

Wangchuk backs CJP protest to improve electoral process

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Activist Sonam Wangchuk on Sunday backed the Cockroach Janta Party's proposed October 2 protest against Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, saying efforts to improve accountability and the country's electoral process deserve support.

While he backed the CJP's proposed agitation, Wangchuk added that he might not be physically present during the protest.

His comments came amid a row over the functioning of the Election Commission following an Indian Express report's revelation that Election Commissioners S S Sandhu and Vivek Joshi objected on record at least 14 times over the past 10 months to decisions concerning voter registration, deletions and restoration of names and the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls.

The Election Commission on Saturday asserted that all decisions relating to SIR received the unanimous approval of all three commissioners.

It also announced measures to assist voters facing notices during the revision, including home visits by Booth Level Officers in cases involving unmapped electors and logical discrepancies, and said such people would generally not have to



appear personally for hearings.

Wangchuk expressed his support for CJP's proposed protest but said he did not need to physically participate in every movement. "Backing definitely, anything to improve accountability in the nation, always with them," he said.

"The whole idea of supporting movements for me is that these movements are on their own. So there are many people now for that issue, and I am happy to see that, and therefore I hope I will not be needed on the CEC issue," he said.

Wangchuk said the electoral process was among the most important requirements for a democratic country and needed to be improved. "If the election process is spoiled, then what is left of democracy?" he said, adding that promises made by governments must be fulfilled.

Referring to the promise made to Ladakh on the Sixth Schedule, he said, "The promises that you made should be fulfilled.

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‘HE NEEDS TO RESIGN NOW’ Priyanka renews demand for CEC’s ouster

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Malappuram

Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Sunday reiterated her demand for the immediate resignation of CEC Gyanesh Kumar, alleging that he has political leanings and questioning how he could conduct fair elections.

Vadra was speaking to reporters while travelling as part of her constituency (Wayanad) visit.

Asked about the allegation that Kumar had urged former Keralam Chief Secretary Jiji Thomson to contest the 2019 Lok Sabha elections on a BJP ticket, the Congress MP termed it "com-



pletely illegal and unethical".

She said the allegation showed that those at the highest levels of the election system and the institutions responsible for conducting polls "have party leanings".

"Not only do they have party leanings, but they are actively propagating those parties. How can they conduct fair elections? This is just one in a series of things that this gentleman (the chief election commissioner) has done, which are completely illegal and unconstitutional. He needs to resign, and he needs to resign now," she said.

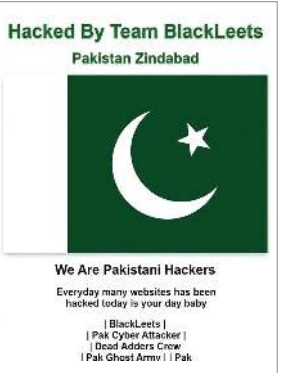
Asked whether the Congress intended to protest against the CEC, the Congress MP from Wayanad Lok Sabha constituency said protests had already been held across the country over the issue. "In every district we have had protests against him. In Delhi also there were protests," she said.

GAD website hacked; Pakistani flag posted

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

The official website of the Kerala Government's General Administration Department (GAD) was hacked on Sunday by a group claiming to be Pakistani hackers.

The website was compromised in the morning, following which a Pakistani flag was displayed on its homepage. A message claiming responsibility for the attack was also posted in the name of 'Team Bl@ckleets'.



Kerala GAD website hacked, Pakistani flag posted

"We are Pakistani hackers. Every day, many websites have been hacked; today is your day," the message said, along with a slogan in support of Pakistan.

The hosting service provider temporarily suspended the website's account as soon as the security breach was detected, officials said. This was done to prevent further access to the compromised website.

The Kerala police cyber cell and the hi-tech crime enquiry cell have launched...

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Kerala CM demands CEC’s resignation, calls him ‘BJP agent’

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

Keralam Chief Minister V D Satheesan on Sunday said CEC Gyanesh Kumar should not continue in office, alleging that he acted as a BJP agent and "sentenced Indian democracy to death".

In similar social media posts on Facebook and X, the CM said the claims made by former Keralam Chief Secretary Jiji Thomson



about the CEC were extremely serious.

Thomson has reportedly claimed that Kumar, in 2016, had urged him to join the BJP while he was still serving as an IAS officer.

"No further evidence is required to prove that Gyanesh Kumar acted as an agent of the BJP. It is now evident that he served as an operative who subverted democracy on behalf of the BJP.

"History will record Kumar, who traded away the Election Commission's credibility to the BJP, as the person who pronounced a death sentence on...

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VACB seizes Rs 14.10 lakh, USD 788 from GST official’s residence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kochi

The Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau seized unaccounted cash of Rs 14.10 lakh and USD 788 from the residence of a GST joint commissioner in Kochi during a search in connection with a disproportionate assets case, officials said on Sunday. According to the VACB, officials searched the residence of Prajani Rajan, joint Commissioner in the State Goods and Services Tax Department, at Pachalam on Saturday as part of the inves-



tigation into a disproportionate assets case registered against her. A preliminary inquiry by the VACB found that Prajani Rajan had allegedly acquired assets disproportionate to her known sources of income, estimated at around Rs 2.89 crore, between 2014 and 2024, officials said. Searches were conducted at three locations—her office at Thevara, and her two residences at Pachalam.

The searches began at 7.45 am and concluded at 9.15 pm, the VACB said. The searches were conducted by a team led by Deputy Superintendent of Police A L Yesudas under the supervision of Ernakulam Special Cell Superintendent of Police M J Sojan. The seized cash and documents will be produced before the Muvattupuzha Vigilance Court, the VACB said.



Priyanka Gandhi Vadra shares a cheerful moment with traditional percussionists playing the Chenda Melam alongside Revenue Minister A.P. Anilkumar during her public outreach visit to Wayanad on Sunday

Priyanka Gandhi visits home of percussionist Porur Unnikrishnan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Wayanad

Wayanad MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra visited the residence of renowned percussionist Porur Unnikrishnan on Sunday as part of her constituency tour.

During her visit, the Congress leader interacted

with a large group of traditional percussion artists from the region. The discussion focused on Wayanad's cultural heritage and the livelihood and financial challenges faced by traditional artists amid changing times.

The artists also showcased their skills, including singing and performing their art-

forms and also raised concerns over the lack of institutional support for preserving and promoting traditional art forms.

Earlier in the day, Priyanka also interacted with honey farmers at Kappil in Wandoor to discuss agricultural and trade-related issues affecting the constituency.

Asian Games Silver medalist Ancy aims to breach the 7m mark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Nagoya (Japan)

Thrissur-born long jumper Ancy Sojan won silver in the women's long jump final at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games on Saturday. Ancy is the second Indian woman after Anju Bobby George to win two Asian Games medals in the women's long

jump, following her silver in Hangzhou in 2023.

Ancy, who held the gold medal position from her first attempt of 6.49m and improved to a season-best 6.53m in her fifth round, could only manage 6.49m in her last jump as China's Huang Yingying produced a leap of 6.55m on the final attempt to snatch gold away.

Her compatriot Shaili Singh, who had been in bronze position deep into the competition, was also displaced on the final round by Mengyi Tan's 6.46m, finishing fourth. It was a joyous moment for Ancy's parents back home in Nattika, Thrissur. Her mother, reflecting on the conditions in Japan,...

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So i used my friend’s car, what about it? ssks K.M. Shaji



Minister K.M. Shaji

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

Local Self-Government Minister K.M. Shaji on Sunday defended his use of a friend's Range Rover as his official vehicle, saying he had not violated any existing rules.

He said the vehicle

belonged to a friend whom he had known since his days as MLA from Azhikode. He rejected criticism that accepting the use of the vehicle implied an expectation of favours in return.

"The use of vehicles by ministers is governed by government orders. I referred to an order issued by the General Administration Department on May 23, 2026. Similar orders were issued in 2011, 2016 and 2021. The rules specify the number assigned to a minister's vehicle, while the display of the national flag is governed by the...

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Three-day bank strike from today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

Banking services are likely to be affected across the country as the United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) is set to observe a three-day nationwide strike from September 28 to 30, after conciliation talks with the

Deputy Chief Labour Commissioner failed to resolve the pending issues.

The unions are primarily demanding implementation of a five-day banking week, which they say was agreed upon in the March 8, 2024 Settlement and Joint Note. They have also raised...

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Kerala Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar receives Vice President C.P. Radhakrishnan on his arrival in Thiruvananthapuram on Sunday. Union Civil Aviation Minister K. Ram Mohan Naidu and Ministers Bindu Krishna and C.P. John are seen nearby.

TN revokes order exempting law & order Dept from RTI Act

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chennai

The Tamil Nadu government on Sunday revoked a controversial order that exempted the state's Public (Law and Order) Department from the purview of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, following intense pushback from political allies of the ruling TVK and transparency advocates.

The administration officially withdrew the GO of the Human Resources Management (R) Department, dated September 21. The now-retracted order had originally invoked Section 24(4) of the transparency law to classify the department as an "Intelligence and Security

Organisation," thereby shielding it from public disclosures.

The swift reversal comes after the initial move by the TVK-led state administration triggered a political storm, drawing sharp criticism from alliance partners—the Congress and the Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK).

Prior to the revocation, VCK chief Thol Thirumavalavan had termed the gazette notification "highly shocking," warning it would "pave the way for suppressing human rights," and had strongly demanded its immediate withdrawal.

Congress MP Karti Chidambaram also flagged the initial decision, stating...

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‘Humanimal’: When the boundary between man and beast dissolves

THREYAMBAKA A.B.
■ Thiruvananthapuram

There is a moment in Kafka's 'Metamorphosis' when Gregor Samsa wakes to find himself an insect and simply... continues. He does not rage against the transformation. He adjusts, shifts his weight onto unfamiliar limbs, wonders what to do about the office. It is that quiet, unglamorous slide—not the shock of becoming something else, but the strange calm of settling into it, that seven artists have chosen to sit inside at Bhavageetham Prayaana Art Hub in Kowdiar this month.

The exhibition is called "Humanimal." No hyphen. No border checkpoint between the two words, as its curator, Sreekrishnan K.P., likes to

put it. Walk through the space and you will find bodies that will not stay still—a spine curling into a tree branch, a horse fusing with the hollow of a shell, a woman's form dissolving into the outline of a plant. Running from September 19 to 30 and presented by Triva, the show asks a question that sounds almost childishly simple until you try to answer it: where does the human end, and the animal begin?

"We are trying to understand how the human and the animal mix in the human imagination," Sreekrishnan explains. His reference point is Kafka. "There is no way around Kafka—it really mixes human and animality. One morning, a man who works in a bank suddenly



transforms into a kind of cockroach." That transformation, he says, was never just a literary device—it was a way of asking how such mixing works in the imagination, beyond politics, which is what sent him looking for artists working in that hybrid space.

The show brings together Midhun Mohan, Babu Xavier, J. Steffy Mol John, Ithiri Kunjan, Firoz Nediya, Bhagyanathan C. and Johns Mathew, a group Sreekrishnan describes not as a lineage but as "a pack; anonymous, numerous, resilient, disgusting to

power." It's a deliberate phrase, pointing to how the cockroach of Kafka's story—meant as a degradation, becomes, in these artists' hands, something else entirely. "It was an insult to an older generation," he says. "But they turned it into something bigger."

For Sreekrishnan, that reversal is political as much as aesthetic. "This is the kind of politics emerging now; not hierarchical, no big leadership demanding things. It's horizontal, spread out. The cockroach is like that too." The phrase "towards a minor aesthetic," running through the show's language, traces back to the Jasmine Revolution, he says; a politics that can't yet be

fully defined, only gathered and analysed, which is what this exhibition attempts.

Among the works anchoring that search is Steffy Mol John's cycle of watercolours, fifty-odd paintings made one to a night over more than fifty nights in the seaside town of Thengapattanam, after "all the domestic things stop." The paintings are small and disciplined, almost devotional in their restraint; a single board, a single sitting, each closed before the feeling behind it could be revised into something tidier. Their surfaces are pitted and weathered, closer to lichen on stone than watercolour bloom, aged...

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Keralam to seek inclusion of dairy sector in VB-G RAM G

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kannur

Keralam Minister Sunny Joseph has said he will urge the Centre to include dairy farming under the VB-G RAM G scheme to help address rising production costs faced by farmers. The state Electricity Minister was speaking at the inaugural session of a block-level dairy meet at Edakkad here on Saturday, according to a district administration release.

Joseph said dairy farmers and dairy groups were the backbone of the sector, with the rising cost of production being the main challenge confronting them.

To address this, they had put forward several



Keralam Minister Sunny Joseph

demands, the most important being the inclusion of the dairy sector under the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) scheme, he said.

Joseph said he would request the Centre to consider the demand, as the difficulties faced by dairy farmers

were also affecting related groups and enterprises.

He said many families had been engaged in cattle rearing as a livelihood for a long time, while the sector also comprised several large and small farms.

Besides, several allied activities, including fodder and fodder-grass production, were dependent on the dairy sector, he said.

Joseph said that, apart from assistance from the state government, dairy groups were implementing several schemes to encourage farmers. The dairy farming sector needed to be transformed in a manner that would attract younger generations to the profession, he added.

New LPG consumers to get smaller cylinders at higher cost

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

New domestic LPG consumers in Kerala will now receive 10-kg composite gas cylinders instead of the standard 14.2-kg cylinders, as part of changes introduced by the Centre amid disruptions linked to the West Asian conflict. The revised system has been gradually implemented in Kerala over the past few months, reported by the gas agencies.

The cost of obtaining a new domestic LPG connection, including the cylinder, regulator and fittings, has also increased to around Rs 5,000. The amount is non-refundable when the connection is surrendered, agencies said. Earlier, a new connection cost Rs 4,000. The refill cost for the 10-kg cylinder is currently at Rs 960 in Kerala. This has resulted in a significantly higher per-kilogram cost compared with existing domestic LPG connections. As the new cylinders have a lower capacity, consumers may also have to purchase refills more frequently during the year.

However, existing domestic LPG consumers will continue to receive refills under their current terms and retain their existing subsidy benefits. The revised arrangement applies to new domestic connections.

MLAs can use ADS funds to purchase KSRTC buses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

The State Government has allowed MLAs to use their Asset Development Scheme (ADS) funds to purchase buses for the Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC), with each MLA permitted to fund up to three buses during the 2026-27 financial year.

The move was aimed at strengthening public transport and expanding the KSRTC fleet amid financial constraints and the need to replace ageing buses.

The seating capacity, body type and fuel type of the buses will be decided in consultation with the KSRTC Chairman and Managing Director, Dr. P. S. Pramoj Shankar.

The KSRTC CMD has been directed to provide MLAs by September 30 with estimates of the total cost of procuring buses, based on their model or type. The estimates will include taxes, registration and other charges.

MLAs seeking to use their

ADS allocation for bus procurement must submit proposals to the concerned District Collector by October 15. The Collector will issue administrative sanction within seven days and designate the KSRTC CMD as the implementing officer.

The KSRTC CMD will consolidate the sanctions and conduct the procurement through a single tender in accordance with State and Central government rules.

The order said route planning would prioritise passenger requirements in the respective constituency in consultation with the MLA. All operational expenses, including fuel, staff salaries, maintenance and repairs, will be borne by KSRTC.

The buses will be added to the corporation's public fleet and may be deployed for services including Ordinary and Fast Passenger operations. KSRTC will also have the authority to redeploy them based on changing requirements, subject to technical suitability, applicable rules and service standards.

Liver Foundation chairman Babu Kuruvila dies at 60

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kochi

Liver Foundation of Kerala (LIFOK) chairman Babu Kuruvila, 60, died at a private hospital in Ernakulam on Sunday following chest pain. Kuruvila, a native of North Chalakudy and resident of Vazhakkala, was rushed to Lisie Hospital after developing chest pain at his residence early Sunday. He later died while undergoing treatment. Kuruvila was actively involved in organ donation awareness and welfare initiatives for liver disease patients and transplant recipients. He played a key role in guiding LIFOK, which supports liver transplant recipients, patients and their families.

Under his leadership, LIFOK received the State Government's award for the best supporting NGO and the national award for the best supporting NGO through the NOTTO, under the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.



India captain Shubman Gill celebrates his century during the ODI cricket match against the West Indies at Greenfield International Stadium in Thiruvananthapuram on Sunday.

Ganesh Kumar accuses NSS chief of nepotism

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Idukki

Former minister K.B. Ganesh Kumar has criticised Nair Service Society (NSS) General Secretary G. Sukumaran Nair, accusing him of favouring his family and relatives and questioning his leadership of the organisation.

Speaking at the silver jubilee celebrations of the Vandanmedu NSS Union on Sunday, Ganesh Kumar alleged that the NSS was being run in the interests of Sukumaran Nair's children and relatives. He also alleged that Sukumaran Nair's daughter has been given charge of NSS colleges and questioned her qualifications to manage them.

He criticised Sukumaran Nair for recently honouring General Education Minister N. Samsudheen during his visit to the NSS headquarters, alleging that the reception was linked to Nair's grandson's government service. Ganesh Kumar also accused Nair of taking positions against the Muslim community and alleged that he had intervened to stop the Chandanakudam festival in Changanassery.

Ganesh Kumar further alleged that Nair had asked NSS karayogams to withdraw their deposits from Dhanlaxmi Bank following the removal of a relative



Former minister K.B. Ganesh Kumar

Ganesh Kumar also accused Nair of taking positions against the Muslim community and alleged that he had intervened to stop the Chandanakudam festival in Changanassery.

from the bank. He also accused Nair of making casteist remarks against Mata Amritanandamayi, while pointing out that Nair's grandson was studying at an engineering college run by her organisation.

He alleged that Nair was using jobs for wife and children to exert influence over people and mocked the claim that lawyers alone were qualified to become NSS general secretary.

Ganesh Kumar also demanded an explanation for the dissolution of the High Range NSS Union and Pathanapuram NSS Union, alleging that both were disbanded secretly.

He called for the NSS to be "saved from the hands of the wicked and the cowardly" and again urged Nair not to be swayed by petty gains.

India needs an Indian education service

The idea of creating an All India Education Service is not new: a permanent, All-India cadre of trained education officers, recruited the way IAS officers are being recruited by UPSC is often placed in hot debate and given away due to reasons unknown. It has been argued over and over that our best educational institutions need good academic administrators capable of decision making and implementation as leader educators. They should be given the job of actually running our schools and universities. It has a name — the Indian Education Service, or IES — and it has been proposed, debated, and quietly shelved so many times. And now it is high time we needed a fresh thought about it in the context of fast evolving learning scenario. Over the past few years, the entire Indian educational ecosystem has undergone drastic changes in terms of knowledge, teaching, learning, skill acquisitions. The present educational system, including both school and higher educa-

tion, needs to be revamped by educational visionaries and leaders who have to be recruited and trained for the purpose, just like our Civil Services. The Indian Education Service being discussed here does not currently exist as an active service — it is a proposal, revived and dropped repeatedly since the 1960s, for a dedicated administrative cadre for education alone. Owing to the immense growth and diversification of the graduate programs and allied courses, especially with the advent of new gen courses related Artificial Intelligence, Bioinformatics, biotechnology nanoscience etc, the academic administration has become very complicated which necessitates well trained cadre of educational leaders.

An Indian Educational Service actually existed under British rule, between 1896 and 1924, though it was mostly staffed by British officers running colonial education policy. After Independence, the idea was reborn with better inten-



Dr D K Sathish
Former Principal,
University College,
Thiruvananthapuram

tions. The Kothari Commission of 1964-66 recommended a proper Indian Education Service, on par with the IAS and IPS, arguing that education needed the same quality of dedicated Academic administrative leadership. The same recommendation resurfaced in the National Policy on Education of 1968, again in 1986, again in the 2016 T.S.R. Subramanian Committee report, and again in the draft National Education Policy of 2019. And each time, it was left out without any serious discussions of the final policy.

Even NEP 2020, after a detailed analysis of almost every other part of Indian education, dropped the IES quietly, reportedly after resistance from states worried about the Centre reaching further into a subject which is in concurrent list at present.

Why a Fresh Look ?

An IAS officer might spend two years as an education secretary before being posted to irrigation or urban development. A brilliant teacher might become a headmaster and then, without any training in administration, end up running a whole district's schools. Neither path builds the kind of long-term, specialised expertise that a subject as complicated as education actually needs.

Compare this to health, forests, or revenue — each has its own cadre of specialists who spend entire careers

understanding that one domain. Education, arguably the sector that shapes every other sector eventually, has no such dedicated cadre. This is quiet ironical. Always the quality of an educational institution, whether it is a school, college or University is ultimately relies on the professional management of the system coupled with the academic excellence of the faculty. Learning ecosystems are fast evolving that necessitates well-trained leaders at the top.

The Honest Counterargument

IES is worth trying, only if it is built as a genuine specialist service with real postings inside schools, universities, and state education departments — not as a shortcut for people who want an IAS-equivalent badge without the accountability that should come with running something as consequential as a child's education.



Wangchuk backs CJP protest to improve electoral process

For example, Ladakh was promised a 6th Schedule."

Wangchuk said he supported organisations, political parties and politicians working to bring justice and accountability, including people within the ruling BJP.

He said October 2 was a "very sacred day" as it marked the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, whose methods of peaceful protest had inspired movements for people's rights.

The CJP has announced that its protest will begin in Mumbai on October 2 as part of its campaign seeking accountability from the Election Commission.

Opposition parties have also been seeking action against the CEC over issues surrounding the SIR, with INDIA bloc parties expected to meet in Delhi on September 30 to discuss a coordinated response.

Kerala CM demands CEC's resignation, calls him 'BJP agent'

Indian democracy,"

Satheesan said on X.

Accusing Kumar of "undermining democracy" while holding one of the country's highest constitutional offices, the CM said the chief election commissioner should no longer continue in the post.

He further said the Constitution underscored the purity and sanctity of the electoral process.

Satheesan accused Kumar of having a "criminal mindset" and "tethering" the EC, which is meant to function with complete independence, to the "stables of the Sangh Parivar".

"His continuation in this post poses an extreme danger to Indian democracy. Kumar has dismantled the transparency, integrity, impartiality and high democratic spirit of the Election Commission," he claimed.

"Everything stated earlier by Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi has now been proven true. Kumar has degraded the EC into a body operating in mutual collusion with the BJP, and his continued presence in office will only further tarnish Indian democracy," the CM added.

Asian Games Silver medalist Ancy aims to breach the 7m mark

said there was little room for disappointment given the circumstances. "We have to consider the weather conditions. Due to the rain, all the jumpers were affected, so we are still very happy with the result we anticipated," she said.

Her father, Sojan E.T., an auto-rickshaw driver who used to train his daughter on the sands of their village beach, described the moment as one of quiet fulfilment. "I feel very happy because God is blessing us and granting the fruits of our hard work," he said, adding that with the season now over, attention would turn to

preparations for next year's World Championships.

Ancy, a Chief Petty Officer with the Indian Navy's Physical Training branch, trains at the Reliance Athletics High Performance Centre in Navi Mumbai. Alongside her two Asian Games silvers, she holds a silver from the 2025 Asian Athletics Championships in Gumi and a bronze from the 2026 Asian Indoor Championships in Tianjin. With the national record now firmly in her possession, her sights are set on becoming the first Indian woman to breach the 7-metre mark as she builds towards the World Athletics Championships and future Olympic campaigns.

Three-day bank strike from today

issues related to the Performance Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, workload, staff shortages and compliance pressures.

The Centre has said the PLI scheme has been kept in abeyance, while the demand for a five-day workweek remains under consideration. The government has appealed to bank employees to avoid the strike and ensure uninterrupted services.

If the latest strike goes ahead, branch-based services could face disruption. Digital banking, ATMs and other automated services are expected to remain available, although some transactions requiring staff intervention may be delayed.

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The government has also directed public sector banks and regional rural banks to remain open on Sunday, September 27, ahead of the strike. The Reserve Bank of India has approved the operation of bank branches, offices, ATM-linked branches and currency chests on the day to facilitate customer transactions.

In Kerala, protest programmes will be held across districts as part of the strike. In Thiruvananthapuram, a protest dharna will be held at 9.30 am on September 28 in front of the Union Bank of India Regional Office at Statue. According to the notice issued by All India Bank Officers' Confederation (AIBOC) Kerala State Secretary Sreenath Induchoodan, the programme will be inaugurated by Leader of the Opposition Pinarayi Vijayan.

The UFBU, an umbrella organisation of major bank employee and officer unions, has warned of an indefinite nationwide strike from October 26 if the issues remain unresolved. The proposed three-day strike, coming immediately after the September 26-27 weekend holidays, could lead to interruptions in physical banking services over several consecutive days. Customers have been advised by banks to complete essential branch-related transactions in advance and make use of digital banking facilities

where possible.

So i used my friend's car, what about it? ssks K.M. Shaji

Flag Code of India. There is no rule requiring a minister's vehicle to be government-owned," he said.

"The vehicle in which the minister travels is the minister's vehicle," Shaji said, adding that there was nothing wrong with using a privately owned vehicle for government-related purposes, as long as official privileges were not misused for personal purposes.

Asked whether accepting free benefits or favours from private individuals was against the rules, Shaji said it was not. He argued that accepting a meal, staying at someone's house or traveling in someone's car did not automatically mean that a minister would favour that person in return.

He also challenged journalists to identify any law or specific provision that prohibited his actions. "Can you show me a law in this country that says what I did was wrong?" he asked.

Responding to criticism of his lifestyle, Shaji said he travelled in expensive cars and lived a relatively lavish life. People would naturally notice such things and raise questions, but added that becoming a minister did not mean giving up his personal

identity and way of life. He also alleged that a photograph used in reports about the controversy was AI-generated.

During the press conference, he displayed photographs of LDF leaders standing alongside the businessman who allegedly sponsored his foreign trip. He raised allegations against the previous LDF Government, accusing it of unethical practices, corruption and nepotism, particularly in the Local Self-Government Department. He said there were around 10,000 appointments in the department and that he would examine them.

The Minister alleged that some people had been appointed without examinations based on recommendations from party offices, while candidates who had cleared Public Service Commission examinations were waiting for jobs.

He also raised issues concerning BUDS schools, alleging that there had been no therapists in BUDS schools in eight districts for the past 10 years. He claimed that funds allocated in 2018 for their modernisation remained unspent.

Shaji further alleged corruption in Kudumbashree CDS offices in Attappadi, Wayanad, Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha involving funds meant for Scheduled Castes.

He said a Vigilance investigation had been ordered into a housing complex in Ernakulam that was con-

structed at a cost of Rs18 crore and later required another project worth Rs 28 crore for repairs.

On allegations of backdoor appointments at the Kerala Institute of Local Administration, Shaji said his department would appoint candidates based on qualifications, irrespective of their political affiliations.

'Humanimal': When the boundary between man and beast dissolves

the moment they were finished. Elsewhere, Firoz Nediath pushes the human-animal question into desire itself, imagining eroticism as a field passing between a spine and a tree, a flower and flesh, a landscape and an organ.

Asked what remains of "the human" once its identity grows this unstable, Sreekrishnan doesn't offer a tidy answer. "It can transform into different things and come back to human, or not fully. The old modern idea of a fixed human self doesn't really exist anymore. It's a mixture." He hopes visitors leave not with answers but better questions — a sense of how subtly, and how far, that old boundary has already moved.

TN revokes order exempting law & order Dept from RTI Act

it set a "bad precedent" and maintaining that the scope of the RTI Act must be

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Directors Debate Freedom of Expression and Linguistic Barriers

NAVNEETH
■ Thiruvananthapuram

Linguistic discrimination, identity crisis, and challenges to freedom of expression took centre stage at the 'Meet the Directors' interactive session held at Kairali Portico, as part of the 18th International Documentary and Short Film Festival of Kerala (IDSFFK). The session featured filmmakers representing 13 films screened across various categories, ranging from campus films to long documentaries. Addressing the audience, Aayush Singh, director of Mother Tongue, highlighted



how language-based alienation is a stark reality across the country. He shared his personal experiences of linguistic discrimination and discussed how his film addresses the bias faced by non-Marathi speakers in Mumbai. He emphasized that language should serve as a bridge to

unite Indians rather than divide them. The routine session evolved into a discussion on current political situation in our country and broader concern about artistic freedom and solidarity among filmmakers. The speakers pointed out the difficulties faced by filmmak-

ers who question the state and authorities. Director Kamal K M also requested the audience and fellow filmmakers to stand in solidarity with the 7 filmmakers whose work have been denied permission to screen by the central government. The discussion also highlighted the ethical and political responsibilities of filmmaking. Documenting tribal communities, linguistic identities and people's private lives requires filmmakers to negotiate questions of representation, sensitivity and access. The session was moderat-

ed by Dr. Rajesh James. The panel of participating directors included Venugopal R. (Mudi yettu), Kamal K.M. (The Making of Political Ubu), Darwin Annakumar (Maram Maramkothi), Cyril Syriac (Like the Birds), Aravind Roy (Heart Attack), Kalpajyoti Bhuyan (Dreams of a Forgotten Past), Tashmin Majumdar (Bird's Nest in Storm), Manshing Baskey (Sacred Sal Tree), Shayar Gandhi (Caress Me), Prachi Chowghule (An Oyster Life), Kalyani B. (Mirage), Aayush Singh (Mother Tongue), and Rithwik Deepa (The Shadow of Time).

A boy, a prize, and a home that's not there anymore

THREYAMBAKA A.B
■ Thiruvananthapuram

There is a question a child asks his mother early in "Globe," a short film by Shijin V., that lands with the weight of an entire political history behind it: "Mother, can't we live in this house anymore?" It's a simple sentence. It is also, the director says, the whole film in miniature — a question that echoes across every indigenous settlement in the world fighting to hold on to the ground beneath it. "Globe" tells the story of young Kariyan and his father, who leave their forest home in Attappadi to travel and collect a prize the boy has won in a story-writing competition. What unfolds, in Shijin's words, is "a cinematic folk tale about existence, identity, and resistance"; rooted in the real land struggles of Kerala's tribal communities, and shot after six months of research and workshops in local schools in the region. The film is adapted from a short story by Prabhakaran Master, which Shijin — a graduate of Film and Video Communication at NID Ahmedabad, where "Globe" began life as his graduation film, stumbled upon almost by accident. "The story reads almost like a lightweight children's tale,

but the politics it addresses is global," he says. "The title 'Globe' metaphorically represents land everywhere in the world." It was that quiet universality, he says, that compelled him to adapt it: "Reading it as a reader, I felt compelled to adapt it into a new story world as a filmmaker and communicate its message to society." Choosing to tell that story through a child was not incidental. "Who can tell stories better than a child?" Shijin asks. "A child is relatable, and even simple things a child says can carry deep political meaning." The film weaves the boy's perspective against his father's over the course of their journey, using that innocence, he says, to make an otherwise heavy political message "far more impactful." That impact, for Shijin, is inseparable from where the film was made. "Attappadi taught me how a region's culture and politics shape a narrative," he says. "I went with a simple story idea, interacted with locals, listened to their experiences, and developed the script from those real emotions." The boy who plays Kariyan was found through that same process - a school teacher, shown a character sketch Shijin had drawn before ever visiting Attappadi, immediately

recognised a student in her class who matched it. "I met him and his parents, built rapport, and found him to be natural and intelligent," Shijin recalls, adding that casting a non-actor is ultimately about "visual authenticity on screen." The film's central irony sharpens toward its end: the boy wins his prize, but cannot make it home with it. "This mirrors reality," Shijin says. "Governments promise land to tribal settlements before every election, but in the end, few actually receive it. The prize failing to reach home symbolizes this unfulfilled promise across multiple layers." He resists offering the audience any tidy resolution to that loss. "I leave the interpretation open to the audience rather than forcing deep emotional closure, which is why the final frame remains blank and quiet," he says. "Even if they lose their land or prize, their true emotions remain hidden from a society that ignores them." That theme of exclusion found an unsettling echo off-screen. "Globe" was among 31 films initially denied a festival screening, with permission arriving only the evening before - after which the boy, his mother, and others travelled through the night from

Attappadi to attend. "Just as authorities deny land to these communities, the initial denial of screening felt like a denial of our space," Shijin says. "As an outsider looking through my lens, experiencing that denial made me understand their emotions even deeper." Asked, finally, who ought to own the land at the heart of his film, Shijin doesn't hesitate. "The people whose identity and culture are rooted in the land should own it," he says. "The land is their ecosystem, but outside moneyed interests encroach upon it." In the film, he points out, a bus carries the name of a particular community that dominates local commerce - a small, deliberate detail illustrating how outsiders "turn indigenous inhabitants into labourers on their own land." Shijin V., whose earlier short 'Song of Roland' (2025) screened at IDSFFK and other international festivals, made "Globe" with Dev B. Raj as director of photography and K.R. Aswin on music and sound design. The film is competing in the short fiction category, carrying forward, in twenty-odd minutes, a question far larger than its runtime: what happens to a people's identity when the land that holds it is quietly, legally, taken away.

Youth stabs stepfather to death

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Palakkad

A youth allegedly stabbed his stepfather to death following a drunken brawl at Malampuzha here on Saturday night. He was subsequently taken into custody. The deceased was identified as Vinod (38) of Kurthikadavu, Anakkal, Malampuzha. The accused has been identified as his stepson, Satheesh. According to police, Vinod and Satheesh had been consuming liquor together at their home on Saturday night when an argument broke out at around 7:30 pm after Satheesh demanded more alcohol, which Vinod refused. As the altercation escalated, Satheesh allegedly restrained Vinod in the courtyard and stabbed him in the left chest before assaulting him further, police said. Vinod died on the spot.

Congress SC/ST MPs Forum to hold Dalit-Adivasi Self-Respect meet on Sept 29

Meet to discuss purification event after Kharge's rally in Uttarakhand and other incidents against SC & ST communities

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi



The Congress SC/ST MPs' Forum, in collaboration with the AICC departments concerned with Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, will organise a Dalit-Adivasi Self-Respect Meeting at Mavalankar Hall, Constitution Club of India, on September 29. Addressing a press conference here today, MPs Dr Mallu Ravi, Manoj Kumar, Tanuj Punia, Karamveer Baudh, and Bhajan Lal Jatav, along with Dr Vikrant Bhuria, MLA and Chairman of the Adivasi Congress, said, the meeting would discuss the "purification" ritual conducted in Haldwani, Uttarakhand, following a public meeting addressed by Congress president and Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge, which was an affront to his self-respect and dignity. The meeting will also take up various incidents of discrimination and violence against members of Scheduled Castes and

Scheduled Tribes across the country that are in violation of the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, and the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. The Forum emphasised that the Constitution guarantees every citizen the rights to self-respect, dignity, equality, freedom and fraternity, including citizens belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Expressing concern over continuing violations of laws enacted to protect SC/ST communities, the Forum said public representatives belonging to these communities must unite to fight discrimination and social prejudice both inside Parliament and state legislatures and

through public forums. The initiative is being organised in collaboration with K. Raju, National Coordinator (SC, ST, OBC and Minority Departments) and AICC in-charge of Jharkhand; Rajendra Pal Gautam, Chairman, AICC SC Department and in-charge of Uttar Pradesh; and Dr Vikrant Bhuria, National Chairman, Adivasi Congress and MLA from Jhabua. The organisers have invited Congress MPs from both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, former MPs, ministers in Congress-ruled states, former ministers, party MLAs, MLCs and former legislators, besides representatives of the AICC SC and ST departments, to participate in the meeting.

Clash at Satyajit Ray Film Institute

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kolkata

A clash broke out at the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute (SRFTI) in Kolkata after students objected to an event organised by the Akhil Bhartiya Grahak Panchayat West Bengal Prant on the institute campus. According to reports, the organisation had rented an auditorium on the campus for its programme. The situation escalated when a group of students questioned the organisers over holding the event inside an educational institution, leading to a phys-

ical confrontation between the two sides. Students alleged that outsiders entered the campus and assaulted them, with some claiming they were slapped and forcibly dragged out of the premises. Female students also alleged that they were subjected to inappropriate physical contact and assault during the confrontation. Some students further alleged that they were attacked with knives and called "anti-nationals", "naxals", "terrorists" and "bangladeshis". Teachers were also reportedly targeted in the incident. Meanwhile, representa-

tives of the Akhil Bhartiya Grahak Panchayat West Bengal Prant said they had legally booked and paid for the auditorium and were conducting the programme peacefully when students allegedly attacked them. The organisation alleged that students tore down its posters and banners and damaged a picture of Swami Vivekananda. Organisers also alleged that some students were under the influence of intoxicants. Reportedly, four of the members of the organisers were injured in the confrontation and had to be admitted to hospital.

60-yr-old falls ill after eating bread and jam, dies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thrissur

A 60-year-old man died of suspected food poisoning at a private hospital in Ottapalam early Sunday, hours after he and his two daughters fell ill following a meal at their home in Pazhayannur. The deceased was identified as Vinod Kumar, a resident of Kunnath House, Neeramukku, Pazhayannur. His daughters, Vidya and Vrinda, were also taken ill, but are currently stable. According to family members, the three had consumed bread and jam at their home on Saturday night. Soon after, all three began experiencing severe vomiting and acute physical discomfort. They were rushed by ambulance to Valluvanad Hospital in Ottapalam for emergency treatment. Despite medical intervention, Vinod Kumar succumbed to his illness at around 3:20 AM on Sunday. Of his two daughters, one has since been discharged after receiving primary treatment, while the other remains admitted under observation. Hospital authorities said her health indicators are currently stable and satisfactory. Acting on a statement from the family's relative, Jithin, the Pazhayannur police have registered a case of unnatural death and launched an inquiry. Health department officials have said that a conclusive determination of food poisoning as the cause of death cannot be made until the post-mortem report and a chemical analysis of Vinod Kumar's internal organs are completed.

KSRTC special services to clear Pooja, Diwali Rush

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

The Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) has announced special interstate bus services to meet the expected surge in passenger demand during the Mahanavami, Vijayadashami and Diwali holidays. The special services will operate from October 14 to November 14, connecting major cities including Bengaluru, Mysuru and Chennai with various destinations across Kerala. Advance online booking has already been opened for passengers. KSRTC will operate special services from Bengaluru to several destinations in Kerala, including Kozhikode, Malappuram, Thrissur, Nilambur, Ponnani, Emakulam, Changanassery, Pala, Alappuzha, Kollam, Punalur, Kottarakkara, Cherthala, Haripad, Kottayam, Adoor, Kannur, Payyannur, Kanhangad and Thiruvananthapuram.



Additional services will operate from Mysuru to Kannur and Madurai. From Chennai, special buses will be available to Thiruvananthapuram and Emakulam. Special services from various depots in Kerala to Bengaluru include services from Kozhikode, Nilambur, Ponnani, Malappuram, Thrissur, Emakulam, Changanassery, Alappuzha, Kollam, Punalur, Kottarakkara, Cherthala, Haripad, Kottayam, Adoor, Kannur, Payyannur, Kanhangad and Thiruvananthapuram.

Special services to Mysuru will be operated from the Pala and Kannur depots, while services to Chennai will run from Thiruvananthapuram and Emakulam. Some services will operate on alternate days. KSRTC said additional buses would be deployed on routes witnessing heavy passenger demand, based on the rush in the coming days. Tickets can be booked through the official KSRTC website, www.keralartc.com, and the Ente KSRTC Neo OPRS mobile application.

Bengal native held with 17 kg cannabis

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kannur

The Excise Department has arrested a West Bengal native suspected of being a key link in the interstate smuggling of cannabis to Kerala, seizing 17 kg of the drug from his possession. The accused, identified as Dasarath Mandal (21), a native of Murshidabad in West Bengal, was nabbed at Payyanur Railway Station on Saturday around 11:30 am,

acting on a tip-off received by excise police. According to the department, Mandal was carrying a 17-kg consignment of cannabis, smuggled via train from Odisha, at the time of his arrest. A case has been registered against him under relevant provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. Excise officials said Mandal is suspected to be one of the key links in a larger network smuggling cannabis from

other states into Kerala, and is believed to have made previous trips to the state carrying ganja from Odisha. The department said it has also received information regarding his accomplices, and further investigations are underway to trace the wider network. Mandal is scheduled to be produced before the Payyanur Judicial First Class Magistrate Court, and, following legal proceedings, will be transferred to the Vadakara Narcotic Court.

താൻ എന്റെ നാടിന്റെ കാവലാൾ

തൃശ്ശൂർ തദ്ദേശം

ലഹരികെതിരെ ജനസേന

തൃശ്ശൂർ രണ്ടാം ഘട്ടം സംസ്ഥാനതല ഉദ്ഘാടനം

ഇനി ത്രിതലപഞ്ചായത്തിലെ ഓരോ വാർഡിലും തൃശ്ശൂർ ജനജാഗ്രത സമിതി

28 സെപ്റ്റംബർ 2026 | രാവിലെ 11 | മലബാർ കോളേജ്, വേങ്ങര

ഉദ്ഘാടനം: ശ്രീ. രമേശ് ചെന്നിത്തല (ബഹു. ആഭ്യന്തര - വിജിലൻസ് - കയർ വകുപ്പ് മന്ത്രി)
അധ്യക്ഷൻ: ശ്രീ. പി. കെ. കുഞ്ഞാലിക്കുട്ടി (ബഹു. വ്യവസായം - വാനിയം വകുപ്പ് മന്ത്രി)
ശ്രീ. കെ. എം. ഷാജി (ബഹു. തദ്ദേശ സ്വയംഭരണ വകുപ്പ് മന്ത്രി)
ശ്രീ. എ. പി. അനിൽകുമാർ (ബഹു. വനവകുപ്പ് മന്ത്രി), ശ്രീ. പി. കെ. ബഷീർ (ബഹു. പൊതുമരാമത്ത് വകുപ്പ് മന്ത്രി)
എംപിമാർ, എംഎൽഎമാർ തുടങ്ങിയവർ പങ്കെടുക്കും

രാവിലെ 11 മുതൽ 12:30 വരെ സംസ്ഥാനത്തെ എല്ലാ തദ്ദേശ സ്വയംഭരണ സ്ഥാപനങ്ങളിലും തൃശ്ശൂർ പതാക ഉയർത്തൽ, ലഹരി വിരുദ്ധ പ്രതിജ്ഞ തൃശ്ശൂർ വാനിയർ ബാഡ്ജ് സ്വീകരണം

IN AND OUT



A delegate leaves the Kairali Theatre while another enters during the IDSFFK on Saturday. The Kairali Theatre is the venue for the fest that commenced -Prathyash Vipanchika

Keralam to focus on time-bound execution of flagship projects: CM Satheesan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

Keralam Chief Minister V D Satheesan on Wednesday said the state government is focusing on the implementation of the flagship projects in a time-bound manner without compromising on quality, while scaling up efforts to attract investment by sending out the message of 'Invest in Keralam' globally. Satheesan was delivering the inaugural address to the three-day 'Reimagining Keralam' initiative that features a series of Round Table Conferences (RTCs) to evolve the framework for fast-tracking the transformational projects announced by the state government in the 2026-27 Budget.

"This event is the biggest step for turning the concept of 'Invest Keralam' into a reality. We need to adopt a modern-day approach while executing projects that are also result-oriented. In



income - generating projects, it would be ideal to leverage the support of the Malayali diaspora," Satheesan said.

The state promises plenty of investment opportunities if the advantages it offers are leveraged diligently, especially in the aviation and maritime sectors, he noted.

Highlighting the strengths of Keralam in various verticals, including healthcare and education, the Chief Minister said the talent pool of the state has to be showcased globally and create opportunities for the youngsters to work in their home state.

Noting that the state will set sustainable models in all key domains, Satheesan

said the government is keen to develop a disaster resilience management system that will serve as a model for the country.

In his keynote address to the inaugural session of the event, Industries Minister P K Kunhalikutty said it is vital to create a conducive ecosystem by leveraging cutting-edge technology in every sector to pave the way for attracting investments in a big way.

"All these matters will be discussed at the RTC by experts. The government is committed to removing hurdles through policy initiatives to enable completion of projects in a time-bound manner," he added.

In his address, K M Chandrasekhar, Vice Chairperson, State Planning Board, said the ideas and suggestions emerging from the roundtables will be consolidated to prepare the 15th Five Year Plan in a different mode.

ED likely to probe Amster Overseas MD

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kochi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) is likely to examine the alleged financial transactions in the multi-crore overseas job fraud case involving Amster Overseas Managing Director Parvathy Maya Shaji. Police are preparing a report detailing the suspected movement of money through foreign bank accounts and are expected to submit it to the ED on Monday.

Parvathy was arrested at Thiruvananthapuram International Airport on September 24 after arriving from abroad. She was subsequently taken to Kochi for further proceedings. She is the primary accused in two FIRs registered at Palarivattom police station, with police initially estimating that around Rs 10 lakh had been collected from victims in those cases.

According to investigators, the accused allegedly collected lakhs of rupees from people after promising jobs in Poland, Armenia and Canada. A significant portion of the money is suspected to have been routed through foreign bank accounts. Police are also preparing lookout notices to trace other accused who are believed to be abroad, including Parvathy's partner, Aneesh Menon.

Police have also raised questions over the legality of the recruitment operations. Amster Overseas, located near Changampuzha Park in Edappally, and Amster Immigration Overseas in Palarivattom allegedly did not possess the licences required for overseas



According to investigators, the accused allegedly collected lakhs of rupees from people after promising jobs in Poland, Armenia and Canada. A significant portion of the money is suspected to have been routed through foreign bank accounts.

recruitment. Records have also brought another entity, Amster HR Consultancy, under scrutiny.

The accused's social media activity has also come under scrutiny, with reels featuring luxury cars, expensive jewellery and designer clothing gaining attention online. Police have alleged that some job-seekers who demanded refunds were threatened by Parvathy and her associates.

Parvathy's husband Aneesh Menon, managers Abhijith Nair, Aju K. Mathew and Vishnu Vijayan, and her father Shaji have also been named as accused.

Meanwhile, the court is scheduled to pronounce its verdict on Parvathy's bail application on Monday. The police are also taking steps to trace and bring back the accused who are currently abroad.

'A Human Day' documents the life of a rickshaw puller

ARYA C.S
■ Thiruvananthapuram

For filmmaker Krishnakant Mishra, the most compelling meaningful stories are often found away from the spotlight, in the everyday lives of people whose work and struggles rarely receive recognition. His 16-minute documentary, 'A Human Day: Hand Pulled Rickshaw of Kolkata,' was screened in the competition section of the 18th International Documentary and Short Film Festival of Kerala, bringing one such life into focus.

The film takes viewers into the daily world of a manual rickshaw puller in Kolkata, looking beyond his work to the dignity, hardship, and resilience that shape his life. Mishra made the film almost entirely by himself, serving as its director, producer, cinematographer, screenwriter, editor, and sound designer.

The idea behind A Human Day took shape during Mishra's recovery from a serious illness following COVID-19. Watching the nurse who cared for him made him reflect on the many ordinary people who quietly do mean-

ingful work every day, often without recognition. Years later, that realization became the foundation for his filmmaking journey.

Mishra spent six months preparing himself to work as a one-man filmmaker, learning shooting, writing, interviewing, editing, and voiceovers. He also lost 20 kg from his weight of 120 kg as he prepared himself physically and mentally for the demands of filmmaking.

He launched A Human Day two months ago, with the long-term ambition of making 1,000 films across 200 countries and documenting the lives of people whose stories often remain unseen.

Mishra met the rickshaw puller while he was out for work and asked if he could accompany him the following day. He eventually spent the day walking 25 kilometers alongside him, observing his work, routine, and interactions with passengers.

Manual rickshaws may now be confined to certain parts of Kolkata, but for Mishra they offer a glimpse into a disappearing way of life. The rickshaw puller featured in the film lives with a



life-threatening disease, yet continues to work through the day with a smile and without complaint. After finishing his work, he returns home, only to wake up at 4 a.m. and begin another day.

The film goes beyond poverty to explore the dignity, endurance, and worldview of a man whose labor receives little recognition. It also draws attention to the contrast between those whose achievements are celebrated and those who quietly keep cities moving.

Director and writer Shamil Raj praised the documentary, calling it the best film he had seen at this year's IDSFFK so far. Corporate employee Praveen M. said A Human Day made him rethink how

society views achievement and endurance. While the physical strength of Olympic medal winners is celebrated, he noted, the daily endurance of an auto rickshaw driver often goes unnoticed. The driver's smile despite his hardships, he said, reflected more than an acceptance of fate. "It is his quiet faith in himself, his daring nature to build a life, and a will that simply refuses to tire," Praveen said.

Aromal, a script writer, also praised the film for offering a rare glimpse into the disappearing world of manual rickshaw pulling while capturing Kolkata's visual character. The documentary presents an intimate portrait of a man who travels extraordinary distances for small earnings and little social recognition. Despite his hardships, he continues to find moments of happiness. Told largely from his perspective, the film feels "very real and deeply emotional," Aromal said.

For Mishra, this is precisely what the documentary seeks to achieve. "I want to dig into human value systems and efforts beyond what is shown on social or electron-

ic media to inspire the human race," he said.

The film also marks Mishra's first experience with the festival circuit. So new was he to film festivals that he admitted he did not even know the rules when he first entered one. The response from the audience, however, encouraged him. What mattered most, he said, was that people felt something while watching the film.

Mishra also praised the organisation of the festival and Kerala's strong cinema culture. He said he met people deeply knowledgeable about both Western and Eastern film traditions, leaving him feeling like a student eager to learn.

Asked about Malayalam cinema, Mishra said he does watch Malayalam films and has seen many movies such as 'Kumbalangi Nights' and 'The Great Indian Kitchen.' He said he was particularly impressed by the seriousness with which people in Kerala engage with cinema and the wider cultural scene. He also plans to submit around 20 documentaries for the next edition of IDSFFK.

Muraleedharan hits back at Pinarayi; claims health sector destroyed during LDF rule

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

Health Minister K Muraleedharan on Sunday hit out at Leader of Opposition in the state assembly Pinarayi Vijayan, alleging that the public health sector of the state was destroyed during the last 10 years of LDF rule.

Muraleedharan was responding to Vijayan's allegations, a day ago, that the UDF was weakening public healthcare to benefit private hospitals.

The CPI(M) veteran had also alleged that government hospitals in Keralam were facing an acute medicine shortage. Rejecting the allegations,

the minister claimed it was the previous LDF government that destroyed the public health sector and gambled with the lives of the ordinary people to benefit the private hospitals.

Muraleedharan claimed that when the UDF government came to power, the health department had a debt of Rs 2,575 crore with the state-run Kerala Medical Services Corporation Ltd (KMSCL), which handles medicine procurement, having a liability of Rs 900.

He contended that it was the Left government which spent Rs 45 crore on purchasing unnecessary equipment, medicines and PPE kits and took commission.

"Now, it costs Rs 40 lakh to destroy these useless items," the minister said in a Facebook post.

Besides that, the Left government started construction of buildings in every corner of the state by giving contracts to people close to them, and then the work was abandoned after pocketing the commission, he alleged.

He further claimed that the condition of the completed hospital buildings was even worse as they had countless issues, including leakage.

There are countless problems like deterioration and leakage, he said.

"The UDF government and the Health Department are

currently undertaking a mission to complete the half-finished buildings, appoint the necessary staff and make them useful for the state," the minister contended.

On the issue of medicine availability in government hospitals, Muraleedharan claimed that the situation was much better now than during the time of the LDF administration.

"More medicines are now available with KMSCL and Karunya as compared to this period last year," he asserted.

The minister said that many medicines procured during the last government's tenure were found to be substandard by the Drugs Control Department.

BJP secy says it was Jiji who wanted to join party

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

BJP State Secretary Jiji Joseph has hit back at former Chief Secretary Jiji Thomson over his claim that he was invited to contest the Lok Sabha election on a BJP ticket with an assurance of a ministerial post if he won.

In a Facebook post, Jiji Joseph claimed that Thomson had himself shown interest in joining the BJP and had sought to establish ties with the party's leadership.

Joseph said details of private discussions and meetings involving political

workers were generally not made public. However, he said he was setting aside that practice on this occasion as Thomson had "engaged in mischief" through his recent revelation.

Recalling an event held in Kochi on June 26, 2017, Joseph said the BJP Minority Morcha had organised a function to honour Senior Metropolitan Philipose Mar Chrysostom. Joseph, who was the state president of the Minority Morcha at the time, said a senior Sangh Parivar leader had contacted him and asked him to invite Thomson to the programme, saying that

Thomson was interested in joining the BJP.

Joseph said he subsequently invited Jiji Thomson to the event, where, according to him, the former bureaucrat praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the initiatives of the Union government.

Joseph further claimed that following Thomson's participation in the BJP-organised event, he was appointed as an Independent Director of Cochin Shipyard, a Central government-owned company, in 2017, a position he held until 2020.

The BJP leader also claimed

that Thomson may have been aspiring for a position higher than the Cochin Shipyard appointment. Referring to Thomson's recent revelation, Joseph concluded his post by invoking the Malayalam saying "Kittatha munthiri pulikkum", meaning "sour grapes".

Thomson, who retired as Chief Secretary in 2016, had recently claimed that Gyanesh Kumar, who was then serving as an IAS officer, suggested during a flight journey that he contest the 2019 Lok Sabha election on a BJP ticket and allegedly assured him of a ministerial position if he won.

Congress Booth-Level Agents Are the Party's Pillars: Deputy CM Bhatti Vikramarka

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Nagulavanch, Khammam District

A grand meeting of Congress Booth-Level Agents (BLAs) was held at Nagulavanch village in Chintakani mandal on Sunday.

Telangana Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka said that Booth-Level Agents (BLAs), who take the Congress party's ideology and the government's welfare programmes to the people, are the true pillars of the party. He assured that both the party and the government would always stand by them.

Addressing the Chintakani Mandal Congress BLA Atmeeya Sammelanam as the chief guest, the Deputy Chief Minister called upon BLAs to take the government's welfare and development programmes to every household and help strengthen the image of Praja Palana.

He appreciated the performance and hard work of BLAs in Chintakani mandal, stating that their efforts were out-

standing compared to those in other mandals. Describing the Congress party as being like a mother, Bhatti Vikramarka said he bowed his head in respect to every party worker striving to strengthen the Congress at the grassroots level.

He said that every grassroots worker would receive due recognition for their hard work. He emphasized that BLAs have a major responsibility to ensure that government welfare schemes reach every household and that the people experience the benefits of good governance.

The Deputy Chief Minister said that Madhira Assembly constituency had fallen behind in development because there had been no Congress government for the previous ten years. He said that the development backlog accumulated over the last 15 years would be completed within the present five-year term by working at a rapid pace.

He assured that all pending works relating to schools, roads, hospitals and other infra-



structure would be completed on a priority basis during the next two years, enabling party leaders and workers to confidently move among the people in their villages.

Bhatti Vikramarka said the Congress government was working with public welfare as its primary objective. He stated that nearly 1.06 crore families across the state were being provided six kilograms of fine rice per month free of cost, describing it as an exemplary "Telangana Model" for the country.

He said that the government was providing financial relief to women through free bus travel and had revived the DWCRA loan system, with a

target of providing loans worth 71 lakh crore.

Under Gruha Jyothi, free electricity is being provided for consumption of up to 200 units. He said that in villages, around 80 to 90 per cent of households were benefiting from quality electricity without having to pay electricity bills.

For the treatment of poor people, the Rajiv Aarogya health insurance coverage has been increased from 75 lakh to 710 lakh, he said. He also announced that the 'Indiramma Bhee-ma' scheme, providing 75 lakh of free insurance coverage to every family in the state, would be launched on November 19.

In the education sector, the

government has cleared the fee reimbursement arrears left pending by the previous government and introduced a new system under which the amount is deposited directly into students' bank accounts, he said.

He stated that nearly 27 lakh students in government schools were being provided free hot breakfast, milk and ragi porridge. He also said that Young India Integrated Residential Schools were being constructed on 25 acres in every Assembly constituency, with international standards.

The Deputy Chief Minister further stated that the government was implementing farmers' loan waiver along with providing 71,000 per acre as investment assistance.

TPCC observer Duddilla Srinu Babu, Khammam District Congress Committee (DCC) President Nootthi Satyanarayana Goud, Congress Mandal President Kanneboyina Gopi, and other Congress leaders and workers participated in the meeting.

■ States Focus ■



NANOMEDICINE WILL DRIVE PERSONALISED CARE: JITENDRA

Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology Jitendra Singh on Sunday said that nanomedicine will drive the next generation of precision Medicine and personalised healthcare, adding that India's indigenous research carries global potential. Speaking at the inaugural function of the World Congress on Nanomedicine in New Delhi, he described nanomedicine as one of the most transformative developments in medical practice, with the potential to make healthcare increasingly precise and personalised by working at the nanometre scale. The minister said the future of medicine would increasingly involve individualised treatment based on a patient's genetic profile, lifestyle, dietary habits and environmental factors, with nanotechnology offering new possibilities for precision at the cellular level. (PTI)



GOA CM SAWANT HAILS PM'S CALL FOR DRUG-FREE INDIA

Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Sunday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for people's participation in nation-building and a drug-free India resonated with the coastal State's efforts to promote its culture, heritage and tourism. Sawant, after listening to the 138th episode of Modi's monthly radio programme *Mann Ki Baat*, in a post on X, said the Prime Minister highlighted *Jan Bhagidari* (people's participation) as a powerful force in nation-building. "The Prime Minister highlighted Jan Bhagidari as a powerful force in nation-building and called upon citizens to support the *Nasha Mukta Bharat* movement, by guiding youth away from harmful habits and supporting those striving to overcome addiction," Sawant said. Modi also shared the story of Ganesha Himal Museum in Chiang Mai in Thailand, which showcases India's faith, art and the Ashtavinayak tradition, highlighting how Indian cultural traditions are reaching devotees across the world, the CM said. Sawant said the PM's message on promoting India's rich heritage, culture and tourism was particularly relevant to Goa on World Tourism Day. "On World Tourism Day, the message of promoting India's rich heritage, culture and tourism resonates strongly with Goa's own journey of showcasing its unique traditions to the world," he said. (PTI)

Shah flags off India's first LNG-powered train in Gujarat

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi/Gandhi Nagar

Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Sunday launched railway development projects worth ₹1,472 crore and flagged off India's first LNG-powered train from Sabarmati Railway Station in Ahmedabad. Shah said the new dual-fuel train will help protect the environment, make travel more convenient for passengers, and improve safety. The LNG-powered train is a Diesel Electric Multiple Unit with two 1,400 HP Driving Power Cars, converted at the Sabarmati Integrated Coaching Depot to run on both diesel and LNG. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) is stored in cryogenic tanks of about 2,200 litres each and can replace almost 40 per cent of diesel use. The engines can switch between diesel and LNG as needed. Field trials have already covered over 2,000 km. Officials estimate yearly fuel savings of about Rs 11.9 lakh per power car and nearly ₹23.9 lakh for an eight-coach train, along with lower emissions of carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter. Shah said the launch is part of Indian Railways' push to reduce diesel use. He pointed out that diesel consumption dropped from 293 crore litres in 2015-16 to 108 crore litres in 2024-25, with the goal of reaching zero by 2030. The network is now 99.6 per cent electrified, up from about 30 per cent before 2014. At the same event, Shah also opened a new WAG-12 locomotive maintenance shed in the Ahmedabad Division, built for ₹700 crore. The new facility can service up to 300 high-power WAG-12 electric locomotives, each with 12,000 HP in a twin-section setup. These engines can haul as much freight as about 600 trucks, so one engine can now do the work that used to need two. The event also included the launch of a WAG-12 locomotive.



Union Home Minister Amit Shah during the inauguration and foundation laying ceremony of various important projects for Gujarat railway in AhmedabadPTI

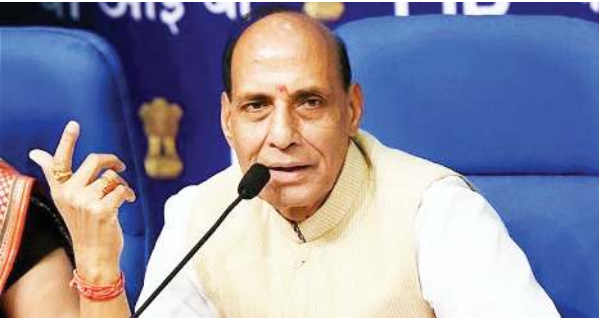
Union Home Minister Amit Shah during the inauguration and foundation laying ceremony of various important projects for Gujarat railway in AhmedabadPTI

Shah also laid the foundation stones for the Indian-made Kavach automatic train-protection system on 404 km of track: 157 km on the Ahmedabad-Palanpur section and 247 km on the Ahmedabad-Samakhiali section, for ₹411 crore. Kavach is already in use on the

Peace must not mean weakness: Rajnath

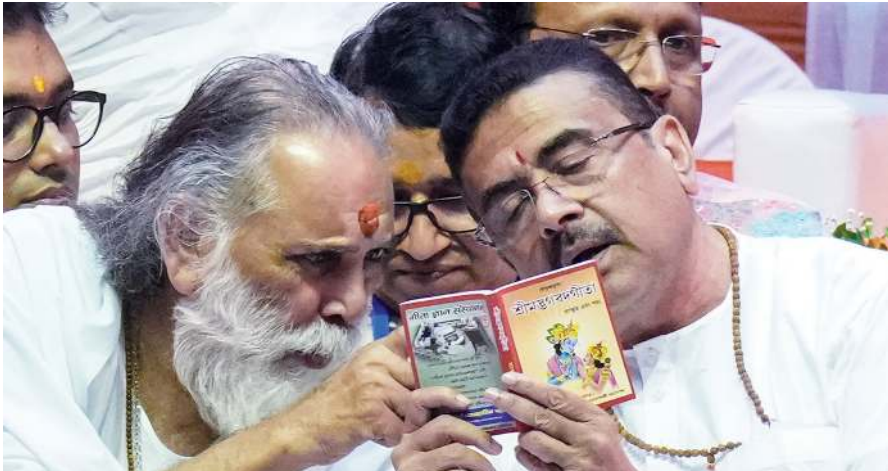
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday said, "India believes in peace and does not seek to occupy the territory of any country. However, peace should not be mistaken for weakness. We seek global stability, but not at the cost of our strategic autonomy. We are firmly committed to safeguarding our security and strategic autonomy when threatened." Making these assertions while addressing a defence conclave here, he also underlined that there can be no scope for dialogue with any country that promotes terrorism against India. "Countries that use terrorism as an instrument of state policy or provide shelter and support to terrorists must be firmly reminded that terrorism cannot be a strategic asset for any nation, the defence minister said. He reiterated that as long as a neighbouring country continues to pursue a policy of supporting terrorism, India remains fully entitled to take all necessary measures against terrorism," referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks at the recent SCO meeting. Emphasising national unity as a key pillar of national security, Rajnath Singh stated that the security of the country is not solely the responsibility of the armed forces but a collective responsibility of every citizen. He urged citizens to rise above divisions based on religion, caste, creed, language, region and other identities, and to place national interest above personal and narrow interests. He described India as a civilizational power whose rise is based on inclusive development rather than confrontation or disruption. He outlined three foundations of India's approach: its long democratic and civilizational traditions, the principle of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* and the vision of *Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas*, and five strategic pillars—respect, dialogue, prosperity, security and culture. Rajnath Singh highlighted India's significant progress towards self-reliance in defence, noting that the country is developing indigenous capabilities ranging from aircraft and drone engines to fifth- and sixth-generation fighter jets. He emphasised that growing international demand for Indian missiles, radars, ammunition and defence platforms reflects global confidence in India's technology, quality and delivery capabilities. Rajnath Singh stated that the nature of warfare is rapidly changing, with modern conflicts extending beyond conventional domains to cyber, space, electronic and information warfare, alongside emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, drones, autonomous systems, quantum technology and hypersonic systems. He underlined the need for India to develop future-ready capabilities across these domains. Highlighting India's efforts to address strategic vulnerabilities in areas such as technology, energy, data, and supply chains, the defence minister said initiatives are underway to strengthen domestic capabilities in semiconductors and critical minerals, diversify energy sources, and enhance energy security.



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No disrespect to seers will be tolerated: Suvendu



West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari with Swami Gyananand Ji Maharaj during the grand mass recitation of the Bhagavad Gita by 11,000 participants at Netaji Indoor Stadium in KolkataPTI

SAUGAR SENGUPTA
■ Kolkata

West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari on Sunday reiterated that his Government would not tolerate any disrespect shown to the sadhus. Taking part in a programme for mass recitation of the Bhagavad Gita featuring 11,000 voices at the iconic Netaji Indoor Stadium, Adhikari assured the seers, saying "*zamana badal gaya* (time has changed)," that all the sanatanis could practice their religion without fear. "*Zamana Badal Gaya* (Bengal has changed) for good ... gone are the days when the *sadhus* were

humiliated and disrespected ... now the Government will not tolerate any humiliation of the Sadhus ... in Bengal no one will be stopped from organising Pujas or chant Hanuman Chalisa, Bhagwad Gita or Krishna Naam, blow conch shells, chant your mantras and worship Gaumata (mother cow) freely... No Sadhus will be ridiculed... remember that the Government has changed," he announced to thunderous applause. Reminding that he had taken strong action against those who had tried to insult Godman Dharendra Shastri, the Chief Minister said "some people had tried to humiliate Baba

Bageshwar dham but we have taken strong action against them driving home the message that no acts against the sanatanis will now be tolerated in West Bengal." Announcing that he was not attending the programme as the Chief Minister but as a Sanatani, Adhikari said, "I have come here as a son of Maa Bharati ... I must thank you for reawakening Bengal," adding, however, that the State would have to remain alert against the "*Azadi and Tukde* gangs who demand freedom for Kashmir." He also promised participation in the Kurukshetra International Gita Mahotsav.

2025 Ladakh violence: Wangchuk seeks release of inquiry report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A year after violence in Ladakh left four people dead and led to his detention under the National Security Act, activist Sonam Wangchuk on Sunday demanded the release of the judicial inquiry report, higher compensation for victims and accountability for the use of state powers. The Magsaysay awardee, who was released in March this year, said the inquiry, headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice B S Chauhan, should establish what happened during the police firing on September 24 last year, including whether an order to open fire was issued and whether prescribed crowd-control measures had been exhausted before live ammunition was used.



"These are not questions to be answered by rumours, accusations, or counter-accusations. That is exactly why a judicial inquiry was constituted," he said. Addressing a press conference in Delhi a year after his detention, Wangchuk recalled how he was taken to Jodhpur on a special flight on September 26 last year and subsequently informed

that he had been detained under the NSA and would be kept in total isolation. Wangchuk said he believed there had been a plan to kill him in an encounter on September 24 last year. "From what I understand, there was a plan to make an encounter of myself, but that could not happen," he said, adding that he was instead taken into "total isolation" in a jail cell.

CISF to guard NTA premises, stricter monitoring for confidential areas

GUNJAN SHARMA
■ New Delhi

The National Testing Agency, (NTA) which recently moved its operations to a new office following a huge controversy over NEET paper leak and administrative lapses, will now be guarded by CISF to ensure foolproof arrangements in the "confidential areas" on its premises, officials said. The move comes in the wake of the question paper leak of medical entrance exam NEET-UG earlier this year, which had sparked nationwide student protests and led to the resignation of then Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan. A day after Pradhan's resignation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced the constitution of a high-powered task force headed by Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani to recommend reforms to make the exam system leakproof. The panel is yet to submit its report. According to a CBI chargesheet, which identified three subject experts as primary sources of the paper leak, there was no checking or frisking of experts during entry or exit from the confidential section at the NTA, allowing the experts to take briefs from designed question papers on small chits, made out of plain sheets provided to them for rough work and translation. Set up in 2017 under the Ministry of Education to conduct fair, transparent and standardised examinations, the NTA was so far operating from its office in Okhla. "A dedicated over 55,000 square feet office space has been allotted in the Government of India Press Building on Minto Road. The fifth floor and parts of the fourth and sixth floors of the said building have been allotted to the National Testing Agency. Confidential and sensitive operations have been shifted in the last one month to the newly allotted building," a senior



Representative photo

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official told PTI. The CBI report also noted that the work of the three accused experts went unnoticed as there was no dedicated CCTV live feed monitoring control room in the NTA office in the national capital. On the plan for monitoring at the new premises, the official said, "Confidential areas have been demarcated in the building where the movement and operations will be strictly monitored to ensure that a foolproof system is in place. The Home Ministry has approved Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) security cover for the premises," the official added. Sharing the details, the official said 39 CISF personnel have been deployed who will be responsible for security, appropriate access-control and screening measures, including frisking using X-ray baggage screening machine and Door Frame Metal Detectors (DFMDs). "The CISF is being deployed

at suitable locations at all the entry and exit points for monitoring and regulation of access into the confidential area," the official added. Other parts of the Government of India Press Building are already under CISF cover. While no educational institution in the country has CISF security, the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), which conducts the recruitment exams, is guarded by CISF. A similar NEET paper leak in 2024 led to the setting up of a high-level committee headed by former ISRO chairman K Radhakrishnan. The panel made detailed recommendations for enhanced security controls for examination-critical systems covering question paper systems, candidate registration, fee payment, admit card systems, computer-based testing platforms, OMR processing, normalisation engines and result systems. (PTI)

Manipur peace requires community dialogue, not military force: Kiren Rijiju

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Union minister Kiren Rijiju on Sunday said the warring communities in Manipur must talk to each other to ensure permanent peace in the troubled state, as the Centre cannot use the military to end the conflict, which has been going on intermittently for more than three years. Addressing a conclave organised by the Assam-based Pratidin Media Network here, Rijiju also said that "humiliation and insult" towards small communities

by successive governments since Independence led to the formation of a large number of militant groups in the Northeast. Sharing his own experience of facing humiliation at the hands of then-Union Home Minister SB Chavan in the 1990s – when he and other students went to meet him as part of a student delegation – Rijiju said Chavan even insulted then-Union minister of state PK Thungon for accompanying the students, terming them "*gunda*" (rowdies). Talking about the ongoing

conflict in Manipur, the minister for parliamentary and minority affairs said the Meitei and Kuki communities, as well as the Naga and Kuki communities, must talk to each other to find an amicable solution. "I have a simple formula. Surrender arms, and peace will automatically come. We cannot use the military because its side effects are huge. The groups should talk to each other. There should be dialogue. A solution will come through talks, and only then will peace prevail," he said. Rijiju said everyone should



Union minister Kiren Rijiju

appeal to the fighting groups to abjure violence and surrender arms; there can be no development without peace, he said. There was a time when even the most junior

officer of the Union Government was always dismissive of the problems faced by the small communities in the Northeast and would sometimes not even grant an

appointment, Rijiju said. "Frustrated by such behaviour, many groups went back to their homes in the Northeast, took up arms, and engaged in violence," he said. The minister asserted that no one can support or validate militants taking up arms, as there can be no justification for such acts in a democracy. "But we have to see why they took up arms," he said. However, the minister noted that the situation has changed completely in the last 12-and-a-half years since the Narendra Modi

Government came to power. "Today, the Northeast is no longer an isolated and neglected region. In the last 12-and-a-half years, from what I have seen, it has changed so much. In fact, we are becoming one of the engines of growth for India," he said. However, Rijiju added that sometimes one or two incidents can entirely spoil the progress. "More than 10,000 militants have surrendered in the last 12-and-a-half years and joined the mainstream," he said.

Sharing his life journey from a small village in Arunachal Pradesh, Rijiju said, "I grew up in a place so remote that I did not know what was happening in the world. Coming from such a background, I am now in a position where my decisions and contributions are critical to national politics – at the heart of Indian politics." The minister also said that Parliament is the symbol of Indian democracy. "Sitting there to formulate policies and shape the destiny of India is a great journey and a vast opportunity for someone like me," he said.

The macro cost of syndicated corruption

When corruption becomes systemic, the cost is no longer measured in bribes paid, but in opportunities lost.



PRASHANT TEWARI

"When plunder becomes a way of life for a group of men living together in society, they create for themselves, in the course of time, a legal system that authorizes it." - Frédéric Bastiat

India's corruption problem can no longer be understood merely through the familiar image of an individual official accepting a bribe. The more serious challenge is the emergence of what may be described as syndicated corruption: a network in which political interests, sections of the bureaucracy, business intermediaries, compromised processes, and, in some cases, influential interests in the media or legal system can interact to protect one another. When corruption becomes networked rather than individual, its consequences are no longer merely financial. It begins to alter the functioning of the State itself.

The macroeconomic cost is enormous. Corruption distorts competition, increases transaction costs, weakens public institutions, discourages investment and diverts resources from productive activity. More dangerously, it destroys the most valuable intangible asset of a democracy: citizen confidence.

Modern democracy has created another structural complication. Elections require organisation, mobilisation, communication and increasingly sophisticated campaigns. As the cost of political activity rises, dependence on money, patronage and networks can increase. The danger arises when public office is viewed not primarily as an instrument of public service but as a source of political, administrative and financial leverage. When access to the State becomes a commodity, government begins to resemble an ATM for those who control the access points.

This is not a problem that belongs exclusively to one political party. The BJP blames the Congress, the Congress blames the BJP, while other parties blame both. Governments change, political slogans change, and investigative priorities change, but the underlying institutional question remains: why has corruption not become sufficiently dangerous for those who practise it?

The greatest victim is the last person in the queue, the citizen without money, influence or political connections. For a powerful individual, a delayed file may be an inconvenience. For a poor citizen, it can mean losing a job, a benefit, medical treatment, a school opportunity or access to justice.

A municipal certificate, land record, police complaint, school service, tax assessment, health facility or welfare entitlement should be a matter of right. When corruption enters these transactions, the citizen pays twice, first through taxation and then through an informal payment for obtaining what the State is already obligated to provide. The World Bank has repeatedly noted that corruption disproportionately harms poor and vulnerable populations by increasing costs and reducing access to essential services.

The economic consequences extend far beyond petty bribery. Corruption can distort public procurement, favour connected businesses, weaken competition, inflate infrastructure costs and redirect capital towards rent-seeking rather than productive investment. It can influence taxation, customs, public enterprises and the allocation of licences and contracts. At its extreme, this becomes a form of state capture, where private interests acquire the ability to influence how public institutions operate. That is why corruption is not merely a moral issue. It is an economic efficiency issue, an investment issue and ultimately a national competitiveness issue.

"Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." - Lord Acton

The institutional danger becomes greater when accountability mechanisms themselves become ineffective. If a bureaucracy can indefinitely delay action, if complaints are discouraged, if investigations take years and judicial proceedings stretch across generations, the citizen eventually learns a devastating lesson: fighting the system costs more than surrendering to it.

Allegations of corruption involving the judiciary, media or other institutions must, of course, be established through evidence and due process. But even the perception that justice, investigation or journalism can be influenced by vested interests can damage institu-

When plunder becomes a way of life for a group of men living together in society, they create for themselves, in the course of time, a legal system that authorizes it." - Frédéric Bastiat



AI GENERATED ILLUSTRATION

INDIA THEREFORE NEEDS GOVERNANCE IN WHICH THE LAST PERSON ON THE STREET BELIEVES THAT THE STATE WORKS FOR HIM. JAPAN AND SINGAPORE PROVIDE IMPORTANT EXAMPLES OF HOW ADMINISTRATIVE DISCIPLINE, INSTITUTIONAL PREDICTABILITY, TECHNOLOGY AND ENFORCEMENT CAN REDUCE EVERYDAY FRICTION BETWEEN CITIZENS AND GOVERNMENT

The author is a public policy expert and columnist

tional legitimacy. An independent judiciary and a free media are important precisely because they are expected to restrain concentrations of power and expose wrongdoing.

India has repeatedly witnessed anti-establishment movements that mobilise public anger against corruption and entrenched interests. The rise of the Aam Aadmi Party demonstrated how anti-corruption politics could become a powerful vehicle for political mobilisation. More recent protest movements, including those framed around the "cockroach" metaphor, similarly reflect public frustration with established interests. But there is an important distinction between exposing selected corrupt interests and dismantling the institutional incentives that reproduce corruption.

One government can expose the corruption of its predecessor and yet create new centres of influence. A movement can begin with an anti-corruption agenda and subsequently become part of the same political ecosystem it once criticised. Unless the institutional architecture changes, the cycle survives.

India's neighbourhood provides another warning. The economic and political difficulties experienced by Pakistan, Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh cannot be attributed to corruption alone. Political instability, economic mismanagement, institutional weaknesses, external shocks and social divisions have all played significant roles. Yet weak governance and corruption can amplify each of these vulnerabilities. When citizens lose faith that institutions operate fairly, political grievances become economic grievances, and economic grievances can eventually become threats to social stability.

India therefore needs governance in which the last person on the street believes that the State works for him. Japan and Singapore provide important examples of how administrative discipline, institutional predictability, technology and enforcement can reduce everyday friction between citizens and government.

Certainty of punishment matters more than the mere existence of punishment. India has laws such as the Prevention of Corruption Act, FERA, PMLA. But, is there any fear of law for a corrupt man in India? The real test is whether investigation, prosecution and adjudication are sufficiently swift, impartial and credible to create deterrence.

There is also a legitimate public-policy debate about stronger punishment for grave, repeated or organised corruption involving substantial public losses. Deliberate fabrication of evidence, forged documents and false statements under oath must similarly face meaningful consequences under constitutional safeguards and due process. The objective should not be vengeance. It should be to make deliberate institutional fraud economically and legally irrational. The question before the nation is larger than BJP versus Congress, Left versus Right, government versus opposition, or one pressure group versus another. It is whether a democracy of 1.4 billion people can sustain rapid economic transformation while allowing corruption to remain embedded in everyday governance.

"Corruption is worse than prostitution. The latter might endanger the morals of an individual; the former invariably endangers the morals of an entire country." - Karl Kraus

The real cost of syndicated corruption is not the money exchanged under the table. It is the factory that is never built, the entrepreneur who gives up, the public project that becomes expensive, the patient who waits, the student who loses an opportunity and the citizen who stops believing that the State belongs to him. The battle against corruption is therefore not simply a battle against bribery. It is a battle to restore institutional credibility, economic efficiency and citizen confidence. For a country aspiring to become a developed economy, that battle is not optional. It is foundational. And India is desperately running of options and time.

From Himalayan tragedy to global accountability



NAVITA SRIKANT

Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal laid the diplomatic groundwork. Prime Minister Balendra Shah has now carried it to the leaders' level - and done something harder than plead for sympathy after the Bhotekoshi-Trishuli catastrophe. He has turned a national tragedy into an argument about climate justice, financing, resilience and the failures of global governance.

Climate, Shah told the UN General Assembly, respects no border. Khanal had already framed the disaster as an extraordinary Himalayan catastrophe and placed Nepal's experience before the international community, arguing that climate-induced disasters do not respect political boundaries. Shah carried the message further, describing the tragedy as a warning to humanity and insisting the Himalayas - whose rivers, glaciers and ecosystems sustain nearly two billion people - cannot be treated as a peripheral ecological zone. Tellingly, he resisted turning climate change into a geopolitical battlefield, calling instead for shared responsibility and solidarity.

Finance, he insisted, must be real rather than repackaged. Khanal's demand that the Loss and Damage Fund be capitalised through new, additional grants rather than repackaged commercial debt became, in Shah's hands, a critique of the entire architecture of climate finance. His formulation - "Relief. Rehabilitation. Reconstruction. And also: Responsibility. Reparation. Resilience." - gave Nepal's diplomacy a vocabulary worth repeating. His point was blunt: when a poor country must borrow to rebuild what a crisis it did not cause has destroyed, the system is failing at justice, not merely at generosity. The conversation, in his hands, moved beyond climate solidarity as rhetoric to the architecture, accessibility and quality of financing itself.

Development, in this telling, becomes a resilience question. Khanal's language of "climate-resilient, inclusive and sustainable" development gave Shah a still-wider frame. For Nepal, resilience is no longer confined to the climate sector; it touches infrastructure, connectivity, energy, agriculture, livelihoods and the durability of development gains themselves. Shah's warning that a single disaster can erase years of progress reframes catastrophe as a development emergency, not only a humanitarian one.

The means matter as much as the message. Shah pushed further on finance, technology and participation - the tools developing countries actually need, not just the sympathy they are offered. He linked climate vulnerability to food, fuel, fertiliser, supply chains and the ability of ordinary citizens to build secure livelihoods. His most striking image was the contrast between a world that can move weapons rapidly across borders and one where poor farmers still struggle to get fertiliser and fuel: proof, he suggested, that global systems mobilise vast logistical and financial capacity for war while remaining inadequate for basic human security.

Taken together, these threads mark an evolution in how Nepal argues its case - from asking the world to help it recover, to asking the international system to change how it responds. Shah placed Nepal alongside other climate-vulnerable states, landlocked developing countries and LDCs, and argued that justice must be both distributive, over who bears the costs, and procedural, over who gets a voice. His proposal for a Himalayan Climate Resilience Mechanism led by Nepal, India and China - sharing satellite data, monitoring dangerous glacial lakes, running joint early-warning systems and coordinated cross-border disaster assistance - would move Himalayan cooperation from political declaration to operational architecture. For a region where disaster still outruns warning systems, that shift from paperwork to plumbing is not cosmetic. His hope that the range could become "a laboratory of international cooperation, rather than a frontier of fragmented information" captures that strategic ambition well.

One place the address could have gone further: acknowledging India's role as first responder. Shah thanked India and China jointly for their "prompt and generous assistance," a formulation that understates what actually happened. On 26 August 2026, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called Shah directly, conveyed condolences, and pledged "all possible humanitarian assistance"; Indian teams, per the PIB, were already coordinating rescue and relief with Nepalese authorities on the ground. That first-responder relationship, and the highest-level commitment behind it, deserved explicit mention in a speech otherwise built around the future architecture of Himalayan cooperation. Naming it would not have undercut Shah's proposal; it would have grounded it, showing that the trust a trilateral mechanism requires already exists in practice between Nepal and India.

What Shah's address ultimately asks is bigger than aid for Nepal. It asks what the international system must do differently when disasters threaten to erase decades of hard-won development gains - through finance that doesn't reproduce the debt it claims to relieve, through preparedness before rather than sympathy after, through cooperation instead of fragmentation. From Vanuatu to Kathmandu, vulnerable nations are no longer simply describing what climate change does to them; they are demanding that the system which enabled it be held accountable for fixing it. Nepal has spoken from the mountains. The question now is whether the world is ready to listen, and, more importantly, to act.

But the deepest cost of the Bhotekoshi-Trishuli catastrophe may not be measurable in either lives or infrastructure alone. Along that river stood a living civilisation: settlements, temples, livelihoods and generations of ancestral memory shaped by the water itself. Roads and bridges can be rebuilt.

A cultural landscape, once its communities and continuity are broken, cannot simply be reconstructed. This is the dimension still missing from most Loss and Damage frameworks: recognition that climate disasters can amount to civilisational loss, not merely a humanitarian or developmental setback. For Nepal, and for every country the Himalayas touch, rebuilding cannot mean only replacing what was destroyed. It must also mean preserving what can never be replaced.



The author is a financial, geopolitical and security analyst and India-Nepal Relations Observer

The Freebie reckoning: How cash-for-votes politics is fuelling a global debt trap



ASHWANI MAHAJAN

Freebies have become political currency worldwide, and the currency keeps changing denomination. In India, what began with free electricity, water and bus travel has expanded into bicycles, scooters, mangalsutras, laptops and tablets - doled out by parties that once opposed such schemes on principle, all in the name of "public welfare." The habit has now crossed the Pacific. US President Donald Trump has proposed handing every American adult \$5,000, contingent on his Republican Party retaining control of both the House and the Senate in the midterms.

Strip away the packaging, and the message to voters is blunt: back Trump's party, collect a cheque.

There is a bitter irony here. Agencies tied to the United States have long marked down Indian democracy despite its peaceful transfers of power, free press, and independent judiciary - even as those same agencies have recently begun downgrading America's own democratic score. Now Trump's direct cash-for-votes offer raises an uncomfortable question worldwide: will elections turn on development, clean governance and constitutional rights, or on who pays more? If Democrats respond by topping

Trump's offer, the rivalry will not stay at the national level - it will filter down to state and local races too, exactly as it has in India, where the strain such competition places on public services offers a preview of what it eventually costs.

India's freebie economy is concentrated in a familiar list of states - Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana, Rajasthan, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Comptroller and Auditor General data for 2024-25 shows Punjab, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu each spending over 13.5 percent of total government expenditure on such schemes.

Tamil Nadu and Delhi are cited most often, but their books don't show the same strain: Delhi's per capita government revenue is more than double the national average - an indirect result of per capita income also more than twice the national figure - and Tamil Nadu sits in a broadly similar position, a cushion most states simply don't have.

Even the BJP, historically the loudest critic of freebie politics, has fallen in line - not just matching rival schemes but publicising its own versions to shift the political calculus, from Madhya Pradesh's Ladli Behna Yojana to Delhi's Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana.

The party frames these as more disciplined -



Delhi's version, unlike AAP's, is restricted to economically weaker women, even as the BJP has quietly kept AAP's free power and water in place. Principle, it turns out, is negotiable once a rival's scheme starts working - a case study in political compulsion overriding fiscal caution.

The real cost shows up in the debt numbers. In 2010-11, combined Centre-and-state debt stood at 65.6 percent of GDP - a figure adjusted for transactions between the two layers of government so it isn't double-counted - with the Centre accounting for 48.6 percent and states for

23.5 percent. By 2024-25 that combined figure had climbed to 81.9 percent, with the Centre at 57.5 percent and states at 28.5 percent.

The distribution matters as much as the total: states leaning hardest on freebies carry debt-to-GSDP ratios far above the national picture - 47.3 percent in Punjab, 44 percent in Himachal Pradesh, 38 percent in West Bengal, 37 percent in Kerala, 36 percent in Rajasthan, and 34.7 percent in Andhra Pradesh. That kind of debt load eats into fiscal space, inflates interest obligations, and crowds out productive investment.

What should alarm policymakers is the pace, not just the level. Between 2010-11 and 2018-19, India's total debt crept from 63.6 percent to 66.5 percent of GDP - barely moving. That it then jumped to 81.9 percent within seven years reflects both the pandemic shock, which briefly pushed combined liabilities to 88.7 percent in 2020-21, and a freebie-driven spending pattern that has kept debt elevated well after the emergency passed. Even now, the country sits far above its 2010-11 baseline - and state governments, not the Centre alone, are driving a meaningful share of the increase.

The United States is not immune to the same arithmetic, and arguably has less room to

spare. Its debt-to-GDP ratio has risen from 95.7 percent in 2010-11 to 123.9 percent in 2025, with the IMF projecting 141.5 percent by 2030. Against that backdrop, Trump's \$5,000 pledge is estimated to cost the federal budget \$1.2 to 1.3 trillion. Trump insists tariffs will cover the bill, but independent estimates put tariff revenue at a ceiling of roughly \$195 billion - leaving close to \$1 trillion to be absorbed by the federal budget, and by extension US government debt, pushing it up by a further 2 to 3 percentage points.

India offers the preview; the United States may be about to live the sequel. Once cash offers replace policy debate as the currency of elections, the competition rarely stays contained - it moves from the centre to the states, from one party's ledger to its rival's, until governments of every stripe are borrowing against the future to win the present. The fiscal reckoning that follows is not abstract: it shows up as debt states can't service, investments that never get made, and less room to respond to the next genuine crisis. Democracies that let elections be auctioned this way are not so much choosing their leaders as mortgaging them. That is a bill voters, not politicians, eventually pay - and unless the debate returns to development, governance and public amenities rather than who hands out more, it deserves a far louder public reckoning than it has received so far.

The writer is the National Co-convenor of the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch and a former Professor at PGDAV College, University of Delhi

PM urges online self-enumeration for census

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Noting that the census is a national responsibility, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday urged citizens to self-enumerate online to ensure accurate data for planning the nation's future.

In his monthly radio address, *Mann Ki Baat*, he said so far more than 2.6 crore people have entered their details on the census portal via mobile phones, completing the self-enumeration.

"Census is a national responsibility for all of us. It is important for the nation as accurate information about you and your family helps create a precise picture of the country's future," he said.

The prime minister said the online self-registration facility is highly convenient, allowing citizens to easily enter information for themselves and their families directly from their mobile phones. Along with Hindi, this facility is available in 16 regional languages, he said.

"A grand picture of the nation is currently emerging. This picture includes you, your family and even your neighbours. I am referring to



India's census. The first phase of this exercise is nearly complete across all States and union territories," he said.

Modi said data of over 32 crore families has already been recorded, and work is currently underway also in the remote, snow-clad regions of Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Uttarakhand.

"To do this, you need to visit the census online portal. The portal is se.census.gov.in

log in using your mobile number, enter your location, fill in the details regarding your family and submit the information," he said.

The prime minister said the entire process takes about 15 to 20 minutes and for that, no documents need to be uploaded. "After submitting the information, you will receive a special ID. You can share this ID with the census enumerator when they visit your home. After the

information you provided is verified, it will become part of the census record," he said.

In his radio broadcast, the prime minister also spoke about protecting the environment and animals. Modi said when people protect the environment, they do not merely save plants or animals; they strengthen that entire ecosystem.

He said some initiatives taking place in various parts of the country are beautifully highlighting this sentiment. Referring to the Sonai Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam, he said there was a time when elephants used to inhabit this area, but as human interference on forest land increased, the elephants moved away.

He said three years ago, this land was cleared of encroachment, and the results have been remarkable - the elephants have returned here again. "Herds of elephants are once again being spotted in areas where they had not been active for years," he said.

Modi said another wonderful initiative has taken place in Assam itself - this effort is to save a tiny creature, the Pygmy Hog.

"Once, its very existence was under threat; at that time, a conservation programme was launched with just six Pygmy Hogs, and they were reintroduced into the wild. Grasslands were also curated for their living. Today, thanks to this program, the Pygmy Hog population has risen to over 190," he said.

The prime minister said the relationship between humans and nature is not limited to its preservation because when people care for nature, it becomes a source of sustenance for their own lives.

He said in Sundarbans of West Bengal, some women are setting an inspiring example of this very bond, and some women from Jharkhali are creating mangrove forests.

"Most of them are women who lost their husbands to tiger attacks. After losing their husbands, they found a means of livelihood within the Sundarbans itself," he said.

The prime minister said the mangroves they have planted are now serving as a natural protective shield for their villages, while also providing them with an income.

TMC MLA Kunal Ghosh attacked in West Bengal, blames BJP

SAUGAR SENGUPTA
■ Kolkata

Senior Mamata All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) leader and party MLA Kunal Ghosh was allegedly attacked by motorbike-borne miscreants who smashed the windshield of his vehicle. This was the second such attack in 24 hours, the former TMC Rajya Sabha member complained.

The pro Mamata Banerjee TMC leader, who literally broke into tears, said, "They had nearly killed me... it was an attempt to murder as they were carrying guns and hammers... they trailed my car for quite some distance," before attacking his vehicle at Narkeldanga area near Sealdah in North Kolkata.

"This is the second such attack as they attacked me yesterday while I was going to Mamata Banerjee's programme at Serampore... and now they attacked me here," he said, alleging, "this is a jungle raj that is going on during the BJP rule... where if an MLA is not safe then who is safe," he said.



Mamata AITC MLA Kunal Ghosh

MTMC general secretary Abhisek Banerjee too raised concerns about the "prevailing law and order situation," seeking intervention from State Governor RN Ravi. "There is no place for political violence in a democratic state ... this cycle of violence must stop, and I urge the honourable Governor to direct the Director General of Police and Commissioner of Police

to bring the guilty to book."

The BJP, however, denied any involvement in the attack, with State party president Samik Bhattacharya saying the attack on Ghosh could have resulted from the current conflict between the two groups in the party — one led by Mamata Banerjee and the other by Opposition Leader Ritabrata Banerjee.



Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis

Crop loss survey begins in Maharashtra, says CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Nagpur

The Maharashtra Government has begun work on preparing crop inspection reports after declaring 265 talukas drought-affected, and it will provide appropriate assistance to affected farmers, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Sunday.

He said that considering the possibility of El Nino peaking in next February, "we should be ready to face troubles if it intensifies".

The State Government on Saturday declared drought in 265 of its 358 talukas, or 74 per cent of the State, amid rainfall deficit and announced various relief measures, including crop loan restructuring, land revenue concessions, and power bill subsidies.

Fadnavis said complaints about the exclusion of certain talukas from the drought criterion are very few and that losses in those areas will be assessed.

"The assistance will be provided to the affected talukas. Twelve emergency measures have been approved, and at the first trigger we already issued orders for their implementation," Fadnavis told reporters.

He said the Government

has started preparing (crop) inspection reports to an extent, and will provide appropriate assistance after these reports are prepared.

"We are rapidly completing whatever processes are needed (preceding the announcement of financial assistance to farmers)," Fadnavis added.

He said the state Government has received complaints about the exclusion of some talukas from the drought criterion; however, the numbers are very few.

"Even in those locations from where we are receiving complaints, we will assess losses incurred by farmers," he said, adding that cultivators affected by crop loss will be included under Trigger Three, reiterating that no farmer will be left out.

Responding to a query on water wastage at certain facilities, Fadnavis said every district should prepare a water plan.

"If you reserve water from the available stocks, it will last until July and August 2027, and if somewhere there is excess water, then that water can be used for other purposes," he added.

He said many large reservoirs currently have abundant water and they are full.

TN revokes controversial order exempting Law and Order Department from RTI Act

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Chennai

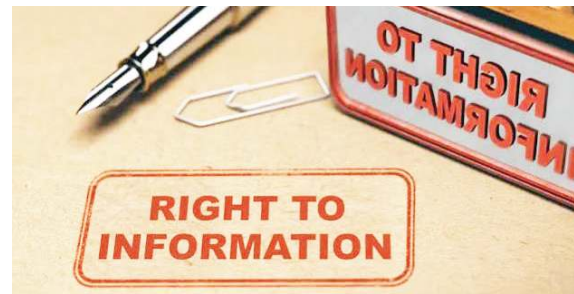
The Tamil Nadu Government on Sunday revoked a controversial order that exempted the State's Public (Law and Order) Department from the purview of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, following intense pushback from political allies of the ruling TVK and transparency advocates.

The administration officially withdrew the GO of the Human Resources Management (R) Department, dated September 21. The now-retracted order had originally invoked Section 24(4) of the transparency law to classify the department as an "Intelligence and Security Organisation," thereby shielding it from public disclosures.

The swift reversal comes after the initial move by the TVK-led state administration triggered a political storm, drawing sharp criticism from alliance partners—the Congress and the Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK).

Prior to the revocation, VCK chief Thol Thirumavalavan had termed the gazette notification "highly shocking," warning it would "pave the way for suppressing human rights," and had strongly demanded its immediate withdrawal.

Congress MP Karti Chidambaram also flagged the initial decision, stating it



Representative image

set a "bad precedent" and maintaining that the scope of the RTI Act must be expanded rather than restricted.

Had the order remained in force, the exemption would have blocked RTI access to records concerning inquiries into police torture, custodial deaths, police firings, communal clashes, and security-related detentions, he argued. The Sivaganga Lok Sabha MP later welcomed the Government revoking the controversial GO.

CM Vijay to launch one-gram gold ring scheme for newborns in TN

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Chennai

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay will launch the Thaaaimanam Thanga Mothiram Thittam, a welfare scheme, on Monday, under which the Government will provide a one-gram gold ring to babies born in state-run hospitals.

Sources on Sunday said the CM will arrive in Madurai to launch the scheme at the Government Rajaji Hospital.

Arriving by a special flight, Vijay will inaugurate the scheme at the GRH auditorium and present gold rings to 25 newborns.

He is also scheduled to visit the maternity ward to personally present rings to

infants born on the day.

To be eligible for the one-gram gold ring scheme, mothers of newborns must be permanent residents of Tamil Nadu.

The scheme was originally scheduled to be launched on September 15, the birth anniversary of late Chief Minister C N Annadurai, but was postponed due to Vijay's overseas trip to London.

Under the (maternal uncle gold ring) scheme, each eligible newborn delivered at a Government hospital will receive a one-gram, 22-carat gold ring.

The State Government has allocated an annual outlay of ₹755.83 crore for the scheme. In the first phase, 1.28 lakh gold rings have



been made ready.

The gold rings will carry unique serial numbers and be distributed in tamper-proof packaging, the Government said in a press release.

The scheme will be imple-

mented across the State, except in areas falling under the Maduranthakam and Dharapuram Assembly constituencies, where bypolls are scheduled to be held on October 6.

Eligible beneficiaries

should be registered under the Pregnancy and Infant Cohort Monitoring and Evaluation (PICME) system and have a Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) ID.

The gold rings will be provided when the beneficiaries are discharged from the hospitals.

Government sources said the scheme would not only increase public trust in Government healthcare services but also promote safe delivery practices in hospitals.

According to the Government, around 7.80 lakh children are born in Tamil Nadu every year and, as per the National Family Health Survey-6 (NFHS-6), 99.9 per cent of these deliveries take place in health-care institutions.

Former Tripura CM Manik Sarkar faces protests, black flags

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Agartala

Former Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar on Sunday faced protests and black flags by a group of villagers in West Tripura district while he was on his way to attend a DYFI programme, police said.

Sarkar's party, the CPI(M), and the Congress condemned the attack and alleged that it reflects the prevailing law-and-order situation under the BJP-led Government in the State.

Police said Sarkar was proceeding to attend the Mohanpur divisional committee conference of CPI (M)'s youth organisation, DYFI, at Kalibazar around 12 pm when protesters surrounded his vehicle and raised slogans asking him to go back.

They also waved black flags at Sarkar who was the chief minister between 1998 and 2018.



"A strong contingent of police and CRPF personnel reached the spot after being alerted and escorted Sarkar safely to the local CPI(M) office. The ex-chief minister addressed the programme and safely returned to Agartala", Sub Divisional Police Officer (SDPO), Mohanpur, Asish Das Gupta, said.

CPI(M) State secretary and Leader of the Opposition in the Tripura Assembly, Jitendra Chaudhury, condemned the incident and said he had spoken to Director General of Police (in-charge) GS Rao, who assured him that the matter would be looked into.

Nearly 5,000 rescued after rains swell rivers across Chhattisgarh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Jagdalpur/Raipur

Nearly 5,000 people were rescued, including 16 airlifted, in the last two days after heavy rains swelled rivers in Chhattisgarh, officials said on Sunday, while a video showed people retrieving liquor bottles swept away from a shop in Dhamtari.

As many as six truck drivers and helpers were stranded on a highway in the worst-affected Bastar and sought help from the rooftops of their vehicles before being rescued, they said.

On Saturday, two persons were reported missing after being swept away in separate incidents in Dhamtari district, while two boys, aged 12 and 16, were swept away while bathing in the swollen

Arpa river in Bilaspur district, they said, adding that the body of one of the victims was found.

Although rainfall has subsided, rising water levels in rivers and streams due to continued inflow from upstream areas and release of water from dams have aggravated the flood-like situation, particularly in Bastar and adjoining areas, they said.

More than 1,000 persons have been rescued and shifted to relief camps in the last 24 hours in Bastar district, an official in Jagdalpur said. Sixteen persons stranded in the Dongaghat area were rescued using helicopters on Sunday morning, he said.

The administration has set up 43 relief camps in urban and rural areas of the district, where more than 5,000

affected people were being provided shelter, food and other essential facilities, the official said.

The Indravati river level rose to 12.56 metres by 8 pm on Saturday, 4.26 metres above the danger mark. The rising water level has prompted heightened vigilance in low-lying and riverside settlements, with field teams instructed to monitor vulnerable areas round the clock and evacuate people whenever required, he said.

Bastar Collector Akash Chhikara and Superintendent of Police Shalabh Sinha visited several affected areas, including Dongaghat and Asna, for the second consecutive day on Saturday to assess the situation. They also inspected arrangements at a relief camp in



Panarapara, he said.

In another rescue operation, around half a dozen truck drivers and helpers stranded amid floodwaters near Sonarpal in the district

on National Highway-30 were rescued by relief teams on Saturday, he said.

Five trucks got stranded after several feet of water accumulated on the

Jagdalpur-Raipur road. The drivers and helpers had taken shelter on the roofs of the vehicles and sought help from the administration through videos, he said.

In Dhamtari, the rising water level of the Mahanadi had submerged the liquor shop, sweeping away bottles kept there. A video showed some people trying to retrieve the bottles from the flowing water using a sari and net tied to a bamboo pole.

A 65-year-old retired forest department employee, Babulal Sahu, went missing in Sirsida village of the district. His mobile phone, shawl, walking stick and towel were found near the riverbank, raising fears that he may have been swept away, officials said.

In another incident, a 15-year-old girl, Tarana Nishad, was swept away in a rivulet near a petrol pump in Megha village under the Magarlod police station area, they said.

Police and SDRF teams were conducting search operations in both places.

In Bilaspur, two boys, aged 12 and 16, were swept away while bathing in the swollen Arpa river at Madhuban Ghat in the Dayalband area on Saturday. The body of one of them was recovered late on Saturday, while a search was underway for the other boy, officials said.

In Durg, 764 people were rescued after water entered around 200 houses in 13 rural areas and parts of Durg and Bhilai following continuous rainfall on September 24 and 25. They were shifted to 16 temporary relief camps established in different places of the district to provide food, drinking water and other essential facilities, officials said.

FROM THE WORLD

NEPAL

Ten missing after avalanche strikes

Ten people, including climbers and support staff, went missing after an avalanche struck the Himlung Himal peak in Nepal's Manang district, local media reported. According to the Expedition Operators Association Nepal (EOAN), eight people from Himalayan Holidays Nepal and two from Imagine Nepal Treks lost contact after the avalanche buried tents at the base camp of the 7,126-metre Himlung Himal peak in the Nar Phu area, The Himalayan Times newspaper reported. Ram Krishna Lamichhane, director general of the Department of Tourism, said authorities were closely monitoring the situation, The Kathmandu Post reported. Officials were working to locate and rescue thoseunaccounted for, he said. (PTI)

THAILAND

Rain eases in Bangkok

Rain eased in Thailand's capital on Sunday, but flooding persisted in several low-lying areas, with thousands forced to move into temporary shelters. At least eight people were reported killed in the past 10 days nationwide. Days of continuous downpours have caused widespread flooding and severe disruptions in Bangkok, impacting traffic and businesses, with accumulated rainfall exceeding 30 centimetres (11.8 inches) in many areas. Thailand's Meteorological Department said moderate to heavy rain was still expected Sunday in several parts of the country, but conditions were expected to improve by Monday. The city set up more than 200 temporary shelters, and about 3,000 people remained in them as of Sunday. Officials said 31 roads were still impacted by floodwaters. (PTI)

India, Canada ties to reach higher level: Jaishankar

YOSHITA SINGH

United Nations

India and Canada are preparing to take their relationship "to a higher level", External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said after holding a "productive discussion" with his Canadian counterpart Anita Anand on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly (UNGA). "Always a pleasure to meet FM @AnitaAnandMP of Canada #UNGA81 A productive discussion as we prepare to take the relationship to a higher level," Jaishankar said in a post on X Saturday. Earlier this week, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said at the UN that Prime Minister Narendra



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar

PTI

Modi is expected to visit Canada around December this year, noting that Ottawa is making "good progress" in its trade negotiations with India. "We are making good progress in our trade negotiations with India. It is an exceptionally important relationship on many many levels, people-to-people levels, security levels, and also trade and economic," Carney had said at a press conference Tuesday on the sidelines of the UNGA. Carney was responding to questions on when Modi would visit Canada and how close Ottawa was to concluding a free trade agreement - called the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement -

with India. US President Donald Trump will host the G20 Summit on December 14-15 at the Trump National Doral Miami resort in Doral, Florida. Amid discussions in India regarding diversification of its energy sources, Jaishankar also met Venezuela Foreign Minister Felix Plasencia Gonzalez on the UNGA sidelines. After the meeting, he said: "Our energy ties are gaining momentum, besides other areas of bilateral cooperation. We also discussed current regional issues." He also met Belarus Foreign Minister Maxim Ryzhenkov and his Mexican counterpart Roberto Velasco Alvarez of Mexico. (PTI)

RUSSIA BACKS INDIA'S FOR UNSC SEAT



Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov

YOSHITA SINGH

United Nations

Russia has backed India's candidature for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, saying that any reform of the UN body cannot involve additional seats being allocated to Western countries, especially to Germany and Japan. "Our principled approach is the following: UN Security Council reform cannot involve any additional seats being allocated to Western countries, especially to Germany and Japan, who are now on the path to militarism and revanchism," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in his address to the UN General Assembly. "We are in favour of broadening the representation of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. We support Brazil's and India's candidatures for a permanent seat, and at the same time, I wish to emphasise this: we must satisfy the interests of the African continent," he said. Lavrov added that through its foreign policy, "Russia is trying to fix the situation in the world, working together with its allies and strategic partners: the BRICS, the SCO, and the Eurasian Economic Union". (PTI)

Relentless rainfall triggers floods, landslides across Nepal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kathmandu

Relentless rainfall across Nepal since Thursday has triggered fresh floods and landslides, swept away houses and disrupted road traffic, according to a media report, as the Himalayan country reels from the disaster that killed at least 1,453 people and more than 5,000 remain missing. The bodies of 1,451 people have been recovered till Saturday a month after flash floods, originating near the Nepal-Tibet border, devastated towns and villages in northern and central Nepal, according to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and



Management Authority (NDRRMA). Two others had died while undergoing treatment. A total of 13,795 people have been rescued till Saturday, the NDRRMA said. In Rupandehi district, a part of Lumbini province, floodwaters from the Tinau

River swept away six houses along the riverbank in Butwal on Saturday night as the river rose above its danger level, the Kathmandu Post newspaper reported. A police official was quoted as saying that around 200 houses along the river-

bank in Butwal were at risk, with security personnel evacuating about 1,000 people overnight after the Tinau and nearby streams swelled amid continued rain. Authorities initially moved around 500 residents from Majhuwa, a high-risk area in Butwal Metropolitan City-13, to the Durga Temple holding centre, the report said. They were later transferred to safer locations, in various schools in Butwal-11. The Tinau River crossed its danger mark at around 8 pm on Saturday, prompting security personnel to begin rescue and evacuation operations. The Rupandehi district administration has urged people living near

rivers and streams to remain alert and move to safer areas if water levels rise further. In Chitwan district of Bagmati province, the Narayani River and the Riu stream crossed their danger levels early Sunday as rain continued. At the Devghat gauge station, the Narayani River reached 9.23 metres at around 5.15 am, according to the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology. The warning level there is 7.3 metres, and the danger level is 9 metres. The Riu, which flows along the boundary of Madi and Chitwan National Park, reached 3.92 metres. Its warning level is 3.4 metres,

and its danger level is 3.8 metres, the Kathmandu Post reported. The Riu flows through southern Chitwan before joining the Rapti River near Meghauli and eventually draining into the Narayani. Heavy rain has also triggered landslides and mudslides at several points in Chitwan, disrupting road traffic. At Dharapani in Ichchhakamana Rural Municipality-4, part of the road subsided further, and a mud-laden landslide blocked traffic in both directions, a police official said. A landslide at Simaldhara in the same municipality has also blocked the road in both directions.

Burnham brings good vibes to Labour conference, tough choices ahead

JILL LAWLESS

London

British Prime Minister Andy Burnham has been in the job for two months, and so far his party isn't demanding his head. These days, that's an accomplishment. The governing Labour Party opens its annual conference beside the River Mersey in Liverpool on Sunday, with Burnham pledging to turn the page on a decade of economic and political turmoil that has made him the UK's seventh prime minister since its 2016 vote to leave the European Union. He says his message in a keynote speech on Tuesday will be: "It's time for Britain to have hope again." "We've had a decade since

Brexit and it's been a decade of too much drift, too much division, and we need to draw a line on that," Burnham said as he arrived in Liverpool on Saturday. His message is aimed at both the British public and a centre-left party that is hopeful but nervous - ready to embrace his promise of better times, but worried about economic damage rippling out from conflict in the Middle East. University of Manchester political science professor Rob Ford said Burnham's difficult task is to win over "a sceptical electorate" eager for change, "while at the same time doing that within the constraints of a very difficult economic and fiscal situation."



British Prime Minister Andy Burnham

In short: "How do you serve people a bowl of cold porridge and convince them it's a pepperoni pizza?" Britain's main political parties all hold conferences in September and October, combinations of pep rally, social gathering and policy

forum that set the political tone and agenda for the year ahead. Last year's Labour gathering was gloomy, as members despaired about Prime Minister Keir Starmer's deep unpopularity, little more than a year after winning

power in a landslide, and the seemingly unstoppable rise of the anti-immigration opposition party Reform UK. Burnham, then the popular mayor of Greater Manchester, was followed around Liverpool by journalists as speculation grew that he would challenge Starmer. Events came to a head months later when a panicky party forced Starmer's resignation and his replacement by Burnham as party leader and prime minister in July. Now, Labour is seeing a "Burnham bounce" driven by the new leader's upbeat talk and modest moves to put money in voters' pocketbooks by cutting tax on electricity bills and capping bus fares. (AP)

Russian kills 2 in Ukraine amid de-escalation call



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kyiv

Russian strikes on Ukraine killed at least two people overnight into Sunday, officials said, hours after Moscow rejected German calls to ease off its escalation toward NATO. Russia's top diplomat on Saturday brushed off what's believed to have been the first tete-a-tete with his German counterpart since Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The meeting was held during the UN General Assembly's annual gathering of world leaders, as an intensifying aerial war between Russia and Ukraine shows no sign of slowing. Ties between Russia and Germany have soured in recent weeks, following an attempted drone attack last month at Leipzig airport that Berlin blamed on the Kremlin. With front-line positions largely unchanged since last year, Moscow has hammered its neighbor with cruise and ballistic missiles, powerful glide bombs and jet-powered drones in recent months. Meanwhile, Kyiv's long-range drones have targeted Russian oil refineries and businesses. In Kyiv, a man was found

dead after a Russian drone hit a non-residential building overnight, according to Ukraine's emergency service. Another drone struck a single-story vehicle repair shop, leaving firefighters battling the blaze into early Sunday, the emergency service said. Russian forces also struck Ukraine's southern Odesa region, which surrounds the country's main Black Sea port, multiple times overnight into Sunday, killing one person and injuring two others, according to the head of the local military administration, Oleh Kiper. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was dismissive after the meeting in New York, which was held at German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepful's request. Lavrov said that Wadepful "simply reiterated his official position condemning Russia". "You can judge for yourself whether that counts as dialogue or not," he said. Wadepful expressed openness to a better relationship but said it required a genuine willingness from Russia's leadership to end the war in Ukraine, according to a German delegation official.

Proposed Sikh marriage bill in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reviewed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Peshawar

A proposed law to give full legal recognition and protection to Sikh marriages in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been reviewed by lawmakers, government officials and representatives of the Sikh community at a consultation held here. The meeting earlier this week discussed the key provisions of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sikh Anand Kaaraj Bill, 2026, its current status and the remaining steps before it can be presented to the provincial assembly, said Gural Singh, vice chairperson of the Parliamentary Caucus on Minorities and a member of



the provincial assembly. Muhammad Saeed-ur-Rehman, local government focal person for family laws, briefed the meeting on the legislative process. He said that after vetting by the law department, the bill would be sent to the Cabinet Committee on Legislation. After approval by the com-

mittee, the bill would be placed before the provincial cabinet and subsequently presented in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly for consideration. The proposed law aims to provide a clear legal framework for Sikh marriages, covering the solemnisation of Anand Kaaraj, compulsory

registration and issuance of marriage certificates, matrimonial rights and duties, maintenance, custody, reconciliation and dissolution of marriage. Anand Kaaraj is the traditional Sikh marriage ceremony, performed according to Sikh religious traditions and centred on the recitation of the four 'Laavaan' in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Participants were told that the proposed legislation would go beyond the Anand Marriage Act, 1909, which mainly provided legal recognition to marriages performed according to the Sikh Anand Kaaraj ceremony. Under the proposed law, both parties would have to be at least 18 years old and give their free and full consent to

the marriage. Consent obtained through force, fraud, coercion, misrepresentation or undue influence would not be considered valid. The bill also makes registration of Sikh marriages compulsory and proposes licensing Anand Kaaraj Registrars through the local government, elections and rural development department. A registered Anand Kaaraj would be recognised as a valid marriage for legal and civil purposes, including inheritance, succession, maintenance, guardianship, legitimacy of children, family registration and identity documents. The proposed Anand Kaaraj certificate would also serve as legal proof of marriage before courts, tribunals, government departments

and other public institutions. The bill provides for equal rights and responsibilities of spouses, including mutual respect, support and maintenance. It also seeks to protect Sikh families from violence, coercion and abuse and provides legal mechanisms for reconciliation and dissolution of marriage. The proposed law would give Family Courts jurisdiction over matrimonial matters involving Sikh marriages. Asker Pervaiz, chairperson of the Parliamentary Caucus on Minorities and a member of the provincial assembly, said the legislation was intended to provide the Sikh community with a clear and accessible legal framework while respecting its religious traditions.

Rio residents tackle gangs as crime dominates Brazil election

ELEONORE HUGHES/DIARLEI RODRIGUES

Rio de Janeiro

Crime is the top concern for Brazilians ahead of October's presidential election, with candidates competing to offer the toughest - and most effective - approach to the deep-seated problem. Senator Flavio Bolsonaro, son of ex-President Jair Bolsonaro, is seeking to defeat President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, with a promise to loosen organised crime's grip on Brazil, particularly in Rio de Janeiro. After Rio's deadliest-ever police operation last year, in which more than 120 people

were killed, polls indicated that the hard-line policies Sen. Bolsonaro touts are popular. Lula, meanwhile, has argued for a more prominent role of the federal government in the fight against organised crime as well as greater coordination between Governmental institutions. But while politicians trade barbs, residents in Rio de Janeiro have been designing their own responses, with ex-traffickers launching podcasts and grieving mothers stepping up to stop youth recruitment. Many residents, community leaders and experts say

that the current approach - which favours armed confrontations between police and the groups - is inefficient and often results in indiscriminate loss of life. They're taking on crime on their own to bridge that gap. Once a week, a group of former drug-traffickers gather in a small recording studio on the outskirts of Rio to dissect their past lives of crime and those of their guests. They air the episodes of 01 Sobreviventes, or 01 Survivors, on YouTube and streaming platforms. A painting of the four founders grinning hangs on the wall, while the podcast's



Mothers whose sons were killed by police attend a tribute event in the Morro da Crianca favela in Rio de Janeiro on Saturday

AP

logo - a microphone breaking a chain - is projected on a screen over the desk. "We want to propagate the idea that crime isn't worth it," said host Fabio Santos, a 56-year-old ex-trafficker from the Mangueiras favela who spent 25 years in prison. "We want them to follow our current lives so that they don't go through what we went through," he added after recording a recent interview with a former gang member who is now a pastor. The podcast, launched in 2024 and followed by more than 225,000 people on Instagram, is both for those tempted by the allure of quick

cash and for those who need convincing to course-correct. Crime leads to prison, a wheelchair or a coffin, they say repeatedly. Santos says several people have said they have seen traffickers listening to the podcast and that he regularly hears about people who left the world of crime or didn't enter thanks to their work. Alan Duarte, 38, grew up in Complexo do Alemao, one of the two sprawling complexes of favelas targeted in Rio's lethal police operation last year. He lost a brother, uncle and cousins - 10 family members in all - to violence.

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UP has emerged as preferred investment destination: Goyal

Uttar Pradesh has emerged as a preferred investment destination due to favourable industrial policies and its ability to attract large companies, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Sunday.

Addressing the UP International Trade Show in Greater Noida, he also said that significant increase in the state revenue collection has helped to push the development of the state.

The minister noted that the state currently has an annual export volume of around ₹2 lakh crore and has set a target to increase this to ₹5 lakh crore by 2030.

“Uttar Pradesh is a preferred investment destination due to its favourable industrial policies,” he said, adding that major corporations and global investors are arriving across sectors, creating new employment opportunities.

He added that excise duty collection increased over four times to ₹60,728 crore in 2025-26 from ₹14,273 crore in 2016-17. It is expected to reach ₹70,000 by the end of this fiscal.

Land transfer registration fees, including stamp duty collections, increased to ₹43,802 crore in the 2026-27 Budget, from ₹11,564 crore in 2016-17.

A similar jump has been registered in mining revenue collections and all this is being used to push the state's economic development, Goyal said.

Goyal added that the next frontier for Uttar Pradesh's development lies in expanding exports in global markets, attracting international investments, strengthening tourism and building global recognition for brands from the state. (PTI)

PE investment in co-working at \$946 million since 2016: Report

Private equity investment in India's coworking segment stood at nearly \$946 million since 2016 amid rising demand for managed flexible office space from corporates, according to Knight Frank.

Real estate consultant Knight Frank India data showed that the coworking segment has attracted \$945.5 million private equity (PE) fund between 2016 and June 2026.

The highest PE fund inflow was seen at \$594.5 million in 2022. In the first half of 2026, the PE investment touched \$30.9 million, surpassing \$24.3 million in the entire 2025 calendar year.

On the rising importance of this segment, the consultant said co-working operators contributed to 24 per cent of the total 48 million sq ft gross office space leasing achieved in January-June 2026 across eight major cities.

The co-working or managed workspace operators take office space from real estate developers to set up their centres. Then, they sub-lease spaces to corporates of all sizes.

Large enterprises have taken 72 per cent of the total seats available in managed workspace centres.

The consultant noted that this indicates that flexible managed office space is no longer primarily associated with freelancers, startups and small businesses. From end-use perspective, global capability centres accounted for 52 per cent of demand.

This showcases that managed office space is increasingly becoming part of the real estate strategy of larger organisations seeking greater flexibility in capacity and location.

There are many managed office space operators listed on the stock exchanges, including WeWork India, Smartworks, Awfis, and IndiQube.

The Executive Centre and Table Space have filed documents with Sebi to launch their initial public offering.

Other major players are Incuspaze, Simpliwork Offices, Urban Vault, 91Springboard, Spring House Workspaces, BHIVE Workspace, 315Work Avenue, The Office Pass, and Hanto Workspaces. (PTI)

Bullion faces choppy spell amid US data

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Gold and silver are expected to face another choppy spell, with US data, West Asia tensions and their impact on crude prices set to test bullion sentiment during a holiday-shortened week, analysts said.

Market participants will shift their focus to the US data calendar, with consumer confidence, GDP and PCE inflation readings, alongside Eurozone inflation.

Additionally, manufacturing PMIs, speeches from Federal Reserve officials and the US non-farm payrolls report will provide further cues for bullion sentiment, they added.

Geopolitical uncertainty will continue to play a role, particularly the US-Iran standoff, after US President Donald

Trump said that he rejected Tehran's proposal to reopen the Strait of Hormuz within a week and resume nuclear talks in exchange for lifting the naval blockade.

Commodity markets would remain closed on Friday for Mahatma Gandhi Jayanti.

“The broader outlook remains cautious with volatility likely to stay elevated as the market will closely focus on the upcoming US nonfarm

The Pioneer

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM | MONDAY | SEPTEMBER 28, 2026

BUSINESS 10

FMCG growth moderates in June quarter: NielsenIQ

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

India's fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector witnessed a moderation in growth during the June quarter of 2026 amid a broader consumption slowdown, with rural markets recording a 5 per cent decline in volumes, according to a quarterly report by NielsenIQ.

The slowdown in the country's FMCG sector, has now widened beyond a handful of categories to a broader basket of products, signalling a more systemic demand slowdown driven by rising input costs and weakening consumer sentiment, it said.

“FMCG slowdown is no

longer confined to core categories. Until Q1, '26, weakness was concentrated in a few categories. By Q2 '26 (June quarter), macro pressure is visible across a wider basket, creating a more systemic slowdown,” said the NielsenIQ FMCG Quarterly Snapshot for April-June 2026 (AMJ '26) said.

As many as 68 per cent of FMCG categories registered a decline in the April-June quarter, indicating that consumption pressures have intensified and spread well beyond core categories, the report said.

The report classified FMCG categories into four bands based on the severity of the slowdown, with the impact varying sharply across

product segments.

Only 8 per cent of categories fell under the “Least Impact” band, described as “islands of growth amid macro slowdown”. These included vermicelli and noodles, packaged rice, hair oils and liquid toilet soaps.

Another 25 per cent of cat-

egories were classified as “Low Impact”, indicating muted momentum but relatively stable demand. This group comprised packaged atta, non-refined oils, utensil cleaners, and palmolein oils.

The largest share, at 35 per cent, was in the “Medium Impact” category, where

emerging headwinds were seen having a moderate negative effect on momentum. Iodised salt, biscuits, salty snacks and shampoo were among the products in this band. At the other end, 33 per cent of categories were classified as “Heavy Impact”, the most severe band, reflecting strong growth headwinds. Washing powders and liquids, refined oils, detergent cakes and bars, and toilet soaps were among the products in this group, pointing to pressure across home care, personal wash and edible oils segments.

Overall, 68 per cent of FMCG categories fell in the Medium and Heavy Impact bands, pointing to meaningful growth pressure during

the quarter, while only 8 per cent of categories were classified as relatively resilient.

The spread of category-level decline aligns with sharper rural distress, where overall volumes fell 5 per cent against a 2.1 per cent rise in prices, dragging rural FMCG value down 2.9 per cent.

In the June quarter, which dominates rural distribution with an 82 per cent sales share nationally, “dragged rural FMCG into decline”, while organised trade sustained urban growth. Its volume was down 6 per cent.

Modern trade and e-commerce continued to post strong volume growth of 17.5 per cent and 34.8 per cent, respectively, with expansion into non-metro markets.

Customer first and nation always SBI's growth mantra: Chairman

KUMAR DIPANKAR
■ New Delhi

Digital first, customer first, nation always' is the philosophy guiding State Bank of India (SBI) as it drives business growth, Chairman of the country's biggest lender C S Setty said.

Talking to the news agency in an interview, Setty said the bank's focus over the past two years has been on strengthening its capital base, deepening its role in the financial sector and building a more digital, customer-centric banking model. Looking back at his tenure, Setty said several of the most visible objectives his team set had been achieved, including capital augmentation, the listing of SBI Mutual Fund and the bank's strategic role in addressing the Yes Bank issue.

“These are the most visible outcomes of my tenure,” said Setty, who completed his two years as the bank's chairman last month.

However, he said the more consequential changes were taking place beneath the surface and would strengthen both SBI and the wider banking industry over the longer term.

At the heart of this trans-

formation, he said, is a “digital-first” approach. Setty argued that the rapid adoption of digital payments in India demonstrated how technology can fundamentally change the way people interact with financial institutions.

The same approach, he said, needs to extend across banking. A digital-first banking system, however,

cannot come at the expense of the customer, he said, adding that banks must ensure that customers are protected while carrying out digital transactions and should simultaneously work to improve financial and digital literacy.

The larger objective, he said, should be to help customers achieve meaningful livelihoods rather than viewing banking merely as a series of transactions.

“We cannot be just looking at a transactional approach,” he said, emphasising the importance of building long-term relationships with customers, an approach that he said has traditionally been associated with SBI.

This philosophy, he said, is captured in the framework of “digital first, customer first, nation always.” Setty acknowledged that the vision

may sound ambitious, but argued that it is achievable.

SBI, he said, has demonstrated over the past seven decades the role a large public sector bank can play in supporting the real economy.

“We would like to continue that journey,” he said, signalling that SBI's next phase will seek to combine its traditional relationship-led banking model with digital innovation and a broader developmental mandate.

He further said SBI's total business could double to around Rs 200 lakh crore by 2030, when the bank celebrates its platinum jubilee, given its current growth trajectory.

SBI came into existence on July 1, 1955, through an Act of Parliament, which, among other things, provided for the transfer of the undertaking of the Imperial Bank of

India. The country's biggest lender crossed the landmark of Rs 100 lakh crore business, which is an aggregate of total loans and advances in the second quarter of the last financial year.

This rose further to Rs 110.01 lakh crore by the end of June 2026.

Whether the bank had set a specific target for its platinum jubilee year, Setty said there was no formal milestone, but the bank's growth trajectory could take its total business to Rs 170-180 lakh crore and potentially as high as Rs 200 lakh crore by 2030.

“We don't have any milestone, but if you take the current growth rate, I think we should be around Rs 170-180 lakh crore, or maybe reaching Rs 200 lakh crore. That would be another important milestone,” he said. (PTI)

Mahindra & Mahindra weighs SUV price hike amid rising commodity costs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Mahindra & Mahindra is weighing another price increase across its SUV portfolio amid recent commodity price increases, with a decision expected in the next couple of weeks, CEO Automotive Division, Mahindra Group Nalinikanth Gollagunta said.

In an interview with PTI, Gollagunta said the company has already taken three price increases this year -- in January, April and July, with the July increase being about 2.7 per cent on sports utility vehicles (SUVs).

“We're watching it very closely. As you know, we've already taken three increases -- one in January, one in April, and a fairly significant one in July, about 2.7 per cent on SUVs. That said, it's something that can be very dynamic, so we continue to watch it,” he said.

Elaborating further, Gollagunta said, “We'll probably take a call in the next couple of weeks on whether we need a price increase... I can't say we will or we won't, but it's something we're looking at closely, given the recent price increases on commodities”.

He said recent price

increases across the auto industry have not affected customer inquiries or bookings, with vehicles still priced below pre-GST levels.

“No, primarily for a couple of reasons -- we're still well below pre-GST prices, so demand continues to be quite intact and robust at this point,” Gollagunta said.

On the festive season, he said demand should be strong for Mahindra as well as across the industry, helped by prices remaining below pre-GST (Goods and Services Tax) levels and a refreshed product portfolio.

“Festive should be very good for us, and across the industry, for a couple of reasons. We've had inflationary pressures, but the reality is the GST price cuts from last year are holding us all well below pre-GST prices,

even with the inflationary price increases we've made over the past year or so,” he said. On hybrid technology, Gollagunta said Mahindra remains focused on electric vehicles and would adapt if the regulatory environment changes.

“We're very clear in our minds -- EV is the end state the country is heading towards, and that's also what the government has made clear to the industry. If you look at the CAFE (Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency) norms, there's a very clear differentiation between the benefits given to an EV versus a hybrid.

So our focus is on EVs to that extent. If the regulatory environment changes, we have the ability to adapt, but at this point our focus is primarily on EVs,” he shared.

On capacity, Gollagunta said Mahindra currently has about 60,000 units of monthly ICE (internal combustion engine) capacity and about 8,000 units of EV (electric vehicle) capacity, and is largely delivering to those levels.

“The next set of capacity increases will happen at the end of March, early April -- the 60,000 ICE capacity will go to 70,000, and the EV capacity of 8,000 will go to 12,000. So, where we are now, we're at 68,000, and we'll go to 84,000 in about six months,” he said.

Gollagunta also said the company has several product refreshes and two major launches lined up over the next two quarters.

“We'll have a set of refreshes coming -- some of this we've already talked about. We have about 5 (product) refreshes; a few have already happened, and two or three more are coming up. Other than that, we have two major launches coming within the next couple of quarters -- that's also why we've added the capacity. We'll have one major launch on the ICE side and one major launch on the EV side, both happening within the next two quarters,” he said.

Mobile phone retailers to protest against UPI MDR charges on October 2

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Mobile phone retailers across India plan to observe October 2 as “No UPI Day” in protest against 0.4 per cent merchant discount rate charges on UPI transactions, a senior official of industry body AIMRA said.

The Government has introduced a 0.4 per cent fee on UPI transfers exceeding ₹2,000 to merchants from October 15, while exempting person-to-person transactions as well as small payments from any charges.

“The All India Mobile Retailers Association (AIMRA) has called for a ‘NO UPI DAY’ on October 2, 2026, to highlight the concerns of mobile retailers regarding the 0.4 per cent Merchant Discount Rate

(MDR) applicable to eligible merchant UPI transactions,” AIMRA Vice President and President for Delhi NCR region, Tarvinder Singh, said in a statement.

He said retailers will symbolically cover UPI QR Codes with black cloth and refrain from accepting UPI payments on Gandhi Jayanti.

According to a representation sent to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman by AIMRA, the move to impose MDR on UPI will lead to an immediate net monthly loss

of ₹2,000 to ₹12,000 for a small retailer processing ₹5 lakh to ₹30 lakh monthly via UPI, thereby wiping out a substantial portion of their net income.

The mobile retailers' body estimates that 0.4 per cent MDR will impose an unsustainable burden of approximately ₹40 crore per month and nearly ₹500 crore per annum on small mobile retailers across India.

“If We Want Digital India, UPI Must Remain Zero MDR. This is not a protest against UPI or Digital India. Our concern is the additional financial burden being placed on merchants who accept digital payments. If we want Digital India to grow further, digital payments should remain affordable for the entire retail ecosystem.

ITC steps up dairy push in East, bets on branded milk

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bengaluru

ITC is strengthening its presence in the fresh dairy segment in Eastern India through its flagship Aashirvaad brand, betting on rising demand for branded milk and value-added dairy products across Bihar, West Bengal and Jharkhand.

The diversified conglomerate, which entered the fresh dairy business in 2018 with the launch of Aashirvaad milk in Bihar and later expanded to West Bengal and Jharkhand, has emerged as the second-largest dairy player in Bihar with a lineup ranging from fresh milk to curd, paneer, lassi and Mishti Doi.

As part of its expansion strategy, ITC has tailored its dairy portfolio to regional tastes, local consumption patterns and evolving consumer preference for quality-assured dairy products.

When asked about expansion to other regions, Hemant Malik, Chief Executive Officer, Foods Division, and Executive Director, ITC, said Eastern



India will remain a key focus market for the company's dairy expansion plans, which offers significant headroom for expansion.

"East is one of the most promising growth markets for the dairy category and will be central to our growth strategy in the coming years," Malik told PTL. For instance, in Bihar, over 80 per cent of consumers purchase loose milk, which presents a "compelling opportunity" to transition households to branded value-added dairy solutions that ensure quality, safety, and consistency, he said.

"In South India, consumers moved to branded curd over

a decade ago, and we wanted to enable a similar transition in Bihar. With our pouch curd offerings, we are helping consumers shift to branded curd that delivers assured quality and consistency, backed by the trust of ITC," said Malik.

Moreover, in the value-added segment, ITC is evaluating innovative and healthier dessert options as it seeks to broaden its portfolio beyond products such as Mishti Doi. For ITC, the dairy business is "one of the fastest-growing categories witnessing high double-digit growth".

It currently operates dairy manufacturing facilities at Munger, Patna, Muzaffarpur

and Gaya in Bihar, Ranchi in Jharkhand, and Howrah and Bardhaman in West Bengal.

As part of Project Gomukh, ITC works with over 40,000 dairy farmers and directly procures milk from dairy farmers. "The overarching objective of the project is to increase milk productivity and improve the quality of milk, while empowering rural farmers and increasing their income," it said.

ITC, which aspires to become India's leading FMCG player, has expanded brand Aashirvaad beyond wheat flour into staples, spices and fresh foods, and even the frozen category, aiming to double consumer spends to over ₹20,000 crore in the next five years.

According to the company's latest annual report, its 'Aashirvaad Svasti' fresh dairy portfolio maintained strong growth during FY26, aided by the strengthening of its premium milk variant 'Select' and robust growth in value-added products such as curd, paneer, Mishti Doi and lassi.

Assam CM Himanta reviews preparations for Hazarika centenary celebrations in New Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday visited Bharat Mandapam in the national Capital to review the facilities and preparations for the grand closing ceremony of the birth centenary celebrations of Bharat Ratna Dr Bhupen Hazarika.

The grand finale and closing ceremony of the centenary celebrations of the legendary singer, composer and cultural icon will be held at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, on November 29, 2026. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to attend the landmark event.

During his visit, the Chief Minister inspected the halls and reviewed the arrangements being made for the grand finale. Senior officials briefed him on the preparations and various aspects of the programme.

An exhibition showcasing the life, works and times of Bharat Ratna Dr Bhupen Hazarika, the doyen of Assamese and Indian culture, will also be organ-



ised at the venue as part of the centenary celebrations. The exhibition will highlight his remarkable artistic journey, contribution to Indian music and culture, and enduring legacy.

"We are curating an unforgettable tribute, one truly befitting the legacy of Sudhakantha," Dr Sarma said in a post on X after his visit to Bharat Mandapam.

The centenary celebrations seek to commemorate the extraordinary life and legacy of Bharat Ratna Dr Bhupen Hazarika, whose music transcended linguistic

and geographical boundaries and established him as one of India's most influential cultural figures. His compositions and songs reflected themes of humanity, social harmony, fraternity and national integration.

The grand finale in the national capital will bring together eminent personalities, artists, cultural practitioners and admirers of Dr Hazarika from across the country for a fitting culmination of the centenary celebrations.

The event will also provide a platform to showcase

Assam's rich cultural heritage and the unparalleled contribution of Bharat Ratna Dr Bhupen Hazarika to India's cultural landscape.

Additional Chief Secretary B Kalyan Chakravarthy, Commissioner & Secretary, Information and Public Relations, Padmapani Bora, Resident Commissioner, Assam Bhawan, Kavitha Padmanabhan, MLA Taranga Gogoi, Director, Information and Public Relations, Manabendra Dev Ray, among other senior officials, were present during the inspection.

Renewable Energy India Expo 2026 to unlock ₹2,800 crore investment in bioenergy sector: IBA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Indian Biogas Association (IBA) on Sunday said the Renewable Energy India Expo (REI) 2026, scheduled for next month, is poised to unlock over ₹2,800 crore in fresh investment for India's bioenergy sector.

This year, the spotlight is firmly on biogas as a game-changer for India's green growth, an IBA statement said.

This momentum was further strengthened by the Union Cabinet approval of the Rs 23,731 crore GOBARDhan (Galvanising Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan) National Circular Bioenergy Scheme in August 2026, which took effect on September 1, 2026.

The REI 2026 is scheduled from October 22 to 24, 2026, at the India Expo Mart & Centre,

Greater Noida. The ₹2,800 crore investment pipeline expected from the Expo represents nearly 12 per cent of the ₹23,731 crore GOBARDhan scheme outlay.

By bringing together investors, developers, technology providers and policy makers, REI 2026 can help turn policy momentum into scalable projects and support the government's ambition of nearly tenfold growth in domestic CBG production, the statement added.

This year's Bio-Energy Pavilion, powered by the IBA, is set to be the largest ever, featuring 35 per cent more exhibitors than 2025 and strong participation from global technology leaders, startups, and policy-makers.

Supported by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) and the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas



(MoPNG), the pavilion will showcase innovations in waste-to-energy, CBG technologies, co-digestion models, and digital monitoring solutions, the statement said.

"India is no longer looking at

biogas as just a rural solution. It is now a cornerstone of the clean energy economy, reducing carbon emissions, supporting farmers, fuelling transport, and enabling green hydrogen. With the GOBARDhan scheme provid-

ing long-term pricing certainty and offtake assurance, REI 2026 will demonstrate how the sector is scaling from pilot projects to nationwide impact," said A R Shukla, President, Indian Biogas Association.

The GOBARDhan scheme, to be implemented till 2035-36, aims to increase domestic compressed biogas (CBG) production nearly tenfold, mobilise large-scale private investment, and create a vibrant circular bioeconomy across the country.

Key features include an administered CBG price of ₹2,110 per MMBtu, assured offtake mandates for CNG and PNG segments, capital assistance of up to ₹2 crore per TPD for greenfield CBG plants, and dedicated support for pipeline infrastructure and credit guarantees.

The three-day REI Expo 2026 is expected to attract over 70,000

participants from across the globe, covering sectors like bioenergy, solar, wind, hydrogen, e-mobility, and energy storage.

"With India's potential to generate over 62 million tons of CBG annually, we can cut down fuel imports, create thousands of rural and urban jobs, and build a truly circular economy. The GOBARDhan scheme's pricing support, capital assistance, and offtake mandates have addressed the sector's biggest blockers," IBA Chairman Gaurav Kedia said.

The IBA is the first and largest nationwide and professional biogas association for stakeholders of the biogas industry, including Technology providers, Project developers, Plant operators and planners of biogas plants, and representatives from public policy, science and research in India.

Delhi jewellery and gem fair 2026 begins

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Lok Sabha MP Praveen Khandelwal on Saturday inaugurated the 14th edition of the three-day Delhi Jewellery & Gem Fair (DJGF) 2026, organised by Informa Markets.

Khandelwal stressed on the need for upskilling the manpower and adoption of newer technologies in the jewellery sector. He noted the sector's export potential and highlighted that rising gold prices are reshaping consumer demand toward lightweight, design-driven, and studded jewellery while strengthening the push from "Vocal for Local" to global competitiveness.



Lok Sabha MP Praveen Khandelwal inaugurated 14th edition of the three-day Delhi Jewellery & Gem Fair (DJGF) 2026

The MP also underscored Free Trade Agreements potential in pitching India's ambitious targets toward a \$100 billion export and a \$30 trillion economy by 2047.

The DJGF has brought together over 650 exhibitors, 3,000 plus jewellery brands and more than 150,000 designs under one roof. The event is witnessing participation from jewellery manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers, distributors, exporters and allied industry professionals from across India.

Petronet to pay 1% of profit as commission to directors

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Petronet LNG Ltd, India's biggest gas importer, has sought shareholders' approval to continue payment of commission to its directors, capped at 1 per cent of annual profits, for another five years from financial year 2026-27 to 2030-31.

The proposal, contained in the notice for the company's forthcoming general meeting, seeks approval for distribution of a sum not exceeding 1 per cent per annum of profits calculated under Section 198 of the Companies Act, 2013, among the directors in such amounts and proportions as may be decided by the board from time to time.

Shareholders had last approved the commission arrangement at the annual general meeting held on September 28, 2021, for FY22 to FY26. The earlier approvals for similar payments were granted in 2007, 2011 and 2016, according to the shareholder notice.

The company said the proposed continuation was

being sought in view of its "healthy financial position".

For the fiscal year ended March 31, 2026, Petronet paid its CEO Akshay Kumar Singh and other directors a commission of ₹26.5 lakh each, according to the annual report. They had received a commission of ₹25.5 lakh in the previous fiscal year.

The commission took Singh's total remuneration in 2025-26 to ₹3.64 crore, up from ₹3.03 crore in the previous financial year.



Independent directors on the company board also got ₹10 lakh each as commission on profit, besides the sitting fees. They were paid ₹9.75 lakh commission in previous 2024-25 fiscal.

The actual commission paid to whole-time directors, including the managing director and CEO, and independent directors has remained well below the statutory ceiling, according to the company.

CIJW school conducts seminar on northeast India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Aizawl

Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School, Vairengte, conducted a two-day seminar on "Cultural Diplomacy, Ecosystem of Tribals and Indigenous People, Population-Centric Engagement and Way Ahead for Northeast India" on 23-24 September 2026.

The seminar brought together eminent moderators and speakers from NIT Silchar, Assam University, Central University of Jharkhand, Mizoram University, North-Eastern Hill University, Tripura University, the Indian Institute of Public Administration, and DIPR, DRDO, along with army officers, academicians, and students. The three thematic sessions brought academic research, professional experience and local understanding onto a common platform.

The first thematic session, "Cultural Diplomacy & Ecosystem of Tribals and Indigenous People," explored the cultural strengths of Northeast



India and their potential for strengthening people-to-people linkages. The second thematic session, "Population-Centric Engagement," placed trust at the centre of meaningful engagement with local populations.

The final thematic session, "Economic & Technological Pathways & Way Ahead," focused on future development opportunities for the region. Participants analysed extensive comparative economic data and offered suggestions the strengthen economic

development in Northeast India. The technological dimension highlighted existing Government technology initiatives while also proposing new technology-enabled solutions to improve governance, accessibility, service delivery, and development outcomes.

An interesting progression of ideas also emerged through the two days. The discourse began with the 3 Cs — Connectivity, Culture and Community, emphasising that regional engagement must go beyond physical connectivity alone.

As the discussion widened towards cross-border linkages and cooperation, the thought expanded to the 5 Cs — Culture, Community, Connectivity, Cooperation and Confidence.

In his closing remarks, Maj Gen Kulvir Singh, SM, PhD, Commandant, CIJW School, carried this progression further into a comprehensive 7 Cs framework - Culture, Community, Connectivity, Capacity, Commerce, Confidence and Convergence. He also underscored inclusive growth and meaningful participation of women as essential elements in shaping the way ahead for Northeast India.

This 3-5-7 progression captured the broad journey of the seminar-from cultural understanding and community engagement, through cooperation and confidence, towards capacity building, economic opportunity and convergence of efforts.

The seminar strengthened Army-academia interaction and generated practical perspectives towards an inclusive, people-centric and progressive future for Northeast India.

Electronics PLI beneficiaries get ₹19,091 crore incentives

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Large-scale electronics manufacturing PLI beneficiaries have received the highest incentives of ₹19,090.98 crore under the scheme till June this year, while the sector has attracted investments of ₹20,580.20 crore.

The government launched the PLI schemes in 2020 for 14 sectors, including electronics and pharmaceuticals, with an approved outlay of Rs 1.91 lakh crore, to enhance manufacturing capabilities, attract investment, promote exports, generate employment, and reduce import dependence.

The Government provides fiscal incentives to the eligible PLI beneficiary firms on incremental sales (over base year). The Production-Linked



Incentive (PLI) scheme for large-scale electronics manufacturing (LSEM) was started in 2020 with an aim to boost domestic manufacturing of mobile phones in the country.

The scheme approved as many as 32 beneficiary companies. India has emerged as the second-largest mobile manufacturer in the world, and smartphones have emerged as one of India's top exported commodities.

The tenure of this scheme was extended from five years (2020-25) by one year till 2025-26. Smartphone exports from the country have increased to about \$30 billion in 2025-26 from \$5.5 billion in 2021-22.

In total, the government has disbursed ₹36,754 crore to beneficiary companies under the schemes since the launch in 2020 till June 30 this year, according to the DPIIT data.

GDA showcases Ghaziabad's development vision at UP International trade show

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Greater Noida

The Ghaziabad Development Authority (GDA) is showcasing the city's ongoing transformation and future growth potential at the Uttar Pradesh International Trade Show (UPITS)-2026, being held at the India Expo Centre & Mart, Greater Noida, from September 25 to 29.

Through an attractively designed exhibition stall, GDA has presented a comprehensive picture of Ghaziabad's ongoing and proposed development projects, highlighting planned urban expansion, modern

infrastructure, improved connectivity, residential development, sports facilities, green spaces and urban beautification.

The fourth edition of UPITS-2026 provides a major platform to showcase Uttar Pradesh's industrial strength, development potential, and investment opportunities to visitors, investors, and international delegates. According to official information, the event features more than 2,400 exhibitors, over 550 international buyers and participation from 85 countries.

HarNandiPuram: A New Chapter in Planned Urban Development

The ambitious HarNandiPuram Residential Scheme occupies a prominent place in GDA's exhibition. Proposed across approximately 501 hectares, the scheme envisages well-planned residential sectors supported by a network of roads, green spaces, parks, civic amenities and improved connectivity.

International Cricket Stadium to Strengthen Ghaziabad's Sports Infrastructure

The proposed International Cricket Stadium in Raj Nagar Extension is another key attraction at the GDA stall. GDA has prepared



a preliminary design and cost assessment for the proposed stadium, while the process of joint development between GDA and the Uttar Pradesh Cricket Association (UPCA) is also being pursued.

Hapur Chungi Flyover to Enhance Traffic Connectivity

Improving traffic movement and strengthening urban connectivity are key priorities in GDA's infrastructure plans. The proposed four-lane flyover and service/slip roads at Hapur Chungi have therefore been prominently featured at the exhibition. GDA is also showcasing its initiatives to create new recreational, cultural

and knowledge-based public spaces. These include Anand Vatika, Viksit Bharat Experience Park, Sanskriti Darshan Park and the R a m a y a n a - t h e m e d Park/Anand Vatika.

GDA's vision is centred on planned urban expansion, enhanced connectivity, sustainable and green development, improved civic infrastructure and modern public amenities. Through its participation in UPITS-2026, GDA is presenting Ghaziabad's development journey and future opportunities to visitors, investors and delegates from across India and around the world.

BRIEFLY

Ancy Sojan clinches long jump silver at Asian Games



India's Ancy Sojan led for a major part of the competition before settling for the silver medal in the women's long jump competition at the Asian Games here on Sunday. Ancy recorded a best jump of 6.53m to finish behind Huang Yingying of China, who produced a late 6.55m jump to snatch gold. Earlier, India's Harita Bhadra clinched the bronze medal in the women's 200m, clocking 23.20 seconds in the final. Bhadra finished third, just ahead of Japan's Ido Abigeirufuka, who clocked 23.21 seconds. There was, however, heartbreak for Ancy's compatriot Shaili Singh, who missed out on a bronze medal in the women's long jump final after China's Mengyi Tan produced a 6.46m effort to move ahead of the Indian jumper. (PTI)

Squash: Silver lining, but no gold again for India at Asiad



India's long wait for an individual squash gold at the Asian Games stretched on Sunday as young guns Anahat Singh and Abhay Singh were outplayed by seasoned Malaysian opponents and settled for silver medals after straight-game defeats. On a rain-soaked day that added to the gloom around the Indian camp, Abhay, ranked 24th in the world, found defending champion Ng Eain Yow a class apart as the Malaysian produced a controlled, tactically astute performance to win 11-9, 11-5, 11-5 in 44 minutes. Anahat, 18, had an equally frustrating afternoon, going down 4-11, 4-11, 7-11 against Malaysia's world No. 5 and defending champion Sivasangari Subramaniam in just 27 minutes. The result means that both Anahat and Abhay missed out on securing berths for 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, where the game will make debut. The Indians will now have to look for other route. (PTI)

Asiad Hockey: Indian women to play Korea in semifinal



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Kakamigahara

Sunelita Toppo scored a brace as the Indian women's hockey team trounced Singapore 7-0 in their final Pool B match to set up the Asian Games semifinal against Korea here Sunday. India topped Pool B with five wins from as many games. The semifinal is scheduled for September 30. Skipper Salima Tete (17th minute), Sunelita (22nd, 24th), Lalremsiami (26th), Rutuja Dadoso Pisal (29th), Nikki Pradhan (35th) and Deepika (55th) scored for India. Defending champions and reigning Olympic silver medalist China will take on hosts Japan in the other semifinal. Unfancied Singapore gave India a run for their money in the first quarter even though the Salima Tete-led side dominated the proceedings. Singapore were particularly brilliant in their penalty corner defence as they denied India as many as eight penalty corners. The play was mostly in the Singapore half with India mounting attacks after attacks and in the process earning innumerable penalty corners but the Singaporeans defended with heart to deny their opponents. But two minutes into the second quarter, skipper Salima finally gave India the lead with a fine field goal. In the 22nd minute, Sunelita doubled India's lead scoring from a botched up penalty corner effort. Sunelita again registered her name in the score sheet, again directing in a Deepika's flick from a penalty corner from a variation. Lalremsiami then extended the lead deflecting in another Deepika flick from a penalty corner three inutes later. Rutuja made the scorelin 5-0 with a fine field goal in the 30th minute. But the Indians were quote sloppy from penalty corners as they converted just three from 15 they earned in the first two quarters. The Indians continued to earn penalty comers a galore but failed to convert them from direct tries. Four minutes into the third quarter, India extended their lead through Nikki Pradhan, who pushed home a loose ball from another messed up set piece. The Indians secured five more penalty corners in the third quarter but failed to convert them as the Singaporeans defended in numbers. For records, India had 24 penalty corners in the first three quarters out of which they converted just three, that too from variations and a rebound. Five minutes from the hooter, India secured two back-to-back penalty corners and Deepika finally scored with a powerful flick to the left of the Singapore goal-keeper. India had another set piece a minute later but wasted the chance. (PTI)

Indian boxers storm into Asiad semis



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Nishio (Japan)

Indian boxers Parveen Hooda, Ankush Panghal and Narender Berwal assured the country of three medals with dominant quarterfinal wins at the Asian Games here on Sunday, while Sachin Siwach's campaign ended in the last eight stage. Parveen defeated world championships silver medalist Navbakhor Khamidova of Uzbekistan by a 5-0 margin to move into the women's 65kg semifinals. Narender (+90kg) added another medal to his bronze from the previous edition after forcing the referee to stop his quarterfinal against Thailand's Adthapong Saengtpe in less than two minutes. The Indian super heavyweight unleashed a barrage of heavy blows on his Thai opponent, forcing the referee to give Saengtpe three standing counts before stopping the contest. Ankush, who won Commonwealth Games gold last month in Glasgow, notched a 5-0 unanimous decision win over Tajikistan's Nekruz Salimov in the men's 80kg quarterfinal. It was, however, the end of the road for Commonwealth Games champion Sachin, who went down 0-5 to local favourite Shunsuke Kitamoto of Japan in the men's 60kg quarterfinal. It was the Haryana boxer's first bout of the ongoing edition as she had received a walkover in the previous round, but Parveen showed no signs of rust, expertly landing a flurry of combination punches on Khamidova. "I'm feeling very good. My coaches made a plan for how to fight. I managed the distance well and focused on counter-punching. That was our strategy for the bout," she said after the win. Parveen's bronze medal from the previous edition was taken away after the International Testing Agency (ITA) suspended her for 22 months for a whereabouts failure. Since returning from her suspension late last year, Parveen has moved up from 57kg to 65kg. She was one of only three boxers who failed to finish on the podium in last month's Commonwealth Games. "I'm getting my confidence back. Being away from your sport for so long makes you doubt yourself and wonder how you'll perform in the future. "But now I feel confident again and want to achieve even more than what I lost during that time away," she added. Making his Asian Games debut, Ankush put up a dominant display to outclass Salimov and book his place in the semifinals. "In the first two rounds I boxed at long range, and I had already won those two rounds. After that the opponent was just passing the time," Ankush said. "There was no difficulty at all. I am not satisfied with my performance. I have already secured a medal. But it doesn't matter because I am looking ahead," he added. The Haryana boxer started strongly, landing clean singles, including a straight left and a right hook, to keep Salimov on the back foot. The Tajik tried to counter, but his punches lacked accuracy and impact to trouble Ankush, who took opening round on all five cards.< Ankush maintained the pressure in the second round, continuing to attack and landing a steady stream of punches. Salimov tried to close the distance and find openings on the counter, but Ankush was quick to respond and largely kept control of the exchanges.

As injuries pick up, questions on selection



PHILEM DIPAK SINGH
■ Nagoya

The list of injured Indian track and field athletes at the ongoing Asian Games grew longer on Sunday after 400m hurdler Yashas Palaksha pulled up midway through his heat race, raising questions about how these athletes were selected in the first place, and who will be held accountable. Yashas did not start in the Indian Athletics Series Final held on September 10 in New Delhi where almost all the Asian Games-bound members participated. There was speculation that Yashas was carrying an injury. Woman 100m hurdler Jyothi Yarraji and triple jumper Praveen Chithravel, who also did not take part in the New Delhi meet, pulled out on Saturday due to injuries. Yarraji was carrying knee stress while Chithravel was struggling with a calf muscle pull. They were, however, cleared after their coaches gave assurances to the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) about their fitness by showing medical certificates. On Sunday, Yashas pulled up with an apparent hamstring injury even before clearing the first hurdle in his 400m hurdles heat, leading to a DNF (Did Not Finish) status. "His injury has been assessed by the team doctors," an Indian team coach said. On Saturday, Yarraji pulled out before her 100m hurdle heat race after "feeling pain" during warm-up. Chithravel went for his first attempt but could not complete his jump, leading to leaving the pit holding his calf. He was later taken off in wheelchair, and he got NM (No mark) status. (PTI)

DAILY SUDOKU

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★★

HOW TO SOLVE IT

Sudoku is a logic puzzle where you fill a 9x9 grid so that numbers 1 to 9 appear once in every row, column, and 3x3 box, using elimination and logical deduction- no maths involved.



SOLUTION (26.9.26)

3	5	2	8	7	1	6	4	9
8	9	7	6	2	4	1	5	3
6	4	1	9	5	3	2	8	7
7	3	8	5	1	6	4	9	2
9	2	6	4	8	7	3	1	5
5	1	4	2	3	9	7	6	8
1	8	9	7	6	2	5	3	4
4	7	3	1	9	5	8	2	6
2	6	5	3	4	8	9	7	1

DOUBLE CROSSWORD

MONDAY | SEPTEMBER 28, 2026

ACROSS

3 A mine rediscovered in a Welsh strait (5)
8 Girl to do wrong with, in a deluge (5)
10 Is such a coat dressy? (5)
11 Intend to go first class to Maidenhead (3)
12 Got together again for just so long (5)
13 He's a bit freakish in his wild way (7)
15 Powerless to revise the rent for one (5)
18 A traffic stopper in the road around central Harlesden (3)
19 Pictures, I see, from the sciences (6)
21 The same again, and not so much of it! (7)
22 Plunder from Waterloo terminus (4)

DOWN

1 Blare loudly at a politician (5)
2 Such cakes are black but not burnt (7)
4 Regarded as rich after one short day (4)
5 A fair touring around, note, covers a lot of ground! (6)
6 I, a Frenchman, get the girl (5)
7 Success at twenty? (5)
9 What the poilu has to put on his hair (3)
12 Average sized Scandinavian fruits? (7)
14 Fireplace salesman? (3)
16 What the last man did? (5)
17 Majestically, they could have been stars (5)
19 Frowned when a beastly female entered the vehicle (7)
20 For batsmen, they can come in pairs (5)
21 Norma's terrible Italian (5)
23 They've been given credit for maybe extravagant things (7)
24 Urge to chuck teacher into the river (6)
25 Having no central heating is negative (3)
27 Never the left sock (5)
28 Corrected in crude style (5)
30 Dogs said to interest mountaineers (5)
32 Old devil at the police station (4)
33 Having left at some stage, he may be back in jug (3)

SOLUTION (26.9.26)

ACROSS

1, O-cean
6, Larch
9, Mention
10, Snipe
11, Youth
12, Milan
13, Sp-art-an
15, Lea
17, Here
18, Sta-l-rs

DOWN

2, Can-ape
3, Ampere
4, Nee (rev.)
5, Stain
6, Loyalty
7, Anon
8, Cutter
12, Magi-c
13, Shift
14, Arson

15, Licit
16, As-ked
18, Stein
19, Millers
21, Rag-USA
22, Sh-err-y
23, Region
25, Swain
26, Bit-e
28, Bed

Archery: Indian compound teams enter semifinals in Asian Games



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Nagoya

India made a strong start to their Asian Games archery campaign as both the men's and women's compound teams marched into the semifinals along with the recurve and mixed teams with a string of convincing victories here on Sunday. The men's compound team of Kushal Dalal, Sahil Jadhav and Ganesh Mani Ratnam began the competition with a 235-215 win over the UAE in the round of 16 before edging Bhutan 235-232 in the quarterfinals. The women's compound trio of Jyothi Surekha Vennam, Chikitha Taniparthi and Prithika Pradeep also registered two wins, defeating Mongolia 238-223 in the round of 16 and Kazakhstan 233-230 in the quarterfinals. Both Indian compound teams will face South Korea in the semifinals on September 30. In the men's recurve section, Dhiraj Bommadevara and Sanjay Bhoge opened with a 5-1 win over the Philippines before registering another identical victory to seal their place in the semifinals. The women's recurve team of Kirti and Kumkum also enjoyed a dominant run, blanking Mongolia and Chinese Taipei 6-0 in their respective matches to advance to the last four. Later in the recurve mixed team event, Dhiraj Bommadevara and Kumkum defeated the UAE 6-0 before producing an identical scoreline against Vietnam to book their semifinal berth. The compound mixed team of Chikitha Taniparthi and Sahil Jadhav also made it through, beating Mongolia 160-146 and Kazakhstan 159-154 in their two matches. India had swept all five available gold medals in compound archery at the Hangzhou Asian Games, held in 2023, and will look to maintain their dominance in the discipline in Japan.

Sindhu criticises badminton scheduling after playing three matches in 24 hours



PHILEM DIPAK SINGH
■ Nagoya

Ace Indian shuttler PV Sindhu on Sunday expressed her displeasure at playing three singles matches in a span of 24 hours, saying the cramped Asian Games badminton scheduling "was not really well organised" and does not give enough recovery time. Sindhu was scheduled to play two matches on Saturday, with the second match ending after midnight. She then returned to the court on Sunday for her quarterfinal match against Chen Yufei of China which Sindhu lost. "Not really, because the scheduling was not really well organised is what I feel," said Sindhu when asked if she had ever played two matches in any major championships earlier. "We literally slept really late and then coming back in the morning (on Sunday), playing two matches in a day. Recovery is the most important priority." The two-time Olympic medalist played her second round match in the afternoon of Saturday. Her third round match ended after midnight (around 1am local time on Sunday). Her quarterfinal match started around 1:30pm local time on Sunday. Asked how she prepared herself mentally to play three matches in 24 hours, Sindhu said, "It's more than mentally preparing, you need to recover. Even though you think you are doing good, physically you might not be able to go there or you might not be able to play." "When there are long rallies, definitely yes, recovery. When you had a good thing, you would automatically (go) but your legs don't move. "But I think apart from that it was a good game overall but it's just that the scheduling should have been a bit better." Shuttlr Unnati Hooda was also not happy with scheduling as many players had to play more than one matches in a day. (PTI)