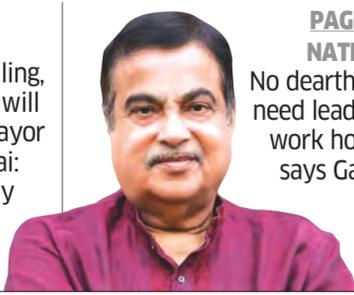




PAGE 5 NATION
If God is willing, Sena (UBT) will install its mayor in Mumbai: Thackeray



PAGE 6 NATION
No dearth of fund, need leaders who work honestly, says Gadkari



PAGE 9 GLOBAL
Ukrainians arrives in US for peace talks



PAGE 10 SPORTS
An Se Young, Christie storm into India Open final



AGENDA

Iran implodes!

GREAT OFFERS!



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PIONEER IN SHORT

TRUMP THREATENS EUROPE WITH TARIFFS

US President Donald Trump announced on Saturday that he will impose a 10 per cent import tariff from February on goods from eight European countries — Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, and Finland — citing their opposition to a proposed US purchase of Greenland.

TENSIONS FLARES UP IN MURSHIDABAD

Fresh unrest erupted in West Bengal's Murshidabad district on Saturday as protesters again blocked National Highway-12 and attempted to disrupt rail services at Beldanga, a day after violent agitations over the death of a migrant worker had crippled road and rail connectivity. Hundreds of locals gathered at Barua More, bringing traffic on NH-12 to a halt and causing long queues of stranded vehicles. Protesters also damaged a railway gate and tried to block trains, prompting police to deploy additional forces and baton-charge crowds at some locations to restore order. The renewed agitation was triggered by allegations that another migrant worker, Anisur Sheikh from the area, was brutally assaulted in Bihar. Tension had been simmering since Friday following the death of 36-year-old Alauddin Sheikh, whose family alleged he was beaten to death in Jharkhand.

CONGRESS MLA SPARKS RAPE ROW

Madhya Pradesh Congress MLA Phool Singh Baraiya triggered a major political controversy on Saturday after making remarks that appeared to link women's "beauty" with rape and described sexual crimes against Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women as yielding "teeth phal" or religious reward. The comments surfaced as a video of an interview went viral on social media, coinciding with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's visit to Indore. In the video, Baraiya is purportedly heard claiming that rape occurs when men see "extremely beautiful" women and questioning the presence of such beauty among Dalits, tribals and OBCs. He further alleged that Hindu scriptures sanction such acts, though he failed to cite a specific text when asked.

POLL LOSS WILL BE DISCUSSED: AJIT PAWAR

Maharashtra Deputy CM Ajit Pawar congratulated the BJP after it trounced NCP and NCP (SP) alliance in the Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad civic polls. Pawar had attacked the BJP for irregularities in the civic bodies, bringing a very high amount of acrimony in the campaign. The BJP, an ally of the NCP in the Mahayuti, had hit back with warnings that Pawar must introspect before making such statements. Speaking to reporters on Saturday, Pawar said his party would sit and discuss the poll reversal. The takeaway from this defeat is not to get discouraged but to continue working, the Deputy CM added. Asked about possible reasons for the defeat in Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad, once the bastion of the NCP and the Pawars, he said, "It is just 24 hours since the results have been declared. The party will sit and discuss the outcome." The BJP stumped the Pawars in the Pune polls, clinching 119 seats, with Ajit Pawar-led NCP coming in distant second with 27 and its ally NCP (SP) getting three seats, while the Congress managed 15 seats.

IndiGo fined ₹22.2 cr for December chaos

RAJESH KUMAR
New Delhi

Holding the management responsible, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has imposed financial penalties amounting to ₹22.20 crore on IndiGo and taken strict enforcement action against its senior management after a probe found serious planning, operational and regulatory lapses for a massive network-wide operational disruption between December 3 and 5 last year. Additionally, IndiGo has been ordered to pledge a bank guarantee of ₹50 crore in favour of DGCA, to ensure compliance with the directives and long term systemic correction.

The disruption resulted in the cancellation of 2,507 flights and delays of 1,852 flights, causing inconvenience to over three lakh passengers stranded at various airports.

DGCA has also issued caution to IndiGo's CEO for inadequate oversight and crisis management.

CONTINUED ON >> P4



Stranded passengers searching for their luggage at the Bengaluru airport in December last year due to IndiGo cancellations

FINE EXPLAINED

- Daily Penalty : ₹30,00,000
- Total Days of Non-Compliance : 68 days
- Total Penalty for Continued Non-Compliance: 68 × ₹30,00,000 = ₹20,40,00,000/- (Rupees Twenty Crore Forty Lakh Only)

COMPONENT AMOUNT

- One-time systemic penalties: ₹1.80 crore
- Continued non-compliance penalty: ₹20.40 crore
- Total Penalty Imposed: ₹22.20 crore

KHAMENEI ATTACKS TRUMP AS US SEEKS TO CALM ALLIES



AGENCIES
Dubai/Copenhagen/New Delhi

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Saturday accused US President Donald Trump of being a "criminal" for backing anti-government protesters, as he for the first time acknowledged that the recent unrest had left "several thousand" people dead.

In a speech broadcast on state television, Khamenei blamed demonstrators for the bloodshed, calling them "foot soldiers" of the US who had attacked mosques and public institutions.

He alleged the unrest was fuelled from abroad, claiming rioters were armed with weapons imported from outside Iran, without naming countries.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Atishi video sparks Delhi-Punjab clash

RAJESH KUMAR
New Delhi

A forensic report on a controversial video clip linked to Leader of Opposition Atishi has triggered a fresh political flashpoint between the BJP-led Delhi Assembly and the AAP governments in Delhi and Punjab. Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta on Saturday said a forensic science laboratory (FSL) report had concluded that the video allegedly showing Atishi making remarks disrespecting Sikh Gurus was original and untampered.

Gupta announced that he would direct a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) into what he described as parallel and questionable forensic actions initiated outside Delhi. Earlier, police in AAP-ruled Punjab claimed that their forensic examination revealed that the video was "doctored".

In response to the statement by Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the BJP government in Delhi is free to demand a CBI probe into the issue of the forensic report over the



alleged remarks by AAP leader Atishi in the Delhi Assembly. Mann pointed out that forensic investigation has already established that Delhi Assembly Leader of Opposition (LOP) Atishi did not say any such thing which insults the Sikh gurus. Addressing the media, Mann said "The forensic report has come, and the court has also made its position clear. But if the BJP believes that the CBI is above even the forensic laboratory, then it should go ahead and order a CBI probe as well."

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal also wrote to Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta, seeking the disqualification of Leader of Opposition Atishi as MLA

over her alleged blasphemous remarks against Guru Tegh Bahadur.

Badal urged Gupta to recommend the registration of an FIR against Atishi. The AAP leader's remarks "deeply hurt the religious sentiments of the Sikh community", the former deputy chief minister said.

Earlier, addressing a press conference, Gupta said a forensic science laboratory report on the veracity of the video related to Leader of Opposition Atishi's alleged remarks disrespecting Sikh gurus has stated that the clip was original and without any tampering. The Speaker said Atishi should meet him and apologise over the matter.

Reading out key portions of the FSL report, Gupta quoted: "Regarding the authenticity and genuineness of the video, it is to state that we have received transcription and listened to the same at the laboratory and there is no indication of any form of alteration, tampering in the identified video shot on the basis frame by frame analysis using video analyst system."

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Infiltration biggest challenge for West Bengal, refugees need not worry: PM attacks Mamata

TONY DAS
Kolkata/Guwahati

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday reiterated the infiltration issue in West Bengal alleging that large-scale illegal migration has altered the State's demography, triggered riots, and thrived due to the ruling party's "patronage and syndicate raj".

In a separate public address in Guwahati, PM attacked Congress for opening doors for infiltrators as they formed its vote bank. He accused the grand old party for being the stumbling block for the development of entire north eastern region.

Launching a sharp attack on the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress government in the State, amid the ongoing political controversy over the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and ED raids on the political consultancy firm of TMC, Modi sought to reassure refugees such as the Matuas, who migrated to India after facing religious persecution in neighbouring



PM Modi interacting with students during flagging off the country's first Vande Bharat sleeper train between Howrah and Guwahati (Kamakhya) in Malda West Bengal

Bangladesh, asserting that they had nothing to fear.

Addressing a mega rally in this Muslim-majority district of Malda town, the PM said infiltration posed "a very big challenge" in West Bengal. He said that the BJP, once voted to power, would take "big action" to crack down on infiltrators and stop illegal migration in Bengal. "There are developed and prosper-

ous countries in the world which have no shortage of money, yet they are removing infiltrators. It is equally necessary to remove infiltrators from West Bengal," PM said.

In the evening Modi took part in a roadshow from Assam's Guwahati airport to Azara, commencing his two-day tour of the northeastern state. During the four-km roadshow, Modi witnessed

Assam's diverse ethnic culture amid cheers by people, who had lined up on both sides of the road. He will again address a public meeting on Sunday in West Bengal. In Guwahati, Modi launched a blistering attack on Congress, alleging that the Opposition paralysed the growth and development of Assam when it was in power.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

NIA books five for online radicalisation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Saturday chargesheeted five persons, including a woman, in a case relating to online radicalisation of vulnerable youth by terror group Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) in Gujarat.

The accused — identified as Mohammad Fardeen, Kureshi Sefulla, Mohammad Faique, Zeeshan Ali and Shama Parveen — have been named in the charge sheet filed before a special NIA court in Ahmedabad, officials said.

NIA's investigation in the case had revealed that the accused used social media platforms for propagating, supporting and disseminating the anti-India ideologies of the banned AQIS, a statement issued by the probe agency said.

CONTINUED ON >> P4



Mamata asks CJI to protect Constitution



West Bengal CM addressing a gathering during the foundation stone-laying ceremony of the Mahakal Mahatirtha Temple in Siliguri

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Jaipur

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday urged Chief Justice of India Surya Kant to protect the country's Constitution, democracy and judiciary.

Banerjee, speaking at a programme to inaugurate a building of the Jaipur Circuit Bench of the Calcutta High Court, also called on Justice Kant to protect people of the country from being wrongly targeted by

"agencies". "Please protect the Constitution, democracy, judiciary, history and geography of the country from disaster," she said, without elaborating.

"You (the CJI) are the guardian of our Constitution, we are under your legal guardianship. Please protect the people," Banerjee said. Justice Kant was also present at the programme. "These days, there is a trend of media trials before disposal of cases; this must stop, too," Banerjee added.

Capital AQI surges, GRAP IV activated

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi-NCR's air quality worsened sharply on Saturday, prompting authorities to enforce the strictest restrictions under Stage IV of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP).

The move comes a day after Stage III curbs were applied, with all earlier stages now active. The 24-hour average AQI began at 354 ("very poor") but surged to 416 ("severe") by 6 PM, and crossed 450, triggering Stage IV or "Severe+" measures.

The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) cited western disturbances, unfavourable weather, and stagnant pollutants as reasons for the



spike. Stage IV restrictions include halting non-essential truck entry, limiting BS III and BS IV vehicles, banning construction and demolition, and mandating hybrid work for schools up to Class XI and 50 per cent staff in offices.

NCR Pollution Control Boards and other agencies concerned have been asked to escalate the preventive measures to prevent further deterioration of air quality in the region.

Echoes of survival: India's largest river dolphin survey begins

RAJESH KUMAR
New Delhi

At least 26 researchers sailing on three boats have embarked to record ecological and habitat parameters of the Dolphins in the Ganga, Indus and Brahmaputra by using modern technologies such as hydrophones for underwater acoustic monitoring. In the first phase, the survey will cover the main stem of the Ganga from Bijnor to Ganga Sagar and then the Indus River.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has rolled out the second range-wide estimation of riverine and estuarine dolphins under Project Dolphin from Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh. India is home to two species of freshwater



The Ganges river dolphin from Katwa Shankhai Ghat

dolphins - Ganges (Platanista gangetica) and Indus (Platanista minor), which serve as bio-indicators of healthy river ecosystems. Both dolphins are classified as Endangered and listed as Schedule I species under the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

In the second phase, it will cover Brahmaputra, the tributaries of the Ganga, the

Sundarbans, and Odisha. Apart from the Ganges River Dolphin, the survey will assess the status of the Indus River Dolphin and Irrawaddy Dolphins, along with habitat condition, threats, and associated conservation-priority fauna. This initiative will generate robust scientific data to support evidence-based conservation planning and policy action for India's river ecosys-

tems. The ongoing survey follows the same standardized methodology as the previous exercise, however will additionally cover new stretches and operational areas to include a new species, Irrawaddy dolphin, estimation in Sundarbans and Odisha.

The previous nationwide survey (2021-23) recorded an estimated around 6,327 riverine dolphins in India, including Ganges River Dolphins in the Ganga, Yamuna, Chambal, Gandak, Ghaghara, Kosi, Mahananda and Brahmaputra systems, and a small population of Indus River Dolphins in the Beas. The majority of the dolphins — estimated to be 2,397 — were observed in Uttar Pradesh, followed by Bihar (2,220) and West Bengal (815), highlighting the critical importance of the Gangetic basin for long-term dolphin conservation.

Researchers from the Wildlife Institute of India surveyed 58 rivers across 10 states between 2021 and 2023 to produce the first comprehensive count of India's river dolphins.



Govt raises income cap for ration card application to ₹1.2 lakh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Delhi Government has decided to raise the annual income cap to ₹1.20 lakh from the previous ₹1 lakh, to enable more households to be eligible for ration cards. The decision to raise the annual income cap was taken in a recent Cabinet meeting headed by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta to make Delhi's food security system more equitable and focused on poor families.

rules for several years, more than 3,89,883 applications for ration cards have remained pending in Delhi, and over 11,65,965 people are still waiting for food security benefits. Data verification revealed that the income details of around 6,46,123 people did not match the prescribed norms. About 95,682 individuals had remained in the system for a long time without availing any benefits. Nearly 23,394 duplicate names were found, while in 6,185 cases, benefits were recorded in the names of deceased persons. Around 56,372

people had themselves requested to opt out of the system. Owing to all these reasons, a total of more than 8,27,756 vacancies were created; these slots will now be filled with those who have been waiting for years for a ration card or food security coverage, according to a statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office. Now, the families with an annual household income of up to ₹1.20 lakh will be eligible for a ration card. New food security rules will be implemented in Delhi with the resolve that "no one should go



hungry", the statement quoted the chief minister as saying. Under the new rules, families will not be eligible if they own property in A to E category colonies in Delhi, pay income tax, own a four-wheeler excluding one commercial vehicle used for livelihood, have any family member in government service, or have an electricity connection exceeding 2 kilowatts. The Chief Minister made it clear that food security is not an act of charity, but a right of the poor. The government's resolve is that no needy person should go

hungry merely because of shortcomings in the system. An income certificate issued by the revenue department has been made mandatory to apply for ration cards, thereby ending the system of self-certification. According to the CM, the "first-come, first-served" system will now be discontinued. The applications will be examined, approved and prioritised through district-level committees to ensure that the neediest families are placed higher on the list. Each district-level committee will be chaired by the district

magistrate or additional district magistrate, and will include the local MLA and officials concerned. The committee will scrutinise applications and arrange them in order of priority so that the most deserving families receive benefits first. Additionally, a 20 per cent waiting list will also be prepared to ensure that vacancies are filled promptly, the statement said. The CM explained that the district-level committee has been designated as the central unit for priority determination.

Delhi Police recovers narcotics worth ₹1 crore, 2 held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Delhi Police busted a drug peddling gang after the arrest of two men and the recovery of about 400 grams of contraband, valued at over ₹1 crore, from their SUV in northwest Delhi.

The accused, Jaswant Singh alias Lallu, 42, and Ashok Kumar, 30, both residents of Sultanpuri, were arrested on Friday while transporting the illicit consignment in an SUV, police said. Police laid a trap near Naharpur bus stand on the road leading towards M2K Market on Maharaaja Agrasen Marg in Rohini, they said.

Following a surveillance, police spotted an SUV occupied by the two accused and intercepted it, he said. During questioning, the duo allegedly tried to mislead police, prompting the team to conduct a thorough search of the vehicle, police said.

A packet containing 383 grams of smack and heroin was recovered from a concealed cavity under the steering wheel of the car, police added. Subsequently, police registered a case under relevant sections of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, and arrested both the accused, they said. Police said the seized narcotics are valued at over ₹1 crore in the international market. The SUV used for transporting the drugs has also been seized.

During the investigation, police found that Jaswant Singh, a school dropout who studied up to Class 3, was previously involved in drug trafficking and had been arrested earlier in a 2021 NDPS Act case registered at Sultanpuri police station, they said.

Further investigation is underway to trace the other associates involved in the drug trafficking network, officials added.

GRAP-IV enforced in Delhi



New Delhi Commuters making their way through a cold and foggy morning in New Delhi on Saturday PANKAJ KUMAR

RAJESH KUMAR
New Delhi

With air quality worsening sharply across the Delhi-NCR, authorities on Saturday invoked the strictest restrictions under Stage IV of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), triggering emergency curbs across the region.

This comes a day after the CAQM enforced GRAP 3 restrictions in Delhi-NCR on Friday. Currently, all stages of GRAP are in force. Earlier in the day, the 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) was recorded at 354, falling in the 'very poor' category. It deteriorated to 416, falling in the 'severe' category, by 6 pm.

The highest level of emergency curbs has been enforced with immediate effect after Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) crossed the 450-mark, triggering measures aimed at preventing any further spike in pollution and safeguarding public health. The Stage IV curbs come in addition to the preventive and restrictive actions already in force under Stage I, Stage II and Stage III of GRAP.

In a statement, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) said the AQI of Delhi which was recorded as 400 today ie 17.1.2026 at 4 pm exhibited a sharp increasing trend and has been recorded 428 at

8PM, owing to western disturbance, highly unfavourable weather/ meteorological conditions and lack of dispersal of pollutants.

The Commission said its GRAP sub-committee had decided to enforce all measures under Stage IV or 'Severe+' air quality with immediate effect after pollution levels crossed critical thresholds. In an official statement, the panel said, "Keeping in view the prevailing trend of air quality and in an effort to prevent further deterioration of air quality in the region, the CAQM Sub-Committee on GRAP decides to invoke all actions as envisaged under Stage-IV of the extant GRAP 'Severe+' Air Quality (DELHI AQI > 450), with immediate effect, in the entire NCR."

It added that these steps would be in addition to restrictions already in force under Stages I, II and III. In an official order, the government directed that all administrative secretaries and heads of departments shall attend office regularly, with no more than 50 per cent staff strength physically present. Further, NCR Pollution Control Boards and other agencies concerned have been asked to escalate the preventive measures to prevent further deterioration of air quality in the region. Restrictions on the move-

ment of BS III petrol and BS IV diesel four-wheelers in Delhi, Gurgaon, Faridabad, Ghaziabad and Gautam Budh Nagar; work from home for 50% staff in govt and private offices in Delhi; hybrid mode for classes till IX and XI in Delhi; ban on construction and demolition activity, and barring the entry of non-essential trucks running on non-cleaner fuels in the city are among the restrictive measures under stage IV of the GRAP.

As part of the Stage IV action plan, the entry of trucks into Delhi has been completely stopped, except for those carrying essential commodities or providing essential services.

However, trucks running on LNG, CNG, electricity or BS-VI diesel are permitted to enter the city. "Stop entry of BS-IV truck traffic into Delhi (except for trucks carrying essential commodities/providing essential services)," it said.

It is further clarified that all BSIII and below diesel operated commercial goods vehicles viz, LGVs, MGVs, HGVs, registered outside Delhi, are already not permitted to enter Delhi wef 1.11.2025, even if they are carrying essential commodities/providing essential services.

MCD collects ₹2,700 crore in property tax

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

In a remarkable fiscal surge, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has raked in over ₹2,700 crore in property tax, 45 per cent higher than the last year's corresponding period. The taxpayer base has swelled by nearly 21 per cent, jumping from 10,31,177 to 12,43,375 compared with FY 2024-25.

The number of total property taxpayers has increased from 10,31,177 to 12,43,375 in comparison to the last financial year 2024-25, marking an impressive growth of nearly 21 per cent. The Assessment & Collection department attributed this record-breaking performance to the multi-pronged strategy adopted under MCD Commissioner Ashwani Kumar, with a strong focus on taxpayer facilitation, compliance enhancement, and effective enforcement.

The key driver for the record collection has been the Tax Amnesty Scheme called SUNIYO 2025-26. Under this initiative, taxpayers get a waiver of interest and penalties by paying the current year's tax (2025-26) plus the last five years (2020-21 to 2024-25) property tax dues. Due to this, many taxpayers who had earlier filed



incorrect Property Tax Returns (PTRs) and paid lesser property tax availed this Scheme. Additionally, taxpayers who had previously paid property tax only once or twice of financial year and failed to pay tax for subsequent financial years also availed this Scheme. As a result, approx 1.70 lakh taxpayers have availed the SUNIYO Scheme, and as a result, property tax revenue amounting to ₹933 crore has been received up to 31st December 2025, which includes property tax of ₹320 crore from 91,000 new taxpayers.

However, there are still more than 6 lakh recorded taxpayers who have either paid lesser property tax or have not paid property tax at all and have not availed the SUNIYO Scheme. Further, all taxpayers who have not yet been brought in tax net are

₹35 CRORE FOR MICROCHIPPING, VACCINATING STRAY DOGS IN UPCOMING MCD BUDGET

New Delhi: In the upcoming Budget, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has earmarked around ₹35 crore specifically for microchipping and vaccination of stray dogs, officials aware of the matter said. Microchipping is the implantation of an integrated chip under an animal's skin for recording information such as vaccination history, location and identity. MCD officials said this allocation is for better managing the city's stray dog population, a step that reflects growing concerns about public safety and animal health. According to officials, ₹20 crore of this allocation will be spent directly by the corporation, while the remaining ₹15 crore will be channelled through partnerships with non-Governmental organisations (NGOs) that have experience

working in animal welfare. "The collaboration with NGOs is intended to expand reach and accelerate the fieldwork needed to inoculate and track street dogs," officials said. The corporation has also set a target to microchip and vaccinate at least 25,000 dogs across the city in the next 2-3 months, officials said.

"Microchipping will help record key information such as vaccination history, location and identity, which can be used later to monitor health and respond quickly in cases of dog bites or disease outbreaks," they said, adding that the cost of a single microchip will be roughly around ₹300. Further, the corporation is planning to set aside ₹60 lakh for catching and relocating monkeys in the national Capital in its bid to reduce human-animal conflict in the Capital.

also urged to avail the scheme to save themselves from penal action under the DMC Act 1957.

The MCD appeals to these defaulters to avail the SUNIYO Scheme and clear all the property tax dues/liabilities. Subsequent to the closing of the scheme period, coercive

action will be initiated against the defaulters/non-filers taxpayers who have not paid property tax.

The SUNIYO Scheme is extended up to 31 January 2026 with a small penalty of five per cent. Taxpayers can avail these benefits through MCD's property tax portal.

Forgetting history weakens democracy: RS deputy chairman

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Forgetting history weakens democracy and erodes a society's moral direction, Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh Narayan Singh said on Saturday while addressing a symposium at the World Book Fair being held at Bharat Mandapam.

The symposium, organised by the Delhi Legislative Assembly, was held on the occasion of the release of a coffee table book titled "Shri



Veer Vithal Bhai Ki Gaurav Gatha: Ek Shatabdi Yatra." "A society that forgets its history loses not only its future but also its moral direction. History is not

merely a record of the past; it is the foundation upon which democratic institutions, public consciousness, and national character are built," said Singh at the event.

In his address, Singh commended the Delhi Legislative Assembly Secretariat for reviving a "largely forgotten chapter of India's freedom struggle through a meticulously researched and documented publication."

Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta stated that the period from 1912 to 1933 constituted the most decisive phase of India's freedom movement, culminating with the passing of Veer Vithalbhai Patel on October 22, 1933.

BARFLEX POLYFILMS LIMITED

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Email Id: info@barflex.co.in Phone: 9810021106 Website: www.barflex.co.in

Corrigendum - Utilisation of Proceeds from the Fresh Issue

This Corrigendum is being submitted to the Stock Exchange(s) pursuant to Regulation 32 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015 and the applicable provisions of the SEBI (ICDR) Regulations, 2018, to rectify and update the previously disclosed information under the section "Utilisation of Net Proceeds".

The earlier disclosure contained inadvertent errors in the reporting of gross proceeds, issued-related expenses and the utilisation status as at 31 March 2025. Further, the utilisation position has been updated for the period ended 30 September 2025. The corrected and final details, consolidated into a single disclosure, are provided below. The earlier tables may accordingly be disregarded.

A. Details of Proceeds from the Fresh Issue

Particulars	Amount
Gross Proceeds from the Fresh Issue	1231.20
Less: Issue-related expenses*	57.07
Net Proceeds from the Fresh Issue	1174.13

*Issue related expenses refer to expenses in relation to fresh issue only.

B. Revised and Final Utilisation of Proceeds

(Corrected utilisation as at 31-03-2025 and updated utilisation as at 30-09-2025)

Particulars	Gross Proceeds	Proposed Utilisation as per Prospectus	Utilisation up to 31-03-2025	Unutilised Amount as at 31-03-2025	Utilisation up to 30-09-2025	Unutilised Amount as at 30-09-2025
Capital expenditure towards purchase of additional plant and machinery	1174.13	1174.13	349.26	824.87	1174.13	-
Issue Expenses	57.07	57.07	57.07	-	57.07	-
Total	1231.20	1231.20	406.33	824.87	1231.20	-

C. Management Confirmation

The Company confirms that:

- The figures earlier reported as at 31-03-2025 have been corrected to reflect the accurate utilisation status and the unutilised balance of ₹ 824.87 lakhs.
- The entire unutilised amount of ₹ 824.87 lakhs (as at 31-03-2025) has been fully utilised during the period ended 30-09-2025 strictly in line with the objects of the issue.
- As at 30-09-2025, no amount out of the Fresh Issue proceeds remains unutilised.

For and on behalf of Board
Sd/-
Jaiwant Bery
Managing Director
(DIN: 00380445)

Place: New Delhi
Date: 17-01-2026
A-41, First Floor, Friends Colony East, New Delhi-110065

PUBLIC NOTICE

IN THE MATTER OF SECTION 13 OF THE LIMITED LIABILITY PARTNERSHIP ACT, 2008 READ WITH RULE 17 OF LLP (INCORPORATION OF LLP) RULES, 2009 AND OTHER APPLICABLE PROVISIONS, IF ANY, OF THE LIMITED LIABILITY PARTNERSHIP ACT, 2008 AND

AND

IN THE MATTER OF ALAMKRITHA LLP HAVING ITS REGISTERED OFFICE AT A-044, SIGMA-1 GREATER, NOIDA, GAUTAM BUDH NAGAR, ALPHA GREATER NOIDA, GAUTAM BUDDHA NAGAR, DADRI, UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA, 201310.

Notice is hereby given to the General Public that the LLP proposes to make an application to the Registrar of Companies, Kanpur Uttar Pradesh under section 13 (3) of the Limited Liability Partnership Act, 2008 seeking permission to change its Registered office from the state of "Uttar Pradesh" (A-044, SIGMA-1 GREATER, NOIDA, GAUTAM BUDH NAGAR, ALPHA GREATER NOIDA, GAUTAM BUDDHA NAGAR, DADRI, UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA, 201310) to the state of "Delhi" (DSC233, FIRST FLOOR, DLF SOUTH COURT, SAKET, NEW DELHI-110017)*. Any person whose interest is likely to be affected by the proposed change of the registered office of the LLP may deliver or cause to be delivered or send by Registered post of his/her objections supported by an affidavit stating the nature of his/her interest and grounds of opposition supported by an affidavit to the Registrar of Companies, Kanpur Uttar Pradesh within twenty one days from the date of publication of this notice.

FOR ALAMKRITHA LLP
SD/-
MUJIB PATHAK MRIGANK PATHAK
(Designated Partner) (Designated Partner)
DPIN: 10051031 DPIN: 10051032
Date: 18.01-2026
Place: New Delhi

SD/-
MUJIB PATHAK MRIGANK PATHAK
(Designated Partner) (Designated Partner)
DPIN: 10051031 DPIN: 10051032
Date: 18.01-2026
Place: New Delhi

PUBLIC NOTICE

IN THE MATTER OF SECTION 13 OF THE LIMITED LIABILITY PARTNERSHIP ACT, 2008 READ WITH RULE 17 OF LLP (INCORPORATION OF LLP) RULES, 2009 AND OTHER APPLICABLE PROVISIONS, IF ANY, OF THE LIMITED LIABILITY PARTNERSHIP ACT, 2008 AND

AND

IN THE MATTER OF AUREATE MOTOCORP LLP HAVING ITS REGISTERED OFFICE AT A-044, SIGMA-1 GREATER NOIDA, GAUTAM BUDH NAGAR, ALPHA GREATER NOIDA, DADRI, UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA, 201310.

Notice is hereby given to the General Public that the LLP proposes to make an application to the Registrar of Companies, Kanpur Uttar Pradesh under section 13 (3) of the Limited Liability Partnership Act, 2008 seeking permission to change its Registered office from the state of "Uttar Pradesh" (A-044, SIGMA-1 GREATER, NOIDA, GAUTAM BUDH NAGAR, ALPHA GREATER NOIDA, DADRI, UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA, 201310) to the state of "Delhi" (DSC233, FIRST FLOOR, DLF SOUTH COURT, SAKET, NEW DELHI-110017)*. Any person whose interest is likely to be affected by the proposed change of the registered office of the LLP may deliver or cause to be delivered or send by Registered post of his/her objections supported by an affidavit stating the nature of his/her interest and grounds of opposition supported by an affidavit to the Registrar of Companies, Kanpur Uttar Pradesh within twenty one days from the date of publication of this notice.

FOR AUREATE MOTOCORP LLP
SD/-
MUJIB PATHAK MRIGANK PATHAK
(Designated Partner) (Designated Partner)
DPIN: 10051031 DPIN: 10051032
Date: 18.01-2026
Place: New Delhi

SD/-
MUJIB PATHAK MRIGANK PATHAK
(Designated Partner) (Designated Partner)
DPIN: 10051031 DPIN: 10051032
Date: 18.01-2026
Place: New Delhi

PUBLIC NOTICE

Known to all that my client Pradeep Singh owner of UGF, Property No. B-53, area 50 sq. yds., Kharsa No. 317, Sanjay Enclave, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi, and My Client purchase property from Deepak Kumar vide GPA, AT&S & Will dated 11.11.2025, now My Client wants to sell aforesaid property. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property, shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.

AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION
Ch. No. 760 - Dwarka Court Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-75
Mobile :- 9899013918

PUBLIC NOTICE

Known to all that my client Jasbir Solanki and Deepak Solanki owner of Third Floor Front Side, Property No. 19, area 125 sq. yds., Kharsa No. 309, Bhagwati Vihar, Block-V, Sec-C, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi, and My Client purchase property from Chetia Devi vide GPA, AT&S & Will dated 15.04.2024, now My Client wants to sell aforesaid property. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property, shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.

AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION
Ch. No. 760 - Dwarka Court Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-75
Mobile :- 9899013918

PUBLIC NOTICE

Known to all that my client Shri Govind Parsad and Smt. Madhu Gupta owner of Third Floor Plot Nos. 16, 39, 39 B & 17/A, Total Area Meas. 96 Sq. Yds. Kharsa Nos. 872-873, Sewak Park, Uttam Nagar, and My Client purchase property from Smt. Jagwanti, Sh. Parthash Chand and S. Surjit Singh vide GPA, AT&S & Will dated 28.11.1997, 27.01.1990 and 19.02.1988 now My Client wants to sell aforesaid property. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property, shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.

AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION
Ch. No. 760 - Dwarka Court Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-75
Mobile :- 9899013918

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is hereby notified for the public at large that my client, SHRI PRADEEP KUMAR VERMA S/O LATE SHRI VIJAY KUMAR VERMA, R/O C-150/A, STREET NO.7, BHAJAN PURA DELHI-110053 is going to get registered a Will Deed Dated 29.04.2013 with the concerned Sub-Registrar, executed by his father LATE SHRI VIJAY KUMAR VERMA Son of Shri Purshtam Singh, in favour of my client, who is the beneficiary, since Shri Vijay Kumar Verma has already expired on dated 14.07.2019. Any Person's have any Objection, Claims(s), Interest with regard to registration of aforesaid Deed of Will, may contact the undersigned within 3 days from the Publication of this Notice, failing which the claim of any of such person will be considered to be waived and/or abandoned with immediate effect.

Advocate Ranvir Singh
(Central Govt. Sec. Counsel)
Delhi High Court

Dated : 18th January 2026

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE is hereby given that Anju Gupta, Rohit Gupta and Rohan Gupta (Sellers) claims to be owner and in possession of Third Floor of prop. No. 1/643, Vaishali Ghaziabad, U.P. (herein after called the said property) having inherited the said property after the death of Rajat Kumar Gupta who expired on 03.11.2025, said Rajat Kumar Gupta was the owner of the said property vide Sale deed dated 19.04.2024 reg. vide Doc No. 4554, & said Sellers has agreed to sell the said Property to Sarthak Aggarwal and said Sarthak Aggarwal agreed to create a mortgage in favour of our clients IDFC FIRST BANK LTD, ITO Branch, any person's having claim against the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, lien or otherwise howsoever, are hereby intimated to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 7days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned and our client shall proceed with the disbursement of loan and subsequent creation of mortgage in respect thereof.

Vishal Diwan (Advocate)
Advocates and Solicitors
Ho.No.2 (LGF), NRI Complex, N.D-19
Mobile No. 9818399999

मध्यप्रदेश पुलिस आवास एवं अधोसंरचना विकास निगम

कार्यालय परियोजना यंत्री
भद्रभद्रा रोड संभाग क्रमांक-02, भोपाल
मोबा. : 9425601534, ई-मेल : bhopaldivision2@gmail.com
क्र. मप्रपुआअविनि/55/पर्य/भोपाल-02/तरा/2026
भोपाल, दिनांक : 16.01.2026
विज्ञप्ति

'निर्माण कार्य 42 एनजीओ एवं 252 आरक्षक आवास गृह (G+5) रेडियो कॉलोनी, भद्रभद्रा रोड, भोपाल (म.प्र.) के निर्माण कार्य हेतु निविदा क्रमांक-28/2025-26 ऑनलाइन निविदा क्रमांक MPPHCL/TENDER No. 2026 MPPHC 476411_1) आमंत्रित की जाती है। निविदा प्रपत्र दिनांक 16.02.2026 समय 5.00 बजे तक ऑनलाइन से खरीदे जा सकते हैं, विस्तृत निविदा सूचना एवं अन्य विवरण Portal : https://mptenders.gov.in पर देखे जा सकते हैं।

म.प. माध्यम/124014/2026 परियोजना यंत्री



Bikoshito Bangla Bikoshito Bharat



The development of Bengal forms the foundation of India's future, and today's launch strengthens that foundation

Shri Narendra Modi, Hon'ble Prime Minister



A transformative gift of infrastructure projects worth over ₹830 Crore in the Ports, Shipping, Inland Waterways & Rail Sectors for West Bengal

Laying of Foundation Stone for

Extended Port Gate System at Balagarh including IWT Terminal and Road Overbridge

- Capacity expansion of the Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port Authority, Kolkata
- Reduces Kolkata's traffic congestion
- Smoother handling of the increasing volume of containerized coal and general cargo
- Reduced logistics costs and boost to employment

Launching of

Electric Catamaran at Kolkata

- Energy-efficient watercraft with air-conditioned cabin for 50 passengers
- Cuts travel time significantly and reduces load on road transport
- Equipped with state-of-the-art amenities for enhanced comfort and convenience
- Promotes tourism and regional economy

Inauguration of

New Rail Line Between Jayrambati and Maynapur

- Fast and convenient rail connectivity for Bankura district and surrounding rural areas
- Improved access to major pilgrimage centres such as Jayrambati and Kamarpukur
- Better access to education, healthcare and essential services
- New opportunities for regional trade, tourism and livelihoods

Flagging off of

- Kolkata (Santragachi) – Tambaram Amrit Bharat Express Train
- Kolkata (Howrah) – Anand Vihar Terminal Amrit Bharat Express Train
- Kolkata (Sealdah) – Banaras Amrit Bharat Express Train
- Jayrambati - Maynapur Passenger Train

- Reliable, efficient and safe option for long distance travel
- Better connectivity to important centres in North and South to improve trade, commerce and passenger movement

by

Shri Narendra Modi Hon'ble Prime Minister

IN THE AUGUST PRESENCE OF

Dr. C.V. Ananda Bose
Governor, West Bengal

Mamata Banerjee
Chief Minister, West Bengal

Sarbananda Sonowal
Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways

Ashwini Vaishnav
Union Minister of Railways; Information and Broadcasting; and Electronics & Information Technology

Shantanu Thakur
Union Minister of State for Ports, Shipping and Waterways

Dr. Sukanta Majumdar
Union Minister of State for Education and Development of North Eastern Region

Suvendu Adhikari
Leader of Opposition, West Bengal Legislative Assembly

Rachna Banerjee
Member of Parliament

Saumitra Khan
Member of Parliament

Samik Bhattacharya
Member of Parliament





IN FOCUS



The Foreign Minister of Japan, MOTEGI Toshimitsu, along with ONO Keiichi, Japanese Ambassador to India, took a ride on the Delhi Metro. The delegation was briefed about the Delhi Metro project by senior DMRC officials at Central Secretariat, followed by a train ride from Central Secretariat to Patel Chowk and back. During his visit, the Minister showed keen interest in various aspects of the construction and operation of the Delhi Metro, which is a proud symbol of Indo-Japanese friendship and collaboration. PIONEER PHOTO

Want to return Bangladesh under caretaker Govt: Hasan

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

Senior Awami League leader and former Bangladesh foreign minister Dr Hasan Mahmud on Saturday said his party is ready to return to Bangladesh and participate in national elections, but only if they are held under a neutral caretaker Government. Speaking at a press conference at the Press Club of India, Dr Mahmud said leaders currently living abroad, including former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, are eager to return but fear political persecution under the current interim administration. "Bangladesh is our country. We want to return with Sheikh Hasina and others who are outside Bangladesh. But elections must be held under a caretaker Government and the rule of law. The current



Former Bangladesh foreign minister Dr Hasan Mahmud

Government is hostile, and there is a risk of revenge. We need a level playing field. Only then will we participate in the elections," he said. Dr Mahmud's statement comes despite the Awami League having previously rejected the BNP's demand for a caretaker Government before earlier elections. The party currently faces major legal and political challenges in Bangladesh. The interim

Government has barred the Awami League under sections related to alleged anti-Bangladesh activities and other charges, and the Election Commission has suspended its registration. Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam said, "As long as the ban and deregistration remain in place, the Awami League cannot take part in the upcoming polls," referring to

the national election scheduled for February 12.

Despite these hurdles, Dr Mahmud claimed the Awami League continues to enjoy broad public support. "Our leader Sheikh Hasina is widely popular. The people of Bangladesh are living under fear because of atrocities happening in the country," he said. Party sources also said Awami League leaders have reached out to India and several other countries for international support to ensure their participation in the elections.

At the same press conference, Dr Mahmud accused the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) of producing a biased and methodologically flawed report on the July-August 2024 unrest in Bangladesh. He alleged that the report selectively used evidence,

ignored key testimonies, inflated casualty figures, and overlooked violence against police, minorities, and Awami League workers. He announced that Bangladesh would submit a formal objection to the UN, calling for an impartial and comprehensive review.

Dr Mahmud also criticised the interim Government led by Muhammad Yunus for pursuing anti-India policies and allowing violence against minority communities. "Bangladesh is witnessing unprecedented incidents where citizens have been killed and burned—something rare anywhere in the world," he said. He claimed the current administration was deliberately engaging in anti-India politics despite Bangladesh being bordered by India on three sides and stressed India's role in Bangladesh's Liberation War.

To illustrate rising hostility towards India, Dr Mahmud referred to a protest where a woman raised slogans like "Dilli na Dhaka" while wearing a saree from Kolkata, a shawl from Kashmir, and attire representing southern India or Delhi, which he said symbolised India's deep cultural and historical links with Bangladesh.

The press conference was addressed by several senior figures, including Nijhum Majumder, Barrister and Solicitor and Head of the Legal Team at the International Crimes Research Foundation (ICRF); Bangladesh Education Minister Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury Nowfel; Awami League representative Rabi Alam; Bangladesh Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud; and S Shaker, Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA).

CM inaugurates multiple development projects in Shalimar Bagh Assembly

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, on Saturday inaugurated multiple development projects in the Shalimar Bagh Assembly constituency, aimed at strengthening public healthcare, nutrition and core infrastructure in the area.

The Chief Minister inaugurated three new Ayushman Arogya Mandirs at WVP Block, VP Block (Pitampura) and Haiderpur. She also inaugurated an Atal Canteen at Nehru Camp near the Haiderpur Badli Mor Metro Station. In addition, the construction works of Meenakshi Temple Road in Shalimar Bagh West (BB Block) were formally launched.

Addressing the gathering, the CM said that the Ayushman Arogya Mandirs will ensure



access to free and quality healthcare close to people's homes. These centres will provide doctor consultations, essential diagnostic services, medicines, immunisation and primary treatment facilities, with special benefits for senior citizens, women and children. The Chief Minister informed that the newly inaugurated Atal Canteen at Badli Mor will

offer hot and nutritious meals to the needy at a nominal cost of ₹5, ensuring food security with dignity. She added that the construction of Meenakshi Temple Road will help ease traffic congestion, improve road safety, and facilitate smoother movement, thereby contributing to the overall development of the area.

Parvesh Verma launches sewer lines in Deoli, Ambedkar Nagar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Delhi Jal Board (DJB) on Saturday launched a large-scale sewer development project covering unauthorised colonies in the Deoli and Ambedkar Nagar Assembly constituencies. Delhi's Water Minister, Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma laid the foundation stone of the project, aimed at stopping untreated household sewage from flowing into stormwater drains that ultimately discharge into the Yamuna.

The project assumes particular significance as the work was originally sanctioned and initiated in 2018, with a planned completion timeline of May 2020. However, despite laying plans for nearly 57 kilometres of sewer lines, only



about 32 kilometres of work could be completed, leaving large parts of the project incomplete. As a result, out of 16 identified colonies, only five received partial sewer connectivity, while the remaining areas continued to discharge sewage into open drains.

"This project remained incomplete for years, leaving residents and the Yamuna to suffer. We have now ensured funding, accountability, and monitoring so that the work is completed within the stipulated timeframe," Verma said after the foundation stone. "Cleaning the Yamuna requires stopping sewage at the source. This Delhi Jal Board project focuses on unauthorised colonies in Deoli and Ambedkar Nagar, where the lack of sewer connectivity has directly contributed to pollution of the Yamuna. This project remained incomplete for years, leaving residents and the Yamuna to suffer. We have now ensured funding, accountability, and monitoring so that the work is completed within the stipulated timeframe," he said.

Highlighting the delay in execution over the past several years, the Minister said the present Government is committed to completing the work within a defined timeline.

Shinde on edge as race for Mumbai mayor heats up

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Mumbai

As the race to pick the next Mumbai Mayor heats up after registering an emphatic win in the Mumbai civic body polls, the BJP and Eknath Shinde led Shiv Sena has gone on edge following a cryptic statement by Uddhav Thackeray led Shiv Sena. Thackeray on Saturday said his party can have its Mayor in Mumbai if "God is willing".

Shinde has now swiftly moved all its newly elected corporators to Taj hotel as day after the alliance of the BJP and rival Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena won the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections. The Eknath Shinde-led outfit contested 90 seats and won 29 in the Mumbai civic polls, results of which were announced on Friday.



Shinde's 29 corporators are crucial for the BJP to elect their mayor for the first time in the city.

BJP won 89 and its ally Shinde-led Shiv Sena bagged 29 seats in the BMC elections, while Shiv Sena (UBT) managed 65 and its ally Maharashtra Navnirman Sena six seats. Congress, which fought in alliance with Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA), bagged 24 seats, AIMIM 8, NCP 3, Samajwadi Party 2, and NCP (SP) got just one seat. A senior party leader said the corporators were moved to a luxury hotel to help them "refresh" after a hectic election season.

Infiltration biggest challenge for West...

Addressing a huge gathering at the Arjun Bhogswar Barua Sports Complex where he witnessed a Bodo folk dance 'Bagurumba Dwhou 2026' by 10,000 performers, Modi said Congress always used Assam as a tool for having political gain by keeping the region in a disturbed state.

"Many issues in Assam, particularly in the Bodoland area, were kept alive by the Congress party for their vote bank politics. BJP government is cleansing sins of Congress, connecting hearts and places in Assam.

Sound of gunshots in Assam has been replaced by sound of musical instruments," the Prime Minister said.

Recalling the BJP's electoral victory in Bihar recently, Modi in his rally in Bengal said he had then remarked that "it was time for Bengal", and expressed confidence that the State would give the party an overwhelming mandate in the upcoming Assembly elections.

Citing recent electoral successes elsewhere, Modi said the BJP was receiving unprecedented support even in areas where it was once considered weak. Referring to recent civic poll results in Maharashtra and gains in Kerala, he asserted that the party's development model was earning the trust of voters, particularly the youth.

In the rally, Modi affirmed the demographic balance had changed in many parts of West Bengal. "People tell me that in several places, even the spoken language is beginning to change. Differences are emerging in language and dialect. Due to the increasing population of infiltrators, riots have started occurring in many areas of West Bengal, including Malda and Murshidabad," he said.

Modi alleged that the TMC's "syndicate" system was working to ensure infiltrators were settled in the state, and claimed there was an "alliance between infiltrators and the ruling party". "You will have to break this alliance. I assure you that as soon as a BJP government is formed, strict action will be taken against infiltration and infiltrators," he said.

The Prime Minister also reassured the refugees, especially the politically significant Matua community which has been the BJP's core vote bank since 2019 riding on the promise of citizenship under the CAA. Stepping up his attack, Modi said the "thuggery" of the TMC and its "politics of threatening and intimidating the poor" would soon come to an end. He asserted that Bengal, surrounded by BJP-ruled states, was now ready for a change. Modi also flagged the non-implementation of the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme in the state. The PM, during his stay in Assam, is scheduled to lay the foundation of the Kaziranga Elevated Corridor and flag off two Amrit Bharat Express trains. Modi was received at the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport here by Governor Laxman Prasad Acharya, besides Chief Minister Himanta and senior officials of the state government.

Several platforms have been erected on the roadside for performances by hundreds of artists from across the state, an official said. The roadshow began from a round-about on

National Highway-17 near the airport and will end at Azara. As per the schedule, he will leave for Kaliabor on Sunday morning to lay the foundation stone for the Rs 6,957-crore Kaziranga Elevated Corridor, and later virtually flag off two Amrit Bharat Express trains, and address a public meeting before leaving for West Bengal again.

Atishi video sparks Delhi-Punjab clash

Speaker further said the forensic examination was carried out by taking into account all relevant facts and by following due process.

He added that the report clearly establishes that the verbatim record and the audio-video footage are identical. "As per the FSL report, there has been no tampering or manipulation whatsoever in the audio or video recording of the House proceedings," Gupta said, asserting that the findings uphold the authenticity of the Assembly records and the integrity of the legislative process.

Gupta announced that he would direct a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) into what he described as parallel and questionable forensic actions initiated outside Delhi. "The Assembly also warns the Punjab chief minister to refrain from interfering in its affairs and seeking to cover up the matter through political manipulations," Gupta stated. Gupta said Atishi should meet him and apologise, else the assembly will take a serious view of it.

In a social media post, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said the FSL report has clarified that the video of the Assembly Secretariat of January 6, when LOP Atishi made a "shameful, undignified" remark against the sacrifices of Sikh gurus was 100 per cent correct and was not tampered with. Delhi minister Kapil Mishra, who shared the video on his social media handle, asserted that the FSL report has established the "sin" committed by Atishi. A bigger sin was committed by AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal, who "misused" the Punjab Police to protect her, Mishra charged.

NIA books five for online radicalisation

They posted provocative posts, including videos, audios and photos, through various social media accounts, it said.

NIA further found that, through these posts, the accused had called for armed revolt against the democratically elected Indian government, and for the establishment of the Caliphate based on the Sharia law, the statement alleged. They also promoted the extremist ideologies of other proscribed terror organisations to radicalise gullible youth, it said.

NIA, which had taken over the investigation from ATS Gujarat, had seized various incriminating materials, in both paper and digital formats, along with deadly weapons like semi automatic pistol with cartridges and a sword from two of the five accused in the course of the investigation. The NIA, during investigation, further traced the digital footprints and identified incriminating posts strengthening evidence against the accused.

The investigations revealed that Shama Parveen from Bengaluru, Karnataka, propagat-

FROM PAGE - 1

ed AQIS videos through her social media and actively participated in extremist groups that promoted radical content after the Pahalgam Attack and Operation Sindoor, the NIA said.

She was in regular contact with a Pakistani national, Sumer Ali, to whom she sent screenshots and discussed banned literature and operations, it said.

Her mobile phone contained incriminating books authored by extremist ideologues, videos, and Pakistani contact numbers, all of which were recovered during the investigation, the probe agency said. According to NIA findings, Mohammad Faique, a resident of Old Delhi, had played a pivotal role in the conspiracy by sharing "radical posts and inciting content on Jihad, Ghazwa-e-Hind, and violence against a section of society".

He circulated excerpts from extremist and radical literature promoting the ideology of AQIS and Pakistan-based terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) leaders through his Instagram account and also through a group specifically created for the purpose, the probe agency said.

He further collaborated and conspired with other accused to spread the violent ideology and content widely, it said.

Sheikh Mohammad Fardeen from Ahmedabad, Kureshi Sefulla from Modasa (Gujarat) and Zeeshan Ali from Noida (UP) were found to have engaged actively and conspired to promote the radical content in the form of audio, video and other posts promoting the banned terror outfits, the NIA said. They had regularly liked, commented, and collaborated on posts inciting Jihad, Ghazwa-E-Hind and rebellion against the democratically elected Indian government and advocated Khilafat and Sharia law, it added.

IndiGo fined ₹22.2 cr for December chaos

The Accountable Manager (COO) has been warned by the DGCA for failing to assess the impact of the Winter Schedule 2025 and revised FDTL norms.

The regulator has also warned the senior vice president (Operations Control Centre) and directed that he be relieved of current operational responsibilities, barring him from holding any accountable position.

According to a statement issued by the DGCA, it has imposed ₹1.80 crore in one-time penalties for six instances of non-compliance with Civil Aviation Requirements (CARs), including failure to ensure effective implementation of FDTL norms, improper delegation of operational control, and shortcomings in accountable management. In addition, the airline was fined Rs 20.40 crore for continued non-compliance over 68 days between December 5, 2025 and February 10, 2026, at a daily penalty of ₹ 30 lakh.

Warnings have further been issued to the deputy head-flight operations, AVP-crew resource planning and director-flight operations for lapses in manpower planning and roster management. IndiGo has been instructed to take action against other personnel identified through its internal inquiry and submit a compliance report to DGCA.

Beyond penalty, DGCA has directed IndiGo to furnish a Rs 50 crore bank guarantee under a newly instituted IndiGo Systemic Reform Assurance Scheme (ISRAS). The guarantee will be released in phases based on DGCA-certified implementation of reforms across four areas: leadership and governance, manpower planning and fatigue-risk management, digital systems and operational resilience, and sustained board-level oversight. The chairman and members of the board of directors of InterGlobe Aviation Ltd, the firm that owns IndiGo, in a statement confirmed they have received the DGCA's orders and will take appropriate measures. "We would like to take this opportunity to inform all of our stakeholders, particularly our valued customers, that the board and the management of IndiGo are committed to taking full cognizance of the orders and will, in a thoughtful and timely manner, take appropriate measures," the statement said.

A four-member inquiry committee, set up by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on the directions of the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), found that the primary causes were over-optimisation of operations, inadequate regulatory preparedness, weak software systems, and shortcomings in management oversight at IndiGo. The committee members examined the airline's operations, spoke to key officials, and reviewed its planning and crew management systems. The inquiry found that the disruptions were not caused by bad weather alone but by deeper operational problems within the airline.

The inquiry report identified over-optimisation of operations, inadequate regulatory preparedness, and deficiencies in planning software and management oversight as the primary causes of the disruption. It found that IndiGo failed to maintain adequate operational buffers and did not effectively implement revised Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) norms.

The Committee observed that the airline's management failed to adequately identify planning deficiencies, maintain sufficient operational buffer, and effectively implement the revised Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) provisions. These lapses resulted in widespread flight delays and large-scale cancellations, causing inconvenience to passengers.

The Inquiry further noted an overriding focus on maximising utilisation of crew, aircraft, and network resources, which significantly reduced roster buffer margins. Crew rosters were designed to maximise duty periods, with increased reliance on dead-heading, tail swaps, extended duty patterns, and minimal recovery margins. This approach compromised roster integrity and adversely impacted operational resilience. The inquiry also included within its purview long term reform measures addressing systemic issues so that such incidents do not occur in the future and passengers are not put to any inconvenience.

The findings underscore the need for balanced operational planning, robust regulatory preparedness, and effective management oversight to ensure sustainable operations and passenger safety and convenience.

DGCA acknowledged that IndiGo restored operations swiftly and complied with refund and compensation norms. On MoCA's directions, the airline also issued a Rs 10,000

'Gesture of Care' voucher with a 12-month validity to passengers affected by cancellations or delays exceeding three hours during the disruption period. The DGCA said the action was taken after reviewing the airline's operational lapses that led to widespread inconvenience for passengers during the period.

The disruption at India's largest airline which carries over 60 per cent of the country's domestic air passengers has been primarily triggered by crew shortages following the implementation of the new Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) norms. The second and final phase of the revised crew duty and rest regulations came into effect last month, leaving IndiGo inadequately prepared for the transition.

Khameni attacks Trump as US seeks to calm allies

Iranian officials have repeatedly accused the US and Israel of fomenting the protests.

The demonstrations began on December 28 over Iran's worsening economy and spread nationwide, prompting a harsh crackdown. A US-based human rights group has put the death toll at least 3,090, though the figure has not been independently verified. Tehran has since returned to an uneasy calm, with no fresh protests reported for days and daily life resuming in the capital.

Khamenei's remarks came amid heightened tensions with Washington.

Trump had earlier urged Iranian protesters to persist, warning Tehran of consequences if executions were carried out, but struck a more conciliatory note on Friday, praising Iran for allegedly cancelling planned hangings. The White House has not clarified the basis of Trump's claim. As Iran grappled with unrest and a sweeping internet shutdown that left citizens largely cut off from the outside world, limited connectivity began returning on Saturday, with text messaging and partial internet access restored in some areas. The turmoil prompted several countries to urge their nationals to leave Iran. In New Delhi, emotional scenes unfolded at the Indira Gandhi International Airport as Indian students and other nationals arrived home on commercial flights.

Families spoke of days of anxiety during the communications blackout and relief once contact was restored and the Indian Embassy in Tehran began coordinating assistance. India has advised its roughly 9,000 nationals in Iran, most of them students, to leave using available means and avoid travel to the country until the situation stabilises. Meanwhile, Trump's confrontational foreign policy rhetoric reverberated elsewhere. A bipartisan US Congressional delegation visiting Copenhagen sought to reassure Denmark and Greenland after Trump threatened tariffs or other measures if allies did not support US control of Greenland, a semi-autonomous Danish territory. Senator Chris Coons said there were "no current security threats" to Greenland and warned that pressuring close allies risked undermining US credibility within NATO.

As Iran counts the cost of its deadliest unrest in decades, the crisis continues to ripple beyond its borders, straining diplomacy, displacing citizens and sharpening global scrutiny of Tehran's crackdown.



Cold conditions intensify in Jammu and Kashmir



Cold conditions tightened its grip in Kashmir with a drop in minimum temperatures as the meteorological department forecast spells of wet weather, especially in the higher reaches of the valley over the next few days. Srinagar recorded a low of minus 3.2 degrees Celsius on Friday night, down from minus 1.5 degrees Celsius the previous night.

Kerala court denies bail to expelled MLA Mamkootathil

A Kerala court on Saturday declined to grant bail to expelled Congress MLA Rahul Mamkootathil in the third sexual assault case against him in which he was arrested last week. The Kerala High Court and a sessions court in Thiruvananthapuram have earlier protected the MLA from arrest in the first two cases of sexual assault booked based on complaints of two different women.



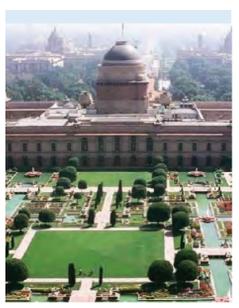
Former minister Mahendrajit Singh Malviya joins Congress



Two years after leaving for the BJP, former Rajasthan minister Mahendrajit Singh Malviya returned to the Congress after the party's top leadership approved his re-induction. The proposal was cleared by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, after which an official letter confirming Malviya's return to the party was issued late on Friday.

Rashtrapati Bhavan closed for public visits from January 21-29

The Rashtrapati Bhavan (Circuit 1) will remain closed for public from January 21 to 29 in view of the upcoming Republic Day Parade and the Beating Retreat ceremony, an official said. "Visit to Rashtrapati Bhavan (Circuit-1) will remain closed for the general public from January 21 to 29, 2026, due to the upcoming Republic Day Parade and Beating Retreat Ceremony," said the statement.



Indians return amid unrest in Iran, reunite with families

RAJESH KUMAR
New Delhi

Tears of anxiety gave way to waves of relief and gratitude at Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport late Friday, as several Indian nationals arrived from chaos-torn Iran amid raging protests, a total internet blackout, movement restrictions and a crackdown on protestors in a volatile security situation.

Upon their return, Indians recalled how "dangerous" the situation in Iran was and thanked the Indian Government.

The arrivals followed advisories from the Ministry of External Affairs and the Indian Embassy in Tehran, asking Indians, including students, pilgrims, businesspeople and tourists, to depart Iran using available transport options. The first two commercial flights carrying Indians from Iran landed in Delhi late last night, since violent protests erupted against the Khamenei regime.

These were regular flights

and not part of any evacuation effort. Some flights from India had been impacted on January 15 due to a brief closure of the Iranian airspace amid escalating tensions. The situation now appears to be moving towards normalcy, though several Indians chose to return as air traffic resumes over Iran. Poignant scenes of relief and reunion unfolded at the IGI airport on early Saturday as families embraced their loved ones who returned from Iran amid the worsening security situation there.

While some welcomed their children with flower garlands, a father held his daughter to his chest, smiling as tears welled up in his eyes — a moving image capturing the tumult of emotions these families endured while their children were stranded amid the political unrest in Iran.

Since Friday night, families were seen waiting anxiously outside the arrival terminal of the Indira Gandhi International Airport, scanning every group of passen-



gers emerging through the gates in the hope of spotting a familiar face. Many of those who returned from Iran on commercial flights, including students, described their last few days as tense and marked with uncertainty.

"The conditions are bad there. The Government of India is cooperating a lot, and the Embassy provided us with information on leaving Iran as early as possible 'Modi ji hai toh har cheez mumkin hai'," said a

returnee after landing in Delhi. Another returnee spoke of the growing sense of insecurity in recent weeks. "We were there for a month. But we were only facing problems for the last one or two weeks. When we went

outside, the protesters would come in front of the car and cause trouble.

The internet was shut down, which is why we could not tell our families anything. We were worried. We could not even contact the embassy," he said. "It was a very difficult time," said a student who arrived from Tehran.

"The situation on the streets was tense and the internet shutdown made us feel completely isolated. Reaching India and seeing our families waiting for us brought a sense of safety and relief," she said.

Recalling his departure from unrest-hit Iran, another student Shazid said the situation was uncertain, and the lack of communication made it worse. "Once we were informed about the travel arrangements, there was a sense of relief. Reaching home and seeing our families waiting for us is something we truly needed," he said. A young woman, who is studying at a medical college in Shiraz,

said, "The internet was not working. So, we didn't exactly know what was happening around the country." The student said the situation in the city she was in was "fine".

"We have come back on our own in a commercial flight, and not on the arrangement of the Indian Government," she said. Families said their anxiety peaked when there was a blackout, with little information about the safety of their loved ones. Some relief came after the Indian Embassy in Tehran stepped in, restored communication and began coordinating assistance for stranded nationals, they said.

Abbas Qazami, whose mother arrived on Saturday, recalled the anxious hours stretching into days as he awaited her safe return. "When the internet was shut, we were extremely worried. We had no way to contact her. Once communication resumed and the embassy became actively involved, we felt reassured. We registered with the

embassy as soon as the advisory was issued, and after that, the process was smooth," he said. Families said the Indian Embassy remained in constant touch with citizens stranded in Iran, issuing advisories and guiding them through the process of homecoming.

Mohd Abbas, a relative of another returnee, said even limited communication helped families cope with the uncertainty. "There was tension throughout, but we trusted the embassy and the Government. That trust helped us remain calm despite the situation," he said.

The Ministry of External Affairs had earlier advised all its nationals in Iran, including students, pilgrims, businesspersons and tourists, to leave the country using any available means as the security situation deteriorated. The advisory followed massive anti-Government protests that began late last month after Iran's currency, the Rial, plunged to record lows.

India skips South Africa-led naval exercise

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

India on Saturday said it skipped a South Africa-initiated multilateral naval wargame featuring a number of BRICS countries as the exercise was not an institutional activity under the grouping. The exercise held in South African waters comprised the navies of China, Russia, Iran, Egypt, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) among others.

The week-long military wargame took place amid increasing tensions in Iran over possible military strikes on the country over its crackdown on anti-Government protesters. "We clarify that the exercise in question was entirely a South African initiative



MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal

in which some BRICS members took part," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. "It was not a regular or institutionalised BRICS activity,

nor did all BRICS members take part in it," he said. Jaiswal was responding to media queries on India's absence from the so-called "BRICS naval exercise". The MEA spokesperson

said India has not participated in previous such activities. "The regular exercise that India is a part of in this context is the IBSAMAR maritime exercise that brings together the navies of India, Brazil and South Africa," he said.

The last edition of IBSAMAR (India-Brazil-South Africa Maritime) was held in October 2024. India is the current chair of BRICS. BRICS, originally comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, expanded in 2024 to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the UAE, with Indonesia joining in 2025. It has emerged as an influential group representing around 49.5 per cent of the global population, around 40 per cent of the global GDP and around 26 per cent of the global trade.

Suspected Pak drones spotted in Ramgarh sector

MOHIT KANDHARI
Jammu

In yet another incident of suspected cross-border aerial incursion, a drone believed to be of Pakistani origin was spotted hovering along the International Border (IB) in the Ramgarh sector of Samba district on Saturday evening.

According to ground reports, the drone reportedly hovered over the Indian territory for approximately 5 minutes before returning to the Pakistani side.

Security agencies have taken note of the incident & surveillance along the IB has been beefed up.

"It was around 7.00 p.m the drone movement was observed in the Ramgarh sector while it was approaching from the direction of the Pakistan side opposite to a BSF BOP. The drone was



Representative picture

spotted moving towards the Ramgarh sector and then returning towards the Pakistan side", official sources confirmed.

Earlier, on 13 January, two incidents of drone spotting were reported in the Jammu sector. On January 11, alert troops of the Indian Army guarding the Nowshera sector in Rajouri successful-

ly tackled multiple drone intrusions by opening fire from medium and light machine guns.

A total of five drone sightings were reported along the LoC in Rajouri and Poonch, and the International border in Samba late Sunday evening.

After Operation Sindoor in May 2025, multiple drones

have attempted to violate the Indian airspace and retreated inside the Pakistani territory after hovering over the sensitive locations for some time.

Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan, joined by Director Intelligence Bureau (IB) Tapan Deka, on Wednesday reviewed the prevailing security scenario across the Union Territory, with major emphasis on Counter Terror (CT) Operations targeting terrorists, terror infrastructure, and the developments along the Line of Control (LoC) and the International Border (IB) with reference to drone incursions.

India has repeatedly sent out a strong warning to Pakistan, saying that "Operation Sindoor" is not over yet and any future act of terrorism against India would invite severe consequences.

India seeks consular access to 16 Indian held in Iran for allegedly smuggling diesel

ASHOKE RAJ
New Delhi

India has stepped up diplomatic efforts to secure consular access for 16 Indian nationals detained by Iran after their vessel, MT Valiant Roar, was seized by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) on December 8.

New Delhi has said that despite repeated requests over the past month, Iranian authorities have yet to grant access to the crew.

According to the Indian Embassy in Tehran, the tanker—owned by Dubai-based Glory International FZ LLC / Prime Tankers LLC—was intercepted in international waters near the Dibba port close to the UAE.

While the ship was reportedly carrying Very Low Sulphur Fuel Oil, Indian authorities have accused it of smuggling around 6,000 tonnes of diesel. In a statement posted on X, the Embassy said it was formally informed of the detention in mid-December and that the Indian Consulate in Bandar Abbas wrote to Iranian authorities on December 14 seeking consular access.

"The request for consular access has been repeated numerous times since then through diplomatic correspondence and in-person meetings, including at the ambassadorial level," the Embassy said, adding that Iran was also urged to allow the crew to communicate with their families in India. The Embassy noted that it contacted the UAE-based ship-owning



company on December 15 and has since remained in touch with its Iran-based agents to ensure regular supplies of food, water, and fuel for the vessel, as well as to arrange legal representation for the crew.

After being alerted to dwindling provisions on board, the Mission intervened with Iranian authorities, following which emergency food and water supplies were delivered in early January. The Indian Consulate in Dubai is also pressing the ship's owners to ensure legal assistance and uninterrupted provisioning for the detained crew. The Embassy said the case is expected to proceed through Iran's judicial process but

stressed that efforts to obtain early consular access and speedy completion of legal proceedings are continuing.

The issue has also reached Indian courts. Family members of the detained crew have approached the Delhi High Court seeking directions to the Union Government to secure consular access, expedite the investigation, and facilitate the crew's return to India.

The High Court has issued notice to the Centre, with the matter scheduled for hearing on January 21. Separately, the parents of one crew member have appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to intervene in the matter.

If God is willing, Shiv Sena (UBT) will install its mayor in Mumbai: Uddhav

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Mumbai

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday said if God is willing, the party could have its mayor in Mumbai, remarks coming a day after the BJP-Eknaath Shinde-led Shiv Sena combine won the civic elections in the financial capital. A day after the BJP-Sena combine wrested the Mumbai civic body from the Thackerays in high-stakes elections, Uddhav interacted with Sena (UBT) workers.

He said the BJP wants to mortgage Mumbai and won the polls by betrayal, adding that Marathi manooos will never forgive this sin.

Thackeray said it's his dream to install Shiv Sena (UBT)'s mayor in Mumbai, and if God is willing, this dream will be realised. He said the BJP is under impression that it has finished off Shiv Sena (UBT), but that didn't happen. "The BJP couldn't finish off Shiv Sena on the ground," he said, apparently referring to 65 seats won by Sena (UBT) in the BMC elections.

The BJP used all means but could not buy loyalty, he added. "They (BJP) have registered victory by betrayal for mortgage Mumbai. Marathi manooos will never forgive this sin. The battle has not ended, but it has just begun," Thackeray added.

The BJP won 89, and ally Shiv Sena bagged 29 seats in the 227-member BMC, while Shiv Sena (UBT) managed 65 and MNS six seats. The Congress, which fought in alliance with Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA), bagged 24 seats, AIMIM 8, NCP 3, Samajwadi Party 2, and NCP (SP) got just one seat.

Organiser: Ministry of Education, Government of India. Co-organiser: nbt.india, IITPO.

Guest of Honour Country: India, Qatar, Spain. Focus Country: India, Qatar, Spain.

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States Focus



ANDHRA CM LAYS FOUNDATION FOR GREEN FUEL PLANT

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and his deputy Pawan Kalyan on Saturday laid the foundation for a green ammonia and green hydrogen plant in Kakinada district. Both the leaders also unveiled a pylon marking the fixing of machinery in the plant, entailing an investment of ₹13,000 crore and an annual production capacity of 1.5 MMTPA.

"CM Chandrababu and Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan laid the foundation for Kakinada AM Green's green ammonia and green hydrogen complex," an official release said. Unlike grey and blue ammonia produced using coal, oil, and natural gas, green ammonia is completely environment-friendly with no carbon emissions.



TWO MAOISTS KILLED IN BIJAPUR ENCOUNTER

Security forces on Saturday gunned down two Naxalites, including senior cadre Dilip Bedja, in an encounter in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, police said. The gunfight broke out in the morning hours in the forested hills of the district's northwest region, where a joint team of security forces was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, a senior official said.

He said that personnel belonging to the Special Task Force and District Reserve Guard – both units of the Chhattisgarh police, and CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action – an elite unit of CRPF) were involved in the operation, which was launched based on inputs about the presence of Bedja, a divisional committee member, in the area. The identity of the other cadre killed in the firing was yet to be ascertained, the official said. "So far, bodies of two Naxalites and AK-47 rifles have been recovered from the spot," he said, adding that a search operation is underway.

PM unveils projects of ₹3,250 crore in West Bengal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Kolkata

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday unveiled rail and road infrastructure projects worth ₹3,250 crore, aimed at strengthening connectivity and accelerating development in West Bengal and the North East.

At a public function in Malda in north Bengal, the Prime Minister virtually flagged off four Amrit Bharat Express trains connecting New Jalpaiguri with Nagercoil and Tiruchirappalli, and Alipurduar with SMVT Bengaluru and Mumbai (Panvel). Earlier, the Prime Minister flagged off the country's most advanced and the first set of Vande Bharat sleeper trains between Howrah and Guwahati (Kamakhya) from Malda Town Railway Station.

The fully air-conditioned sleeper train is expected to cut travel time on the Howrah-Guwahati route by around 2.5 hours. Currently, it takes nearly 18 hours from Howrah to Guwahati by train. Speaking at the inaugu-

ration function, Modi said the new projects, especially the new trains, will enable and empower the youth of the region. "There was a time when we used to watch the developed foreign nations and dream of such modern trains in our country. Today that dream has come true," the PM said.

India has both modernised its transport facilities and made the country self-reliant, Modi said, adding that the country is currently making more railway coaches in India than in Europe or the US.

Speaking at the occasion, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said that India would soon be exporting Vande Bharat trains. "Keeping in mind the food tastes of the region, passengers of the Vande Bharat trains departing from Kolkata would be served Bengali cuisine and those from Guwahati would be offered Assamese food," he announced.

A statement issued by the PMO stated that the new projects will enhance afford-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during flagging off the country's first Vande Bharat sleeper train between Howrah and Guwahati (Kamakhya) in Malda, West Bengal. West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose and Union Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnav and others are also seen

able and reliable long-distance rail connectivity. "These services will support the mobility needs of common citizens, students, migrant workers and traders, while strengthening inter-State economic and social linkages," it said.

At the function, Modi laid the foundation stone of four major railway projects in the State, including the new rail line between Balurghat and Hili, next-generation

freight maintenance facilities at New Jalpaiguri, upgradation of the Siliguri Loco Shed, and modernisation of Vande Bharat train maintenance facilities in Jalpaiguri district. "These projects will strengthen passenger and freight operations, improve logistics efficiency in North Bengal, and generate employment opportunities in the region," the statement said.

The PM also flagged off two new train services

equipped with LHB coaches to facilitate connectivity of the region's youth, students, and IT professionals to Bengaluru, a major IT hub of the country. Modi laid the foundation stone for the rehabilitation and four-laning of the Dhupguri-Falakata section of National Highway-31D, a key project to improve regional road connectivity in North Bengal.

"These projects will play a vital role in building

modern infrastructure creation and improved connectivity, strengthening the Eastern and North-Eastern regions as key growth engines of the nation," the statement said.

On a two-day visit to eastern India, Modi is scheduled to criss-cross poll-bound Bengal and Assam, blending high-voltage political messaging with a push of infrastructure launches as the countdown to the 2026 assembly elections enters its decisive phase.

He is scheduled to return to the State on Sunday after holding a political rally in Malda on Saturday afternoon and then moving to Guwahati for his overnight stay there and spearheading a host of scheduled events the following morning.

On Sunday, the PM will address a keenly monitored political meeting from Singur in Hooghly district, the epicentre of the anti-land acquisition movement that propelled Mamata Banerjee to power in 2011 and reshaped the State's political landscape.

Govt responsible for Indore water fatalities: Rahul

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Indore

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday blamed the Government's negligence for the fatalities linked to contaminated drinking water in the country's cleanest city, Indore, raising questions over the so-called urban model.

The leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha met patients and families affected by the vomiting and diarrhoea outbreak linked to water contamination in Indore's Bhagirathpura, emphasising that "clean water is a public right".

He also took potshots at the Central Government, saying Indore is a new model smart city that doesn't even have clean drinking water.

"People are being intimidated," he said. Accompanied by MP



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi meets LoP in the Madhya Pradesh assembly Umang Singhar and State party President Jitu Patwari at Devi Ahilyabai Holkar International airport in Indore

Congress president Jitu Patwari and leader of the opposition in the assembly, Umang Singhar, Gandhi met four patients undergoing treatment at Bombay Hospital, a private facility, enquired about their health, and interacted with their family members.

He later visited the Bhagirathpura area, where the outbreak was reported last month, and spoke to the families of the deceased persons. "It's the Government's responsibility to provide clean water to people and reduce pollution.

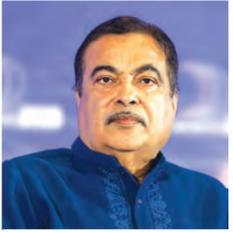
But the Government isn't fulfilling these responsibilities," he told reporters after meeting families of victims.

Raising questions on the urban model, he said that people in Indore are dying after drinking contaminated water as they are not getting a clean supply.

No dearth of fund, need leaders who work honestly, says Gadkari

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Vidisha (MP)

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Saturday said there was no shortage of money in the country and the need was for political leaders who honestly work for villages, the poor and farmers.



Union Minister Nitin Gadkari

Addressing a function in Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh after laying the foundation stone and inaugurating road projects costing several thousand crore rupees, the Union minister said he had the mythological "Draupadi ki thali", which can feed everyone and ensure no one goes hungry.

"There is no dearth of money in this country. There is no shortage of funds. There is need for political leaders to work honestly for villages, the poor and farmers," the Union Road Transport and Highways Minister asserted.

"I have Draupadi ki thali. Let any number of people come. Not a single person will return hungry. We will feed everyone, that I can promise," he said after Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Public Works Department Minister Rakesh Singh sought approval for road projects.

"Draupadi ki thali" is a legend associated with the Mahabharata and is centred around the 'akshay patra' that Krishna gave Draupadi to ensure saints who had come when the Pandavas were in exile were well fed though there was no food at the time in the household.

Congress top brass discusses poll strategy with TN leaders

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

The Congress' top brass met senior party leaders from Tamil Nadu on Saturday to chalk out a strategy for the upcoming Assembly polls and deliberate on the cadres' demand for a power-sharing understanding with the DMK.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge chaired the meeting that was attended by former party chief Rahul Gandhi, AICC general secretary in-charge organisation KC Venugopal, Tamil Nadu Congress chief K Selvaperunthagai, MPs P Chidambaram, Manickam Tagore, Karti Chidambaram, Jyothimani, V Vasanth, and Professionals' Congress chief Praveen Chakravarty, among others. The meeting at the party's Indira Bhawan headquarters here comes amid calls from Tamil Nadu Congress for a share in power if the DMK-led alliance wins the Assembly election due by March-April this year.

Congress MP Manickam Tagore had said recently that it was time to debate "share in power." CLP leader and Killiyoor (Kanyakumari district)



Mallikarjun Kharge

legislator S Rajeshkumar had also batted for a coalition Government.

Congress party in-charge for Tamil Nadu, Girish Chodankar had asked if any political party, "will say that they don't want the power; then we should name ourselves as NGO."

However, ruling out the scope for a coalition Government, senior DMK leader and Tamil Nadu Minister I Periyasamy had asserted this week that Chief Minister MK Stalin is firm on the stand against sharing power with allies. The meeting comes amid spec-

ulation that the Congress could also consider an alliance with newly formed actor-turned-politician Vijay's TVK, but state unit leaders have denied such a possibility.

Since 1967, both the DMK and the AIADMK had formed their own Governments despite fighting polls in alliance with other parties. Following independence, when the first general election was held in the then composite Madras state in 1952, the Congress party failed to secure an absolute majority.

It was the only during the First Assembly's term (1952-57) that non-Congress leaders (including Manickavelu Naicker of the Commonweal Party) were accommodated in the Congress-led State Cabinet.

In 2006, though the DMK did not have an absolute majority, it ran the Government for full five years (2006-11) with support from allies, including the Congress and without sharing power with allies.

Without any success, the TN Congress leaders had made the same "share power with us" demand during the DMK's 2006-11 term too.

Bhopal gas tragedy: MP Government plans memorial at cleaned up Union Carbide site

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Saturday said a memorial to Bhopal Gas Tragedy victims will be built on the site of the Union Carbide factory that was cleaned of hazardous waste recently.

The memorial will be built after taking into confidence all sections of society and under the guidance of the High Court, Yadav said while becoming the first CM in the State to visit the site at Arif Nagar and its core area without wearing a safety mask.

The methyl isocyanide (MIC) gas leak in the intervening night of December 2-3 in 1984 killed thousands and left lakhs fighting debilitating illnesses for life. It is generally considered the worst industrial disaster in the world.

"The chemical waste lay there for nearly 40 years. Under the guidance of High Court, our Government successfully disposed of the chemical waste without any environmental damage or human loss," he said.

"By taking all sections of society and affected parties into confidence, and under guidance of the High Court,



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav

we will now proceed to build a memorial for those who died in the Bhopal gas tragedy on this now-cleaned campus. The State Government stands with all gas victims at every step and will spare no effort for their welfare," the CM said.

During his visit, Yadav also discussed with officials of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief and Rehabilitation Department regarding the construction of the memorial. After the disposal of the waste linked to the gas leak, the State Government is making all necessary arrangements for the proper development of the complex,

along with the construction of the Bhopal Metropolitan Area, Yadav added.

He pointed out that the disaster took place during the rule of the opposition party (referring to the Congress), adding the then Government acted negligently and left the area unattended. "They made no decision to remove the toxic waste from the factory and closed the factory to all after this horrific tragedy. Even during the UPA Government's tenure at the Centre, nothing was done to develop this gas-affected area. The scene of deaths that Bhopal witnessed will never fade from

our memories," he said.

The State Government now has worked to remove this stigma from the capital, for which all affected parties, including the Gas Relief Department, deserve praise, Yadav added. The then Government helped Warren Anderson, the Union Carbide CEO at the time, to escape, Yadav said. Rahul Gandhi must apologise to the nation for this, he added.

"Following court orders, our Government disposed of Union Carbide's toxic waste last year. This also serves as a message to the world about how modern scientific methods can be used to dispose of toxic waste without causing environmental or human harm," he said.

While returning from the inspection of the Union Carbide factory premises, Yadav stopped his convoy at the request of a woman praying in Arif Nagar. Those present for the visit included the CM's secretary Alok Kumar Singh, Public Relations Commissioner Deepak Kumar Saxena, Gas Relief Director Swatantra Kumar Singh, Municipal Commissioner Sanskriti Jain, among others.

Tourist arrivals picking up as conditions improve after Pahalgam attack: J&K chief secretary

ANIL BHATT
Jammu

Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo on Friday said that the tourism sector in Jammu and Kashmir, which suffered a major setback following the Pahalgam terror attack and subsequent adverse weather conditions, is gradually showing signs of recovery, with tourist arrivals picking up as conditions improve.

Dulloo said that a major project has been conceptualised to promote sustainable tourism in emerging destinations with the objective of reducing pressure on traditional hotspots across J&K and its implementation is

being carefully planned. "If we look at tourism, the impact after the Pahalgam attack and subsequently the rise in incidents of heavy rains and floods caused significant losses in 2025. However, we are now gradually seeing a recovery. As weather conditions improve, tourist arrivals have started increasing again," Dulloo told PTI in a video interview here.

He said that while revival is underway, the Government is reassessing its tourism strategy to prepare for rising visitor numbers and sustainable growth. "As tourism grows, we must also focus on how prepared we are to manage the increasing foot-

fall. This calls for a reassessment of our tourism strategy and capacity," he added.

The chief secretary stressed the need to develop new tourist destinations to reduce pressure on traditional hotspots that often exceed their carrying capacity during peak seasons. "By developing new destinations, tourist footfall will be distributed more evenly. This will generate employment for local communities, lead to infrastructure development, attract investment and help mitigate seasonal tourism peaks," he said.

The tourism sector in Kashmir was severely impacted after last year's April 22



Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo

Pahalgam attack, in which 26 civilians, including 25 tourists, were killed by terrorists. Following the attack, around 50 tourist spots and resorts were closed for security reasons. Several destinations have recently been reopened, and more will be thrown open to tourists after the completion of security audits.

He said a major project has been conceptualised in this direction and its implementation is being carefully planned, including transportation and other infrastructure arrangements. "Our focus will remain on developing new tourist destinations to ensure sustainable growth of the tourism sector," Dulloo

said. Referring to the SPREAD initiative, the chief secretary said it seeks to decongest overburdened tourist spots by developing eco-sensitive, year-round alternatives while balancing economy, ecology and equity.

He said that with support from the Department of Economic Affairs and implementation through the Economic Reconstruction Agency, the SPREAD project will focus on infrastructure development, waste management, ecological conservation and livelihood generation.

"Community engagement and private sector participation are central to this initiative, which envisions holistic

development across both Jammu and Kashmir regions in line with global best practices," he added.

Dulloo also underlined the need for a targeted strategy to convert the rising pilgrim footfall in Jammu into longer tourist stays. "A focused approach is required to promote the region's wider leisure, heritage, adventure and spiritual attractions beyond the main pilgrimage routes," he said.

He stressed proactive use of digital platforms and social media, including collaboration with influencers, to expand outreach and attract national and international tourists. (PTI)



PROSPECT

Maruti Suzuki to invest ₹35,000 crore to build new plant in Gujarat

Maruti Suzuki India Limited will develop a new plant near Sanand in Ahmedabad district with an investment of ₹35,000 crore, facilitating potential employment opportunities for 12,000 individuals, the Gujarat Government has said. The country's largest passenger car manufacturer will establish the plant at Khoraj GIDC, an official release said. Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel on Saturday handed over an "investment letter" to Maruti Suzuki Managing Director Hisashi Takeuchi in Gandhinagar for this plant. "Maruti Suzuki India Limited will establish a new vehicle manufacturing plant at Khoraj on 1,750 acres of land made available by GIDC (Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation), with an investment of ₹35,000 crore," it said.

Blankets distributed at IP University to needy



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Under the 'Warmth of Makar Sankranti' — Annual Winter Relief Drive organised by local Kishore Kumar memorial club, a heartfelt initiative unfolded at Dwarka campus of Indraprastha University on Friday.

The vice chancellor of the university Padma professor Dr Mahesh Verma, along with registrar, Dr Kamal Pathak, distributed blankets to those in need,

a small gesture with a powerful message. 'Humanity comes first' this winter, we stand together sharing warmth, dignity and hope", said the vice chancellor.

According to the general secretary of the club Kamal Dhiman, the blankets were distributed to mostly the residents of nearby cluster areas.

The organisation is engaged in such type of noble causes for decades, said Professor of the university.

AlchoBev associations urge Telangana Govt to clear their dues

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Three leading AlchoBev associations of the country, in a joint Statement, has urged the Telangana Government to clear their ₹3,900-crore dues payable to their suppliers of alcoholic beverages.

This delay in payment is denting the investment environment in the State, said a joint Statement from CIABC, BAI, and ISWAI.

"This comes despite the State collecting over ₹3,000 crore in October 2025 alone through liquor retail licence application fees, while December 2025 revenue turnover has also been at an all-time high," they said.

Significantly, excise revenues of Telangana has increased more than fourfold over the past decade (from around ₹9,000 crore in 2014 to nearly ₹38,000 crore in FY 2023-24). The alchobev industry is facing significant payment delays

from the State's beverage corporation (TGBCL).

"This has also led to a negative sentiment in the industry, which is highlighted by the fact that industrial investments in the State are declining. Incidentally, the State Government's TG-iPASS approvals have declined more than 50 per cent," it said.

Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC) represents the home-grown Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) players, while ISWAI (International Spirits and Wines Association of India) represents the imported premium portfolio of spirits and wine brands in India.

BAI (Brewers' Association of India) represents leading beer makers — United Breweries, ABInBev, and Carlsberg. The alchobev sector contributes more than a third of Telangana's tax revenues (the highest among Indian States) generating ₹2,300-₹2,600 crore every month.

Railway infrastructure grew during Modi Govt: Himanta

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

Adding a new milestone in rail connectivity for the Northeast, Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off India's first Vande Bharat sleeper train from Malda, as Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma attended the flag off ceremony virtually from Kamakhya Railway station here today.

It may be noted that the high speed Vande Bharat sleeper train will run between Kamakhya Station in Assam and Howrah in West Bengal. It is India's first Vande Bharat sleeper train, marking a remarkable achievement for the region and for Indian Railways. The 16-coach rake comprises 11 AC 3-Tier coaches, four AC2-Tier coaches and one First AC coach, with a total passenger capacity of 823 passengers



Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya, CM Himanta Biswa Sarma and top railway officials travelling in newly inaugurated Vande Bharat sleeper train on Saturday

(AC 3-Tier: 611, AC 2-Tier: 188, First AC: 24). The train will cover the distance of 972 km between Guwahati and Kolkata in 14 hours.

The train is scheduled to depart from Kamakhya at 18:15 hrs, and reach Howrah at 08:15 hrs on the next morning. In the return trip, the train is scheduled to depart from Howrah at 18:20 hrs, and reach Kamakhya at

08:20 hrs the next day. Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister Sarma said that North Eastern Region once considered as periphery, has now been transformed into a centre of importance with improved modes of connectivity. Thanks to the NDA Government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who brought North East at the



PIONEER PHOTO

centre of all important Government priorities, Sarma Stated.

The Chief Minister on the occasion also thanked the Prime Minister for flagging off the first Vande Bharat sleeper between Kamakhya and Howrah. Introduction of the train will augur well in revolutionising the rail connectivity in the region. He expressed hope that the

train will definitely further strengthen the bond of friendship and boost cultural and religious tourism of the both the States.

Sarma moreover said that under the NDA Government there has been an intensive focus on improvement of the railway infrastructure in Assam and other Northeastern States in recent years. He said that the trans-

port and logistics infrastructure in Assam is crucial for economic development of the region considering Assam's geo-strategic location in the country.

He also said that the focus of the Centre can be clearly seen from the series of development activities, ushering a new connectivity revolution in the region. He in this regard also expressed his gratitude to the Prime Minister who will also flag off two Amrit Bharat Express Trains from Kaziranga on Sunday.

Minister Environment and Forests Chandra Mohan Patowary, Union Minister of State for External Affairs Pabitra Margherita, MPs Bijuli Kalita Medhi, Pradan Baruah, Bhubaneswar Kalita, MLA Atul Bora, GM NF Railway Chetan Kumar Srivastava and host of other dignitaries were present on the occasion at the Kamakhya railway station.

Global industry leaders and IIT Directors to attend IITians' Tech Summit today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Over 500 policymakers, global industry leaders, entrepreneurs, and IIT leadership and alumni will participate in the PanIIT Tech4Bharat Summit 2026 on January 18 in Chennai to chart a technology-led growth roadmap towards achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047.

The Summit, marking 75 years of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), is being convened by PanIIT Alumni India, a Delhi-based umbrella organisation representing alumni of all 23 Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), in association with IIT Madras.

New Delhi-headquartered PanIIT Alumni

India has a presence in 27 countries.

The eminent congregation will brainstorm on innovation, entrepreneurship, public policy, deep tech, infrastructure, finance, energy, and nation-building, reflecting the evolving role of IITs as catalysts for a Viksit Bharat, said Prabhat Kumar, Chairman, PanIIT Alumni India.

"Tech4Bharat is a collective expression of the IIT alumni community's commitment to India's future. As the IIT system completes 75 years, the Summit will explore how technology, policy, industry, and academia can collaborate to accelerate inclusive and sustainable national development."

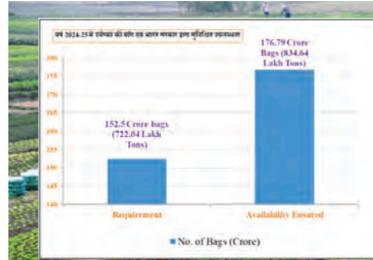
Government ensures record availability of fertilisers for farmers in 2024-25

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Government of India has ensured record availability of fertilisers for farmers during the year 2024-25 to meet their agricultural needs in a timely manner.

Against an estimated national requirement of about 152.50 crore bags (722.04 lakh tonnes) of fertilisers, the Government ensured a total availability of around 176.79 crore bags (834.64 lakh tonnes). This surplus availability reflects the Government's strong commitment to supporting farmers and maintaining uninterrupted agricultural activities across the country.

This achievement was made possible through close coordination among the Railway authorities, Port authorities, State Governments, and fertiliser companies. The Indian Railways gave priority to fertiliser rakes to ensure fast transportation, while ports ensured quick unloading and smooth evacuation of imported fertilisers. The Government also strengthened storage



and distribution systems so that fertilisers reached farmers on time.

In addition, the Government held regular review meetings with fertiliser companies, continuously monitored demand and supply and resolved supply-related issues promptly. These proactive steps ensured that no region

in the country faced a shortage of fertilisers. As a result of these coordinated and sustained efforts, record fertiliser availability was achieved nationwide during 2024-25.

This has provided significant relief to farmers and helped ensure stability in agricultural production.

NTPC recognised as a top employer for 2026 in India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The 2026 Top Employers have been announced and NTPC Limited has been recognised as a Top Employer in India for 2026 by the Top Employers Institute.

The certification demonstrates NTPC's ability to create a high-performing workplace through data-driven people strategies, independent validation, and a clear focus on practices that drive business performance, employee engagement and growth. This is the 4th consecutive year that NTPC has been certified as a Top Employer in India by the Top Employers Institute.

Active in 131 countries/regions, Top Employers Institute is the global authority in HR certification, benchmarking and advisory. The Top Employers Institute programme certifies organisations based on the participation and results of their HR Best Practices Survey. This survey covers six HR domains consisting of 20 topics such as People Strategy, Work Environment, Talent Acquisition, Learning, Diversity & Inclusion, and Wellbeing.

NTPC completed the HR Best Practices Survey, validation and audit process of the Top Employers Institute Certification programme and achieved successful Top



Employers status, according to a Press release.

Being certified as a Top Employer showcases NTPC's dedication to a better world of work which is exhibited through its "People before PLF (Plant Load Factor)" approach and progressive HR policies, leadership and people practice which contribute towards the achievement of the organisational goals, creating positive organisational outcomes and enhanced employee engagement.

NTPC currently operates over 87 GW of installed capacity, with 32 GW under construction, and has set an ambitious target to scale up to 149 GW, including 60 GW of renewable energy capacity, by 2032, and further to 244 GW by 2037. The roadmap envisages a capital expenditure of approximately ₹7 lakh crore, with expansion plans across energy storage systems, pumped storage projects, nuclear power, green hydrogen, and chemicals.

Bihar's renowned academician Professor Jitendra Nath passes away

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Patna

Prof. Jitendra Nath, a respected figure in Bihar's academic circles, passed away on January 8, 2026, at the age of 89, leaving behind a legacy of profound influence through education, humility, and unwavering positivity.

Born on December 20, 1936, Prof. Nath embarked on his teaching journey in 1962 as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at DAV College, Siwan.

He later joined Raj Narain College, Hajipur, a premier institution under B.R.A. Bihar University, Muzaffarpur, where he served with distinction for decades in the English Department.

Known for his deep passion for literature and commitment to nurturing students, he inspired generations with insightful lectures and mentorship until his retirement in 1996. His career reflected a steadfast dedication to quality education in the heart of Vaishali district.

In an era when many clung to possessions, he selflessly donated a portion of his land in Hela Bazar, Hajipur, to a long-time associate, showcasing his large-hearted compassion.

Residing in Nakhhas Chowk, he maintained a grounded lifestyle, often



walking to and from college, even in scorching summers, to prioritise his children's education, his sweat-soaked shirts bearing silent testimony to his resilience and values.

An inquisitive mind and perennial storyteller, he stayed remarkably informed about regional, national, and global affairs through conversations and radio, despite fading eyesight.

He shared timeless wisdom, often quoting Harivansh Rai Bachchan: *Jo man ka ho wo accha, aur jo na ho wo aur bhi accha.*

2 SRS executives declared fugitive economic offenders in fraud case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Gurugram

A special PMLA court in Gurugram has declared two SRS Group executives as fugitive economic offenders (FEOs) in a case of "fraud" with investors and homebuyers involving an amount of ₹2,200 crore, officials said on Saturday.

The declaration was made by the court of Special Judge Vani Gopal Sharma on January 15 under the provisions of the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act (FEOA) against Sunil Jindal and Jitender Kumar Garg.

The two, along with another executive of the company, Praveen Kumar Kapoor, were declared proclaimed offenders by the court in 2025. Kapoor was deported by the United States in November

last year on the strength of an Interpol Red Notice that the ED had got issued against him.

He is currently lodged in the Neemka jail in Haryana's Faridabad. "... Keeping in mind that accused Sunil Jindal and Jitender Kumar Garg have failed to appear in this court despite due service of summonses as envisaged under section 10 of the Fugitive Act, therefore respondents Jitender Kumar Garg and Sunil Jindal are hereby declared as Fugitive Economic Offenders under section 12(1) of the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018..." the court order, accessed by PTI, said.

The FEOA was brought in 2018 by the government with an aim of bringing to justice those who have left India to evade the clutches of law after committing

fraud with a benchmark value of at least ₹100 crore.

The ED moved the court last year to get the two accused declared as FEOs. The money-laundering case against the SRS Group and its promoters stems from a clutch of 81 FIRs filed by the Haryana (Faridabad) Police and the Delhi Police, apart from the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

It is alleged that SRS Group promoters and executives lured investors by promising high returns on their investments in various residential and commercial projects.

"Funds from such investments were deposited in hundreds of shell companies created by SRS Group and were subsequently laundered off," the ED had earlier alleged in a press statement.

ICICI Bank Q3 profit slips 2.68 per cent to ₹12,538 crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

ICICI Bank consolidated profit for the December quarter declined 2.68 per cent to ₹12,537.98 crore, hit by an RBI-mandated ₹1,283-crore provision for agricultural loans wrongly classified as priority sector advances.

On a standalone basis, the country's second-largest lender reported an over 4 per cent decline in the October-December profit at ₹12,883 crore.

The bank also announced that its board has decided to extend Managing Director and Chief Executive Sandeep Bakhshi's term by two years, a surprising move given the usual practice of top leadership at banks getting three-year extensions.

Its Executive Director Sandeep Batra elaborated on the RBI's action and



added that if not for that, the bank's standalone net profit would have shown a 4 per cent increase.

Batra said ICICI Bank was asked by the RBI to set aside ₹1,283 crore as standard asset provision for working capital advances on the agricultural lending front which should not have been classified as priority sector loans (PSL).

The provisioning requirements for PSLs is different from other loans, he said, adding that the RBI's action is with respect of loans of ₹20-25,000 crore done since 2012. The central bank asked the bank to set aside the money following its annual supervisory exercise for FY25, Batra said, stressing that the bank is satisfied with the asset quality of

loans and the provisions will get written-back as the loans get repaid.

Meanwhile, on Bakhshi's reappointment, Batra maintained that the decision has been arrived at after discussions between the MD and the board, and declined to reply any other questions.

The core net interest income jumped 7.7 per cent on-year to ₹21,932 crore during the reporting quarter, on the back of an 11.5 per cent loan growth and a 0.05 per cent expansion in the net interest margin to 4.30 per cent.

Its non-interest income excluding treasury operations increased 12.4 per cent to ₹7,525 crore during the reporting quarter.

It had to set aside ₹145 crore following the implementation of the new labour codes, and the overall provisions doubled to 2,556 crore, courtesy the RBI-man-

dated provisions on agricultural loans. The bank continues to hold a contingency provision of ₹13,100 crore.

From an asset quality perspective, fresh slippages declined to ₹5,356 crore during the reporting quarter from ₹5,304 crore, and ₹4,277 crore of the new additions were in the retail and rural segments.

The gross non-performing assets ratio improved to 1.53 per cent as of December 31, 2025 from 1.58 per cent three months ago.

On the loan growth side, the domestic corporate portfolio rose 5.6 per cent, retail grew 7.2 per cent while the business banking portfolio led with a 22.8 per cent growth. From a capital adequacy perspective, the overall capital buffer was at 17.34 per cent, including the profits for the first nine months and the core buffer stood at 16.46 per cent.



NEW DELHI | SUNDAY | JANUARY 18, 2026

FROM THE WORLD

Khamenei calls Trump criminal for backing protests

PAKISTAN
14 killed in road accident
14 people, including six children, were killed when a truck carrying about a dozen passengers fell from a bridge due to dense fog in Punjab province of Pakistan on Saturday.

ASSOCIATED PRESS N DUBAI
Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Saturday branded US President Donald Trump a "criminal" for supporting protesters in Iran, and blamed demonstrators for causing thousands of deaths.



He described the protesters as "foot soldiers" of the United States and said they had destroyed mosques and educational centres. "Through hurting people, they killed several thousand of them," he said.

administration would "act accordingly" if the killing of demonstrators continued or if Iranian authorities executed detained protesters. In his speech, Khamenei said rioters were armed with live ammunition that was imported from abroad, without naming any countries.

There have been no signs of protests for days in Tehran, where shopping and street life have returned to outward normality, and Iranian state media has not reported on any new unrest.

Internet traffic monitoring service Cloudflare and internet access advocacy group NetBlocks reported very slight increases in connectivity Saturday morning, while Iran's semiofficial Mehr news agency also reported limited internet access.

USA
National Guards stay in DC

National Guard troops (NGT) will be on the streets of Washington, D C, until the end of the year, according to a memo reviewed by The Associated Press.

Syrian Government forces enter Deir Hafer town after Kurdish fighters withdraw

Syrian Government forces entered the outskirts of a northern town Saturday morning after the command of Kurdish-led fighters said it would evacuate the area in an apparent move to avoid conflict.



A convoy of Syrian Government forces drives on a road leading to the town of Deir Hafer, Syria

were working on removing all mines and explosives. It added that troops would also move toward the nearby town of Maskana. Over the past two days, more than 11,000 people fled Deir Hafer and Maskana using side roads to reach Government-controlled areas after the Government announced it would launch an offensive to take the two towns.

Friday boosting the rights of the country's Kurds, who made up about 10 per cent of Syria's population of 23 million before the conflict began in 2011.

Al-Sharaa's decree recognised Kurdish as a national language, along with Arabic, and adopted the Newroz festival, a traditional celebration of spring and renewal marked by Kurds around the region, as an official holiday.

Man crushed to death in Bangladesh

A Hindu man was crushed to death in Bangladesh after he tried to stop a vehicle from leaving a petrol pump without paying for fuel, police said.



Ripon Saha FILE PHOTO

The incident, which took place on Friday in Rajbari district, marks the latest in a spate of violence targeting Hindus in Bangladesh. The victim, identified as 30-year-old Ripon Saha, was a fuel station worker, The Daily Star newspaper reported on Saturday, quoting police officials.

owner Abul Hashem alias Sujan, 55, and his driver Kamal Hossain, 43. Hashem, a former treasurer of Rajbari district Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and former president of the district Jubo Dal, is a contractor by profession, police said.

casting votes for candidates of their choice. The Council said it has recorded 51 incidents of communal violence in December 2025 alone.

PUBLIC NOTICE
That my client Urmila Devi W/o Sh. Kalu Ram R/o B-516, New Sanjay Amar Colony, Vishwas Nagar, Delhi-110032, hereby declare that she disowned her son Mohit and severed all her relations with him due to personal reasons.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given on behalf of Smt. Anurita Mangal who are owners of the residential plot No. 40/10 Third Floor (front side) with roof rights land area measuring 100 Sq. Yds. Built on Portion of Property No. C-44 out of Kharsa No. 12/14 Situated in the area of Village Matiala Delhi State Colony known as Swak Park Block-C in Uttam Nagar New Delhi-110029.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given on behalf of Smt. Rajwati who is owner of PLOT NO. 36, AREA MEASURING 200 SQ. YDS., OUT OF KHASRA NOS. 31/19, 31/20, 31/22, SITUATED IN THE AREA OF VILLAGE MATIALA EXTN., SOUTH BLOCK, NEW DELHI-110053.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given on behalf of Mr. Santosh Kumar Biswakarma to inform to the public at large that Smt. Pranati Bai W/o Shri. Santosh Kumar is the owner of the Second Floor (Front LHS middle portion), area measuring 60 sq. yards, built-up property bearing No. 219/C, above the existing 180 sq.yards, out of Kharsa No. 548/135, situated at Savitri Nagar, in the revenue estate of village Sheikh Sarai, New Delhi - 110017 vide S.D. dated 16.12.2022 (Doc. No. 1125) and same to be financed & mortgaged by Ujjivan Small Finance Bank Ltd. Raj Nagar, Ghazabad, U.P. That Regd. GPA dated 05.10.2008 & Regd. WILL dated 07.10.2008 (Doc. No. 5923) executed by Mr. Rattan Sharma in favour of Mr. Deep Sharma HUF through its Kartar Shri Deep Raj Sharma has been cancelled.

THE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL LUCKNOW
600/1 University Road Near Hanuman Temple Lucknow 226007
(O.A. No. 852/2025)
(Summon To the Defendants under section 19 (3) of the Recovery of Debts and Bankruptcy Act 1993 read with Rule 12 and 13 of the Debts Recovery Tribunal (Procedure Rule 1993) Original Application No. 897 of 2024

THE PIONEERS CLASSIFIED S
CHANGE OF NAME
I, Mamta Bai, Mother of No.6504328M Sep Sudheer Kumar, R/o- Makaan No. 47, Ward No. 16, Jinora, Hoshangabad, M.P.- 461775, have changed my name from Mamta Bai to Mamata Bai, vide affidavit dated 17/01/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PUBLIC NOTICE
THIS IS TO INFORM THE GENERAL PUBLIC RAJESH KUMAR IS THE OWNER OF PROPERTY MEASURING 200 SQUARE YARDS 12.7 MARLA COMPRISED IN KHAWAT NO. 570, KHATOM NO. 622, TOTAL KITE 4 SITUATED WITHIN THE REVENUE ESTATE OF MEHARANA, WITHIN THE ABADI OF DEVI LAL COLONY, SONPAT AND WITHIN THE LIMIT OF MUNICIPAL CORPORATION, SONPAT VIDE TRANSFER DEED DATED 12-02-2018 TRANSFER DEED NO. 1227 EXECUTED BY SMT. KAVITA IN FAVOUR OF RAJESH KUMAR REGISTERED AS DOC.NO.1227. THE OWNER HAS MISPLACED THE REGISTERED SALE DEED NO. 8679 DATED 03.02.2010 EXECUTED BY SMT. PONAM IN FAVOUR OF SMT. KAVITA IN RESPECT OF SAID PROPERTY FOR WHICH COMPLAINT IS REGD. VIDE APPLICATION NO. 13239072050358, REGISTERED AT DEVI LAL COLONY SONPAT. ANYONE WHO FINDS THE ABOVE MENTIONED DOCUMENTS KINDLY HANDOVER THE SAME TO THE MANAGER OF RBL BANK, SONPAT.

कार्यालय नगर पालिक निगम, रायगढ़ (छत्तीसगढ़)
क्रमांक 10155 / न.पा.नि. / 2026
रायगढ़ दिनांक 16-01-26
॥ ई-प्रोक्वोरमेंट निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना ॥
नगर पालिक निगम, रायगढ़ द्वारा निम्नलिखित कार्य हेतु ऑनलाईन (Online) निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है :-

कार्यालय नगर पालिक निगम, रायगढ़ (छत्तीसगढ़)
क्रमांक 10155 / न.पा.नि. / 2026
रायगढ़ दिनांक 16.01.26
पं क्रमांक 10155 / न.पा.नि. / 2026

PD(158)C
I, Shamide, W/o No.2889885A Honey Nb/Sub Barkat Ali, R/o- Alipur Aterana, Muzaffarnagar, U.P.- 251309, have changed my name from Shamide to Samida, vide affidavit dated 17/01/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(162)C
I, Aparna, Mother of No.14892070N Sep(MT) Sopley Vishal Dattatray, R/o- Near Adivasi Hostel, Mahadev Nagar, Ravi Nagar, TQ/Dist- Amravati, Maharashtra- 444605, have changed my name from Aparna to Aparna Dattatray Sopley, vide affidavit dated 07/01/2026 before Notary Public Amravati, Maharashtra.

PD(163)C
I, Madhubala, W/o No.14653903M Hav Deepak Kumar, R/o- Vill & PO- Rampur Hari, Dist- Muzaffarpur, Bihar- 843117, have changed my name from Madhubala to Madhubala Singh, vide affidavit dated 16/01/2026 before Notary Public Cantt.

Indian man jailed in US for illegal export
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New York
A 58-year-old Indian national was sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison in the US for conspiring to illegally export controlled aviation components from Oregon to Russia.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER : PWD, BARCHALLA & DHEKIAJULI TERRITORIAL ROAD DIVISION, DHEKIAJULI.
NO:EE/BTRD/PD/NA/2025-26/
PRESS NOTICE INVITING BIDS
The Executive Engineer, PWRD, Barchalla & Dhekiajuli Territorial Road Division, Dhekiajuli On behalf of the Governor of Assam, invites bid from approved and eligible contractor registered with Assam PWD (Roads) for 7 (Seven) nos of work amounting to Rs. 84.89 Lakh (approx) for the Recovery and Re-Construction of Roads under NDRF(PD/NA-2022) for the year 2025-26 in Barchalla LAC and Dhekiajuli LAC of Sonitpur District of Assam.

Ukrainians arrives in US for peace talks

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Kyiv

A Ukrainian delegation arrived in the United States for talks Saturday on a US-led diplomatic push to end the nearly 4-year-old war as Russian attacks again took aim at Ukraine's power grid, cutting electricity and heating in freezing temperatures.

Kyrylo Budanov, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's chief of staff, said he arrived in the US to discuss "the details of the peace agreement."

Writing on the Telegram messaging app, Budanov said he, together with Ukrainian negotiators Rustem Umerov and Davyd Arakhamia, would meet with US envoy Steve Witkoff, President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and US Army Secretary Dan Driscoll. Zelenskyy said Friday that the delegation



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy shaking hands with Czech Republic's President Petr Pavel during their meeting in Kyiv, Ukraine

would try to finalise with US officials documents for a proposed peace settlement that relate to postwar security guarantees and economic recovery.

If American officials approve the proposals, the US and Ukraine could sign the documents next week at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Zelenskyy said at a Kyiv news conference with Czech President Petr Pavel.

Trump plans to be in Davos, according to organisers. Russia would still need to be consulted on the proposals. Russia struck energy infrastructure in Ukraine's Kyiv and Odesa regions overnight on Saturday, the Ministry of Energy said. More than 20 settlements in the Kyiv region were left without power following the attacks, the ministry wrote on its official Telegram channel. Russia has hammered

Ukraine's power grid, especially in winter, throughout the war. It aims to weaken the Ukrainian will to resist in a strategy that Kyiv officials call "weaponising winter."

Ukraine's new energy minister, Denys Shmyhal, said Friday that Russia had conducted 612 attacks on energy targets over last year. That barrage has intensified in recent months as nighttime temperatures plunge to minus 18 degrees Celsius.

Ukraine has introduced emergency measures, including temporarily easing curfew restrictions to allow people to go whenever they need to public heating centers set up by the authorities, Shmyhal said.

Officials have instructed state energy companies Ukrzaliznytsia, Naftogaz and Ukroboronprom to urgently purchase imported electricity covering at least 50 per cent of their own consum.

Floods devastate Southern Africa, over 100 dead



Children wade through floodwaters in a neighborhood in Maputo

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Nkomazi

Army helicopters rescued people stranded on rooftops and hundreds of tourists and workers were evacuated from one of the world's biggest game reserves, as torrential rains and flooding in three countries in southern Africa killed more than 100 people, authorities said Friday.

The death toll across South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe is an accumulation of weather services issued warnings that more rain was on the way, possibly bringing more destructive flooding. Mozambique was the hardest hit, with flooding across swathes of the country's central and southern provinces. Its Institute for Disaster Management and Risk Reduction said 103 people had died in an unusually severe rainy season since late last year, though that count included deaths from various causes including electrocution from lightning strikes, drowning in floods, infrastructure collapse caused by the severe weather and cholera, the institute said.

More than 200,000 people have been affected in Mozambique, thousands of homes have been damaged and tens of thousands face evacuation, the World Food Program said of another crisis in a poor country with limited resources that has faced several damaging cyclones in the last few years.

In neighbouring South Africa, officials said Friday the death toll from floods in two northern provinces had risen to at least 30, with rescue efforts ongoing. Zimbabwe's disaster management agency said that 70 people have died and more than 1,000 homes have been destroyed in heavy rains since the beginning of the year, while infrastructure including schools, roads and

bridges collapsed. Flooding has also hit the island nation of Madagascar as well as Malawi and Zambia.

The United States' Famine Early Warning System said flooding was reported or expected in at least seven southern African nations, possibly due to the presence of the La Nina weather phenomenon that can bring heavy rains to parts of southeastern Africa.

The South African army was using helicopters to pluck people to safety as they took refuge on rooftops or in trees in the northern Limpopo province. The army also had to rescue police officers and border control officers from a checkpoint on the South Africa-Zimbabwe border, it said.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa visited flood-stricken areas in Limpopo on Thursday and said that region had received around 400 millimeters (more than 15 inches) of rain in less than a week.

He said that in one district he visited "there are 36 houses that have just been wiped away from the face of the Earth." Limpopo Premier Phophi Ramathuba said more than 1,000 houses were damaged across the province, with many of them washed away entirely. "It's so terrible," she said.

There was also extensive damage in Mpumalanga province, where roads and bridges were damaged or destroyed.

In the Nkomazi Municipality near the border with Mozambique, residents were trying to repair the damage in their flooded homes and yards — and bracing for more extreme weather after the South African Weather Service issued a red-level 10 alert for more destructive rains and floods for that part of the country, the highest warning level.

Journalists in Bangladesh demand safty protection

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Dhaka

Journalists, editors and owners of media outlets in Bangladesh demanded that authorities protect them following recent attacks on two leading national dailies by mobs.

They said the media industry in the South Asian country is being systematically targeted in the interim government headed by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus. They said the administration failed to prevent attacks on the Daily Star, the country's leading English-language daily, and the Prothom Alo, the largest Bengali-language newspaper, both based in Dhaka, the Capital.

In December, angry mobs stormed the offices of the two newspapers and set fire to the buildings, trapping journalists and other staff inside, shortly after the death of a prominent Islamist activist.

The newspaper authorities blamed the authorities under the interim government for failing to adequately respond to the incidents despite repeated requests for help to disperse the mobs. Hours later, the trapped journalists who



Journalists in Bangladesh demanding safety protection

took shelter on the roof of the Daily Star newspaper were rescued. The buildings were looted. A leader of the Editors Council, an independent body of newspaper editors, was manhandled by the attackers when he arrived at the scene.

On the same day, liberal cultural centres were also attacked in Dhaka. It was not clear why the protesters attacked the newspapers, whose editors are known to be closely connected with Yunus. Protests had been organised in recent months outside the offices of the dailies by Islamists who accused the newspapers of links with India.

On Saturday, the Editors Council and the Newspapers Owners Association of Bangladesh jointly organised a conference where editors, journalist union leaders and journalists from across the country demanded that the authorities uphold the free press amid rising tensions ahead of elections in February.

US Congressional delegation seeks to reassure Denmark, Greenland after Trump's threats

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Copenhagen

Bipartisan US Congressional delegation on Saturday sought to reassure Denmark and Greenland of their support following President Donald Trump's threat to punish countries with tariffs if they don't back the US taking over the strategic Arctic island.

Delegation leader Senator Chris Coons, a Delaware Democrat, said the current rhetoric around Greenland is causing concern across the Danish kingdom. He said he wants to de-escalate the situation. "I hope that the people of the Kingdom of Denmark do not abandon their faith in the American people," Coons said in Copenhagen, adding that the US has respect for Denmark and NATO "for all we've done together."

Coons gave a news conference Saturday ahead of rallies planned in Copenhagen and Nuuk, the Greenlandic capital, in support of the self-governing island. His comments contrasted with those emanating from the White House. Trump has sought to justify his calls for a US takeover by



Senator Chris Coons from the Democratic Party speaking during a press conference with the American delegation, consisting of senators and members of the House of Representatives in Copenhagen

repeatedly claiming that China and Russia have their own designs on Greenland, which holds vast untapped reserves of critical minerals. The White House hasn't ruled out taking the territory by force.

"There are no current security threats to Greenland," Coons said.

Trump for months has insisted that the US should control Greenland, a semiau-

tonomous territory of NATO ally Denmark, and said earlier this week that anything less than the Arctic island being in US hands would be "unacceptable."

During an unrelated event at the White House about rural health care, he recounted Friday how he had threatened European allies with tariffs on pharmaceuticals. "I may do that for Greenland too," Trump said. "I may put

a tariff on countries if they don't go along with Greenland, because we need Greenland for national security. So I may do that," he said. He had not previously mentioned using tariffs to try to force the issue.

Earlier this week, the foreign ministers of Denmark and Greenland met in Washington with US Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio. That encounter didn't resolve the big differences, but did produce an agreement to set up a working group — on whose purpose Denmark and the White House then offered sharply diverging public views.

European leaders have insisted it is only for Denmark and Greenland to decide on matters concerning the territory, and Denmark said this week that it was increasing its military presence in Greenland in cooperation with allies.

"There is almost no better ally to the United States than Denmark," Coons said. "If we do things that cause Danes to question whether we can be counted on as a NATO ally, why would any other country seek to be our ally or believe in our representations?"

Egypt, Sudan welcome Trump's offer to mediate dam dispute

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Cairo

Egypt and Sudan welcomed on Saturday President Donald Trump's offer to resume US mediation efforts with Ethiopia to resolve a long-running Nile River water dispute following Addis Ababa's construction of a giant dam.

Ethiopia inaugurated the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, or GERD, last fall. It is Africa's largest and is meant to produce more than 5,000 megawatts, doubling Ethiopia's electricity generation capacity. Egypt sees the dam as a "grave violation of international law" that poses "an existential threat," fearing a severe effect on Nile water flow. Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi said in a social media post that he valued "President Trump's attention



to the central importance of the Nile River issue for Egypt," adding that his country is committed to "serious and constructive cooperation with the Nile Basin countries, based on the principles of international law, in a manner that achieves shared interests without causing harm to any party." He said that Egypt supports the US efforts to resolve the dispute

with Ethiopia.

In a post on X, Gen Abdel-Fattah Burhan, chairman of Sudan's ruling Sovereign Council and its military chief, hailed Trump's initiative as a step "to find sustainable and satisfactory solutions that preserve everyone's rights." There was no immediate comment from Ethiopia. On Friday, Trump posted on social media a letter he sent

to el-Sissi, saying: "I am ready to restart US mediation between Egypt and Ethiopia to responsibly resolve the question of 'The Nile Water Sharing' once and for all."

Washington-led mediations began during Trump's first term, but they effectively collapsed in 2020, when Ethiopia withdrew — though some discussions later continued under the African Union without reaching a settlement. Cairo and Khartoum call for a legally binding agreement on how GERD, located on the Blue Nile near Ethiopia's border with Sudan, will be filled and operated, while Addis Ababa insists on guidelines. Egypt, a mostly desert country, depends on the Nile River to supply its booming population of 110 million with fresh water. It fears that the dam

will drastically reduce the Nile's flow, with potentially severe effects on its agriculture and other sectors. El-Sissi has said that his country's share of Nile water is "untouchable," though he favoured resolving the dispute through negotiations.

Sudan, meanwhile, wants coordination of the operation and replenishment of the GERD's reservoir to avert unexpected impacts on its dams. Ethiopia says the \$5 billion dam is essential, arguing the vast majority of its population lacks electricity. The dispute now centres on how the dam's annual replenishment is conducted, the amount of water Ethiopia will release downstream if a multi-year drought occurs and the method the three countries will use to settle future disputes.

Congress can not intervene in release of Epstein files: Justice Department

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ New York

Manhattan's top federal prosecutor on Friday said that a judge lacks the authority to appoint a neutral expert to oversee the public release of documents in the sex trafficking probe of financier Jeffrey Epstein and British socialite Ghislaine Maxwell.

Judge Paul A Engelmayer was told in a letter signed by US Attorney Jay Clayton that he must reject a request made earlier this week by the congressional cosponsors of the Epstein Files Transparency Act to appoint a neutral expert.

US Republican Ro Khanna, a California Democrat, and Republican Thomas Massie,



a Kentucky Republican, say they have "urgent and grave concerns" about the slow release of only a small number of millions of documents that began last month. In a filing to the judge they said they believed "criminal violations have taken place" in the release process.

Clayton, though, said Khanna and Massie do not have standing with the court

that would allow them to seek the "extraordinary" relief of the appointment of a special master and independent monitor.

Engelmayer "lacks the authority" to grant such a request, he said, particularly because the congressional representatives who made the request are not parties to the criminal case that led to Maxwell's December 2021 sex trafficking conviction and subsequent 20-year prison sentence for recruiting girls and women for Epstein to abuse and aiding the abuse.

Epstein died in a federal jail in New York City in August 2019 as he awaited trial on sex trafficking charges. The death was ruled a suicide.

US President Trump's protectionist trade policies allow China to swoop in

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Washington

America's top trading partners are responding to President Donald Trump's belligerent and unpredictable trade policies by trying to take their business elsewhere. Canada broke with the United States on Friday, slashing its 100 per cent import tax on Chinese electric vehicles in return for lower tariffs on Canadian farm products, particularly canola seeds.

"It's a huge declaration of realignment in Canada's economic relations," said Edward Alden, who studies trade issues as a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. "The economic threat from the United States is now perceived by Canadians as far bigger than the economic threat from China. So this is a big deal."



Canada has repeatedly been the target of Trump's impulsive wrath. In October, for instance, he said he was imposing a 10 per cent tariff on Canadian imports as a reprisal for Ontario's provincial government airing an advertisement that criticised the president's go-to diplomatic tariff tool. He didn't follow through on the increase, but tariffs on some key Canadian

sectors like steel and aluminium remain. But Friday's deal with China is a potentially perilous one for Canada's prime minister, Mark Carney, who risks retribution from Trump on the eve of negotiations over the renewal of a North American trade pact that is crucial to Canadian businesses.

Canada is not alone in looking for alternatives to America's massive market as Trump slaps massive tariffs on imports in an attempt to strong-arm other countries into moving production to the United States.

The European Union is expected to formally sign a trade pact Saturday with the South American alliance known as Mercosur, which includes the region's two biggest economies, Brazil and Argentina. The EU is also pursuing a trade deal with India. China, pounded by US

tariffs since Trump's first term, has diversified its exports away from the world's biggest economy to markets such as Europe and Southeast Asia.

It seems to be working. China's trade surplus with the rest of the world surged to a record \$1.2 trillion in 2025, the Chinese government reported Wednesday, despite tumbling exports to the US. Since returning to the White House in January, Trump has overturned seven decades of US policy in favour of ever freer trade. He's imposed double-digit taxes on imports from almost every country on Earth, as well as singling out specific industries, such as steel and autos, for levies of their own.

Trump says tariffs will raise money for the US Treasury, protect American industries, and bring investment into the United States.

On Thursday, in fact, Taiwan agreed to invest \$250 billion in the United States in return for Trump reducing the tariff on its products to 15 per cent from 20 per cent.

The president's use of tariffs has often been arbitrary and unpredictable. He targeted Brazil, for instance, for prosecuting his friend, former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro. On Friday, he threatened to slap tariffs on countries that don't support his efforts to wrest control of Greenland from Denmark.

Friday's deal in Beijing marks a turnaround in Canadian policy. In 2024, Canada followed the US by imposing 100 per cent tariffs on EVs from China, reflecting fears that inexpensive Chinese cars would overwhelm domestic North American automakers. First, it's canola farmers who need export

markets, and this pact lowers China's tariff on canola from 84 per cent to 15 per cent. Canola farmers are hailing Canada's new trade deal with China as great news that could restore exports for the major crop.

Second, the Trump administration, favoring fossil fuels over green energy, "is actively hostile to EV production in North America," said economist Mary Lovely, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics.

America's opposition "threatens to make the North American (auto) industry obsolete in the future, as China moves ahead with rapid quality improvements in batteries and electronics for EVs." China's strengths in the electric vehicle sector are undeniable," Carney said Friday. China produces some of the most affordable and efficient

vehicles in the world. And in order for Canada to build our own competitive EV sector, we need to learn from innovative partners, access their supply chains, and increase local demand." But Carney's economic rapprochement with Beijing amounts to a gamble.

"This was an extraordinarily difficult thing for Carney to do," Alden said. "Relations between Canada and China have been extremely fraught." In 2018, China detained two Canadians in retaliation for Canada arresting an executive of the Chinese tech firm Huawei at the request of the United States.

All three were released in a 2021 swap. Canada also launched an investigation three years ago into whether the Chinese interfered in Canadian elections in 2019 and 2021.

BRIEFLY

U19 WC: No handshake at toss in India vs Bangladesh match



The strained bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh filtered onto the cricket field as captains of the two teams abstained from making customary handshake ahead of their ICC Under 19 World Cup Group A match here on Saturday. After a delayed start owing to rain, India skipper Ayush Mhatre and Bangladesh vice-captain Zawad Abrar stood at the toss but there was no exchange of cordiality between them before or after the spin of the coin. However, both the teams are yet to make an official statement about the incident.

It may be recalled that a no handshake policy is in vogue between India and Pakistan from last year's Asia Cup in the aftermath of Pahalgam massacre and the ensuing Operation Sindoor carried out by the Indian Armed Forces. The political and cricketing relation between India and Bangladesh are on the lowest ebb of late. Several anti-Bangladesh rallies were held in various parts of India, protesting against the reported persecution of minorities in the neighbouring country in recent days.

Andreeva rallies to beat Mboko in Adelaide final



Third-seeded Mirra Andreeva trailed 3-0 but came back to win nine games in a row and 12 of the last 13 to beat Victoria Mboko 6-3, 6-1 in the Adelaide International final on Saturday. The match featured the only players aged under 20 inside the top 20 on the WTA Tour. Andreeva is 18 and Mboko 19. The Canadian took a 3-0 lead in the first set before Andreeva evened the match, winning 13 consecutive points and dominating the rest of the set and match.

Trailing 3-0 in the second set, Mboko took a medical timeout when her blood pressure and pulse was taken. She returned to win her first game of the second set but Andreeva closed out the match three games later. It was Andreeva's fourth WTA title.

An Se Young, Christie storm into India Open final

AMIT KUMAR DAS
New Delhi

World number one An Se Young continued her imperious run, while Indonesia's Jonatan Christie showed his trademark resilience as they advanced to the women's and men's singles finals respectively at the USD 950,000 India Open Super 750 tournament here on Saturday.

Top seed and defending champion An Se Young, who has already won 11 titles this season and claimed the Malaysia Open Super 1000 last week, was in complete control as she swept past former world champion Ratchanok Intanon of Thailand 21-11, 21-7 in the women's singles semifinals.

"Every match is a new feeling. I feel pressure but I try not to think about my feeling. I just try my best on the day

and focus on my game," said South Korean An. An will face China's world number two Wang Zhiyi, who edged out compatriot and Tokyo Olympic champion Chen Yu Fei 21-15, 23-21 in the other semifinal.

"I am looking forward to the final but I think tomorrow is Wang Zi, I will try my best," An said. In the men's singles, third seed Christie recovered from an early deficit to outlast Singapore's former world champion Loh Kean Yew 21-18, 22-20 in 46 minutes to enter the final.

"I'm very happy. Loh is a very good player. He is playing very well. In the first set, he already was ahead maybe by 6-7 points. So I just wanted to give my best in this match," said Christie, who left the national training center to become an independent player after the Sudirman Cup last year. The world



number four Indonesian will face either Canada's Viktor Lai or Chinese Taipei's Lin Chun-Yi in the title clash.

In women's doubles, Japan's Yuki Fukushima and Mayu Matsumoto defeated second seeds Pearly Tan and

Thinaah Muralitharan of Malaysia 21-16, 21-13, while third-seeded Thai mixed doubles pair of Dechapol Puavaranukroh and Supissara Paewsampran stunned top seeds Feng Yan Zhe and Huang Dong Ping of China 16-

21, 21-19, 21-16. **'Materials from bird nest' halt play:** Play was briefly interrupted during the women's doubles semifinal between top-seeded Chinese pair Liu Sheng Shu and Tan Ning and sixth seeds Baek Ha

Na and Lee So Hee of Korea after some "material from the bird's nest" fell on the court. With the Chinese duo leading 6-3 in the opening game, the match was stopped for a few minutes as officials inspected and cleaned the surface. While the players initially indicated it was bird droppings, officials later clarified that the interruption was caused by "material from a bird's nest."

The India Open, being held at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium for the first time ahead of the World Championships in August, has been marred by complaints over air quality, extreme cold, hygiene concerns and the presence of stray animals.

On Thursday, a men's singles match involving HS Prannoy and Loh was halted twice due to bird droppings on the court. (PTI)

Chinnaswamy stadium gets nod to hold international matches

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Bengaluru

After months of uncertainty, the Karnataka State Cricket Association on Saturday received permission from the state Home Department to host international and IPL matches at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

The Home Department gave the go-ahead to conduct matches after examining the report submitted by a government-appointed task force, which found the security enhancement works at the venue satisfactory. "We are pleased to inform you that the Home Department, Government of Karnataka, has granted permission to the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) to host international and IPL matches at the iconic M. Chinnaswamy Stadium, Bengaluru," said Vinay Mruthyunjaya, the KSCA



spokesperson. Mruthyunjaya said the association is confident of meeting all the parameters laid down by the government committee.

"The permission is subject to compliance with specific terms and conditions prescribed by the Government and the concerned authorities. KSCA is confident of fulfilling all the stipulated conditions," he added.

All cricket activities were halted at the Chinnaswamy after 11 fans were killed in a stampede outside the venue

during RCB's IPL trophy celebrations last year.

The subsequent investigation had blamed the lack of crowd management measures for the stampede on June 4 when nearly three lakh fans thronged the venue to take part in RCB's celebrations.

The new state association regime headed by former India pacer Venkatesh Prasad has been holding talks with various government agencies since last month to bring cricket back to the venue.

Hamilton to get a new engineer

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Maranello (Italy)

Lewis Hamilton will have a new race engineer talking to him over the radio in Formula 1 after Riccardo Adami was moved to another role with Ferrari.

Race engineers are the staff members most often in contact with drivers on track, discussing race incidents, car setup and strategy. The radio chatter between Hamilton and Adami came in for scrutiny during the British driver's disappointing 2025 season.

Ahead of the start of pre-season testing this month, the Italian team said Adami would work with its driver academy and oversee test runs in older F1 cars, without naming a replacement.

The team "would like to thank Riccardo for his commitment and contribution to his trackside role and wishes him every success in his new position," Ferrari said in a statement which didn't mention

Hamilton by name. "The appointment of the new race engineer for car #44 will be announced in due course."

Seven-time world champion Hamilton denied any problems in his relationship with Adami, who previously worked with four-time champion Sebastian Vettel, though their radio chatter sometimes indicated frustration.

In their first race together at the Australian Grand Prix, Hamilton asked Adami to "leave me to it" because he felt he was being distracted with information he didn't need. At the Miami Grand Prix in May, Hamilton questioned whether the team might

have a "tea break" as Ferrari took its time deciding on strategy. In Monaco, Hamilton asked if Adami was upset with him and seemed not to get a reply.

For the first time in his career, the British driver didn't finish on the podium in a grand prix all year, his first season following a blockbuster move from Mercedes.



Vijender named to Asian Boxing Council

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Indian boxing icon Vijender Singh has been appointed as a member of the Asian Boxing Council, marking another significant milestone in his journey from an elite athlete to global sports administrator.

Vijender, India's first Olympic medalist in boxing, brings with him nearly two decades of experience at the highest level of the sport, both in amateur and professional boxing.

His appointment to the Asian Boxing Council reflects his deep understanding of the sport and his continued commitment to its growth across the continent. Speaking on the devel-

opment, Vijender said, "I am honoured to be appointed as a member of the Asian Boxing Council.

I would like to thank the Boxing



Federation of India and its leadership for entrusting me with this responsibility.

"I hope to fulfil this role to the best of my ability at the international level. Just as we created history in Beijing, I am committed to working for the growth of Asian boxing, with a strong focus on Indian boxers, and helping our athletes achieve even greater success in the future."

The Asian Boxing Council plays a key role in shaping the sport's competitive and developmental framework across the region.

Vijender's inclusion is expected to add an athlete-first perspective to policy discussions, governance, and long-term planning.

UP Warriorz notch second win, beat MI by 22 runs: WPL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Navi Mumbai

Captain Meg Lanning and fellow Australian Phoebe Litchfield struck dominating half centuries to set up UP Warriorz's comprehensive 22-run win over defending champions Mumbai Indians in the Women's Premier League (WPL) here on Saturday.

With the win, UP Warriorz stamped their dominance over Mumbai Indians in the WPL season 4 as they had also beaten the same opponents by seven wickets on Thursday.

This was Mumbai's third loss in five matches while UP Warriorz notched up their second win in five games.

Sent in to bat, Lanning (70) and Litchfield (61) made



UP Warriorz's players celebrate a wicket during the Women's Premier League (WPL) T20 cricket match between Mumbai Indians and UP Warriorz, at the DY Patil Stadium, in Navi Mumbai

Mumbai bowling look ordinary with their impressive batting and shared 119 runs for the second wicket off just 76 balls to take UP Warriorz to 187

for 8. Chasing 188, Mumbai struggled all throughout with their top batters failing to make it count. Openers Hayley Matthews (13) and Sajeevan

Sajana (10) fell at the same team score of 23 while one-down Nat Sciver-Brunt (15) and Nicola Carey (6) were also dismissed in quick succession.

Harleen Deol, who scored a match-winning 64 not out in Warriorz's 7-wicket win over the same opponents on Thursday, took a stunning diving catch to get rid of in-form Carey.

Mumbai were 62 for 4 at the halfway mark, needing more than 12 runs an over to overhaul the target.

To make matters worse for Mumbai, captain Harmanpreet Kaur (18) was out in the 11th over off the bowling of Chloe Tryon.

By then, Mumbai were 69 for 5 and their run chase had gone haywire. But Amanjot Kaur (41 off 24 balls) and Amelia Kerr (49

not out off 28 balls) gave a valiant late resistance with a 83-run partnership for the sixth wicket but it was too late in the day.

Mumbai ended at 165 for 6 in 20 overs to lose the match. Shikha Pandey, who conceded just 3 runs in the penultimate over and also took one wicket, was the most successful UP Warriorz's bowler with figures of 2/30.

Earlier, UP Warriorz's opener Kiran Navgire failed for the fifth time, getting out in the opening over for a first-ball duck.

She wasted one more chance after scores of 1, 5, 0, 10 as she attempted to drive an inswinging delivery from Nicola Carey only to see her wickets cart-wheeling.

Olympic qualification points on offer for Pune Grand Tour

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Pune

Indian cyclists will race for crucial Olympic qualification points when the country hosts its first-ever UCI 2.2 multi-stage road race, the Bajaj Pune Grand Tour, starting here on Monday.

India will field their largest-ever contingent of 12 riders — split into the Indian national team and the Indian development team — in the five-day event, which runs till January 23 and serves as a key stepping stone on the road to qualification for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games.

The race opens with a 7.5km prologue at Goodluck Chowk which will determine early positions in the general classification, before moving into a demanding four-stage test across Pune and the Western Ghats that combines sprinting, climbing and tactical depth.

Stage 1 on January 20, the 87.2km Mulsai-Maval Miles, winds through Pune's IT hub Hinjewadi, blending flat sprint sections with sharp urban turns.

In Stage 2, the 105.3km Maratha Heritage Circuit is covered on January 21, and is expected to be decisive, featuring steep ghat climbs around Purandar Fort, Sinhagad and Khadakwasla Lake.

The 134km Western Ghats Gateway stage on January 22 stretches from Purandar to Baramati across the Deccan plateau, testing speed and race craft amid rolling terrain and

crosswinds, before the race concludes with the 95km Pune Pride Loop — a technical urban circuit passing landmarks such as Shaniwar Wada.

Terming it a defining moment for Indian cycling, the Indian Federation (CFI) secretary general Maninder Pal Singh said: "Securing a UCI 2.2 multi-stage race was not easy, and it reflects years of consistent work by the Cycling Federation of India to build credibility at the international level."

"This event opens a direct pathway for our riders toward Olympic qualification and changes how cycling is viewed by governments, sponsors, and stakeholders across the country. Hosting a race of this scale in India gives our athletes the opportunity to compete, learn, and progress

into elite competitions," he said.

National chief coach Maxat Ayazabayev said: "It is extremely important for India hosting more and more such races for the development of our riders."

"The Pune Grand Tour will give our riders valuable race experience of an international standard on home roads. We are hopeful of delivering strong results," he said.

Indian national team coach Joginder Singh described the race as historic.

"The Pune Grand Tour is historic for Indian cycling. Now we have an international race in our own backyard, in our familiar conditions."

"With a strong mix of young and experienced riders in the Indian team, this UCI 2.2 event can be a real turning point for the growth of professional road cycling in India," he said.

Among the riders,

Harshveer Sekhon said racing at home was a source of motivation.

"I don't see racing at home as pressure; I see it as motivation. Competing on home roads, in front of our own people, gives me energy."

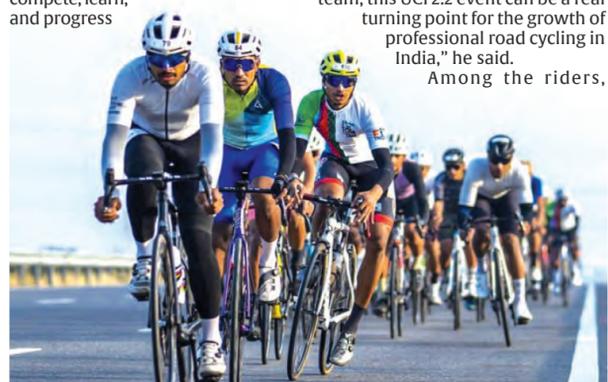
"This is my first experience of a stage race of this scale in India. Our preparation has been strong, and we're looking forward to performing well," he said.

Surya Thathu, racing in his home state of Maharashtra, said, "Races like the Pune Grand Tour were something we once watched only on television, and to compete in a multi-stage race of this scale in India, especially in my home state of Maharashtra, is incredibly special."

"Racing in Europe is challenging, as riders have to manage all the logistics on their own. However, Pune Grand Tour feels different — here every aspect of our preparation has been well taken care of. More races like this will give young riders real opportunities, just as regular racing does in countries like Belgium."

Another rider Vishvajeet Singh said: "When we arrived in Pune and inspected the routes, the quality of roads and overall organisation really stood out."

"The level of support provided to the teams, vehicles, logistics and infrastructure, is comparable to what we see in major international tours. Experiencing that in India is special, and it motivates us to give our best," he said.



India's FIFA World Cup dream is still alive: Ashalata Devi

HIMANK NEGI
New Delhi

Indian women's football stalwart Ashalata Devi says the dream of seeing the country play at the FIFA Women's World Cup remains alive, but stressed that sustained progress at the grassroots level is crucial to bridge the gap with the world's elite.

"Our dream of the World Cup is still alive. We still have to work even harder at this time," Ashalata told media Videos. The veteran defender pointed out that all three national teams — Under-17, Under-19 and the senior side — have qualified for their respective AFC Asian Championships, making 2026 a potentially defining year for the women's game in India. "Under-17, Under-19 and the senior team have already qualified for AFC (competitions). If we do well there, obviously our dream of the World Cup is still alive," she said.

One of the most capped players in Indian women's football history, Ashalata — who has earned over 100



international caps and captained the national side on multiple occasions — said the (senior) team has made steady progress but is still short of world-class standards. "We have been doing better for a long time, but still according to world-class levels, we are not there yet. Still, we are trying a lot," she said.

"I have so much faith in the players. Their passion, hard work and dedication — they have been working for so many years. I really hope this time we qualify for the World Cup and do better for Indian women's football."

Having spent more than a decade anchoring India's defence, Ashalata identified

grassroots development as the biggest area needing immediate attention. "The problem is that we skip the basics and go straight to the technical aspects," she said. "In my time, I started playing football at the age of 13. Now many players start at 10 or 11. But if we start at five or six years, learning becomes much better."

She emphasised that skill acquisition becomes increasingly difficult with age. "After 17 or 18 years, teaching skills like ball control becomes very difficult. By then, players play more by expression than learning. That's why grassroots football is very important," she added. (PTI)



India look to protect home ODI record, NZ eyes historic win

AMANPREET SINGH
■ Indore

India's absolute dominance at home will come under examination when they meet a determined New Zealand in the decisive third ODI at the high-scoring Holkar Stadium here on Sunday, with the three-match series locked at 1-1.

India have not lost a bilateral ODI series at home since March 2019, when Australia overturned a 0-2 deficit to win 3-2, including the decider in Delhi. But that history is now firmly on the line. For New Zealand, the context is equally compelling.

The Black Caps have toured India for bilateral ODIs since 1989 but have never won a series in India and this is arguably their best opportunity to break that barren run.

India head coach Gautam Gambhir would not like another tumbling at home under his regime after getting a number of unwanted firsts. India lost five Tests at home under Gambhir apart from losing an ODI series in Sri Lanka for the first time. India's defeat in the second ODI at Rajkot was shaped less by one extraordinary innings than by how New

Zealand seized control of the middle overs.

Daryl Mitchell's unbeaten century was built on calculated aggression, particularly against spin, an area where India have been struggling of late. Indore, with its short boundaries and minimal assistance for bowlers, offers even less margin for error.

India's ability to tackle spin has raised questions. Despite depth and power, the side has continued to show discomfort against spin in the middle overs. Strike rotation has stalled at key phases, forcing batters into high-risk options rather than controlled accumulation. On a ground where totals can quickly spiral beyond 350, those quiet overs can decisively tilt the momentum.

Will there be a RoKo show: Much of the spotlight will be on Rohit Sharma, who is enduring a lean run in this series. His ultra-aggressive approach at the top has been a defining feature of India's recent ODI philosophy, but repeated early dismissals has added a bit of pressure.

Virat Kohli, meanwhile, remains the fulcrum around which India's ODI batting revolves. With India's next 50-over assignment for senior players likely to come in



July during the tour of England, the fans would hope for another RoKo show.

Selection balance: The choice between Nitish Kumar Reddy and Ayush Badoni is effectively a

debate between depth and control.

Reddy adds seam-bowling insurance, though used sparingly, and late-innings power, while Badoni offers a tighter technique

against spin and composure in the middle overs.

The case for including left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh also gains weight at Indore, where variations rather than raw pace often deter-

mines success.

Arshdeep's ability to swing the new ball, attack the stumps and execute yorkers at the death offers India a different tactical dimension, particularly against New Zealand's largely right-handed top and middle-order.

His inclusion would also reduce the burden on the spinners in the middle and late phases, allowing India to rely more on pace-off deliveries, wide yorkers and hard lengths — methods better suited at Holkar Stadium than spin.

The challenge lies in whom he replaces. Mohammed Siraj's new-ball role makes him difficult to leave out. The most likely trade-off would be a spinner or a seam-bowling all-rounder, depending on conditions and batting depth.

KL Rahul's role is one area where clarity already exists. His returns at number five underline the value of keeping him in that position rather than pushing him down to six, where his ability to manage tempo and rebuild under pressure is diluted.

New Zealand has oodles of confidence and clarity. Mitchell's dominance, supported by Devon Conway, has reflected the Black Caps' ability to identify match-ups and execute without overreach.

Their bowlers, though lacking headline names, have used variations and hard lengths effectively in conditions offering little natural assistance.

At a venue where bowlers are often reduced to do damage control, the contest is likely to hinge as much on decision-making as it is on skill. For Shubman Gill and his side, the challenge is not just to win a series, but to demonstrate tactical flexibility and situational awareness — traits that define successful teams when margins are thin and pressure is real.

Teams (from):

India: Shubman Gill (c), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, KL Rahul (wk), Dhruv Jurel (wk), Ravindra Jadeja, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Ayush Badoni, Kuldeep Yadav, Arshdeep Singh, Prashidh Krishna, Mohammed Siraj, Harshit Rana.

New Zealand: Michael Bracewell (c), Devon Conway (wk), Mitchell Hay (wk), Nick Kelly, Henry Nicholls, Will Young, Josh Clarkson, Zak Foulkes, Daryl Mitchell, Glenn Phillips, Adithya Ashok, Kristian Clarke, Kyle Jamieson, Jayden Lennox, Michael Rae. (PTI)

Matter of just one wicket: Siraj on Jadeja

AMANPREET SINGH
■ Indore

India pacer Mohammed Siraj on Saturday backed senior all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja to rediscover his rhythm quickly, insisting that it would only take one wicket for the left-arm spinner to return to his best in the series-deciding third ODI against New Zealand, here on Sunday.

Jadeja went wicketless in the first two ODIs against New Zealand (0/44 and 0/56) in the ongoing series and could scalp only one batter in the preceding three-match series against South Africa at home. "I don't think there is any concern about Jadeja's form. It is a matter of just one wicket. Once you get that breakthrough, you will see a different bowler altogether," Siraj said at the pre-match press conference.

Despite recent lean returns, Jadeja's overall ODI record remains valuable —

nearly 2,900 runs at just over 32 and 232 wickets across 209 matches. Siraj underlined that the bowling unit remained confident despite being put under pressure in the second ODI, where missed chances allowed New Zealand to level the three-match series.

"We played very well in both matches. In the first ODI, our bowling and batting were very good. In the second match, even after losing early wickets, KL Rahul batted well and Nitish Reddy also contributed," he said.

Reflecting on Daryl Mitchell's match-winning knock, Siraj felt India had their chances. "There was an opportunity. When the catch dropped, if we had taken that chance, the result could have been different. World-class batters don't give you many opportunities, and when they get one, they make you pay," he said.

Asked why Mitchell has consistently troubled India, Siraj



said the bowlers had clear plans but execution at crucial moments was lacking.

"We tried our best to get him out and had plans, especially for the middle overs. But again, it comes down to taking that one opportunity. If we had taken that wicket, the scenario would have been different," he added.

Siraj also stressed that the team environment remains positive despite the series going into a decider.

"The team environment is very good. There is strong input from the seniors. Wins and losses happen, but the

atmosphere in the dressing room is very healthy, especially as we prepare for bigger tournaments," he said.

On the prospect of Arshdeep Singh sharing the new ball at the small Indore ground, Siraj expressed confidence in the left-armed but said the decision remains with the management.

"Arshdeep has bowled very well and took wickets with the new ball. The captain and coach decide the roles, but as a bowler, if someone is taking wickets at the other end, my job is to

build pressure and not give runs. I have full confidence in him," Siraj said. "Harshit (Rana) has also done well, taken wicket upfront. It's good for him that he is getting an opportunity ahead of the World Cup."

Talking about his exclusion from the T20 World Cup, Siraj said he would have loved to compete in the big tournament but workload management perhaps dictated the call. With Holkar Stadium traditionally producing high-scoring matches, Siraj said he would stick to bowling a stump-to-stump line.

"It is a small ground and usually a high-scoring venue. As a bowler, if you bowl stump-to-stump, you always have options like LBW or bowled. Even if you miss, there is still a wicket chance," he said. India and New Zealand are tied 1-1 in the three-match ODI series, with Sunday's match set to decide the winner. (PTI)

Reminded me of how fragile life is: Martyn on return from coma

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Melbourne

Former Australian batter Damien Martyn on Saturday returned home from hospital after recovering from an "awful" meningitis attack, which he said made him realise "how fragile life is." Martyn was taken ill on December 27, 2025 and had to be put in an induced coma in the intensive care unit, but showed signs of recovery in the first week of January.

But now the ordeal is behind him.

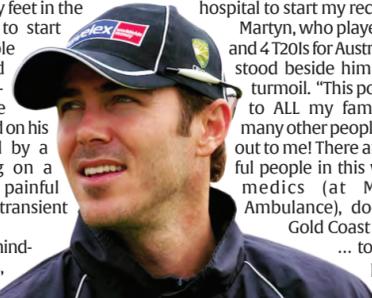
"Bring on 2026... I'm back! So happy to be home, to be able to put my feet in the sand on the beach and to start thanking all those people that reached out to me and my family in their unwavering support," Martyn wrote in an emotional note posted on his X account, accompanied by a picture of him standing on a beach. Martyn said the painful episode taught him the transient nature of life.

"This experience has reminded me of how fragile life is, how quickly everything

can change & how precious time is!"

The 54-year-old former World Cup winner also reminisced about his battle with the disease. "On the 27th of December 2025 my life was taken out of my hands... when meningitis took over my brain, & unbeknownst to me I was placed into a paralysed coma for 8 days to help me fight this awful disease. And that I did! Fight that is!... After being given a 50/50 chance of surviving, I came out of the induced coma 8 days later... not able to walk or talk. "And yet 4 days after that, with the doctors in disbelief, I walked, I talked and proved to them all why I should be released from hospital to start my recovery," he stated.

Martyn, who played 67 Tests, 208 ODIs and 4 T20Is for Australia, thanked all who stood beside him during the days of turmoil. "This post is a BIG thank you to ALL my family, friends and so many other people who have reached out to me! There are so many wonderful people in this world... from paramedics (at Mermaid Waters Ambulance), doctors & nurses (at Gold Coast University Hospital) ... to family, friends and people I didn't even know.



VH Trophy final: Saurashtra, Vidarbha in battle of equals

G UNNIKISHNAN ■ Bengaluru

A fascinating battle of equals is on cards as a closely-matching Saurashtra and Vidarbha vie for their third and maiden Vijay Hazare Trophy title respectively here at the BCCI

masterclass in innings building and nerveless construction of chase.

Ravikumar Samarth too has underlined his value with some useful contributions in the middle-order, aggregating 427 runs.

matches played across CoE 1 and 2 grounds here, and the trend looks set to continue, also reducing the role of spinners, particularly in the second innings.

However, Vidarbha's young skipper and left-arm



Centre of Excellence grounds on Sunday.

Unlike in the past, both Saurashtra and Vidarbha do not have any superstars in their line-up.

But their batters and bowlers have so far performed like a well-oiled machine in this edition of the tournament, helping them humble some more fancied teams en route to the final.

Saurashtra have been served well by the likes of skipper Harvik Desai, their top run-getter with 561 runs, and Vishvaraj Jadeja, who fashioned their semifinal win over Punjab with a blistering hundred.

On the other hand, Vidarbha's batting has been propped up by Aman Mokhad, the tournament's highest run accumulator with 781 runs, and Dhruv Shorey (515 runs).

Mokhad, an opener in the classic mould, has been quite impressive thus far, and his century in the semifinal against Karnataka here was

Nothing really separates these two teams in terms of batting, and bowling too offers a similar tale.

Pacers Ankur Panwar (21) and Chetan Sakariya (15) have kept Saurashtra's new ball attack tight, and they have been effective at the death as well.

Vidarbha have relied on Nachiket Bhut (15) and Yash Thakur (15) in this tournament, and they will hope for an encore from the young pace duo in the final.

Darshan Nalkande (12) too gives Vidarbha a reliable pace option in the middle and death overs. They way he dismantled Karnataka in the business end of the semifinals here was a testimony of skills and temperament.

However, toss will be a crucial factor in the final because of the dew that sets in towards the second innings, and whoever calls right will be eager to bowl first.

The chasing team has won four out of six knockout

spinner Harsh Dubey's ability to keep the batters' under check might come in handy. But beyond such calculations, both Vidarbha, the runners-up last year to Karnataka, and Saurashtra will have to calm their nerves to climb over the final hurdle.

Teams (from):
Vidarbha: Harsh Dubey (c), Yash Thakur (vc), Atharva Taide, Dhruv Shorey, Aman Mokhad, Yash Rathod, Shivam Deshmukh (wk), Akshay Wadkar, Nachiket Bhute, Darshan Nalkande, R Samarth, Parth Rekhade, Dipesh Parwani, Praful Hinge, Shubham Dubey, Ganesh Bhosle.

Saurashtra: Harvik Desai (wk/c), Vishvaraj Jadeja, Prerak Mankad, Sammar Gajjar, Chirag Jani, Ruchit Ahir, Dharmendrasinh Jadeja, Ankur Panwar, Prasanta Rana, Aditya Jadeja, Chetan Sakariya, Hetvik Kotak, Pranav Karia, Yuvraj Chudasama, Parth Bhut, Tarang Gohel, Jay Gohil, Ansh Gosai, Parswaraj Rana, Hiten Kanbi. (PTI)

Not averse to joining politics: Shahid Afridi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Karachi

Pakistan's former captain Shahid Afridi has said he is not averse to joining politics in the future after he moved his residence from his hometown Karachi to capital Islamabad.

Afridi was born in the northern tribal area of Pakistan but since childhood he spent his entire life in Karachi. However, on Saturday, he confirmed he had moved to Islamabad.

Asked if this was because he was now thinking of joining politics, he made it clear that for he would not be joining politics for now.

"I want to see Pakistan prosper and I think that is only possible if a government and other important



institutions are allowed to complete their constitutional terms," he told the Jang Newspaper. "Pakistan and Pakistan cricket has given me everything, fame, wealth and I

would definitely like to do something for my country," he said. In the past Afridi has always negated queries about whether he would join politics.

He would not be the first Pakistani cricketer to join a political party as not only did the great Imran Khan formed his own party but also went on to become the prime minister of Pakistan.

Imran's new ball partner, Sarfaraz Nawaz, also joined Pakistan Peoples party and was minister of sports for a while.

Afridi said he had been offered government positions in the past but he didn't accept them because he didn't want to just hold a portfolio but wanted to leave an impact on the country's scenario.

PSL AUCTION: PCB THINKING OF INTRODUCING NEW CONCEPT

Lahore: The Pakistan Cricket Board is thinking of introducing a new concept called 'drauction' in the Pakistan Super League amid a clear divide among the eight franchises over the introduction of a player auction instead of the prevailing draft system.

The Governing Council of the PSL which met in Lahore on Friday with the owners of all franchises agreed to experimenting with the 'drauction' concept of getting local and foreign players.

The PCB has not elaborated on what 'drauction' is but an insider said it is likely to maintain a draft categorised system for local players and an auction for overseas

players in the PSL.

Some franchises have argued in favour of an auction system pointing out that with the PSL now being held in the same window as the Indian Premier League, a lot of the unsold players in the IPL auction would only be available for PSL, if they fetched competitive prices in an auction. Some of the franchises have raised concerns that a players auction would test their finances as their allocated USD 1.3 million purse for the players draft would have to be increased for an auction system. The council meeting confirmed that the PSL's 11th edition would start from March 26.

Venus set for a record at Australian Open

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Melbourne

At 45, it's no surprise Venus Williams will be setting an age record at the Australian Open when she lines up Sunday in the first round.

The fact she'll be the oldest player ever to

received a wild-card entry to play at the year's first major for the first time in five years.

"I hadn't thought about it until it came out in the press," she said Saturday in closing her pre-tournament news conference. "So yay. Yay for me! Let's do this."

She then left the auditorium and walked hand-in-hand with her husband, Andrea Preti, down a corridor back toward the player area — which isn't much like she remembered it from her previous trip in 2021, the 21st time she'd competed at Melbourne Park. Williams was married in December, a celebration she said was her priority between the first two major tournaments in a comeback to the tour that started last July.

SAI launches mega recruitment drive

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

In a bid to strengthen athlete support, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) has initiated nationwide recruitment of assistant coaches across 26 disciplines for its Centres of Excellence (COE) and other training facilities with shooting, athletics, swimming and wrestling set to be among the biggest beneficiaries.

SAI has invited applications for 323 vacancies for assistant coaches, 33 per cent of them reserved for women, to be posted at its various Regional Centres, National Centres of Excellence and Training Centres spread all over India. "The recruitment methodology is structured into a two-stage process: a Computer based online written test, called Computer Based Test (CBT) and a Coaching Ability Test (CAT)," the body stated in its latest notification.



"The final composite weightage in the recruitment methodology shall be 60 per cent for the Coaching Ability Test and 40 per cent for the Computer based online written test," it added.

"The candidates appearing in the written examination shall be shortlisted for the Coaching Ability Test (CAT) in the ratio of 1:3 i.e. The number of candidates to be shortlisted for the coaching ability test will be three times the number of vacancies in each sport and in each category," Athletics and shooting have

28 vacancies each, while in swimming 26 slots will be filled. Twenty two coaches will be on-boarded for wrestling. In boxing, 19 assistant coaches would be hired and all major disciplines, including weightlifting, archery badminton, and table tennis would be covered during the recruitment drive.

The online tests will be held in Delhi, Lucknow, Chandigarh, Bhopal, Gandhinagar, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bhubaneswar, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Thiruvananthapuram, Guwahati and Imphal.

"The number of centres can be reduced or increased, depending upon the number of candidates," SAI stated.

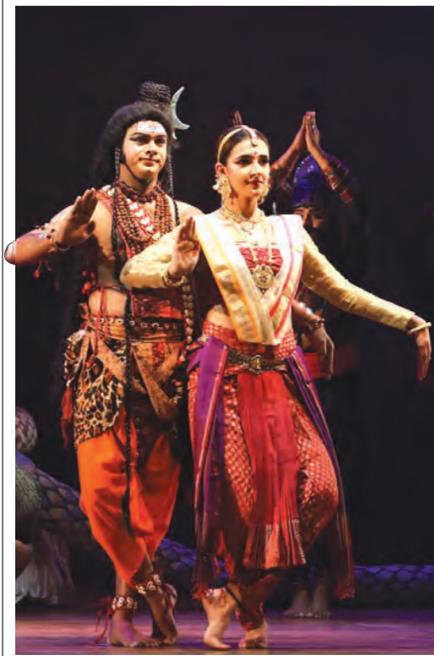
Open to aspirants who are at least 30 years of age, the minimum qualification for applying is a diploma or equivalent in coaching from SAI-NIS, Patiala or from any other recognised Indian / foreign university.



Threads OF THE GOLDEN AGE



Dance of the decades



TEAM VIVA

When ancient roots meet the daring reach of a new vision, art stops being a relic and begins to function as a conscience. The first phase of the five-day Festival of *New Choreographies - KalaYatra 2026* concluded on a high note, leaving the capital's audience in a state of quiet, reflective wonder. The Festival is a unique presentation of ten new choreographies that reflect India's civilisational soul through history, philosophy, and lived memory. Drawing from the scholarly vision of Sonal Mansingh, the Kamani Auditorium became a home for Bharat's civilisational soul, expressed through daring and modern movements.

The journey began with *Amrut-Manthan*, a magnum opus by Sonal Mansingh and the CICD repertory that made ancient myth feel as real as the people sitting in the stalls. This energy deepened with *Athijeevanam*, where Guru TB Jagadeesan used the traditional weight of Kathakali to voice a modern cry for nature. The stage remained a kaleidoscope of regional genius, moving from the divine grace of Deepti Omchery Bhalla's *Naadaswarupaam Devim Maami* to the thunderous, earthy vigour of Yakshagana in Girija Kalyana, directed by Guru Keremane Shivananda Hegde. By the third evening, the tragic, fated struggle of Guru Vaibhav Arekar's *Karna - Bound by fate* and the lyrical Sattriya beauty of Sita Bibaha Bihar by Guru Bhabananda Barbayan proved that these forms remain our most potent language for the human condition.

Mansingh is hitting on a raw truth. Heritage only survives if we have the nerve to let it mutate because it cannot stay frozen under glass. With the second phase opening, the question shifts from the art to our own survival. As we migrate our entire lives into the cloud, are we actually prepared to scrap the ancestral vocabulary that anchors us? Or are we just letting it go by default?

January 28 features *Duryodhana* and *Chakravayuha*, dragging the classical 'anti-hero' into psychological drama. The January 29 finale pairs *Saugandhikaharam* with the LGBTQ+ Rainbow Dance Troupe's Matrika. By staging queer narratives with ancient Sanskrit drama, Mansingh proves inclusivity is an old tradition, not a new trend.

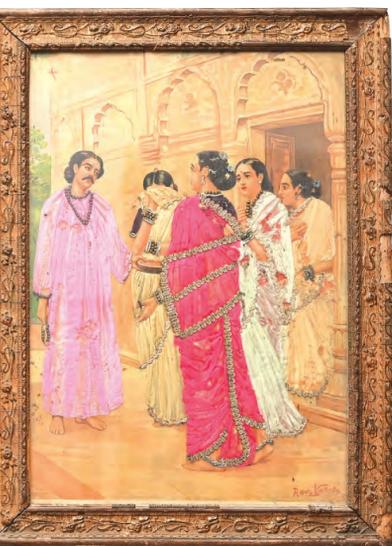
AS SONAL MANSINGH, SAID, "EVERY NEW CHOREOGRAPHY CARRIES THE WEIGHT OF TRADITION AND THE COURAGE OF RENEWAL."

Centuries of Dutch shadows meet Indian souls in a palace where light tells our shared story, says SAKSHI PRIYA

The winter light in Delhi feels heavy. It's January, so the sun struggles a bit against the haze, casting a gold glow that makes even the concrete look gentle. It's perfect lighting for art. Inside the Travancore Palace this week, that atmospheric vibe was on full display.

Engendered, in association with the Embassy of the Netherlands, presents *Inheritances of Light, Geographies of Loss* functions as a restless and nearly uncomfortable site of convergence. Most visitors walk into the palace expecting the sterile, predictable reverence of a standard art show. Instead, curator Myna Mukherjee has staged a collision. She has effectively placed the ghosts of several centuries to occupy the same air. The stakes center on the involvement of the Mauritshuis and the Drents Museum. These institutions serve as the literal gatekeepers of the Dutch Golden Age—the primary custodians of Rembrandt and Vermeer. They are here to witness a mutation: the quiet, 17th-century Dutch aesthetic being inhaled and exhaled by a contemporary Indian consciousness.

A bizarre but necessary friction exists in seeing these spirits filtered through a modern lens. The 'Golden Age' leans into a mirror and finds an Indian face staring back. It is a reckoning with legacy. This exhibition proves that history refuses to sit in a museum. It moves. It bleeds. It changes. This path of light eventually found its way into the 19th-century workspace of Raja Ravi Varma. He was the pioneer who really grasped European realism, borrowing that sharp play of light and shadow from the Dutch masters to bring a new kind of life to the faces of Indian gods. Varma knew that to make a deity feel real to the human eye, the shadows had to be just right. Through those borrowed techniques, he gave India a new way to see its own stories. In his hands, ancient myths felt as real as the touch of silk



LEGACY IN FLUX: HOW OLD SPIRITS SHAPE NEW WORLDS

A heavy-hitting panel brings together European museum directors and cultural leaders to ask: how do we carry old spirits into a new century? From Rembrandt's hidden Mughal influences to the future of shared legacies, these curators and thinkers explore how our pasts mirror one another in a modern, restless world.

on skin. That historical conversation crashes into the present through the craft of JJ Valaya. We often encounter Valaya amidst the flashbulbs and runway frenzy, but here, his work requires a quieter, more intense focus. It is art in fabric. The heavy velvets and oxidized metals seem to swallow the gallery lights. They sit with the monumental weight of sculpture.

There is an old, unwritten rule in high fashion: you can always tell when a designer truly loves women. He builds a temple around the body. Valaya's installation is purely architectural. His 'Alika' jacket and signature Chevron patterns serve as archives of a nomadic royalty, stitched with the memory of empires that stretched from the Khyber Pass to the canals of Europe. He frames the female form in dignity, wrapping it in history rather than exposing it to a casual gaze. As Valaya says, "Light has always been a carrier of memory revealing not just form, but history, emotion, and cultural exchange. Couture becomes a lens through which craftsmanship and inheritance are examined."

Around these textile monuments, the contemporary art bites back. The exhibition refuses to be purely decorative. Rabiul Khan's installation, a tent pierced with bullet holes, forces light to behave like an intruder. It cuts through the canvas in sharp, painful beams that stop a viewer cold. Just a few steps away, Supriyo Manna works with reeds that are quietly disappearing from our landscape. His weaving is a desperate, delicate attempt to save something before it is gone forever. The work is so thin and honest that it feels like it might shatter if you even breathe on it. This exhibition shows that the

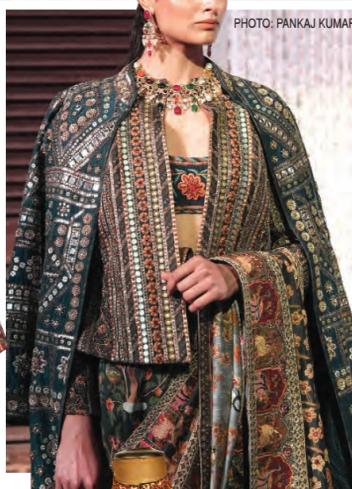
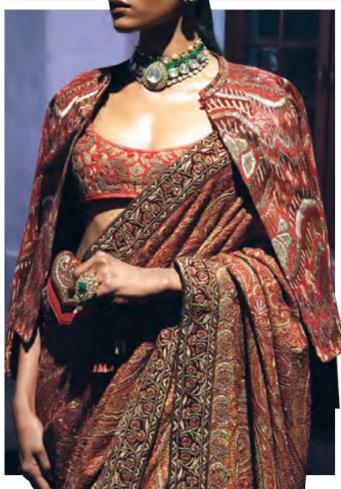


PHOTO: PANKAJ KUMAR

exchange is ongoing. Myna Mukherjee observes that this illumination is a form of "ethical attention, shaped by material exchange, shared histories, and the quiet ways cultures learn to see one another." Ambassador for International Cultural Cooperation, Netherlands Dewi van de Weerd notes that this artistic exchange is "continually reinterpreted through contemporary practice, collaboration, and shared responsibility."

Inheritances of Light understands that geography is just a line on a map. Light is the only inheritance that travels everywhere. It touches the gold on a Valaya jacket and the oil on a Dutch canvas with the same indifferent, beautiful grace.



LIGHT IS THE ONLY INHERITANCE THAT TRAVELS AND HEALS EVERYWHERE.



Satish Gujral: A 100 years of fire

SAKSHI PRIYA

As Satish Gujral once said, "Art is a language I used when words failed me." Standing inside the National Gallery of Modern Art, *Satish Gujral 100: A Centenary Exhibition* feels like a homecoming for a man who spent his life translating silence into structure. This landmark retrospective, open until 30 March 2026, is curated by Kishore Singh. It brings together the public reach of the NGMA and the private archives of the Gujral Foundation to honour a century of creative rebellion.



The exhibition charts the grit of 1952, when Gujral travelled alone to Mexico. He navigated the isolation of hearing loss and a world of unfamiliar tongues with almost no

physical construction. His transition into architecture was an expansion of his soul. The archival sketches for the Belgian Embassy show he viewed a brick wall with the same emotional depth as a human face. This show reveals a multidisciplinary giant who used his hands to build what his ears could not hear, leaving a legacy that remains a cornerstone of Indian heritage until the exhibition concludes on March 30.

PHOTO: PANKAJ KUMAR



The Alag Aasmaan of Indian Indie: Anuv Jain's global flight

SAKSHI PRIYA

"Mere husn ke ilaawa kabhi dil bhi maang lo na (Ask for my heart, not just my beauty)," That line lands like a bruise. It is the reason thousands of people find themselves submerged in the world Anuv Jain has built. As an Indian singer-songwriter, he takes a plain and almost unremarkable sentence and turns it into a scar. He ignores the over-produced sludge on the radio and skips the studio gimmicks. Instead, he pulls you into a quiet space where it is just a guitar and a truth that feels almost too intrusive.

Coming out of Ludhiana, he has buried the old industry rules. You do not need a corporate machine when the stories are this raw. He is a poet who realises that love in 2026 is unfinished and confusing. Speaking with *The Pioneer*, he opened up about the tour, the fame, and the emotions behind the music with the same unfiltered honesty that defines his songs.

The Delhi leg of the world tour, which recently took place at the JLN Stadium, set the tone for what lies ahead. Recalling his bond with the city, he says, "The loudest and emotional crowd is exactly what I am looking for. I love Delhi. It feels like home whenever I am performing there. The people feel like family."

Talking about the final chapter of his trilogy, he explains, "Dastakhat is the final part of a trilogy. Not that I am going to stop doing shows, but it just felt like this one

chapter is just getting complete. *Dastake* is a knock, *Gul Dasta* is the gift, and *Dastakhat* is that final signature before leaving. It completes the entire circle." The explosion of *Husn* changed everything. He admits, "I literally went into my team meeting and told each and every one of them that this song is going to change our lives." What followed surprised even him. "What actually happened was just way beyond what any of us expected."

On taking Indian indie global, he sounds grateful rather than triumphant. "Independent music is finally getting its due. There are so many non-film artists performing in stadiums and so many people turning up for them. I am just happy to be part of this wave." Despite the fame, he still calls himself shy. "I do not even call them my fans, man. They are my family. When I am performing for them it feels like home." Criticism affects him, but not enough to harden him. "I am somebody who does everything with all his heart. I am always willing to learn and completely okay with criticism."

For Anuv, the music is a map of his own life. "All of these songs are these memories that I keep going back to. Whenever I listen to them, it just transports me back to that moment and that time when I was writing."

There is no jury more important than the audience. If people see their own heartbreaks tucked into his verses, the opinions of experts carry no weight. He lets the fame sit in the background while the songs take the lead. In a world constantly shouting for a second of your time, Anuv Jain remains the quiet voice that actually makes you stop.



DASTAKHAT WORLD TOUR

Dastakhat marks a massive shift for Anuv Jain, moving from intimate bedroom sessions to a full-scale global stage. This world tour is the final chapter of a trilogy that began years ago, acting as a formal signature on his journey so far. Starting this January, the India leg will travel through Ahmedabad, Pune, Chandigarh, and Kolkata, before hitting major hubs like Mumbai and Bengaluru in February.

But it does not stop at the border. The tour is set to expand into a two-year international trek covering 23 cities across Australia, North America, and Europe. For an independent artist from Ludhiana, this is a defining moment. It proves that raw, honest storytelling can travel just as far as any big-budget production. As he moves from city to city, Anuv Jain surpasses the simple act of vocal performance; he exports a fragment of home to a global stage.

FOR SUGGESTIONS, FEEDBACK OR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, PLEASE WRITE TO US AT FEATURES@DAILYPIONEER.COM

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Printed and published by Kushan Mitra for and on behalf of CMYK Printech Ltd., Regd Office:- 201-205, 208-210, 2nd Floor, Pratap Bhawan 5, B.S.Z. Marg, New Delhi-110002 Phone: 011-46035729, and printed at The Indian Express Ltd., A-8, Sector 7, Dist. Gautam Budh Nagar (U.P.) Noida-201 301, Ph: 01202470700. Executive Editor Deepak Kumar Jha. AIR SURCHARGE of ₹ 2.00 East: Calcutta, North: Leh West: Mumbai & Ahmedabad South: Bangalore & Chennai. Central: Khajuraho. Lucknow Office: 4th Floor, Sahara Shopping Centre, Faizabad Road, Lucknow-226 016. Phone:- 9415089265



Iran implodes!

A Nation Under Strain

Iran is facing a deep existential crisis – economic hardship, intense domestic unrest, and escalating confrontation with Israel and the United States.

Its domestic problems are no longer confined within its borders; they are affecting the entire region. As the US President throws his weight around, Iran faces a major challenge – to defend and safeguard its borders. The bigger question is this: has Iran's leadership failed its own people, or have years of sanctions, isolation, and external pressure pushed the country into a perilous corner?

Ensuing crisis in Iran: A threat to peace and regional stability

Iran has witnessed large-scale protests to change the regime for the past two decades. The 2009 Green Movement followed a heated presidential election and was characterised by massive protests throughout the country with a focus on achieving political reform through greater transparency. In 2019, large-scale protests began erupting throughout the country following the sharp rise in fuel prices. Quickly, these protests turned into a much wider and deeper expression of socio-political and economic discontent that was shared by many people. The Women, Life, Freedom movement began in 2022 after the killing of Mahsa Amini in the custody of government officials and called for an end to compulsory hijab laws, as well as restrictions on women's rights and state authority. Each protest movement spread rapidly across several social groups and met with large-scale government responses, marking key moments in the evolution of contemporary Iranian society.



ANISUR RAHMAN

ATIKUR RAHMAN

culties and international pressure. This can, however, never be denied that the major causes of the unrest in Iran are internal mismanagement and external interference, especially from the United States and Israel, which are both considered long-time adversaries of Iran. In response to the protests and actions used against protesters by the Iranian government, the US took an active and public stance. The US President Donald Trump and other American government officials publicly supported the Iranian protesters, which Tehran considers proof of outside influence. Although US officials deny that the US Government is responsible for causing the unrest, these statements fit into a larger US agenda: to apply economic and diplomatic pressure on Iran, to limit its influence in West Asia, and to protect energy routes like the Strait of Hormuz, as well as to restrict Iran's development of nuclear weapons and missile technology.

It seems that the US intends to weaken the Iranian regime, though it presents itself as the defender of human rights in the region. It is evident that US sanctions against Iran and its financial networks have also created additional inflation, increased unemployment, and devalued the currency, which are all immediate and direct causes of public discontent and therefore have contributed to a higher level of public unrest in Iran. The Israeli government's approach to Iran is more specific and less broadly based than that of the US, but it is equally impactful on the Iranian regime's economic well-being. Both the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and NATO's interven-

tion in Libya in 2011 were justified by each country's desire to protect human rights, eliminate authoritarian leadership, and promote democracy.

The results of the US intervention included the removal of Saddam Hussein; however, following this removal of a dictator, Iraq has been plagued with ongoing instability, sectarian violence, weakened government institutions, and contested control over oil resources. Further, although Iraq now has a democratically elected government, it remains fragile. Similarly, although the removal of Muammar Gaddafi was the result of NATO's military intervention, Libya has suffered from the lack of a stable democratic government. In Libya, NATO's actions have led to the emergence of multiple governments competing for power, as well as the rise of numerous militias and foreign governments seeking to influence the direction of Libya's future. As a result of both invasions and the underlying strategic interests related to the intervention in Iraq and Libya, today's Iranian government views this history of intervention as further evidence that whenever a foreign power calls for intervention or regime change, it has led to crisis in society. In this manner, Iranians see the current crisis as deepened due to their lack of trust in foreign powers.

Energy Markets and Response of the Gulf States

By implementing severe sanctions against Iran, deploying significant military assets to the region, and launching airstrikes against Iranian-affiliated targets throughout West Asia, the US has substantially complicated the operation of global energy markets. A large portion of the world's oil and gas reserves is held by Iran; sanctions have reduced the amount of Iranian oil on the market and therefore have created considerable price volatility, particularly in times of increased military tension in the Strait of Hormuz. Approximately one-fifth of the total global oil trade passes through the Strait of Hormuz. Prior to sanctions, major importers of Iranian crude oil

included China, India, Japan, South Korea, and Turkey. While China continues to purchase oil from Iran, other countries have had to search for more expensive ways to obtain crude oil. The unfolding crisis has also drawn the attention of Arabian Peninsula states (GCC) on account of their security interests, economic stability, and diplomacy. It is noted that Gulf Arab states have not openly supported the Iranian protests; rather, they share a degree of interest in minimising the potential for a regional conflict that might destabilise energy markets and threaten the security of the region.

Moreover, it is seen that Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, and Egypt have engaged in extensive diplomatic efforts to urge both the United States and Iran not to resort to military action. During this period, Gulf Cooperation Council states warned the United States that a military strike against Iran would most likely result in retaliatory attacks on US interests from other regional countries, would create a direct threat to oil infrastructure in the GCC, and therefore the world, and would create a major disruption to global energy supply chains. Subsequently, the United States chose to delay carrying out any military action against Iran due to indications that the level of violence in Iran was decreasing.

Way Forward

Looking into the future, there are many uncertainties and challenges regarding the Iranian ruling system, which has continued to face public protests on account of declining economic conditions and increasing pressure from external powers. The Iranian Government must address pressing socioeconomic challenges such as inflation, unemployment, falling currency, gender inequality, and restrictions on freedom to meet the aspirations of the Iranian people.

Furthermore, the Iranian regime must come out with a pragmatic approach to deal with continued sanctions that have isolated Iran and have continued eroding the quality of life and living standards due to rising inflation, high unemployment rates, and a weak currency. These protests must be taken seriously so that people restore their lost faith in the governance system. Several programmes and policies must be initiated for meeting people's economic needs and aspirations. It is also the responsibility of the world's major powers, which share a collective obligation to work toward avoiding escalation to military confrontation, to support the tenets of international law, and to seek diplomatic resolution to these issues involving Iran, which directly threaten peace, energy security, and economic stability in the region.

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Recent Protest and Counter-Protest

Iran has been experiencing protests and unrest since the last week of December 2025. Merchant storekeepers within the Grand Bazaar in Tehran put their businesses on hold due to the worsening condition of the Iranian economy, expressing frustration regarding high inflation, falling currency value, and the rising cost of living. The protests soon expanded beyond just an economic issue to become a national event with demonstrations in several cities across the country, such as Tehran, Mashhad, and Karaj. Over time, protesters began calling for more than just financial relief; they were also demanding political accountability as well as systemic change in the government. There were reports from various activist organisations that during the uprisings, large numbers of protesters had been killed as the government responded with considerable force, including the use of live ammunition.

On the other hand, hundreds of thousands of Iranians came together in many cities to show their support for Iran's government. The demonstrations were intended to promote national unity, national stability, and resistance against foreign interference. The people placed their national flag over themselves and held up portraits of the leaders of the Islamic Republic. The demonstrators chanted for Iran's national sovereignty and independence. Demonstrators cited the government as providing security to its citizens against the economic conditions facing the country due to regional tensions and foreign intervention, but argued that improving conditions should come through legal and constitutional methods rather than through protest. These dual forms of mobilisation illustrate the increasingly divided social and political atmosphere in Iran due to growing economic diffi-

Domestic problems

A Domestic Upheaval and Government Crackdown: Iran's people are on the streets. The country is facing protests triggered by economic hardship, water shortages, corruption and mismanagement. Reportedly 5,000 have been killed in the crackdown - the deadliest unrest since the 1979 revolution - and widespread internet shutdowns are adding to the hardships of the people.

Severe Economic Woes: Years of harsh international sanctions have crippled the economy making even basic amenities beyond the reach of the common man. Inflation has soared, the currency has collapsed, and key industries are struggling. External pressures have exacerbated structural failures within Iran's economy and governance.

Social Breakdown: Iran is also reeling under worst droughts in decades, driving water shortages which is causing internal migration and contributing to anger over perceived government incompetence in resource management.

External crisis

Iran is deeply embroiled in regional conflict, especially with Israel and by extension, the United States:

- A major escalation occurred in 2025, when Israel launched strikes against Iranian nuclear and military facilities; the US struck Iranian nuclear sites causing heavy damage but the nuclear sites survived.
- Iran has prepared itself for the US attack. Its Revolutionary Guards are on increased missile readiness, and its leadership has issued stern warnings against foreign interference in domestic affairs.

These confrontations have drawn in regional actors like Yemen's Houthis and global powers through alliances and strategic interests making the whole region volatile.

What went wrong...

The crisis stems from a complex blend of internal and external pressures:

Economic and Political Mismanagement: Chronic government mismanagement - from corruption and financial instability to failing public services - has deepened public frustration. Even before the current round of protests, economic grievances had been simmering for years.

Impact of Sanctions and Isolation: International sanctions, especially those resumed after the US withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal, have isolated Iran diplomatically and economically. Restricted oil exports and limited access to global financial systems have constrained growth and worsened living standards.

Iran at cross purpose with the US

Iran has refused to bow to the US pressure and has maintained its stance against the Israel, helping the Palestinian militant group Hamas and other proxy groups across the Middle East. Its pursuit of uranium enrichment - which many Western powers view as a step toward nuclear weapons capability - has further heightened tensions. Its government has constantly withstood the western pressure to give up its nuclear programme which it says is for peaceful purposes. Iran is indeed paying the price for standing against the US and the West.

Iran – A history of revolution, resilience, and the struggle for change

Iran's contemporary history is marred by periods of unrest and crisis as well as continuous growth and strides in nation-building. It overthrew the US-backed monarchy in 1979 to establish a revolutionary Islamic Republic. Thereafter, it maintained an anti-West stance, braving sanctions and isolation on the world arena to date. The overthrow of the Shah in 1979 was indeed a turning point in the political history of Iran. Here is a brief contemporary history of Iran.

1970s - Growing Discontent and Revolution

- Shah's rule and modernisation: In the early 1970s Iran under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi pursued rapid modernisation and economic growth reliant on oil revenues, but also suffered rising inflation, inequality, and political repression.
- Widespread opposition: By the late 1970s, protests against the Shah's authoritarian rule, corruption, and Western influence intensified.

- Islamic Revolution (1978-79): Mass demonstrations, strikes, and civil resistance culminated in the Shah's departure in January 1979 and the fall of the monarchy. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini returned from exile.

Early 1980s - The Islamic Republic is born

- New theocracy formed: The revolutionary government consolidated power, adopting a theocratic constitution with the Supreme Leader as the highest authority.
- Political repression: Rival political groups - leftists, liberals, and others - were purged, and thousands were executed in state-sponsored campaigns to eliminate opposition.
- Hostage crisis: In November 1979, Iranian students seized the US embassy in Tehran, holding diplomats hostage for 444 days, which severely damaged Iran-US relations.

1980s - Iran-Iraq War

War with Iraq (1980-1988): Iraq President Saddam Hussein

invaded Iran soon after the revolution, leading to a devastating eight-year conflict with massive casualties and economic strain.

1990s - Recovery and Reform Movements

Reconstruction and politics: After the war, Iran focused on reconstruction. President Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) pushed for political reforms, civil society, and a 'Dialogue Among Civilisations.'

2000s - Conservatism and Nuclear Tensions

- Political polarisation: Hardliners regained influence under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), intensifying confrontations with the West over Iran's nuclear program.
- Green Movement (2009): Large protests erupted after contested presidential elections, demanding democratic reforms.

2010s - Sanctions, and Renewed Unrest

- Economic pressures: Harsh US sanctions linked to Iran's nuclear activities deeply affected the economy.
- Social protests: Between 2017 and 2019, Iran saw widespread protests over economic hardship.

2020s - Current State

- Mahsa Amini protests (2022-23): The death in custody of a young woman branded for 'improper hijab' ignited nationwide protests demanding freedom.
- 2024 Presidential Election: Independent reformist Masoud Pezeshkian won the June-July 2024 election following the death of Ebrahim Raisi.
- 2025-26 unrest and crackdown: Since late 2025, large protests driven by economic decline, currency collapse, and wider discontent against the regime have erupted across the country. The government's brutal suppression has caused thousands of deaths and mass arrests.

"THE PURPOSE OF THE UNITED NATIONS SHOULD BE TO PROTECT THE ESSENTIAL SOVEREIGNTY OF NATIONS, LARGE AND SMALL."
— NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV

India under siege: The strategic challenges

Managing simultaneous threats from the neighbours

India today finds itself encircled by a volatile neighbourhood dominated by unelected or unstable regimes, many of which have historically posed challenges to its security and sovereignty. From persistent cross-border terrorism originating in Pakistan to the systematic marginalisation of minorities, especially Hindus, in Pakistan and Bangladesh, India's external environment remains fraught with risk. Recent unrest along the Myanmar border, intensified by that country's internal conflict, has further destabilised India's northeastern frontier. Together, these developments underline a critical reality: safeguarding India's security perimeter has been a continuous and evolving priority since independence, shaped by hostile borders, regional instability, and enduring threats to national integrity.

In a village near the Line of Control (LoC), daily routines have quietly adapted once again. Evening movement is cautious, conversations turn hushed at unfamiliar sounds, and drone sightings are discussed with the resignation of experience. Far to the east, exporters in West Bengal describe growing unpredictability in cross-border trade with Bangladesh, where political unrest and administrative disruptions now translate quickly into delayed shipments and cancelled orders. In the Northeast, border districts remain on alert as instability across the Indo-Myanmar frontier continues to affect security conditions. These local experiences reflect a broader regional pattern.

Across South Asia and India's eastern periphery, political instability, economic stress, and armed conflict have intensified simultaneously. Pakistan is grappling with a renewed surge in militant violence, Bangladesh is navigating a difficult political transition, Sri Lanka remains economically fragile despite restructuring efforts, and Myanmar's civil war continues without a clear end. For India, these developments converge at the border-through security risks, economic spillovers, and strategic pressure-reshaping the country's neighbourhood environment as 2026 begins.

A neighbourhood under strain

Pakistan has seen a marked deterioration in internal security. Militant attacks have risen sharply, driven by groups operating from its western regions, including factions linked to the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and transnational extremist networks. Balochistan remains volatile, with separatist groups repeatedly targeting security forces and infrastructure projects, including assets associated with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. This pattern reinforces long-standing concerns in New Delhi that Pakistan's internal instability continues to generate indirect pressure along India's western frontier.

Bangladesh is undergoing political flux following leadership changes and sustained public mobilisation. While state institutions continue to function, the transition has coincided with episodes of unrest and a more visible role for Islamist political actors. These developments have had tangible consequences for India. Bangladesh is India's largest trading partner in South Asia, and disruptions at land ports and transport corridors have affected exporters and logistics networks in West Bengal and the Northeast, highlighting the economic sensitivity of the eastern border.

Myanmar remains locked in a prolonged civil war involving the military junta and multiple resistance groups. Large areas of the country remain contested, and cross-border security challenges persist along India's northeastern frontier. The conflict has complicated border management and heightened concerns over arms trafficking and organised crime networks operating in poorly governed spaces.

Sri Lanka has stabilised from the depths of its 2022 crisis but remains economically vulnerable. Debt restructuring agreements and multilateral support have improved liquidity conditions, yet growth remains modest and public finances constrained. Climate-related shocks—cyclones and flooding—continue to impose repeated fiscal and infrastructure costs. Sri Lanka's depen-



ASHOKE RAJ

dence on external assistance has also sharpened strategic competition among its partners, with economic vulnerability translating into diplomatic leverage.

Converging risks for India

The impact of instability across India's neighbourhood is cumulative rather than compartmentalised.

Security risks have expanded geographically. On the western front, Pakistan's internal turmoil has coincided with increased militant activity, reinforcing the persistence of proxy threats. In the east, the continuation of conflict in Myanmar complicates border control and internal security in sensitive northeastern states. The strategic importance of the Siliguri Corridor-India's narrow link to the Northeast—has grown as instability affects both Bangladesh and Myanmar simultaneously.

Economic exposure has become a frontline concern. India's annual trade with Bangladesh exceeds \$11 billion, with land routes playing a critical role. Political unrest, administrative delays, or informal restrictions across the border have immediate consequences for Indian exporters, particularly in sectors such as textiles, agriculture, and small-scale manufacturing. Unlike maritime disruptions, land-border interruptions disproportionately affect smaller firms and regional supply chains.

Strategic competition overlays these challenges. Economic stress in neighbouring states increases reliance on external financing, infrastructure development, and emergency assistance. In the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal, ports, logistics hubs, and connectivity projects increasingly carry strategic significance alongside commercial value. As a result, neighbourhood instability often intersects with broader geopolitical rivalry rather than remaining a purely local issue.

India's response

India's engagement across its neighbourhood reflects differentiated conditions rather than a single policy template.

In Sri Lanka, India has played a visible role in crisis response and recovery, extending emergency assistance after climate disasters and participating in stabilisation efforts during the debt crisis. These measures have helped sustain bilateral ties during a period of economic fragility and reinforced India's role as a key regional partner.

With Bangladesh, India has maintained diplomatic engagement and trade continuity despite political uncertainty. Security cooperation and institutional dialogue have continued, even as businesses report heightened volatility linked to domestic developments across the border.

Along the Myanmar frontier, India has prioritised border security coordination and humanitarian support in cooperation with state governments. While these measures address immediate pressures, the protracted nature of the conflict means that security challenges remain persistent rather than episodic.

Regarding Pakistan, India has sustained a posture of deterrence and preparedness.

Infrastructure upgrades, surveillance enhancements, and intelligence coordination along sensitive sectors reflect assessments that instability within Pakistan continues to pose indirect risks to India's security environment.

At the regional level, platforms such as BIMSTEC and Indian Ocean cooperation mechanisms provide frameworks for engagement, though their capacity to respond quickly to overlapping crises remains uneven.

Patterns shaping India's neighbourhood

Several patterns emerge from developments across India's neighbourhood.

First, instability is increasingly multi-directional. Challenges arise simultaneously from the west and the east, reducing India's ability to sequence or compartmentalise responses.

Second, economic and security dynamics are tightly linked. Trade disruption, internal unrest in neighbouring states, and security risks often stem from the same underlying political and economic shocks.

Third, state capacity in neighbouring countries matters as much as intent. Even where bilateral relations remain formally cooperative, weak institutions and domestic volatility generate spillover effects that India must manage regardless of diplomatic goodwill.

What the past year underlines is that India's neighbourhood challenge is less about episodic crises and more about structural instability across adjoining states. Pakistan's internal security trajectory, Bangladesh's political flux, Sri Lanka's fragile economic recovery, and Myanmar's unresolved conflict are driven primarily by domestic factors beyond India's direct control. These stresses interact with India's geography, trade routes, and security calculus whether New Delhi intervenes or not. The result is a regional environment where disruption has become frequent rather than exceptional.

A limited but unavoidable inference follows. India's strategic posture in 2026 is shaped not by its ability to resolve neighbours' internal problems, but by how effectively it absorbs and buffers their spillover effects. The neighbourhood is no longer a zone of influence in the traditional sense; it is increasingly a zone of exposure. Managing that exposure—across security preparedness, economic resilience, and diplomatic bandwidth—has become a defining feature of India's external environment as the decade unfolds.

As India navigates an increasingly unstable neighbourhood and persistent threats to its sovereignty, the imperative of vigilance and resilience remains unchanged. History reminds us that national security is not merely a matter of borders and military strength, but of collective resolve and the courage to act in defence of the motherland. As Tipu Sultan once declared, "It is better to live one day as a lion than a hundred years as a jackal." In today's strategic environment, that sentiment continues to resonate as a call for firmness, unity, and an unwavering commitment to protecting India's national interests.

(The author, an Associate Editor with *The Pioneer*, has over a decade of experience covering foreign policy and conflict)

India's triple border crisis

India confronts an unprecedented convergence of security threats across its 15,200 km land frontiers and 11,098-kilometre coastline, amplified by emerging technological challenges. With instability erupting simultaneously in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, combined with maritime vulnerabilities and AI-enabled hybrid threats, India faces its most complex perimeter security challenge.

Pakistan has always been involved in posing multifaceted threats. Pakistan ranked twelfth on the 2024 ACLED Conflict Index with disputed elections, economic freefall reaching 35.4 per cent inflation, and its 25th IMF bailout. Militant violence more than doubled with 856 attacks in 2024. The April 2025 Pahalgam attack killing 28 triggered Operation Sindoor, India's most significant military strikes since 1971.

Pakistan weaponises narco-terrorism as hybrid warfare. Drone-related drug smuggling cases spiked to 179 in 2024 from just 3 in 2021, with over 800 kg heroin and 1,200 kg opium seized. ISI-backed drug cartels fund terrorism while abducting Indian youth, particularly in Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir, where one addict walks into Srinagar OPD every 12 minutes.

The Sir Creek dispute adds another flashpoint. Pakistan's military build-up in this 96-kilometre tidal estuary prompted Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's October 2025 warning. The disputed waters facilitate terrorist infiltration—the 2008 Mumbai attackers captured an Indian boat here—while control determines access to oil and gas reserves worth billions. Bangladesh's terror revival is extremely worrisome for India. The August 2024 upheaval ousting Sheikh Hasina has unleashed chaos. Murders average 11 daily in 2025—a 25.9 per cent increase—while mob lynchings surged 1,250 per cent. Indian security forces detected 1,104 infiltration attempts in 2025, the highest in nearly ten years.

Most alarming is the revival of Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, dormant for eight years. With ISI support, JMB recruits from illegal immigrant camps and Rohingya settlements, instructing infiltrators to work in Muslim-dominated areas while planning attacks. The JMB-Al Qaeda nexus now targets India's northeast and West Bengal. Bangladesh's growing rapprochement with Pakistan—with direct trade resuming for the first time since 1971—enables cooperation between anti-India terror outfits, creating a dangerous arc of instability.

In Myanmar, the military junta controls only 21 per cent of territory while rebels hold 42 per cent, with over 3.5 million displaced and 6,486 civilians killed by April 2025. The conflict directly fuels Manipur's ethnic violence. An estimated 40,000 Rohingya reside in India in sensitive areas like Jammu, West Bengal, and Delhi. Indian intelligence has documented links between Rohingya and terrorist organisations, including a 2018 NIA prosecution charging a Rohingya man with building Al-Qaeda networks. With 70,000 Rohingya fleeing into Bangladesh over the past year, India faces the dilemma of balancing humanitarian obligations with security concerns about terrorist recruitment and radicalisation. Cross-border drug trafficking from the Golden Triangle, arms smuggling, and insurgent movements further exploit the porous frontier.

Maritime vulnerabilities also pose serious threats. With a coastline spanning 11,098 kilometres, India's maritime trade worth \$800 billion annually faces escalating threats. Chinese naval presence with six to eight PLAN submarines under the String of Pearls strategy, and terrorist infiltrations across the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal and Palk Strait threaten sea lanes. India's 12 major ports and 217 non-major ports face exposure to smuggling, terrorism, and cyber intrusions. Maritime drug trafficking surged with 10,564 kg seized in 2024.

Most alarming is terrorism's evolution—educated professionals including doctors, engineers, and academics now leverage technical expertise for sophisticated attacks. Analysis of Islamic State recruits shows less than 2 per cent were uneducated. The November 2025 Delhi blast, perpe-



KRIPA NAUTIYAL

trated by educated professionals using biotechnology knowledge, exemplified this threat. Women jihadists add another dimension, with more trained as combatants and suicide bombers, exploiting reduced security scrutiny. Adversaries deploy AI for sophisticated propaganda, deepfakes, and coordinating

hybrid attacks. India's dependence on foreign AI infrastructure creates strategic vulnerabilities.

Technological fortification is essential. The Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System integrates sensors, communication networks, and command-control solutions. Plans announced in April 2025 aim to cover the entire India-Pakistan border with electronic surveillance within four years, incorporating anti-drone systems that intercepted 294 Pakistani drones in Punjab in 2024. Border infrastructure funding jumped 50 per cent to Rs 5,597 crore in Budget 2025-26. The government sanctioned Rs 31,000 crore for fencing the Myanmar border, while approximately 3,141 kilometres of the Bangladesh border is fenced. In counter-narcotics operations, narcotics worth ₹25,330 crore were seized in 2024—a 55 per cent increase over 2023. BSF's jurisdiction extended from 15 km to 50 km from international borders enhanced interdiction success. The Indian roadmap envisions AI, machine learning, and big data integration by 2026-27, with AI-powered smart fences and predictive algorithms, though indigenous capability development remains crucial.

India's challenges demand nuanced responses. With Bangladesh, engaging diplomatically while monitoring the Pakistan-Bangladesh-JMB nexus remains critical. For Myanmar, balancing support for democratic forces with pragmatic engagement requires calibration. The Sir Creek dispute needs resolution through sustained diplomatic engagement while maintaining military deterrence. Maritime security requires naval and coast guard modernisation, regional cooperation frameworks, and intelligence-sharing. The AI domain demands urgent indigenous capability development to reduce dependence on foreign infrastructure.

Most critically, India must integrate security with economic development, cultural sensitivity, and diplomatic engagement. Enhanced inter-agency coordination between military, paramilitary, intelligence agencies, and state governments remains essential. The simultaneous instability in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar—combined with maritime vulnerabilities, narco-terrorism, and AI-enabled hybrid threats—presents India with an existential challenge.

However, with strategic investments in technology, infrastructure, indigenous AI capabilities, maritime power projection, and adaptive diplomacy, India can transform vulnerabilities into strengths.

The test lies in implementing a cohesive vision that anticipates threats, protects sovereignty, enables prosperity, and maintains regional stability in an increasingly volatile and technologically complex security environment.

(The author is a retired Additional Director General of Indian Coast Guard and a defence and strategic study expert)

Ramayan and the anatomy of governance: Leadership lessons from the shoreline

I come from a small town in Haryana called Narnaul. Every month of Sawan, my grandfather would read the Ramayan, and I would sit beside him, absorbing the great story as it unfolded. The moment that always held me the most was the debate on who should cross the sea to Lanka. Years have passed, but that scene, and that voice, still anchor me. In a world that keeps moving, those evenings taught me something quietly strategic: before the leap, there must be clarity, courage, and the right person stepping forward.

That beach meeting was not a 'scene'. It was a high-pressure war room with sand under the feet and destiny on the agenda. Everyone had opinions, everyone had strength, and yet the air carried an awkward silence—the kind you see in a conference room when a file is marked URGENT, the deadline was yesterday, and the table waits for someone to say, "I will take ownership." The *Vanar Sena* had muscle, courage, and numbers. What they needed in that moment was something more bureaucratic and more rare: role clarity.

Jambavan did not give Hanuman a pep talk. He did something far more operational. He diagnosed a capability gap that was not a skills issue, but a self-awareness issue. Hanuman, the most overqualified resource on that shoreline, was sitting quietly because he had forgotten his own mandate. Jambavan's reminder was not praise; it was calibration. And in one conversation, the mission moved from debate to decision. That, for me, is where the Ramayan starts sounding like



ADITYA PRAKASH BHARDWAJ

governance—not because it preaches, but because it understands how institutions and humans inside institutions actually function.

Hidden capability and the quiet art of mentorship Hanuman's awakening is a reminder that 'capacity building' is not always a training programme with banners and folders. Often it is one senior who sees potential, calls it by name, and removes hesitation. In administration, the best seniors are not the ones who collect credit; they are the ones who unlock talent.

Modern public systems are increasingly designed to unlock capability at scale. UPI is a clear example. It did not merely digitise payments; it mainstreamed economic participation for citizens and small merchants with extremely low friction. NPCI reported around 20.47 billion UPI transactions in November 2025 alone.

That is Jambavan as infrastructure: a system that tells millions, quietly and consistently, "You can do this." Once Hanuman remembers his strength, the story could have ended early. He could have gone straight for a dramatic win. Instead, he stays within scope. He conducts reconnaissance, finds *Sita Mata*, delivers Shri Ram's message, offers assurance, gathers intelligence, and returns.

This is a masterclass in mission discipline.

In bureaucracy, the temptation to 'solve it per-



sonally' is constant, especially for capable officers. But institutions do not run on individual heroics; they run on repeatable processes, clear responsibilities, and coordinated execution. The mature choice is often to win correctly rather than win quickly.

That is why modern governance increasingly invests in coordination frameworks. PM Gati Shakti, for example, is framed as an integrated planning approach to improve multi-ministry coordination and reduce implementation friction by bringing stakeholders onto a common platform. In Ramayan terms, it is not just about building a bridge; it is about ensuring the bridge fits the plan, the plan fits the mission, and the mission fits the larger dharma.

'Bhaya bina hoye na preet'

'Bhaya bina hoye na preet' sounds blunt, but it carries a governance truth: trust needs protection. A society that rewards honesty must also

discourage dishonesty; otherwise, the incentives invert and the honest become naïve.

The Ramayan repeatedly shows this balance. Diplomacy is attempted, messages are sent, and persuasion is tried. But the duty to protect the innocent is not outsourced to goodwill. Deterrence exists so that peace can exist.

In recent years, citizen-facing enforcement has become more process-driven and technology-enabled. The National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal and the 1930 helpline are designed to help citizens report cyber fraud quickly so that action can be initiated faster. Similarly, 'Chakshu' under 'Sanchar Saathi' enables the reporting of suspected fraud calls and messages. This is deterrence done in a modern way: predictable, accessible, and rule-bound—not fear as theatre, but consequence as design.

Why files are moral documents

Dasharathji keeping his word, even when it costs him dearly, is one of the most administratively relevant moments in the epic, because governance is ultimately a credibility business.

States function on commitments: notifications, orders, citizen charters, contracts, affidavits, and assurances. A word recorded is not just language; it becomes an obligation. That is why drafting is not clerical; it is ethical. Any experienced officer has seen how one sloppy sentence can create years of litigation or confusion, and how one precise paragraph can prevent a hundred grievances. The Ramayan understands this deeply: speech becomes action when power sits behind it. It is also why reforms that standardise processes and reduce arbitrary variation matter. The Income Tax

Department's faceless appeal ecosystem is framed as a structured digital workflow to enable more consistent, system-driven handling of appeals, with defined exceptions for specific categories. clarity in process protects both citizen and state.

The ruler as citizen

Shri Ram accepts exile not because it is pleasant, but because the rule of law cannot be optional for those at the top. If the ruler can stand outside the rulebook, then the rulebook is merely decoration. This is the core of good governance: authority must be accountable.

Recent years have also seen efforts to reduce the distance between citizen and administration by cutting friction and increasing verifiability. DigiLocker is a strong example. It enables citizens to access and share verified documents digitally, supporting paperless verification and faster service delivery. That is not just convenience; it is state capacity expressing itself as respect for citizen time. That scene before Lanka stays with me because it captures the anatomy of governance in one tableau: capability that needs activation, power that needs purpose, trust that needs protection, words that need integrity, and authority that needs humility. The Ramayan does not teach administration through lectures; it teaches through situations. People hesitate, ego flares, duty intervenes, and then someone, quietly, does the right thing in the right way. Some stories do not age. They simply change the setting from a shoreline to a meeting room, and the stakes from Lanka to public trust.

(The writer is IRS, Joint Commissioner, Income Tax Department)

"THE ONLY TIME TO EAT DIET FOOD IS WHILE YOU'RE WAITING FOR THE STEAK TO COOK"
— MARK TWAIN

Sonam Losar: The living tradition of The Himalayas



ANIL RAJPUT

As winter gradually starts showing signs of receding, local inhabitants from India's Himalayan regions, ready themselves to observe Sonam Losar, a festival to mark the seasonal change representing renewal and continuity. Celebrated in Ladakh, parts of Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and the higher Himalayan regions of Himachal Pradesh, Sonam Losar commemorates the New Year according to the traditional lunar calendar of several Himalayan communities. Falling between mid January and February, (falls on 19th of January this year) the festival presents an occasion to carry forward age-old traditions, ethical conduct, and shared responsibility into the new year.

Sonam Losar is an acknowledgment of perseverance rather than a celebration of abundance. In societies that endure high-altitudes and harsh winter conditions, it marks a moment to pause and reaffirm community bonds defining the idea that change requires patience, preparation, and respect for the cycles of nature. As a result, Sonam Losar is commemorated in a restrained and dignified manner shaped more by reflection and togetherness rather than by extravagant spectacle.

The origins of this festival are deeply rooted in India's Himalayan civilisational culture. For centuries, communities inhabiting these regions organised their lives around climatic thresholds rather than a fixed calendar. The arrival of the New Year presented an opportunity to offer thanksgiving for what has passed and reorganize life for what is to come. Homes were tidied, old tools made ready for use, livestock shelters repaired, debts settled, and relationships renewed. Rituals were performed to seek protection and to ensure safety and well-being within households and villages.

Ritual observance during Sonam Losar unfolds over several days. Invocations are offered in monasteries, village shrines, and household altars. Prayer flags with spiritual inscriptions are replaced, and new ones hoisted symbolising the renewal of gratitude and the dispersal of good-will across the land. Masked dances, music, and communal gatherings follow, filling the air with mirth and joy. The severity of another harsh winter is put behind and replaced with a moral and social reset.

In Arunachal Pradesh, Ladakh, and Sikkim, Sonam Losar is marked by region specific ceremonies that emphasise spiritual and moral values that the festival represents. Among the Tamang communities, households begin the New Year with early morning prayers offered to local deities and ancestral guardians, seeking harmony between family, land, and season. Ritual lamps are lit and incense is burned to purify homes, followed by offerings of food and water at household altars. In Ladakh, monasteries conduct special prayer assemblies where chants are recited for peace, health, and agricultural well being, while homes perform protective rituals meant to ward off misfortune. In Sikkim, similar ceremonies are held within monasteries and villages, where prayer flags are changed and symbolic offerings are made to mark the



end of the old year and the moral readiness to enter the new one. Across these regions, rituals are conducted in a somber manner showing humility and readiness to enter the next chapter of existence.

One of the most distinctive aspects of Sonam Losar lies in its social significance. Unlike festivals marked by individual ceremonies, Sonam Losar offers a platform for strengthening collective bonds. Entire villages gather together in anticipation and revelry. Elders play a central role in guiding rituals, transmitting oral traditions, and ensuring that customs are followed with discipline rather than improvisation. This intergenerational participation reinforces purity of purpose, ensuring that cultural knowledge is transmitted through experience rather than instruction alone. In environments where survival historically depended on cooperation, Sonam Losar became a cultural platform to renew trust, social order, and collective accountability that bind families and communities together.

During Sonam Losar, clothing reflects both climate and cultural continuity. Men and women wear traditional woollen robes such as the goncha, often layered over heavy undergarments and secured with wide sashes that are symbolic of the region and made to protect against the cold climatic conditions. Silver jewellery, turquoise ornaments, and embroidered accessories are added by the woman-folk in keeping with the simplicity of the people. This in itself mirrors the festival's character of simplicity

shaped by generations adapting to life high in the Himalayas.

The heart of the festival nevertheless lies in the warm preparations of the domestic kitchens. Long before the festival begins, families get together to prepare an inventory of available foodstuff, dry vegetables and meats, roast grains, and ingredients for use in the festival meals. Such assessments are made for practical purposes rather than anxiety, to determine the availability of resources. Food systems, thus, remain resilient and waste is consciously avoided. The recipes used are rarely written but the processes are well rehearsed and transmitted through observation and repetition, often led by the elders in the family who carry the culinary memory across generations. Younger members learn not only how to cook but when to cook, how much to prepare, and which foods are related to specific rituals and occasions.

Emphasizing an egalitarian society, men and elders assist with grinding grains, storing firewood, and preparing preserved ingredients. Cooking is a collective exercise enjoyed by the whole family rather than considered an arduous task. This ensures that the culinary preparations become an enjoyable family activity and an occasion to transmit to the younger generations the distinctive Himalayan heritage. Cuisine here is not merely a festive spread but a responsibility to be learnt.

Food prepared during these days is nourishing, warming, and naturally seasonal, intended to restore strength after months of cold while preparing the body to the metabolic adjustments required for the change in the seasons. Meals are

only consumed after ritual offerings to local deities are completed, affirming the belief that nourishment is inseparable from gratitude and discipline.

Warm soups and noodle based dishes form the foundation of Sonam Losar meals, particularly during early mornings and evenings. *Thukpa*, prepared by simmering hand-made wheat noodles in a lightly seasoned vegetable or meat broth, is consumed in the entire region and is often the first shared meal of the New Year. A dash of black pepper adds to its warmth and nourishment. *Momos*, made by filling thin wheat dough wrappers with minced meat or vegetables and steaming them gently, are prepared in large numbers to serve relatives and neighbours, as generous hospitality is a hallmark of the festivities. *Skyu* and *Chutagi*, wheat based pasta dishes slow cooked with root vegetables and mild spices, are eaten during extended family gatherings on subsequent days. Their preparation requires patience and cooperation, but the outcome is well worth the wait.

The cuisine of Ladakh during Sonam Losar, like the rest of the region, reflects a deep reliance on foods that offer nourishment, strength, and longevity. In addition to staple soups and breads, households prepare *gur gur cha* (often called butter tea) made by churning strong brewed tea with yak butter, salt and water to enhance meals, and sustain energy through long ritual days. *Chhurpe* based dishes, made using hardened local cheese or dried curd prepared from yak or cow's milk, and softened in broth, are consumed during prayer intervals. *Shabalay*, a lightly pan-fried stuffed bread filled with meat or vegetables, is prepared in some homes for festive lunches, offering nourishment without excess. These foods are eaten slowly and deliberately, shared among elders and guests, who are served first, reinforcing the Ladakhi ethic of hospitality and respect for labour.

Breads and staple accompaniments hold equal importance and symbolic weight. *Khambir*, a dense sourdough flatbread made from naturally fermented wheat flour, is baked in abundance and eaten throughout the festival, particularly during prayer mornings. *Tingmo*, a soft steamed bread prepared from yeast leavened dough, accompanies soups and stews and symbolises humility and adaptability. In some households, buckwheat pancakes and roasted grain flatbreads are prepared in small quantities, linking the meal directly to local agriculture and seasonal limitations.

Barley, a local produce of the Himalayan region, specially in high altitude areas of Ladakh, Lahaul-Spiti and Sikkim is a staple crop that is widely used in local dishes. *Paba*, a Ladakhi local bread made from barley, is usually eaten with butter tea or stews of vegetable or meat frequently relished by elders as it is easily digestible and yet healthy. *Tsampa*, prepared from finely roasted barley flour, is consumed by mixing it with butter tea or warm water during early rituals, reinforcing strength and self-reliance. Barley stews cooked with dried vegetables

further emphasise careful resource use and continuity through winter. *Chhang*, a mildly fermented barley beverage, prepared weeks in advance of the festival, is shared liberally, reinforcing social harmony.

In Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, Sonam Losar cuisine reflects common regional agricultural practices through a lighter approach to ritual meals. Tamang households in Arunachal Pradesh prepare simple rice and barley-based dishes paired with fermented greens and seasonal vegetables. Steamed dumplings made with locally grown grains, and filled with a variety of stuffings along with mild vegetable broths, make for a popular meal. In Sikkim, the festival is marked by foods rooted in the region's Himalayan heritage influenced by Bhutia, Tibetan, Lepcha, and Tamang communities. Dishes such as *momos* and *thukpa* are common like the rest of the area. Traditional preparations like *phagshapa*, made from meat simmered with radish and dried red chillies. *gundruk*, a fermented preparation of leafy greens like mustard and radish leaves and *chhurpi*, a fermented cheese made from yak's milk reflect long-standing practices of fermentation and preservation. Together, these foods underscore a cuisine shaped by climate and seasonality rather than indulgence.

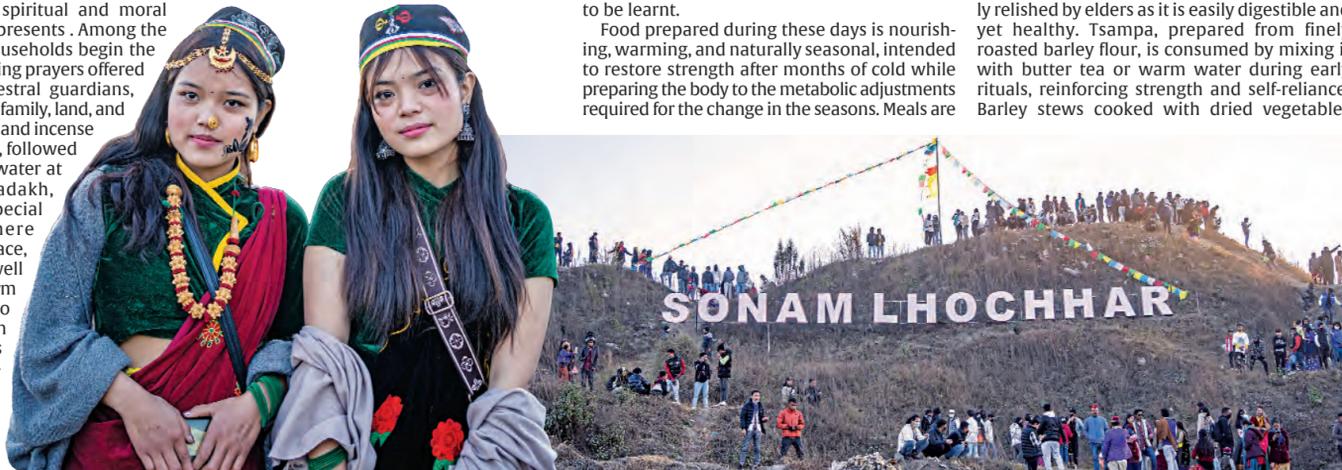
Sweet preparations are mostly reserved for auspicious moments. *Dresi*, a festive rice dish cooked with butter, sugar, and dried fruits, is prepared on the most significant day of Sonam Losar and consumed at dawn or after the initial rituals. *Khapse*, deep fried crisp pastries made from wheat flour and lightly sweetened dough, is normally served during tea time in the evenings. *Sel roti*, a lightly fermented ring shaped rice bread with a mild sweetness, is especially popular among Tamang communities. These sweetened barley or wheat preparations are served to children as a special offering and blessing for success as the New Year begins.

In the Himalayan region, food preservation practices such as sun-drying, smoking, fermenting, and storing grains and meat in naturally cold conditions have been practiced as practical responses to long winters and limited growing seasons. These techniques have been passed down through generations by oral tradition and daily practice with elders teaching youngsters by example especially during these festivals. This ensures food security while reflecting a keen understanding of the sustainable use of resources. The preserved and fermented foods become central in Sonam Losar cuisine more out of necessity rather than preference as the fields are still slow bound.

In contemporary India, Sonam Losar holds growing significance as a reminder of celebrating the conditions that we live in. As Himalayan regions experience rapid social and economic transformation, the festival also serves as an anchor of identity. It reminds younger generations that tradition is not an obstacle to progress but a framework that lends guidance for the future. Culinary participation reconnects them with ancestral knowledge rooted in balance rather than convenience and forms an inherent component of this future.

Festivals such as Sonam Losar, though observed in the high reaches of India's mountains, serve as cultural reference for the nation as a whole, reflecting and reinforcing its diverse civilisational fabric. They preserve Himalayan heritage by passing down values refined over centuries. It is my belief that recognising and safeguarding the principles embodied in such festivals is a shared responsibility for all of us, ensuring their relevance for future generations. In doing so, I am confident that Sonam Losar will continue to guide communities through changing seasons, carrying forward a legacy shaped by resilience, dignity, and wisdom.

(The writer is Secretary, Cuisine India Society)



Step into a new era of style, taste, and sound



TEAM AGENDA

Anyone who lives in Delhi probably knows OTB. It has been a permanent part of Khan Market since 2012, usually the spot people end up at for a long Friday night. But twelve years is a long time, and the place has finally ditched its old look. The loud, bright reds and yellows everyone remembers are gone. The new interior is totally different now-lots of deep browns, gold accents, and warm lighting. It feels like the 'box' has finally grown up along with its regulars.

Architect Aatika Manzar did the redesign, and you can tell the goal was to make it look expensive without being 'stiff'. It does not have that cold feeling you get at most new high-end places. Visitors can either hide in a cozy indoor nook or grab a seat on the terrace to look out at the old market buildings. It is a flexible space. You could go there for a quiet afternoon coffee or end up staying for a loud party once the DJ starts at night.

But the biggest change is not the decor; it is what is happening in the kitchen. Chef Akshay Malhotra has moved the menu toward global comfort food. They even brought in new pizza ovens that hit 509°F. Pizzas go in and come out in under two minutes now. The crust is crispy and charred, and honestly, it is better than what you get at most specialised pizza shops.

The menu has starters like *Nested Lotus Kebab* and *Malai Broccoli*, which are handled well. But the *Ghee Roast Chicken* with *Malabar Parantha* is the real stand-out. It is heavy, rich, and exactly what people want when they are looking for soul food. For something lighter, the



Truffled Edamame Crystal dim sums are a good choice. For dessert, do not even bother looking at the rest of the list. Just get the *Burnt Cheesecake*. It is thick and creamy and actually lives up to all the hype. The bar is different now too. The *Mango Picante* has a sharp kick to it, and the *Rose Whisper* is a more refined pick. Even the coffee is much better than before. The *Pistachio Latte* is a solid choice if you are just there for a midday meeting. It is still the OTB people know, but it is not just a 'box' anymore. It has finally become a neighborhood legend.

Twelve years of stories, now wrapped in a brand-new golden glow. From heritage views to that perfect 500°F wood-fired crunch, our transformation is all about elevated flavors and effortless soul. Whether it's a quiet coffee or a high-energy night under the stars, your favourite social spot just got a whole lot better.



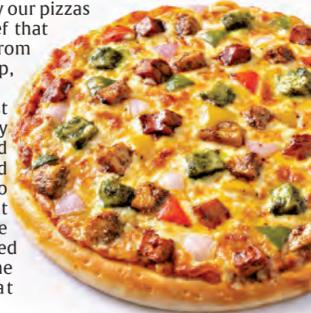
Happiness in every slice!



TEAM AGENDA

Circle of Crust brings its signature 'Pizza But Better' philosophy to West Delhi. The grand opening recently, saw a massive turnout of foodies eager to experience the innovative handcrafted menu. Known for its 'Indianised' flavour palette, the menu features everything from *Paneer Makhani* to *Pizza Chatkare*. Founders Neha and Kartik Anand expressed their excitement about joining Uttam Nagar's bustling food scene, emphasising their commitment to craftsmanship and consistent quality. With a growing footprint spanning Punjab, Chandigarh, and Dubai, this new Delhi outlet marks a major milestone in their expansion. Whether you're craving a classic slice or a bold new fusion, this is the place to go. Staying true to its modern philosophy, Circle of Crust blends innovative crusts with bold, Delhi-style flavours, ranging from whole wheat, beetroot, and spinach crusts to flavour-packed pizzas like *Paneer Makhani*, *Chicken Tikka & Butter Chicken*. Kartik Anand, Co-Founder, said, "Seeing people enjoy our pizzas reaffirmed our belief that great pizza comes from care, craftsmanship, and consistency."

As Circle of Crust continues its journey across India and beyond, the brand remains committed to delivering consistent quality, memorable flavours, and elevated pizza experiences, one neighbourhood at a time.



Tuning Life Like a Veena

As we celebrate Basant Panchami, remember that movement stretched is dance, mind stretched is meditation, sound stretched is music, and life stretched is celebration. A mind that knows how to celebrate remains light, whereas a heavy mind carries stress even in success

GURUDEV SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR

As soon as you begin to look within, a new Spring is born within you, where a new leaf grows, a new bud appears, and a new flower blooms. Vasant Panchami is the fifth day of the new spring season that we celebrate in the warmer half of the month, a festival where people everywhere honour wisdom. It is also an auspicious day to begin a child's educational journey. It is an auspicious day when children write their first letters as part of a ceremony called Vidyarambham.

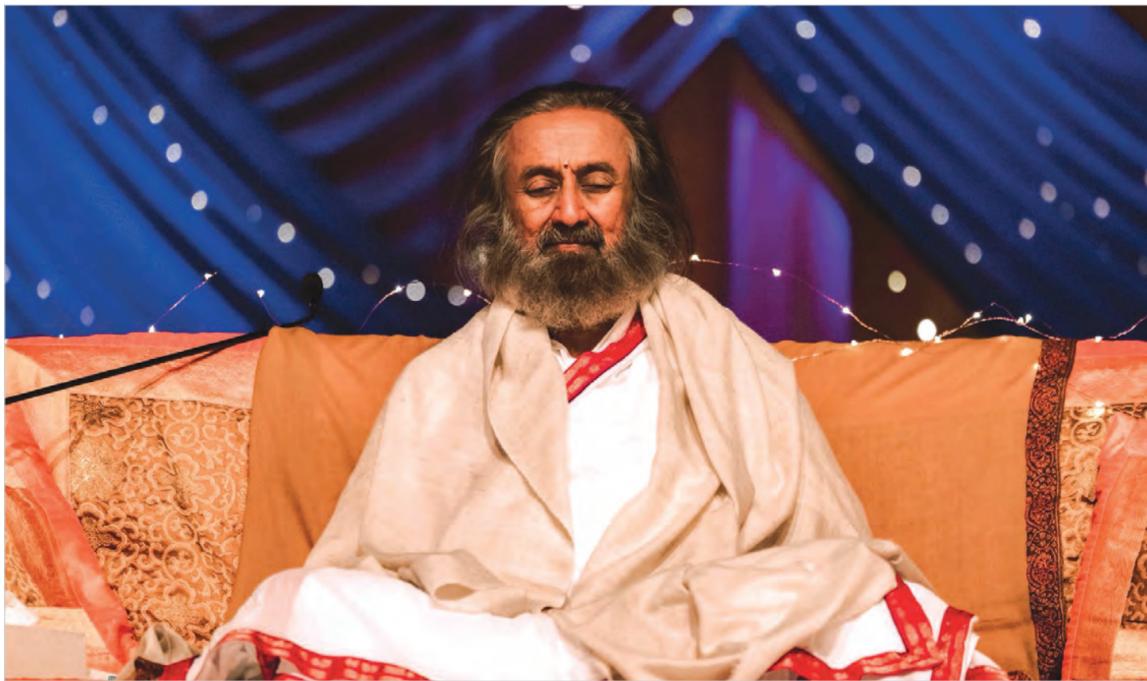
Vasant means where there is happiness; the word Santas means bliss. We have five senses, and when we feel good in what we see, hear, and speak, we experience this inner spring with our senses.

Beyond the calendar and custom, this day celebrates something subtle—the moment when wisdom begins to flower within. Knowledge does not dawn when the mind becomes more active; it dawns when the mind becomes subtle. A subtle mind is relaxed, receptive, and capable of recognising harmony where effort alone cannot reach.

You know, in this country, education has never been divorced from spirituality. Spirituality is an integral part of education. Knowledge was never seen as something floating or transient. If you look at the symbol of Saraswati, the Goddess of Wisdom, that appears in schools across the country, she is seated on a rock. Knowledge is always rock solid. It is steady and brings stability to life. Once knowledge dawns, it stays with you; it does not vanish. Saraswati is said to be born out of the creator, yet she stays with the creator as an inseparable part; if knowledge leaves, creation cannot exist. This is why knowledge has always been revered.

Next to Saraswati is the peacock, which symbolises beauty and celebration. Knowledge should bring beauty within. It should make life graceful, not dry. In one hand, she holds a book, representing intellectual excellence, and in the other hand, there is the Veena, one of the oldest Indian stringed instruments. Music must be part of education. Scientists also say that the left brain is associated with logic, and the right brain is associated with music. It cannot be that you use only the left brain or only the right brain. You need to balance both. And then there is the japa mala or rosary, which signifies meditation, experiential knowing, and balances both parts of the brain. Learning music improves your right brain, while logic and study sharpen the left brain.

If any one of these components is missing, education is not complete. Intellectual knowledge, music, art and culture, dance, and meditation together allow wisdom to dawn. Swadhyaya, the study of knowledge of both the world and the self, has always been a part of our education system. Anything that aids the



"MUSIC AND SPIRITUALITY ARE AMONG INDIA'S MOST UNIQUE AND TIMELESS GIFTS TO THE WORLD. MUSIC IS THAT RHYTHM AND HARMONY THAT FLOWS FROM THE UNIVERSAL TO THE INDIVIDUAL, FROM THE COSMOS TO THE FINITE" — GURUDEV

development of the spirit is spirituality. In this sense, logic, art, culture, music, and meditation all belong together.

The Veena carries a deeper meaning too. The Veena represents the human body. Just as the Veena has seven strings in all, our human body is also made out of seven dhatus (fundamental tissues—plasma, blood, muscle, fat, bone, marrow, and reproductive tissue). Also, the seven layers of existence (Body, Mind, Breath, Intellect, Memory, Ego, and Self) need to be tuned well to connect with cosmic energy. When the Veena is tuned properly, the music that comes out of it is melodious. When life is tuned well, what comes out is divine music. Similarly, the various aspects of life have to be tuned properly. Our relationship with our Self, the people in our family, in the workplace, and in society—all these need to be tuned from time to time. If the strings are too tight, they snap. If they are too loose, there is no music. Life also needs similar tuning.

The purpose of music is to create silence deep within you, and the purpose of silence is to make you dynamic in life. So, silence that does not make you dynamic is no good, and that music which does not make space for silence, peace, and harmony within oneself is no good either. Music is one blessing that binds us all together. Across races, religions, and continents, if there is one power that unites everyone other than love, it is music. Music and meditation cleanse your being. They make your feelings softer and lighter. When feelings are purified, thoughts get purified automatically. Then the right thought comes up in you. This is where intuition awakens. Intuition comes when the mind becomes quiet. When the mind is agitated, it cannot grasp anything subtle.

There are different levels of knowledge. One level is where you get knowledge through the senses; intellectual knowledge is another, but beyond both is intuitive knowledge, which comes from within.

As the mind becomes more subtle, free from cravings and aversions, this subtle knowledge becomes available to us.

Meditation is experiential knowledge. It is not something you merely understand; it is something you experience. When the mind settles down, clarity dawns naturally. Meditation does not make the mind dull; it makes it sharp. When the mind relaxes, the intellect becomes sharp. A calm and collected mind is not docile; rather, it is a source of creativity and dynamism. That is why meditation has always been an essential part of education.

Music and spirituality are among India's most unique and timeless gifts to the world. Music is that rhythm and harmony that flows from the universal to the individual, from the cosmos to the finite. Spirituality brings resilience, peace, strength, and inner silence to the soul.

Spirituality and music together can uplift people, get them out of depression, and help them start a new life with enthusiasm.

As we celebrate Basant Panchami, remember that movement stretched is dance, mind stretched is meditation, sound stretched is music, and life stretched is celebration. A mind that knows how to celebrate remains light, whereas a heavy mind carries stress even in success. Knowledge that has touched life always carries lightness.



VASANT PANCHAMI IS THE FIFTH DAY OF THE NEW SPRING SEASON THAT WE CELEBRATE IN THE WARMER HALF OF THE MONTH, A FESTIVAL WHERE PEOPLE EVERYWHERE HONOUR WISDOM. IT IS ALSO AN AUSPICIOUS DAY TO BEGIN A CHILD'S EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY. IT IS AN AUSPICIOUS DAY WHEN CHILDREN WRITE THEIR FIRST LETTERS AS PART OF A CEREMONY CALLED VIDYARAMBHAM. VASANT MEANS WHERE THERE IS HAPPINESS; THE WORD SANTAS MEANS BLISS. WE HAVE FIVE SENSES, AND WHEN WE FEEL GOOD IN WHAT WE SEE, HEAR, AND SPEAK, WE EXPERIENCE THIS INNER SPRING WITH OUR SENSES.

One of the world's largest centres of brilliance

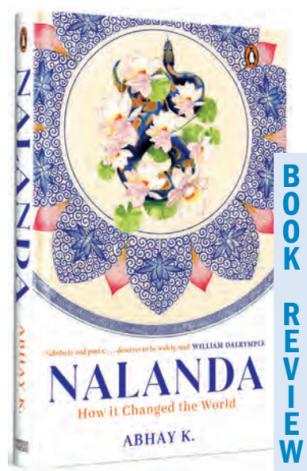
ANIL BHAT

Owing to much suppression and alteration of India's history by the Mughals, the British till 1947, and its Nehruvian hijacking for at least seven decades thereafter, the uniqueness and magnificence of Nalanda never received the recognition it deserved. It was the world's first residential university, a global knowledge hub with immense libraries, attracting scholars from across Asia from the 5th to the 12th centuries CE. After its unfortunate destruction in 1193, the only British contribution was its excavation and some highlighting. As late as 2010, the Congress-led UPA introduced the Nalanda University Act in Parliament, and in 2016 the BJP got it declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, recognising its global significance. Considering that post-Independence there are not many who wrote about Nalanda, this book by Abhay K is most welcome.

Two of the Buddha's most prominent chief disciples, Sariputta, who organised the Buddha's teachings, and Maudgalyayana, a very popular teacher, became instrumental in spreading the Dharma, the Eightfold Path to enlightenment.

Nalanda was the first-ever residential university, spread over a vast, self-contained campus with dormitories housing 10,000 monks and up to 2,000 teachers, classrooms, and a vast nine-storeyed library known as Dharma Gunj (Mountain of Truth), holding millions of manuscripts. This made it a centre for advanced study in various disciplines, apart from Buddhism, including logic, astronomy, medicine, mathematics, philosophy, and grammar.

Nalanda was a prime example of the ancient Indian Guru-Shishya Parampara (teacher-disciple tradition), where students lived closely with teacher-scholars for immersive learning, focusing not just on academics but also on moral and spiritual development. It was a global hub that attracted scholars and students from China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, Java, Sumatra, Greece, and Persia — a gathering that often fostered international collaboration. Some of the many venerated Hindu



Title: Nalanda: How it changed the world
Author: Abhay K
MRP: ₹699/-
Publisher: Vintage, an imprint of Penguin Random House

teachers were Aryabhata, the mathematician and astronomer who wrote Aryabhata's while at Nalanda, introducing concepts such as zero; Nagarjuna, the philosopher who established Madhyamaka philosophy, meaning the 'Middle Way', a major Mahayana Buddhist school at Nalanda; Dharmakirti and Dignaga, the logicians and Buddhist monks who developed Buddhist logic; Asanga and Vasubandhu, brothers who founded the Yogachara (Mind-Only) school; Shantideva, the author of the Bodhisattvacaryavatara, a guide to the Bodhisattva's way of life; Santaraksita, the head monk of Nalanda Mahavihara who travelled to Tibet to found the Samye Monastery. Tibetan Buddhists credit Nalanda as the source of Tibetan Buddhism; Chandrakirti, revered for his commentaries clarifying Nagarjuna's philosophy; and Atisha, a Bengali scholar critical to the "later dissemination" of Buddhism in Tibet.

Of the many foreign scholars who came to Nalanda, two famous ones were the Chinese pilgrims Xuanzang (Hiuen-Tsang) and Yijing, who docu-

mented their extensive studies and teaching experiences at Nalanda, highlighting its international character.

Around 1193 CE, Turkish-Afghan invader Bakhtiyar Khilji (Khalji) caused atrocious destruction at Nalanda University, brutally killing monks and setting aflame its great nine-storeyed library, which, according to historical accounts, burned for an extended period of weeks or even months, destroying millions of manuscripts and marking a catastrophic loss of knowledge.

Post-Independence, there has been a revival of Nalanda in India.

Nav Nalanda Mahavihara was a precursor initiative started in 1951, also near the ruins, focusing on Pali Buddhism and higher learning, pre-dating the international university.

Nalanda Open University was established in 1987 as another step in re-establishing Nalanda's educational prominence.

In 2010, the process of resurrecting Nalanda began in Rajgir, Bihar, as the modern Nalanda University, a 'Net Zero' international research university with a new campus, aiming to revive the ancient centre of learning. While the ancient ruins remain, this new institution carries forward the legacy, attracting scholars and focusing on Asian studies, philosophy, and statecraft. It has been supported by a partnership of 18 participating countries that signed a Memorandum of Understanding for its establishment. These are China, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Portugal, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Singapore, Thailand, Myanmar, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Various institutions inspired by Nalanda's legacy have been established in foreign countries. The Nalanda College of Buddhist Studies is in Toronto, Canada. The Nalanda Institute is in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The Nalanda Institute for Contemplative Science is in New York, USA, and the International Buddhist College, modelled after Nalanda, is in Hatyai, Thailand.

(The book reviewer is a VSM (Retd), strategic affairs analyst and former spokesperson of the Defence Ministry and the Indian Army)

Cinema branding beyond stories on screen

GYANESHWAR DAYAL

This is not a book about movies alone. It is about everything that happens around them — and how those surrounding forces often grow larger than the story on screen itself.

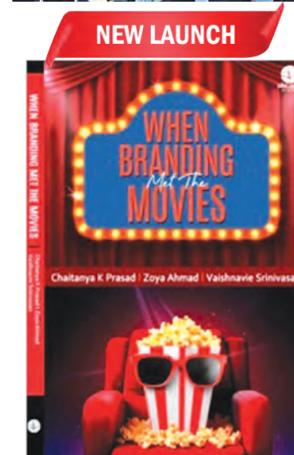
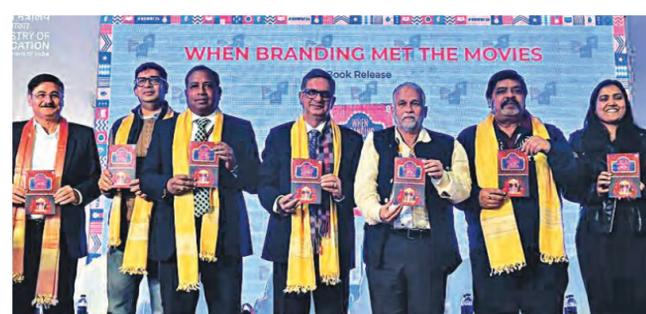
Cinema, after all, no longer merely entertains. It sells emotion. It packages longing into trailers, turns songs into deeply personal anthems, and somehow ensures that a single poster lodges itself in our memory long after the plot has politely exited. A slow-motion entry shot, a perfectly timed teaser drop, or a director's name that alone guarantees an opening weekend-branding in cinema is everywhere. And, inconveniently for purists, it works.

This book sets out to unpack that alchemy across the vast film ecosystem: Bollywood and Hollywood, regional powerhouses and indie outliers. It moves from the personal branding of stars and filmmakers to the legacy-building strategies of production houses; from fashion, film festivals, and awards to the marketing machines and social media ecosystems that keep films alive long after the credits roll. What makes a film linger in our collective consciousness and quietly become part of who we are? That is the question at hand.

We begin at the beginning. What is branding, really? How did it evolve from simple trademarks into layered narratives that now surround almost everything we consume? Cinema branding, in particular, is a peculiar creature. It operates simultaneously at multiple levels—the film, the star, the director, the studio—each constructing identities that often outlast the films themselves.

From there, we rewind to the early days of Indian cinema, when posters were hand-painted works of art, trailers were events rather than uploads, and the Mahurat ceremony transformed the first day of shooting into a media spectacle. These were not merely clever publicity tactics; they were foundational practices that shaped how audiences remembered, discussed, and mythologized films for decades.

Music warrants a chapter of its own—because, honestly, try humming the Jaws theme without feeling a little uneasy. Songs become signatures that transcend language. Costumes create instant recognition. Awards elevate small films into cul-



Title: When branding met the movies
Author: Chaitanya Kumar Prasad, Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavie Srinivasan
MRP: ₹310
Publisher: National Book Trust

Production houses take centre stage as well, because some studios possess identities so distinct that a single opening logo is enough to set expectations. From expansive marketing campaigns and brand tie-ins to VR experiments and interactive stunts, the line between watching a film and participating in it continues to blur.

Then comes the digital reckoning. Social media did not merely alter cinema branding; it rewired it entirely. Streaming platforms invented rules in real time. Audience engagement ceased to be a one-way conversation. Today, a single tweet can dent an opening weekend. We examine what genuinely works, what is merely noise, and why 'going viral' has become both a strategy and an obsession. The final section confronts reality head-on: market saturation, piracy, fragmented audiences, and ethical questions the industry often prefers to sidestep. But it also looks forward—to spaces for innovation, trends worth paying attention to, and the enduring possibility that something genuinely new can still emerge.

If you have ever wondered why some films feel like movements, why certain actors function as walking brands, or why that one song refuses to leave your head weeks later, this book may offer a few answers. It is part detective work, part fan letter-written without excessive reverence, because this industry does not always demand it, but with respect, because it undeniably earns it. Cinema does not merely tell stories. It weaves itself into our own. And understanding how it does so makes the magic richer, not weaker.

(The book reviewer is a Senior Editor with The Pioneer)