrandisement reduces Latin America to US colony, denying nations their fundamental right to determine their own political futures. The capture of Maduro evokes memories of the 1989 invasion of Panama and the arrest of Manuel Noriega-another episode justified on drug-trafficking charges. That intervention left hundreds of civilians dead and resulted in the installation of a US-favoured government, while Panama endured long-term political and social consequences.

Claims that the US will "run" Venezuela until a "proper transition" takes place should ring alarm bells within the United Nations. What lies ahead for Venezuela is prolonged instability, fragmentation of state authority, and a future shaped by foreign interests rather than national reconciliation. The world must come together to condemn this brazen display of power and the total disregard for international law that it represents.

Somnath Swabhiman Parv: A 1000 Years of Unbroken Faith (1026-2026)

If the Somnath Temple, which was attacked a thousand years ago and faced continuous attacks thereon, could rise again and again, then we can surely restore our great nation to the glory it embodied a thousand years ago before the invasions



NARENDRA MODI

Somnath...hearing this word instils a sense of pride in our hearts and minds. It is the eternal proclamation of India's soul. This majestic Temple is situated on the Western coast of India in Gujarat, at a place called Prabhas Patan. The Dwadasha Jyotirling Stotram mentions the 12 Jyotirlingas across India. The Stotram begins with "सौराष्ट्रे सोमनाथं च ..", symbolising the civilisational and spiritual importance of Somnath as the first Jyotirling.

It is also said: सोमलिङ्गं नरो हृद्गा सर्वपापैः प्रमुच्यते। लभते फलं मनोवञ्छितं मृतः स्वर्गं समाश्रयेत्॥ It means: Just the sight of Somnath Shivaling ensures that a person is freed of sins, achieves their righteous desires and attains heaven after death. Tragically, this very Somnath, which drew the reverence and prayers of millions, was attacked by foreign invaders, whose agenda was demolition, not devotion. The year 2026 is significant for the Somnath Temple. It has been 1,000 years since the first attack on this great shrine. It was in January of 1026 that Mahmud of Ghazni attacked this Temple, seeking to destroy a great symbol of faith and civilisation, through a violent and barbaric invasion. Yet, one thousand years later, the Temple stands as glorious as ever because of numerous efforts to restore Somnath to its grandeur. One such milestone completes 75 years in 2026.

It was during a ceremony on May 11, 1951, in the presence of the then President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, that the restored Temple opened its doors to devotees. The first invasion of Somnath a thousand years ago in 1026, the cruelty that was unleashed upon the people of the town and the devastation that was inflicted upon the shrine have been documented in great detail in various historical accounts.

When you read them, the heart trembles. Each line carries the weight of grief, cruelty and a sorrow that refuses to fade with time. Imagine the impact it had on Bharat and the morale of the people. After all, Somnath had great spiritual significance. It was also on the coast, giving strength to a society with great economic prowess, whose sea traders and seafarers carried tales of its grandeur far and wide. Yet, I am proud to state unequivocally that the story of Somnath, a thousand years after the first attack, is not defined by destruction. It is defined by the unbreakable courage of crores of children of Bharat Mata. The medieval barbarism that began a thousand years ago in 1026 went on to 'inspire' others to repeatedly attack Somnath. It was the start of an attempt to enslave our people and culture. But,



THE SACRED DUTY OF REBUILDING THE SOMNATH TEMPLE AFTER INDEPENDENCE CAME TO THE ABLE HANDS OF SARDAR VALLABHBHAI PATEL. A VISIT DURING DIWALI TIME IN 1947 MOVED HIM SO MUCH THAT HE ANNOUNCED THAT THE TEMPLE WILL BE REBUILT THERE

each time the Temple was attacked, we also had great men and women who stood up to defend it and even made the ultimate sacrifice. And every single time, generation after generation, the people of our great civilisation picked themselves up, rebuilt and rejuvenated the Temple. It is our privilege to have been nurtured by the same soil that has nurtured greats like Ahilyabai Holkar, who made a noble attempt to ensure devotees can pray at Somnath. In the 1890s, Swami Vivekananda visited Somnath and that experience moved him. He expressed his feelings during a lecture in Chennai in 1897 when he said, "Some of these old temples of Southern India and those like Somnath of Gujarat will teach you volumes of wisdom, will give you a keener insight into the history of the race than any amount of books. Mark how these temples bear the marks of a hundred attacks and a hundred regenerations, continually destroyed and continually springing up out of the ruins, rejuvenated and strong as ever! That is the national mind, that is the national life-current. Follow it and it leads to glory. Give it up and you die; death will be the only result, annihilation, the only effect, the moment you step beyond that life current."

The sacred duty of rebuilding the Somnath Temple after independence came to the able hands of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. A visit during Diwali time in 1947 moved him so much that he announced that the Temple will be rebuilt there. Finally, on May 11, 1951, a grand Temple in Somnath opened its doors to devotees and Dr. Rajendra Prasad was present there. The great Sardar Sahib was not alive to see this historic day, but the fulfilment of his dream stood tall before the nation. The then Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, was not too enthused with this development. He did not want the Honourable President as well as Ministers to associate with this special event. He said that this event created a bad impression of India. But Dr. Rajendra Prasad stood firm and the rest is history. No mention of Somnath is complete without

recalling the efforts of KM Munshi, who supported Sardar Patel very effectively. His works on Somnath, including the book, 'Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal', are extremely informative and educative. Indeed, as the title of Munshi Ji's book conveys, we are a civilisation that carries a sense of conviction about the eternity of spirit and of ideas. We firmly believe that which is eternal is indestructible, as outlined in the famous Gita verse "नेन चिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि ...". There can be no better example of our civilisation's indomitable spirit than Somnath, which stands gloriously, overcoming odds and struggles.

It is this same spirit that is visible in our nation, one of the brightest spots of global growth, having overcome centuries of invasions and colonial loot. It is our value systems and the determination of our people that have made India the centre of global attention today. The world is seeing India with hope and optimism. They want to invest in our innovative youngsters. Our art, culture, music and several festivals are going global. Yoga and Ayurveda are making a worldwide impact, bootstrapping healthy living.

Since time immemorial, Somnath has brought together people from different walks of life. Centuries ago, Kalikal Sarvagna Hemchandracharya, a respected Jain monk, came to Somnath.

It is said that after praying there, he recited a verse, "भववीजाङ्कुरजनना रागाद्याः क्षयमुपाता यस्याः". It means - Salutations to That One in whom the seeds of worldly becoming are destroyed, in whom passion and all afflictions have withered away." Today, Somnath holds the same ability to awaken something profound within the mind and soul. A thousand years after the first attack in 1026, the sea at Somnath still roars with the same intensity as it did back then. The waves that wash the shores of Somnath tell a story. No matter what, just like the waves, it kept rising again and again.



The aggressors of the past are now dust in the wind, their names synonymous with destruction. They are footnotes in the annals of history, while Somnath stands bright, radiating far beyond the horizon, reminding us of the eternal spirit that remained undiminished by the attack of 1026. Somnath is a song of hope that tells us that while hate and fanaticism may have the power to destroy for a moment, faith and conviction in the power of goodness have the power to create for eternity. If the Somnath Temple, which was attacked a thousand years ago, could rise again and again, then we can surely restore our great nation to the glory it embodied a thousand years ago before the invasions. With the blessings of Shree Somnath Mahadev, we move forward with a renewed resolve to build a Viksit Bharat, where civilisational wisdom guides us to work for the welfare of the whole world. Jai Somnath!

Narendra Modi is the Prime Minister of India and is also the Chairman of the Shree Somnath Trust

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PIC TALK



A woman takes blessings from a Naga sadhu of Niranjani Akhara during the ongoing Magh Mela festival at Sangam, in Prayagraj

PHOTO: PTI

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INDORE WATER FIASCO: CLEANLINESS RANKINGS MASK CIVIC FAILURE

In Indore, the city celebrated as India's cleanest for eight consecutive years, the outbreak of a water-borne disease in Bhagirathpura, claiming several innocent lives, has devastated families. Laboratory reports indicate that infection spread through leaks in the drinking-water network and contamination from foul sewage.

Such gross negligence by the civic administration has proved fatal. For ordinary citizens, breaking through the web of mismanagement within the municipal corporation and other civic agencies has become impossible.

The proverb about digging a well only after the house has caught fire fits Bhagirathpura, where inspections of the entire pipeline have begun only now. Meanwhile, blame and counter-

blame dominate public discussion, overshadowing the tragedy of polluted water and the suspicious accounting of deaths.

Transparency, speedy repair, and independent monitoring are urgently required. Residents deserve safe water, not excuses and statistics.

It is also noteworthy that Bhagirathpura falls within the Indore-1 Assembly constituency of the state's Urban Development and Housing Minister, Kailash Vijayvargiya.

That fact inevitably raises serious questions about accountability, responsibility, and the apparent indifference of those charged with protecting public health, in a crisis of trust today for all. The incident must be probed and responsibilities must be fixed as soon as possible.

Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad

When Survival Meets Coexistence



SANJAY CHANDRA

2ND OPINION THE PIONEER

I begin most mornings the same way: with a cup of tea in one hand and the newspaper in the other. It is a ritual that took root early in my childhood and, to my mild surprise, has survived into later life—one of the few habits to do so. Some friends insist that both tea and newspapers now contribute equally to acidity, given the tone of contemporary headlines. Still, I persist. There is something especially satisfying about reading the paper on the first day of the year, when the noise of daily updates gives way to reflection and summary. This year, too, the tradition held. One article that caught my attention focused on Project Tiger. On the surface, it carried good news: years of sustained conservation have led to a welcome rise in tiger numbers. Yet success, as so often happens, comes with com-

plications. The growth in population has not been matched by a corresponding expansion of habitat. As a result, nearly a third of India's tigers now roam beyond core forest areas, edging closer to human settlements. This immediately brought back memories of a visit to the Masai Mara in Kenya, where we once saw three cheetahs wandering casually through a village. Our driver and several tourist vehicles bounced excitedly over rough ground to follow them, while the villagers watched with practiced indifference, as though this were an entirely ordinary sight. My wife remarked that there are now reports of big cats living almost alongside humans, not unlike stray dogs in our cities. Dogs, after all, diverged from wolves thousands of years ago, forging a mutually beneficial relationship with humans. Ironically, after perfecting coexistence, we refined it further by dividing dogs into two rigid categories: pets and strays. We now find ourselves locked in fierce—and sometimes ugly—debates over their right to exist, arguing like proverbial cats and dogs over whether they deserve protection or removal. The past year saw these tensions erupt following a court ruling on the issue, proving that few things ignite public emotion as quickly as a moral argument.

Centuries from now, historians may note how humans first separated animals into wild and domestic, and then subdivided the domestic into pet and stray—an evolution-

ary detour entirely of our own making. At the heart of this lies our selective application of two ideas: survival of the fittest and peaceful coexistence. As the dominant species, we expand as though it were our unquestionable right, encroaching on forests, fields, and coastlines. Yet we also reserve for ourselves the authority to decide when coexistence should be promoted and when compassion should be exercised. Too often, peaceful coexistence becomes a corrective tool, invoked only when our own comfort is threatened. This pattern repeats not just

across species, but within humanity—between communities, nations, and ideologies. Even outer space is not spared. I sometimes wonder how things might have unfolded had dinosaurs, or some other prehistoric species, survived to become dominant. Would they have made room for humans? Animals do fight for territory, but usually for food, mates, and survival—not for ideology or excess. Watching wildlife today, one often sees different species sharing a water hole, birds cleaning parasites from a resting lion, and scavengers performing their quiet, essential role. Each contributes to a fragile balance that sustains the whole. That humans might need to relearn peaceful coexistence—or even collaboration—from the animal world is a humbling thought, and one well worth serious reflection.

The writer, the founder of Kala, is an author, speaker, coach, arbitrator, and strategy consultant.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Biopic 'Ikkis' revives patriotic cinema

Among the Christmas-New Year releases, the Hindi film Ikkis, a biopic on Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal, is poised to create box-office records in India and abroad. Directed by Sriram Raghavan, the film is a poignant tribute to the bravery and idealism of India's youngest recipient of the Param Vir Chakra. Young actor Agastya Nanda delivers a stellar performance that anchors the narrative with restraint and dignity.

Set during the 1971 Indo-Pak War, the film traces Arun's journey from rigorous military training to the battlefield, highlighting themes of courage, friendship, and ultimate sacrifice during the Battle of Basantar, where he laid down his life at the age of twenty-one. Ikkis also marks the final on-screen appearance of the legendary Dharmendra, lending the project an added layer of emotional resonance. With its thoughtful writing, strong performances, and judicious use of technology, Ikkis demonstrates how patriotic stories, when grounded in truth and sensitivity, can be both compelling and commercially successful. One hopes the film inspires more directors to approach such themes with seriousness rather than empty bombast, and encourages audiences to reflect on service, family, and the true cost of freedom.

M Pradyu | Kannur

Urgent action needed to save the birds

Animals and birds have always held a special place in the human heart. Pets provide comfort, companionship, and emotional support, while wild birds serve as a living connection to our planet's ancient past. Nearly ten thousand species of birds continue to survive across the world, enriching ecosystems and human imagination alike. Pet birds such as parakeets, budgerigars, and parrots often enjoy safety and care under the protection of their owners. Unfortunately, the same security is rarely available to birds in the wild. Wild birds, like many other animals, face mounting threats from shrinking habitats, climate change, pollution, and relentless human intrusion. The illegal trade in exotic birds, frequently driven by organised criminal networks, demands firm and uncompromising action.

National Bird Day, observed on 5 January, reminds us that every bird matters and that human awareness and responsibility are crucial.

Spreading awareness, rescuing injured birds, supporting shelters, and protecting both domestic and wild species from cruelty and predators are essential civic duties. Collective action today can ensure that future generations inherit skies filled with colour, song, and the delicate beauty of freedom.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

Railways moves towards safety & comfort

Indian Railways is set to launch its first Vande Bharat sleeper service between Guwahati and Kolkata later this month, with Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw assuring passengers that fares will remain significantly lower than those of air travel. This marks an important step in expanding affordable, high-quality long-distance rail connectivity. Looking further ahead, India's first bullet train is scheduled to commence operations on August 15, 2027, with services introduced in phases along the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail Corridor.

Once fully operational, the train is expected to cover the 508-kilometre distance in just two hours and seventeen minutes, dramatically transforming intercity travel for millions. The Vande Bharat sleeper train features a sleek, aerodynamic design inspired by modern bullet trains and is equipped with the indigenous KAVACH anti-collision system. These advancements highlight significant progress in safety, comfort, and punctuality, while also reflecting growing confidence in India's domestic engineering capabilities and commitment to sustainable transport.

The focus now must be on completing projects on schedule, ensuring transparency in costs, and keeping fares affordable for ordinary passengers.

S. Sankaranarayanan | Chennai



A regulator in turbulence: How the DGCA lost its way

FIRST
Column

As India enters a new year and nears a century of civil aviation regulation, the DGCA finds itself under unprecedented scrutiny. Once led by pioneering airmen and technocrats, the regulator is now exposed by airline mismanagement, regulatory inertia and repeated safety lapses. The IndiGo saga has underscored the urgent need to reform India's aviation sector



SANJAY LAZAR



strength per aircraft. CAR Section S-III-C, Part II, Clause 8.4 mandates a minimum of three sets per aircraft (six pilots), despite the DGCA approving the national carrier's policy as far back as 2019 for a minimum of 6.5 sets (13 pilots) for narrow-body aircraft and 12.5 sets (50 pilots) for long-haul operations, excluding reserves.

The three-set concept is obsolete, incompatible with modern fatigue management and safety norms. Yet the DGCA persists with it, providing errant airlines a convenient fig leaf to cut costs and overwork pilots. Ironically, many DGCA systems in use today trace their origins to Shelmerdine himself nearly a century ago—from pilot and aircraft licensing to accident reporting and the drafting of the Aircraft Act, 1934.

Following ICAO and FAA audits in 2006, serious deficiencies were flagged and Parliament constituted the Kaw Committee to recommend reforms. The Kaw Committee proposed the creation of an Indian Civil Aviation Service, financial and administrative autonomy, and professional management of the regulator. Parliament subsequently recommended replacing the DGCA with an autonomous Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). The CAA Bill, 2013, passed committee scrutiny but lapsed after the 2014 elections.

Those reforms vanished without trace. Today, as India stands on the brink of becoming the world's third-largest aviation market, with nearly 2,000 aircraft and 250 airports, it continues to rely on regulatory mechanisms inherited from colonial times—long abandoned even by Britain and dozens of other nations.

Calls for radical reform may sound extreme, but the need to restructure and professionalise the DGCA is undeniable. Unfortunately, the Bharatiya Vayuvan Vidheyak, 2024, moves in the opposite direction, entrenching dysfunction rather than curing it.

India urgently needs a clear separation of administrative and technical functions, with seasoned aviators and professionals leading the regulator, as is the global norm.

The Prime Minister and the Aviation Minister owe it to the nation to purge, modernise and liberate aviation oversight through an independent CAA-style body—so that Indian aviation can truly fly high, without fear or favour.

As we herald another new year, almost a century after Lt Col (later Sir) Francis Claude Shelmerdine established India's Department of Civil Aviation in 1927 and went on to become the country's first Director General of Civil Aviation, he must surely be turning in his grave. The sordid IndiGo saga has exposed the tender underbelly of Indian aviation and the DGCA alike.

The year 2025 is one that Indian aviation would rather forget. Looked at more charitably, however, 2026 could yet prove to be a harbinger of much-needed change. That golden generation of airmen and aviation traditions—beginning with the great J.R.D. Tata, Aspi Engineer, Purshottam Kabali, Shelmerdine and Sir Victor Sassoon, and carried forward by Indian Air Force pilots and technical heads of the DGCA—has long since passed.

The glory years of the 1970s and 1980s, when Air Marshals such as Jafar Zaheer and Air Vice Marshal C.K. Shantaram Rajee—both decorated and eminently distinguished Director Generals of Civil Aviation—led the regulator, effectively ended with the tenure of the last technical head, Mr Kanu Gohain, who demitted office in 2007.

A course correction under the UPA resulted in airmen and technocrats being permanently supplanted by IAS officers. Over the past 17 years, the post has effectively become a bureaucratic preserve and a plum posting. This is not to say that non-IAS officers did not serve with distinction in the interregnum. Some did so with great honour—among them Mr H.S. Khola, Mr M.R. Sivaraman, and Dr S.S. Sidhu, who later went on to become ICAO Secretary General.

In recent times, the DGCA has come under fire for numerous sins of commission and omission, despite—or perhaps because of—the fact that it is currently headed by an eminently distinguished bureaucrat. The AI-171 tragedy, incidents of GPS spoofing, Airbus software issues, the mess at IndiGo, and the alleged scams within the system have exposed long-festering cracks in the Directorate's armour. It took the bloodletting of both the Indian

INDIA URGENTLY NEEDS A CLEAR SEPARATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND TECHNICAL FUNCTIONS, WITH SEASONED AVIATORS AND PROFESSIONALS LEADING THE REGULATOR

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populace and the political class to realise that the DGCA had perhaps become a large cesspool of red tape, shielded for years from public scrutiny under the guise of public safety. In 2025, that final veil was torn apart by a cascading series of failures that made Indian aviation appear farcical.

In an earlier article, we traced the IndiGo crisis and how blinkered—or creatively selective—vision at the regulator triggered a domino effect across the aviation market. The DGCA has grown too large, too unwieldy, and at times, dangerously dysfunctional.

Today, the DGCA comprises 19 divisions, headed by officials of the rank of Economic Adviser (EA), Joint Director General (JDG), or Deputy Director General (DDG), all reporting upwards to the EA or DG. Each division is vested with

defined oversight responsibilities, yet when the system collapses, accountability is conspicuously absent.

The IndiGo crisis is a textbook example: its roots lie across multiple DGCA divisions, yet no one is ever found culpable. Schedules were approved by the DDG (AED) and his superior without verification, but no action followed—on the contrary, the approvals were quietly defended using antiquated rules.

The JDG (DAT) and the Chief Flight Operations Inspector were responsible for flight standards and pilot oversight at IndiGo, yet appeared unaware that 120 pilots had been let go or that recruitment had been paused as early as May.

The regulator conveniently forgot the airline's requests for deferment of Phase II of the CAR in September 2025, as well as the seven dispensations sought.

Either the left hand did not know what the right was doing—or plausible deniability was the chosen refuge. A recent transfer of a DGCA official appeared ominous amid the IndiGo crisis but turned out to be a routine, long-pending change.

The real questions remain unanswered: why do officers facing vigilance inquiries continue to occupy sensitive positions years beyond permissible norms? Why did previous DGs freeze serious investigations?

A genuine purge—post an independent external inquiry—would inevitably have to include senior JDGs, DDGs and the CFO, if the government has the will to clean its Augean stables. Political expediency, however, often weighs heavier.

At the heart of the problem lies the continued exploitation of archaic rules—most notably those governing pilot

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SINCE 1865

Dealing with Delhi's toxic air: A governance failure, not a seasonal anomaly



PARUL SHARMA

Every winter, Delhi's air pollution crisis returns with grim predictability. Schools shut, hospitals issue advisories, flights are delayed, and public anger briefly peaks. The debate that follows is equally familiar: stubble burning versus vehicles, construction dust versus coal plants, individual behaviour versus government failure. Yet despite years of discussion and data, the air remains toxic. This persistence points to two deeper truths: a lack of public clarity about the issue, and a failure of public systems—planning, governance, and institutional capacity—unfolding in plain sight.

At the same time, several civic efforts are working to address these gaps. One point is often missing from the public narrative: air pollution is not a behavioural anomaly or a technological gap that can be solved through private fixes. It is the cumulative outcome of fragmented urban planning, weak enforcement, and misplaced priorities over decades. Delhi's air quality is poor not just in winter but throughout the year. Seasonal meteorology worsens the crisis, but the sources are structural and continuous. Motorised transport, dominated by private vehicles, accounts for nearly half of particulate pollution.

Construction and road dust contribute roughly another third. Coal-based thermal power plants operating on the city's periphery add significantly to emissions, with many violating sulphur dioxide norms. Household emissions, small industries, and biomass burning further compound the burden. Stubble burning, often portrayed as the primary villain, contributes a variable share—between 4 per cent and 20 per cent depending on wind conditions—and only for a limited four- to six-week window. Yet public discourse disproportionately fixates on it, allowing harder conversations about urban mobility, land use, and industrial regulation to be postponed. This misalignment between causes and responses becomes stark when public funding is examined. India's National Clean Air Programme allocated about ₹19,711 crore over six years for 131 cities—roughly ₹25 crore per city per year. A large portion of this funding remains unspent. Of what is spent, much goes toward short-term measures such as water spraying on roads, which



offers visual relief but little evidence-based impact.

The deeper constraint is institutional capacity. Pollution control boards remain understaffed, underpowered, and financially constrained, with limited enforcement authority. Urban planning institutions lack legal teeth. Transport, environment, housing, and land-use decisions continue to operate in silos. Without empowered institutions, even well-intentioned policies remain aspirational.

Policy incoherence compounds the problem. Restrictions on construction in ecologically sensitive zones coexist with permissions for large-scale development. Older vehicle bans are inconsistently enforced, even as the policy narrative increasingly centres on electric vehicles.

While EVs are important, they do not address a fundamental truth: replacing one private vehicle with another does not solve congestion, emissions, or exposure. Cities with cleaner air have not merely electrified cars; they have reduced dependence on them. International experience shows that another path is possible. Cities that have successfully tackled air pollution treated it as a governance challenge rather than an environmental add-on. Beijing invested heavily and consistently, relocated polluting industries, enforced emission norms, and built integrated public transport systems. The lesson is not replication, but coherence and follow-through.

A more effective response in India requires clear sequencing of action. In the short term, priorities must include immediate reduction of exposure: strict enforcement of construction-site compliance, penalties for non-compliant vehicles and industries, and demand-side measures such as congestion pricing and

rationalised parking fees.

Revenues should be ring-fenced to strengthen public transport and last-mile connectivity. In the medium to long term, air quality improvement depends on reducing private vehicle dependence. This requires sustained investment in reliable public transport, safe walking and cycling infrastructure, and the creation of low-emission zones around schools, hospitals, and dense activity centres. Industrial and thermal power plants that cannot meet emission standards must be relocated beyond urban peripheries.

At the institutional level, pollution control boards must be adequately staffed, funded, and empowered. City-level planning authorities need legal authority, and state and national institutions must be strengthened to enforce environmental and mobility norms.

A regional unified metropolitan transport authority across all modes can align planning, pricing, and operations. Transparent, real-time air quality data should guide both policy and accountability. Delhi's air pollution crisis is neither inevitable nor insoluble.

It is the outcome of choices—and can be reversed by better ones. Experts such as Sunita Narain, Arunabha Ghosh, Vimlendu Jha, Amit Bhatt, and Jyoti Pande Lavakare have articulated both the problems and solutions for years. Treating clean air as a national priority, strengthening public institutions, and committing to sustained reform can turn today's crisis into an opportunity to build healthier, more resilient cities.

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Health for all: Reclaiming the soul of Indian healthcare



RICHARD HAY

India's medical institutions, once revered as sanctuaries of healing, are today rapidly degenerating into centres of unchecked commercial exploitation. What was meant to serve humanity has, in many cases, become a profit-driven enterprise, indifferent to human suffering.

The Hippocratic Oath, solemnly taken by every doctor, clearly states: "I will use treatment to help the sick according to my ability and judgment, but never to injure or wrong them." Yet, in today's healthcare ecosystem, this sacred pledge is being brazenly violated. Healing has been replaced by billing, and compassion by calculation. Medical colleges and hospitals increasingly function like corporate entities, where patients are viewed not as human beings in distress but as revenue-generating units. Unnecessary diagnostic tests, inflated bills, denial of ethical care, and coercive treatment practices have become disturbingly common.

Even more alarming is the unholy nexus between hospitals and insurance companies, which often results in inflated claims, denial of genuine treatments, and the ruthless exploitation of helpless patients. The poor and middle class suffer the most, stripped of dignity at their most vulnerable moments. Equally dangerous is the widespread circulation of spurious, substandard, and unnecessary medicines, prescribed not for healing but for profit. This amounts to nothing less than a silent public health crime. Regulatory bodies such as the National Accreditation Board for Hospitals (NABH), the National Medical Commission, and State Medical Councils appear to have reduced themselves to mere licensing authorities, frequently turning a blind eye to grave ethical violations. Accreditation has become more procedural than principled, more bureaucratic than moral. It is deeply troubling that the Government of India, along with institutions such as the NABH, Central Consumer Protection Department (CCPD), Indian Medical Council, and the Indian Medical Association, has failed to exercise effective moral and regulatory authority.

Instead of protecting patients, the system often shields powerful medical lobbies. Institutions such as the National

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865



Human Rights Commission (NHRC), State Human Rights Commissions (SHRCs), and allied bodies have, in many cases, failed to act decisively. Their silence in the face of blatant injustice amounts to institutional abdication.

The State cannot remain a mute spectator while citizens are reduced to victims within systems meant to protect them. Healthcare is not a commodity; it is a moral obligation and a constitutional responsibility. India urgently needs stringent laws, uncompromising enforcement, and exemplary punishment for those who betray medical ethics. The nation must reclaim the soul of its healthcare system. The time has come to bridge the widening chasm between corporate interests and clinical care. This demands a fundamental shift in how healthcare is governed, centred on three imperatives: legislative accountability, transparent supervision, and decisive state action. Legislative accountability requires the enactment of a national framework that holds hospitals legally and criminally liable for predatory billing and medically unjustified procedures.

Transparent supervision must transform regulatory bodies from passive licensing offices into active guardians of ethics, while incorporating independent civil society oversight to curb the influence of medical lobbies. Decisive state action presupposes that the State can no longer remain a mute spectator to the unholy practices prevailing in the healthcare sector. We must dismantle systems that prioritise ledger entries over human lives. India must urgently reclaim the soul of its healthcare system by restoring human dignity to the centre of medical practice. The nation expects—and deserves—nothing less.

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AI PCs emerged as one of last year's success stories, albeit without enough consumer buzz. According to the Gartner forecast, they may represent 31 per cent of global shipments of PCs. With annual shipments of nearly 78 million units in 2025, the market share of AI PCs, which are defined as personal computers with embedded neural processing units or equivalent AI accelerators, more than doubled from roughly 15 per cent in 2024. This shift has two implications. First, AI PCs are not a fringe experiment. They are moving toward mainstream adoption within the PC category.

Second, the sheer pace of growth, and market share, suggest that manufacturers and buyers are prioritising devices with built-in AI capability, even if specific AI use cases are still evolving. Examples of products in this category include premium laptops such as Dell XPS 13 Plus with Intel Core Ultra processors and built-in neural engines, Lenovo ThinkPad Z13 with integrated AI accelerators, and Microsoft Surface Laptop Studio 2 with Copilot+ optimisation.

Despite the growth, there was uneven adoption. While awareness among IT partners is high, and some estimates suggest that more than 70 per cent of B2B partners are aware of AI PCs, only a minority of enterprise buyers ranked AI capability as the top purchasing criterion. Instead, they were keen on issues such as Windows 11 upgrades, security, and battery life.

A similar mixed story eluded the AI-first gadgets and consumer hardware, some of which collapsed in 2025. For example, the Humane AI Pin and Rabbit R1 captured imagination, and rapidly lost relevance. Humane, a high-profile AI startup backed by celebrity investors, shut down the production of AI Pin consumer product, and sold the assets for \$116 million, a fraction of the earlier valuations.

Similarly, Rabbit R1, an AI lifestyle device that was once touted as a new category, underperformed. According to the founder's statements, and multiple reporting sources, of the 1,00,000 units sold, about 5,000 users used them actively. This highlighted a steep fall-off in engagement after the initial purchases. The failure for this category was structural. It desired to replace smartphones without matching the latter's reliability, ecosystem depth, or breadth of utility. AI alone is not enough to justify a new category. This was a sobering reminder, as the industry soberly realised that AI possibly works best as a layer, and not as a standalone product.

Gaming handheld PCs was another category that leaned toward disappointment. It generated online discussions in 2025, but the commercial footprint remained modest. Devices such as Steam Deck OLED refresh, and Windows-based handhelds gained visibility, but the volumes remained niche. Battery life constraints, high prices, and fragmented software experiences limited the appeal. The global shipments of Windows-based or dedicated gaming handheld PCs stayed below two million units in 2025.

Not all the innovative hardware struggled in 2025. A category that achieved meaningful traction was smart glasses, particularly the AI-enabled eyewear, which progressed beyond experimentation, and moved towards mainstream adoption. According to Omdia, worldwide shipments of AI glasses, which may cross the five-million mark in 2025, will double to more than 10 million in 2026. After more than 150 per cent growth in the last year, the forecast is for 200 per cent growth this year, and a predicted sales of 35 million by 2030.

Data from Counterpoint corroborates this momentum. In the first half of 2025, global smart glasses shipments surged by 110 per cent year-on-year, with AI-enabled models accounting for nearly 78 per cent. Meta's Ray-Ban Meta AI glasses captured nearly 73 per cent share of the smart glasses market during the period. Meta is likely to capture the bulk of the share of projected shipments this year.

Apple's Vision Pro, a spatial computer that blends the physical world with digital content, may be one of the most tech-impressive products of the decade, but 2025 made it the firm's most conspicuous product miss. It failed to achieve a meaningful scale. Multiple reports indicate that global shipments remained below one million units, with estimates clustering between 400,000 and 600,000 units since the launch. After reports that Apple had cut production targets in 2024 due to the softening of demand, the slowdown persisted in 2025.

The pricing barrier was decisive. At \$3,499, Vision Pro sat far outside the mass-market reach. While Apple positioned it as a productivity and collaboration tool, enterprise pilots did not translate into scaled rollouts. Developers slowed investment due to low installed base, and unclear monetisation pathways. By mid-2025, reports suggested that the firm had decided to reduce component orders, delay a second-generation Vision Pro, and shift the focus to a lower-cost variant in 2026. Counterpoint estimates that AR/VR headsets accounted for less than one per cent of global consumer electronics shipments in 2025.

Let us end with a smartphone, although we discussed them in a previous column. Samsung's Galaxy Z TriFold was one of 2025's most striking launches. Launch details confirm that the firm unveiled the device at a high price point (roughly \$2,440), and a large 10-inch display. The device was targeted at niche enthusiasts. Reports from South Korea indicate limited initial production, with 20,000-30,000 units made in the first run, a figure that is smaller than typical flagship volumes. This cautious approach reflects that Samsung is hedging on demand. Independent data supports this view.



Back to oil, the new data

Actions on Venezuela, Russia, China, India are about energy

OUR TAKE



Sutanu Guru
Author, Journalist
and Academician

The US invaded Venezuela, abducted the latter's president and his wife, and charged them with narco-terrorism. However, one of the main reasons behind this bizarre, seemingly illegal, and anti-global act is the fact that Venezuela holds the largest oil reserves in the world. There was a time till the late 1990s when the nation could produce almost 10 million barrels per day. Since then, Venezuela witnessed rules by a few socialist governments such as those led by Hugo Chavez, and Nicolas Maduro. Maduro, the abducted president, is now an arrested 'criminal' in America.

Several media articles speculated about the reasons behind Donald Trump's reckless and such one-sided act that is akin to a de facto invasion of a country, and infringement with its sovereignty. Well, the fact of the matter is that it boils down to a resource that mattered as much a century ago. From the 1920s to 2026, despite hiccups, ups and downs, oil is still a powerful medium of leverage to exert massive control over the global economy, and producer-consumer nations. Forget about data being the new oil; oil is the data. In several cases, Trump's animosity and rivalry slips on slick surfaces.

Just before Venezuela, the US announced that it was bombing the terror group ISIS' bases in Nigeria because they were indiscriminately killing Christians. For close to five decades, Christians in many parts of Africa were slaughtered. America was least bothered. Now, Nigeria matters because not only does it produce a lot of oil, it has massive reserves. Look at what is happening in Iran. Every now and then, the US seems to be on the verge of sponsoring a regime change and encouraging street protests there. There is no doubt that Iran's regime is authoritative, ultra-

conservative, and has no respect for human rights.

But Iran is an ancient civilisation, and followed independent policies for the past several decades, apart from America-sponsored Shah's regime. It is one of the largest producers of oil, and faces severe American sanctions. Russia is another massive producer of oil, and faces severe western sanctions Iran, Venezuela, Nigeria, and Russia may find it virtually impossible to sell oil legally. Trump has announced that the US will control Venezuelan oil. What does this mean? It implies that at one stroke, the US and its allies have cut off, will do it, or take over almost a quarter of the global supply.

Let us now look at some of the largest energy guzzlers. The biggest consumers are China, America's Enemy No. 1, and India. Then comes Japan followed by many Asian countries. These nations are dependent on oil supplies from Venezuela, Nigeria, Iran, Iraq, and Russia. The last one became a major supplier after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. By 2026, America coerced Japan and India to buy more oil from America, and non-Russia sources. The same is true of the Asian nations. Oil power, and the related geopolitics and global games that began a century ago are back with a vengeance.

Who said, history does not repeat itself? In the early part of the twentieth century, the global powers, predominantly the UK and the US, captured access to the newly-discovered and massive oil reserves in West Asia, or the Middle East. Since then, the region West Asia remained a key fulcrum that directed the power geopolitics behind oil, which still dominates the fossil fuel market. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait,

Oman, Bahrain, and Qatar remain the key players in the global market, which was the case since the two world wars.

There was a phase, beginning in the early 1970s, when a group of oil nations, OPEC, dictated oil prices. It was primarily controlled by the producers in the Middle East. But the phase did not last long as the US controlled the oil barring the production in Iran, Libya, and Iraq. We know what happened in Libya and Iraq. We know what the US wants in Iran. Now, it is Venezuela's turn, which is a major supplier of oil and metals to China, and has ties with Russia.

Yet another ironic twist in the tale is how the US dealt with global powers in the past. Apart from the UK, which was in decline after World War II, the main rivals were Germany, and Japan. Germany did not have direct control over oil, and the US effectively blockaded oil from reaching Japan during the period. Without going into the details, this sums up the story of the second world war, and its winners and losers. Oil largely decided this. Will the world witness another global war that is linked to oil?

Only the equations have changed. America's most-crucial rival, China, is not a pushover. It has the economic means, military might, and geopolitical presence, apart from the control over crucial non-oil resources. Indeed, despite Trump's trade-and-tariff tactics, China is winning the economic war. It pushed Trump to agree to a temporary truce. The trade battles in 2025 indicate that the Red Dragon has come of age, and will not be bullied by the US. Although China did not go to the extent that the US did in Venezuela, the former flexed its muscles in Taiwan, and South China Sea.

Despite the adverse impact on its economy, Russia, another newborn rival of the US, has survived the turmoil due to the western sanctions on its oil exports, and frozen assets across the globe. It may be winning the Ukraine war despite the early setbacks. The West, or some of the backers, are losing interest in the prolonged war. Russia used smuggling routes, and old ships to transport the oil to the buyers. India and China became heavily dependent on Russian imports. This irked Trump, who took on India, and dealt with China gingerly. The truth is that Russia will not give in easily.

Hence, as America pushes to gain more control over oil production, and global supplies, Russia and China will counter its moves. This rivalry will not be won easily as the communist allies, unlike the Axis Powers (Germany-Japan), have the oil, and market. Both Russia and China have access to other sources, and markets. In the end, Trump's ideology may remain limited to business. He may not wish to control the oil market, but merely push more American oil, and force buyers to switch from Russia to the US. It may be a limited-strategy war. Let us see who will be Trump's next target?

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



KS CHALAPATI RAO and KVK RANGANATHAN

Within three months of the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) with the European Free Trade Association, which kicked off on October 1, 2025, India concluded another free trade agreement with New Zealand. Called the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA), it includes, according to official releases, New Zealand's commitment to facilitate \$20 billion of foreign direct investment (FDI) over 15 years. The details of the agreement are currently being drafted. Unlike the \$100 billion, and one million jobs commitments under TEPA, CECA's pledge attracted less attention, perhaps because the figure is less dramatic.

However, there are two common features between the two promises. As in TEPA, there is no investor-state dispute settlement mechanism in CECA, and only private sector investments will be counted. There is a rebalancing mechanism under which India may withdraw the concessions if the investment targets are not met. However, in CECA, this may be overseen by a committee, rather than the allowance of an automatic grace period. The difference is that unlike TEPA, CECA does not include an explicit figure about jobs.

To assess potential investment flows under CECA, it is imperative to examine the nature and contours of New Zealand's economy. It is dominated by services, and manufacturing accounts for nearly 10 per cent of the GDP. The latter is concentrated in low- to medium-technology activities such as food and beverage processing, wood products, and basic metal fabrication, which are closely linked to natural resource endowments. New Zealand's strengths lie in agricultural science, food technology, veterinary science, and environmental management. This limits the scope for technology-intensive investments, except in niche areas or through the acquisition of existing assets rather than new expansion.

Expenditure on R&D is modest in New Zealand, and concentrated in agriculture, food systems, and selected services including computer-related activities. Beyond a few global leaders, such as Fonterra in dairy, and Fisher & Paykel Healthcare in medical devices, the private sector is dominated by small and medium enterprises with limited capacity for overseas expansion. This diminishes the likelihood that Zealand's outward investment can involve large-scale industrial upgrading or significant technology transfer to India.

At first sight, average inflows of \$1.33 billion per year do not appear impossible. But

Two FTAs, a common lesson

Expected investments under free-trade deals may be on the higher side



the issue is New Zealand's capacity, and the past bilateral trends. Historically, the cumulative FDI is negligible. Official data show that between January 2000 and December 2024, equity inflows from New Zealand were nearly \$87 million. In the past decade, the annual average was roughly \$4.5 million. Of this figure, a small share went into manufacturing, with most of the money spread across services, advertising, and agriculture-related activities. With such a low base, future inflows or reinvested earnings are unlikely to emerge as major drivers for investments under CECA.

This is consistent with New Zealand's overall outward investment pattern. Net outward FDI flows are small and volatile and, in some of the past years, they were negative. A large portion consists of reinvested earnings rather than new flows. Manufacturing accounts for a limited share, whereas wholesale trade and services dominate. Geographically, most of the outward FDI goes to Australia, and the United States, with smaller shares in other nations. This suggests that New Zealand's investors seek large markets, advanced technologies, or institutional familiarity. India may only benefit because of its vast market, and growing middle class.

Against this background, a projected inflow of \$20 billion over 15 years represents a sharp departure from historical behaviour, and New

Zealand's past investment relationship with India. Even if some increase occurs in the future, it is likely to be in areas where New Zealand has genuine strengths, such as agricultural technologies, renewable energy, and selected services. These can be useful, but they are unlikely to significantly strengthen India's manufacturing and technological base, or aid the Make-in-India scheme.

As with TEPA, the mode of entry, sectoral focus, and patterns of divestments remain unclear. The CECA pledge, therefore, has a strong "Nando Raja Bhavi'yati" flavour to it. The jewellery is taken today, and comfort is drawn from the possibility that many things can happen tomorrow. There is a chance that the merchant may not return to settle the accounts. Hence, while it is a charming story, it is a risky basis for high expectations due to policy changes. New Zealand's official responses placed little emphasis on the investment angle. Public statements focused mainly on the higher bilateral trade, and export gains for the New Zealand exporters.

Clearly, the bilateral partner's existing economic structure, technological profile, innovation system, and outward investment patterns suggest that CECA is unlikely to emerge as a large or transformative source of industrial investments. In any case, an average annual inflow of \$1.33 billion is unlikely to make a meaningful contribution to development



Why AI's Productivity Gains Are Invisible in India's Official Numbers

AI is spreading rapidly across offices, IT services, and Government. Yet productivity data show little movement, revealing a mismatch between technological change and economic measurement.



NISHANT SAHDEV



This has direct implications for India

India's economic strategy increasingly rests on digital public infrastructure, services exports, and the productivity of its vast working-age population. AI is already being deployed in software development, logistics, education technology, and parts of Government. But much of its early impact will appear as faster workflows, fewer errors, and improved coordination rather than higher output per worker.

If policymakers rely solely on headline productivity numbers, they risk missing early signals of structural change. Worse, they may conclude prematurely that AI is economically insignificant — leading to underinvestment in skills, power infrastructure, data systems, and institutional reform. There is a second risk as well. If AI-driven gains are absorbed as invisible efficiency — shorter decision cycles, tighter feedback loops, fewer mistakes — the benefits may remain concentrated within firms rather than translating into wages or employment growth.

That is a distributional challenge, not a technological one, and it requires policy attention. The solution is not to abandon productivity statistics.

It is to recognise their limits. Artificial intelligence does not behave like earlier labour-saving machines. It behaves more like cognitive infrastructure — closer to electricity or the internet than to a mechanical tool.

When intelligence becomes abundant and cheap, measuring its impact through labour-based accounting alone becomes increasingly misleading.

The AI era is unlikely to announce itself through a sudden explosion in GDP. It will announce itself through something quieter and harder to capture: faster decisions, fewer errors, tighter coordination, and organisations that tolerate far less inefficiency than before.

That creates a political and policy risk. When official statistics fail to register real change, Governments are tempted to conclude that nothing important is happening. Investment is delayed. Reforms are postponed. Skepticism hardens into complacency. The danger is not that AI will fail to transform the economy. The danger is that it already is — while our measurement systems insist that it hasn't.

Author is a theoretical physicist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, US, and the author of the forthcoming book *The Last Equation Before Silence*

Artificial intelligence is now embedded in everyday work across the world. Lawyers draft contracts with it, programmers debug code with it, consultants prepare presentations with it, students learn with it, and bureaucracies quietly experiment with it. India is no exception. From startups in Bengaluru to Government departments piloting AI-enabled systems, adoption is rising steadily.

And yet, when economists and policymakers look at the headline numbers, the story appears strangely flat. Productivity growth remains modest. GDP has not surged. Wages have not jumped. The long-promised "AI dividend" seems delayed, if not absent. This has led to a familiar conclusion: perhaps artificial intelligence is being oversold. A more uncomfortable possibility deserves attention. The problem may not be AI. The problem may be how we measure productivity itself. Modern productivity statistics were designed for a very different economic world — one in which intelligence was scarce, slow, and inseparable from human labour. AI quietly violates all three assumptions. As a result, some of its most important effects remain largely invisible to our economic instruments.

Consider what the data show

In advanced economies such as the United States, labour productivity growth has hovered around 1-1.5 per cent annually over the past decade, with no sustained acceleration even after the release of powerful generative AI tools in late 2022. Yet adoption has been extraordinarily rapid. A 2024 working paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research found that nearly 28 per cent of U.S. workers were already using generative AI at work within 18 months — one of the fastest technology diffusion curves ever recorded.

High adoption. Modest productivity growth. That is the puzzle

At the level of individual tasks, however, the effects of AI are anything but modest. Field experiments conducted by researchers associated with MIT exam-

ined customer-support workers using generative AI tools. Average productivity rose by about 14 per cent. For newer and less experienced workers, gains reached 30-35 per cent. Employee attrition fell. Response quality improved.

These are large effects by historical standards. Yet overall firm output barely moved. Companies used the gains to reduce training time, standardise responses, and shorten resolution cycles rather than to increase the number of calls handled.

Output stayed the same. The system changed

A similar pattern emerged in a 2023 Harvard — Boston Consulting Group experiment involving management consultants. With access to advanced AI tools, consultants completed tasks 25-40 per cent faster and produced higher-quality work. But total billable output did not rise proportionally. Firms absorbed the gains as time savings, error reduction, and smoother coordination.

From the perspective of GDP, little happened. From the perspective of organisations, work was reorganised. India is already seeing this pattern.

Public disclosures and executive commentary from large Indian IT services firms suggest that generative AI is being used extensively to reduce turnaround times in coding, testing, and customer support. In 2024, senior executives across major firms indicated that AI tools were cutting task completion time by roughly 20-30 per cent in selected service lines, even as overall revenue growth remained subdued. The gains were absorbed as efficiency, quality control, and margin protection rather than expanded output. From a national accounts perspective, little changed. From an organisational one, workflows were being quietly rewritten. This distinction matters because artificial intelligence primarily compresses

time, not labour. It reduces the latency involved in thinking, drafting, searching, summarising, and deciding.

Productivity statistics, however, are designed to capture changes in output per hour worked — not changes in how quickly uncertainty is resolved.

In physics, choosing the wrong variable to measure does not produce a slightly wrong answer; it produces a misleading one. The same principle now applies to economic measurement.

Another blind spot lies in how averages dominate productivity analysis. AI's most consistent impact is not on the average level of performance, but on its distribution. Study after study shows that AI narrows performance gaps. Lower-performing workers improve the most. Error rates fall. Variability shrinks. These changes matter enormously for

organisations, which care about reliability, predictability, and worst-case outcomes. But productivity statistics largely ignore them. They track averages, not distributions.

There is also a historical lesson worth recalling. During the early decades of electrification in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, productivity growth remained stubbornly low. Factories initially treated electric motors as drop-in replacements for steam engines, preserving old layouts and workflows. Only when production was reorganised around electricity did productivity surge — decades later.

In 1987, economist Robert Solow famously observed that computers were visible everywhere except in the productivity statistics. The computer-driven productivity boom arrived only in the late 1990s, once organisations, management practices, and skills caught up. Artificial intelligence appears to be following a similar trajectory. It is reorganising work faster than it is increasing measurable output.



From linear to loops: Anchoring India's digital future to circular telecom economy



KAMENDRA KUMAR

Telecommunications today is far more than an enabler of connectivity; it is the vital backbone of digital governance, economic growth and social transformation.

As India's digital footprint expands at a record pace, the transition toward a circular economy is no longer a peripheral environmental goal but a core strategic

necessity. This shift is the only way to ensure that our rapid digital growth remains resource-efficient, environmentally sustainable, and resilient against global supply chain shocks. The sheer scale of India's telecom evolution underscores the urgency of this transition.

Currently contributing approximately 6 per cent to the national GDP, this massive ecosystem supports 1.18 billion subscribers and nearly 870 million broadband users, powered by over 7.7 lakh towers and 35 lakh route kilometres of optical fibre. With 5G already deployed in over 700 districts, the industry's footprint is set to explode further through network densification and the proliferation of data centres.

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However, this unprecedented expansion brings systemic risks that the tradi-

front, India is adopting a consultative, incentive-driven approach — utilising tools like Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) and sustainable public procurement — rather than relying solely on punitive regulation. Simultaneously, industry leaders are restructuring supply chains to create a trusted market for refurbished equipment. Serving as the digital orchestrator of this entire shift is technology; AI, IoT and Blockchain are providing the transparency and traceability needed to manage assets throughout their entire lifespan.

Ultimately, circularity is not a single-company optimisation problem but a collaborative ecosystem challenge. The DoT vision emphasises multi-stakeholder partnerships between manufacturers, service providers and startups. Success will require building institutional frameworks to monitor progress and creating formal education pathways to develop the "green" talent necessary for a circular future. This collective effort transforms circularity from a corporate responsibility into a fundamental design principle for the entire industry.

Looking toward Vision-2030 and the broader goal of Viksit Bharat 2047, circular telecom becomes integral to India's development trajectory. By reducing dependency on critical raw materials and creating new categories of green jobs, we strengthen our long-term economic resilience. If we treat the circular economy as a strategic opportunity rather than a compliance burden, India will not just grow — it will emerge as a global leader in sustainable digital development.

Writer is former Director of TCIL, former Vice Chairman of TEPC and Hon Advisor of BRICS CCI

The rise of intelligent healthcare: Inside India's AI-driven medical transformation



ANUHYA REDDY KURLY

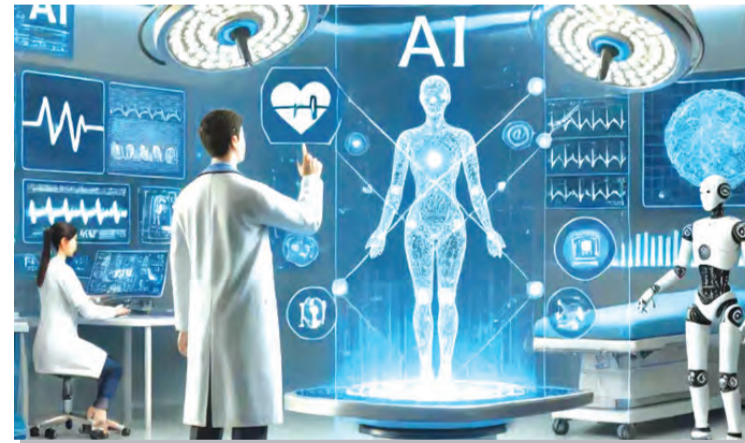
Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer a futuristic promise — it's the pulse driving transformation across nearly every industry, and healthcare is at the vanguard of this technological revolution. In the Indian context, AI's role is especially prominent in business intelligence and data-driven decision-making, paving the way for more advanced healthcare innovation. AI is reshaping healthcare in drug development and building, streamlining day-to-day operations related to documentation using AI-powered ICR, and also preventing payment fraud through AI analytics.

This whole transformation says that technology is not just improving healthcare but also reinventing its very foundation. At the heart of this shift is predictive analytics, which uses both past and current data to forecast results and helps in guiding critical decisions.

As per Wipro's research "Leveraging AI — Predictive Analytics in Healthcare", the latest algorithms can reveal various patterns in clinical, environmental, and behavioral domains.

These analytics can determine the likelihood of a disease outbreak or a patient admission to hospital and also forecast the risk of patient deterioration even before the appearance of symptoms. With the help of these outputs, doctors can take precautionary actions by using different indicators like lifestyle patterns, environmental conditions, and geographic location.

At the same time, hospitals can also leverage these inputs on managing staff and effectively use resources with greater precision in line with the patient flow. The healthcare sector, which was more of a reactive space, is now turning into a proactive ecosystem by steadily shifting towards anticipation and prevention. AI is also modifying how different diseases can be diagnosed or treated, hence making medicine more accurate as well as customised.



In September 2025, Medanta — The Medicity introduced AI and data analytics enabled cancer care initiatives in Dimapur, Nagaland.

As per Dr Amit Bhargava, Director of Medical Oncology at Medanta, the latest AI tools and applications can help on quickening the therapy development by designing clinical trials and predicting treatment responses.

Physicians can evaluate the tumor to target particular genetic abnormalities that are responsible for the growth of cancer. The survival rates can be improved drastically and the negative effects can be lowered to great extent due to the customised medicine that is developed based on advanced precision machine based strategy.

There is a need for AI-based precision oncology to improve early detection and targeted treatment strategies, as India is estimated to record 1.57 million new cancer cases in 2025, as per the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). AI is now reshaping how hospitals function by making them agile, and responsive. AI-driven OCR can now transcribe doctors' handwritten notes and printed forms into perfect digital notes with high reliability, reducing errors and hence allowing healthcare professionals to focus more on the patients. A glimpse of this transition can be seen at Apollo Hospitals, which announced plans in March 2025 that it would spend 3.5 per cent

of its digital budget to increase AI integration. As per a Reuters report, the goal is to automate all routine clinical documentation and hence

potentially save each clinician 2 to 3 hours a day, time that can instead be spent on focusing on the patient interactions. These new systems already help convert doctors' notes, generate discharge summaries, and even be able to suggest antibiotics based on the patient data. Beyond hospitals, AI-powered analytics tools are helping hospitals make sense of the vast information that is generated each day, from medical histories and lab results to sensor readings and administrative files.

By integrating the data that was once trapped in silos, AI enables a collective view of patient care and hospital operations and hence improves decision-making and ensures more coordinated decisions across India's diverse healthcare ecosystem. With the advancements in natural language processing (NLP) and voice analytics, IBM Watson and Google Cloud NLP can now interpret free text documents like clinical notes, call transcripts, and patient reviews, uncovering patterns in behavior and service quality, hence transforming how institutions listen and communicate. Hence, from this data and from the insights captured, clinicians are able to deepen their understanding of the patient experiences along with diag-

nosing their medical conditions effectively. We can see the transformation is reflected in India's growing healthcare analytics sector. According to IMARC Group (2024), the market was estimated to be worth 1.71 billion USD and is expected to rise at a strong compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 25.58 per cent to reach 15.47 billion USD by 2033. AI adoption among medical professionals has also surged dramatically. The Elsevier Clinician of the Future 2025 report revealed that 40 per cent of Indian clinicians now use AI technologies, which is a 3 fold increase from 12 per cent the year before. Adoption rates in countries such as the United States (36 per cent) and the United Kingdom (34 per cent) are broadly comparable to India's, although China demonstrates a markedly higher rate at 71 per cent. It is also found that 52 per cent of Indian doctors are confident that most patients will soon use AI applications to self-diagnose, marking the notable increasing confidence in digital healthcare applications.

Hence, we can conclude from the trend that the healthcare sector in India is not just experimenting with AI but scaling it. AI has included itself in almost every layer of Indian healthcare, from disease prediction algorithms to the treatment personalization platforms, along with the hospital operations.

Though it started as a simple efficiency tool, AI is now transforming how physicians diagnose, how administrators make decisions, and how patients recover. The integration of business analytics with AI has resulted in a data driven system which is faster and fairer.

In this new ecosystem, even a tiny bit of knowledge has the power to save a life, and every decision is built by insight rather than instinct. At the end, the core strength of AI lies not in replacing the doctors but in empowering them to notice the patterns invisible to the eye that may go unseen and hence serving better.

The future of Indian healthcare will not merely be written by machines but guided by human medical skill and AI technology, where it listens, learns, and ultimately, cares.

Writer is a AI and Computer Science engineer





FROM THE WORLD

USA

Caribbean travel plans disrupted

The US military operation that captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife fled him out of the country early Saturday has also disrupted Caribbean travel at a busy travel time for the region. No airline flights were crossing over Venezuela on Saturday, according to FlightRadar24.com. Major airlines cancelled hundreds of flights across the eastern Caribbean region and warned passengers that the disruptions could continue for days after the Federal Aviation Administration imposed restrictions. Flights to Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Aruba and other destinations near Venezuela were also cancelled.

ISRAELI

Bedouin killed in police raid

Israeli police shot and killed a Bedouin Arab man during an overnight raid in his village in southern Israel, according to media reports and a local official. The shooting of 36-year-old Muhammed Hussein Tarabin threatened to worsen the already strained relations between the Israeli government and the country's Bedouin minority. Israeli police have been conducting a large-scale operation in the village of Tarabin for the past week.

China calls for immediate release of Maduro

KJM VARMA ■ Beijing

China on Sunday called on the United States to release Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife "at once" and "resolve issues through dialogue and negotiation."

"China expresses grave concern over the US forcibly seizing President Nicolás Maduro and his wife and taking them out of the country", a Chinese Foreign Ministry statement here said.

The move is in clear violation of international law, basic norms in international relations, and the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, it said.

"China calls on the US to ensure the personal safety of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, release them at once, stop toppling the government of Venezuela, and resolve issues through dialogue and negotiation," it added.



The ministry earlier on Saturday condemned the US airstrikes on Venezuela and the capture of Maduro and his wife, describing it as a hegemonic act that seriously violates international law. China is deeply shocked by

and strongly condemns the US' blatant use of force against a sovereign state and action against its President, it said, reacting to a question on US President Donald Trump's announcement about American

airstrikes against Venezuela and the capture of Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores.

Such hegemonic acts of the US seriously violate international law and Venezuela's sovereignty, and threaten peace and security in Latin

America and the Caribbean region, the ministry said.

"China firmly opposes it. We call on the US to abide by international law and the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, and stop violating other countries' sovereignty and security," it said.

The fall of the Maduro government and his capture by the US is regarded as a major setback for Beijing, as it shared close strategic ties with Venezuela from the days of Maduro's predecessor, Hugo Chávez.

Beijing's strategic partnership with Venezuela in the last two decades was built on political alignment, energy cooperation, and shared opposition to the US and Western influence in Latin America.

During this period, China has become a major buyer of Venezuela's oil despite US sanctions. PTI



Mamdani terms US military action in Venezuela 'act of war'

YOSHITA SINGH ■ New York

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani has said he spoke with President Donald Trump "directly" to register his opposition to the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife by the US military, as he termed the unilateral attack on a sovereign nation an "act of war".

Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores have been indicted in the Southern District of New York and are being brought to the city to face the charges against them.

Responding to a question on the situation in Venezuela and Maduro's capture at a press conference, Mamdani said he "called the president and spoke with him directly to register my opposition to this act".

"I registered my opposition. I made it clear and we left it at that," Mamdani said, giving no details of what Trump's response to him was. The extraordinary international development has come just two days after Mamdani was sworn-in as New York City Mayor.

Mamdani was briefed Saturday morning by his administration officials, including his chief of staff and the police commissioner, on the US military capture of the Venezuelan president and his wife, as well as their planned imprisonment in federal custody here in New York City.

Mamdani said the "blatant pursuit of regime change" impacts New Yorkers, including Venezuelans who live in the city. "Unilaterally attacking a sovereign nation is an act of war and a violation of federal and international law," the newly sworn-in mayor said in a statement.

"This blatant pursuit of regime change doesn't just affect those abroad, it directly impacts New Yorkers, including tens of thousands of Venezuelans who call this city home. My focus is their safety and the safety of every

New Yorker, and my administration will continue to monitor the situation and issue relevant guidance," Mamdani said.

US Attorney General Pamela Bondi said in a post on X that Maduro and Flores have been indicted in the Southern District of New York.

Maduro has been charged with narco-terrorism conspiracy, cocaine importation conspiracy, possession of machine guns and destructive devices and conspiracy to possess machine guns and destructive devices against the US.

"They will soon face the full wrath of American justice on American soil in American courts," Bondi said, as she thanked Trump for "having the courage to demand accountability on behalf of the American People, and a huge thank you to our brave military who conducted the incredible and highly successful mission to capture these two alleged international narco traffickers".

Meanwhile, Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi, a senior member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, said while Maduro is an "illegitimate dictator" who has inflicted immense suffering on the Venezuelan people, that reality does not give any president a blank check to use military force without Congress authorisation.

"By acting without congressional authorisation and publicly asserting US control over another sovereign nation, President Trump is abusing presidential power and undermining the Constitution's separation of powers," Krishnamoorthi said. He said the Trump Administration must immediately account for the safety of US personnel, disclose whether there were any casualties and fully and immediately brief Congress.

"The president has now stated that the United States will run Venezuela, committing the country to open-ended responsibility.

US actions in Venezuela set dangerous precedent: Guterres

YOSHITA SINGH ■ United Nations

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has voiced his concern over the escalation between the US and Venezuela culminating in the capture of the country's President Nicolás Maduro, saying the developments constitute a "dangerous precedent".

The secretary general is "deeply alarmed by the recent escalation in Venezuela, culminating with today's United States military action in the country, which has potential worrying implications for the region", a statement issued by his spokesperson said on Saturday.

Guterres said that independently of the situation in Venezuela, "these developments constitute a dangerous precedent" and said he is "deeply concerned that the rules of international law have not been respected".



Maduro and his wife have been indicted by federal authorities in New York on charges of narco-terrorism and conspiracy to possess destructive devices against the US. In an extraordinary development, President Donald Trump announced on Truth Social in the early hours of Saturday that the US

"successfully carried" out a "large scale" strike against Venezuela and Maduro, "who has been, along with his wife, captured and flown out of the Country. This operation was done in conjunction with US Law Enforcement".

US Attorney General Pamela Bondi said in a post on X that Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores have been indicted in the Southern District of New York. Maduro has been charged with narco-terrorism conspiracy, cocaine importation conspiracy, possession of machine guns and destructive devices against the US.

"They will soon face the full wrath of American justice on American soil in American courts," Bondi said, as she thanked Trump for "having the courage to demand accountability on

behalf of the American People, and a huge thank you to our brave military who conducted the incredible and highly successful mission to capture these two alleged international narco traffickers". Guterres continued to emphasise the importance of full respect—by all—of international law, including the UN Charter. "The Secretary-General calls on all actors in Venezuela to engage in inclusive dialogue, in full respect of human rights and the rule of law," the statement added.

UN human rights chief Volker Türk also expressed alarm by US intervention in Venezuela. "We urge everyone to exercise restraint and fully respect the UN Charter and international human rights law. The protection of people in Venezuela is paramount and must guide any further action," Türk said on X. PTI

Maduro's ouster sparks celebrations in South Florida

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Doral (US)

Revellers chanted "liberty" and draped Venezuelan flags over their shoulders in South Florida on Saturday to celebrate the US military operation to capture Nicolás Maduro and remove him from the country — a stunning outcome they had longed for but left them wondering what comes next in their troubled homeland.

For some Venezuelan natives, the military action — culminating months of stepped-up US pressure — brought their dreams of reuniting with loved ones closer to reality after years of heartbreaking separations. People gathered for a rally



Venezuelans celebrate in Bogotá, Colombia on Saturday after US President Donald Trump announced that US forces had captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro

in Doral — the Miami suburb where President Donald Trump has a golf resort and where roughly half the population is of Venezuelan

descent — as word spread that Venezuela's now-deposed president had been captured and flown out of the country.

Outside El Arepazo restaurant, a hub of the Venezuelan culture of Doral, one man held a piece of cardboard with "Libertad" scrawled with a black marker. It was a sentiment expressed by other native Venezuelans hoping for a new beginning for their home country as they chanted "Liberty! Liberty! Liberty!"

"We're like everybody — it's a combination of feelings, of course," said Alejandra Arrieta, who came to the US in 1997. "There's fears. There's excitement. There's so many years that we've been waiting for this. Something had to happen in Venezuela. We all need the freedom."

North launches missiles ahead of South Korean leader's visit to China

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Seoul

North Korea launched multiple ballistic missiles toward its eastern waters Sunday, its neighbours said, just hours before South Korea's president left for China for talks expected to cover North Korea's nuclear program.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement that it detected several ballistic missile launches from North Korea's capital region around 7:50 am. It said the missiles flew about 900 kilometres (560 miles) and that South Korea and US authorities were analysing details of the launches.

South Korea's Defence Ministry noted the launches violated UN Security Council resolutions that ban any ballistic activities by North Korea. It urged North Korea to

cease provocative actions immediately and respond to South Korea's push to restart talks and restore peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi said that at least two missile launches by North Korea have been confirmed. "They are a serious problem, threatening the peace and security of our nation, the region and the world," Koizumi told reporters.

North Korea ramps up weapons display ahead of political meet. The launches were the latest weapons demonstration by North Korea in recent weeks. Experts say North Korea is aiming to show off or review its achievements in the defence sector ahead of its upcoming ruling party congress, the first of its kind in five years.



Observers are watching the Workers' Party congress to see whether North Korea will set a new policy on the US and resume long-stalled talks between the two countries.

North Korea has been focusing

on testing activities to enlarge its nuclear arsenal since its leader Kim Jong Un, 's summit with US President Donald Trump fell apart in 2019. Kim has also boosted his diplomatic credentials by aligning with Russia over its war in Ukraine

and tightening relations with China. Observers say Kim would believe his leverage has sharply increased to wrest concessions from Trump if they sit down for talks again.

North Korea hasn't announced when it will hold the congress, but South Korea's spy service said it will likely occur in January or February. Launches come before the South Korean leader's trip to China: Sunday's launches also came hours before South Korean President Lee Jae Myung departed for China for a summit with President Xi Jinping. During the four-day trip, Lee's office said he would request China, North Korea's major ally and biggest trading partner, to take "a constructive role" in efforts to promote peace on the Korean Peninsula.



Tense calm in Venezuela

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Caracas (Venezuela)

A tense calm held in Venezuela on Sunday, one day after President Nicolás Maduro was deposed and captured in an American military operation. Venezuela's capital Caracas was unusually quiet Sunday with few vehicles moving around. Convenience stores, gas stations and other businesses were mostly closed. A day before, lines wound through stores and outside gas stations as uncertain Venezuelans stocked up on goods in case turmoil broke out.

Roads typically filled with runners and cyclists sat largely empty and Venezuela's presidential palace was guarded by armed civilians and members of the military.

Outside the capital, in La Guaira state, families with houses damaged in blasts during the operation that captured Maduro and his

wife were still cleaning up debris. Some buildings were left with walls gaping open.

After the seismic shift in Venezuela and promises by President Donald Trump that the United States would "run" Venezuela with the help of Maduro's Vice President Delcy Rodríguez, no one in the country seemed to know where things stood or what lay ahead.

In a low-income neighborhood in eastern Caracas, construction worker Daniel Medalla sat on the steps outside a Catholic church and told a few parishioners that again there would be no morning Mass.

Medalla theorized the streets remained mostly empty not because people are worried about another US strike but because they are fearful of government repression if they dare celebrate, coming after a fierce government crackdown during last year's fraught elections.

Heavy rains cause flooding in Northern California

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Corte Madera

Heavy rain and high tides believed to be the most severe in two decades caused flooding in parts of Northern California on Saturday, prompting road closures and rescues of residents trapped in their cars. Roadways through a 24-kilometre stretch from the Sausalito area to San Rafael were flooded after a downpour coincided with record-breaking "King Tides," Marin County Sheriff's Sgt. Michael Dobbins said. No injuries were reported but authorities were called to assist when cars got stuck in floodwater as high as three and four feet (1.1 and 1.2 metres), he said. "There is a lot of water in the roadways," Dobbins said, adding the tides were reportedly the highest in more than two decades. "Along with heavy rains, it just created the perfect storm for flooding on the streets."



Earthquake hits western Nepal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kathmandu

An earthquake of magnitude 4.3 hit Udayapur district in eastern Nepal, officials said. There were no immediate reports of loss of lives or damage of any kind due to the quake. The earthquake struck at 10:51 pm on Saturday with its epicentre located at Bagapati in the Udayapur district, according to the National Earthquake Monitoring and Research Centre (NEMRC). The tremors were also felt by people from the neighbouring districts. Earlier on Saturday morning, an earthquake measuring 4.6 magnitude hit the Taplejung district in eastern Nepal. Nepal, which experiences multiple quakes in any given year, lies in one of the most active tectonic zones (Seismic zones IV and V); it makes the Himalayan nation extremely vulnerable to earthquakes.

British, French warplanes strike suspected IS weapons site in Syria

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ DAMASCUS

British and French warplanes carried out an airstrike in central Syria on an underground facility where members of the Islamic State group are suspected to have stored weapons and explosives, the British defence ministry said on Sunday.

The strikes occurred Saturday evening on the structure in the mountains just north of the historic town of Palmyra in the country's Homs province, the ministry's statement said. Britain and France are part of the US-led coalition that has been fighting IS militants for more than a decade. The ministry said the British military used Typhoon FGR4 fighter jets supported by a Voyager refu-



elling tanker and were joined by French aircraft in the joint strike. The British air force used Paveway IV guided bombs to target a number of access tunnels

down to the facility, the statement said, adding that while a detailed assessment is now underway, initial indications are "that the target was engaged success-

fully." "This action shows our UK leadership, and determination to stand shoulder to shoulder with our allies, to stamp out any resurgence" of IS and its

"violent ideologies" in the Middle East, said Defense Secretary John Healey.

There was no immediate comment from Syria's Government on the strikes. Syria joined the anti-IS coalition late last year.

Despite its defeat in Syria in 2019, IS sleeper cells still carry out deadly attacks in Syria and Iraq where the extremists once declared their caliphate. UN experts say IS still commands between 5,000 and 7,000 members across its former stronghold in Syria and Iraq.

Last month, the Trump administration launched military strikes in Syria to "eliminate" IS fighters and weapons sites in retaliation for an ambush attack near Palmyra that killed two US troops and an American civilian interpreter days earlier.



DRONE STRIKE KILLS ONE IN RUSSIAN BORDER

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Moscow

One person was killed, and two others wounded when a Ukrainian drone struck a car in the Russian border region of Belgorod, local officials said on Sunday, ahead of peace talks to end the nearly 4-year-old war in Paris this week.

Belgorod regional Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said a young child was among the wounded. In Ukraine, three people were wounded in the Kharkiv region in drone strikes overnight into Sunday, the country's State Emergency Service said.

Meanwhile, the death toll from a Russian missile attack on the city of Kharkiv on Friday increased to four when two other bodies were found under the rubble of a building, Kharkiv regional head Oleh Syniehubov wrote on Telegram Sunday. The latest attacks came after national security advisers from Europe and other allies visited Kyiv on Saturday to discuss security guarantees and economic support, as a US-led diplomatic push to end the war in Ukraine intensifies.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, preparing to travel to Paris for a meeting with partners, said on Saturday that work on the peace proposals could now accelerate as Ukraine has shared all documents under discussion with the 18 national security advisers, including those on security guarantees.

He said representatives from Ukraine's General Staff and military sector would meet on Monday in Paris, followed by a meeting on Tuesday of European leaders, where he said he hoped documents on security guarantees would be finalised.

Four policemen killed by unknown gunmen in Pakistan



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Peshawar

At least four police personnel were killed by unknown gunmen in two separate firing incidents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in northwestern Pakistan, officials said on Sunday. The incidents occurred in Lakki Marwat and Bannu districts of the restive province on Saturday. According to a spokesperson for Lakki Marwat police, unknown motorcycle-riding

terrorists opened fire in Sarai Naurang city, killing three on-duty traffic police officials. The assailants managed to flee the scene after the attack, he said. In the second incident, Bannu police said one of their personnel was killed in a firing incident in the Mandan area. The slain constable was on his way from home to report for duty at Mandan Police Station when armed men opened fire on him, resulting in his death, they said.

Three held in connection with death of Hindu businessman in Bangladesh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dhaka

Three persons were arrested on Sunday in the case of hacking and burning to death a Hindu businessman in Shariatpur district of Bangladesh, local media reports said.

Khokon Chandra Das, 50, was assaulted near Keurbhanga Bazar in Damudya in Shariatpur district, about 100 kilometres south of Dhaka, on Wednesday night. He died on Saturday. Prothom Alo newspaper said a team of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) arrested the three accused on Sunday morning from Kishoreganj, about 100 kilometres northeast of Dhaka.

The arrested were identified as Damudyar Sohag Khan, 27, Rabbi Molya, 21, and Palash Sardar, 25.

RAB Madaripur Camp Company Commander Superintendent of Police Mir Monir Hossain told Prothom Alo that the accused were being brought to Madaripur camp from Kishoreganj. Madaripur is about 20-



odd kilometres away from Shariatpur.

Das, who ran a medicine shop and mobile banking business, was travelling in an autorickshaw when the attackers intercepted the vehicle and allegedly beat him up, hacked him with sharp weapons and then poured petrol on his head before setting him on fire, media reports had said on Thursday.

In a bid to save himself, Das jumped into a roadside pond as locals raised an alarm. The attackers fled the scene, police said, adding that he was rescued by locals, taken to Shariatpur Sadar Hospital, and then referred to Dhaka due to the severity of his injuries.

Doctors in Dhaka said Das suffered multiple injuries across his body, including a serious wound to his abdomen, along with burn injuries on his face, head and hands. Shariatpur Superintendent of Police Rawnak Jahan said the victim had named the accused before his death, news portal *BDNews24* said on Sunday.

Das' was the fifth death of a person from Hindu community since December and radical groups in Bangladesh are visibly trying to intimidate the minority faiths, Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council spokesman Kajol Debnath said after his death on Saturday.

BNP thanks PM Modi for condolence message on Khaleda Zia's demise

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has expressed its appreciation to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his condolence message following the death of former Bangladesh prime minister Khaleda Zia, underscoring her enduring role in shaping India-Bangladesh relations even as Dhaka prepares for a crucial political transition.

Khaleda Zia, a three-time prime minister and the founding figure of the BNP, passed away on December 30 after a prolonged illness. Her death prompted tributes from leaders across South Asia, reflecting her long-standing influence on regional politics. In a personal letter addressed to her son and BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, Prime Minister Modi described Zia as a leader of "rare resolve and conviction" whose vision and legacy would



BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman

continue to guide relations between the two neighbouring countries.

The letter was handed over by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, who represented India at Zia's funeral in Dhaka. Jaishankar also met Tarique Rahman on the sidelines of the funeral, conveying condolences on behalf of the Indian government and people. The interaction was viewed as a significant diplomatic gesture at a time when bilateral ties have faced strains over regional developments and concerns related to minority communities.

11 candidates in fray in Portugal's presidential poll

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Lisbon

A record number of 11 candidates in Portugal's upcoming presidential election kicked off their campaigns on Sunday. The official two-week campaign period preceding the Jan. 18 election will see the contenders competing to capture voters' support. However, the broad field makes it unlikely that any candidate will capture more than 50 per cent of the vote, leaving the two top candidates to compete in a runoff ballot on Feb. 8.

Among the frontrunners, according to recent opinion polls, are the candidates from the country's two main parties that have alternated in power for the past 50 years: Luis Marques Mendes from the centre-right Social Democratic Party, currently in Government, and Antonio Jose Seguro of the centre-left Socialist Party.

They are expected to face strong challenges from Andre Ventura, the leader of the



populist anti-immigration Chega party, whose surge in support made it the second largest party in Portugal's Parliament last year, and Henrique Gouveia e Melo, a retired rear admiral running as an independent who won public acclaim for overseeing

the speedy rollout of COVID-19 vaccines during the pandemic.

In Portugal, the president is largely a figurehead with no executive power. Mostly, the head of state aims to stand above the political fray, refereeing disputes to defuse ten-

sions. However, the president also possesses powerful tools, being able to veto legislation from Parliament, although the veto can be overturned, as well as dissolve Parliament and call for snap elections.

After Portugal's third

general election in three years in May, its worst spell of political instability for decades, the next head of state is likely to encourage compromises. But the next occupant of the president's riverside "pink palace" in Lisbon will likely have to rule on some hot-button matters.

The pressing issues include a proposed new bill that introduces limits on who can obtain Portuguese citizenship and under what circumstances they can be stripped of it. The Constitutional Court last month struck down the proposal, which has been returned to Parliament.

A Government package of labour reforms that has already brought street protests and a major strike will also land on the president's desk, as could a law permitting euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide in Portugal that Parliament approved in 2022 but has been held up by constitutional objections. Almost 11 million people are eligible to vote in the election.

Gunmen raid village in northern Nigeria, killing 30 people and abducting others

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Minna

At least 30 villagers have been killed while several others were abducted by gunmen who raided a village in northern Nigeria's Niger state, police said Sunday, the latest in a cycle of deadly violence in the conflict-hit region.

The gunmen stormed the Kasuwan-Daji village in Niger state's Borgu local Government area on Saturday evening and opened fire on residents. They also razed down the local market and several houses, Niger state police spokesman Wasiu Abiodun said in a statement. At least two residents put the death toll at 37 and said it could be much higher as some people remained missing as of Sunday.

Residents also said security forces are yet to arrive in the area, contradicting the police' claim that they have deployed officers to search for those kid-



napped. Such attacks are common in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, where dozens of rogue gangs seeking control often target remote communities with limited security and Government presence.

Saturday's attack in Kasuwan-Daji village happened near the Papi community, where more than

300 schoolchildren and their teachers were kidnapped from a Catholic school in November. The attackers who raided Kasuwan-Daji arrived from the National Park Forest along Kabe district, according to the police, pointing to a usual trend where abandoned expansive forest reserves act as hideouts for armed gangs.



Lee lands in China, hoping to sidestep Taiwan tensions

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Hong Kong

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung arrived in China on Sunday as Beijing looks to deepen ties with the nearby country after heightened tensions between China and Japan over Taiwan, a self-ruled island it claims as its sovereign territory. Lee's four-day trip is his first visit to China since taking office in June. It comes at a time of heightened tensions between China and Japan, after Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said in November that her country's military could get involved if China were to take action against Taiwan. China's official news agency Xinhua reported on Sunday afternoon that Lee arrived in Beijing. During his stay, Lee will meet with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, their second meeting in just two months.



Second Body found in Spanish coach search

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Jakarta

Indonesian rescuers recovered a second body Sunday in the ongoing search for a Spanish soccer coach and two of his children who went missing after a tour boat sank during their Christmas holiday. The rescue team retrieved the body floating near Padar island, about 2 kilometres from the site of the sinking, said Fathur Rahman, the Maumere Search and Rescue Office chief. Rahman said the body was transported to a hospital in Labuan Bajo, a gateway town to the park in eastern Indonesia, for identification. The family holiday in the park area turned tragic for Valencia CF Women's B coach Fernando Martin, 44, when the boat carrying him, his wife, their four children, four crew members and a local guide, sank on the evening of December 26 after suffering engine failure.

PROSPECT

IIT Roorkee alumni meet held



On Saturday, January 3, 2026, IIT Roorkee alumni celebrated their global meet at Darbar Hall, Hotel Taj Palace, New Delhi, with a full attendance of alumni. It was a summit with the main theme on 'Reinventing in the age of AI' and others. Five start-ups were selected for the cash award.

In 2005, the first alumni global meet of this level was organised by the initiative of Mr Subodh and Mr Kamendra, who remained with the Roorkee University Students' Association (RUSA).

IIT Roorkee alumni are known for their eternal bonding with a legacy of 178 years. The prominent alumni who attended the meet were the Secretary Power, Secretary, NDMA, Chairman TRAI, CMD CONCOR, CMD IRCON, CMD Balmer Lawrie, DG, NCCBM, IG DP and many more. The present President of the alumni association has also remained the Chairman and the CEO of the Railway Board. The honorary secretary is the CGM, EIL. The platinum sponsor of the event was Vision IAS, whose founder is an esteemed alumnus. The Chief Guest was the Director, IIT Roorkee, Prof KK Pant.



Manabendra Deb Ray IPS, Secretary cum Director of Information and Public Relation, Assam at the New Year get-together organised by Jansanyog, Assam

ONGC to store CO₂ in depleted wells at Gandhar field

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) plans to store captured carbon dioxide in depleted wells at Gujarat's Gandhar oilfield, marking the company's first full-scale Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) pilot and a major step in its decarbonisation strategy.

The pilot will use two abandoned onshore wells to inject around 100 tonnes of CO₂ per day into subsurface hydrocarbon reservoirs, officials said.

CO₂ will be captured from nearby industrial sources in the Dahej area as well as ONGC's own Hazira plant, transported to the Gandhar wells and injected underground to prevent it from entering the atmosphere. The project also aims to test using CO₂ to enhance oil recovery, turning a potentially harmful greenhouse gas into a productive resource, they said. ONGC had previously sourced CO₂



Gandhar oilfield in Gujarat

from Indian Oil Corporation's Koyali refinery, roughly 80 km away, for injections into the well.

CO₂ in the earth's atmosphere contributes significantly to global warming as a greenhouse gas. India is the 3rd largest

emitter of CO₂ in the world after China and the US, with a 2022 NITI Aayog report putting annual emissions at about 2.6 gigatonne.

India has committed to reducing CO₂ emissions by 50 per cent by 2050 and reaching net zero by 2070.

Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) is emerging as a critical decarbonisation tool for hard-to-abate industrial sectors, where emissions cannot be eliminated through electrification alone.

In these industries, fossil

fuels are used not only as an energy source but also as an integral part of production processes, making CCUS essential to achieving deep emissions reductions.

ONGC plans to engage a specialised CCUS consultant for technical advisory, regulatory guidance, and detailed feasibility studies to ensure safe and effective implementation. Officials said depleted reservoirs like Gandhar provide ideal geology for long-term CO₂ storage, enabling emissions reduction from legacy oil and gas operations while leveraging existing infrastructure.

The pilot project will demonstrate the scalability as well as integrated approach for decarbonising hard-to-abate industrial sectors, enhancing oilfield productivity, and producing blue hydrogen — offering immediate operational gains and long-term strategic value for India's energy transition. ONGC had in December

2022 signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Shell to cooperate in CCUS studies, focusing on joint CO₂ storage study and EOR screening assessment for key basins in India, including depleted oil and gas fields and saline aquifers. Officials said Shell may be involved in the pilot project at some stage.

ONGC plans to hire a specialised CCUS consultant with comprehensive expertise in carbon capture, transportation, storage and monitoring technologies.

The consultant will provide end-to-end technical advisory, regulatory guidance, and feasibility studies along with cost estimates related to the CCS pilot project.

The company has committed USD 12 billion investment in carbon capture and energy transition projects.

These investments will help the fossil fuel giant to reach net zero emissions across its Scope 1 and Scope 2 operations by 2038.

Bharat Coking Coal to launch IPO on January 9

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Bharat Coking Coal Ltd (BCCL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Coal India Ltd, is set to open its initial public offering on January 9, marking the first public issue of 2026. The initial public offering (IPO) will be closely tracked by the Dalal Street as an early gauge of investor appetite for public sector undertakings (PSUs) in the new year.

According to the red herring prospectus (RHP), the maiden public issue, entirely an offer for sale (OFS) of 46.57 crore equity shares by Coal India Ltd (CIL), will close on January 13, while anchor investor bidding is scheduled for January 8.



The proposed listing of BCCL is part of the Government's broader divestment push in the coal sector, aimed at unlocking value in Coal India's subsidiaries and enhancing transparency

through market discipline. The company will announce key details, such as price band, lot size and issue structure, on January 5.

Last year, Central Mine Planning and Design Institute

Ltd (CMPDIL), another wholly-owned arm of CIL, had also filed its draft papers with Sebi for an IPO via the OFS route. While BCCL is a coal-producing entity, CMPDIL serves as Coal India's technical and planning arm.

The timing of BCCL's issue comes against the backdrop of a blockbuster year for the primary market.

In 2025, companies raised a record nearly ₹1.76 lakh crore through IPOs, buoyed by strong domestic liquidity, resilient investor sentiment and a supportive macroeconomic environment.

This surpassed the ₹1.6 lakh crore mobilised by 90 firms in 2024 and the ₹49,436 crore raised by 57 companies in 2023.

CBDT chief asks officials to be ready for transition to new IT Act

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

CBDT Chairman Ravi Agrawal has asked the Income Tax Department to be ready and active for the new direct tax law that will be implemented this year from April 1, saying he expects tax officials to work with clarity and purpose.

In his customary new year communication to the staffers of the department, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) chief said new rules, procedures and forms were under formulation for this transition.

The CBDT is the administrative body for the I-T Department. The new I-T Act will replace the over six-decade-old current Income Tax Act of 1961.

Calling 2026 a year of "special significance" for the department, the head of the direct taxes administration in the country urged the officials for their "readiness, understanding of the law and shared confidence in its implementation".

"This year carries special significance. With the Income Tax Act 2025 notified and scheduled to take effect on 1 April, 2026, we prepare for the shift to the Income Tax Act 2025.

"New rules, procedures and forms are under formulation and training and capacity building are already underway," Agrawal wrote to the department officials in his January 1 letter. Media has accessed



Ravi Agrawal

the communication in which the CBDT chief has stated that the months ahead will require their "active involvement in training and familiarisation so that we understand the intent and structure of the new law and are able to guide tax payers with clarity".

"Your involvement and curiosity will shape how smoothly we make transition," he said.

Agrawal added that the approach to tax administration was "evolving".

"Beyond collection (of revenue and taxes) and enforcement, the role of the department is increasingly centred on facilitation, trust and service. Technology will be central as systems evolve to align with the new framework," he said.

He further said that familiarity with data platforms and automated processes will become integral, particularly for the younger officers and staff, who will lead the tax department in the coming years.

GMR Visakhapatnam airport successfully conducts validation flight

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Visakhapatnam

Leaping operational readiness, GMR Aero-led GMR Visakhapatnam International Airport Limited on Sunday conducted a validation flight at the upcoming Bhogapuram Airport near here.

The validation flight was conducted by an Air India aircraft in the presence of Union Minister for Civil Aviation Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu, senior officials from the Ministry of Civil Aviation, Airports Authority of India (AAI), Andhra Pradesh government officials, and leadership from the GMR Group, a press release said.

The successful flight validated the airport's airside infrastructure, navigational aids, runway systems, and overall operational readiness, in line with regulatory requirements laid down by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). It is a crucial step in the process



of acquiring an aerodrome licence and a critical prerequisite before the commencement of commercial flight operations, the release added.

Rammohan Naidu said the day marked a historic milestone in the

development journey of Andhra Pradesh. "Visakhapatnam is set to become the economic capital of the East.

The Bhogapuram Airport will serve as a powerful engine of

growth — creating employment opportunities, catalysing regional industries, and significantly enhancing connectivity for people and businesses alike. The airport will strengthen trade, boost exports, and unlock the immense tourism potential of Andhra Pradesh," he said.

He further said that with world-class infrastructure, the project would accelerate economic development, attract investment, and place the region firmly on the global aviation and commerce map.

The minister had earlier said that the target was to start airport operations by June this year.

Business Chairman (Airports), GMR Group, G B S Raju, said the Bhogapuram International Airport reflected the Group's long-standing commitment to creating world-class national assets that catalyse economic growth and regional development.

"For over two decades, the Group has played a pioneering role in

building and operating some of India's most iconic airports, transforming aviation infrastructure through scale, sustainability and passenger-centric design," he said.

GMR Group Deputy Managing Director I Prabhakar Rao said the Bhogapuram Airport project had achieved over 90 per cent completion and was progressing well ahead of stipulated timelines.

GVIAL is developing the airport under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model on a Design, Build, Finance, Operate and Transfer (DBFOT) basis. The Greenfield Airport will be developed in stages.

Initially, the airport will be built to handle six million passengers per annum and will be scaled up based on passenger traffic growth.

The airport will also feature an aeropolis, an aviation hub, and a dedicated state-of-the-art cargo terminal, ensuring world-class facilities for efficient cargo operations.

Huddle Global: Showcasing Kerala's Startup Ambition

BY GYANESHWAR DAYAL

Startups have emerged as powerful engines of economic growth, innovation and job creation across the world. By translating ideas into scalable businesses, they fuel productivity, attract investment and create high-quality employment. For regions seeking inclusive and future-ready development, a vibrant startup ecosystem is no longer a luxury but a necessity. Kerala's determined push to position itself as an innovation-led investment destination came into sharp focus at Huddle Global's seventh edition of India's largest beachside startup festival, held at Kovalam.

Organised by the Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM), the three-day event brought together policymakers, investors, entrepreneurs, academics and global experts to reflect on the evolution of Kerala's startup ecosystem and chart the way forward. From fintech and AI to clean technology and animation, Huddle Global highlighted how innovation is becoming central to Kerala's development narrative.

Anoop Ambika, CEO, Kerala Startup Mission said, "Kerala has taken a big leap in establishing Kerala as hub of startups and as our chief minister said we now are poised to move to consolidate this and move to innovation phase"

Over the past decade, Kerala has steadily built a policy-driven startup ecosystem, bucking conventional wisdom that innovation thrives only in industrial powerhouses. Experts speaking at a session titled "From Mission to Momentum: The Evolution



of Kerala's Startup Ecosystem and Way Forward" noted that unlike many other States, Kerala's startup growth was not anchored in large industry support but was sustained by consistent and forward-looking Government policies.

Former Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, M Sivasankar, underlined the need for Kerala to now adopt a distinctive "Kerala Model" of entrepreneurship. He argued for a balanced mix of MSMEs and unicorn startups, suggesting that KSUM identify 100 startups capable of reaching a ₹100-crore valuation and 10 potential IPO candidates within the next two years. He also flagged a major gap in institutional finance, pointing out that banks

remain hesitant to fund startups until they transition into MSMEs, calling for targeted policy intervention.

The importance of strategic clarity was echoed by Dr Saji Gopinath of IIM Kozhikode, who stressed that startups must clearly choose between the MSME and venture-backed routes, with KSUM aligning its policies accordingly. Others, including analytics leader Tapan Rayaguru, cautioned startups against excessive dependence on Government grants, urging them to build sustainable, market-driven models.

Adding to the debate, Dr Jayasankar Prasad of the Centre for Management Development advocated greater autonomy for KSUM, suggesting it

evolve into an independent institution with a stable, permanent workforce. Former Kerala Real Estate Regulatory Authority Chairman P H Kurian highlighted the value of international exposure, recommending that startups be taken to overseas exhibitions to build confidence, networks and global markets.

The opening session of Huddle Global 2025 further underscored Kerala's broader economic vision. Finance Minister K N Balagopal, presenting "Vision 2031 - What is in Store for Kerala's Knowledge Economy," outlined how the state is leveraging digitalisation, AI, automation and logistics to drive its next growth phase. He highlighted the emerging Vizhinjam-Kollam-Punalur development triangle as a strategic hub combining port-led growth, manufacturing and inland connectivity.

The government's commitment to innovation was reinforced through measures such as recapitalising the Kerala Financial Corporation to strengthen KSUM's seed funding programmes and attract private venture capital. Digital and science parks focused on advanced technologies from semiconductors to robotics are being developed to anchor global research and industry partnerships.

As Huddle Global has demonstrated, Kerala's startup journey is no longer experimental. It is evolving into a mature, globally connected ecosystem-one that blends policy support, talent depth and quality of life to position the State as a compelling destination for innovation and investment.

IRFC rated 'Excellent' by DPE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Indian Railway Finance Corporation Limited (IRFC), has been rated "Excellent" by the Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) for the financial year 2024-25, marking the fifth consecutive year of achieving the highest performance rating since its listing in FY 2020-21.

According to IRFC Press Release, the sustained recognition reflects IRFC's ability to withstand emerging challenges, maintain institutional strength, and deliver consistently high performance, while evolving its business model in line with its expanded mandate. The rating reaffirms IRFC's strong governance framework, operational efficiency, and financial discipline. During the year, IRFC continued to strengthen and diversify its lending portfolio in a calibrated manner, aligned with its mandate, following a whole-of-Government approach. The company has successfully brought efficiencies in railway-linked infrastructure financing, while extending timely and cost-effective funding support to the railway ecosystem and



strategically linked sectors, thereby remaining true to its core mandate.

Commenting on the achievement, the IRFC Chairman and Managing Director Manoj Kumar Dubey said: "The 'Excellent' rating for the fifth consecutive year since listing is a strong endorsement of IRFC's institutional robustness, strategic clarity, and execution capabilities. Even as IRFC has transitioned into its IRFC 2.0 phase, the organisation has demonstrated its ability to brace challenges and deliver superior performance."

Under IRFC 2.0, we are working relentlessly and with prudence, focusing on selective deployment of capital in high-quality assets that are aligned with our mandate and risk framework. I am pleased to note that IRFC has already achieved its annual sanction guidance of ₹60,000 crore for FY 2025-26 by the end of Q3, reflecting strong momentum and disciplined growth. We remain committed to enhancing financing efficiency and supporting the railway ecosystem and related national infrastructure development."

BRIEFLY

JAY SHAH HOPES TO HOST 2036 OLYMPICS IN GUJARAT



International Cricket Council chairman Jay Shah on Sunday said that after hosting the Commonwealth Games in 2030, India aims to bring the Olympic Games to Gujarat in 2036 and set a target of winning 100 medals. Addressing the 'Run for Girl Child' marathon organised by Dr Hedgewar Seva Smruti Seva Samiti in Surat, Shah said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had played a key role in bringing the Commonwealth Games to Gujarat. "After Commonwealth 2030, we are aiming to host the Olympics in 2036 here," he said. Referring to India's performance at the Paris Olympics 2024, where the country won eight medals, Shah said the target for 2036 should be at least 100 medals, with Gujarat contributing 10 of them. He expressed confidence that women athletes would win at least two of those medals.

STASYA PANDYA WINS SILVER AT JUNIOR EQUESTRIAN MEET



Young equestrian talent Stasya Pandya of Mumbai delivered a commendable performance at the Junior National Equestrian Championship (JNEC), clinching a silver medal in the Dressage Team Event (Children 1 category) here. Competing astride Kirrihi Taonga from Surge Stables, Bengaluru, she scored 67.463 and played a key role in her team's podium finish. Stasya trains and rides at the Amateur Riders Club here under the mentorship of coach Bobin Tshering. The silver-winning team delivered a collective performance with Haripriya Singh astride Fritz scoring 71.243 and Amara Singh astride Count Me In D' Grading scoring 68.581, both representing Sea Horse Equestrian, Gujarat.

Tyson Fury says he is coming out of retirement in 2026



ASSOCIATED PRESS
Manchester (England)

Tyson Fury is returning to the ring after announcing on Sunday that he will step out of retirement.

The former heavyweight world champion confirmed his comeback in a post on social media, which sets up the prospect of a long-awaited showdown with Anthony Joshua.

"2026 is that year. Return of the mac," Fury posted on Instagram. "Been away for a while but I'm back now, 37 years old and still punching. Nothing better to do than punch men in the face and get paid for it."

Fury retired last year after losing for a second time to Oleksandr Usyk in December 2024. Before his two bouts with Usyk he was unbeaten in 35 fights, winning 34 and drawing one.

Fury did not mention potential opponents, but his announcement comes after increased speculation about a clash with British rival Joshua in 2026. Joshua, who is also a former world champion, last month knocked out YouTube star Jake Paul. But he was injured in a fatal car crash that killed two of his friends in Nigeria this week, which has resulted in uncertainty over his immediate plans.

Fury is a two-time world champion. He ended the reign of Wladimir Klitschko with a points win in 2015 that saw him crowned Super WBA, IBF and WBO champion. He didn't fight again until 2018 — but a thrilling trilogy with American Deontay Wilder resulted in a draw and two victories to claim the WBC title.

England 211-3 as bad light stops play in final Ashes Test

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Sydney

Joe Root and Harry Brook shared a 154-run partnership to guide England to 211-3 before bad light stopped play on Day 1 of the final Ashes Test, which featured an emotional on-field tribute for the Bondi terror victims and first responders.

Root and Brook joined when the tourists were at a perilous 57-3 on Sunday and rallied England through the middle session before bad light and rain stopped play just before tea and prevented the match from resuming after the interval.

At stumps Root was unbeaten on 72 and Brook was 78 not out, sharing England's best partnership of the five-test series. Australia has already retained the Ashes with wins in the first three tests.

The duo raised their half-centuries within the same over that their stand hit triple figures as England took control on a pitch that didn't appear to offer too much assistance for Australia's



bowlers.

Root made his 67th test fifty off 65 balls with seven boundaries, while Brook completed his 15th half-century from 63 balls in more streaky fashion, with some big shots narrowly avoiding the catching fielders and frustrating the hosts.

"I've just got to be a little bit more patient and take my ones here and there," Brook

said. "It's just about staying in my own bubble really and not getting too far ahead."

Triple strike: England lost three wickets in quick succession midway through the morning session after Ben Duckett and Zak Crawley had got the tourists away to a swift start after England captain Ben Stokes won the toss and chose to bat.

Mitchell Starc ended their

partnership at 35 when he teased an edge from Duckett (27) through to wicketkeeper Alex Carey for his 27th wicket of the series.

Australia then got two wickets in eight balls with Michael Neser trapping Crawley (16) lbw and then Scott Boland sending Jacob Bethell (10) on his way with a trademark ball that nipped off the seam and caught the

edge through to Carey. **Heavy security and emotions:** In a rarity at a sporting event in Australia, police with long-arm rifles, mounted police and riot squad officers were on patrol as part of heightened security measures at the sold-out match following the antisemitic terror attack which killed 15 people at nearby Bondi Beach three weeks ago.

Before play commenced, victims of the shootings, first responders and community members were honoured with an on-field tribute, including a guard of honor and a standing ovation from the capacity crowd.

In strong emotional scenes, the largest roar of the morning was for Ahmed al Ahmed, the shop owner who helped put an end to the rampage of one of the two shooters, as he joined other community members and emergency services on the field.

After the standing ovation, Ahmed, along with the others, were each greeted by the Australian team with Usman Khawaja embracing

Ahmed, who was wearing a sling to protect the shoulder where he was shot during the attack.

Khawaja is playing his 88th and final test for Australia after announcing his retirement on Friday.

No place for spin: Australia made one change with all-rounder Beau Webster getting his first appearance of the series at the expense of Jhye Richardson.

Webster's recall meant there was no space for spinner Todd Murphy, the first time Australia has not fielded a specialist spinner at the SCG since 1888.

England called up speedster Matthew Potts after Gus Atkinson was injured during the fourth test.

England lost each of the first three tests to allow Australia to retain the Ashes in just 11 days of on-field action.

England then won its first Ashes match Down Under since 2011 with a four-wicket win in the Boxing Day test that led to days of sustained criticism about the overly grassed pitch.

Bengal Tigers beat Ranchi Royals 1-0 in Women's HIL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Ranchi

Agustina Gorzelany (37) scored the winner as Shrachi Bengal Tigers recorded a 1-0 win over Ranchi Royals in the Women's Hockey India League here on Sunday.

With this win, the Bengal Tigers moved to the second position in the points table.

The Ranchi Royals came into this contest high on confidence with two consecutive wins and started the game with their midfield controlling the tempo in the opening exchanges.

They had five penalty corners and seven circle penetrations in the first quarter, but couldn't find a way past Jennifer Rizzo in goal for



Shrachi Bengal Tigers player Agustina Gorzelany (green socks) celebrates with teammates after scoring the lone goal against Ranchi Royals

the Tigers.

Playing on the counter attack, the Tigers had a late opportunity of their own before Bichu Devi Kharibam pulled off a couple of sharp

putting the Royals' defence under pressure. They made seven circle penetrations and a couple of penalty corners, attacking in waves in search of the opening goal.

But Madhuri Kindo stayed firm in goal for the hosts though, making crucial saves to keep her side on level terms to end a hard-fought first half with the score at 0-0.

In the second half, Ranchi Royals came close to breaking the deadlock on a couple of occasions but it was the Tigers who eventually drew first blood through Gorzelany, converting from a penalty corner.

Gorzelany struck for the fourth time in the competition to give her side 1-0 lead, which proved to be decisive.

WFI withholds technical officials for inter-university wrestling meet



WFI bars technical officials from inter-university wrestling meet

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

The All India Inter-University Wrestling Championship, scheduled to be hosted by Chandigarh University from January 5, has been thrown into uncertainty after the host institution opted for a referee panel different from the one recommended by the WFI, leading to the national federation declining to depute technical officials.

The Association of Indian Universities (AIU) on December 11 issued a circular clearly stating that the concerned National Sports Federation would supervise the technical conduct of the championship.

In response, Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) submitted a panel of international referees to the AIU on December 24 for officiating the competition. However, the federation informed the AIU on December 27 that Chandigarh University had not approached it directly for the referee panel.

On December 30, WFI received a separate panel of referees proposed by Chandigarh University for approval. The federation told the host university that it had already forwarded an approved panel to the AIU and advised Chandigarh University to appoint officials from that

list as per its requirement.

WFI said no response was received from Chandigarh University thereafter. The AIU, on December 31, once again forwarded the WFI-approved panel of referees to the host institution. "Despite this, Chandigarh University did not initiate any further communication with WFI regarding the appointment of technical officials," the federation said.

Consequently, on January 2, WFI formally informed both the AIU and Chandigarh University that, in the absence of confirmation and given the extremely short notice, it would not be feasible for technical officials — who would need to travel from different parts of the country — to attend the championship.

WFI also raised concerns that the host university had approached the TSR system vendor seeking to conduct the competition draws manually instead of using a computerised system, a move the federation said went against established norms aimed at ensuring transparency.

The stand-off has cast a shadow over the technical conduct of the championship, a key event in the university sports calendar and an important platform for emerging wrestlers, with uncertainty now looming over the smooth conduct of the competition.

Rice double helps Arsenal rally for win

ASSOCIATED PRESS
London

Declan Rice proved why he's a leading candidate to be the Premier League's player of the season by inspiring Arsenal to a comeback behind victory at Bournemouth that opened up a six-point lead.

The England midfielder scored two second-half goals — with almost identical, side-footed finishes — in a 3-2 win on the south coast.

Rice was a doubt for the match because of a knee injury that forced him out of the 4-1 win over Aston Villa on Tuesday. He was fit enough to return and was the difference between the teams.

"We are going to need everyone chipping in at different points so happy to help the team," said Rice, who scored twice in a Premier League game for



the first time. Arsenal fell behind in the 10th minute when Evanilson stroked into an unguarded net after intercepting a woeful pass out from the back by Gabriel Magalhaes.

The Brazil center back made amends by lashing in the equaliser six minutes later, following a mazy run by Noni Madueke, for a second goal in as many starts since returning from six weeks out injured.

After Rice's double, a long-range strike by Bournemouth substitute Eli

McGinn scored twice in the second half, building on England striker Ollie Watkins' long-range opener in first-half stoppage time.

Morgan Gibbs-White reduced the deficit to 2-1 in the 61st minute only for McGinn to restore Villa's two-goal cushion after a poor piece of goalkeeping from Forest's John Victor, who raced out of his area in an attempt to collect a ball over the top.

McGinn easily rounded Victor and slotted the ball home from 30 yards (meters). Victor went off injured immediately after the goal. Villa's 11-game winning run — which included eight victories in the league — was ended on Tuesday by a 4-1 thumping by Arsenal.

Wolves finally win: Wolves beat West Ham 3-0 to finally claim a first league win of the campaign and end its historically bad start to a top-flight season.

No team has taken this long to record its first win in a Premier League since the competition's inception in 1992.

Jhon Arias, Hwang Hee-chan and Mateus Mané scored first-half goals for Wolves, which moved onto six points, still 12 from safety with 18 games remaining.

Wolves manager Rob Edwards said he was torn between feeling "a bit of relief and really pleased."

"We should enjoy it," he said, "but it's only one win. That's all it is."

Wolves was only six points behind next-to-last Burnley, which lost at Brighton 2-0, and eight off third-to-last West Ham.

West Ham manager Nuno Espirito Santo said his team's performance was "embarrassing" and the worst in his coaching career.

"I don't recall one day that I felt so bad in a football pitch," Nuno said.

Damien Martyn able to talk now, has made miraculous turnaround: Gilchrist

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Melbourne

Former Australia cricketer Damien Martyn has made a "miraculous turnaround" and is now able to talk after coming out of an induced coma due to a bout of meningitis, according to his former teammate Adam Gilchrist.

Gilchrist said Martyn, who was diagnosed with meningitis and admitted in a Gold Coast hospital recently, is responding to treatment and now able to talk. "It's been an unbelievable turn of events in the last 48 hours. He is now able to talk and respond to treatment," Gilchrist was quoted as saying by cricket.com.au.

"He will remain in hospital and continue to receive treatment, but the turnaround has been miraculous. He has responded extraordinarily well

since coming out of the coma to the point where his family feels it's like some sort of miracle," said Gilchrist, who is also a close friend of Martyn. The legendary wicketkeeper-batter said Martyn's family is hoping that he will be moved out of the ICU soon.

"It has been so positive that they're hopeful he will be able to

move out of the ICU into another part of the hospital which is representative of what a great recovery it's been and how quickly it has flipped around.

"He's in good spirits and overwhelmed by the support. There is still some treatment and monitoring to go but it's looking positive. His wife Amanda just really wants to say to everyone she is convinced that the love, goodwill and sense of care that they felt from everybody, via messages and via the coverage in the press really helped him."

Born in Darwin, the 54-year-old former right-handed batter made his Test debut at 21, replacing Dean Jones in the 1992-93 home series against the West Indies.

Garcia shrugs off hostile homecoming

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Barcelona

Goalkeeper Joan Garcia shrugged off the jeers and vitriol in his return to Espanyol and Barcelona teammate Fermín López set up two late goals for a 2-0 victory in a heated Catalan derby. Fermín assisted fellow substitutes Dani Olmo and Robert Lewandowski in the 86th and 90th minutes to tilt the match in favor of the La Liga leaders.

But the credit for the win went to Garcia, who made superb saves to frustrate an Espanyol attack that dominated all but the final period.

The final score hid a superb effort by fifth-placed Espanyol. Pere Milla and Roberto Fernández drew save after save from Garcia, who was playing his first game at Espanyol since he left the "parakeets" last summer for its top rival. His highlight came in the 39th when Garcia used a reflex one-hand save to paw a point-blank header by Milla over his crossbar. Espanyol went as far as installing a



thin mesh barrier behind the goals at RCDE Stadium to impede any object from being thrown toward the goalie from the stands. That did not dissuade the section of the club's most fervent young supporters from holding up signs with the image of a rat in Barcelona's burgundy-and-blue colors while shouting at Garcia, a former fan favorite.

"Espanyol played a fantastic game. We didn't deserve it (the win)," Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said. "I have to say thank you to Joan Garcia. He played an unbelievable match. He is one of the best goalkeepers in the world and we had the players off

the bench who showed the quality this team has."

Flick also credited Espanyol coach Manolo González for having given Garcia the "confidence" to grow last season, when he caught the eye of many top clubs in Europe.

"(Garcia) plays for us now and he has played unbelievable all season. He played fantastic and the clean sheet today was his responsibility."

Olmo broke through for Barcelona when he used one smooth touch to lob a pass by Fermín over Espanyol goalie Marko Dimitrov. Fermín then followed that by dribbling past his marker inside the right

side of the box before laying off for Lewandowski to finish off Espanyol.

Before that late burst by Barcelona, the action had mostly been in Garcia's box where he made three steps to turn back Roberto in the second half. The loss broke a run of five straight victories by Espanyol, its best winning run since the 1998-99 season.

"Today was a day to win and we let it get away from us," Espanyol's González said. Next up for Barcelona is a trip to Saudi Arabia for the Spanish Super Cup along with Madrid, Atletico Madrid and Athletic Bilbao from Jan. 7-11.

Villarreal wins, Valencia loses: Barcelona increased its lead over second-placed Real Madrid to seven points before the latter hosts Real Betis on Sunday. Villarreal beat Elche 3-1 to end a run of three straight losses across the league, Champions League and Copa del Rey. The victory on the road ensured Villarreal maintained third place in the table 11 points behind Barcelona.

T20WC: BCB wants matches in India to be shifted to Sri Lanka

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has been instructed by its sports ministry to seek shifting of the country's T20 World Cup league games from India to Sri Lanka as there are "concerns about players' safety" following Mustafizur Rahman's ouster from the IPL on BCCI instructions.

The Shah Rukh Khan co-owned IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) released the Bangladesh left-arm pacer, who was bought for ₹9.20 crore after a bidding war at last month's auctions in Abu Dhabi, following BCCI's diktat.

BCB president and former Bangladesh skipper Aminul Islam Bulbul refrained from making any public comment after an Emergency board meeting following the development. However, government advisor Asif Nazrul said he has instructed the Board to ask the Jay Shah-led ICC to shift Bangladesh's four league games — three in Kolkata and one in Mumbai — to Sri Lanka.

"As the adviser in charge of the Ministry of Sports, I have instructed the Cricket Control Board to put the entire matter in writing and explain it to the ICC," Nazrul wrote in Bengali on his Facebook page.

"The board must make it clear that if a Bangladeshi cricketer, despite being under contract, cannot play in India, then the Bangladesh national team cannot feel safe travelling to India to play the World Cup.

"I have also directed the board to formally request that Bangladesh's World Cup matches be held in Sri Lanka instead," he further wrote.

Bangladesh's four league games are — against West Indies (February 7), Italy (February 9), England (February 14) in Kolkata followed by their last game against Nepal (February 17) in Mumbai.

A BCCI source, however, insisted that the shift is next to impossible with just a month left for the tourna-



ment. "You can't just change games at someone's whims and fancies. It is a logistical nightmare. Think about opposition teams. Their air tickets, hotels are booked.

"Also on all days there are three games each which means one game is in Sri Lanka. There is broadcast crew. So it will be easier said than done," the BCCI source said.

India's arch foe Pakistan already is already playing its World Cup game in Sri Lanka as per an understanding worked out months ago.

The Indo-Bangladesh relationship has plunged into chaos after the ouster of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled to India in August last year following anti-government protests. She was sentenced to death in absentia by a tribunal for her alleged role in a deadly crackdown during the agitation in which several students were killed.

Although the BCCI did not explicitly cite the current political situation for its decision to seek Rahman's release, it did say that the move was triggered by what's been happening all around. Hindus have been targeted for violent attacks since Hasina's ouster. IPL broadcast to be suspended in Bangladesh? Nazrul also said that he has requested the adviser for Bangladesh's Information and Broadcasting Ministry (I&B) to ensure that broadcast of IPL in Bangladesh is suspended.

"Under no circumstances will we tolerate any insult to Bangladeshi cricket, cricketers, or Bangladesh itself. The days of servitude are over," he said. There is a bit of disbelief in the BCB corridors that things took such a turn after India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar attended former PM Khaleda Zia's funeral in Dhaka. "The BCB announced the schedule for India's tour of Bangladesh because there was a sense of positivity but now we need to get an official confirmation from the Indian board as to why Mustafizur's contract was cancelled," a BCB source told PTI on conditions of anonymity. "Till now BCCI hasn't communicated anything to BCB officially. Only after official communication will BCB decide further course of action," the source said.

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BANGLADESH NAMES SQUAD FOR T20 WC

Dhaka : Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Sunday announced a 15-member squad with Litton Das as captain for the T20 World Cup next month, hours after it was instructed by the country's sports ministry to seek shifting of the team's league games from India to Sri Lanka.

Das stayed as captain while pacer Taskin Ahmed returned to the side after missing the recent Ireland series. Ahmed will team up with Rahman, who was also expectedly named in the squad, in the pace department. "The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has announced the national squad for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026, to be jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka from 7 February to 8 March," the BCB said on X.

Bangladesh squad: Litton Das (Captain), Mohammed Saif Hassan (Vice Captain), Tanzid Hasan, Mohammad Parvez Hossain Emon, Tawhid Hridoy, Shomim Hossain, Qazi Nurul Hasan Sohan, Shak Mahedi Hasan, Rishad Hossain, Nasum Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Taskin Ahmed, Md Shaifuddin, Shoriful Islam.

Making efforts to host 2036 Olympics: Prime Minister Modi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Varanasi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday asserted that India is preparing with full strength to host the 2036 Olympic Games, and declared his government was committed to providing "more and more players greater opportunities to compete" by hosting mega sporting events in the country.

Addressing the inaugural function of the 72nd Senior National Volleyball Championship, being held here, via video conference, Modi said, the government was making every possible effort to provide exposure to budding athletes to take up Olympic sports, and schemes like Khelo India were proving a game-changer in harnessing talent.

"The 2030 Commonwealth Games will be held in India, and the country is making strong efforts to host the 2036 Olympics, with the aim of giving more and more players greater opportunities to compete," said Modi. "Through the Khelo India campaign, hundreds of youth have had the chance to advance to the national level," added Modi.

Noting that initiatives like the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) were transforming the sports ecosystem in India, with efforts focused on building strong infrastructure, funding mechanisms, and providing young athletes with global exposure, he said that the country's growing clout in sport could be gauged from the fact that India had hosted 20 top-notch interna-



A split-screen shows Prime Minister Narendra Modi, left, addresses the inauguration of the 72nd National Volleyball Tournament in Varanasi via video conferencing from New Delhi

national competition in the last 10 years.

"India has hosted more than 20 major international events across several cities, including the FIFA Under-17 World Cup, Hockey World Cup, and major chess tournaments." Recalling the time when the government and society were indifferent towards sports, he said the past decade had brought about a massive change in the mindset of the country.

"The government has significantly increased the sports budget, and today India's sports model has become athlete-centric, with focus on talent identification, scientific training, nutrition, and transparent selection, ensuring that the interests of players are prioritised at every level," he said.

"Today the nation is riding on the 'reform express', with every sector and every development destination connected to it, and sports being one of them," he said.

"India's progress is not limited to the economic front but is also reflected in the confidence seen on the sports field. India's performance across various sports has consistently improved since 2014," he added.

Elaborating on the

reforms his government had undertaken in the sports, the PM said the National Sports Governance Act and the Khelo Bharat Policy 2025 will provide opportunities to the right talent and increase transparency in sports organisations.

He emphasised that these provisions will allow the youth to advance simultaneously in both sports and education. The PM expressed happiness that Varanasi had come up as a major sporting destination, saying that securing a place on the country's sporting map through the National Volleyball Competition was highly significant for the city. The tournament, being held from January 4 to 11, will witness the participation of more than 1,000 players, representing 58 teams, from across the country.

"Hosting the National Volleyball Tournament in Varanasi underscores the growing emphasis on strengthening sports infrastructure and promoting athletic development in the city." Drawing parallels between volleyball and the country's growth, the PM said "I see so many parallels between India's development story and volleyball."



Wolves claims first win in 20th Premier League game

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Wolverhampton (UK)

It has taken 20 games but Wolverhampton Wanderers finally have their first win in the Premier League.

A 3-0 victory over West Ham at Molineux on Saturday brought some respite for Wolves after its historically bad start to a top-flight season.

No team has taken this long to record its first win of a Premier League campaign since the competition's inception in 1992.

The record for the longest winless start to a top-division campaign is held by

Bolton Wanderers, who won for the first time in the 1902-03 season on their 22nd attempt.

Wolves, which has won twice in the English League Cup this season — including against West Ham — last tasted success in the Premier League on April 26. That was a month before the end of last season.

Jhon Arias, Hwang Hee-chan and Mateus Mané scored first-half goals for Wolves, which moved onto six points — still 12 from safety with 18 games remaining — but was only six points behind next-to-last Burnley, which lost at Brighton 2-0 on Saturday.

Senegal and Mali set up Africa Cup quarterfinal

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Rabat (Morocco)

Sadio Mané led Senegal to the quarterfinals of the Africa Cup of Nations after a 3-1 win over Sudan in Tangier.

The 2019 and 2022 African footballer of the year chased and harried, and set up goals and chances for teammates, leading by example in the absence of suspended captain Kalidou Koulibaly.

Mané set up midfielder Pape Gueye's first goal of two and substitute Ibrahim Mbaye's goal to send the Lions of Teranga, the 2021 champions, through to a quarterfinal against Mali, which held on with 10 men on a cold, wet night in Casablanca to beat Tunisia 3-2 in a penalty shootout.

"We needed to dig deep," said Senegal coach Pape Thiaw, whose team faced an early setback when Aamir Abdallah stunned the favorites with Sudan's opener in the sixth minute.

It was the first and last goal scored by a Sudanese player in the tournament. The Falcons of Jeddah defeated Equatorial Guinea in



the group stage thanks to an own goal.

The Sudanese, who played all of their qualifying matches away from home as the country contends with a brutal war and humanitarian crisis, were bold against Senegal. "I am sure the Sudanese people know that we came to this competition and proudly represented them," Sudan coach James Kwesi Appiah said. Senegal was a challenge too far, though. Mané set up Gueye to score in the 29th. Gueye also got the second before the break, set up by Jackson. The

19-year-old Mbaye made his entrance as a substitute in the 74th and Mané set up the youngster to wrap it up on a break three minutes later.

Mali digs even deeper: El Bilal Touré fired Mali into the quarterfinals with the winning penalty in a 3-2 shootout win over Tunisia after they finished 1-1 with extra time. Mali goalkeeper Djigui Diarra saved two penalties to make up for misses from Yves Bissouma and Dorgeles Nene, as the Eagles set up a showdown with Senegal in Tangier on Jan. 9. Tunisia was left to rue the miss from Ali Abdi and saves

Diarra made to deny Elias Achouri and Mohamed Ben Romdhane. They failed to beat Mali despite having an extra player from the 26th minute, when Woyo Coulibaly was red-carded for a dangerous tackle on Hannibal Mejbri.

It was one of many bad tackles. Referee Abongile Tom had already issued four yellow cards before the red.

Coulibaly was the second Mali player sent off in two games after Amadou Haidara against Comoros.

Even after the sending off, neither Mali nor Tunisia managed a shot on target in the first half. Fans needed to wait till the 88th before Elias Saad crossed for Firas Chaouat to head what most assumed was Tunisia's winner. But Tunisia defender Yassine Meriah conceded a penalty in stoppage time, and Lassine Sinayoko duly equalized from the spot to send the game to extra time. It was Mali's first shot on target. Sinayoko also scored in the shootout to draw the team level again after Mali captain Yves Bissouma started by blazing his penalty over.

Receiving threats for backing BCCI against Bangladesh pacer



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Mumbai

Shiv Sena (UBT) spokesperson Anand Dubey on Sunday claimed he had received death threats for hailing the BCCI's decision directing Kolkata Knight Riders to drop Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman from its 2026 IPL squad.

Dubey received threatening messages on his WhatsApp number and phone calls from unidentified persons on Saturday, the Samta Nagar police station official said. An NC has been filed on his complaint under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita sections 352 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace)

and 351(4) (criminal intimidation), and efforts are on to trace and apprehend the culprit/s, the official said. Sharing a detailed post on social media, Dubey claimed he was abused and threatened for terming the BCCI's move as "good decision".

"The issue (threats and abuse) is serious and must be looked into the police, state government," the Shiv Sena (UBT) leader added. Kolkata Knight Riders has released Rahman, whose services it had bought for ₹9.20 crore in an IPL auction, after being instructed to do so by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) amid heightening diplomatic tensions between the two neighbouring countries.

Gasperini's homecoming heartbreak: Roma falls to Atalanta

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Milan

Gian Piero Gasperini's return to Bergamo ended in defeat as his Roma lost at Atalanta 0-1 in Serie A.

Giorgio Scalvini claimed the only goal in the 12th minute and Atalanta rose to eighth place.

Roma could have moved level with second-placed Inter Milan with a win but instead was left level on points with Juventus, which moved into fourth despite being held to a surprise 1-1 draw by relegation-threatened Lecce. Como was three points further back after a Lucas Da Cunha penalty gave it a 1-0 win over Udinese.

There was a minute's silence before kickoff in every game in Serie A this weekend for the victims of the fire at a Crans-Montana



bar. It was Gasperini's first match against Atalanta since leaving in the summer after nine high-scoring seasons in charge, during which he transformed the Bergamo team into a top contender in Italy and Europe. Atalanta has struggled since his departure and is already on its second coach after Gasperini. However, it was

the home side which took the lead in the 12th minute when Scalvini managed to bundle in a corner.

Gianluca Scamacca thought he doubled Atalanta's lead in the 28th but it was ruled out after a lengthy video review because the home forward was judged to be offside at the start of the movement.

Penalty saved: Juventus dominated and had numerous chances but it was Lecce which took a surprise lead in first-half stoppage time.

There seemed little danger when Juventus defender Andrea Cambiaso rolled a ball towards teammate Pierre Kalulu but it was underpowered and Lameck Banda rushed in to intercept before cutting past two opponents and firing into the near corner.

Juventus leveled almost immediately after the break as Weston McKennie touched on a cross and rushed into the area, right in front of goal, to control the return pass from Kenan Yildiz and fire home.

It was McKennie's first goal in Serie A this season although the United States international has scored two in the Champions League.

Czech midfielder scores twice for Lyon

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Paris

Midfielder Pavel Sulc kept his scoring run going with two goals as fifth-placed Lyon won at struggling Monaco 3-1 in Ligue 1. Sulc is one of the best signings this season in French soccer and took his tally to 11 goals in 23 games since joining from unheralded Czech club Jablonec in the offseason. "He's a different kind of player," Lyon coach Paulo Fonseca said. "He's not amazing technically but he's very efficient, he works very hard for the team and the ball seems to be drawn to him."

Sulc netted from close range in the first half and arrowed in a fine strike from the edge of the penalty area in the 57th minute to put Lyon back ahead, after Mamadou Coulibaly equalised in first-half stoppage time.



Brazilian defender Abner Vinicius made it 3-1 late on as mid-table Monaco lost for the sixth time in seven league games. Monaco goalkeeper Lukas Hradecky went off injured early on after taking a blow to the knee following a challenge with Sulc and was replaced by Philipp Köhn. Lyon's opening goal came in the 35th minute when Corentin Tolisso's corner

from the left was headed on by Nicolas Tagliafico and Sulc kneed the ball in from one meter out.

Monaco equalised when Lyon's defense failed to deal with a long pass toward forward Folarin Balogun and Coulibaly profited. Coulibaly was shown a straight red card in the 70th for a dangerous high tackle on Tagliafico's chest.

Lille drops points: Lille missed the chance to move into third spot when it lost at home to sixth-placed Rennes 2-0. Lille defender Alessandro was sent off in the 13th for impeding striker Breeil Embolo on the right side of the area. Winger Przemyslaw Frankowski and defender Quentin Merlin scored for Rennes in the second half. Debut goal earns draw: Loan signing Elye Wahi scored on debut under new coach Claude Puel as Nice drew with Strasbourg 1-1.

Puel replaced Franck Haise amid high tensions at Nice, which recently ended a nine-game losing run with a French Cup win but is without a victory in Ligue 1 since October 29.

Wahi has endured a torrid time since joining Eintracht Frankfurt from Marseille last season.