

Prayer protest at Rajghat

All-India protests against CEC, 'hijacking' of country

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

INDIA bloc leaders on Thursday staged a peaceful protest at Mahatma Gandhi's memorial at Rajghat to highlight what they alleged was the "hijacking" of the country by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and the Chief Election Commissioner through a criminal conspiracy by indulging in 'vote chori'.

The opposition leaders prayed at Mahatma Gandhi's memorial for "wisdom to the BJP government and the chief election commissioner".

They also paid floral tributes at the memorial and later sat in a peaceful protest there.

The opposition leaders said they would continue their protest on Friday and

are likely to meet in Parliament House in the morning.

Several leaders later said they would continue their struggle till CEC Gyanesh Kumar resigns, even though they did not disclose their strategy.

Congress leader and head of media and publicity department Pawan Khara told reporters, "We prayed for wisdom to this government, wisdom to CEC Gyanesh Kumar and prayed for protecting the vote of every voter as well as democracy in the country."

CPI-M leader John Brittas said this protest will continue Friday also.

"Till Gyanesh Kumar tenders his resignation, INDIA bloc protest will be continuing. If his masters - Modi and Amit Shah - are



bent upon protecting Gyanesh Kumar, they will also sink with him. We are proceeding with resolve and determination." CPI leader P. Sandosh also said, "We will continue our protest Friday also. It will be better for the country if Gyanesh Kumar resigns soon."

V. Sivadasan of CPI-M said the unity of opposition parties is intact.

This is the third consecutive day of protests by opposition MPs and leaders. On Tuesday, Rahul Gandhi staged an eight-hour sit-in inside Akashvani Bhawan complex and on Wednesday the leaders staged a protest at the roundabout near Shangri-La hotel in central Delhi after they were stopped by the police and forcibly removed and detained.

NH 66 delays to be resolved urgently: Satheesan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Thiruvananthapuram



Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan on Thursday said that Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari has assured that urgent steps will be taken to resolve delays and expedite construction work on the National Highway 66 expansion project.

Satheesan, in a Facebook post, said that this was one of several crucial decisions taken in his meeting with Gadkari at Delhi to accelerate the development of Kerala's road and transport sector.

In the meeting, the union minister assured necessary further approvals for the NH 966 Kozhikode-Palakkad project, for which 80 per cent of the land acquisition is complete, and said that the Union Cabinet approval for the Thiruvananthapuram Outer Ring Road project would be secured soon, the CM claimed.

He said that the other decisions taken in the meeting included expediting the measures to ensure the availability of river sand and quarry materials required

for National Highway development, preparing a Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the Sabarimala ropeway project, fast-tracking the necessary central and state approvals for it, and taking steps to complete it within two years.

"A request was also made to expedite other road projects in Keralam as well, including the Western Ernakulam bypass, the Kothamangalam-Muvattupuzha bypasses, and connectivity to the Kozhikode International Airport," the CM said.

He said that the meeting resulted in several crucial decisions that will help to advance Keralam's road and transport infrastructure projects in a time-bound manner through the cooperation of the central and state governments.

"Four people killing Democracy will be punished"

Rahul Gandhi alleged

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Musk says 'oligrachs' blocked Star link India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Hyderabad

US business tycoon Elon Musk has alleged that "certain oligarchs" have blocked his company Starlink's satellite communication services in India to maintain their monopoly in the country. In response to information posted by the DodgeDesigner handle on social media platform 'X' about the non-availability of mobile coverage in over 11,000 villages, Musk said: "Unfortunately, we are being blocked by certain oligarchs in order to maintain their monopolistic chokehold on the Indian people."

"You can guess who they are... This is a crime against



the people of India!" Musk posted on 'X'.

Meanwhile, the Centre on Thursday slammed Musk over his allegations that Starlink's satcom services are being blocked, and made it clear that demonstrating compliance with security norms is an absolute must for every satcom licensee in the country.

The government also emphasised that a fair and non-discriminatory framework is in place for all telecom offerings, including satellite services.

Any suggestion that the framework or its application is unfair or discriminatory is baseless and misconceived, the government said in a statement.

Congress capital march seeks removal of CEC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Thiruvananthapuram

The District Congress Committee held a protest march from the Palayam Martyrs' Memorial to the AG's Office on Thursday, as part of the Black Day observed on the AICC's call. The party protested the alleged "undemocratic" arrest of Rahul Gandhi and other leaders in Delhi and demanded the removal of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, whom it accused of overseeing electoral malpractice.

The Congress alleged that the Central Government and the Election Commission had removed 13 crore voters from the electoral rolls, and that the Commission had misled the Supreme Court and taken several incorrect actions. KPCC president Sunny Joseph, who inaugurated the protest, said the struggle led by Rahul Gandhi was a fight to protect the country's democracy. "The more the movement is suppressed, the stronger it becomes," he said.



KPCC president Sunny Joseph addresses a black day protest march organised by the KPCC at the AG's office in Thiruvananthapuram on Thursday, protesting the alleged assault by the Delhi Police on Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi and Congress representatives from Kerala. Minister M. Liju and Congress leader M.M. Hassan are also seen.

Thiruvananthapuram District Congress Committee held a protest march from the Palayam Martyrs' Memorial to the AG's Office on Thursday

Excise Minister M. Liju alleged that the Central Government had undermined the neutrality of elections. He also claimed that Prime Minister

Narendra Modi came to power through "vote chori" and called for the Election Commission to be impeached. A meeting held at the venue after the march was presided over by DCC president N. Sakthan. M.M. Hassan, MLAs M. Vincent, M.R. Baiju and Sudheer Shah Palode, Neyyattinkara Sanal, Manakkad Suresh and Raman P. Nair also addressed the gathering.

Mayor Rajesh, Sugathan booked over forged signature

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Thiruvananthapuram



A case has been registered against Thiruvananthapuram Mayor V.V. Rajesh, the Corporation secretary and BJP councillor over an alleged forged signature, police said on Thursday.

The case was registered at the Museum police station against Rajesh, councillor Sugathan K. and Thiruvananthapuram Corporation Secretary following a complaint lodged by CPI(M) councillor S.P. Deepak on Wednesday night.

According to police, Sugathan was detained under the Kerala Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act (KAAPA) after allegedly being involved in multiple criminal cases.

As per the FIR, the accused persons conspired to forge Sugathan's signature in the attendance book for council meetings held on February 26, March 11, and April 27 this year. Police officials said that under the Kerala

Municipality Act, prolonged absence from council meetings can lead to disqualification under specified conditions. The complainant alleged that the forged signature was made to prevent Sugathan's disqualification, police said.

Deepak claimed that Sugathan's signature on his election nomination papers differed from the signature in the council meeting attendance book, officials said.

The case has been registered under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita pertaining to forgery, criminal conspiracy and making a false document.

Sugathan was recently released from jail following a direction of the Kerala High Court.



Cochin Shipyard gets order to build 40 ships

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

State-owned Cochin Shipyard has received orders to build over 40 ships from the US, Germany, Norway and other countries, Shipping Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said on Thursday.

Addressing a press conference here, Sonowal said the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways is creating a comfortable ecosystem for shipbuilding.

"Most of the orders we are receiving for shipbuilding are for Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL) from foreign countries like Germany, America, and Norway. So far, we have received orders

for more than 40 ships," he said.

A senior shipping ministry official said that some Russian entities have also shown interest in building ships in India, in collaboration with Indian shipyards, including Cochin Shipyard. The Minister said Indian shipbuilders are earning credibility globally.

"That is the reason why we are getting this number of orders, and this reflects how India could generate confidence about its quality production, about its capacity building," he added.

The minister also said Belgium has expressed its willingness to work with India to promote shipbuilding.

Rs 600 cr sanctioned for Karunya

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Thiruvananthapuram

The Keralam government has sanctioned more than Rs 600 crore in additional funds for the Karunya health schemes to clear pending claims and restore the schemes to normal functioning.

An additional Rs 307.10 crore has been sanctioned for settling claims under the Karunya Arogya Suraksha Padhathi (KASP), while Rs 293.62 crore has been allocated for the Karunya Benevolent Fund. The additional allocation for KASP is over and above the Rs 592 crore provided in the Budget. The government said the additional funds would be used to clear crores of rupees in pending claims accumulated during the previous government's tenure and ensure the smooth functioning of the schemes.

Actor Nana Patekar passes away

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Panaji

Veteran actor Nana Patekar, known for his versatility and powerful screen presence, passed away at his Goa residence in the early hours of Thursday, sources said. He was 76.

Patekar is suspected to have suffered a heart attack, the sources said.

The actor was brought to a private hospital after he was found unconscious at his apartment in Dona Paula, near Panaji, Dr Shekhar Salkar, a senior doctor at the medical facility said.

Despite being administered CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation) for 45 minutes, Patekar could not be revived and was declared dead at 5.10 am, he said.

A medico-legal case has been registered in this connection, and a postmortem would be conducted, he added.

As per information provided by a friend of Patekar to the hospital doctors, the actor had messaged him around 3.30 am that he was not feeling well.

"The friend saw the message around 4 am and rushed to the apartment of Patekar, who was living with



a caretaker," Salkar said.

The caretaker rushed to the private hospital, from where an ambulance was sent to his house. "The treatment started in the ambulance itself," Salkar said.

Patekar's residence is about 5 minutes away from the hospital.

Patekar was known for his roles in several Hindi and Marathi films.

His notable Hindi movies include "Parinda", "Prahaar", "The Final Act", "Tirangaa", "Krantiveer" and "Khamoshi: The Musical".

Patekar was a recipient of three National Film Awards, several Filmfare Awards, the Maharashtra State Film Award and Filmfare Awards Marathi.

He had also received Padma Shri, the country's fourth-highest civilian honour.

Canadian poet-essayist Anne Carson wins Literature Nobel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Stockholm

Canadian poet and essayist Anne Carson has won the 2026 Nobel Prize in literature "for her bold and inventive oeuvre that, in playful dialogue with the classical tradition, has created new forms for contemporary literature."

Ingrid Carlberg, permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy, said on Thursday that the author was in Iceland "listening to the wind" when the academy reached her to notify her of the win.

"She was very taken by surprise," Carlberg said.

Toronto-born Carson, 76, draws on themes and stories from ancient Greek and Roman literature for works that often blend elements of poetry, essay and fiction. Her books include 'Eros the Bittersweet,' a look at the pleasure and pain of desire in ancient Greek literature, verse novel 'Autobiography of Red,' 'Men in the Off Hours,' a collection of poetry and prose that won Canada's Griffin Prize for poetry in 2001 and 'Norma Jeane Baker of Troy,' which compares Marilyn Monroe and



Helen of Troy.

Carson has also translated works of classical Greek literature that, the Swedish Academy said, "may be regarded as independent works in their own right." They include 'If Not, Winter,' based on poem fragments by Sappho, 'Sophocles' tragic plays 'Electra' and 'Antigone' and Euripides's 'Bakkhai.'

"Almost all her literary production has centred upon the intersection between the philologist's obsession with words and the poet's desire for new meaning," said Anders Olsson, chair of the literature committee.

Carson has taught classics at several North American universities and has lived in Iceland, where she and her husband,

Robert Currie, were granted citizenship in 2022. The prize was announced by the Swedish Academy in Stockholm on Thursday.

Last year, Hungarian writer Laszlo Krasznahorkai, whose surreal and anarchic novels combine a bleak world view with mordant humour, won the Nobel Prize in literature for work the judges said upholds the power of art in the midst of "apocalyptic terror." Three science awards were announced earlier this week. The Nobel for medicine went to three scientists whose work led to a tool that uses light to help unravel how the brain works. The physics award recognised a scientist's efforts to demystify a rare group of neutrinos. The chemistry prize recognised two scientists for untangling mysterious mirror images in molecules, a discovery that has been used to develop countless drugs. This week ends with Friday's peace prize. The Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences will be announced Monday. The prize money this year is 12 million Swedish kronor (about USD 1.2 million).

"Four people killing Democracy will be punished"

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The protests organized by the 'INDIA Bloc' demanding the resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) of India, Gyanesh Kumar, have reached their third day in Delhi. Opposition MPs continued their agitations on Thursday as well. On this occasion, top Congress leader Rahul Gandhi launched a fierce attack against PM Modi, Amit Shah, Mohan Bhagwat, and Gyanesh Kumar.

Rahul Gandhi alleged that those four individuals are conspiring together to murder democracy. Making sensational remarks, he said, "They will definitely be punished, and all of you will witness it; this is my guarantee." He criticized the government, stating that despite their protests being peaceful, the administration is blocking them. He mentioned that on the first day, they were stopped from going to the Election Commission office, and on the second day, they were not allowed to proceed to Jantar Mantar, claiming that MPs were assaulted.

As part of the protests today, the opposition MPs first paid their respects at Rajghat. The bloc leaders have readied their next course of action on this matter. Opposition MPs are scheduled to meet President Droupadi Murmu on Friday, having already secured an

appointment for the same. They will be submitting a memorandum to the President regarding the allegations against the Election Commission.

May join Jantar Mantar protest on Oct 10: Mamata

Kolkata: Former West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said she may participate in the Cockroach Janata Party-sponsored protest demanding the removal of Gyanesh Kumar as Chief Election Commissioner at Delhi's Jantar Mantar on October 10, but a final decision on this would be taken later.

Speaking to reporters at the NSC Bose International Airport here before boarding a flight to the national capital to take part in the ongoing protests of the opposition INDIA bloc, Banerjee lashed out at the BJP and the Election Commission for the alleged SIR anomalies and electoral malpractices in Bengal.

"I may join the protest at Jantar Mantar scheduled for October 10, but nothing can be confirmed now. We have maintained a relationship with them (the BJP) and have extended our support, while any further decision regarding our participation will be taken later," Banerjee said.

Cong leaders detained in Hyderabad

Hyderabad: Several ruling Congress leaders in



Assam protests break barricades

Guwahati: Members of Assam's Congress unit on Thursday staged protests across the state, including Guwahati, against alleged police harassment and detention of opposition MPs during a march in New Delhi demanding the resignation of CEC Gyanesh Kumar.

Several senior leaders, including former state Congress president Ripun Bora and Assam Pradesh Mahila Congress chief Mira Borthakur Goswami, were detained by police outside the state party headquarters here after they broke through barricades to take out a protest march.

Bora, who led the protest at Rajiv Bhawan, said the Congress would continue its fight against what it alleged was the illegal deletion of voters' names by the CEC at the behest of the BJP-led government.

"It is our democratic right to protest, and the govern-

ment cannot take it away," the 70-year-old leader said.

Similar protests were staged in several parts of the state, including Dibrugarh, Diphu, Nagaon, Nalbari and Charaideo.

Bandh observed in Odisha

Bhubaneswar: Supporters of INDIA bloc parties held demonstrations and blocked roads as part of a 12-hour bandh to protest against alleged irregularities in the SIR exercise, a new mining law, and "errors" in school textbooks.

Business establishments, petrol pumps, shops and many educational institutes were closed, while public transport such as buses and autorickshaws remained off the road.

The protesters, led by Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) president Bhakta Charan Das, picketed at major junctions across the state.

"The protest was peaceful and successful as the public

wholeheartedly supported it. We demand resignation of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar for irregularities in SIR exercise and complete rollback of the MMDR (Amendment) Act," Das said.

INDIA bloc in Bihar hits streets

Patna: The opposition INDIA bloc in Bihar, led by RJD working president Tejashwi Yadav, hit the streets on Thursday to press the demand for Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar's resignation over alleged irregularities in the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls.

Yadav charged Gyanesh Kumar with "murdering democracy while enjoying legal immunity that has no parallels. Even the President of the country can face trial upon completion of term".

"Nonetheless, the nation realises that the CEC is just an instrument. Even the press releases issued by him are

Rahul Gandhi

vetted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, both of whom must be ousted from power to fix the system," the RJD leader alleged.

Yadav also said he had on Wednesday spoken to Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, who asked him to "join the agitation" in Delhi.

"I look forward to being a part of his Rashtrapati Bhawan march," Yadav said.

Protests in Jaipur, other districts in Rajasthan

Jaipur: INDIA Bloc leaders and supporters staged a protest in Jaipur on Thursday demanding the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar over alleged irregularities in the electoral process.

The Congress party held similar protests in the districts as well.

Rajasthan Congress president Govind Singh Dotasra accused the Election Commission of ignoring the opposition's demand for an investigation into alleged "vote theft".

"We are only demanding an investigation into the vote theft, but they are neither listening to us nor allowing us to protest," Dotasra said.

He also criticised the alleged police action against

Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, saying they could not be intimidated.

Thousands join protests in Tripura

Agartala: Tripura's Congress unit on Thursday staged a protest rally here, demanding the immediate arrest of CEC Gyanesh Kumar over his alleged role in the deletion of names of 13 crore electors from the electoral rolls through the SIR. Thousands of Congress leaders and workers, led by Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) president Asish Kumar Saha and senior MLA Sudip Roy Barman, gathered in front of the Agartala Press Club and marched to the office of the District Magistrate, West Tripura, where they staged a protest demanding Kumar's arrest.

"The Congress, under the banner of the INDIA bloc, has been spearheading a movement across the country demanding the removal of Kumar. We allege that 13 crore voters' names have been deleted from the electoral rolls in the name of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR). We strongly condemn the unconstitutional move of excluding crores of valid voters," Saha told reporters.

'Skill Kerala' to train 10K students in emerging tech

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

A university degree alone may not be enough to meet the demands of the changing job market, and industry-oriented skill development can help young people become entrepreneurs and innovators, Minister P.K. Kunhalikutty said on Thursday.

He was speaking after inaugurating the 'Skill Kerala - Emerging Technology Skilling Programme', which aims to equip students in higher education institutions across the state with skills in emerging technologies. The initiative is part of the Chief Minister's 100-day action plan and is being implemented by the ICT Academy of Kerala under the Accelerate Kerala initiative. Kunhalikutty said skill development should go beyond employment generation and focus on nurturing entrepreneurs, innovators and technology professionals. Providing quality training to students with innovative ideas could help unlock Kerala's potential, he said.

He also stressed the need to maintain a constructive atmosphere on university



campuses, observing that educational institutions should not become centres of political clashes. The emergence of the Gen Z generation was influencing the political landscape, and political leaders needed to adapt to the changing educational environment, he added.

Universities across the state were willing to support initiatives to improve students' skills and employability, Kunhalikutty said. He noted that young people were closely following developments in the IT sector and could benefit from emerging opportunities if they had access to quality training and career prospects within Kerala. The initiative represents a joint effort by the government and universities to harness the potential of emerging technologies, he said, adding that governments must respond to the

aspirations of the younger generation.

The programme portal was launched by Higher Education and Social Justice Minister Roji M. John at a function held at the Hilton Garden Inn in Thiruvananthapuram. Under the scheme, 10,000 students across Kerala will receive training through more than 70 courses covering 17 emerging technology domains. The programme will be fully funded by the government, with no additional financial burden on students or educational institutions. The initiative also includes faculty development programmes and industry-led workshops to bridge the gap between academic learning and industry requirements. Participants will receive industry-aligned certification upon completion of the training.

'Indradhanus' reveals extraordinary life of an ordinary man: Vishnunadh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

Actor Indrans' autobiography 'Indradhanus' is about the extraordinary life of an ordinary man, Congress leader P C Vishnunadh said at a discussion on the book organised by the KPCC Vichar Vibhag at the Sathyan Memorial Hall in the capital on Thursday.

"This is not the life story of a film star. The book records the paths he walked and the hardships he endured," Vishnunadh said. He noted that OTT platforms have earned Indrans fans worldwide, and that the era when good films depended solely on festivals is over.

Comparing Indrans to wine that tastes better with age, Vishnunadh said the actor has

grown into an astonishing performer who draws the strength to portray powerful characters from the painful and humiliating circumstances of his early life. "The book never tries to present Indrans as a celebrity, and that it records aspects of his life, including how the name of his tailoring shop became associated with his own identity," said the minister. In his reply, Indrans said he felt the responsibility of being an author was greater than that of being a film actor. He described reading as a profound experience that cannot be hurried, and said the characters he met in books helped him portray roles on screen. "I have taken something from every writer I have read," he said. He said DC Books was the first to encourage him to

write about his experiences. Watching his old tailoring shop, tea shop, grocery shop and barber shop disappear inspired him to document those memories, which led to his earlier book 'Soochiyum Noolum'. "There is a language and way of life that only people from Thiruvananthapuram can understand," Indrans said, recalling his childhood runs through the city's hills, valleys, laterite kilns and canals. "I wrote about things I experienced.

There is no exaggeration in it," he added. He had wanted to release the book in Thiruvananthapuram but could not at the time, and said he was proud to hold the discussion in his hometown as the seventh edition was released.

RPF seizes 11 kg ganja at Ernakulam Railway Station

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kochi

The Railway Protection Force (RPF) Crime Intelligence Branch, Thiruvananthapuram, seized approximately 11 kg of ganja during an inspection at Ernakulam Railway Station on Thursday. The ganja was recovered after Train No. 22642 Shalimar- Thiruvananthapuram Express arrived at Ernakulam Railway Station at around 3.35 pm. The contraband was found abandoned

without any passenger claiming ownership.

The seizure was carried out by a team from the RPF Crime Intelligence Branch, Thiruvananthapuram, under the direction of Senior Divisional Security Commissioner, RPF Thiruvananthapuram Division, Mohammed Haneef. The team comprised Inspector Jipin A.J., ASIs J.P. Anilkumar, Sijo Xavier and Vijayakumar, Head Constable Vipin, and Constables Manoj, K. Suneesh and Kalaiselvan.

Private startups won't overtake ISRO: Madhavan Nair

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

Private startups will not be able to overtake ISRO in launch vehicle design and production, G Madhavan Nair, former Chairman of ISRO, has said.

Speaking at a seminar titled 'ISRO's Future - Concerns and Anxieties', organised by ISRO Pensioners' Association at Mahatma Ayyankali Hall, Thiruvananthapuram on Thursday, Madhavan Nair said that, though many new startups have come up in the space sector, they will

not be able to design and produce launch vehicles capable of lifting 5,000 to 10,000 kg class of satellites to their intended orbits in the near future. What is now being celebrated is the successful launch of a small satellite launch vehicle capable of lifting 300 kg class of satellites, he pointed out. Additionally, services in areas like defence, education, navigation etc., which the nation and common man are now receiving at nil cost, may not be available when these are given away to profit-driven private companies, he said.



CPI state secretary Binoy Viswam honouring actor Indrans at the cultural meeting hosted by the 'Nammalonnur' collective at the MN Smarakam in Thiruvananthapuram on Thursday.



Family of three missing from Kattakkada traced in Kochi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

A three-member family who were reported missing from Kattakkada in Thiruvananthapuram have been traced in Kochi. Shankar (34), a native of Veeranakaavu in Poovachal, his wife Athira (27) and their three-year-old daughter Dhvani were reported missing by Athira's mother on October 6. Subsequently, the Kattakkada police had launched an investigation into the disappearance of a family. Athira's mother had filed the complaint after relatives lost all contact with the family from Tuesday. However, Athira contacted her mother on Thursday and informed her that they were in Kochi.

Relatives told the police that the family had been under stress due to unresolved financial debts and liabilities. Soon, cyber cell units were tracking the mobile phone tower locations of the family. Police teams also scanned CCTV footage from surrounding transport hubs and exit points out of Thiruvananthapuram, and examined financial transactions.

Police had urged the public with credible information about Shankar, Athira or Dhvani to contact the Kattakkada Police Station or the Kerala Police helpline.

Bindu Krishna says abuse charges should not be 'party settled'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

Women and Child Development Minister Bindu Krishna on Thursday said allegations of sexual harassment against a CPM leader should not be settled within political parties and urged the woman concerned to approach the law. Krishna was referring to allegations of sexual harassment against the CPM leader from a north district, who recently resigned as the party district secretary.

Media reports alleged that the leader resigned after a woman lodged a sexual harassment complaint against him with the party leadership.

Speaking to reporters, Krishna said reports about the allegations were serious and that criminal offences should be dealt with through legal action.

"Whenever such allegations of sexual harassment arise against CPM party leaders, the party settles it internally without bringing it before the rule of law in public society. That is not



desirable at all," she said.

"If anyone has committed serious criminal offences, they must certainly be subjected to legal action," the Minister said, urging women who had faced such alleged harassment to come forward and approach the law. Krishna also criticised the practice of settling such complaints within political organisations. "It is never correct," she said, adding that anyone accused of harassment should be brought to justice.

However, CPI(M) leaders said they were unaware of any such complaint and maintained that the party does not protect members facing allegations of offences against women.

Four post matric hostels inaugurated across state

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Palakkad

Four post-matric hostel buildings completed at Kozhijampara, Manissery, Aluva and Mayithara were inaugurated by SC, ST and Backward Classes Welfare Minister K.A. Thulasi on Thursday. The three-storey girls' hostel at Kozhijampara in Palakkad district, built at a cost of Rs 5.3 crore by the Kerala Construction Corporation, has accommodation for 60 students. It will primarily serve students of the nearby Kozhijampara Arts and Science College and Government ITI.

Admission has been granted to 23 students so far, including 13 from Scheduled Caste communities, two from Scheduled Tribe communities, two from Other Eligible Communities (OEC) and six from Other Backward Classes (OBC).

The hostel has facilities

including a lift, furniture, kitchen equipment, electricity and drinking water.

The Minister said the government would give greater priority to schemes aimed at developing skills and improving employment opportunities for students from backward communities. She said all 32 projects announced by the department as part of the government's 100-day action programme had been completed successfully within the stipulated time. The department would also directly undertake house construction for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe families, she said, adding that applications had been invited for financial assistance for house repairs.

The inauguration ceremony was held at the Kozhijampara Government Arts and Science College, with Sumesha Achuthan MLA presiding.

IJU Condemns Assault on Woman Journalist in Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The leadership of the Indian Journalists Union (IJU) including President Geethartha Pathak and Secretary General Vinod Kumar Kohli, has strongly condemned the recent assault on a woman journalist in Delhi. Working closely alongside the national body for the welfare of media personnel, the TUVJH 143 association continues to walk hand-in-hand in this ongoing struggle for journalists' rights. In a significant organizational milestone, the Central Government has appointed a member from the Manipur Journalists Union—a close affiliate travelling alongside the IJU journey—as an official member of the newly reconstituted PCI.

Private bus owners warn indefinite strike over Priyadarshini

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

Private bus operators in the state have announced an indefinite strike demanding that the government resolve the difficulties faced by the sector due to the Priyadarshini free travel scheme. As the first phase of the agitation, the Kerala State Private Bus Operators Federation will organise a march to the Secretariat and a sit-in protest on October 14.

The federation's main complaint is that private buses operating on routes covered by Priyadarshini buses are not generating sufficient revenue to meet diesel expenses and provide reasonable wages to their



UDF protest over NH 66 toll collection turns violent

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thrissur

A protest by the Congress-led UDF turned violent as activists clashed with police over toll collection at an NHAI toll plaza in Nattika here on Thursday, police said. The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has decided to start toll collection at Nattika on NH 66 from October 8.

However, UDF leaders alleged that toll collection had started without completing the works on the service road and pedestrian overbridges, officials said.

At around 7.30 am, Congress and Indian Union

Leaders condole Nana Patekar's death

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

State leaders including Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan, on Thursday condoled the death of veteran actor Nana Patekar, recalling his contribution to Indian cinema and praising his acting and philanthropic work.

The 76-year-old actor, known for his versatility and powerful screen presence, died at his Goa residence in the early hours of Thursday.

Satheesan, in a post on 'X', said that he was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of the legendary actor, Padmashri Patekar.

"His fierce screen presence, extraordinary versatility, and powerful portrayals left an enduring legacy in Indian cinema. Beyond the arts, his dedicated grassroots work for the welfare of farmers and underprivileged communities was truly commendable,"



Satheesan said. Heartfelt condolences to his family, friends, and legions of admirers, he added. In a Facebook post, Union Minister of State and actor Suresh Gopi quoted Patekar as saying, "I am an actor, not a star. Stars shine for a moment, but actors stay forever."

Gopi described Patekar as

Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan, on Thursday condoled the death of veteran actor Nana Patekar, recalling his contribution to Indian cinema and praising his acting and philanthropic work.

the "undisputed king of histrionics" and said few actors in the history of Indian cinema had commanded the craft with such authority.

He recalled Patekar's performances in films including 'Parinda', 'Krantiveer', 'Tiranga' and 'Natsamrat', and praised his dialogue delivery and screen presence.

Gopi also highlighted Patekar's philanthropic work through the Naam Foundation, noting that he

had supported drought-affected farmers and rural communities in Maharashtra.

"An irreplaceable void in Indian cinema. Rest in peace, legend," Gopi said.

CPI(M) veteran and former CM Pinarayi Vijayan also condoled the demise of the actor.

In a post on 'X', the Leader of Opposition said that Patekar's passing is a great loss to Indian cinema.

"Few actors have made such a lasting impact across both mainstream and independent cinema. With his extraordinary range, intensity and distinctive presence, he brought depth to every role and influenced generations of actors and filmmakers," Vijayan said.

He said that Patekar's immense contribution to Indian cinema will be remembered with admiration.

"My heartfelt condolences to his family, friends and admirers," he added.

UST donates lightweight wheelchair to para shooter Akhil Sam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

UST has donated an ultra-lightweight wheelchair to national para shooting athlete Akhil Sam to support his mobility, training and participation in competitions. The wheelchair was handed over to Akhil Sam at a ceremony held at the company's Thiruvananthapuram campus on Wednesday as part of its corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative focusing on disability inclusion and independent living.

Sam has been using a wheelchair for the past 10



years following a spinal cord injury. He took up competitive shooting after the injury and has since participated in para shooting championships across the country. He won gold at the 2004 Kerala State Shooting

Championships and bronze at the 2004 Zonal Para Shooting Championship in Pune, qualifying for national-level competitions.

The heavy wheelchair he had been using made travelling and training difficult,

as it had to be dismantled and reassembled for every trip. The new lightweight wheelchair is expected to ease transportation and help him train and compete with greater independence.

"Akhil Sam's persistence and dedication in the face of real challenges embody core UST values and the ambitions of our CSR programme. We hope to help him build on what he has achieved by removing barriers to competition," said Sunil Balakrishnan, Chief Values Officer and Global Head of Development Center Operations at UST.

Was state govt elected illegally? BJP asks CM to clarify

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

BJP state president Rajeev Chandrasekhar on Thursday demanded that Chief Minister V D Satheesan should clarify the Congress national leadership's alleged position that the Kerala government was not legally elected.

Speaking at the BJP's 'Mission 2029' state leadership meeting at KG Marar Bhavan, Chandrasekhar said the Chief Minister had a responsibility to tell the people where he stood on the reported position of the Congress national leadership. Chandrasekhar also criticised the UDF government, claiming that it had failed to deliver on its promise of a 'New Kerala' even after 140 days in office. He alleged that people were instead facing power cuts,



price rise, unemployment and economic stagnation.

Meanwhile, Chandrasekhar said the BJP should strengthen its grassroots presence ahead of the 2029 elections and urged party workers to focus on public service rather than relying solely on social media campaigns. He called on workers to meet voters directly, understand their concerns and communicate the development initiatives of the Narendra Modi government.

Claiming that the BJP had broken the perception that it

could not win elections in Kerala during the last Assembly elections, Chandrasekhar said the party was emerging as a political alternative in the state. He urged workers to establish the BJP's position as the main opposition among the public.

He said the 2029 elections would be crucial for the country and called for intensified organisational work across all sections of society. "The politics of service" should form the foundation of the party's activities, he said.

The remarks were made during a reception for BJP Kerala Prabhari and Rajya Sabha MP M Nagaraj and Kerala Co-Prabhari M Venkatesan. The two leaders also attended the BJP Core Committee meeting and the 'Mission 2029' state leadership meeting.

Row over job for KPCC leader's wife at SIEMAT

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

The temporary appointment of Shani Shafeer, wife of KPCC general secretary and Congress leader B R M Shafeer, as a research officer at the State Institute of Educational Management and Training (SIEMAT) under the Education Department has triggered a political controversy. DYFI activists staged a protest against the appointment, laying siege to the SIEMAT director R. Arun Kumar.

Shani Shafeer was appointed to the post for one year with a monthly salary of Rs 40,000. The appointment has come under scrutiny amid allegations that she was selected without inviting applications or conducting an interview and solely on the basis of her biodata.

Responding to the allegations, the SIEMAT Director said the appoint-

ment was made because it was a temporary post and no notification was required. He said no other biodata had been received and that the selection was based on Shani Shafeer's qualifications. "All posts here are temporary, and there are no permanent appointments. She was selected based on her qualifications, not because she is Shafeer's wife. Notifications were not issued for temporary appointments in the past either. We examined the biodata received and appointed her because she possessed the required qualifications," Arun Kumar said. He added that the institute would consult the government on the next course of action in view of the controversy.

Meanwhile, officials at the Education Department also said that no one, including relatives of CPM leaders appointed by the previous government, had

been removed from SIEMAT, which is involved in teacher training.

Shafeer defended the appointment, saying his wife had applied when the vacancy arose and had not taken away anyone else's opportunity. The appointment has nevertheless drawn criticism, particularly because the UDF had made allegations of nepotism and appointments involving relatives a major political issue against the previous government. Shafeer's earlier remarks at an NGO association conference have also resurfaced in the controversy. Soon after the UDF came to power, he had reportedly told his brother-in-law, who had sought a transfer in the police department, to "go and do your job". The remark, which had drawn an enthusiastic response from the audience, is now being recalled amid allegations that Shafeer has facilitated a temporary appointment for his wife.

Poly student booked for morphing pics of female classmates, teachers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kollam

The Punalur police have registered a case against a fifth-semester student of the Government Polytechnic College, Punalur, for allegedly morphing photographs of female students and teachers and circulating them on adult websites and social media platforms.

The accused, Achyuth S, a fifth-semester Electrical and Electronics Engineering student, allegedly captured pictures of female classmates and teachers using his mobile phone, morphed them and uploaded the images on adult websites. He also sold them for money. According to initial reports, the images were also distributed through dedicated Telegram groups.

The matter came to light when female classmates discovered the activity and complained to the college principal. The administration summoned Achyuth and questioned him in the presence of his parents. Confronted with the evidence compiled by his classmates, he reportedly admit-

ted to the act. The college suspended him indefinitely, and the principal submitted a detailed report to the Directorate of Technical Education.

Following the college's complaint, the Punalur police registered an FIR and seized his mobile phone, which has been handed over to the Cyber Cell for forensic examination. Investigators are mapping his digital footprint to determine the extent of distribution and whether AI-based morphing bots or deepfake software were used. Police are also tracing financial transactions to identify buyers and the money earned.

Statements of the affected teachers and students are being recorded. Police said such cases are typically booked under the Information Technology Act and relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, though the specific charges in this case were not detailed.

Victims of online harassment can report content through the Kerala Police Cyberwall portal.

CBL 2026 sixth leg, Indira Gandhi Boat Race tomorrow

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kochi

The sixth leg of the Champions Boat League (CBL) 2026, along with the Indira Gandhi Boat Race, will be held at Marine Drive here on October 10. The event, organised by the Tourism Department, will begin at 1 pm, with the boat races scheduled to start around 2 pm. Higher Education Minister Roji M John will inaugurate the event, while T J Vinod MLA will preside. Fisheries, Harbour Engineering and Social Justice Minister V E Abdul Ghafoor will deliver the CBL message. Emakulam MP Hibi Eden and Kochi Mayor Minimol V K will attend as chief guests. Nine snake boats that secured top positions in the 2026 Nehru Trophy Boat Race in Alappuzha will compete in the CBL leg. The participating boats are AROMA-1, Nadubhagam, Veeyapuram, Melpadam, Niranam, Arpoopara, Cheruthana, Punnamada Niranam and Thalavady.

Rainy Day Delight



School students cross a rain-soaked road amid heavy showers, enjoying the monsoon rain on Thursday in Thiruvananthapuram .

-A V Muzafar

Resignation row: Sreelekha to break silence on Sunday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram



Former Director General of Police and BJP councillor in Thiruvananthapuram City Corporation R. Sreelekha has said she will respond to the controversy surrounding her reported resignation from the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation Council on October 11. In a Facebook post, she questioned the media coverage of the episode and asked people to wait until Sunday to hear her side of the story. "I want to explain why the media spent three to four days celebrating that Sreelekha resigned. Please wait until Sunday, October 11. Listen to what I have to say as well," she wrote. The controversy began on October 3 when Sreelekha announced her resignation as councillor in a WhatsApp message. The

announcement triggered widespread media coverage, following which the BJP state leadership intervened and reportedly persuaded her to reconsider her decision.

She subsequently deleted the message. Reports suggested that her dissatisfaction stemmed from the party leadership's decision to choose another leader for the Mayor's post. The circumstances surrounding the resignation announcement and the party's intervention have since drawn much attention.

Free eye screening, spectacles for children in 72 schools

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

A free eye screening and spectacles distribution programme was organised for children, including those with disabilities, studying in 72 schools under the Neyyattinkara Block Resource Centre (BRC).

The programme was jointly organised by the Venganoor Elite Lions Club, Neyyattinkara BRC and Sreenethra Eye Care Hospital, with the objective of detecting vision-related problems at an early stage and ensuring timely treatment and care. A team of expert ophthalmologists conducted the screening, and children identified with vision problems were given necessary advice for further treatment and follow-up. Spectacles were distributed

free of cost to eligible children.

Dr. Jancy Rani, DPO, SSK Thiruvananthapuram, presided over the function. Anand Kumar, Trainer, BRC Neyyattinkara, delivered the welcome address. Neyyattinkara Municipal Chairperson W.R. Hema inaugurated the programme. Pannimala Suresh, BPC, BRC Neyyattinkara, explained the project. Nandakumar R.S., Secretary, Venganoor Elite Lions Club, offered felicitations, while Anu Varghese Thankal CRCC, BRC Neyyattinkara, proposed the vote of thanks. The organisers said that such collaborative initiatives are important in protecting the eye health of all children, particularly those with disabilities, and in improving their learning and overall quality of life.

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Applications are invited against existing and retirement vacancies in the following posts in our institution		
Sl.No.	Post	No. of Vacancy
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6	HSST ARAB JR	1
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Date: 07/10/2026		

PUBLIC NOTICE	
This notice is issued to inform the general public that I, Ajay P.J., son of Prasanna Kumar, residing at Ulthram, Pulippara, Nedumangad P.O., Karippoor Village, am the absolute owner of the land measuring 1.82 Acres along with the building situated in Karippoor Village, Nedumangad Taluk, Thiruvananthapuram District, covered under Old Survey Nos. 722/4-2, 722/3-1, and 822/2-3, Re-survey No. 683/4-15-1, in Re-survey Block No. 36, as acquired vide Title Deed No. 404/2026 registered at the Nedumangad Sub-Registrar Office. The original prior title deed (munaadharanam) of the said property, registered as Settlement Deed No. 364/2016 at the Nedumangad Sub-Registrar Office, has been irrevocably lost. I intend to avail a financial facility/loan from IDBI Bank, Thiruvananthapuram Branch, by submitting a certified copy of the aforementioned lost Document No. 364/2016. Any individual, institution, or bank having any claim, objection, mortgage, or encumbrance over the said property or document is hereby requested to submit the same in writing, supported by valid proof, to my address given above or to the bank/concerned authorities within 7 days from the date of publication of this notice.	
Ajay P.J., Contact: 9567686864	



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
 Kochi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

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PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
 Alappuzha

Security heightened outside CEC house

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi

Security outside Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar's residence in New Moti Bagh has been stepped up after fresh threat inputs and a sharp escalation in protests by the INDIA bloc over the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

The CEC already enjoys Z-plus cover, the second-highest civilian security category in the country after the Special Protection Group protection extended to the Prime Minister and his immediate family. Officials said the category already involves roughly fifty personnel working in shifts, with layered arrangements for the protectee's residence, movement and cavalcade.

In the latest review, additional police and Central Industrial Security Force personnel have been placed outside the house, at Nirvachan Sadan on Ashoka Road, and with his personal



CEC Gyanesh Kumar's residence in Delhi

security detail. The CISF reinforcement of "additional reserve" strength was ordered on October 7.

Local district police have also been told to increase deployment and coordinate with other agencies to prevent any untoward incident as protests continue in the New Delhi district. A senior police officer said the decision followed a new threat assessment. Protesters

found Kumar's home in New Moti Bagh colony, and some tried to enter the area and approach the house.

Security pickets were set up nearby. In a separate incident, protesters demonstrated outside his family's home in Agra. Security staff in the colony confirmed that more paramilitary personnel were stationed inside the complex because of the protests.

Delhi Police officials said

CEC has had Z-plus security for some time, and the latest move only strengthens this arrangement instead of changing his security category.

With this cover, over fifty officers from central armed police forces and Delhi Police are on duty.

He also has personal security officers, watchers, and close-protection teams working around the clock. The extra security comes as

Opposition parties step up their campaign for the CEC's resignation. INDIA bloc leaders, led by Lok Sabha Opposition Leader Rahul Gandhi, have accused the Commission of irregularities in the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls and of favouring the Government.

Senior Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, along with leaders from the Samajwadi Party and Trinamool Congress, have also called for the CEC's removal. On October 6, Opposition leaders marched to the Election Commission headquarters, but police stopped them and detained several people.

Later, more attempts to reach protest sites, including Jantar Mantar, led to more detentions before the leaders were released. On October 5, authorities deployed about 5,000 security personnel for separate protests in the capital, and over 120 protesters were briefly detained. The protests have spread

beyond Delhi. Earlier, Youth Congress workers spray-painted slogans on the gate and walls of the family's Agra home, calling the Chief Election Commissioner a "traitor" and a "vote thief."

Student and youth groups have held sit-ins and torchlight marches in several cities, and a larger Opposition protest is planned for October 10. Police and intelligence agencies have been told to monitor the situation closely.

The political dispute over the revision process has continued for weeks. Opposition parties claim there have been large-scale deletions and a lack of transparency.

The Commission says that any differences among Election Commissioners during internal talks do not change the fact that final decisions, including those on the revision, were unanimous. The Supreme Court has sent a notice to the Commission and the Centre about a plea questioning some decisions linked to the CEC.

Kerala BJP chief slams Satheesan over detention

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram



Kerala BJP president Rajeev Chandrasekhar

Kerala BJP president Rajeev Chandrasekhar on Thursday accused Chief Minister VD Satheesan of trying to distract Kerala people with "fake protests about democracy" while his administration was allegedly violating law and fundamental rights through its actions against Thiruvananthapuram Corporation councillor R Sugathan.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's protests against CEC Gyanesh Kumar as a "fraud drama," the BJP leader alleged.

Chandrasekhar's 'X' post came in the wake of Satheesan's participation in the agitation in Delhi against the CEC and his social media posts criticising the detention of Rahul Gandhi during the protest.

The CM on Wednesday said that the FIR against Gandhi for questioning electoral integrity is an "attack"

on democratic dissent. He also said, "the fight against irregularities in the electoral rolls and for free and fair elections continues. Democracy will not be silenced."

Replying to the CM, Chandrasekhar said, "To CM @vdsatheesan, don't waste your time and try to distract malayalees with your fake protestations about democracy, secularism and the constitution when your administration is covering itself with violations of law, justice and fundamental rights."

New CAPF administration law comes into force amid SC challenge

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Wednesday brought the Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Act, 2026 into force, converting a fiercely contested statute into the working law for the leadership of India's largest internal-security formations even as the Supreme Court continues to hear challenges to its validity.

Parliament passed the Act in early April, and the President approved it on April 9, 2026. The law covers Group A general-duty officers

in the CRPF, BSF, CISF, ITBP, and SSB. The Government set the enforcement date for October 8. Now, the Centre-drafted rules on recruitment, promotion, deputation, and service conditions are in effect. The law sets aside half of Inspector General posts for Indian Police Service (IPS) officers on deputation, at least 67 per cent of Additional Director General posts for the same group, and all Special Director General and Director General posts for deputation. The Centre also gets rule-making powers that apply even if previous judgments or orders say otherwise,

and the Act takes priority over other laws in case of a conflict. The Government says this system aims to bring consistency and clear roles across the five forces that handle border security, protect key sites, and manage counter-insurgency.

Cadre officers see the law differently. Over 3,000 serving Group A officers, including gallantry award winners and women officers, have petitioned the Supreme Court to strike down important parts of the law as unconstitutional. They say Sections 3 and 4 block their path to top positions, which the court had opened



for them last year. They believe Parliament has undone a court judgment instead of following it.

One of the main petitioners is a CRPF officer who has

received the Shaurya Chakra. The petitioners want the court to declare the disputed sections unconstitutional and to order that higher administrative posts should

go to qualified executive cadre officers from within the forces.

The officers want to restore the Supreme Court's May 23, 2025, decision in Sanjay Prakash versus Union of India. In that ruling, the court said the CAPFs are organised Group A services, ordered a review of the cadre within six months, and told the Centre to reduce IPS deputation up to the Senior Administrative Grade gradually. The Government's review petition was dismissed in October 2025. Contempt proceedings began after the MHA reported that 46 IPS officers were

still deputed to the five forces after the judgment. A special bench was constituted after a contempt petition disappeared from the cause list, prompting the court to seek an explanation from the Registry and note that too much heat can be generated from a listing dispute.

Further hearings have been fixed later this month and into November, with the Centre and the petitioners still exchanging pleadings. The bench will have to read three things together: the 2025 directions, the cadre-review exercise the Ministry says is under way, and a statute that now

writes deputation quotas into law.

For officers who have spent their careers leading companies and battalions, this issue is very real. If a post is reserved for deputation, it cannot be earned through seniority or field service within the force.

The MHA sees these posts as a place where civil-police experience should combine with paramilitary leadership. The notification issued on Wednesday does not resolve this debate. It simply means the debate is now about a law already in effect, awaiting a court decision on whether it will stand.

BJP hits out at Rahul, Priyanka over alleged conduct with cops

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

As the Congress intensified its protest, the BJP on Thursday accused Rahul Gandhi of "inappropriately touching" a female constable and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra of "punching" a cop during their street protest, and claimed that the Congress leaders' actions were not consistent with their slogan of "smash the patriarchy".

The Congress was also trying to create "Nepal-and-Bangladesh-like anarchy" in the country through its protests, as Rahul Gandhi is "desperate" to come to power, BJP spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari alleged.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters here, party spokesperson Sidharth Yadav accused Rahul and Priyanka of attacking police personnel during the protests. Yadav said the visuals being circulated were not of a protest but showed "the anarchy being spread in the national capital" under the leadership of Rahul Gandhi and the Congress.



He alleged that Rahul "inappropriately touched" a woman police constable and claimed that Priyanka "punched" a female police officer in the stomach".

"The conduct of Rahul Gandhi in inappropriately touching a female constable is totally unacceptable," he said. "Priyanka punched a female police officer in the stomach even though she was simply standing there and had not provoked anyone. This is beyond tolerance," he said. The BJP spokesperson also alleged that Congress workers kicked policemen after bringing them to the ground.

Referring to Rahul Gandhi's slogan "smash the patriarchy"

and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's "Ladki Hoon, Lad Sakti Hoon" slogans, Yadav questioned whether the alleged conduct of the Congress leaders was consistent with their stated positions.

"When she was hitting that female police officer, was this the slogan that was going through her mind?" he asked, referring to Priyanka. If that's not the case, "then the truth behind their slogans is now before the country", Yadav said. "Rahul Gandhi has said that there are 47 FIRs against him. But wearing an FIR relating to an alleged crime against a woman as a medal - only Rahul Gandhi can do this in the country," he said.

Will not allow religious conversion, love jihad or land jihad: Suvendu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Malda (WB)

West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari on Thursday said religious conversion, "love jihad" and "land jihad" will not be allowed during his tenure.

Addressing a relief distribution programme in Muslim-majority Malda, Adhikari said religious conversion had occurred in the district's Kaliachak area in the past, but that should not be repeated.

"If it happens in my tenure, no one will be worse than me. I am telling you that there should not be any more religious conversion anywhere. As long as I am alive, I will not allow Mothabari and Kaliachak (incidents to happen again)," Adhikari added. A case had been filed in 2023 alleging forced conversion of two brothers in Mothabari in the district bordering Bangladesh.

There had been communal riots where Hindus suf-



CM Suvendu Adhikari

fered the most, the chief minister said. "Love jihad and land jihad will be stopped. We have given land to BSF. Not even a fly will be allowed to enter," Adhikari said.

The West Bengal Government has transferred 142.79 acres of land to the BSF in May for barbed-wire fencing and border outposts in several districts including Malda.

On the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, Adhikari said applicants would no longer have to approach others for certificates, as the Centre had given the state the power to issue them.

Varanasi set to witness spectacular IAF aerial display on October 25

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Varanasi is all set to witness a spectacular ceremonial aerial display on October 25, marking the IAF's 94th anniversary. The flying display will encapsulate the theme for the celebrations: 'Infallible Impervious and Precise,' it was learnt. Frontline fighter jets, including Rafales, Su-30MKI and Apache helicopters, are likely to enthrall the audience.

Ceremonial fly-pasts showcase the IAF's air assets and also provide a platform to bolster its connect with the masses. The IAF on Thursday held a vibrant parade at the Hindan air base, Ghaziabad to celebrate over nine decades of the force since its inception on October 8, 1932.

The upcoming flying display will encapsulate the theme for the celebrations: 'Infallible Impervious and Precise'. The IAF had put up a spectacular flying display over the majestic Brahmaputra river in Guwahati besides the tradi-



tional parade at the Hindan air base as part of the force's 93rd anniversary celebrations in November 2025.

An array of fighter, transport and helicopter aircraft had flown past the Lachit Ghat, adding to the vibrant hues of Guwahati. The lineup reflected the wide array of aircraft the IAF has in its fleet.

Highlights in last year's fly past included jets such as Tejas, Apache, C-295 and Hawks, symbolising the pathway to national resilience.

Besides, Su-30 MKI and Rafale had enthralled the audience in Assam with breathtaking low-level aerobatics. The performance had

concluded with synchronised manoeuvring by the Suryakiran Aerobatics Team (SKAT) and Sarang helicopter display team, leaving the audience spellbound.

In his address at the Air Force Day celebrations at the Hindan air base, Air Chief Marshal A P Singh said that since its inception in 1932, the IAF has evolved into an exceptional, network-centric and multi-domain force that is alert and ready to meet any challenges.

Besides the ceremonial parade, a static display of some of its prized combat assets such as Rafale and Tejas and a fly past by three Mi-17 helicopters was also hosted.

Nana Patekar leaves behind an unfulfilled dream of settling in Uttarakhand's mountains

ANJALI YADAV ■ Dehradun

Nana Patekar's connection with Uttarakhand's mountains lives on in the memories of people he met during a film shoot in Chamoli, where the said he wanted to build a house and spend his holidays in the mountains. Patekar, one of Indian cinema's acclaimed actors, died aged 75 on Thursday after reportedly suffering a cardiac arrest in Goa.

His Uttarakhand connection dates back to September 2022, when he visited Chamoli the shoot a Marathi film. The unit shot in Lata, Malari and areas around the Niti Valley. During his stay in the areas of the district bordering Nepal and China, Patekar interacted with residents and experienced their food, traditional lifestyle,



weather, and peaceful surroundings. According to locals, He was deeply impressed by the simplicity and beauty of the region and spoke about building a house there.

Patekar stayed with his crew at a homestay in Lata. Homestay owner Narendra Singh Rana recalled that the actor stayed there for seven days and had a separate kitchen where he cooked dishes including chicken and mutton. "He would call every-

one together, sometimes scold them jokingly, and then serve them food," Rana recalled. Rana said Patekar told him he would return and book the homestay for eight days with his friends.

He also said he wanted to buy a small piece of land in Lata and build a small house where he could spend his holidays every year. Rana also remembered Patekar as being warm towards visitors and guests at the homestay, talking to them and

posing for photographs. During the shoot, Patekar also visited Narayan Koti and Devar areas in Rudrapur, where he enjoyed local food, including mandua roti and rai-palak.

He also visited Dehradun and praised Uttarakhand's natural beauty and the hospitality of its people. During the visit, he met the chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami and described the State as an ideal location for film shoots.

Nearly four years later, Patekar's wish to make the mountains his home remained unfulfilled. For the people who met him, however, his brief stay in Uttarakhand remains a cherished memory of an actor who came to the mountains for work but left with a personal dream of returning.

Government plans AI rules on safety, deepfakes within a month: Vaishnaw

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Thursday said the Centre will bring out a consultation paper on AI regulations in a month, dealing with aspects like AI safety, a human-first approach, and deepfakes. He added that the time for such a framework has come, and that industry must shoulder the bulk of the responsibility.

The move assumes significance as concerns over deepfakes, cyber threats and the psychological effects of AI chatbots are growing, and leading researchers have repeatedly called for stronger safeguards. Across the world, governments and regulators are racing to keep pace with fast-moving AI, with the European Union already



IT minister Ashwini Vaishnaw

enacting a comprehensive Artificial Intelligence (AI) Act.

While speaking at an event on the release of the World Development Report, Vaishnaw noted that deepfakes are a "nuisance which can cause huge problems in society", and added that their quality is improving every day. The India Launch of the World Development Report 2026: The Promise of Artificial

Intelligence was organised by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), through the IndiaAI Mission, in collaboration with the World Bank Group.

"People believe them, and it sets a totally wrong precedent. It sets a totally wrong narrative, and people get lured into doing wrong things and believing wrong things," he said, adding the upcoming consultation paper would deal with AI harms and deepfakes as a big area of focus.

"I'll request the department to come out with a regulation-focused consultation paper, which focuses on safety. That's the most important point...safety-related to AI use," Vaishnaw said.

Vaishnaw further said that the upcoming consultation paper will form the basis for AI regulations, and added

that the time has come for India to have such a framework. Other issues that the consultation paper would prioritise are AI harms, including deepfakes, a human-first approach, skilling, as well as a commitment to leave no person behind, the Minister elaborated. "Humanity has to be the most important part of change that has happened," Vaishnaw said.

Vaishnaw made it clear that the industry must shoulder the bulk of the responsibility. "The industry has to take the primary responsibility," he said, listing out issues such as cybersecurity, safety, user harm, psychological disorders and deepfakes. "So we'll come out with that paper in a month's time from now, and based on that we'll go forward with the regulation," Vaishnaw said.

India's AI opportunity lies beyond the race for bigger models

A child learns to recognise a chair from a handful of examples; today's most advanced AI systems require enormous computing power to achieve comparable generalisation. India should compete in the AI race, but also ask the deeper question: what does the 20-watt human brain know that our machines do not?



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE



A child can learn what a chair is from a handful of examples. Give a child a few chairs of different shapes, sizes and colours, and soon the child can recognise a chair they have never seen before. They can distinguish a chair from a table, infer that a stool belongs to the same conceptual family, and apply the idea to objects in unfamiliar settings. Human intelligence generalises from remarkably little data.

Now consider what it takes to reproduce even a fraction of this general-purpose intelligence artificially. OpenAI's latest frontier model, GPT-6 Astra, was developed through the company's largest training run, involving more than 100,000 GPUs at its Stargate facility, according to reporting on its launch. OpenAI describes Astra as its most capable model yet, with state-of-the-art performance across reasoning, computer use, coding, science and professional work.

The contrast is extraordinary. A human brain, weighing roughly 1.3 kilograms, operates on approximately 20 watts of metabolic power. It learns continuously, generalises from sparse experience and adapts to situations it has never encountered. We can now build artificial systems of extraordinary capability, but achieving that capability requires industrial-scale computing infrastructure.

This is not merely a technological curiosity. It may be one of India's most important strategic opportunities. The global AI race is increasingly becoming a race of scale. The largest companies are accumulating GPUs, data, capital and engineering talent at a rate that few countries or institutions can match. India should absolutely participate in this race. We need computing infrastructure, foundational models, chips, data centres and world-class AI researchers. But there is little strategic value in deciding that our ambition is to become the second-best version of something that someone else has already built. There is no enduring national advantage in being second at the same game.

India needs to investigate a different question: why does biological intelligence achieve so much generalisation, abstraction and adaptability with so little energy and so little experience?

We still do not have a satisfactory scientific answer. We understand many components of the brain and have made enormous advances in neuro-

MODERN NEUROSCIENCE HAS DEVELOPED INCREASINGLY POWERFUL INSTRUMENTS FOR OBSERVING THE BRAIN FROM THE OUTSIDE. PERHAPS THE NEXT ADVANCES WILL REQUIRE US TO COMBINE THESE MEASUREMENTS WITH MUCH MORE SYSTEMATIC INVESTIGATION OF SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE FROM WITHIN. IT REQUIRES RECOGNISING THAT A COMPLETE SCIENCE OF COGNITION MAY NEED METHODS CAPABLE OF CONNECTING FIRST-PERSON EXPERIENCE WITH THIRD-PERSON MEASUREMENT

Suresh Prabhu is a former Union Minister and parliamentarian. Shobhit Mathur is the co-founder and Vice-Chancellor of Rishihood University

science, but we do not possess a comprehensive theory of how intelligence emerges from them. We do not fully understand how the brain forms abstractions, transfers knowledge across domains, learns continuously without catastrophic loss of previous knowledge, or constructs useful models of the world from relatively sparse experience.

These are precisely the questions that could produce disproportionate advances in AI. A better understanding of biological intelligence could lead to fundamentally different approaches to learning and computation. A new principle for generalisation could matter more than another generation of larger models. A radically more efficient architecture could matter more than another expansion of computing infrastructure. The largest opportunity may therefore lie not in scaling today's paradigm, but in discovering what today's paradigm is missing.

This is a difficult research programme, and that is precisely why universities should pursue it. Markets and companies naturally favour research with identifiable commercial returns. Fundamental questions about cognition, abstraction and consciousness may take decades to resolve and may produce no immediate product. Yet some of the most consequential technologies in modern history emerged from research whose eventual applications were impossible to predict at the time.

Modern neuroscience has developed increasingly powerful instruments for observing the brain from the outside. Perhaps the next advances will require us to combine these measurements with much more systematic investigation of subjective experience from within. It requires recognising that a complete science of cognition may need methods capable of connecting first-person experience with third-person measurement. This could become a distinctive Indian research programme: neuroscience, cognitive science, AI, mathematics, philosophy and contemplative practice brought together around one fundamental question: what are the computational principles of intelligence?

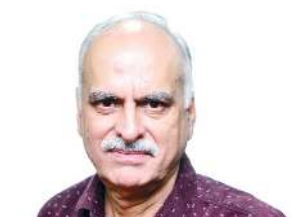
The objective should not be to build an Indian copy of GPT-6 Astra. By the time we reproduce today's frontier, the frontier will have moved again. The objective should be to understand something that the frontier itself does not yet understand.

India should therefore make two bets. We should invest aggressively in the infrastructure required to compete in today's AI economy. Alongside it, we should create long-horizon research programmes willing to pursue questions where the probability, timing and form of the payoff are unknown.

The second bet may turn out to be far more important. The 20-watt brain is telling us something profound. Intelligence does not necessarily require enormous amounts of computation. We simply do not yet understand how nature achieves it.

India's opportunity is to study that gap. If we spend the next decade trying to catch the leaders, we may become very good at following them. If we spend part of that decade discovering a fundamentally different theory of intelligence, we may have a chance to lead.

EC divide raises questions over autonomy



ANIL ANAND

These are troubled times for the Election Commission of India (ECI). For decades, the body has been the standard-bearer of impartial polling, embracing new technology and earning international acclaim as a guide to other democracies on free and fair elections. That reputation now faces its sternest test.

According to an investigative report in *The Indian Express* on September 23, 2026, two of the three members of the Commission, Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, came close to open revolt against Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, only to return to the same table and project normalcy. Their grievance was procedural. They recorded objections 14 times in 10 months to decisions and orders taken without their knowledge. The charge against the CEC is that he has sought to centralise the Commission's functioning, a direct affront to the democratic spirit of a collegiate body.

Controversy is not new to Nirvachan Sadan. The biggest turmoil before this came under T N Seshan, when the poll panel was converted from a solo-driven vehicle into a three-member body. Seshan went to court against the government's decision and made his fellow Election Commissioners, G V G Krishnamurthy and Manohar Singh Gill, parties to the case. Later, CEC N Gopalaswami wrote to the government seeking the removal of Election Commissioner Navin Chawla. The government of the day rejected the plea, and Chawla, who had close links with the Gandhi family, ultimately retired as CEC himself.

In nearly two decades of covering the ECI, I have watched professional and personal rivalries between commissioners play out, sometimes in the open. This is different. An Election Commissioner dissenting from the other two, or the reverse, is one thing. Here, the majority of the Commission says it was bypassed by a minority.

The law is clear. Section 18(2) of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, says all business of the Commission shall, as far as possible, be transacted unanimously. Where the CEC and the Election Commissioners differ, the matter "shall be decided according to the opinion of the majority". Even the procedure for transacting and allocating business can be regulated only by unanimous decision. The principle is older than the statute. In *T N Seshan vs Union of India* (1995), the Supreme Court stressed that Article 324 entrusts elections to the Commission, not to an individual.

The two Election Commissioners then wrote to the Cabinet Secretary about happenings in an autonomous constitutional body. The step is puzzling, though it conveys the gravity of the situation, since the proper authority was the President of India. The ECI has since said the letters concerned an officer on deputation and no policy matter.



At the heart of the row is the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls. A storm was already brewing around it. Former CEC S Y Qureshi has described the SIR in its present form as "illegal and unconstitutional". Now it emerges that much of it was done without the knowledge of two of the three commissioners. As reported, Sandhu and Joshi objected repeatedly to procedural flaws and to being kept out of the loop on adding new voters and deleting names. They described the steps on new voters as "unauthorised, illegal", warned against access to the voter database being centralised in Delhi while bypassing state officials, and flagged concerns over the integrity of the voter software. They also objected to IT department heads becoming super-heads on changes to the rolls while senior ECI officials were kept out. The full Commission did not meet between May and August 2026, which points to a deeper malady in the poll panel.

Did Kumar act on his own? Or is he part of a wider net, controlled from above, as Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi alleges? Gandhi sees the report as vindication of his earlier charge that electoral manipulation helped the ruling dispensation win. At his press conference after the exposé, he tried to link the CEC to the top hierarchy of the Central government. Kumar can hardly feel comfortable after a former Kerala Chief Secretary claimed that Kumar, then a serving officer, had sounded him out about contesting the Lok Sabha election on a BJP ticket. Was he bidding on behalf of the saffron party bosses?

Surprisingly, the ruling BJP seems to have walked willingly into Gandhi's trap. The ECI's own rebuttal was guarded and deadpan, steering clear of the contentious issues. The BJP was more upfront, pressing its spokespersons into service "to defend the ECI". That drew a sharp remark from columnist Tavleen Singh, no one's idea of a critic of the right, in an X post: "Is the BJP not embarrassed that their party spokesmen are speaking on behalf of the Election Commission? Is that not in itself a giveaway?"

In an official statement, the Commission played down the leaks, saying "differing views and observations are a normal part of deliberation". It conceded that members held differing opinions but insisted these did not reflect its official position. On September 26, the three commissioners met together and promised that agendas would be circulated in advance and minutes recorded. That is an indirect admission of what was missing.

The government's role will come under scrutiny because Kumar is the first CEC appointed under the controversial 2023 Selection Act, which gave the executive a clear advantage on the selection panel by removing the Chief Justice of India. The exposé has revived the allegation that a centralised poll panel is being used to the government's advantage. Handled badly, it can have serious repercussions for the government, though it rises above party lines.

An institution whose only real currency is public trust cannot let that trust be settled through press notes and spokespersons. The way back lies in transparency: let the record of who decided what, and when, speak for itself.

The writer is a commentator on socio-political issues



VIRENDRA SACHDEVA

As the curtain falls on the Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Indian archery returns home with nine medals: five gold, two silver and two bronze.

Behind every one of those medals lies a story of courage and sacrifice, and of a sporting ecosystem that has truly come of age.

For centuries, the image of Arjuna fixing his gaze on the eye of the bird has stood as India's timeless lesson in focus. In Aichi-Nagoya, that lesson came alive. Our archers saw nothing but the target: not the reputation of their opponents, not the weight of history, not the pressure of a watching nation. They saw only the ten, and they found it, time and again.

Our compound archers swept all three team titles, men's, women's and mixed, for the second consecutive Asian Games. The women's compound team equalled the world record in the final, and the mixed compound pair secured India's quota for the LA 2028 Olympics, where compound archery will make its Olympic debut.

Yet the defining story of these Games was written in recurve, a discipline long dominated by Korea. Our women's recurve team

ended Korea's run of seven successive Asian Games titles to claim India's first-ever gold in the event. Our mixed recurve pair won India's first medal in that event, and our men's recurve team earned a second consecutive silver. Then, on the final day, a 17-year-old held her nerve in the individual recurve final to win a historic gold and secure an Olympic berth for India. Her composure under pressure is a lesson in how fearless India's young athletes have become.

It is equally heartening that our women led from the front. From recurve to compound, they delivered whenever it mattered most, and they will inspire countless young girls across India to pick up a bow.

These results weren't a day's success, but are the fruit of nearly fifteen years of sustained, collective effort: world-class infrastructure, quality equipment, international coaching expertise, sports science and regular global exposure. There were times when the podium felt within reach yet just beyond our grasp, but the faith of our coaches, support staff and families never wavered. In Nagoya, our athletes also contended with demanding conditions, long commutes, testing winds and heavy rains, yet their poise through it all speaks volumes about their character.



This transformation would be incomplete without acknowledging the visionary leadership of our Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. Under his stewardship, sport has moved from the periphery of national priorities to its very centre. Khelo India has unearthed talent from the farthest corners of our nation, while the Target Olympic Podium Scheme has given our

elite athletes the support and dignity they deserve. Above all, the Prime Minister has changed how India regards its sportspeople. He stands beside them in triumph and in disappointment, assuring every young athlete from the smallest town that a billion hopes stand behind them.

Having been with the sports administration

for a while now, I have witnessed many campaigns, but Nagoya was a first even for me. While I was with the team, the Hon'ble Union Sports Minister personally called not once but twice to ask after our athletes, their preparation and their well-being. That is the culture the Government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has built, one where the highest offices of the nation stand shoulder to shoulder with our athletes, not only on the podium but at every step of the journey.

When a nation honours its athletes, it begins to believe in them. Where there is belief, champions follow. The medals of Aichi-Nagoya, won by young Indians who refused to be intimidated, are the clearest testament to this new sporting India.

To our archers: you have filled 1.4 billion hearts with pride. To the coaches, support staff and families whose sacrifices so often go unseen: these medals belong equally to you.

I am confident that under the exemplary leadership of our Prime Minister, Narendra Modi ji, India will flourish in every sporting discipline and take its rightful place among the world's great sporting nations. As for our archers, they have shown Asia what they are capable of. They are ready for the Olympics, and the world will soon take note.

Jai Hind!

The writer is the Secretary General, Archery Association of India



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Order Order

SC’s forgiving nature led to rise in crime: Justice Datta

The Supreme Court on Thursday orally remarked that due to its forgiving nature in commutation of death sentences, the country is witnessing an increase in crime and this has to “come to an end somewhere”.

A bench of justices Dipankar Datta and Sheel Nagu was hearing a plea seeking premature release of a life convict whose death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in a murder case. Justice Datta orally remarked that earlier murder convictions were based on the ‘rare of rare’ doctrine but times have changed.

“It is because of our forgiving nature, that India is facing these problems. Forgive, forgive, forgive, you have to draw a line somewhere,” he said. Justice Datta recalled that the Supreme Court commuted death sentence in a case where a man raped and murdered his elder daughter.

“The father goes to jail on life imprisonment on the basis of the mother’s testimony. After some years, the father comes out on parole and murders the mother in front of his younger daughter. “On the younger daughter’s testimony, he is given death sentence. And then death sentence is commuted to life sentence by the Supreme Court on the ground that he did not murder the younger child. That is why we say, our forgiving nature has to come to an end somewhere,” he said.

(PTI)



Kerala HC asks TDB for Sabarimala works timeline

As the Sabarimala pilgrimage approaches, the Kerala High Court has asked the Travancore Devaswom Board to give the timeframe within which the preparations for it will be completed.

A bench of justices Raja Vijayaraghavan V and KV Jayakumar directed the Board to place on record a detailed statement regarding each of the works to be completed, the expected date of completion and measures to ensure the quality of the work.

“The statement shall also specify the time frame within which each work is expected to be completed and the mechanism put in place to ensure that the works are completed within the stipulated time and in accordance with the required standards,” the court said.

It also asked the Board to state the manner in which the directions issued by Chief Minister VD Satheesan at the high-level meeting held on September 11 are proposed to be implemented and the steps taken to ensure compliance of the instructions.

The bench issued the directions while hearing a petition initiated by it regarding the various activities undertaken at the Lord Ayyappa temple during the monthly poojas there.

During the proceedings, the court was told by the state Government lawyer that several high-level meetings were convened by the State Devaswom Minister K Muraliedharan and the CM to review the preparatory activities undertaken by various Government departments and the Board for the Sabarimala pilgrimage 2026-2027 and to issue necessary directions. The lawyer also told the court that the CM had issued a firm direction that all pilgrimage-related preparatory works across all departments shall be completed on or before October 31.

(PTI)



Supreme Court sets aside elections in 50 wards in Punjab, orders fresh polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court has ordered fresh elections in 50 municipal wards in Punjab after a fact-finding commission found “widespread obstruction during the nomination process” in the local body polls.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana set aside elections in 50 wards — 28 in Patiala district and 22 in Moga. The top court passed the order after accepting the findings of a one-member commission headed by former high court judge Nirmaljit Kaur.

The local body elections took place on December 21, 2024. The commission was appointed on March 24, 2025, and it submitted its report on November 18, 2025.

“The principal finding of the Commission is of widespread obstruction during the nomination process, whereby nomination papers were



snatched, torn or destroyed, and candidates were assaulted, detained or threatened. “We accept the recommendations and direct that fresh elections be conducted in the relevant 50 wards. The entire process of re-election shall be completed within six weeks,” the bench said in the September 28 order which was uploaded last night.

The apex court noted the submission of senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the Punjab Government, that the state has no objection to the commission’s

SC directs steps to enhance women’s safety

RAJESH KUMAR
■ New Delhi

Giving top priority to the safety of women, especially after recent incidents of crimes against them in Delhi-NCR, the Supreme Court on Thursday issued a series of directions to the police and state government to strengthen preventive measures, public transport security and surveillance.

Invoking the “Broken Windows” theory of policing while hearing the suo motu case it initiated over recent incidents of rape in Delhi NCR, a bench of Justice JB Pardiwala and Justice K Vinod Chandran observed that a broken streetlight, a non-functional CCTV camera or an unattended complaint, though minor in

isolation, together convey that public spaces are not being watched. The bench similarly, noted that visible and unattended signs of civic neglect signal an absence of authority and create a safe haven for anti-social elements.

“A broken or inadequate streetlight, a non-functional CCTV camera, an unmonitored dark stretch, or an unaddressed public complaint may individually appear as minor administrative or infrastructural lapses. However, when such deficiencies remain visible and unattended over a period of time, they collectively convey a perception of neglect and diminished vigilance,” the Court observed.

In a slew of sweeping measures the bench has ordered enhanced patrolling around



educational institutions, stringent verification of drivers and assistants operating public transport and app-based cabs, real time monitoring of police patrolling and CCTV infrastructure through dedicated control room command centres or “war rooms”, removal of

illegally parked heavy vehicles creating blind spots and action against unauthorised liquor outlets and eateries.

The court directed the Delhi government’s chief secretary and the commissioner of police to submit periodic compliance reports. It said both officers would be “personally answerable” if the directions were not implemented seriously.

The bench directed that unauthorised liquor shops and establishments operating without requisite permissions be identified and dealt with in accordance with law. The top court issued notice to the Union Ministry of Home Affairs and the Delhi Transport Department and posted the matter for hearing on November 16. The bench asked

authorities to ensure real-time monitoring of vehicle tracking and SOS systems to strengthen preventive policing and curb sexual offences in the national capital.

In its order, the bench said the manner in which public spaces are maintained, visible police patrolling and surveillance, and the promptness with which reported deficiencies are addressed are equally relevant to crime prevention. It also underscored the importance of effective real-time monitoring of police patrolling and CCTV infrastructure through dedicated control room command centres or “war rooms”.

“Therefore, the Commissioner of Police, Delhi and the Chief Secretary, Government of NCT of Delhi,

are hereby directed to furnish a joint report on (i) whether dedicated control room command centres of this nature currently exist within the NCT of Delhi and, if so, their exact number and the corresponding areas of coverage,” the bench said.

“Hence, the police and the local administration shall consider instituting regular citizen-engagement meetings under the supervision of an officer to be designated for the purpose so that grievances may be received directly and their follow-up monitored efficiently,” it said. The bench said training in preventive policing should form part of the induction of police personnel and be reinforced through periodic training at regular intervals thereafter.

Set up panel to examine unethical pharma marketing practices: SC to Government

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Centre to constitute a committee within two weeks to undertake a holistic and comprehensive examination of issues relating to unethical pharmaceutical marketing practices.

The apex court directed that the committee would endeavour to complete the exercise in a time-bound manner and submit its recommendations to the Centre within two months from the date of its first meeting, after duly undertaking the consultative process and considering the material and suggestions placed before it.

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta passed the order on a plea concerning alleged prevalence of unethical marketing and promotional practices by pharmaceutical companies in their dealings with healthcare professionals.

The petitioners claimed that such practices include direct or indirect monetary benefits,



gifts, hospitality, sponsored travel, entertainment and other inducements extended to medical practitioners with a view to influence their drug prescribing practices.

The bench noted that the Centre has proposed to constitute a three-member committee to examine the issue and make recommendations as to the appropriate statutory and regulatory framework for regulating the conduct of pharmaceutical companies.

“In view of the aforesaid discussion, and having regard to the constitutional obligation to protect the right to health as well as the continuing need for an effective and enforceable framework to

regulate pharmaceutical marketing practices, we consider it appropriate to exercise our jurisdiction under Articles 32 and 142 of the Constitution,” the bench said.

It said the directions issued by the court are intended to secure effective implementation of the existing framework and to facilitate the ongoing exercise of the Centre towards evolving an appropriate regulatory mechanism.

“The Union of India shall, if not already constituted, constitute the committee proposed by it within a period of two weeks from the date of this order,” it said.

The bench said the committee would undertake a comprehensive examination of all issues relating to unethical pharmaceutical marketing practices, including the adequacy of existing statutory and regulatory framework, the efficacy of mechanisms presently in place for monitoring, oversight and enforcement, and the measures required to ensure greater transparency, accountability and effective compliance.

Group of ex-judges dub Opposition attack on EC campaign without evidence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A group of 42 retired judges have defended the Election Commission of India (ECI) against the Opposition onslaught and backed the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, describing it as a lawful exercise.

In an open letter to the “people of India”, the former judges of the Supreme Court and former chief justices and judges of various high courts said they hold no brief for any political party but felt compelled to speak as “silence is no longer a neutral choice”.

The signatories include Former Chief Justice of Jammu and Kashmir and Delhi High Court BC Patel, Former Chief Justice of Karnataka High Court Subhro Kamal Mukherjee, former

Supreme Court judges Hemant Gupta and Pankaj Mittal. The Opposition INDIA bloc leaders have accused Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar of revising electoral rolls to benefit the BJP and have sought his resignation. Both the BJP and the commission have rejected the allegation.

The former judges claimed that India’s constitutional bodies are under “sustained attack”, with the Election Commission of India at the centre of the assault.

“Even the higher judiciary, which we hold in high esteem, and statutory agencies have not been spared,” the letter pointed out. They said the attacks were not reasoned criticism but appeared to be a “calculated campaign” driven by vested political interests, with little



regard for the potentially devastating consequences of “destabilising the world’s largest democracy”.

The former judges described the attacks on the poll panel and other institutions as a “campaign without evidence”. “Criticism of institutions is a democratic right. Denigration is not. Constitutional authorities are now branded ‘thieves’,

those revisions a conspiracy,” they said. The former judges said the allegations of “vote theft” are made at press conferences, “not before courts”.

“When the commission seeks a sworn declaration, none is filed. Electronic Voting Machines are blamed only after defeat. Victories won on the same machines go unquestioned,” the letter said.

In an apparent reference to the Congress, they said a party that governed the nation for over five decades now claims that the very system which elected it is rigged. “It does not act alone. Activist outfits with a long record of selective litigation lend these claims a veneer of legality,” it said.

They file petition, “one after the other” but seldom give proof. The courtroom becomes a stage, and when

the judgment is delivered, it is criticised whenever it does not serve their interests, the letter said.

“Vitriol is then amplified and disseminated on an industrial scale, with the deliberate aim of eroding public confidence in a well-established and widely trusted judicial system,” they said.

On Tuesday, the INDIA bloc MPs marched from Parliament, and Rahul Gandhi observed an eight-hour sit-in at Akashvani Bhawan. On Wednesday, the scene shifted to nearby Jantar Mantar as Gandhi and other INDIA bloc leaders held a street protest against Kumar before being detained by the police later in the evening.

Thursday marked the third day of continuous protests in the national capital by top Opposition leaders.

SC asks Centre to furnish details of rehab centres for disabled children across India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday sought State-wise details on the regulation, standards and monitoring mechanisms governing rehabilitation centres for children with disabilities across India.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana asked the Centre to collect requisite data from all states and Union territories on the implementation of statutory frameworks, constitution of regulatory bodies, and oversight of such facilities, and place these on record through affidavits.

Appearing in the matter, advocate Rahul Bajaj highlighted glaring gaps in statutory compliance under both the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPwD Act) and the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017.

He submitted that rehabilitation centres for persons with disabilities mandate compulsory state-level registration under the RPwD Act and pointed out the urgent need for collection of data to establish whether the designated statutory authorities have actually been constituted across states and whether they are active-



ly monitoring these institutions.

While referring to the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, Bajaj flagged that only 10 states and Union territories have till now notified the requisite minimum standards for mental health establishments.

He underscored the lack of information concerning periodic audits and inspections conducted by authorities to enforce compliance and safeguard the welfare of institutionalised children.

The bench asked the Centre to coordinate with the states and compile a detailed report about setting up and functioning of statutory authorities under the RPwD Act, the formulation and notification of minimum standards across mental health establishments, and the inspection and monitoring protocols currently in place to supervise rehabilitation facilities.

It listed the matter for further hearing on October 22.

FROM THE WORLD

UK

Man bailed after arrest

British man arrested on suspicion of plotting a terror attack following a security incident at a US-run military air base in England has been released on bail, authorities said.

The suspect, who was not named, is the seventh man bailed in the investigation of an apparent plot aimed at RAF Fairford air base, which has been used by American bombers to strike Iran. British authorities have linked the incident to Tehran. Police are continuing to investigate the incident that led to scores of residents being evacuated from their homes near the base on September 27 as armed police officers swarmed the rural area.

Police later said they had found a quantity of an accelerant – gasoline – in three vans linked to the initial five suspects, but no explosives. (AP)

US

USS Lincoln returns home

The USS Abraham Lincoln is returning home to San Diego on Thursday after supporting the Iran war during a record-long deployment of 265 uninterrupted days at sea that included reports of deteriorating conditions among its crew.

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth flew out to the carrier on Wednesday to give the crew the Presidential Unit Citation, the highest honour a unit can receive that is typically reserved for significant achievement in combat.

Hegseth pushed back against what he said were efforts to turn the “Lincoln into some sort of a symbol, a symbol of dysfunction or a symbol of low morale or a symbol of a failed mission.” He said that “what makes the US military and the US Navy and all these sailors different is that you adapt and that you’re resilient and you overcome – you finish the mission nonetheless.” (AP)

India advises nationals in Saudi Arabia to stay indoors

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

India has issued a fresh advisory to its nationals in Saudi Arabia, urging them to remain “alert and vigilant” and follow instructions from local authorities amid the deteriorating security situation in the Kingdom following a series of Houthi attacks.

In its advisory, the Indian government asked all Indian nationals to remain cautious, stay indoors whenever necessary and closely monitor official communications from Saudi authorities.

“Indian nationals are advised to remain alert and vigilant, stay indoors as necessary, and follow the instructions issued by local authorities through official

channels,” the advisory said. The government has also strongly advised Indian nationals not to circulate or repost videos, photographs or news related to the ongoing events. The move is aimed at preventing the spread of unverified information during the heightened security situation.

The Embassy of India in Riyadh and the Consulate General of India in Jeddah, along with their outsourced services through VFS, continue to function normally, according to the advisory.

The Indian missions said they will continue to monitor developments and issue further updates and advisories whenever necessary. For emergency assistance,



the 24x7 Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendra (PBSK) helpline is available at

8002471234. The Indian community has also been advised to follow the official social

media handles of the Embassy of India for verified information and further

updates. The advisory comes after recent Houthi attacks targeting Abha International Airport and King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh. According to Saudi authorities, the attacks killed three people and injured 36 others.

Two people were killed and 28 injured in the attack on Abha airport, while the strike on King Khalid International Airport left one person dead and eight injured.

India has strongly condemned the attacks, calling the targeting of civilian infrastructure “completely unacceptable.” The Ministry of External Affairs also expressed condolences to the families of those killed and wished a speedy recovery to those injured.India

also expressed solidarity with the people and government of Saudi Arabia amid the escalation.

The attacks have also affected commercial aviation in the region. An Air India flight from Delhi to Riyadh turned back mid-air and returned to the national capital amid heightened security concerns.

Air India and Air India Express have suspended flights to and from Riyadh until October 10, as airlines reassess operations amid the evolving security situation.

The latest developments have raised fresh concerns over aviation safety and the security of Indian nationals travelling to or residing in Saudi Arabia.

Air India flight returns to Delhi after Houthi attacks on Saudi airports

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

An Air India flight from Delhi to Riyadh is returning to the national Capital amid heightened security concerns following a series of Houthi attacks targeting airports in Saudi Arabia that have left at least three people dead and 36 injured, according to Saudi authorities.



Air India flight AI2243 departed from Delhi and was flying south over Gujarat before proceeding over the Arabian Sea.

The aircraft subsequently turned around and is now flying back towards Delhi.

The turnaround comes amid growing concerns over aviation safety in Saudi airspace following attacks on airports, including King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh. Air India and Air India Express have suspended their operations to and from Riyadh until October 10, 2026. According to Saudi authorities attacks targeting Abha International Airport and King Khalid International Airport on October 6 and 7 killed three people and injured 36 others. Two people were killed and 28 others injured in an attack on Abha International Airport, while one person was killed and eight others injured in the attack on King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh.

The Houthi group has claimed responsibility for the attacks. Its military spokesperson, Yahya Saree, said the group targeted Saudi airports using ballistic missiles and drones. Saree

claimed that a ballistic missile targeting King Khalid International Airport “struck its target with precision” and disrupted airport operations.

India on Thursday condemned the attacks on Abha International Airport and King Khalid International Airport, describing the targeting of civilian infrastructure as “completely unacceptable.”

“India condemns the attacks over the past few days targeting Abha International Airport and King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, which have resulted in civilian deaths and injuries,” the Ministry of External Affairs said.

“The targeting of civilian infrastructure is completely unacceptable. We express our deepest condolences to the families of those who have lost their loved ones. We wish speedy recovery for those injured. We express solidarity and stand with the people and Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,” it added. The latest attacks come amid renewed fighting between Saudi-backed government forces and the Iran-aligned Houthi group in Yemen. Saree said the

attacks were carried out in response to what he described as Saudi “aggression” against Yemen. He claimed that Saudi Arabia had conducted “60 airstrikes and missile attacks in the past 24 hours”.

The Houthi group also issued what it called a “last warning” to global airlines operating flights through Saudi airspace, saying the area had become a “theater for our military operations”. Saree urged international airlines to stop operating flights through Saudi airspace, warning of the consequences of continuing to do so.

He said airspace over the “sacred areas” of Mecca and Medina was exempt from the warning. The US Mission in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday also urged American citizens to exercise heightened vigilance amid the Houthi threats. It warned that the situation could lead to flight cancellations, airspace closures and other travel disruptions.

The latest developments have raised fresh concerns over commercial aviation in the region, with airlines reassessing their operations amid the deteriorating security situation.

Tanker attacked off Qatar in Persian Gulf, says UK

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Dubai

The British military said that several projectiles struck a tanker off the coast of Qatar, causing multiple casualties.

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations Centre said the attack took place in the Persian Gulf, north of Qatar’s city of Madinat ash Shamal.

The city is on the northern tip of Qatar.

The UK military did not identify the tanker and did not provide any details about the casualties. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack and no comment from Qatar.

Prime Minister Benjamin



Netanyahu’s former military secretary has accused the Israeli leader of altering official transcripts of phone calls from the morning of the October 7, 2023, Hamas-led attacks. The accusations by Maj Gen. Avi Gil came in a

wide-ranging interview with the right-wing Israel Hayom newspaper.

In excerpts of the interview published Thursday, Gil accused Netanyahu of attempting to change records of their phone calls

in the first hour of the attack, possibly in an attempt to shift blame for failures that morning from the prime minister to his advisers. Gil said he reported the attempt, allegedly made by Netanyahu’s chief of staff, to the attorney general.

Gil served as military secretary from 2021 to 2024. In the interview, Gil also confirmed that a senior Egyptian intelligence official had visited Israel shortly before the October 7 attack. Asked whether there had been a warning, Gil said he did not know what message was relayed, but added: “Whoever met with someone or received something is still concealing it today.”

Royal Navy sailor appears in court on charges of spying for Russia

DANICA KIRKA ■ London

A Royal Navy sailor appeared in a London court on Thursday to face charges of spying for Russia.

Teddy Young, 24, has been charged with two offences under the National Security Act, including preparing to disclose protected information between November 2024 and May 2025, London’s Metropolitan Police Service said. During the same period, Young allegedly obtained, copied, recorded or retained protected information for the benefit of a foreign power. Young has been in police custody since he was arrested on Tuesday at his home in



Teddy Young

Bedfordshire, north of London. He appeared at Westminster Magistrates’ Court in central London on Thursday.

“The allegation is that while serving as a Royal Navy warfare intelligence rating with high-level security clearance and intelli-

gence-system access, Teddy Stanley Greenidge Young accessed and retained sensitive UK defence and intelligence material and engaged in activity consistent with preparing to pass protected information to a foreign power,” the Crown Prosecution Service said in a written summary of the allegations.

Young allegedly used the dark web to try to contact Russian authorities, drafting a message that “sought to make contact with a potential threat actor.”

Young, who joined the Navy in April 2024, is accused of committing the offences during his first deployment, which began November 4, 2024. (AP)

French student protests escalating outside Paris high school

JADE LE DELEY/LORNE COOK ■ Paris

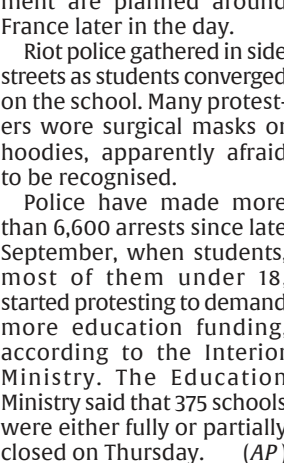
Dozens of students dragged rubbish bins into position outside a high school in northeastern Paris early on Thursday, erecting fresh barricades before police moved in with tear gas as France’s nationwide protests show few signs of ending.

The Helene Boucher Lycee has been a flashpoint for clashes in the French capital, and is one of hundreds of schools disrupted by protesters Thursday.

At least a dozen demonstrations in support of the high school students’ movement are planned around France later in the day.

Riot police gathered in side streets as students converged on the school. Many protesters wore surgical masks or hoodies, apparently afraid to be recognised.

Police have made more than 6,600 arrests since late September, when students, most of them under 18, started protesting to demand more education funding, according to the Interior Ministry. The Education Ministry said that 375 schools were either fully or partially closed on Thursday. (AP)



Italy’s Parliament gives final approval to Giorgia Meloni’s electoral reform

GIADA ZAMPANO ■ Rome



Italy’s Parliament gave final approval Thursday to a sweeping overhaul of the country’s electoral system, handing Premier Giorgia Meloni a key political victory while setting up a likely constitutional battle over the reform.

The proposal – dubbed by supporters and critics alike the “Stabilicum” or “Melonellum” – is widely viewed as an attempt to strengthen Italy’s political system while improving the electoral prospects of the centre-right coalition led by Meloni, which last month celebrated its record as Italy’s longest-serving Government since WWII.

Supporters say the law is designed to produce clearer election winners and more stable governments in a country known for frequent changes of administration. But the centre-left opposition dubbed it “scam law,” arguing the reform is unconstitutional. It has pledged to challenge it and bring it in front of Italy’s Constitutional Court once it takes effect.

The Chamber of Deputies approved the measure in a secret ballot by 227 votes to 164, giving definitive parliamentary approval to the legislation after months of heated debate. The reform introduces a big majority prize that will award bonus parliamentary seats in both houses of parliament to the winning pre-election alliance,

provided it wins at least 42 per cent of the national vote.

Critics contend that such a “majority prize” distorts voter representation and could conflict with previous court rulings that struck down elements of earlier electoral laws. A successful challenge could force Meloni’s conservative Government to revise the system before the next general election.

The new law abolishes Italy’s current mixed electoral system, in which about one-third of parliamentary seats are elected in first-past-the-post constituencies, and replaces it with a fully proportional system.

Meloni’s coalition says the changes will make it easier for voters to identify a governing coalition before elections and reduce the post-election bargaining that has often produced fragile governments. To qualify for the majority prize, parties will have to agree on a common prime ministerial candidate and political platform before the election. (AP)

South Korea tests first domestic hypersonic missile

KIM TONG-HYUNG ■ Seoul

South Korea flight-tested on Thursday its first domestically developed hypersonic weapon, designed to fly at least five times the speed of sound and evade missile defence systems, bringing Seoul closer to what it says could be game-changing weapons capabilities.

There was no immediate response from North Korea, which last week tested its own hypersonic missile that landed in the waters near Japan. South Korean President Lee Jae Myung attended the test, saying it’s a major step in strengthening the country’s conventional defence capabilities, according to a statement. It did not elaborate on where



the test took place. The statement said the weapon separated from its booster rocket at the planned altitude, then descended and manoeuvred both vertically and horizontally before hitting a test target. It said once developed, the weapon would be able to strike key targets by surprise in the “Korean Peninsula theatre of

operations.” Lee stressed that South Korea “must secure our security through our own strength,” and also inspected the country’s most powerful Hyunmoo-5 ballistic missile on Thursday, his office said. It did not mention any direct comments by Lee on the North. Tensions between the Koreans have increased in recent weeks

after three South Korean soldiers were injured in land mine explosions last month near the heavily armed inter-Korean border.

The South’s military and the US-led United Nations Command concluded the blasts were caused by devices planted by North Korea, which has denied responsibility and ridiculed the South’s demands for an apology. North Korea has also stepped up weapons testing activity as its leader Kim Jong Un expands his military nuclear program while taking an increasingly hard line toward Seoul.

Kim has so far rebuffed US President Donald Trump’s calls to revive their diplomacy that broke down in 2019, with his Government

demanding that Washington abandon its “hostile” policy toward Pyongyang and drop demands for its denuclearisation as a precondition for talks.

The tensions have been a setback for Lee, who favours engagement with North Korea and has tempered his rhetoric toward the North even as public anger grows over the mine blasts.

Lee has also called for strengthening South Korea’s conventional defence capabilities while reducing its reliance on the United States, which unilaterally decided to scale back a major military exercise with the South in August, with Trump citing his “very good relationship” with Kim. (AP)

EU sends envoy to Beijing as rising exports from China raise economic anxiety

SAM MCNEIL/CHAN HO-HIM ■ Brussels

The European Union (EU) is bracing for a confrontation with China as a trade deficit exceeding \$1 billion a day heightens anxiety over potential job losses and pushes the bloc’s political leaders to take a more aggressive approach toward its second-largest trading partner.



The European Commission’s top trade envoy Maros Sefcovic

The European Commission’s top trade envoy, Maros Sefcovic, will be in Beijing on Thursday for a two-day meeting with Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao. The goal is narrowing the EU’s 360

billion euro trade deficit with China. Earlier this year, he gave Beijing a deadline of October to provide meaningful results in doing so. Politicians and economists across the 27-nation bloc

consider China’s massive subsidies and exports a major threat to core industrial sectors from steel foundries to car factories.

China diverted many of its exports to the EU and other

markets after the US raised tariffs.

In a debate Tuesday in European Parliament in Strasbourg, lawmakers overwhelmingly expressed anxiety alongside defiance over trade with China. On Wednesday, they voted 454 to 86 on a resolution to toughen up on China that centred on a call for “economic reciprocity and a proportionate EU response if China does not open its markets.”

Ahead of the vote, Hilde Vautmans, the Belgian lawmaker who led the resolution, said that “Europe has economic power, it’s time we used it.” Despite the

seeming European unity this week, it remains unclear what the EU can or is willing to do. It has already rolled out trade measures against Chinese steel imports and e-commerce small parcels.

France’s High Commission for Strategy and Planning in February called for swift action, like 30 per cent tariffs on many of China’s exports, and a devaluation of the euro against the Chinese currency. Sales of German autos are plummeting in China, but China is also poised to gobble up market share in Europe by undercutting European automakers on price thanks to heavy state subsidies. There have

already been mass layoffs at major manufacturers like Volkswagen.

A letter by France and Germany, a copy of which was seen by *The Associated Press*, called for a sweeping rethink of the EU’s China policy. Among other actions, it proposed making it easier for the European Commission to use the bloc’s so-called “trade bazooka,” the Anti-Coercion Instrument.

This is a never-used-before raft of measures for blocking or restricting trade and investment from countries found to be putting undue pressure on EU member nations or corporations. (AP)

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Rupee falls 13 paise to close at 96.88 against US dollar

The rupee depreciated by 13 paise to close at 96.88 against the US dollar on Thursday, on risk aversion in global markets amid escalation of geopolitical tensions.

Forex traders said the rupee is under pressure amid persistent headwinds, including global dollar strength (DXY trading near multi-month highs) and elevated Brent crude prices hovering near \$104 per barrel.

However, suspected intervention by the Reserve Bank of India supported the domestic unit at lower levels.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 96.71 and touched a high of 96.65 against the greenback during intraday. At the end of the trading session on Thursday, the rupee closed at 96.88, down 13 paise over its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee closed at 96.75 against the American currency. "We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on risk aversion in global markets amid escalation of geopolitical tensions. A strong dollar and surge in crude oil prices may also pressurise the rupee." However, declining odds of a rate hike by the US Fed in October and any intervention by the RBI may support the rupee at lower levels. Traders may also take cues from weekly unemployment claims data out of the US," said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Mirae AssetSharekhan. Forex traders said investors will wait for the RBI to take action against speculation on the USD/INR pair, with the Governor Sanjay Malhotra assuring to help in finding rupee to its true value, which is undervalued presently.

(PNS)

CIABC questions Karnataka's AIB tax model

CIABC, the industry association representing domestic Indian-made liquor companies, on Thursday questioned the effectiveness of Karnataka's Alcohol-in-Beverage (AIB) taxation regime and the preferential treatment given to the 'beer' category.

The Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC) countered claims made by the Brewers Association of India (BAI) that the new tax structure has boosted state revenues and encouraged consumption of milder alcoholic beverages.

Citing State Government data for July-September 2026, CIABC said there is a "clear divergence" between volume growth and revenue contribution across Indian-made liquor (IML) and beer. IML sales rose marginally to 171.69 lakh cases (9 litres each) from 169.12 lakh cases a year ago, a volume growth of 1.52 per cent. Despite this near-flat volume performance, IMFL revenue rose 13.36 per cent, or ₹1,064.52 crore, to ₹9,033.21 crore from ₹7,968.69 crore.

Beer sales jumped 49.69 per cent to 126.68 lakh cases from 84.63 lakh cases. Beer revenue rose ₹228.57 crore, or 18.52 per cent, to ₹1,463.07 crore from ₹1,234.50 crore. "The contrast becomes even clearer when the incremental revenue is examined," said CIABC as Karnataka revenue growth continues to be driven by IML. Though beer volumes surged sharply after the implementation of the AIB framework, the bulk of incremental excise revenue continued to come from IFL, the association said, raising concerns over the efficiency and long-term sustainability of the new tax regime. "Total excise revenue during Q2 increased by ₹1,291.94 crore. Of this increase, approximately ₹1,064.52 crore or 82 per cent came from IMFL," said CIABC.

(PNS)

The ePlane Company inks pact with Noida International Airport for air taxi infra

Ubify Technologies Pvt Ltd, which operates as The ePlane Company, on Thursday said it has signed an initial pact with Noida International Airport to develop infrastructure for air taxi operations.

The agreement sets up a comprehensive framework to co-develop the regulatory SOPs, vertiport management systems, and operational ecosystem specifically required to deploy ePlane's flagship e200X aircraft, it said.

This infrastructure partnership complements key engineering progress following the recent public unveiling of the full-scale electric air taxi e200X PT-01 prototype, the company said. This collaboration paves the way for e200X-powered airport-to-airport transit, intra-city commutes,

and emergency air ambulance services across the region, The ePlane company said.

With ground testing (for the prototype air taxi) currently underway, the Memorandum of Understanding ensures that the physical development of the aircraft is met with parallel advancements in ground operations and airspace integration, it said. "Deploying electric air taxis requires more

The Pioneer

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM | FRIDAY | OCTOBER 9, 2026

Sensex drops 1,045 points in broad Indian market sell-off

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Benchmark stock index Sensex tanked 1,045 points while Nifty slid to a 21-month low on Thursday following heavy selling in rate-sensitive, commodities and FMCG shares amid a sharp spike in crude oil prices and growing prospect of tighter domestic and global monetary conditions.

Falling for the second day running, the 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 1,045.46 points, or 1.44 per cent, to settle at a more than two-and-a-half-year low of 71,593.24. During the day, it slumped 1,310.95 points, or 1.80 per cent, to 71,327.75. The BSE barometer had previously closed near this level on February 13, 2024.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dropped 371.25 points, or 1.64 per cent, to end at a 21-month low of 22,231.80. During the day, it 423.15 points, or 1.87 per cent, to a low of 22,179.90 — also its intra-day 52-week low.

From the 30 Sensex firms, ITC was the biggest loser, down by 4.24 per cent. InterGlobe Aviation dropped 3.36 per cent, Power Grid by 3.16 per cent, Bharat Electronics by 3.1 per cent,

Previous Close	72,638.70
Today's Closing	71,593.24
Change	-1045.46 (-1.44%)

TECH MAHINDRA	+0.44%
AXIS BANK	+0.25%
INFOSYS	+0.21%

ITC	-4.24%
INDIGO	-3.36%
POWER GRID	-3.16%
BEL	-3.10%
ADANI PORTS	-2.59%

Adani Ports by 2.59 per cent and NTPC by 2.43 per cent.

Tech Mahindra, Axis Bank and Infosys were the winners. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 4.25 per cent to \$104.5 per barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹6,121.37 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

The Reserve Bank of India raised its benchmark repo rate by 25 basis points to 5.50 per cent on Wednesday, its first hike in nearly four years, while signalling that rate cuts are off the table in the near term and that further hikes could follow amid rising inflation, a weak rupee

and high crude oil prices. The six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the RBI voted unanimously to raise the repo rate, and sprang a surprise with a shift in policy stance to "calibrated tightening" from "neutral".

"The domestic market continued in its sharp sell-off mode as the ripple effects of hawkish RBI policy weighed on rate-sensitive sectors, effectively resetting near-term valuation multiples.

This headwind was further amplified by persistent FII outflows, harder bond yields, and a depreciating INR," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said. Moreover, volatile crude oil prices hov-

ering stubbornly above the \$100 mark continue to be a hurdle for the national economy, he added.

The BSE SmallCap Select index dived 2.58 per cent and MidCap Select index tumbled 2.53 per cent. All BSE sectoral indices ended lower. Power slumped 3.51 per cent, Metal 3.34 per cent, Utilities 3.38 per cent, Realty 3.07 per cent, Capital Goods 3.02 per cent, Industrials 2.93 per cent, Services 2.76 per cent and Commodities 2.71 per cent. A total of 3,426 stocks declined, while 1,003 advanced and 225 remained unchanged on the BSE.

"Indian equity benchmarks ended sharply lower on Thursday as risk aversion intensified across the market. Crude oil remained the key source of pressure, with rising energy prices reviving concerns over a more persistent inflationary backdrop just a day after the RBI shifted its policy stance toward calibrated tightening.

"Elevated US Treasury yields and continued FII selling added to the pressure, while mixed global cues provided little support to domestic equities," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

Govt to cap trade margins at 30% of MRP for anti-cancer drugs, say sources

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Centre has decided to cap trade margins at 30 per cent of maximum retail price for all non-scheduled anti-cancer drugs, covering branded and generic, domestic and imported, patented, and non-patented medicines, Government sources said on Thursday.

The move addresses excessive trade mark-ups and aims to improve affordability while ensuring continued availability of these life-saving medicines, the sources said.

The decision, which is expected to be implemented later this month, will bring down prices of 110 anti-cancer drugs, including 35 patented medicines.

"The primary aim of the trade margin rationalisation

(TMR) is to prevent mis-selling malpractices. There is a tendency to sell drugs having a bigger margin, and since anti-cancer drugs are more expensive than the rest, we wanted to cap the trade margins on them," the sources said.

The move will lead to an estimated annual savings of ₹2,500 crore of cancer patients, they said.

The Supreme Court had on September 29 voiced its concern on the issue of

highly-inflated price of anti-cancer drugs. Batting for a uniform 16 per cent margin on all medicines, a bench of Justice Vikram Nath and Justice Sandeep Mehta told Solicitor General Tushar Mehta appearing for the Centre, "This is carnage. Plain and simple. The cancer drug is priced at an MRP of ₹27,000 despite being supplied to retailers for ₹2,700."

The Government sources, however, said the decision to cap the margins on the drugs was not related to the ongoing case but has been in the works since 2019.

The health department has constituted a committee to finalise the list of drugs, the sources said, adding that the issue of pricing of other medicines needs a calibrated approach.

GTRI urges Govt to scrap proposed October 15 UPI charges

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Government should withdraw the proposed UPI charges, scheduled to take effect on October 15, and keep the digital payment system free for merchants and consumers, economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said on Thursday. It said that charging merchants could raise prices, squeeze small business earnings and weaken household demand.

The charges would also reduce UPI's price advantage over cards, benefiting US card networks and payment plat-

forms, the GTRI said, adding that an independent audit should establish and publish UPI's actual running costs.

"The Government should withdraw the proposed UPI charges scheduled to take effect on October 15 and keep UPI free for merchants and consumers," said GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava.

Ending nearly six years of fully free UPI payments, the Government has introduced a 0.4 per cent fee on transfers worth more than ₹2,000 made to merchants through the platform from October 15, while explicitly ring-fencing everyday person-to-person transactions as well as small

payments from any charge.

Srivastava said that banks save on handling cash and operating ATMs and branches when customers use UPI, and payment apps gain customers' spending data and

opportunities to sell loans, insurance and mutual funds in a market serving more than 55 crore Indians. The Government, he said, benefits from wider digital payments and greater visibility of economic transactions.

"These benefits support the case for sharing UPI's running costs. If these institutions fund the system, UPI can remain free and preserve its advantage over cards. Charging merchants reduces that advantage and creates commercial opportunities for competing payment networks," he said.

He added that PhonePe and Google Pay, which together handle more than 80 per cent of UPI transactions, could earn a share of merchant fees if the fee-sharing arrangement provides for it. "Their market dominance would give them a large potential base for such earnings,"

Srivastava said, adding, "Visa and Mastercard could benefit when UPI loses part of its price advantage. Free UPI allows merchants to receive the full payment. An MDR reduces that benefit and could make cards more competitive. The card networks also seek access to UPI comparable to that enjoyed by RuPay credit cards."

India should resist US pressure to weaken UPI, drawing on Brazil's defence of Pix, its domestic digital-payment system, he said, adding that UPI's affordability and widespread acceptance are economic strengths that India should preserve.

Paytm slips 5% amid reports of deferred UPI merchant fees

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Shares of Paytm, One Mobikwik Systems and other fintech firms ended lower on Thursday amid reports that a proposal to defer the rollout of merchant discount rate (MDR) on UPI to January 1, from October 15, is under consideration.

One 97 Communications, which owns the Paytm brand, tanked 10 per cent to ₹1,560.60 during the day on the BSE. It finally ended at ₹1,640, down 5.42 per cent.

One Mobikwik Systems shares dropped 8.43 per cent to ₹234.40 in intraday deals. The stock later ended 4.57 per cent lower at ₹244.30.

Pine Labs declined 4.95 per cent to ₹168.75 during the day before ending at ₹169.75, down 4.39 per cent. Network People Services Technologies dropped by

3.39 per cent to close at ₹1,791.30. Last month, the Government allowed charging MDR under which transactions above ₹2,000 will attract a fee of 0.4 per cent. Shares of fintech firms jumped when the announcement was made last month amid hopes that this will generate additional revenue.

According to reports, a proposal to defer the rollout of merchant discount rate on Unified Payments Interface (UPI) to January 1 from October 15 is under consideration, with a decision expected in the next few days.

Meanwhile, economic think tank GTRI said on Thursday that the Government should withdraw the proposed UPI charges, scheduled to take effect on October 15, and keep the digital payment system free for merchants and consumers.

Thursday after recovering from the two-month low; however, a strong dollar and elevated crude oil prices capped the upside, said Gaurav Garg, Head of Research at brokerage platform Lemonn.

However, silver moved in the opposite direction. The white metal had resumed its downward march after three sessions of

trading flat, falling by ₹3,000 to ₹2.24 lakh per kilogram from ₹2.27 lakh per kg in the preceding session.

The metal hit its lowest level in more than three months, having last traded around this level on June 29.

Globally, spot gold was marginally higher at \$4,111.94 per ounce, while silver fell over 2 per cent to \$58.50 an ounce. "Gold is steady on Thursday at \$4,120 an ounce in global trade after touching a nine-week low in the previous session," said Vedika Narvekar, Research Analyst- Commodities & Currencies, Anand Rath Share and Stock Brokers Ltd.

The recovery remained constrained as renewed tensions in West Asia pushed crude oil prices to \$105 per barrel, she said.

Nasscom welcomes GST council move on services exports

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

IT industry body Nasscom on Thursday said that the recommendations of the 57th GST Council meeting on overseas branches and R&D services address longstanding concerns related to service exports, input tax credit, refunds and compliance.

The Council, chaired by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, recommended removing existing restrictions on services supplied through overseas branches to qualify as exports, Nasscom noted in a statement. Under current regulations, services supplied from an Indian office to its overseas branch don't qualify as exports because both are treated as establishments of the same entity. "Subject to the other export conditions, it should reduce tax uncertainty, litigation and un-

necessary working capital costs," Nasscom said, noting that Indian companies frequently serve international clients through their overseas branch networks.

Ahead of the meeting, the industry body had flagged the Goods and Services Tax (GST) treatment of head office-to-branch office (HO-BO) transactions as a persistent source of litigation,

noting that the disparity between deliveries via overseas branches versus subsidiaries resulted in input tax credit reversals and additional compliance burdens for exporters.

The Council has also recommended amending the 'place-of-supply' rules for research, testing, certification, and engineering services conducted in India on

goods belonging to overseas clients.

Presently, the physical presence of a customer's prototype or sample in India can disqualify such services from being treated as exports. Nasscom said the proposed change will benefit engineering research and development (ER&D) firms, global capability centres (GCCs) and deep-tech startups providing testing services globally, while helping India attract more international mandates.

Among other measures, the industry body also welcomed the Council's decision to allow input tax credit for employee health and life insurance, the extension of inverted-duty refunds to input services, refund eligibility on plant and machinery, and faster refund processing timelines.

For the e-commerce

segment, Nasscom noted that the proposed simplified registration mechanism for smaller sellers using platform warehouses in other states will facilitate interstate online trade without requiring dedicated physical premises in every state.

"The Council has addressed longstanding concerns affecting service exports, input tax credit, refunds, and compliance.

Its recommendations on notices, prosecution and arrest powers also signal a more proportionate approach to tax enforcement. "Nasscom has engaged with the Government on several of these issues through consultations and detailed submissions over the years. We appreciate the Council's consideration of industry concerns and the Government's continued openness to dialogue," Nasscom said.

COMFED expands SUDHA’s presence in Assam, North-East

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Guwahati

Bihar State Milk Co-operative Federation Ltd (COMFED), which markets dairy products under the SUDHA brand, is strengthening its presence in Assam and the adjoining North-Eastern States through expanded processing capacity and a growing retail network.

As part of the expansion, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma inaugurated a 20,000 litres per day (LPD) milk processing plant at Kanyaka Dairy, Shantipur, Jamugurihat, Tezpur, Sonitpur, on Thursday. Shirsat Kapil Ashok, IAS, Chairman-cum-Managing Director, COMFED, attended the inauguration.

The new plant is expected to strengthen supplies to Tezpur and adjoining areas and support further expansion of SUDHA’s regional distribution network.

SUDHA expands retail network in Assam, North-East

COMFED began marketing SUDHA pouch milk and milk products in Guwahati in November 2018 through a third-party dairy facility at Amingaon. Since then, it has expanded operations to other parts of Assam and neighbouring states, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh.

At present, COMFED’s Guwahati unit markets a range of SUDHA products, including pouch milk, curd, paneer, lassi, peda and milk cake, through approximately 2,200 retail outlets.

Average milk sales from the unit stand at around 50,500 litres per day. During the financial year 2025-26, the unit recorded a turnover of ₹121.17 crore and a profit of ₹8.06 crore, reflecting the



growing acceptance of the SUDHA brand in the region. **Assam offers significant potential for dairy sector**

The North-East, particularly Assam, offers considerable potential for the organised dairy sector.

According to the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), Assam’s household demand for milk and milk products is projected to increase to 89.87 lakh litres per day by 2030.

The projected increase indicates substantial scope to expand dairy supplies, processing infrastructure, and retail distribution in the State.

Expansion in the North-East requires reliable processing and distribution arrangements to serve markets spread across different locations and terrain. COMFED’s approach seeks to bring processing closer to these markets, improve supply reliability and make SUDHA products more widely accessible to consumers.

COMFED plans one lakh LPD dairy facility

COMFED has also begun steps to set up its own dairy processing facility in Assam, with a proposed capacity of one lakh litres per day.

For the proposed project, COMFED has requested the

Government of Assam to allot suitable land. The Assam Industrial Development Corporation (AIDC) has identified potential locations and shown them to COMFED for consideration.

Focus on ‘cooperation among cooperatives’

As a dairy cooperative federation, COMFED’s expansion also offers scope to advance the principle of “cooperation among cooperatives.”

Collaboration in milk sourcing, processing, distribution, and technical support can help cooperative institutions share resources and expertise, strengthen market access, and improve services for producers and consumers.

Such partnerships can connect Bihar’s established dairy cooperative network with opportunities in the North-East and support the wider development of cooperative dairying.

COMFED contributes to Assam flood relief

Alongside its business operations, COMFED has also contributed to relief efforts in Assam. During the recent floods, its Guwahati unit donated ₹4 lakh to the Chief Minister’s Relief Fund.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma appreciated the contribution.

UP to become logistics hub as UPSIDA approves 4 new projects

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh is moving towards strengthening its position as one of the country’s leading industrial and logistics hubs, with the Uttar Pradesh State Industrial Development Authority (UPSIDA) approving four new warehousing and logistics projects across the state.

The projects include one silo project, two warehousing projects and one logistics park. These projects will be established in Pilibhit, Unnao, Gautam Buddha Nagar and Ayodhya districts.

The initiatives are being undertaken under the leadership and guidance of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to accelerate industrial development in the state and contribute to the vision of making Uttar Pradesh a \$1 trillion economy.



₹14,600 crore Investment Proposed Across 75 Projects

With approval for four new projects, UPSIDA has so far approved 75 projects under the Uttar Pradesh Warehousing & Logistics Policy-2022 and the PIP Policy.

These projects are proposed to be developed over approximately 960 acres of land, with a total proposed investment of around ₹14,600 crore.

Implementing these projects is expected to expand

the state’s modern warehousing and logistics infrastructure significantly. In particular, the projects will increase capacity for safe, scientific storage of food grains and provide farmers with better warehousing and logistics facilities.

The projects will also accelerate the development of warehousing clusters, modern distribution centres, silos and cold-chain facilities across the state. This is expected to make the

agricultural supply chain more efficient and seamless while facilitating faster movement of agricultural produce to markets.

New employment opportunities alongside investment

Growing investment in the warehousing and logistics sector is expected to strengthen the state’s infrastructure and generate significant direct and indirect employment opportunities.

These projects will stimulate local economic activity in areas such as transportation, warehousing, packaging, distribution, and allied services, contributing to inclusive economic growth.

Policy incentives strengthening investor confidence

The Uttar Pradesh Warehousing & Logistics Policy-2022, introduced by the state Government, aims to establish Uttar Pradesh as a modern, competitive and globally competitive

logistics hub.

Under the policy, the state provides investors with various incentives, financial assistance, tax-related benefits, and other facilitation measures to establish warehousing and logistics units in the State.

The rapidly expanding expressway network, industrial corridors, and rail and air connectivity further enhance Uttar Pradesh’s attractiveness as a preferred destination for investment in the logistics and warehousing sector.

UPSIDA is also placing particular emphasis on providing investors with a simple, transparent, and time-bound approval process, ensuring that investment proposals translate into ground-level projects at the earliest and contribute to investment, employment generation, and economic activity across the State.

Ghaziabad Municipal Commissioner hears public grievances

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ghaziabad

Ghaziabad Municipal Commissioner Vikramaditya Singh Malik heard public grievances under the ‘Sambhav’ programme and directed concerned officials to take prompt action on all 19 references received during the public hearing.

Of the 19 grievances, eight pertained to the Construction Department, one to the Health Department, one to the Horticulture Department, three to the Street Lighting Department, three to the Property Department, one to the Tax Department, and two to the Jal Kal (Water Works) Department.

The concerned departments of the Ghaziabad



Municipal Corporation immediately took action on the complaints.

The Municipal Commissioner said that under the Sambhav programme, the department aims to address grievances received during the public hearing on the same day.

Several elected councillors also raised issues in their

respective wards and put forward suggestions in residents’ interest. Councillors from Ward No. 24 (Maharoli), Ward No. 74 (Vasundhara), Ward No. 89 (Vaishali), Ward No. 18 (Rajapur) and Ward No. 88 (Gandhi Nagar) discussed various civic issues. They offered suggestions for improving facilities in their areas.

Mega drive to remove illegal

encroachments in Vijay Nagar

The hearing also received a specific complaint about illegal encroachment in Vijay Nagar.

Taking the issue seriously, Municipal Commissioner Vikramaditya Singh Malik directed the concerned departments to conduct a joint mega enforcement drive in Vijay Nagar and take strict action against illegal encroachments.

During the public hearing, the Ghaziabad Municipal Corporation also initiated action on various complaints received.

Additional Municipal Commissioner Renu Singh, General Manager (Jal Kal) Kamakhya Prasad Anand, In-charge Horticulture Dr Anuj, Municipal Health Officer Dr

Mithilesh, Chief Tax Assessment Officer Anirudh Kumar, along with officials of the Street Lighting Department, were present during the hearing.

Special Street Lighting Campaign Ahead of Festivals

In view of the upcoming festivals, the Municipal Commissioner also directed the Street Lighting Department to undertake a special campaign across all wards to ensure street lights function properly and are properly maintained.

The complainants appreciated the Ghaziabad Municipal Corporation’s prompt response and action during the Sambhav public hearing and expressed gratitude for the timely resolution of their grievances.

Bastar Dussehra scripts a tale of tourism

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Besieged by Naxal menace for the last three decades, Bastar has now changed tack after the elimination of ultra-Left terror as it pulls tourists who are venturing into the region’s forests, waterfalls and tribal culture. Bastar’s tourism numbers are now telling a story the region has not been able to witness for a long time.

Post monsoon, Bastar is at its most dramatic: the forests thicken, the waterfalls swell, and the usual trickle of visitors turns into something closer to a rush. Hotel and homestay operators near the region’s main attractions say they have already started preparing for the crowds expected around Bastar Dussehra, Navratri and Diwali.

Dussehra itself runs for 75 days this year, and it is being treated as something more



than a religious calendar event. There is no Ravana effigy burnt here, unlike most of the country’s Dussehra celebrations. Instead, the festival builds around a massive chariot, local folk tradition and tribal belief systems that have nothing to do with the Ramayana. That difference is part of the draw. President Droupadi Murmu’s slated

attendance this year has only added to the attention the festival is getting, and officials expect it to anchor Chhattisgarh’s tourism calendar going forward.

Managing Director of the Chhattisgarh Tourism Board, Saumil Ranjan Chaubey puts it simply: the state is not chasing visitor numbers for their own sake. “The bigger goal is to connect tourism to

the local economy directly, through eco-tourism, homestays, adventure tourism and better infrastructure, while bringing in local youth, women, artisans and small entrepreneurs as the people running these businesses rather than watching from outside,” he said, adding, the improved security and connectivity in the region has added to the

uptick already visible on the ground.

Dussehra is only part of what is drawing people in. Chitrakote Falls, Tirathgarh and Kanger Valley have become regular stops on itineraries that once began and ended with the festival. Inside Kanger Valley, the Kutumsar and Kailash caves offer a different kind of visit altogether, closer to the region’s biodiversity and tribal life than to any festival schedule, and they are increasingly pulling tourism out of the main towns and into villages that rarely saw outside visitors before.

Homestays, local Bastariya food, Mahua-based products and handicrafts are turning into source of livelihood and income for people who had little access earlier. Guides, drivers, small shopkeepers, artisans, and women’s self-help groups are among the beneficiaries.

NTPC concludes electron quiz 2026-27; IIT Madras teams take top honours

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Noida

NTPC, India’s largest integrated power utility, concluded its flagship Electron Quiz 2026-27 on October 8, an initiative aimed at encouraging curiosity, learning and fresh thinking among young minds. Organised from September 5, beginning with the regional round in Lucknow and culminating in the National Finale in Noida on October 8, the quiz was conducted across nine regional locations.

At the Grand Finale, Advik Kabra and Ashish Cherian Thannickal of IIT Madras emerged as the national champions. Sreeram Madhavan V and Ishaan Joshi of IIT Madras secured the second position, while Waqar Moid and Parth Arya Bhat of IIT Kanpur finished third.

Winners receive cash prizes

At the national level, the winning team was awarded ₹1,00,000, while the second- and third-placed teams received ₹60,000 and ₹40,000, respectively.

Teams securing the fourth, fifth, and sixth positions received ₹16,000 each, while

the remaining 12 teams received ₹8,000 each.

Anil Kumar Jadli, Director (HR), NTPC, was present and congratulated the winners. He also complimented all participants for their enthusiasm and encouraged the students to carry forward the spirit of learning and curiosity in their future endeavours.

Speaking about NTPC’s own journey of transformation, Jadli highlighted how the company is evolving beyond its traditional identity into an integrated energy major. He encouraged the youngsters to embrace the same spirit of transformation and adaptability in their own lives and careers.

Over 1,100 teams participate

The regional rounds were held across nine cities-Lucknow, Patna, Ranchi, Raipur, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Noida.

More than 1,100 teams participated in the competition, making this year’s edition one of the largest editions of the NTPC Electron Quiz.

At the regional level, the winning teams were awarded ₹60,000, while the



second- and third-placed teams received ₹40,000 and ₹20,000, respectively. Teams that secured fourth, fifth, and sixth positions received ₹8,000 each.

Among others, SN Panigrahi, Executive Director (HR); Premilata, Executive Director (Strategic HRD & Talent Development); senior executives; employees; and students from various institutes were present to encourage the finalists.

Quiz Organised Since 2004 Since 2004, the NTPC

Electron Quiz, themed ‘The World of Business & Management’, has been a flagship initiative that promotes learning and intellectual growth.

Over the years, the quiz has grown in scale and stature, giving students across the country a chance to learn and compete.

Meanwhile, NTPC Limited, a Maharatna company of the Government of India, is India’s largest integrated power utility with an installed capacity of over 91

GW. As the company strengthens its position across the energy value chain, NTPC is expanding beyond conventional power generation into renewable energy and emerging areas, including battery energy storage, nuclear power, carbon capture, and green chemicals.

The company is targeting 60 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2032, as part of its broader commitment to India’s evolving energy landscape.

Alok Tiwari entrusted with additional charge of managing director of DFCCIL



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Alok Tiwari, IRSE, Additional Member (Bridge), Railway Board, has been entrusted with the additional charge of Managing Director of Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India Limited (DFCCIL), in addition to his existing responsibilities.

Tiwari assumed charge of the post on October 5, 2026. He was welcomed at the DFCCIL Corporate Office by Shobhit Bhatnagar, Director/OP&BD; Anurag Sharma, Director/Infrastructure; Pawan K Rai, Director/Project Planning; and B Mugunthan, Director/Finance, along with other senior officials of DFCCIL.

A 1988-batch IRSE officer, Tiwari has over 36 years of experience in Indian Railways, with extensive exposure to railway infrastructure planning, project execution, construction, safety, freight operations and administration.

Throughout his career, he has worked across the full project life cycle and has directly constructed and commissioned more than 1,000 km of railway infrastructure.

Extensive experience in railway infrastructure

Tiwari has held several key positions during his career, including Chief Administrative Officer, South East Central Railway; Principal Chief Safety Officer, South Western Railway; Divisional Railway Manager, Guntakal; and Chief Project Manager-cum-Group General Manager, RVNL.

His experience covers technical planning, major infrastructure projects, safety management, freight opera-

tions and organisational administration.

After assuming charge as Managing Director, Tiwari chaired a review meeting at the DFCCIL Corporate Office to take stock of key activities, ongoing works and operational priorities.

The meeting covered critical aspects of Dedicated Freight Corridor operations, construction, maintenance, asset reliability, safety, project progress and overall organisational performance.

Focus on Technology, Automation and Efficiency

During the review meeting, Tiwari emphasised the need for a coordinated, outcome-oriented, technology-driven approach across all functions, with a clear focus on improving efficiency, reliability, and productivity.

The meeting also discussed aligning the proposed East-West Dedicated Freight Corridor (EWDFC) and the way forward for its planning and development.

The meeting placed particular emphasis on greater mechanisation and automation in maintenance, adopting modern construction methodologies, wider use of precast solutions, and deploying Artificial Intelligence and digital technologies to enhance asset performance and enable data-driven decision-making.

Emphasis on knowledge management

The new Managing Director also stressed the importance of strengthening knowledge management and institutional memory within DFCCIL.

He called for creating a comprehensive digital repository of drawings

and critical project data at the Corporate Office, supported by robust backup and archival arrangements. The initiative aims to ensure systematic preservation and effective utilisation of institutional knowledge.

Tiwari also called on officers to maintain a strong focus on quality, cost-effectiveness, timely execution, and operational excellence while leveraging technology and innovation to enhance DFCCIL’s capabilities further.

With extensive experience in railway infrastructure, freight operations, safety, and project management, Tiwari takes charge at a key stage in the evolution of India’s Dedicated Freight Corridor network.

His leadership is expected to strengthen further DFCCIL’s focus on operational efficiency, asset reliability, technological innovation, and infrastructure excellence.

DFCCIL is entrusted with developing and operating the Dedicated Freight Corridors to enhance freight transportation capacity, improve logistics efficiency, and facilitate faster, safer, and more efficient movement of goods across the country.

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No.CE/PHD/ACCTS/07/26/328
Dtd.05.10.2026

Name of the Work: “Operation and Maintenance (O&M) of 2.50 MLD STP-II at Brundaban Colony for two years (2027-29)”. Estimated cost: Rs.1,58,00,972.10. Last Date & time of submission : 26.10.2026 up to 18:00 Hrs. Refer our website for details: eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app.
Sd/- Executive Engineer,
PHD, PPA
PPA/PR/30/2026-27 dtd. 07.10.2026

Samson-Sooryavanshi dilemma resurfaces as India eye 2-0 lead against West Indies

TAPAN MOHANTA ■ Ranchi

Sanju Samson's lean run is the lone sore point in an otherwise firing batting line-up and it will prompt the team management to ponder over pairing teen sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi with opener Abhishek Sharma in the second T20I against the West Indies here on Friday.

A win here will power India to a 2-0 lead in the five-match series, but the hosts will certainly want a more productive outing from Samson.

The Kerala batter's last four innings read: 9, 7, 2, 11. Consequently, the partnerships involving Samson in the previous four matches stand at: 7, 12, 2 (both for 2nd wicket with Sooryavanshi coming in as opener), and 29. But the middle-order led by skipper Shreyas Iyer, who has finally found his footing as T20I captain, has covered up those failures in spectacular fashion. Iyer also hammered his maiden T20I century in the 68th match of his career.

So, there will be a temptation to give Sooryavanshi another run. The left-hander has shown that T20 cricket comes naturally to him in the limited opportunities he has received so far.

His wide and unique range of shots, coupled with the ability to produce match-winning knocks have made him a compelling package.

But India have so far backed the established opening combination of



Abhishek and Samson.

The management's support of Samson was evident when he was accommodated at No.3 in the Asian Games in Japan, while giving the opening slot to Sooryavanshi.

However, Samson is yet to respond to that show of faith in him with matching performances.

In that context, the current five-match series against the Caribbeans could become significant for Samson as he cannot hang on to his World Cup performances for an eternity.

But Sooryavanshi, for all his talent, has also discovered that international cricket is a different beast.

He scored 14, 13 and 15 in India's 0-3 defeat in the T20I series against England. In the Asian Games, the Bihar batter made 18 and 35.

They are not bad scores in isolation for a beginner but they also demonstrated the fact that he cannot be rushed into top level cricket simply because of the hype around him.

India's man-

agement will therefore be thinking hard about all the corners before handing another chance to the 15-year-old.

So, that makes Friday's match less about an immediate selection call and more about the Samson-Sooryavanshi question that could grow louder as the series progresses. For Samson, the extension of the current poor run could make his position increasingly difficult to defend.

India will also look at a change in their pace-bowling combination.

Mayank Yadav leaked 16 runs in the opening over of the first T20I at Lucknow and was expensive through the middle and at the death.

He, however, claimed the important wicket of West Indies top-scorer Sherfane Rutherford in the penultimate over. India could be tempted to bring in all-rounder Nitish Kumar Reddy and trust him with the new ball, although that experiment did not work particularly well during the preceding ODI series. The spin department, on the other hand, looked settled after Kuldeep Yadav joined veteran Axar Patel in the eleven. The pair picked up two wickets apiece and kept West Indies batters under pressure. Rookie all-rounder Naman Dhir was another positive to emerge, finishing with impressive figures of 3/31 with his off-spin. For West Indies, batting has to produce far bigger total than 171 all out they managed in opening game. (PTI)



Experience, form helped Bhuvneshwar's recall: Kotak

TAPAN MOHANTA ■ Ranchi



Bhuvneshwar Kumar's loads of experience, coupled with his strong IPL form over past two seasons has led to his recall in India's T20I squad for New Zealand series, assistant coach Sitanshu Kotak said here on Wednesday.

The 36-year-old veteran pacer, who last played for India in November 2022 New Zealand series, has earned a well-deserved return to the national side after impressive performances for Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the IPL, having played a key role in RCB's back-to-back title triumphs in 2025 and 2026. Bhuvneshwar had taken 45 wickets across two seasons (17 in 2025 and 28 in 2026).

India will face New Zealand in a T20I series after the ongoing five-match engagement against the West Indies, and Kotak suggested that the selectors may have felt the need to add experience to an otherwise young bowling group.

"One thing is obviously with the selectors, but I can give you an answer based

on what I think. In England, I personally felt that with Bumrah not being around and a lot of young bowlers playing, you can't beat experience," Kotak said at the pre-match media interaction ahead of the second T20I against West Indies. "The young bowlers are good, they are performing well and getting selected, but at some stage you also need some experience," he said.

"That might be one reason. Another thing is that Bhuvneshwar has been doing really well in the IPL for the last two seasons. So the selectors must have thought that, for New Zealand conditions and all, obviously he has been doing well and we need some experience," he said.

"They must have picked him. That's what I can think, unless you can think something different," Kotak added. (PTI)

Rampaul urges West Indies batters to counter India's spin threat

TAPAN MOHANTA ■ Ranchi

West Indies bowling coach Ravi Rampaul on Thursday urged his batters to "rotate the strike" and rely on their better players of spin to "counter" India's three-pronged spin-bowling attack as they look to bounce back in the five-match series. West Indies made a promising start in the opening T20I in Lucknow but lost three wickets in powerplay —Kamil Pooran, Shimron Hetmyer and Rovman Powell — before India's spinners tightened the screws in the middle overs to bowl them out for 171 in 19.1 overs.

India then continued their batting dominance, riding on captain Shreyas Iyer's unbeaten 102, his maiden T20I hundred, to chase down the target in just 14.4 overs and take a 1-0 lead.

With India expected to retain a strong spin presence in Ranchi, Rampaul believes West Indies need their better players of spin



to bat deeper into the innings. "Definitely, rotation of the strike. Our middle order have Hetty (Hetmyer) and Shai (Hope) as well, and they are very good players of spin. We see that when they bat through the middle, we put up big, challenging scores. So obviously, for our better players of spin, it's about batting longer into the innings," Rampaul said on eve of second T20I at the JSCA Stadium.

Even 500 becoming realistic ODI targets: Dwayne Bravo

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Sharjah

ODI totals of even 500 could become realistic targets in the future as batting continues to evolve at a rapid pace, feels former West Indies all-rounder Dwayne Bravo, who has called on bowlers to significantly upskill and innovate to stay relevant.

Bravo, who was speaking alongside West Indies great Chris Gayle on the sidelines of the World Championship of Legends here, said the growing dominance of aggressive batting has changed the dynamics of the game and placed greater demands on bowlers.

"The skills of the batters have improved significantly. Now the bowlers have to improve and innovate. They have to significantly upskill to keep pace with the changes in world cricket," Bravo said in an interaction with Cricketaaa. "The game is changing. It is going to an uphill tempo, and that is good. But the bowlers have to improve and innovate," he added.

Bravo, who turned 43 on October 7, also admitted that he was happy to have finished his playing career



before the latest acceleration in batting.

"The way batting is happening across the world, I'm glad my playing days are over," he quipped. Gayle, meanwhile, welcomed the fearless approach of the new generation of batters, saying their willingness to attack from the outset was driving the latest run-scoring boom.

"I am happy that batters are now breaking records rather than bowlers. The reason is simple - youngsters are now playing fearless cricket. They attack from ball one," said Gayle. "The game has changed. Players have changed. The batters are now hungry to score and they play fearless cricket from the very first ball," he added.

Pranavi eyes LET title, Olympic medal after Asian Games gold

AMIT KUMAR DAS ■ New Delhi

Bolstered by her maiden Asian Games gold, India's Pranavi Urs is now targeting an Olympic medal and a Major, saying success in the events leading up to June 2027 will be crucial to make the cut for the Los Angeles Games.

The 23-year-old from Mysuru recently became the first Indian woman golfer to win gold at the Aichi-Nagoya Games in Japan. "Olympics maybe or a Major," Pranavi said when asked what she is chasing next.

"My preparation is not gonna (going to) change, I am going to play in LET, just keep doing what I am doing, the cut off date is June 2028, I will be playing as many event



as possible till and may be get a win from there." The gold has also strengthened her belief that an LET title is within reach after she came close to winning on the European

circuit. "It just shows that my game is there and it's up there and it's just a matter of time," she said. "So I just got to be patient and give it time."

The qualification period for women's golf at the LA28 Olympic Games officially began on June 8 this year and will conclude on June 5, 2028, with the final 60-player field to be determined by the OGR standings at the time of the deadline.

Pranavi achieved the feat after carding a 15-under 265 at the Kasugai Country Club East Course last Saturday. Her fine run also carried the Indian women's team comprising Aditi Ashok, and Diksha Dagar to the podium as it bagged a silver medal. "I think it's slowly sinking in. It hasn't sunk in yet fully. Because, I mean, I'm still getting a lot of these messages and calls and lot of interviews, which is very unusual for me. It's little overwhelming, but yeah, it's great to be first one to do it," she said. (PTI)

From village grounds to national arenas: Badnu's young daughters make their mark in cricket

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Bikaner/Mumbai/Delhi

At a time when Indian women's cricket is inspiring millions, a group of talented girls from Badnu, a small village in Rajasthan, is scripting its own story of courage, determination and achievement. Overcoming social and financial barriers, these young athletes have represented Rajasthan at national-level tournaments, won medals and earned opportunities on prestigious sporting platforms.

This extraordinary feat has been made possible by Avaada Foundation, the social impact arm of Avaada Group, which has been supporting the Rajasthan State-Level Under-17 and Under-19 Girls' Cricket Teams from Badnu for two years and has renewed its partnership for the third consecutive year. Beyond sponsorship, the initiative reflects a sustained commitment to nurturing rural sporting talent and enabling girls to pursue their sporting and educational aspirations.

Capturing their inspiring journey, Avaada has launched "Badnu Ke Champions: Ghoonghat Se Helmet Tak,"

a campaign celebrating the transformation of young girls who are challenging social conventions and redefining possibilities through sport. The journey from the ghoonghat to the cricket helmet is more than a change in appearance; it symbolises a shift in mindset, growing confidence and the freedom to pursue ambitions. The campaign highlights how grassroots sporting initiatives can empower rural girls to dream beyond traditional boundaries.

The Foundation covers key expenses, including travel, accommodation, food and nutrition, sports kits, shoes, cricket equipment, tournament fees and practice facilities. It also supports players with logistics, study materials and educational expenses, ensuring that financial constraints do not impede their progress.

The initiative has already yielded remarkable results. Seven girls from Badnu played a pivotal role in helping the Bikaner team win the district-level tournament and the 69th Rajasthan State-Level Cricket Tournament, securing the Rajasthan state championship title.

Among them, Kanchan went on to represent Rajasthan at the National



Ritu Patwari, Director and CSR Head, Avaada Foundation with State-Level Under-17 and Under-19 girls' cricket teams from Badnu, Rajasthan

Championship in Rohtak, Haryana, where her contribution helped the team secure a Silver Medal.

The Under-19 team has also delivered an impressive performance. Six players from Badnu were instrumental in the team's success at the state-level tourna-

ment in Balotra, Barmer, where it finished as runner-up and qualified for the National Championship in Shivpuri, Madhya Pradesh.

Sarita emerged as the tournament's Best Bowler for her outstanding performance. She subsequently represented

Rajasthan at the national level. Sangeeta won a Bronze Medal and Kanchan secured a Silver Medal at the national level.

In another significant milestone, five young cricketers from Badnu, were selected to participate in trials for the opportunity to serve as net bowlers for the Delhi Capitals Women's Premier League team. This opportunity marked an important step in their sporting journeys, taking them from their village and school grounds to a professional cricket platform and giving them valuable exposure to a higher level of sport.

Commenting on the initiative, Vineet Mittal, Chairman, Avaada Group, said, "At Avaada, we believe that sport can be a powerful catalyst for inclusion, confidence and social change, particularly for young girls in rural communities. The journey of Badnu's daughters is a powerful reflection of what becomes possible when talent is given the right platform, encouragement and opportunity. Our vision is to help create an environment where girls are free to dream, compete and aspire without the barriers of circumstance defining their potential. Supporting women in sport, there-

fore, is not just about creating champions; it is about nurturing confidence, leadership and a generation of young women who believe they can shape their own future."

Ritu Patwari, Director and CSR Head, Avaada Foundation, said, "My association with the girls of Badnu has been deeply personal. Having seen their journey closely at the grassroots, I have witnessed not only their talent on the cricket field, but also the determination, confidence and courage with which they have overcome social and financial barriers. At Avaada Foundation, we believe that when a young girl is given the opportunity to pursue her passion, the impact extends far beyond sport. Our endeavour has been to stand beside these girls through their journey, encourage their ambitions and help create the environment they need to grow. Seeing the daughters of Badnu progress from village grounds to state and national platforms is immensely fulfilling, and I hope their journey inspires many more girls across rural India to dream without limits."

Youtube Link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMq8LHuVca4>