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WELFARE FOR ALL | HAPPINESS OF ALL

February 16-20, 2026 | New Delhi, India

Making AI Affordable, Safe and Inclusive

Inauguration by
Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

February 19, 2026 | 10:00 AM | Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi

Watch the event LIVE on

PIONEER IN
SHORT

JHARKHAND: MAN LYNCHED ON RUMORS

A 45-year-old mentally ill man was beaten to death and six women were assaulted in separate mob attacks triggered by childlifting rumours in Jharkhand's Chatra district and Bokaro district, police said Tuesday. Rambali Rajwar, a resident of Ramgarh district, was thrashed on Sunday night in the Piparwar area after locals suspected him of being a childlifter. He died during treatment at Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences on Monday. Police termed it a case of mob lynching and launched a probe; no arrests have been made. Family members said Rajwar, who was mentally ill, had wandered from home a day earlier. In Bokaro, six women from Uttar Pradesh's Jaunpur were assaulted near the Damodar river after being mistaken for childlifters. They had travelled for medical treatment and were later rescued. Amid rising rumours, authorities identified over 300 social media accounts allegedly spreading misinformation and warned of strict action. The district administration appealed for calm and urged people not to share unverified messages.

The ByStander



RAILWAYS TO INSTALL JET SPRAYS

The Ministry of Railways has directed all zonal railways to replace low-level water taps and chain stainless steel mugs with jet sprays in train lavatories to curb water stagnation and improve hygiene. In a February 17, 2026 circular, the ministry said water accumulation on coach lavatory floors was leading to unhygienic conditions and negative passenger feedback. Over time, floor undulations contribute to puddle formation, worsening sanitation. The move follows a successful trial by Northern Railway in its Delhi and Ambala divisions, including in Shatabdi Express coaches.

According to the ministry, 182 Shatabdi coaches have already been fitted with jet sprays.

India, France upgrade ties, launch Year of Innovation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Mumbai

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday expanded bilateral ties, announcing in Mumbai more than 20 agreements spanning defence, skilling, technology, trade and health.

President Macron is on a three-day visit to India from February 17 to 19 to participate in the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi and to hold high-level discussions in India. His visit marks the fourth official trip to India during his presidency.

Addressing a joint press conference, PM Modi described France as one of India's oldest and most trusted strategic partners. "Today the world is going through a period of uncertainty. In such an environment, the India-France partnership is a force for global stability," he said. The PM announced that the two nations have decided to elevate their



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with French President Emmanuel Macron during a meeting, in Mumbai

PTI

engagement to a "Special Global Strategic Partnership," underscoring what he termed depth and energy in bilateral cooperation.

A key highlight of the talks was the launch of the India-

France Year of Innovation, aimed at fostering technology collaborations and strengthening people-to-people ties. As part of this vision, the leaders announced the establishment of the Indo-

French Centre for AI in Health, the Indo-French Centre for Digital Science and Technology, and a National Centre of Excellence for Skilling in Aeronautics.

CONTINUED ON ▶ P4

CRICKET LEGENDS RALLY FOR IMRAN KHAN

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Indian cricket legends, including Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil Dev, have voiced "deep concern" over the reported deterioration of jailed former Pakistan captain and Prime Minister Imran Khan's health. In a joint letter titled Appeal by Former International Cricket Captains, 14 ex-cap-



Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar with Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi arrives to review poll preparedness for forthcoming Assam Assembly Elections, in Guwahati

PTI

April polls likely in five States

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Elections in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry will likely be held on various dates in April 2026. Sources said the Election Commission of India (ECI) would announce the dates together "sometime in the middle of March". While the five-year term of the Puducherry Assembly ends on June 15, the terms of Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal assemblies end on May 20, 23, 10 and seven respectively.

Meanwhile, on Tuesday a full bench of the ECI, led by

Chief Election Commissioner

Gyanesh Kumar, Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu, Vivek Joshi, along with Assam Chief Electoral Officer Anurag Goel, held meetings with political parties and regarding preparations for the upcoming polls in the State.

Following the interaction with the political parties, the ECI held a detailed review with the IGS, DIGS, DEOs and SSPs on every aspect of election planning, EVM management, logistics, training of election staff, seizures, law and order, voter awareness and outreach activities.

CONTINUED ON ▶ P4

DETAILED REPORT ON ▶ P16

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Elections



Dharmendra Pradhan, CM Rekha inaugurate CM Shri School

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Tuesday inaugurated the CM Shri School at Sarojini Nagar and laid the foundation stones for 75 such schools across the Capital. The Government described the launch as the nation's first AI-driven comprehensive education model in Government schools.

The initiative, aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP), aims to transform government schools into "Centres of Excellence" equipped with modern infrastructure and technology-enabled learning systems.

The Government said the move will prepare students not only for board examinations but also for global careers.

Addressing the gathering, Pradhan said the establishment of 75 CM Shri Schools is a significant step toward raising the standards of public education. He said these schools will provide children from economically weaker, lower, and middle-income families with facilities comparable to private institutions.

He congratulated the Delhi Government for its progress in the education sector within a year. He further added that Delhi is contributing actively to strengthening school education, higher



Union Minister of Education Dharmendra Pradhan, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and Minister Ashish Sood during the inauguration of CM Shri Scheme in 75 Government Schools in New Delhi

education, and research-oriented learning in the country.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said the CM Shri Schools are not merely new buildings but a structural reform in public education. She said the aim is to make Delhi's children globally competitive by integrating technology, skill development, career guidance, and holistic learning into the curriculum. "These schools will prepare children not just for exams, but for life," she said.

The Chief Minister announced that AI-enabled smart classrooms are being introduced with interactive panels, digital content, and modern teaching tools. These classrooms will enable

personalised learning based on each student's abilities.

Over 7,000 smart interactive boards will be installed, and 7,000 classrooms will be converted into AI-enabled smart classrooms before March 31.

A dedicated competitive examination portal has also been launched. It will support preparation for JEE, NEET, CUET, CLAT, and NDA directly within government schools. The portal will offer regular online tests and progress tracking.

The Chief Minister said multi-sectoral skill labs will introduce students to robotics, artificial intelligence, design, and mechatronics at an early stage. ICT labs will train students in digital literacy, coding, and computational thinking. Digitised libraries will provide access to e-books, research material, and resources for competitive exams.

Career labs will assess students' interests and aptitude and guide them toward higher education and employment pathways.

'Science of Living' spaces will focus on mental well-being, moral education, and personality development. Language labs will promote multilingual education and foreign language learning. For the first time, mandatory industry-linked internships will be introduced in government schools to provide practical exposure during schooling.

Students emerge relieved after writing 'easy' first paper of CBSE board exams

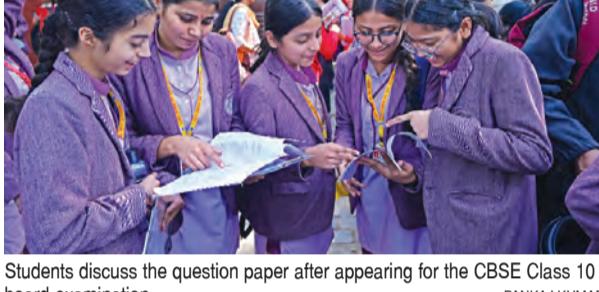
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Nervousness before entering the exam hall turned into relief and confidence for several students who stepped out after appearing for the Class 10 and 12 examinations on Tuesday, saying the paper was easy to moderate.

They said the paper was largely based on the syllabus of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The Class 10 and 12 board examinations conducted by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) began on Tuesday across the country and will conclude on March 10 and April 10, respectively.

Air Force Bal Bharati School's Omisha Dhondiyal, who appeared for the Class 10 Standard Mathematics paper, said her nervousness faded once she went through the question paper. "There was a



Students discuss the question paper after appearing for the CBSE Class 10 board examination

PANKAJ KUMAR

lot of anxiety before the exam, but during the reading time, I felt confident. The paper was much easier compared to last year, and I managed to finish it before time," she said, adding that she had ample time for revision.

A Class 12 student from the same school, who had the biotech paper, said that the questions were mostly theoretical. "The paper was easy compared to the previous year. The questions were

asked largely from the book and most of them were theory-based which was easier to answer," he added.

Nishtha, a Class 10 student from Delhi Public School, described the paper as straightforward. "Most of the questions were directly from the NCERT, and the case-study questions were easy. Like everyone else, I was nervous in the beginning, but the paper turned out to be manageable," she said.

A Class 12 student from the same school, who had the biotech paper, said that the questions were mostly theoretical. "The paper was easy compared to the previous year. The questions were

Youth are architects of Viksit Bharat 2047 vision: Speaker

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta on Tuesday said that youth are the architects of the "Viksit Bharat 2047" vision. The Speaker urged students to view education as a tool for social transformation.

The Speaker is addressing the 35th Annual Day Function of Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar College, University of Delhi, as

the chief guest. He said the country's development roadmap depends on the energy and innovation of its young population. He further adds that the youth are not just beneficiaries of a developed India but the driving force behind its transformation. "This institution is not merely a structure of bricks and stones, but a symbol of the dreams of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, who envisioned social transformation through



35वार्षिक दिवांगी प्रकाशन मनाता

नवंगल, 17 फरवरी 2026, प्रातः 10:00 बजे

education," Gupta said.

The event was attended by members of the college administration, faculty, and a large number of students. During the ceremony, Gupta presented awards and certificates to meritorious students for achievements in academics, sports, and extracurricular activities. Speaking on the national vision, Gupta said India is steadily moving toward becoming the world's third-largest economy.

Meerut Metro set to become India's fastest metro service

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

The upcoming Meerut Metro is set to become the fastest metro service in the country, with a maximum operational speed of 120 km/h, significantly cutting travel time across the city.

The service will operate on a 21 km corridor between Meerut South and

Modipuram with 12 stations, covering the entire stretch in around 30 minutes, including stoppages at all stations, the official said on Monday.

In a first-of-its-kind initiative in India, the Meerut Metro will run on the same tracks and infrastructure as the semi-high-speed Namo Bharat trains, creating an integrated transport model that combines regional rapid



transit with city metro services, the official said.

According to the official, the metro will feature

modern stainless-steel train sets with a lightweight design and a distinctive fluorescent green, blue and orange colour scheme.

The three-coach trains are energy-efficient, equipped with regenerative braking systems, and compatible with Automatic Train Protection and Automatic Train Operation technologies, he added.

Central Coalfields Limited
"A Miniratna Company"
(A Subsidiary of Coal India Limited)

NOTICE

"All the tenders issued by CIL and its Subsidiaries for procurement of Goods, Works and Services are available on website of Coal India Ltd. www.coalindia.in/ respective Subsidiary Company (CCL, www.centralcoalfields.in/) and e-procurement portal <https://coalindependents.nic.in/> and Central Public Procurement Portal <https://eprocure.gov.in/> in addition, procurement is also done through GeM portal <https://gem.gov.in>

THE GAUHATI HIGH COURT AT GUWAHATI

(HIGH COURT OF ASSAM, NAGALAND, MIZORAM AND ARUNACHAL PRADESH)

NOTICE INVITING QUOTATION

Sealed quotations affixing court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees Eight and Paise Twenty-Five only), with a validity period of 180 (One Hundred and Eighty) days, are invited from intending manufacturers / authorized distributors / dealers / firms for the supply, installation, commissioning, and maintenance of a Justice Clock (Outdoor Active LED Display Screen). The sealed quotations must be submitted on or before 25.02.2026 up to 4:00 P.M. The detailed bid document may be downloaded from <https://ghconline.gov.in>

Sd/-

JOINT REGISTRAR (PM&P)-CUM-CPC

Guwahati High Court, Guwahati.

DIPR/C/PIO/888/18-Feb-26

NORTHERN RAILWAY

E-TENDER NOTICE

Sr. DEE-TRS-GZB acting for and on behalf of President of India invites E-Tender against Tender No. 230-TRS-GZB-2025-26-35. The details are as under:

- Name of the work:** Cleaning of Electric Locomotive including cleaning of Radiators, Filters, Loco body, Look out glass & window glass, Driver cabs, Machine room Corridors etc of 3-phase locomotives for a period of 24 (Twenty Four) months.
- Approx. cost of work:** Rs. 47,23,076.00
- Earliest Money to be deposited:** Rs. 94,500.00
- Last Date & Time of Submission of tender bid of tender:** 09-02-2026 (15:00 Hrs.)
- Date & Time of opening of tender document:** 09-03-2026 (After 15:00 Hrs.)
- Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen:** www.reps.gov.in

Note:-

- The tenderer/s must be registered on the Indian Railway E-Procurement System (IREPS) site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for participating in e-tender system.
- For all terms and conditions please refer tender document.
- No manual offers are acceptable.
- Cost of Tender document and Earnest money will be acceptable through net banking or payment gateway only.

No. 230-TRS-GZB-2025-26-35 Date: 10-02-2026

523/2026

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

PUBLIC NOTICE

FOR TRANSFER OF PROPERTY ID

Notice is hereby given to public at large that Mr. Vandita Kumar Singh, wife of Shri Anil Kumar Khurana is the owner of 50% share of Plot No. A-54, measuring 1564.73 Sq.Yds (1308.30 Sq. Mtrs. Approximate) in the residential colony known as Lakewood City, Suraj Kund, Residential colony known as Lakewood City, Suraj Kund, within the Revenue Estate of Village Lakkarpur, Tehsil Badkhal, Distt. Faridabad Haryana. (Property ID 18713H3) who died on 10.01.2024 leaving behind Shri Anil Kumar Khurana (Husband) and Shri Dhruv Dayanand Khurana (Son) The legal heirs Shri Anil Kumar Khurana (Son) and Shri Dhruv Dayanand Khurana (Son) are the joint owners of H.No. 288, Vasant Enclave, VTC Kusum Pur, PO-Vasant Vihar-1, Sub District Vasant Vihar, South West Delhi, Delhi-110057 intends to transfer the Property ID in the record of MCF office of the said property in their names. Therefore, all persons having any claims/objections in respect of said Plot No. 53, measuring 1564.73 Sq.Yds (1308.30 Sq. Mtrs. Approximate) as and by way of sale, exchange, mortgage, gift, trust, maintenance, inheritance, possession, tenancy, occupation, lease, lien, easement, licence or otherwise, however are hereby requested to make the same known in writing to the undersigned within a period of thirty days from the date of publication here in the office of Commissioner, Municipal Corporation, Faridabad.

Rajender Singh Palival (Advocate) Resi.Cum Offt. H.No.224249, Sainik Colony, FBD.

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Rajender Singh Palival (Adv



Delhi University bans protests on campus for a month

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Days after clashes during a protest in support of University Grants Commission (UGC) equity rules, Delhi University (DU) has banned public meetings, processions, demonstrations and protests of any kind on campus for a month, citing concerns over obstruction of traffic, threats to safety and disturbance of public peace.

The university's decision to shut down protests for a month is not an isolated administrative reflex but a response to a series of events that rocked mainly the North Campus over the past week.

In an order issued on February 17, DU Proctor Manoj Kumar Singh said, "This order is issued in view of information received indicating that unrestricted public gather-

ings, processions, or demonstrations on campus may lead to obstruction of traffic, threats to human life, and disturbance of public peace."

It also referred to a prior direction by the assistant commissioner of police, Civil Lines, prohibiting public meetings, carrying torches or similar materials, slogan-shouting and speeches that may affect public tranquillity or traffic flow.

DU's order cites "information received indicating that unrestricted public gatherings... may lead to obstruction of traffic, threats to human life, and disturbance of public peace." The restriction prohibits the assembly of five or more persons, the shouting of slogans, and the carrying of hazardous materials like mashal or torches.

The activities which are banned from Tuesday include



the following: Public meeting, rally, dharna, protest or agitation, Assembly of five or more persons, Carrying of mashaals, beacons, torches or other "hazardous materials".

Doing anything that affects the general tranquillity of the public or the smooth flow of traffic, such as slogans and speeches. "The ban takes

immediate effect and will remain in force for one month unless withdrawn earlier," the order further stated.

Manoj Kumar, proctor, DU, in a statement, said that in the past, organisers often failed to control such protests, which escalated and spread widely, resulting in deterioration of law and order within the uni-

versity campus. When the premier university issued an order banning all public meetings, processions, and demonstrations on the campus for a period of one month, it did not expressly mention the nub of the issue — the UGC's rules against caste discrimination — but it underlined that recent protests had turned violent.

The university in the national capital finds itself at the epicentre of a storm over the University Grants Commission's (UGC) anti-casteism regulations, which have been stayed for now by the Supreme Court.

The ban follows a protest on February 13 and 14 near the Arts Faculty and outside the Maurice Nagar Police Station in north Delhi over proposed University Grants Commission (UGC) Equity Regulations 2026, which are aimed at

addressing caste-based discrimination on campuses but have sparked sharp differences among student bodies.

What began as a demonstration in support of the regulations escalated into violent clashes between rival student groups, with reports of pushing, shouting, and scuffles outside the Arts Faculty gate. Videos of the confrontation circulated on social media, prompting police intervention. Police later registered cross-FIRs after complaints from both sides.

A YouTuber identifying herself as a Brahmin journalist alleged that she was assaulted and subjected to "rape threats by a mob of nearly 500 people".

Videos shared by AISAs members and others showed she made casteist remarks and shoved a woman to the ground too.

STUDENT, TEACHER GROUPS DEMAND ROLLBACK OF DU'S ORDER

New Delhi: After Delhi

University on Tuesday

barred public meetings,

processions and protests on

campus for a month,

several student and

teachers' groups demanded

that the order be

withdrawn, calling it

unconstitutional and

anti-student. Students' and

teachers' bodies said

that the order stands in

violation of constitutional

rights and acts of violence

against teachers, students

and non-teaching staff by

organised groups who are

raising their voices for

social justice and equitable

implementation of UGC

regulations."

order "is a draconian measure designed not to maintain peace, but to stifle legitimate democratic expression," and argued that it contravenes Article 19 (Freedom of Speech and Expression) of the Constitution.

The National Students' Union of India (NSUI) termed the move authoritarian in a statement. Its national president Varun Choudhary said the decision was a "calculated attempt by the Government to crush the democratic spirit of campuses and silence SC, ST, and OBC students who are raising their voices for social justice and equitable implementation of UGC regulations."

CM approves ₹802.18 cr project to redevelop 241 major roads

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Tuesday approved a project worth over ₹802.18 crore for the redevelopment of more than 241 major roads using advanced technology across the city to make them pothole-free, even and long-lasting.

Spanning over 400 km across 45 assembly constituencies, the Central Government will contribute ₹643.36 crore, while the Delhi government will pitch in with ₹158.82 crore, she said. The large-scale and comprehensive road improvement project will be completed by the end of the year, the Chief Minister added.

The roads identified for upgradation include August Kranti Marg in Malviya Nagar, Outer Ring Road, Rao Tula Ram Marg, Kapashera-Bijwasan Road, Najafgarh-



Jharoda Road, Captain Gaur Marg in Kalkaji, Lala Lajpat Rai Marg in Greater Kailash, Dr K.N. Katju Marg in Rohini, Shambhavi Marg in Chandni Chowk, D.B. Gupta Road in Karol Bagh, ESI Hospital Road in Shahdara, Tanda Stand Road in Seemapuri, Preet Vihar Road, Patparganj Road, Khichripur Road, Khudiram Bose Road,

Khajuri Flyover, Gokulpuri Flyover, Zero Pusta Road, Seelampur Road and Loni Road, among others.

Giving details, Rekha Gupta said all roads will be developed under the 'wall-to-wall carpeting' model to ensure that construction work is not partial but carried out across the full width with uniform quality.

She described the initiative as a significant step towards making the Capital safer, more organised and future-ready.

The Chief Minister noted that often only the central portion of roads or isolated potholes are repaired, resulting in deterioration after a short period. Under the new system, entire stretches will be uniformly strengthened from edge to edge, enhancing durability and lifespan. A fully levelled and sealed surface across the complete width will also lead to a marked reduction in dust and air pollution.

Damaged roads generate loose soil and fine particles that become airborne due to vehicular movement, contributing significantly to pollution. The new approach will help reduce particulate matter (PM) levels and improve cleanliness and air quality in surrounding areas.

Work will be undertaken in phases to minimise traffic disruption and public inconvenience. The Public Works Department (PWD) of the Delhi Government will execute the project.

The Chief Minister clarified that the objective is not merely repair but a long-term solution. Each road will undergo a technical assessment of the base layer, necessary strengthening, proper drainage arrangements and final carpeting in accordance with prescribed standards. This will help reduce waterlogging during the monsoon and ensure long-term road safety.

The Government aims to build roads that last for years and provide citizens with safe and reliable travel. She also informed that last year approximately 150 kilometres of roads were constructed in Delhi using the same technology.

Police save stunt biker from angry crowd

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

A late-night motorcycle stunt celebrating India's cricket victory nearly triggered a law and order situation in Old Rajender Nagar.



The incident occurred around 11.30 pm on February 15 on Bada Bazar Road under the Rajender Nagar police station. Police said the rider performed dangerous stunts and rode in a rash and negligent way on a public road.

This posed a serious threat to pedestrians and other commuters. The rider caused havoc, leading an angry crowd to gather and attempt to assault him.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) Anant Mittal said the timely intervention of patrolling staff prevented the situation from spiralling out of control. "Our officers acted swiftly. They not only apprehended the rider but

also shielded him from an aggressive crowd. Their prompt action averted a major law and order problem," he said.

According to the police, when they received information about a biker creating chaos in the area, the team immediately rushed to the spot and apprehended the rider along with his motorcycle bearing registration number DL 6SBM 0533. The accused was identified as Mohit Sharma, resident of Old Rajender Nagar.

During interrogation, Sharma said he was celebrating India's cricket victory. In his excitement, he began doing stunts on the motorcycle in the middle of the road. Police said he admitted to riding recklessly without considering others' safety. Officials also found he was not wearing a protective helmet as required by Section 129 of the Motor Vehicles Act.

As police began questioning him at the spot, a large crowd gathered. Witnesses said several bystanders were angered by the stunt riding, which had endangered lives. The crowd soon turned aggressive. Some individuals allegedly attempted to physically assault the rider.

Sensing the risk of mob violence, police officials quickly formed a protective cover around the accused. They tactfully dispersed the crowd and escorted him safely from the area. Police said their calm handling of the situation prevented possible grievous harm and further escalation.

PM Modi's Swachh Bharat vision is now Delhi's mission

Rekha Government's 'Trash to Transformation Model': A Historic Step Toward a Clean, Healthy and Self-Reliant Delhi



For decades, the landfill sites at Ghazipur, Bhalswa, and Okhla stood as painful reminders of Delhi's waste crisis. These sites are not just heaps of garbage but also symbols of pollution, health risks, and poor urban management. Today, Delhi is at a turning point as the Chief Minister Rekha Gupta-led Delhi government no longer sees waste as a burden, but as a resource. The Rekha government has made it clear that removing garbage mountains is not just about cleaning the city, but it is about using technology, fixed timelines, and transparent systems to deliver real change that improves daily life for citizens.

Mission Mode for a Landfill-Free Delhi

The promise made to the people is now visible on the ground. The Delhi government has set a target to eliminate legacy waste from Bhalswa and Okhla landfills by 2026-27. Further, work is moving ahead under the 3-T model of Technology, Transparency, and Target.

Earlier, only 7,500 metric tonnes of waste were processed per day. Now the capacity has increased to more than 35,000 metric tonnes per day. This means Delhi is not only managing new waste but also clearing decades-old garbage at a faster pace. For residents, this results in cleaner surroundings, reduced foul smell, and better public health conditions.

Through continuous bio-mining, about 76.65 lakh metric tonnes of waste have already been treated across the three landfill sites, and 45 acres of land has been reclaimed. It is pertinent to note that the garbage mountains that once rose nearly 60 meters high at Bhalswa and Okhla have now reduced to 30 to 40 meters. This visible reduction means cleaner air and safer neighborhoods for nearby communities.

Turning Waste into Wealth: The Delhi Way

A major shift in policy is that waste is now being converted into energy and income. The waste-to-energy plant at Narela-Bawana processes 3,000 tonnes of waste every day. Work has also begun to increase the capacity of the Okhla plant to 2,950 tonnes per day. This ensures that garbage is converted into electricity instead of polluting the environment, directly benefiting households through cleaner power generation.

For wet waste management, bio-gas and CBG plants are being developed. At Nangli in Najafgarh, India's first 200 TPD cow dung-based bio-gas plant has been operational. It produces clean energy and strengthens the local rural economy. Dairy owners receive 65 paise per kilogram for cow dung, creating an additional source of income. This also reduces untreated waste flowing into the Yamuna, which improves environmental health for the entire city.

The clear instruction is simple. Waste must not

be burned. It must be scientifically processed. This reduces air pollution and generates clean fuel and organic manure. For traders and nearby residents, this means a cleaner work environment and better air quality.

Going Beyond Cleanliness

The approach of the Delhi government has gone beyond cleanliness. The results of this transformation are multi-dimensional. Reduction in landfill size is lowering



From Political Will to Real Results

Regular review meetings, fixed timelines, and ground inspections under the CM Rekha Gupta-led government have accelerated this mission. For the first time, waste management has moved beyond paperwork to measurable outcomes. This is improving the quality of life for Delhi's residents in a visible and meaningful way.

From Cleanliness to Self-Reliance

Delhi's changing skyline shows that long-standing problems can be solved with clear intent and strong policy action. Garbage mountains are gradually turning into green energy, reclaimed land, and cleaner air. This is not just about sanitation. It is about rebuilding Delhi's identity as a cleaner, healthier, and more self-reliant city.

pollution levels

- Waste is being processed locally in a scientific manner
- Green energy production is increasing
- Dairy and rural communities are getting new income opportunities

This approach is moving Delhi toward a circular economy where waste becomes a resource. The direct benefit for citizens is better health, cleaner neighborhoods, and new economic opportunities.



IN FOCUS



Workers sort red chillies after harvest on the outskirts of Gandhinagar on Tuesday

PTI

HP's first trout hub to be set up in Kangra

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dharamshala



The picturesque Boh Valley in Himachal Pradesh's Kangra district is set to gain a new identity as the state's first dedicated trout fish hub is being developed.

Located about 25 kilometres north of Shahpur, the valley renowned for its breathtaking natural beauty is now poised to emerge as a centre for trout production alongside tourism promotion. Trout — a cold water, freshwater fish — thrives in the clear, fast-flowing rivers and streams of the Himalayas. In Himachal Pradesh, rainbow and brown trout — introduced from Europe — are found in Pabbar, Beas, Tirthan, Uhl and Baspa rivers. These waters provide the low temperatures and high oxygen levels essential for trout growth and reproduction.

The fish is prized for angling, cuisine and aquaculture. Shahpur MLA and Deputy Chief Whip Kewal Singh Pathania on Tuesday said the announcement to establish a trout hub in Kangra was made in the first budget of the current Congress Government. An amount of Rs 3.03 crore was approved for the project, he

said, adding that most of the work has been completed, including the construction of a trout hatchery in Boh. The trout hub would not only strengthen the local economy but also give a significant boost to tourism in the region, Pathania said.

The residents have been encouraged to adopt trout farming as an eco-friendly enterprise. To support their marketing, five motorcycles equipped with ice boxes have been provided and one more is set to be added shortly.

Moreover, two fish kiosks would be set up in Shahpur and Dharamshala to facilitate better sales. Rakesh Kumar, Assistant Director, Fisheries Department, Palampur, said the Dharakundi valley holds immense potential for trout cultivation.

West Bengal chief secretary sends compliance report to ECI ahead of Assembly elections

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi



Nandini Chakravarty
examined the same on its return from the review tour," an official said.

Chakravarty was called by the EC as she took over as the chief secretary in January this year. West Bengal is set to have assembly elections in the next two months.

Besides, the EC top brass also wanted to discuss pending issues with her, the functionary added.

In a meeting with Chakravarty on February 13, the EC had asked her to comply by February 17 with its directions, including payment of enhanced remuneration to BLOs and lodging of FIRs against errant officials who wilfully violated norms during the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise. The EC has pulled up the West Bengal Government for not releasing the increased honorarium for booth level officers (BLOs) and the additional

payment approved for the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

In August last year, the poll panel had doubled the annual remuneration of BLOs from Rs 6,000 to Rs 12,000, and raised the payment for BLO supervisors from Rs 12,000 to Rs 18,000. It also approved an honorarium for electoral registration officers (EROs) and assistant electoral registration officers (AEROS). Another key issue is the EC's directions to the State Government to lodge FIRs against errant officials who "wilfully flouted" norms.

'Bihar has 31.71 lakh Lakhpatti Didis'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Patna



wings, and their respect in society increases even more." The House passed the department's budget by voice vote, even as opposition members walked out, maintaining that they were not convinced by the Government's reply related to the rural development in the state. "A Lakhpatti Didi is a self-help group member who earns an annual house-

hold income of Rs 1 lakh or more. This income is calculated for at least four agricultural seasons and/or business cycles, with an average monthly income exceeding ₹10,000, so that it is sustainable. Lakhpatti initiative facilitates diversified livelihood activities, by ensuring convergence across all Government departments and market players.

Their (Lakhpatti Didis) hard work has changed the village, changed the society, and also changed the status of the family", the minister said. The Lakhpatti Didi scheme was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in August 2023.

Five held for impersonating candidates during teacher recruitment exam

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Jaipur



and Jalore in connection with an ongoing probe into alleged irregularities in the Rajasthan Public Service Commission (RPSC) Senior Teacher (Secondary Education) Second Grade Competitive Examination-2022. Additional Director General of Police, SOG, Vishal Bansal said complaints were received that certain candi-

dates had fraudulently cleared the examination by sending dummy candidates on their behalf and secured appointments as senior teachers. Following a preliminary inquiry, the case was registered and a special investigation team (SIT) was constituted to probe the matter.

The ADG said three MBBS students and two Government school teachers were arrested for allegedly appearing in the examination in place of original candidates in exchange for amounts ranging from ₹3 lakh to ₹5 lakh.

"detected, deleted and deported" and should not be provided employment.

He also said Hindu families should consider having at least three children, citing scientific opinions that societies with an average fertility rate of below three could disappear in the future. Bhagwat said newly-married couples should be made aware of this and added that the purpose of marriage is to carry forward creation, not merely fulfilling one's own desires.

Bhagwat said a lack of harmony leads to discrimination and stressed that all citizens share one country and one motherland.

RSS chief pitches for 3 children in Hindu families

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Lucknow



and said inducement—or coercion-based religious conversions should be stopped.

He also emphasised accelerating efforts to bring people back to the Hindu fold and ensuring their

welfare." There is a need to unite and empower Hindus. There is no threat to us but vigilance is necessary," the RSS chief said.

Raising concerns over infiltration, Bhagwat said infiltrators should be

a month. According to the police, the Bharat Mandapam area has been divided into 10 security zones, each supervised by a Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP)-rank officer. SWAT commandos, bomb disposal squads and dog squads have also been placed on high alert.

The Special Cell of the Delhi Police is monitoring any activities to prevent any attempt by anti-national elements to disrupt law and order or affect the country's image during the high-profile gathering.

Tarique Rahman sworn in as Prime Minister...

Rahman's assumption of office marks the first time in decades that a male leader has held the premiership in the country of roughly 170 million people.

The BNP has also declined to take an additional oath as members of a proposed Constitution Reform Commission associated with the "July Charter" referendum held alongside the general election. Party leaders have maintained that the council's provisions have not yet been formally incorporated into the Constitution.

With a strong parliamentary majority and renewed diplomatic engagement from key regional partners, the new Government now faces the task of translating electoral momentum into policy action and stability for Bangladesh.

J&K would regain Statehood very soon: Meghwal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Jammu

Union Minister for Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal on Tuesday raised hopes among the people of Jammu and Kashmir by stating that the restoration of statehood to the region would happen soon.

Speaking to reporters in Srinagar after attending an event at the Sher-i-Kashmir International Conference Centre, Meghwal described the matter as a "very sensitive issue" but reaffirmed the Centre's commitment.

Citing Union Home Minister Amit Shah's earlier assurance in the Lok Sabha

that statehood would be restored, adding: "You will get it, but there is a process for it. I feel you will soon get to hear about a decision in this regard."

The statement has reignited hopes in the Union Territory, which lost its statehood following the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019 and its reorganisation into two Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, who also attended the event alongside the Union Minister, responded cautiously, noting that no one in Jammu and Kashmir would be fully satisfied until statehood is restored, and

expressed hope that the wait would not drag on much longer. "I heard on the sidelines that the Union Minister said that we will be hearing good news soon."

"It has been one and a half years of waiting. We hope we do not have to wait much longer," Abdullah told reporters.

The chief minister said no one in Jammu and Kashmir will be satisfied till it is done. "The process is on, (though) it is taking longer. We were expecting to get it by now, but we have not got it yet. We have not given up hope, we are talking to the Centre on it continuously," he added.



Union Minister of State Arjun Ram Meghwal and Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah present an award during the Regional Workshop on Tele-Law Activities at SKICC in Srinagar

PTI

Pakistani spy serves 17 years in UP jail, deported

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Saharanpur

which ended 11 months ago. Since being released on March 22 last year, he was housed in the Saharanpur detention centre under tight security. After the completion of all paperwork, he was deported to Pakistan on Monday night under tight security, a senior police official said.

"Iqbal Bhatti alias Devraj Sehgal, a Pakistani citizen who completed his 17-year jail sentence for spying, was deported to his country on Monday night under tight security, a senior police official said.

"Iqbal Bhatti was handed over to Pakistani authorities at the Wagah border," Additional Superintendent of Police Manoj Yadav told PTI, adding that the man underwent a medical examination at the Saharanpur district hospital on Monday night. Bhatti had served a 17-year sentence in Gautam Budh Nagar district jail,

Using this Hakikat Nagar address and forged documents, he obtained voter ID, PAN and also opened an account with the State Bank of India. However, the bank's chief manager, who sensed discrepancies,

Akhilesh slams Yogi over Ahilyabai's broken idol

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Lucknow



Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday slammed Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for the alleged damage to an idol of Ahilyabai Holkar, a visionary queen of the erstwhile Maratha kingdom, and other heritage structures during a redevelopment drive at Varanasi's Manikarnika Ghat.

"The chief minister got the idol of Rajmata Ahilyabai Holkar's idol broken," Yadav told reporters after a programme here, adding that members of the Sanatan and the Pal communities were "very angry" with the chief

minister over the issue. The SP chief further claimed that around "a hundred temples" had been demolished in Varanasi and that a bell donated by the King of Nepal had gone missing. The SP chief's remarks come after a contro-

versy surrounding a redevelopment drive at the historic Manikarnika Ghat last month, which triggered protests by locals and members of Pal Samaj Samiti, who claimed that heritage sites were being damaged in the name of redevelopment, a charge rejected by the district administration. Manikarnika Ghat is among the oldest and most sacred cremation grounds in Hinduism. It is widely believed that those cremated there achieve 'moksha' or liberation from the cycle of rebirth. The district administration has denied the allegations of destruction, maintaining that no temple was demolished or damaged.

The redevelopment project at Manikarnika Ghat includes modernising the site with new amenities, including a wood plaza, VIP seating and flood-resistant cremation facilities. While officials insist the project aims to improve the sacred area, the use of heavy machinery and bulldozers last month sparked protests and led to claims that ancient structures and small temples were damaged.

District Magistrate Satyendra Kumar had earlier said some idols and artefacts found during excavation have been preserved and would be reinstalled once the construction work is completed.

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Political parties urged the polls be conducted in a single phase or two phases. They also asked the ECI to schedule the polls keeping in mind the Bihu festival, an official release said.

The political parties, in general, appreciated the conduct of the Special Revision of the electoral rolls in Assam. The parties also gave suggestions for ensuring the peaceful conduct of elections in the state, the release added.

Last time, assembly polls in West Bengal were held in eight phases — by far the maximum. In Assam, elections were held in two phases, and in a single phase in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry. Of the poll-bound States, Puducherry was the first one to publish its final electoral roll on February 14. Tamil Nadu will publish its post-SIR final poll roll on Tuesday, while Kerala will do so

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recent years. Defence cooperation featured prominently in the discussions.

April polls likely in five States

Among the national parties, Aam Aadmi Party, BJP, CPI(M) and Congress attended the meeting, while among the state parties, All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), Bodoland People's Front (BPF) and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) held separate meetings with the Commission.

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on February 21. West Bengal's final voters' list will be published on February 28. In Assam, where a 'special revision' of electoral rolls took place in place of SIR, the final list was published on February 10.

AI fails to prevent traffic mess

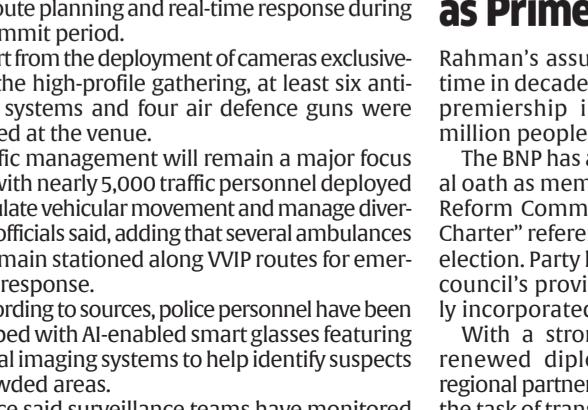
Police said access to the venue will remain strictly regulated through QR code-based accreditation, while a dedicated coordination cell has been set up to oversee intelligence sharing, traffic regulation, route planning and real-time response during the summit period.

Apart from the deployment of cameras exclusively for the high-profile gathering, at least six anti-drone systems and four air defence guns were installed at the venue.

Traffic management will remain a major focus area, with nearly 5,000 traffic personnel deployed to regulate vehicular movement and manage diversions, officials said, adding that several ambulances will remain stationed along VIP routes for emergency response.

According to sources, police personnel have been equipped with AI-enabled smart glasses featuring thermal imaging systems to help identify suspects in crowded areas.

Police said surveillance teams have monitored suspected elements and repeat protesters for nearly





22 Naxalites surrender in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district



As many as 22 Naxalites surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Tuesday, police said. The cadres, including a woman, turned themselves in before senior police and CRPF officials here under the 'Poona Margem' (New Dawn) rehabilitation scheme of the government, Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan said.

Jharkhand speaker Mahato chairs all-party meeting

Jharkhand Assembly Speaker Rabindra Nath Mahato on Tuesday held an all-party meeting and sought the cooperation of all MLAs for the smooth functioning of the House during the Budget session. The session will be held from February 18 to March 19. The state budget for the 2026-27 fiscal will be tabled on February 24. CM Hemant Soren, Leader of Opposition Babul Marandi, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Radhakrishna Kishore were among those who attended the meeting.



Tina Ambani skips ED summons for second time



Reliance Group chairperson Anil Ambani's wife Tina Ambani on Tuesday skipped the ED summons for the second time on Tuesday. The former actor, summoned in connection with a money laundering case, did not appear before the federal probe agency on February 10 following which she was issued the fresh notice.

Screenwriter Salim Khan admitted to Mumbai hospital

Veteran screenwriter Salim Khan, credited for writing celebrated Hindi films such as "Sholay", "Deewar" and "Don" with Javed Akhtar, was admitted to the ICU of Lilavati hospital in Bandra on Tuesday. The 90-year-old was taken into hospital in the morning, a hospital insider said. Details about his health condition are not yet known. As concern mounted, his children, superstar Salman Khan, daughter Alvira, and sons-in-law Atul Agnihotri and Ayush Sharma were seen going into the hospital.



Kharge slams 'chaos' at AI Impact Summit; cites mismanagement

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday claimed that the chaos and mismanagement at the ongoing AI Impact Summit here is giving the country global embarrassment due to the incompetence of the Government.

He also said the Summit could have been used for showcasing India's digital and Artificial Intelligence (AI) capabilities instead.

"What could have been a showpiece AI Summit for the entire world, demonstrating the digital and AI capabilities of India, has reportedly turned into utter chaos and rank mismanagement by this 'PR hungry' Government!" Kharge



Visitors during the India AI Impact Summit 2026 at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on Tuesday

PTI

said in a social media post.

He alleged that founders, exhibitors and visitors had to face extreme distress due to the prime minister "gatecrashing" for a "photo opportunity" on the very first day (Monday) of the five-day Summit.

"Exhibitors are left without food and water, their products are stolen, Digi Yatra miserably fails, laptops, personal electronic devices and even bags are prohibited, only cash instead of digital/UPI payment is accepted, and founders are made to pay huge sums without basic facilities, among many other reasons

of distress," the Congress chief claimed.

"It is extremely unfortunate that our country has to suffer this global embarrassment due to the incompetence of our own Government," Kharge said. Perhaps, the Modi Government should learn from the Bengaluru Tech Summit (BTS), which is an annual feature, in smoothly organising such large-scale digital and tech congregations, the Congress president suggested.

In a post on its social media handle, the Congress said, "Absolute mayhem. Horrifying chaos. Zero civic sense. The India AI Summit, an event meant to showcase India's AI ambitions to the world, soon turned into a chaotic, poorly managed photo op for PM Modi."

Pakistan duo who fled Jammu juvenile home held in Ludhiana

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

In less than twenty-four hours, a joint team of Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab police, with the help of central intelligence agencies, tracked and arrested two Pakistani nationals from a village in Ludhiana on Tuesday.

Exposing the loopholes in the security apparatus, the Pakistani nationals escaped from a juvenile home without facing any resistance, after opening fire on the policemen on duty in the Ranbir Singh Pura area of Jammu late Monday evening.

However, the local gangster who also escaped with them remained at large, and efforts are on to arrest him.

Meanwhile, taking strict note of the major breach of security, six police personnel, including an assistant sub-inspector, were suspended over alleged dereliction of duty leading to the escape of three inmates from a juvenile home.

A separate FIR under sections 109 (attempt to murder), 132 (assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of duty), 262 (resisting, obstructing, or escaping from lawful custody), 307 (theft with preparation to cause death, hurt or restrain), 111 (organised crime) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sahita and sections 3 and 25 under Arms Act (unauthorised possession, carriage,



their hands on a country-made pistol and whether the security of the observation home was compromised due to complacency.

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use of firearms) has been registered to carry out the investigations in the case.

The Director General of Police (DGP) Nalin Prabhakar and Inspector General, Jammu Zone, Bhim Sen Tuti, along with other officers, rushed to the spot late Monday evening and took stock of the situation. The top brass of the police also faced a piquant situation as CCTV footage of the shooting inside the juvenile home also went viral on various social media platforms.

Former DGP SP Vaid questioned the police over the incident. He pointed out that all three inmates had already ceased to be juveniles. "One of the inmates procured a locally-made 'katta' (crude pistol), and all three escaped, possibly trying to cross the border. I am sure police teams will catch them before they do," Vaid said in a post on X.

Macron jogs at Mumbai's Marine Drive, pays homage to 26/11 attack victims

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Mumbai

French President Emmanuel Macron arrived in Mumbai early on Tuesday and began his day by jogging at the iconic Marine Drive near the Coastal Road.

He and First Lady Brigitte Macron later also paid floral tributes to those killed in the November 2008 terror attack at the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel in south Mumbai.

The French president is scheduled to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Lok Bhawan in south Mumbai, where the two leaders will review the progress made in the India-France strategic partnership.



Macron kicked off the day with a jog at the Marine Drive promenade. He was accompanied by his security personnel.

The Mumbai police also maintained tight security in the vicinity.

During the Mumbai visit, Modi and Macron's discussions will focus on cementing the strategic ties and further diversifying them into new and emerging areas.

Both leaders will also exchange views on issues of regional and global importance. They will review the progress made in the India-France strategic partnership.

President Macron is on an official visit to India from February 17 to 19 at the invitation of PM Modi to participate in the AI Impact Summit hosted by India, as well as hold a bilateral summit with the latter in Mumbai.

This is President Macron's fourth visit to India and his first visit to Mumbai.

Sonia Gandhi asked me to decide 2014 swearing-in date: Himanta

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday claimed that then Congress president Sonia Gandhi had asked him to decide on the date for his swearing in as CM when 58 party MLAs had supported him in 2014.

The scenario, however, changed after Rahul Gandhi, who was then in the USA, made phone calls to party leaders, Sarma told reporters.

"Madam (Sonia Gandhi), whom I still refer to as such, had asked me to decide on the date, and I had told her that I would take oath the day after the Ambubachi Mela at Kamakhya Temple in June (2014)," Sarma said.

The situation changed after Rahul Gandhi made the calls, he said.



Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma meeting former PCC president Bhupen Borah at the latter's residence in Guwahati on Tuesday evening after the meeting CM announced Borah will join BJP on February 22 PIONEER PICTURE

"I was hurt then, but now I believe that whatever happens in one's life is for the best and God has given me much more than what I would have got, had I remained in the Congress," he said.

"As the BJP CM, I got a chance to serve both Assam and

Sanatan Dharma wholeheartedly, which would not have been possible had I been in the Congress. I thank Rahul Gandhi for this," Sarma, who became the chief minister in 2021, added. He said that he would elaborate on these developments if he ever writes a book.

"When Mallikarjun Kharge had then come to the State, 58 Congress MLAs had supported me; some leaders remained neutral, and only 12 had said the status quo should remain," Sarma claimed. Justice was not given to "me, but Kharge always told my opponents in the party: you fight with Himanta, but he has the MLAs", the CM said.

"These are facts, and there are many witnesses to this, but I am thankful that it did not happen as I would have become tainted for eternity", he said. Referring to his allegations against State Congress president Gaurav Gogoi of having Pakistani links, the CM claimed that, along with the people of the State, members of that Opposition party are also finding it difficult to accept it. As the election

approaches, many more leaders will speak out.

Sarma claimed that he had said way back in 2012 that he would not bow before leaders who "parachute land" in the state.

"Cabinet ministers in the then State Government had been directed to attend Gaurav Gogoi's meetings. I had refused, saying that I hold a constitutional post and I will not go, but he can attend my public meetings. This antagonised the then leaders of the party," he said.

He claimed that people do not know the real reasons why he resigned from the Cabinet and then the Congress, but "one day they will". Sarma had resigned from then Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi's cabinet in 2014 and from the party in 2015.

Indian Navy to host 5th Goa Maritime Conclave on February 21

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

The Indian Navy is set to host on February 21, the fifth edition of the Goa Maritime Conclave — a premier platform that harnesses the collective wisdom and operational expertise of security practitioners from the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) to generate practical solutions to contemporary maritime challenges.

The maritime domain in the IOR faces a "wide spectrum of traditional and non-traditional challenges", with significant implications for regional security and livelihoods, the defence ministry said on Tuesday.

"The transnational and



multi-dimensional nature of these threats necessitates enhanced cooperation and effective collaborative mechanisms among partner countries," it said in a statement.

The fifth edition of Goa Maritime Conclave (GMC) 2026 is scheduled to be held at the Naval War College, Goa, on February 21.

"As a flagship strategic initiative of the Indian Navy, the conclave has evolved into a premier platform that harnesses the collective

wisdom and operational experience of maritime security practitioners from the IOR to generate outcome-oriented ideas and practical solutions to contemporary maritime challenges," the ministry said.

Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth will be the chief guest at the event.

Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi will host chief of navies, heads of maritime forces, and senior representatives from 14 nations — Bangladesh, Comoros, Indonesia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Myanmar, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Tanzania.

The theme of this year's edition is 'Common Maritime Security Challenges in the

Haryana law & order to be a model for nation: CM Saini

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Chandigarh

Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Tuesday said that the Government is committed to establishing Haryana's law and order as a model in the country by strengthening the police force with modern resources, improved infrastructure, and state-of-the-art training. He said that ₹300 crore is being spent on the modernisation of the police, while the recruitment process for 5,500 new police personnel is underway.

Saini was addressing the valediction ceremony of the sixth batch of the SWAT Commando Course at the



Commando Training Centre in Panchkula, as the chief guest. During the course, 88 personnel received training in modern weapons and specialised operational skills.

On the occasion, Saini inaugurated a firing simulator constructed at a cost of ₹85 lakh. This state-of-the-art facility integrates modern technology with training and provides personnel with an accurate experience of

real-time situations. The simulator enables them to practice complex scenarios without risk, improves reaction time, and enhances firing accuracy. It will make training more effective, scientific, and result-oriented, an official statement said.

Saini said that the Commando Training Centre, Panchkula, was established in 1984 and has been formally imparting commando training since March 4, 1985.

Keeping in view the emerging security challenges at the time, the centre was conceived to prepare a highly trained force for special operations.

MP Bishnu Pada Ray demands Central University for Andaman & Nicobar Islands

VIPUL DHASMANA

■ Sri Vijaya Puram

Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) Bishnu Pada Ray, Andaman and Nicobar Islands (A&NI), has urged the Prime Minister and Home Minister for their urgent intervention in taking a decision to establish a Central University (as in Ladakh) in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in place of Deemed to be University. Further, till such time the Central University is established, the affiliation of all colleges in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands be continued with Pondicherry University.

Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) Bishnu Pada Ray, Andaman and Nicobar Islands. For the first time, remotest Nicobar island's

requested the Prime Minister and Home Minister for establishing a Central University instead of proposed Deemed to be University in December last year, but there was no response from the Union Government, despite the matter being forwarded to the Ministry of Home Affairs for necessary action. A suitable assurance should be issued in this regard so that the ongoing dharna and peaceful protest of the students, which commenced on February 3, can be called off.

It may be recalled that students' protest against establishing of a 'Deemed to be University' was a huge success on Monday in the entire Andaman and Nicobar Islands. For the first time, remotest Nicobar island's

students and citizens also extended their wholehearted support. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are spread over a long length, which makes access to the scattered islands of Nicobar difficult to communicate, but, the social media reduced the distances across the Andaman Sea.

Many students from remote and inaccessible islands of Nicobar reside in Sri Vijaya Puram for their higher studies by paying a price that most of them are unable to afford, and they face tremendous economic pressure. With the establishment of the proposed Deemed to be University, they won't stand a chance to undergo professional studies in medical, law and engineering

colleges. Pondicherry University provides the most affordable and quality higher education, which they want to continue, said a Nicobari parent at the protest site in Sri Vijaya Puram.

Life has become normal since this morning. Shops, transportation, etc., which were completely shut down

remote of remotest. Citizens of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands have shown historic support against an issue which is being forced onto them. I just joined everyone by staying back in my home. I have two children, and I only know how I slog day and night in the heat and rain so that I could provide a better education to my children. Students know what is best for them, and we as parents will always support their decision, come what may be, he concluded.

Meanwhile, MP (LS) A&NI informed in the press release that the criticality of the situation can be judged by the fact that many young leaders of the party and existing PRI members have resigned from their posts and party in protest. This is an alarming situation. BJP party's position is critical, particularly due to the unsolicited statement of the State President, Andaman and Nicobar Islands favoring Deemed to be University in a function held on 15th February on the Union Budget, in the presence of MoS George Kurian.

This singular flash news has acted as adding fuel to the fire and was one of the main reasons for the successful bandh across the territory on Monday.





States Focus



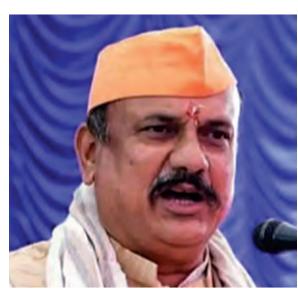
PRESIDENT MURMU ARRIVES IN VISHAKHAPATNAM FOR IFR

President Droupadi Murmu arrived in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday to participate in the International Fleet Review (IFR) on February 18. Andhra Pradesh Governor S Abdul Nazeer welcomed the President at the Naval Air Station Dega. "President of India Droupadi Murmu arrived in Vizag to witness the IFR on February 18," an official release from the Lok Bhawan said. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu is expected to attend the IFR on Wednesday in the port city. The IFR is being hosted by the Indian Navy in Visakhapatnam from February 15 to 25.



13 IRRAWADDY DOLPHINS SEEN AT RUSHIKULYA ESTUARY

The Rushikulya river mouth in Odisha's Ganjam district, which is known for the mass nesting of the endangered Olive Ridley Turtles, was found as a potential habitat for Irrawaddy dolphins, a forest officer said on Tuesday. The forest department officials have sighted the congregation of 13 such critically endangered dolphins near Bateshwar under Khallikot forest range during the counting of the sea mammals, he said. The three-day dolphin census was carried out between January 20 and 22.



Maharashtra Congress chief apologises over Shivaji-Tipu remark controversy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Mumbai

Facing flak for his remarks drawing parallels between Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Tipu Sultan, Maharashtra Congress chief Harshwardhan Sapkal on Tuesday apologised, saying he didn't intend to hurt sentiments.

He reiterated that his remarks were "deliberately distorted" to create social tension as part of a malicious agenda by the BJP.

The Congress leader stated on X that his original remarks were intended to promote unity by displaying portraits of various national icons

India-US trade deal won't harm farmers: Shivraj

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Jaipur

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday said the recent India-US trade deal was finalised after careful consideration, and the Government has ensured that no decision would harm the farming community.

Speaking at a programme in Jaipur, he said, "I am speaking with full responsibility as the Agriculture Minister of India. In the trade agreement, we have taken complete care of the interests of Indian farmers.

It has been ensured that there will be no loss for India's farming community."



he said. On imports, Chouhan said the country has to bring in the things it needs.

"Even today, we are not self-sufficient when it comes to pulses. If something that we need comes from another country, what is the objection?" he asked. Similarly, he

cotton, he said the textile industry faces shortages. "When cotton production falls short, we have to import," the minister said.

Chouhan said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is leveling false allegations on a daily basis.

"There is one leader who is a part-time politician and a full-time dramatist. He neither understands trade nor tradition. Those who have never seen villages and farms are making allegations every day," he said.

The Union minister asked why the former United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government had refused to implement the Swaminathan Committee report, which rec-

ommended that Minimum Support Price (MSP) should be fixed at 50 per cent above the cost of production.

"The UPA Government filed an affidavit saying that this would distort the market. It was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who decided that MSP will be given at 50 per cent above cost," he said.

Chouhan asked why the Congress did not create a buffer stock when there was record sugar production in 2006-07.

"When prices fell, why were farmers not protected? What kind of trade was it to import sugar at ₹36 per kilogram and export it at ₹12.50?" he asked. He said India was self-reliant in edible oils till 1993-

94, but the Congress Government put them under open general licence, making the country dependent on imports. "There were thousands of tonnes of foodgrain lying in warehouses."

Even the Supreme Court had said it should be distributed to the poor. But the UPA Government said that the court should not interfere," he said. Chouhan said it is the NDA Government led by Narendra Modi that is providing free foodgrain to 80 crore poor people.

Farmers are "Annadata", he said, adding that the Government is working to promote the interests of farmers and empower them with technology.

CM Fadnavis sets green energy goal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday described climate change as an "urgent governance challenge", warning that coastal cities like Mumbai are now facing the direct impact of extreme weather conditions.

Speaking at the inauguration of Mumbai Climate Week (MCW), a citizen-led climate conference, Fadnavis called for stronger implementation, investment and global partnerships to tackle climate change. The chief minister inaugurated MCW, a three-day programme, which will include a conference, workshops, case studies, and discussions. He highlighted that



Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis speaking during the inauguration of Mumbai Climate Week in Mumbai

of green energy by 2030. The State is focusing on clean hydrogen, electric mobility, biofuels and sustainable infrastructure, he said, adding that climate action is not merely about compliance but also an opportunity for investment, competitiveness and job creation. Fadnavis pointed out that the Government is implementing large-scale initiatives in renewable energy, e-mobility and climate-smart urban planning.

He stressed the need to strengthen flood control systems, develop data-driven weather forecasting and build disaster-resilient infrastructure. In rural areas, the chief minister said the Government is prioritising climate-resilient agriculture and efficient water management practices.

Gujarat passes Bill allowing women to work night shifts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Gandhinagar



In a push to create job opportunities and improve work conditions, the Gujarat Legislative Assembly on Tuesday passed an amendment bill extending daily working hours and allowing women to work on night shifts in shops and commercial establishments.

The Gujarat Shops and Establishments (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) (Amendment) Bill, 2026, replaced an ordinance promulgated last year when the House was not in session. The Bill, introduced by the BJP

Government, was passed unanimously after discussion, with the Opposition Congress extending its support following assurances from Labour, Skill Development and Employment Minister Kunvarji Bavalia regarding proper safeguards and implementation.

remained a serious concern for the Government.

He said that the State's excise and narcotics department has taken sustained action, resulting in the arrest of 652 drug traffickers and the seizure of 487 kg of contraband drugs in the current financial year.

The Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition) Act, 2019, continued to be strictly enforced in the state, he said. The latest amended prohibition laws and rules notified in October last year allowed partial sale of liquor for foreign and domestic dignitaries, and the manufacture, sale and supply of wine and fruit beer made solely from locally produced agricultural and horticultural products.

Since then, 4,532 people have been arrested and 4,915 alcohol-related cases registered in a three-month span till December last year, the governor said.

Singh also said that the State Government has been making constant efforts to strengthen institutions in order to enhance law enforcement capacities across the State.

ATS, ICG seize 200 kg chemicals from Iranian boat



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Ahmedabad/New Delhi

The Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) and the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) have apprehended two Iranians, who "daringly" navigated a speedboat from Iran to Indian waters, attempting to smuggle more than 200 kg of a suspected chemical substance. In a joint operation, the two agencies intercepted an Iranian speedboat, about 140 nautical miles off the Porbandar coast, on Monday night, seizing 203 packets of white powder and apprehending the accused, ATS Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Sunil Joshi said.

"Packets containing a white powder chemical were recovered from the boat, and the substance has been sent to the Forensic Laboratory for testing. This chemical could not be identified in the primary heroin detection kit," he said.

Joshi said prima facie, it appears that the duo had travelled all the way from Iran on the speedboat. "The manner in which they travelled so far in a speedboat is quite daring. According to information, packets were to be received by a person from Punjab."

LJP(RV) seeks apology from RJD

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Patna



LJP(RV) on Tuesday demanded a public apology from Tejashwi Yadav in the Bihar Assembly over his party, RJD's alleged insult to former Union minister, the late Ram Vilas Paswan.

RJD's Bodh Gaya MLA Kumar Sarvjeet had last week described Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) founder, the late Ram Vilas Paswan, as a "bechara" (pitiable) in the context of his political journey.

Sarvjeet had then urged the Speaker to ensure the installation of a statue of Paswan at a prominent intersection in Patna to highlight his contributions to Bihar politics.

Speaking to reporters outside the Assembly, Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) State President Raju Tiwari said, "We demand that Tejashwi Yadav, as the RJD's leader of the leg-

islature party, apologise publicly in the House over the remarks. His leader has insulted a great man who had a 50-year unblemished political career and had worked with six prime ministers."

On being pointed out that Sarvjeet

had also demanded the installation of Ram Vilas Paswan's statue in Bihar, Tiwari said, "They should stop changing colours like a chameleon. They should first apologise for the insult to Ram Vilas Paswan ji."

We will then definitely deliberate upon installing a statue in his name." Sarvjeet, on the other hand, alleged that Tiwari was unable to digest his demand for the statue of Paswan, whom he called a "Dalit icon".

"Raju Tiwari is not able to digest the fact that a demand has been raised for the installation of a statue of an icon, who has been a messiah for Dalits in Bihar and has worked for the poor people belonging to all castes and religions," Sarvjeet claimed.

On the question of apology, he said that Raju Tiwari will have to "take seven births" to make him bow down to the demand for the installation of Ram Vilas Paswan's statue.

promises they make or fulfil some of them at the fag end of their Government's tenure, the BJP Government fulfils the key promises immediately after coming to power.

Saini talked about the fulfilment of key promises by his Government, which include the Deen Dayal Lado Lakshmi Yojana, the scheme which provides monthly financial assistance of ₹2,100 to eligible women aged 23 years and above.

"We had promised to the farmers of Haryana that 24 crops would be procured at the minimum support price (MSP)."

Today, Haryana is the first State in the country where 24 crops are procured at an MSP," he said.

He claimed that unlike the Opposition Congress and its allies, which don't fulfil the

Cow slaughter row: Rajasthan Assembly adjourned 5 times

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jaipur

Rajasthan Assembly was adjourned five times on Tuesday following heated exchanges between MLAs of the ruling party and Opposition Congress over cow slaughter issue.

During the Question Hour, BJP MLA Balmukundacharya raised the issue of illegal transportation and slaughter of bovines, and asked the Government whether it intends to give cow the status of "Gaumata" like some other States.

Replies to the question, Minister for Animal Husbandry and Gopalan, Joraram Kumawat, said the State Government will study rules and regulations under which other states have given that status. "The Government is fully dedicated to cow conservation and cow service. His question is whether the

Government is considering granting the cow the status of Raja Mata (State Mother). Currently, no such proposal is under consideration of the department," Kumawat said.

He said Rajasthan currently has a strict law under which cases are being registered against those involved in illegal transportation and slaughter of bovines.

Youth offers ganja to deity for likes; Hyderabad Police warn

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Hyderabad



VC Sajjanar, Hyderabad Police Commissioner

famous?" He called it a serious offence and said once the provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and

Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act are invoked, "you may have to regret it for the rest of your life". He further advised them not to sacrifice their golden future for the momentary pleasures of "likes and views".

He said, "Such actions will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Strict legal action will be taken against those responsible. Turn social media into a platform for your creativity...Not a gateway to addiction."

Meanwhile, sources said the Hyderabad Narcotics Enforcement Wing (H-NEW) team is looking into the incident.

remaining commitments are being completed, and work is going on at a rapid pace on 120 promises, Saini told a news conference.

In our *Sankalp Patra*, these were not promises for us, but 'Sankalp Patra' for us is like the holy Gita, Saini said.

Before the Vidhan Sabha election in 2024, we had said that our aim was to provide good governance, transparent administration, and ensure public welfare, he said.

He claimed that unlike the Opposition Congress and its allies, which don't fulfil the

promises they make or fulfil some of them at the fag end of their Government's tenure, the BJP Government fulfils the key promises immediately after coming to power.

Saini talked about the fulfilment of key promises by his Government, which include the Deen Dayal Lado Lakshmi Yojana, the scheme which provides monthly financial assistance of ₹2,100 to eligible women aged 23 years and above.

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"We had promised to



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**Karnataka High Court
quashes BJP's defamation
case against Rahul Gandhi**



The Karnataka High Court on Tuesday quashed the defamation proceedings initiated by the BJP against top Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. The case was filed in 2023, when BJP was in power in Karnataka, following a "corruption rate card" published by the then opposition Congress to claim large scale irregularities prevailing in the state under the saffron party's rule. Along with Gandhi, now Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, the BJP had accused the then Karnataka LoP Siddaramaiah and Congress State president DK Shivakumar.

Presently Siddaramaiah is the Chief Minister and Shivakumar is his deputy.

Challenging the defamation case, Gandhi had approached the High Court stating that the continuation of the case would be an abuse of law.

The bench of Justice S Sunil Dutt Yadav allowed the petition. The complainant said that Rahul Gandhi, Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar had conspired together to defame the BJP Government and made baseless allegation and insinuations.

**There is no country like that,
says SC after accused claims
to be citizen of Vanuatu**

There is no country like that, the Supreme Court said on Tuesday while hearing the bail plea of an accused who said he was a citizen of Vanuatu, a Pacific island nation. A bench of justices Vikram Nath, Sandeep Mehta and NV Anjaria was hearing a plea filed by the man who had challenged a Calcutta High Court order denying him bail in a cheating case.

His counsel told the bench that he was in custody for nearly one year and three months. "You are a citizen of which country," the bench asked.

When the lawyer said the petitioner was a citizen of Vanuatu, the bench asked, "Have you been there." As the lawyer said no, the bench observed, "There is no country like that. We also know a country called Kailasa. Similar to that."

Self-proclaimed fugitive godman Nithyananda claims to have set up a country called the "United States of Kailasa" in 2019. The counsel argued that the petitioner was already granted bail in four other cases. The bench then asked the lawyer appearing for West Bengal, "How much time will you take to conclude the trial?" The State's counsel said it was likely to conclude within six to eight months. The petitioner's counsel sought the court's permission to withdraw the petition.

**Satire, free speech should be protected: X to
Delhi HC on Ramdev's personality rights plea**

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Social media platform X on Tuesday told the Delhi High Court that any content in the realm of satire, fair comment and public speech should be protected from takedown orders in cases seeking protection of personality right.

Justice Jyoti Singh was hearing a lawsuit by Baba Ramdev alleging large-scale misappropriation and commercial exploitation of his personality, image, and identity across various online and social media platforms.

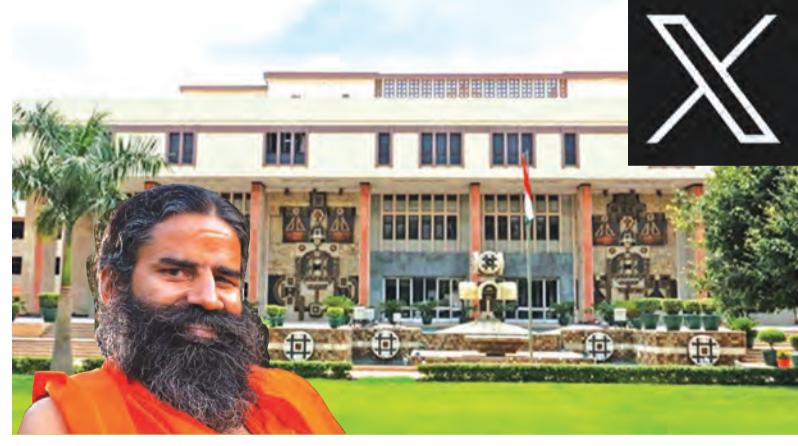
The counsel for X, formerly Twitter, opposed the "indiscriminate" blocking of accounts in personality right suits when there was nothing "egregious", saying such orders have a chilling effect on freedom of speech.

He also referred to a post mentioned in Ramdev's lawsuit, a meme, and contended that it was satire which was protected in a democracy.

"This is purely satire. How does this violate personality rights I fail to understand. This is protected. Satire, fair comment and public speech is protected from personality right. Satire is part of democracy. There is no democracy without free speech," he said.

X's counsel also said that one of the objectionable accounts on its platform, bearing his name, was merely a parody account, which should be protected in this case.

Along similar lines, counsel for Meta Platforms also said that while it was not opposed to taking down of egregious content, there must be some "tangible monetisation" by a third party, especially when a global



blocking order was being sought. He also stated that most offending content was of news organisations and in case of any grievance, Ramdev should sue them for any incorrect information.

"You can't have a personality right against a news channel in putting your name in a news article," the lawyer said as he raised concerns of impact on fair reporting.

Both X and Meta Platforms said they have taken down certain offending content. Counsel appearing for Ramdev said the social media platforms should be fair and the content in question was damaging his reputation.

In his lawsuit, Ramdev said several entities on social media platforms have published and circulated AI-generated deepfake videos, doctored images, etc, to commercially gain from and exploit various aspects of his personality, amounting to infringe-

ment of his personality and publicity rights and violating his fundamental rights under Article 21 of the Constitution of India.

"The pattern of AI-manipulation and impersonation carries the risk of irreversible dilution of the Plaintiff's spiritual persona where it was held that the sanctity of a spiritual leader's identity warrants heightened protection," the lawsuit said.

"The dissemination of these infringing materials is continuous, borderless, and capable of instantaneous replication, and persists despite the knowledge and hosting by major intermediaries such as Google (YouTube), Meta Platforms Inc. (Facebook/Instagram), 10 and X-Corp. The infringing content continues to be widely accessible within the territorial jurisdiction of this Hon'ble Court, resulting in recurring harm and a persistent cause of action," it added.

SC concerned over lawyers using AI tools to file petitions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

As India hosts the world's largest artificial intelligence conclave, the AI Impact Summit-2026, to make a big pitch for the new technology, the Supreme Court on Tuesday red-flagged its flip side. A top court bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant expressed serious concern over a growing trend of lawyers filing petitions drafted with AI tools that contain non-existent judgements such as 'Mercy vs Mankind'.

"We are alarmed to reflect that some lawyers have started using AI to draft petitions. It is absolutely uncalled for," the bench, also comprising Justices BV Nagarathna and Joymalya Bagchi, said. It made the observations while hearing a PIL filed by academician Roop Rekha Verma seeking guidelines on political speeches.

Justice Nagarathna said she recently came across a non-existent citation, 'Mercy vs



Mankind'. The CJI referred to a similar instance and said that in Justice Dipankar Datta's court, "not one but a series of such judgements were cited". Justice Nagarathna said that at times, the judgements referred to are correct, but fake quotes are attributed to those verdicts, making it very difficult

to verify the contents. "It creates an additional burden on the judges," Justice Nagarathna said. Justice Bagchi, meanwhile, lamented the decline in the art of legal drafting and said many special leave petitions mostly comprise lengthy quotations from prior judgments, with little original articulation

of legal grounds. Justice Nagarathna further pointed out that even where real judgments were referred to, the extracts placed before the court were sometimes incorrect. "Then some are citing real supreme court cases but those quoted portions do not even exist in the judgment," she said.

Exercise restraint, don't make statements on each other: Delhi HC tells Sunjay Kapur's wife, sister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday restrained late industrialist Sunjay Kapur's wife Priya S Kapur and sister Mandhira Kapur Smith from making statements against each other. Justice Mini Pushkarna passed the order on a lawsuit by Priya Kapur against her sister-in-law, Madhira Kapur Smith, alleging a continuous, malicious, and defamatory campaign by her sister-in-law through podcasts, interviews, social media posts, and public statements.

"Both parties are directed to exercise restraint in



making statements on each other, directly or indirectly," the judge said.

The court also issued a summons to Smith and podcast host Pooja Chaudhri on the lawsuit and listed the matter for hearing in May.

The senior counsel appearing for Priya Kapur said her sister-in-law uploaded and shared content on social media to tarnish her reputation.

Smith's lawyer, on the other hand, said there was a

"concerted media vilification campaign" against her.

In her lawsuit, Priya Kapur said that within days of Sunjay Kapur's demise, his sister "embarked upon a systematic and organised course of conduct" to malign and socially discredit her.

"The defamatory statements falsely impinge dishonesty, moral impropriety, professional incompetence, concealment of assets and illegitimate assumption of corporate control to the plaintiff," the lawsuit submitted.

The defamatory content, the plea said, was deliberately published and amplified through the podcast 'InControversial' with Pooja

Politicians must foster fraternity in country: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Political leaders must foster fraternity in the country, the Supreme Court observed on Tuesday while asking 12 petitioners, including academician Roop Rekha Verma, to file a fresh plea seeking the guidelines on political speeches.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices BV Nagarathna and Joymalya Bagchi, however, declined to entertain a PIL seeking guidelines for politicians and the media when reporting or amplifying speeches by leaders that allegedly affect the fraternity and constitutional values.

The petition, argued by senior advocate Kapil Sibal, was moved in the backdrop of alleged hate speeches by Assam Chief Minister and activists. Sibal said the Election Commission's Model Code of Conduct (MCC) operates during elections, speeches made before the MCC period circulate on social media even after it comes into force. "In the digital world, when the MCC comes into force, these speeches are repeated. What is the responsibility of the media in such cases so that the democratic atmosphere is not vitiated?" he asked, seeking judicially framed guidelines to caution public figures.

"It's becoming toxic. I am not on any individual," Sibal said, stressing that the relief sought was not directed against a particular leader. However, the bench was not in agreement, with the CJI saying the petition appeared to single out select individuals of a particular political party. "Of course it is against an individual, especially at this time. Withdraw this. File a simple plea on what conditional guardrails have been laid down and how political parties are violating them," the CJI said. He added that a petition target-

ing "selectively chosen few" would not be acceptable and that any such challenge must be objective and even-handed. "We are inclined to entertain such a petition. We are eagerly waiting for someone with objectivity to come and file one," the CJI said.

"Political leaders must foster fraternity in the country," Justice Nagarathna observed and underscored the need for restraint on all sides. "Suppose we lay down guidelines. Who will follow them?" she asked, adding, "Origin of speech is thought. How do you control thought? We must raise thoughts in line with constitutional values."

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be said to be lawful. He is required to be repatriated to Hong Kong, in view of Section 21 of the Extradition Act, he added.

The prosecution opposed the plea, saying cases are pending against the applicant and proceedings therein are yet to be concluded. The court, however, noted that extradition was only for three cases and he has been acquitted in those matters. The judge pointed out that no appeal has been preferred (by the prosecution) against any of those judgments.

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"The allegations against the accused are serious in nature, involving thousands of crores of (money) and thousands of innocent homebuyers. In a case where allegations are of cheating and criminal breach of trust involving a large number of people, the court has to be circumspect while releasing the accused on regular bail," the judge said.

He said according to the allegations, ₹1,335 crore and ₹2,498 crore from the accounts of JIL and JAL, respectively, were diverted at the behest of Gaur.

"Thousands of homebuyers, who had invested their hard-earned money in pursuit of a dream home, are running from pillar to post."

On the other hand, the accused was enjoying the proceeds of crime by layering alleged business transactions," the judge said.

Delhi court rejects ex-Jaypee Infratech MD's bail plea

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

A Delhi court has dismissed the bail plea of former Jaypee Infratech managing director Manoj Gaur in a money-laundering case, underlining that the allegation against the accused is that of cheating and criminal breach of trust, involving scores of people.

The court said while thousands of homebuyers, who had invested their hard-earned money in pursuit of their dream homes, kept running from pillar to post, Gaur was enjoying the proceeds of crime.

Additional Sessions Judge Dhirendra Rana was hearing the plea of Gaur, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on November 13 last year in a case linked to a ₹14,599-crore "fraud" with homebuyers.

The federal agency has alleged that funds collected from thousands of homebuyers for the construction and completion of residential projects were diverted for purposes other than construction, defrauding the buyers and leaving their projects incomplete.

It has claimed that two companies — Jaiprakash Associates Limited (JAL) and Jaypee Infratech Limited (JIL) — collected more than ₹33,000 crore for the construction of residential pro-

jects Jaypee Wishtown and Jaypee Greens in Noida and Greater Noida, respectively.

In its order dated February 16, made available on Tuesday, the court said, "It is a matter of record that he (Gaur) has been charged in four cases and prima facie, he is found involved in the commission of crimes in predicate/scheduled offences."

The judge said there is nothing on record to presume that the accused did not commit any offence or would not commit further offences in the future.

He said as Gaur has been named in 11 FIRs on similar allegations and had a tainted past, there is a strong possibility that he may commit similar offences if released on bail.

During the investigation, the books of account of JIL and JAL have been analysed. As per the certificate issued by the chartered account-

ant of JIL, the total expenditure incurred was only ₹11,829 crore.

Out of 159 towers proposed to be developed, the construction activity in respect of 97 towers was stalled and no work had been undertaken on those towers," the court pointed out.

It meant, the court observed, that 60 per cent of the construction work remained incomplete on the ground and this was the outcome of diverting

the funds collected from the homebuyers and investors.

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Editor's TAKE

India's moment to lead the AI century

The AI Summit signals a decisive turning point, where emerging nations step forward to shape the digital future instead of watching it unfold

The New Delhi AI Impact Summit 2026, underway in New Delhi, is no ordinary summit. It may well define the course of emerging nations through the 21st century – an era where digital supremacy will be paramount and artificial intelligence will write the rules of geopolitics. It was indeed a great step forward for India to host such an important summit, which has been held for the first time away from the US and Europe in an emerging Asian nation – India.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's welcome address at the India AI Impact Summit was more than a ceremonial opening – it was a declaration that India intends to shape, not merely consume, the technologies that will define the 21st century. By framing artificial intelligence within the civilisational ideal of "Sarvajana Hitaya, Sarvajana Sukhaya" – welfare and happiness for all – India placed human dignity, inclusion, and shared prosperity at the heart of a fast-moving digital revolution.

With figures such as Emmanuel Macron, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Sundar Pichai, and Sam Altman in attendance, the summit became a rare platform where geopolitics, innovation, and ethics converged around a single transformative force – AI. Artificial intelligence is already reshaping healthcare, education, agriculture, governance, and enterprise. For India, as for the rest of the Global South, AI holds immense opportunity. Its transformative effect can make a sea of difference in several fields which are critical for the developing world. But this can only happen when AI is channelled in this direction; otherwise, it can also have a dampening effect on global growth, where emerging nations are left out and the West dominates the narrative. With this summit, and given its reach and attendance, the Global South has unequivocally stated that it no longer wishes to remain a consumer of AI technologies but an equal partner in AI journey. It not only uses AI but also contributes to its growth and development. India, in particular, with a huge digital professional base, can be a game changer. Ironically, even the West has realised that it will not be able to pull this off without the help and support of countries like India. The interesting fact remains that, although AI has found a user in almost every realm, given its immense use cases, it is yet to become a commercially viable model. Most AI companies, barring a few like Nvidia that develop the chips which run AI programmes, are operating at heavy losses. For now, they are surviving due to the substantial funding they receive from investors, but this may not last indefinitely, and the AI bubble could burst as the dot-com bubble did in the early part of this century.

In this scenario, the Prime Minister struck a deeper chord by insisting that innovation must be "progressive, innovative and opportunity-driven" – not extractive or exclusionary. By opening its doors to start-ups, researchers, and policymakers from across the world, India has demonstrated that innovation does not have to be monopolised. The promise of technology lies in uplifting all of humanity, ensuring that innovation benefits societies as a whole, not just a few rich nations.



ASHOK K MEHTA

I was in Malaysia when Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived on February 7, on an official visit which lasted less than 24 hours and contained no extraordinary fanfare or excitement. Instead, several NGOs led by an independent preacher, Zamri Vinoth, had planned a rally timed with his arrival to protest against the illegal construction of Hindu temples. PM Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said he would not allow any rally to stoke racial tensions and ordered the police to break up the rally and arrest the organisers. The crackdown ensured the protesters and the planned disruption fizzled out. Ibrahim added he would not permit any movement that would disrespect an honoured guest. Ibrahim has been consistently saying the construction of temples will follow the same laws as mosques and churches. Malaysia is a multi-racial Muslim-majority country sourcing its history from the British colonial period. Peace and harmony have prevailed, though 'Bumiputra Malays' enjoy preferential treatment. The Sultan of Selangor province, Sharafuddin Idris Shah, noted that up to 687 unauthorised temples existed – including Hindu, Buddhist, and Chinese temples. On a visit to Penang Island, I did notice one Hindu temple – a clear encroachment like one sees in Delhi or Noida. I must add that there is some discomfort with Modi's treatment of Muslims in India, and the extradition of Zakir Naik is a bone of contention between the two countries.

While India-Malaysia diplomatic relations were established in 1957, ties have thrived from ancient times due to the third-largest Indian diaspora in Malaysia, especially Tamils. Prominent were two early events: then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru sent on deputation Maj Gen Enayat Habibullah as Deputy Army Chief of the Malaysian Army; Tunku Abdul Rahman, son of the first Prime Minister of the same name, was enrolled as a cadet in the National Defence Academy, Pune, whose first Commandant was Habibullah. Then Malaya became the breeding ground for the first major Chinese insurgency in Southeast Asia, which was comprehensively eliminated in 1968 by British Gurkhas led by Lt Gen Gerald Templar, considered the first guru of counter-insurgency. In Penang, there is a memorial dedicated to the Gurkhas recalling the Malay insurgency from 1948 to 1970, the Indonesian confrontation, as well as the reognition of the insurgency. Nepali filmmaker Milan Chams has made a film, Gurkha: The Warrior, to commemorate their contribution to the Malayan insurgency. Its pre-release screen-



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The writer, a retired Major General, served as Commander, IPKF (South), Sri Lanka, and was a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, now the Integrated Defence Staff
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ing in India on 20 February during an India-Nepal event is to highlight the valour of Gorkhas, which Nepal has declined to recognise as Agniveer.

Modi's meeting with Ibrahim marks the grounding of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of 2024. Ibrahim was in Delhi last year, but Modi could not reciprocate the visit. At the public reception on 7 February, Modi highlighted the special relations founded on the Indian diaspora, with a majority being Tamils.

He announced the Thiruvalluvar Chair at the University of Malaysia and the new Thiruvalluvar Centre for Shared Heritage. On his visits to

Malaysia and Sri Lanka, Modi has been emphasising Tamil bonding with an eye on elections in Tamil Nadu. Looking at Ibrahim, Modi said: "I know he likes MGR songs" – except that in Tamil Nadu, the

BJP's primary rival is not a party founded by MGR but one led by Karunanidhi. During the delegation-level talks on February 8, several issues were discussed and 11 MoUs were exchanged on labour, tourism, connectivity, education, agriculture, healthcare, digitalisation (UPI), and disaster management. More importantly, notes were exchanged on semiconductors, defence, and national security. Talks have been ongoing on India modernising Malaysia's SU-30 fleet and Scorpene submarines. There was discussion on the sale of Astra missiles for SU-30 aircraft and Dornier aircraft. In addition, more integrated cooperation was sought in UNPKO. Both India and Malaya were involved in early UN peace-

keeping in Congo to ensure that copper-rich Katanga did not secede from Congo. Bilateral trade is a mere \$20-25 billion, conducted under the ASEAN-India FTA and India's Act East policy. The one sticky issue which has become the litmus test of bilateral relations is Zakir Naik,

who was provided refuge in Malaysia. The matter is believed to have been discussed at one-on-one talks between the two Prime Ministers. Delhi wants him extradited for

money-laundering and hate speech crimes. Last

year, when Ibrahim was on an official visit, during his presentation at the Indian Council of World Affairs in Delhi, he said: "Zakir Naik can be extradited following legal processes and evidence provided by India". Malaysian High Commissioner in Delhi Muzaffarshah Mustafa said: "We can consider his extradition after due diligence and the rule of law by both countries". In my conversations here, it was clear that Zakir Naik, like Sheikh Hasina (for different reasons), will not be extradited.

Soon after Modi's aircraft lifted off, politics about illegal temples seized the headlines. Ibrahim's directions to local councils that all unauthorised temples be cleaned up met with an avalanche of objections, particularly regarding Hindu temples constructed during the pre-independence colonial period. Also on 8

February, Pakistan's Naval Chief Admiral Naveed Ashraf arrived in Malaysia. Diplomatic niceties such as keeping your honoured guest's rival country at bay for some time are no longer observed. Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh used to observe this protocol; not any longer. Another issue that cropped up after Modi's visit is India's plan to open a consulate in Sabah province. There is more to this than meets the eye, as regional parties in Sabah have raised the issue of sovereignty. Politics is heating up here, though elections are due only at the end of 2027.

Malaysia considers India militarily and economically a strong neighbour, and having close ties benefits the country given the strong and rich contribution of the Indian diaspora. The reaction to Modi's visit was no great shakes, as Malaysians are preoccupied with domestic issues. Political parties and the community agree that relations with India are strategic, friendly, and forward-looking. Ibrahim's personal support for shared values on long-standing ties is a great boost, but most of all, India as a comprehensive strategic partner will be a great asset for Ibrahim's ruling party, which assumed power in December 2020.

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Why God allows suffering despite his divine control



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

2ND OPINION

A question arises: if this is so, why do we see a despot giving trouble to his countrymen? Why is he not stopped by God – the Controller? The same question arises about a tsunami washing away innocent people. And why does a good man suffer while a bad man enjoys? Why do even devotees endure suffering?

Before I answer these questions, let me give a broad picture of what God does as the Controller. God, by His Divine willpower, creates when the time comes to give a new start to Creation. God causes dissolution when the time runs out for the old Creation. In the interim, God maintains it by providing sufficient energy, light, fresh air, potable water, fertile land, etc. In this period, no one can destroy Creation. In spite of being the Controller, God allows free will to all souls; otherwise, they would



become robots. God enforces the 'Karmaphala Siddhanta', which is: what you sow is what you reap. This is based on 'dharma' – righteousness. Surely, profit and loss, birth and death, honour and dishonour are in God's hands. God also sets in motion material nature, which causes rain, summer, winter, etc. Three types of miseries – caused by oneself, by others, and by natural forces like earthquakes – always exist because this planet is 'dukkhalaya' – a place of misery (The Bhagavad Gita 8.15).

Now, the answers to the questions raised in the beginning. A despot reaches that position because of good 'karmas' (acts) done in the past. If he decides to misuse

this privilege to trouble others, he now creates bad karmaphalas – punishable in the future. No one escapes this, and it may happen in a future life. Rewards and punishments are strictly between God and souls; others have no role in it.

God strictly follows dharma, which He Himself has formulated. A tsunami causes death because those who die were destined to. A bad man may be enjoying now because good karmaphalas have manifested. Similarly, a good man may be suffering now because bad karmas have manifested. The same is true of devotees, who must have sinned before taking shelter of God.

All devotees, good people, and bad people are qualified for this planet, where both enjoyment and suffering always exist. It is neither heaven nor Kurukshetra – the abode of God. One must deal with 'sukha' and 'duhkha' appropriately; devotees do so with help from God. They seek liberation, being unhappy with being placed on this earthly planet.

The conclusion is: God's control is perfect; He is absolutely fair. Everything is logical. Great devotees of the past are proofs of God's 'kripa' (grace). God's will always prevails. There should be no doubts about it. This is the Big Picture.

The writer is a spiritual teacher

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Protecting Santhali linguistic identity

It is with reference to the news, "President Murmu urges push to preserve OI Chiki script" (February 17). President Droupadi Murmu's call to preserve and protect OI Chiki, the alphabetic script of the Santhali language, is welcome.

Santhali is one of India's oldest living tribal languages, spoken primarily by the Santhal community and officially recognised under the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The recognition and promotion of Santhali and OI Chiki reflect India's commitment to linguistic diversity, cultural inclusion, and the preservation of indigenous heritage, aligning with constitutional values and inclusive governance. OI Chiki is a phonetic and scientific script designed to accurately represent Santhali sounds. Many tribal languages in India are primarily oral, requiring significant efforts for documentation and script development. Preserving tribal scripts involves documentation, digitisation, and integration into education systems to combat language endangerment.

Preserving tribal languages supports indigenous empowerment, improves literacy among tribal children, reduces school dropouts, and safeguards invaluable cultural knowledge.

P VICTOR SELVARA | TAMIL NADU

Affordable healthcare access is necessity

The directive of the Punjab Health Department to enforce generic drug prescriptions in government hospitals is a timely and necessary reform. For years, patients, especially from low-income families, have struggled with rising out-of-pocket medical expenses.

Generic medicines, when properly regulated, can significantly reduce this burden without compromising quality. The move also sends a clear message against the unhealthy nexus often alleged between some sections of the medical fraternity and pharmaceutical companies.

The government must strengthen the supply chain so that essential generic medicines are consistently available in hospital pharmacies. Any shortage will push patients back to private chemists, defeating the purpose. Jan Aushadhi Kendras need wider coverage and better public awareness. Clear labelling standards and patient education campaigns are equally important so people understand that generics are therapeutically equivalent to branded drugs. Regular prescription audits and a transparent grievance redressal system can reinforce accountability. Affordable medicines are a national priority, and such measures can ease financial strain on millions of families.

S JEEVA | CHENNAI

India leads the AI conversation

The AI Impact Summit underway in New Delhi marks a pivotal moment in our global journey into the age of artificial intelligence. Leaders from governments, industry, technology, and academia have gathered to discuss how AI will transform the world. This summit is more than a conference; it offers a glimpse into the future of intelligence.

AI is no longer confined to laboratories or niche applications. From healthcare and education to agriculture, governance, and creative industries, artificial intelligence is redefining possibilities. Machine learning, generative AI, and advanced data analytics are accelerating decision-making and enabling solutions once thought impossible.

India, already a leader in digital transformation, is positioning itself at the forefront of AI innovation. The focus on responsible and human-centric AI reflects a shared global commitment not only to technological progress but also to ethics, data privacy, and inclusive growth.

At its core, the summit reinforces a vital idea: AI is here to amplify human potential, not replace it. The discussions here will shape future policies, industries, and societies worldwide.

SAMIKSHA MISHRA | JAMMU

MANDATORY BOARD EXAMS NEED BALANCED STUDENT SAFEGUARDS

This refers to the recent news, "Class 10 students must sit for the first of the two board exams, says CBSE." The decision to make the first examination compulsory calls for careful consideration. While the intention may be to ensure discipline and seriousness under the new two-exam system from 2026, the rule could pose genuine difficulties for some students.

Board examinations cover over 46 lakh candidates from diverse backgrounds and regions. Illness, family emergencies, participation in recognised sports events, or local disruptions such as floods or transport strikes can prevent a student from appearing despite sincere preparation. Automatically placing such students in the "Essential

Repeat" category may add avoidable stress and defeat the purpose of offering two opportunities. There are also practical concerns for schools. Clear guidance is needed on attendance requirements, documentation for exemptions, and alignment of internal assessments if a student misses the first attempt. Without uniform instructions, implementation may vary across institutions.

A balanced approach would include a transparent exemption mechanism with clear criteria and a time-bound review process through digital submission of documents via schools. Assessment reforms must uphold standards while remaining sensitive to genuine hardships.

A MYILSAM | COIMBATORE

Please send your letter to the info@dailypioneer.com. In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.



Judicial review and executive responsibility in land governance

A civil court decree determines who has the better claim between contesting parties. It does not invite objections from all stakeholders. And crucially, it does not bind the world at large. It does not confer title *erga omnes* (against the world). Nor does it cleanse historical defects in ownership

FIRST Column



VIVEK KUMAR SINGH

India does not merely suffer from outdated land records. It suffers from a deeper structural confusion between the roles of the judiciary and the executive in determining land title. For decades, civil litigation has quietly evolved into a parallel mechanism for manufacturing ownership. A school of thought, rightly or wrongly, is of the view that courts, meant to adjudicate disputes between parties, have seemingly veered into the realm of land settlement. As per its logic, this palpable institutional drift is neither sustainable nor constitutionally sound. Land titling is fundamentally an executive responsibility.

A civil court decree determines who has the better claim between contesting parties. It does not invite objections from all stakeholders. And crucially, it does not bind the world at large. It does not confer title *erga omnes* (against the world). Nor does it cleanse historical defects in ownership. Yet, in practice, decrees are routinely treated as if they confer definitive ownership. They are used to mutate revenue records, secure loans, transact property, and extinguish competing claims. What is meant to be inter se adjudication becomes, in effect, a substitute for comprehensive settlement.

This distortion thrives in the vacuum created by weak or outdated survey-and-settlement mechanisms. Where the State does not conclusively settle ownership, litigation rushes in. Over time, precedents accumulate. Judicial pronouncements pile upon one another. Gradually, a fiction—that title flows from decrees rather than from a legally mandated settlement process—ostensibly takes root. The consequences are systemic. Across states, collusive title suits have emerged as a quiet menace. Two parties approach court. One claims ownership; the other offers token resistance or none at all. A decree follows. That decree becomes the basis for altering land records. Third parties are never heard. Local communities remain unaware. Public authorities may fail to contest effectively. Government lands have frequently slipped away through such decrees. The judiciary can only decide what is placed before it. It cannot examine the



INDIA REQUIRES A CLEARER DEFINITION OF ROLES IN LAND GOVERNANCE. LAND TITLING MUST BE RECOGNISED CLEARLY AS AN EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

Vivek Kumar Singh, ex-IAS, is presently Chairman, RERA Bihar. As Principal Secretary, Department of Revenue and Land Reforms, Bihar he had ushered in comprehensive digitisation of Land Records

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integrity of the entire spatial and textual record of a locality while resolving a private dispute. But when decrees are treated as instruments of title, their consequences extend far beyond the courtroom. The greatest sufferer is, quite often, the State itself. Governments spend years attempting to reclaim land lost through poorly defended or strategically orchestrated suits. Taxpayer resources are consumed in appeals and fresh rounds of litigation.

Civil courts are not designed to function as cadastral authorities. They do not maintain geo-referenced maps. They do not reconcile ground measurements with textual records at scale. They do not conduct mass public notifications inviting objections from all affected stakeholders. They are institutions of adjudication, not of territorial verification. When they are made to shoulder responsibilities that belong to land administration, aberrations become inevitable.

Land title, if it is to be meaningful, must be settled comprehensively rather than incidentally. Historically and globally, conclusive land titling has always been achieved through executive action comprising survey, demarcation, public notice,

objections, adjudication, and final publication. That process binds the world because the world is invited to participate. It reconciles spatial and textual data. It records government land explicitly. It provides an opportunity for challenge within a defined time frame. And once taken to its logical end, it guarantees a semblance of certainty, if not absolute finality.

This definition of the executive role is not meant to dilute judicial oversight. It is to restore executive responsibility while preserving constitutional balance. Articles 32 and 226 of the Constitution entrust the higher judiciary with the power of judicial review—one of the Constitution's basic features. Recognising land settlement as an executive function does not take away this authority. Courts must remain vigilant against arbitrariness, *mala fide* action, procedural impropriety, and constitutional violations in settlement processes. Executive authority without judicial supervision could be dangerous.

But judicial review ought not to be judicial substitution. There is a crucial difference between examining whether a statutory settlement followed due process on

the one hand, and re-adjudicating parcel by parcel factual determinations (that institutionally belong to land administration authorities) on the other. When writ jurisdiction is invoked to correct systemic flaws like absence of notice, denial of hearing, manipulation of records, exclusion of stakeholders, etc., it actually strengthens governance. It improves end-to-end institutional processes. It compels transparency and accountability.

However, when judicial intervention becomes routine at the micro level by reopening boundary determinations, reassessing possession disputes,

or entertaining fresh title claims over land already settled through a comprehensive statutory process, the objective of conclusiveness erodes. Experience shows that what was meant to be final becomes perpetually provisional. Judicial precedents, layered one upon another, have effectively pushed courts into a quasi-settlement role. This has resulted in a feeling of judicial overburden, not by intent but by accretion. India's land governance would benefit enormously if judicial reviews were strategically directed towards sys-

temic integrity: ensuring transparent publication of draft records, protecting public and common lands, mandating integration of spatial and textual data, enforcing time-bound disposal of objections, and preventing collusive manipulation of settlement exercises. Such supervision would enhance institutional credibility without fragmenting finality.

States, for their part, must undertake modern, technology-enabled survey and settlement operations that protect the sanctity of both spatial and textual revenue data. Cadastral maps must be geo-referenced and aligned with ground realities. Records of Rights must be verified through transparent processes. Mutation histories must be reconciled. Public lands must be clearly demarcated and digitally secured. Each state may customise operational design to local realities, but transparency, public participation, time-bound objections, and statutory finality must remain non-negotiable.

Today's technology removes excuses for inertia. Drone surveys, satellite imagery, unique parcel identification numbers, tamper-evident digital record systems, biometric verification, and secure authentication frameworks can significantly strengthen land governance. A state-certified, digitally authenticated title linked seamlessly with registration systems would reduce incentives for collusive litigation and better protect public assets.

At stake is not merely administrative efficiency. It is the credibility of property rights in India. Infrastructure projects stall because titles are uncertain. Financial institutions hesitate because ownership remains litigable. Urban planning suffers because maps and records do not align. Rural land remains trapped in disputes that outlive litigants. Ownership without certainty is not ownership. It becomes a *de facto* game of dice.

India requires a clearer definition of roles in land governance. Land titling must be recognised clearly as an executive function. Survey and settlement must confer conclusive title. Collusive and repetitive title suits must not be permitted to undermine public processes. Judicial control should ensure legality and systemic integrity. Land disputes should not lead to factual re-adjudication across generations. Courts should resolve disputes. The State must settle ownership. Until that boundary is firmly drawn, uncertainty will remain the most powerful claimant to Indian land.

India's AI Impact Summit: Advancing structural transformation for the world of work

DINESH SOOD

India's AI Impact Summit represents more than a diplomatic achievement. It demonstrates a broader understanding that artificial intelligence constitutes a structural transformation in how societies generate, allocate, and prepare for future work. While public discourse frequently portrays AI as a threat to employment, this perspective overlooks a more significant reality. AI is not eradicating the future of work; rather, it is rendering obsolete certain skills and employment pathways, compelling economies to adopt continuous re-skilling as the cornerstone of opportunity. This distinction is critical. While fixed job roles may diminish, transform, or vanish, the concept of work is expanding, diversifying, and becoming increasingly accessible to individuals who adapt alongside technological advancements.

Historically, particularly in emerging economies such as India, employment followed a linear progression: education led to degrees, entry-level positions, and eventual advancement to senior roles. While this structure provided stability, it also fostered rigidity through repetition, specialisation, and incremental growth. Artificial intelligence disrupts this traditional model by performing structured, repeatable tasks such as coding standard modules, processing documents, generating reports, managing routine customer enquiries, and analysing large datasets—functions that have long formed the foundation of entry-level roles across sectors like IT services, finance, legal support, and media. As AI assumes responsibility for these tasks, traditional entry-level positions are declining in significance. This does not signal the disappearance of work, but a reduction in the economic value of repetitive functions, as employers increasingly rely on intelligent systems to perform predictable tasks more efficiently and accurately than large human teams.

Technological advancements have previously disrupted established career pathways. The Industrial Revolution, for example, eliminated many forms of manual artisanal labour but generated new roles in factory management, engineering, and logistics. Similarly, the computer revolution of the 1990s automated clerical work while creating opportunities in software engineering, digital marketing, and information management. Each technological wave has displaced specific tasks while simultaneously generating new categories of employment. Artificial intelligence represents the next phase of this evolution, distinguished by its unprecedented speed.

The most significant impact of AI lies in its capacity to augment human capabilities rather than merely replace them. While AI can generate content, analyse trends, and automate workflows, it remains dependent on human judgement to establish objectives, interpret outcomes, ensure ethical application, and translate outputs into meaningful actions. Consequently, the economic value is shifting from task execution to skills such as problem-solving and creativity. For example, a junior software engineer can now utilise AI to generate functional code rapidly. However, the design of complex systems, assurance of reliability, comprehension of user requirements, and integration of technology into business objectives continue to necessitate human expertise. Similarly, while AI can support medical professionals in diagnosis, attributes such as empathy, clinical judgement, and the cultivation of patient trust remain uniquely human responsibilities.

This transformation redefines work as the orchestration of intelligence rather than the mere execution of tasks. Individuals who develop the ability to collaborate effectively with AI systems increase their productivity and value. Rather than replacing human workers, AI enhances their output, enabling individuals to achieve results that previously required entire teams. As a result, reskilling has become essential. The conventional model of front-loaded education, in which individuals complete their studies early and rely on that knowledge throughout their careers, is increasingly unsustainable.

Re-skilling is evolving into a continuous process rather than a singular event. This process extends beyond technical training. Although digital literacy, proficiency with AI tools, and data analysis are important, human-centric competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, adaptability, and interdisciplinary understanding are equally vital. This shift also democratises access to opportunity. In the past, advanced tools and capabilities were primarily available to specialists. Currently, AI tools enable individuals with limited formal training to perform complex tasks, design products, analyse markets, and establish businesses. For India, AI presents complex opportunity. Sectors that have traditionally depended on routine services, especially IT-enabled and back-office operations, are experiencing significant disruption. However, India's large population, robust digital infrastructure, and entrepreneurial dynamism uniquely position the country to lead in AI-driven growth.

India's digital public infrastructure—including identity systems, digital payments, and large-scale service delivery platforms—demonstrates the nation's capacity to implement technology at scale. AI can leverage this foundation to enhance healthcare delivery, agricultural productivity, educational access, and governance efficiency.

The Pioneer
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Three tests for India's AI future



VIVAN SHARAN



VEDIKA PANDEY

Economic historians have long shown that technologies spread not simply because they exist, but because societies are prepared for them—through skills, infrastructure, institutions, and systems that make technology inclusive. As global leaders converge at the India AI Impact Summit, this is the lens through which India's AI moment must be viewed—human capital readiness, access to enabling infrastructure, and institutional capacity. The recent Economic Survey strikes a note of caution, warning that rapid AI deployment could outpace the economy's structural ability to reabsorb labour. With over seven per cent of India's GDP tied to the IT/IT-enabled services sector, the stakes are significant. Unlike previous industrial transformations that automated manual labour, job displacement risks associated with AI are more complex to analyse.

On the one hand, what we already know is that AI systems are increasingly capable of writing and improving their own code, compressing the ladder of skills that once trained human programmers. For a country that relies on human-led services for its export strength, this raises hard questions about the durability of India's talent advantage. But protectionism through delay is also a dead end. Slowing AI diffusion to save jobs will inadvertently subsidise domestic inefficiency, leaving industries vulnerable to more agile global competitors who route around—or simply operate beyond—such barriers. An earlier parallel comes from Britain's attempt to protect its domestic textile industry by banning the export of advanced machinery to preserve its competitive edge. Although these restrictions targeted exports, not imports, they were rooted in the same logic of limiting the spread of technology to protect domestic industries. Nonetheless, British machines were smuggled out and used to establish mills across continental Europe. Britain could not stop the rise of competing manufacturing hubs. The way forward is to invest in the capacity to assist workers in their transition, rather than trying to protect them from AI. This entails imagining a meaningful social safety net that is appropriate for the AI era and encouraging companies to invest in innovation and R&D.

Debates on AI also tend to pose a false choice between centralised computing exemplified by cloud services and decentralised on-device computing. In reality, developing economies will likely operate somewhere in between, balancing brute force with resilience and access.

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There is a financial aspect to this discussion too. Cloud computing, once assumed to be infinitely scalable, now faces profitability pressures as AI workloads become vastly more expensive. The orchestration of AI workloads between the cloud and last-mile devices such as smartphones is a feasible alternative in many use cases. This is also where sector-specific deployment is crucial and AI skills can be viewed as 'foundational' infrastructure. In the past, organisations relied on IT departments to choose software, troubleshoot problems, and train staff on tools. AI is different. Hospitals, banks, courts, and factories need in-house expertise that understands both the technology and the domain in which it operates. Building such enlightened workforces may be as important as building data centres.

There is yet another facet of AI diffusion that must concern us all. Regulatory and policy institutions lacking the technical capacity to supervise new technologies tend to rely on blunt measures that are often antithetical to progress.

We have seen this cycle play out in the regulation of encrypted messaging and digital assets. In the face of encrypted communication, legitimate concerns over illicit activity have sometimes led to demands to bypass encryption altogether. This is characteristic of a policy environment where

the absence of precise investigative tools leads to "all-or-nothing" approaches. Similarly, in the early days of cryptocurrencies, regulatory responses often sought to isolate or restrict the technology due to limited visibility into its flows. In both cases, regulatory insecurity stemmed from gaps in supervisory capacity rather than a desire for censorship. When regulators cannot easily distinguish between legitimate and harmful activity, the default response tends towards precautionary restrictions, with unintended consequences such as the offshoring of digital asset entrepreneurs and innovation from India to the UAE and Singapore.

With AI, the stakes are even higher. If we do not build institutional capacity to understand and respond to AI-driven threats with technical nuance, we risk a future where online trust is managed through restrictions that constrain innovation, speech, creativity, and the future of work itself. Regulators, courts, and even the executive branch must bridge technical capacity gaps so they are not forced to choose between vulnerability and regressive rulemaking.

It is in this overarching context that the AI Knowledge Consortium, which consists of 16 research-led institutions, and The Pioneer, are hosting a panel discussion on February 19th, which brings together senior tech and policy leaders for a conversation on how AI is reshaping economies, institutions, and societies. The conversation will examine why some economies move from experimentation to widespread use of new technologies while others do not.

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BLASÉ CAPITAL

AI CURRENTS



As India's AI Impact Summit gets underway, there seems to be all-round excitement and enthusiasm. Even a flurry of bad news over the past two weeks is being converted into good and positive one. Consider the case of Infosys, whose share price received a hammering over the past 12 months, and specifically in the past 12 days or so. Yesterday, suddenly, the stock rose by five per cent. The trigger: a strategic partnership between the Indian IT leader and American Anthropic, which caused the recent jitters in global software and tech stocks, including Infosys. The deal will pair Infosys' Topaz AI platform with Anthropic Claude models (including Claude Code), and impact crucial sectors such as telecom, financial services, software, and manufacturing. Claude's recent launch of a new legal tool forced experts and investors to rethink how AI will replace traditional IT. The Infosys-Anthropic deal gives it another spin: How can AI and traditional software collaborate to boost existing businesses?

On top of this, the IT minister, Ashwini Vaishnaw, announced the potential for an immediate investment of \$200 billion in India AI and deep tech segments over the next two years. This will only the immediate capital inflow. The minister hinted that there will be additional deep tech funding by the venture capitalists, coupled with the country's innovation ecosystem, and digital infrastructure, which will woo and attract the foreign players. "Because of the digital public infrastructure, there is a very good technology framework under the (country's) leadership. Because of this framework, the diffusion of AI in India can be accelerated. This is what everyone believes," he said. He went on to add that global CEOs are keen to invest in the country, particularly in deep tech startups and infrastructure. This was compounded by mind-boggling announcements by some of the Indian industry leaders, which include some of the top empires.

For instance, Adani Group plans to invest \$100 billion to develop renewable energy-powered AI-ready data centres by 2035, seeking to establish the world's largest integrated platform. "The blockbuster investment, which comes as India pushes to gain a stronger foothold in the global AI race, is expected to create a \$250 billion AI infrastructure ecosystem in India over the next decade," said Gautam Adani, the group's patriarch. Recently, the group announced forays in Andhra Pradesh with a mega data centre in partnership with Google. The recent budget gave more-than-20-years tax breaks to such ventures. However, the \$100 billion investment will enable an additional \$150 billion in spending across server manufacturing, sovereign cloud platforms, and supporting industries. "The world is entering an Intelligence Revolution more profound than any previous Industrial Revolution," Adani said. "India will not be a mere consumer in the AI age. We will be the creators, builders, and exporters of intelligence and we are proud to be able to participate in that future," he added.

But despite these bold and loud claims, if one hears carefully, there are murmurs of worries and concerns. No, they are not just about AI's impact on jobs and employment, nature of work, future of some of the businesses, and stock price movements in 2026. One of the most volatile concerns, which has possibly not received adequate attention, relates to Climate Change. According to a media report, "India's AI ambitions are now being poured into steel and concrete. By 2030, the country's data centre capacity is projected to rise from roughly a gigawatt to about eight GW, backed by tens of billions of dollars of investment, and a broader bet that the build-out will anchor India as an AI and cloud hub, generate steady hosting revenues, and create tens of thousands of skilled and semiskilled jobs. Political and industry signals already suggest that 8-9 GW is a milestone, not a finish line."

What remains muted, even unstated, is that the eight GW implies the construction of a heavy industrial sector with major demands on power, water, and materials. For example, by 2030, they will consume 50-70 TWh of electricity annually, or "roughly the demand of a small industrial state like Haryana or Chhattisgarh, or the combined load of a big urban pair like Mumbai and Pune." If one takes the water required for both power generation, and cooling, the demand may double or more than double to 300-400 billion cu litres by the end of the decade. This amounts to nearly half of Bengaluru's annual consumption. Of course, the kind of investments being talked about by Vaishnaw and Adani will crazily drive up the demand for certain metals like copper and aluminum. Metals and minerals will accompany the sub-ecosystem that will comprise cabling, high-capacity transformers and switchgear, steel, concrete, batteries, and server hardware. Most of these critical minerals will need to be imported, which will twist and turn the trade deficit. As a media report contends, "Every additional GW beyond eight GW (target) will magnify these pressures further."

More important than these worries is a more overriding, overwhelming, and overarching one. Is the nation, and its citizens ready for these far-reaching changes? It took nearly two decades for the IT, software, and outsourcing disruptions to stabilise in the country, which made them more acceptable and inclusive in several ways. The disruptions by AI and deep tech may be far more disruptive and dramatic.

Cash is Queen, not King anymore

Use of cash trebled post-demonetisation; cash-to-GDP ratio down

OUR TAKE

It is a dichotomy that monetary experts are unable to explain. There are trends in recent history, especially during the pre- and post-demonetisation periods, which seem a bit inexplicable. Indeed, there is both good and bad news when it comes to the use of cash in India. Over the past nearly a decade, the volume of cash in circulation rose from ₹16.6 lakh crore in March 2016 to ₹40 lakh crore in January 2026, after taking a dip to ₹34 lakh crore in March 2017, immediately after demonetisation. Yet, as a percentage of GDP, cash represents 11.2 per cent now, compared to a peak of 14.4 per cent in March 2021 during the pandemic era, which resulted in an extreme "dash-for-cash." On a year-on-year basis, the cash trend in January 2025 shows a sudden increase of more than 11 per cent. Hence, while in absolute terms, the use of cash is up through the decade, the cash-to-GDP ratio is down.

A recent report by the State Bank of India cites reasons for the stubborn use of cash, as well as its sudden rise in the recent past. These include strict tax enforcement, low interest rates that impact bank savings, and households' penchant to hold money in cash. For example, tens of thousands of small vendors across the country, who invariably deal in cash, got tax notices since they shifted, or were partially forced to do so, to digital UPI-based transactions. This possibly alerted them to safeguard their interests, and demand cash payments, whenever possible. During the tax notices period in 2025, there were reports of huge withdrawals from ATMs in states such as Kerala, Karnataka, and West Bengal. Despite the restrictions on daily cash withdrawals, experts believe that the small traders converted digital money into cash.

While it did leave a digital trail, they were more comfortable with holding their incomes, and spending money, in cash.

Lower interest rates, as is natural and logical, led to lower deposits in savings accounts, current accounts, and fixed deposits. Given that inflation was high until 2025, households found it better, for several reasons, to hold a portion of their money in cash, or to buy assets and pursue investments where cash payments, or partial ones, were the norm. This may include buying properties, plots, land, and commercial and residential buildings. Thus, cash became the means, or a partial one, to save, invest, and speculate, rather than deals through the banking channels. Over the past few years, at least since the pandemic, the prices of gold and silver have zoomed. The rises are unprecedented and, despite high recent volatility, show little sign of tapering down. Hence, households quickly converted bullion holdings into cash, which they preferred to spend on monthly and annual consumption. Thus, formal earnings went through the banks into savings and investments, and the cash from bullion sales funded the lifestyles.

At the same time, digital payments expanded rapidly, especially after demonetisation, which was spurred by the post-pandemic changes. According to data, UPI accounts for 70-80 per cent of digital payments, even as monthly volumes skyrocketed to more than 21 billion in December 2025, and January 2026, or 10 times the levels in October 2020. In simple terms, the average volumes are 700 million a day. In value terms, monthly UPI transactions rose positively from under ₹6.5 lakh crore in August 2021 to

₹28 lakh crore in December 2025, or a rise of more than four times. According to a media report, "The broader trend suggests a structural shift: More cash is being held in absolute terms, but a declining cash-to-GDP ratio, alongside rapid UPI adoption indicates physical currency is increasingly retained for storage, while digital payments handle a rising share of everyday transactions." This seems true from anecdotal evidence: People pay ₹10-30, for a pack of chocolate, cigarette stick, and street food digitally.

However, there are several allied issues that monetary experts need to account for before reaching this more simplistic conclusion. The first is that like in the past, cash is still hoarded by households. It is not spent, and goes out of circulation, maybe for months and years. This may not be fully accounted for by the cash in circulation. In sectors like real estate, still 30-50 per cent of the deal amounts are paid and received in cash. The recipients either hoard the amounts at home, and slowly spend them over months and years, depending on requirements. This is possibly the cash that comes to be spent on marriages, or purchases of large assets. The givers need to generate this cash, which is not lying around with them. Hence, there is a shift from the money lying with formal channels, like banks, to cash. There is anecdotal evidence about cash payments, and cash movements in real estate.

Despite the claims that demonetisation wiped out the hoards of cash with national and regional political parties, no one denies that more cash is spent today on national and assembly elections than ever before. In some of the larger constituencies, it is not unbelievable to hear an expenditure of ₹50-100 crore by a single candidate. This money is stored in funny ways, in large gunny bags in huge stranded warehouses. Of course, elected politicians, or some of them, desire to recover the money spent on elections. Thus, they become the collectors of huge amounts of cash, which is either semi-legally invested, or stashed away as cash in homes, offices, and other places. Changes in election funding, which led to a disaster as it encouraged the black economy, before it was banned by the Supreme Court, remains a dark and opaque grey area. Unless India finds a credible solution to stop the election funding menace, cash will remain crucial.

It may seem weird, even ironic, but the larger use of UPI and digital payments contribute to the cash economy. In effect, a new hybrid cash-digital culture has evolved. Individuals shift between the two. One hears vendors and drivers talking to their family, and friends about giving cash to someone, and transferring the money digitally. In essence, one-half of the transaction is in cash. There are instances when one pays in cash, but the recipient does not have the change. The latter transfers money through UPI to a third person, who returns the money in cash, which is used to settle deals with the first person, who wishes to pay in cash. This blurs the distinction between cash and digital.



A Keynesian Perspective

New scheme on welfare shelf

Government wants to ensure huge success for VB-G Ram G



filled as per the old scheme, 60 million got work," states a media report. Critics argue that the older version was a failure because minimum wages were not always paid. Of the 31 states and UTs, this was the case in 20, as per PRS Research.

Under G-Ram-G, the ruling regime will desire to better the metrics, which are updated under the new rules. The new Act offers guaranteed work for 125 days a year, instead of 100 days. The expenditure ratio in most states, apart from those in the Himalayas and North-East, will change from 90:10 to 60:40, which will imply a higher burden on the states. According to the Opposition, this will limit the overall expenditure on the scheme as the Centre will reduce its exposure, and most states, given their precarious financial state, will find it difficult to cough up money to part

fund it. If the states do have the money, the non-BJP-ruled ones may wish to spend on local schemes, rather than a central one. The BJP-ruled ones can play around with respective expenditures depending on the political and economic needs. The ruling regime will wish to better the wages too to send a strong message.

For the BJP, this is imperative and necessary. Apart from the political criticism, the issue has reached the courts. A PIL in the Madras High Court cites several reasons to disband G-Ram-G, and go back to MGNREGA. The petition states that the older scheme was one of the world's largest social security initiatives, which was studied and hailed by global entities. Experts acknowledged its transformative nature. Hence, a change is unnecessary. In addition, as mentioned above, the burden on the states

will go up, and they may not be able to finance the scheme. G-Ram-G has bid "goodbye" to one of the most crucial facets of MGNREGA, which gave greater autonomy to the village Panchayats. This was in accordance with constitutional norms, which are gone under the new avatar. The Centre, as per Section 4 of the new Act, will "determine the state-wise normative allocation of work... based on objective parameters." In addition, the states can select the beneficiaries from the areas pointed out by the Centre.

Of course, the states, which will finance 40 per cent of the expenditure, have certain flexibility and freedom. But they too have inbuilt legal caveats. For example, they can follow local laws and rules to provide unskilled manual jobs but the financial assistance will be decided by New Delhi, and cannot exceed the entitlements under G-Ram-G. Although the states can formulate rules under the new Act, the rules must "fix the eligibility conditions, procedure for payments to the beneficiaries, maintenance of accounts and so on strictly as per the provisions of the (central) Act." The PIL insists that these and other provisions in the new Act, eight in total, need to be declared "null and void," as is the case with Section 37, which states that MGNREGA (and its rules) "stands repealed from the date when the Centre decides to do so through the issuance of an official notification."

In the future, the legal tussles will accompany the political ones, even as civil right activists and other observers keep a tab on the socio-economic benefits of G-Ram-G compared to MGNREGA. Given the pains that the Centre took to change the name, and introduce new norms for the better, as it claims, the ruling regime will try hard to prove itself correct. The success or failure of G-Ram-G can tip the forthcoming state elections across constituencies. It may even have a huge impact on the national elections, if the budgetary allocations, and actual expenditure remain high, and keep growing every year. Since many of the earlier welfare schemes have been pushed to the background for various reasons, and some of the new ones faced official criticism, including from the Comptroller and Auditor General, G-Ram-G may be the scheme that retains the BJP in power.



Artificial Intelligence in corporate communication: Transformational tool or existential threat?


SAIKAT CHAKRABORTY

When was the last time you used Artificial Intelligence (AI) for a routine task? If you are not sure, think of the autocomplete search suggestions that Google displayed on your desktop, the Maps app you used on your drive or the song that you asked Alexa to play.

Whether we like it or not, AI has already become a part of our daily lives. So, can our professional lives be left untouched?

The above examples of AI have been around for some time and belong to the first wave of the AI revolution – 'Predictive AI'.

What has really shaken up professionals is the breakneck speed of development of the second wave of AI – 'Generative AI' or GenAI in short.

GenAI refers to deep-learning models that can generate high-quality content such as text, images and videos, based on the data they were trained on. The release of ChatGPT, the most famous of the GenAI models, in November 2022 truly made us aware of the capabilities of AI. Since then, barely a month passes without news of a more advanced AI model – Gemini, Copilot, Grok, DeepSeek, Claude.

For the Corporate Communication (CC) professional, this poses a clear and present challenge, because GenAI seems to be able to do a lot of her tasks – only much, much faster.

Does this mean that AI will be able to replace the CC professional? Or will it be an aid to bolster her talents?

There are no clear black and white answers to these questions. The advent of the telephone, personal computers and applications such as Microsoft Excel had also raised the possibility of major job displacement, but ended up as enablers, generating new opportuni-

ties of employment. Will AI go the same way? For now, yes. Used in the right way, AI can be a huge enabler, as CC professionals across the world are discovering.

According to the State of PR Technology 2023 report published by Prowly, a SaaS platform for Public Relations (PR), 67.8 per cent of the professionals surveyed are utilising AI in their work in some form or the other. Obviously, AI does have its perks when it comes to corporate communications.

So, what are the main uses of AI by CC professionals?

Content creation and strategy development

The foremost application of AI in CC, obviously, is content creation. AI's capacity to analyze extensive data and create relevant, contextually fitting content can greatly cut down on the time and resources typically needed for content development. Textual content such as article drafts and social media posts, images, infographics and even animation can be generated in seconds using the right inputs and prompts. This allows communicators to prioritise strategy development over the technical details of content creation. Even for strategy formulation, AI can suggest concepts and ideas which can be built upon by the human.

Personalisation

AI tools can be employed to customise content to fit individual preferences, enhancing personalisation in communication. This level of customisation, which used to require significant resources earlier, is now more achievable due to AI's analytical and generative capabilities.

Speech-to-Text and Translation

AI can quickly and accurately transcribe audio and video interviews which makes it easier to find keywords and relevant information. Translation involving a number of Indian and international languages has also become very easy with AI tools such as Google Translate.

Identifying Influencers

AI-driven tools are now available to assist in finding key influencers within



a particular industry. By utilising data management and analysis, CC professionals can customise their outreach and create more effective campaigns. This approach enables them to precisely target their communications, connect with influential figures, and enhance the overall impact of their messaging.

Contact suggestions

The days of manually compiling traditional media lists through categories and keyword searches may soon be replaced by AI tools which help identify journalists who cover topics related to a particular business, thus allowing the CC professional to select the media outlets

most likely to cover her news pitch. With the help of AI, the CC professional can spend less time drawing up lists and more time building valuable relationships.

Social media automation

With the number of social media platforms proliferating, developing user-relevant content and keeping track of their comments can be very time consuming. AI tools can automate the creation and posting of content and even reply to comments.

Media monitoring

As media channels, particularly online, proliferate, AI can sift through terabytes of data in a fraction of the time needed

by humans to come up with accurate media monitoring reports, highlighting the most important stories for the CC professional. Post-campaign analysis and identifying potential trends become much easier with AI.

Sentiment analysis

Going beyond traditional media monitoring, AI can identify how people think about a brand, company or institution, having the skill to understand words in different contexts, recognise subtleties, and consider various viewpoints. AI's

ability for continuous brand sentiment analysis can be an excellent aid for reputation management, as the CC professional can manoeuvre to emphasize the positive aspects and handle the negative ones more effectively.

Crisis management

AI-powered tools can anticipate when negative sentiment might escalate into a crisis, especially in the social media domain, enabling the CC professional to plan strategies to mitigate these risks. If a crisis does occur, she will be prepared to respond promptly and prevent it from escalating further.

Understood—AI is very helpful. But what are its drawbacks?

Obviously, the possibility of AI replacing humans, especially in the arena of

content creation, is a very real threat. But technically, does it have any drawbacks? Quite a few, actually.

Data security

The very nature of the way GenAI works can become a threat to data security. GenAI uses data available to it, or provided to it for a specific case, to create new content. However, it doesn't forget this data after one use. Rather, it utilises this data for its learning and may generate future content containing the information, especially the free versions. What this means is that the data you put in for your purpose can end in someone else's content. Alternately, copyrighted information of another entity can enter your content, thus creating legal hurdles. Therefore, it is essential to never provide confidential information to GenAI and to double check AI-generated content for potential copyright issues.

AI hallucinations

There have been quite a few instances of GenAI answering questions with false or inaccurate information. One of the most famous faux pas was during Google's introduction of its platform Bard, in which the AI tool wrongly claimed that the James Webb Space Telescope took the first picture of an exoplanet. This mistake was easy to identify, as the telescope was launched in 2021 while the first picture of an exoplanet was taken in 2004. However, this may not always be the case and the CC professional must be on her toes to prevent misinformation spreading.

Chances of bias

Machine learning develops artificial intelligence by studying human behaviour, or rather raw data that captures human behaviour. However, this approach can introduce biases that need to be carefully managed as they can lead to unintentional PR crisis. After all, AI is only as good as the inputs it gets. The CC professional must remain alert for bias in AI-generated content, both written and visual.

Conclusion

The advantages of AI, however, clearly outweigh its drawbacks for CC professionals, as the State of PR Technology

2023 report brought out. As much as 61.4 per cent of early adopters reported increased efficiency and productivity across the board by using AI tools.

For now, the use of AI in Corporate Communications will only increase. An unintentional side-effect of this could be that new entrants into the professional may not get enough ground-level experience, as AI will do most of the repetitive tasks like sending emails, compiling contact lists or media monitoring. These jobs may be monotonous but give freshers the opportunity to learn the ropes and build personal rapport with journalists and clients, which can be very helpful in their later careers.

But the real challenge to the CC professional will come from the third and fourth waves of AI – Autonomous Agents and Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). Autonomous agents are AI-powered programs which, when given an objective, can create tasks for themselves, prioritise their tasks and complete them so that their objectives are achieved.

AGI refers to a theoretical AI system that possesses the ability to understand or learn any intellectual task that a human being can. In short, it is AI with perception – a quality that still differentiates man from machine.

Can the CC professional, indeed all professionals, overcome that challenge? Only time will tell. For now, to maintain their relevance, they need to continuously evolve by staying informed of the latest trends and innovations in the industry, develop new skills (including how to accurately use AI) and re-learn old ones. Most of all, the CC professional needs to remember that she has two skills which the machine may not be able to develop soon – intuition and the personal touch – which are a key feature of the CC function. Machines are still way behind in understanding human emotions and idiosyncrasies. It is crucial for Corporate Communication professionals to leverage this advantage to stay ahead of the game.

Author is a Chief Manager (Corporate Communication), GAIL (India) Limited

Controversy over participation of Bill Gates at AI impact Summit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi



Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates

A controversy erupted on Tuesday over the attendance of Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates at the world's biggest AI summit who became a topic of speculation on Tuesday, following conflicting reports. The Government sources initially stated he would not attend amid allegations surrounding his alleged links to the Epstein files, but a spokesperson for the Gates Foundation quickly contradicted to say he is indeed participating.

Union Minister for Information & Broadcasting, and Electronics & Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw, who is leading the AI show, did not give a direct reply to reporters at a scheduled press conference when asked about Gates' participation.

Government sources in the morning suggested that Gates will not attend the Summit as his name figures in the files relating to the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, and may create some discomfort. However, a spokesperson for his foundation said, "Bill Gates is attending the AI Impact Summit. He will be delivering his keynote as scheduled". He was listed as a keynote speaker on February 19 - the day all the bigwigs will descend at Bharat Mandapam. He was given a 12-minute speaking slot at 1150 hours. The key participant list was decided

months in advance, while the Epstein file revelations have been made in recent weeks. While Gates has not been accused of wrongdoing by any of Epstein's victims, records released by the US justice department include an allegation by Epstein that Bill Gates caught a sexually transmitted disease. Gates's spokesperson had previously called the claim "absolutely absurd". Late last week, Nvidia said its CEO, Jensen Huang, would not travel to India to attend the Summit. Huang was one of the biggest attractions at the Summit. While the company had not given any reason for the move, some had linked it to the presence of Gates at the event.

Asked about his absence, Vaishnaw said, "Jansen reached out to us, and he said that because of something really unavoidable... He was very keen to work through. But he has depoted a very senior executive to join us". He reiterated that some people not attending was their personal choice. "I would not like to comment on it."

Nvidia, he said, is also working with some Indian companies. "I cannot share the names at this point in time, for some very large investments in AI."

Gates featured among the tech moguls, industry

Role of AI in health discussed

GYANVI SHARMA

■ New Delhi

The future of artificial intelligence was not just discussed on the 2nd day of the AI Impact Summit – it was put to an immediate vote. In a lively session led by Professor David Yanagizawa-Drott, delegates were asked to choose how a hypothetical Indian State's health system should deploy AI in district hospitals: rely solely on doctors, hand decisions entirely to machines, or combine the two. At first, nearly 89 per cent backed



"augmentation", with AI assisting doctors who retained final authority.

Even when told automation could cut labour costs by 25 per cent compared with 20 per cent for augmentation and none for the status quo, most stuck with the hybrid model. But when new evidence suggested AI-only systems might worsen

patient outcomes by 30 per cent, while augmentation risked a 5 per cent decline, support shifted dramatically.

Backing for human-only care rose to about 40 per cent, augmentation fell to 56 per cent, and full automation collapsed to 4 per cent, a vivid illustration of how quickly opinion turns when the evidence changes.

Drawing on field research in Ghana, Professor Yanagizawa-Drott described a real-world trial in which an organisation recruiting teachers for rural schools

tested whether to use GPT-4 to automate candidate screening or combine its recommendations with human judgement.

Contrary to popular belief, augmentation proved the weakest option, slowing the process without improving results.

Full automation, in that instance, both reduced costs

and improved the quality of hires. The findings challenge the comfortable assumption that human-AI collaboration automatically delivers the best of both worlds. "Researchers cannot give you the values," the professor told delegates, "but we can help you establish the facts." In a fast-moving technological landscape, he argued, policy must be guided by evidence rather than instinct.

The subsequent panel broadened the debate beyond hospitals to jobs and livelihoods. Citing recent World Bank research, speakers pointed to productivity gains in India's IT sector alongside continued job creation, pushing back against predictions of mass technological unemployment. Shankar Maruwa of A Step Foundation highlighted a 'Blue Dot' model designed to connect informal workers with local opportunities through digital tools.

Yet panellists also warned that AI's benefits may not be evenly shared, noting emerging gender and age gaps in the use of generative systems. As discussions at Bharat Mandapam made clear, the question is no longer whether AI will shape the future of work, but how Governments can ensure its rewards are widely distributed and firmly grounded in proof rather than presumption.

AI gives opportunities to Indian firms: Nasscom

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) globally presents significant oppor-

unities for Indian companies and will not adversely impact their businesses, Nasscom AI Head Ankit Bose said on Tuesday.

To build capacity, the Government and private sector are taking steps. "In the



An AI-driven robot serves food during the India AI Impact Summit 2026, at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on Tuesday

tunities for Indian companies and will not adversely impact their businesses, Nasscom AI Head Ankit Bose said on Tuesday.

He added instead of job cuts, India will witness job transformations as roles evolve with the growing adoption of AI.

"AI is getting developed across the world, but who will deploy that. For that you need people... So now India adding capacity... AI is happening at a massive scale and Indian professionals will deploy that."

So it's a big opportunity for us but we have to be ahead of the curve and we have to keep our skills up to date," Bose told

next few months we are going to enable 1.5 lakh people in AI-based developers... We are working with Government to develop curriculum that are needed in colleges," he said.

He added that there is no major worry for Indian companies which are supplying services to domestic firms or global companies due to this fast-growing technology. In fact, the companies will grow, Bose said.

More people are required to deploy AI globally and there India has strength, he said, adding that there could be some turbulence, but only in the short run.

Kant: India leapfrogged as systems built on open-source architecture, APIs

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ New Delhi



Former Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant

AI is a hugely transformational technology which is going to disrupt every single way of life, former Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant said on Tuesday, emphasising it must be accessible, affordable, accountable, and multilingual to avoid deepening global inequalities.

Speaking at the AI Impact Summit here, he also said India leapfrogged decades of progress in a short span because its systems were built on open-source architecture, open APIs, and global interoperability.

"Make no mistake that this

is a hugely transformational technology. It's going to cut across every sector, it's going to disrupt every single way of life and therefore it's very, very important that AI is made accessible, affordable and accountable," he said at a session on AI for India's Next Billion: Intergenerational Insights for Inclusive and

disruptive technologies. The challenge is whether we can ensure that AI reaches those below the poverty line... Whether AI can be used to transform lives of citizens and whether AI can be used to improve learning outcomes, health outcomes, improve nutritional standards which are major challenges before the world," he said.



India's AI revolution on display

GYANVI SHARMA

■ New Delhi

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology unveiled a sprawling exhibition pavilion that drew dense crowds of students, entrepreneurs, officials and defence personnel at the AI Impact Summit.

All eager to glimpse the technologies the Government believes will define India's digital future. The atmosphere was less that of a conventional conference and more of a working laboratory of the state's AI ambitions.

Among the most striking showcases was AEROARC, AI-powered robotics designed to strengthen India's



AI

IMPACT SUMMIT 12

AI will redefine tech jobs, coding will no longer be core: Nilekani

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bengaluru

Artificial Intelligence is rewriting the grammar of software development. And writing codes will no longer be the central role for tech professionals, Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani said Tuesday.

AI, he said, is being adopted faster than any previous technological transition, from the internet to smart phones, and is poised to fundamentally reshape how businesses operate.

"Talent will have to deal with a world where writing code will not be the goal. It'll actually be making AI work, orchestration, and those kinds of things," Nilekani said at Infosys' Investor Day.

"Customer journeys, operating models, and mental models all have to change. Every enterprise must rethink how it operates." While coding may end, new jobs will be created.

The talent transformation is huge, he said adding there will be a need for AI engineers, forward deployment engineers, forensic analysts roles that didn't exist a few years ago.

Greenfield coding productivity is not the real challenge. The real world is managing trillions of dollars in legacy systems with undocumented dependencies, he said.

He highlighted the unprecedented speed of AI adoption, noting that while the internet took over a decade to reach a billion

users and smartphones five years, AI adoption is happening in just a couple of years, enabled by the infrastructure of prior tech eras. "While the internet took over 10 years to reach a billion users and smartphones five years, AI adoption is occurring in just a couple of years," he said. "Each technology transition has had implications, but this time, it's a fundamental change in the way businesses operate. Customer journeys, operating models, talent — everything has to change."

Nilekani stressed that legacy system modernisation can no longer be deferred, citing high maintenance costs, siloed data, and rising security risks.

"Accumulated tech debt



over decades must be paid. You no longer have the option to defer this," he said, noting that AI provides tools to modernize faster and more economically, though implementation remains complex.

He also emphasised the shift from buying software to building AI solutions, with enterprises layering agentic AI interfaces on existing systems to simplify customer journeys. "Foundational systems will increasingly become systems of record, but the interface will be agentic," Nilekani said.

On legacy systems and modernization, he said accumulated tech debt over decades must be paid. Many large companies spend 60 per cent to 80 per cent of their IT budget on maintenance.

That has zero business value. It's time to flip the ratio.

AI gives us the tools to modernise fast, economically, and at scale — but implementation is the hard part, he said.

Highlighting the deployment gap between AI capabilities and enterprise implementation, he noted the urgent need for talent transformation, change management, and cleanup of technical debt. "It's not about using AI tools. It's about productivity out of those tools. Otherwise, you'll get false productivity," he said.

Nilekani concluded that enterprises must adopt first-principle thinking, agnostic system design, and cross-firm collaboration to harness AI successfully.



Visitors witness a demonstration during the India AI Impact Summit 2026, at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on Tuesday

Ethics key to optimal use of AI in health sector: Jitendra Singh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Ethics will be a key determinant of how effectively artificial intelligence (AI) is used in the health sector, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences Jitendra Singh said on Tuesday.

Citing the example of the Government's sovereign multilingual AI engine Bharat Gen, he said the present Government is ready to come forward even at the formative stages of a new phenomenon.

"Ethics will be a very important determinant of how optimally AI can be used in the health sector," the minister said. He was

speaking at a session in the AI Impact Summit.

Singh said BharatGen is a Government-owned sovereign model, but there are other private sector players also who are working on these models, such as digital health and digital case histories. "In the times to come, we would also have to integrate. Neither can they work in isolation, nor can we. So, we have to be prepared for that," he said.

Launched in October 2024, BharatGen is a Government project to develop a sovereign AI model which will provide services like Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) models and Text-to-Speech (TTS) models for Indian languages.

At the session, BharatGen unveiled its new 17B (billion) parameter LLM (large language models). Currently, BharatGen's AI models support several Indian languages, including Hindi, Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Maithili, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil and Telugu.

BharatGen has released domain-specific fine-tuned models for Ayurveda (Ayur Param), Indian agriculture

(Agri Param) and Indian legal domain (Legal Param).

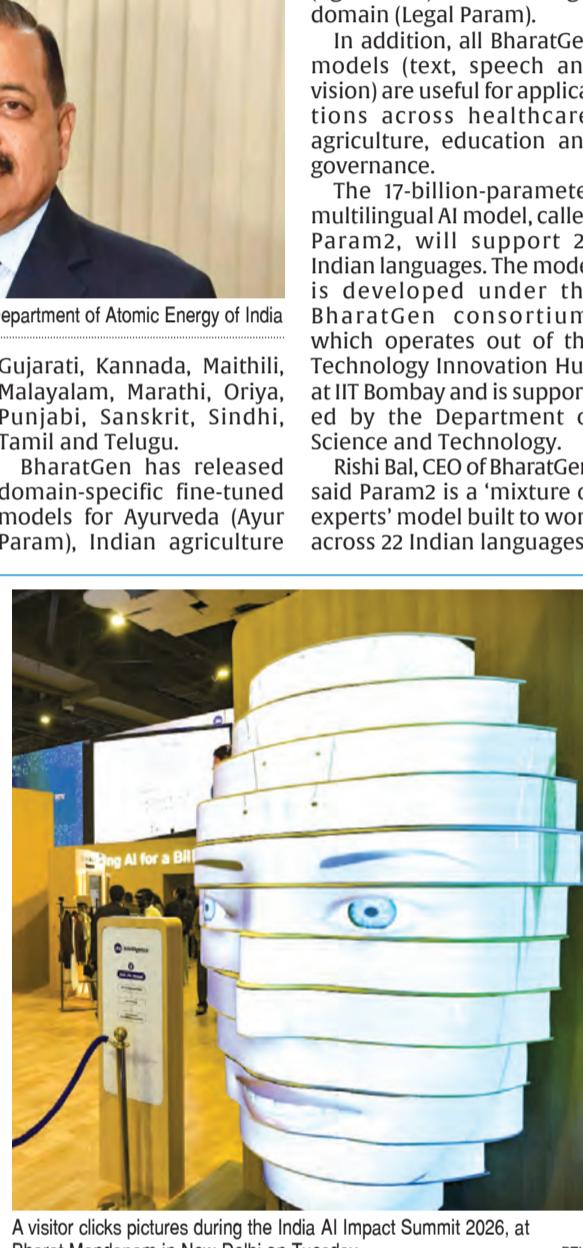
In addition, all BharatGen models (text, speech and vision) are useful for applications across healthcare, agriculture, education and governance.

The 17-billion-parameter multilingual AI model, called Param2, will support 22 Indian languages. The model is developed under the BharatGen consortium, which operates out of the Technology Innovation Hub at IIT Bombay and is supported by the Department of Science and Technology.

Rishi Bal, CEO of BharatGen, said Param2 is a 'mixture of experts' model built to work across 22 Indian languages.

PTI

Jitendra Singh, minister of State in the Department of Atomic Energy of India



A visitor clicks pictures during the India AI Impact Summit 2026, at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on Tuesday

PTI

India needs to embrace new tech in cargo handling: EAC-PM member

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi

India needs to embrace new technology and can save up to ₹20,000 crore by using AI for cargo handling at ports, said Member of Economic Advisory Council to PM Gourav Vallabh on Tuesday.

Speaking at session 'AI-Powered Ports: Reimagining Efficiency and Operations' at the AI Impact Summit here, Vallabh said India is emerging as a global leader in the field of new technology.

"There is an approximate saving by uses of AI of ₹20,000 crore in our handling... And every year we can save ₹15,000 crore as far as the logistic cost is concerned," he said. The question is not whether AI will transform India's ports, Vallabh said adding "the question is whether we are going to lead it or not."

He noted that India's logistics cost at 7.97 per cent of GDP is competitive, "but for Viksit Bharat 2047 aim, our ports should be intelligent and should have intelligent ecosystem."

He said India needs accelerated policy initiatives to reduce the logistics cost.

He pointed out that 95 per cent of total volumes of India's trading is by maritime, but "in spite of annual growth of 13.5 per cent, our ports are not comparable to the biggest ports of the world



Gourav Vallabh, member of Economic Advisory Council to PM

as far as the handling capacity is concerned". So, gap is both of infrastructure as well as intelligence, he added.

Vallabh listed out several

areas of AI application in ports to improve performance. "AI is right now in front of us, it is up to us, we have to accept it," Vallabh noted. Subrat

Tripathy, President Business Development APSEZ Ltd, shared idea of introducing virtual concierge in the ports industry.

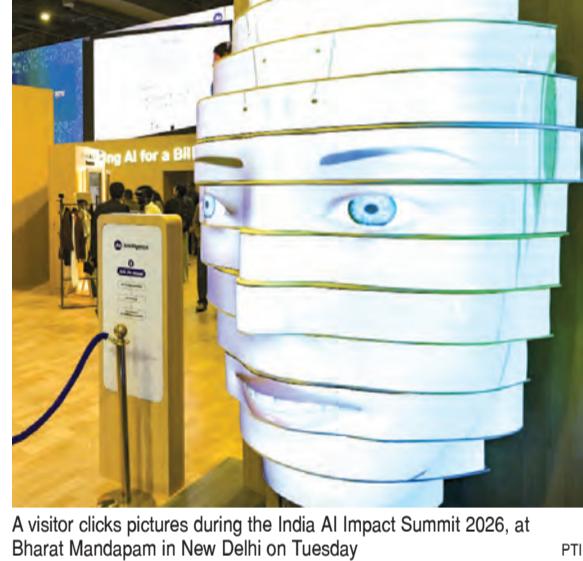
"We've been thinking of developing what is called a virtual concierge. In all interactions on a platform which are not human-based. This is not about replacing human beings, but having a particular tool where we bring in the multiplicities of interactions, vessels, agents, transporters, multiple stakeholders that we have," Tripathy said.

He said AI can also help in predicting weather conditions, navigation and safe operations of ports. Susanta Kumar Purohit, Chairperson, VO Chidambaranar Port

Authority, said, "Artificial intelligence is not merely a technological upgrade for ports; it is a structural shift in how we plan, operate and govern maritime infrastructure."

Aprajita Rana, AZB & Partners, spoke on legal aspects on usage of AI in the industry including safety and authenticity of the data.

"I think, going forward, what we really need to promote in the industry is having some sort of AI governance mechanism. You actually need to have some governance standards about how you're going to deploy AI and to what extent, what kind of functionalities," Rana said.



A visitor clicks pictures during the India AI Impact Summit 2026, at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on Tuesday

PTI

Fears that AI will replace doctors largely misplaced: Anupriya Patel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

When India speaks of AI in healthcare, it is not limited to sophisticated algorithms or the promise of precision alone, but is measured by the extent to which technology touches lives and addresses health inequities across the country, Minister of State for Health, Anupriya Patel, said on Tuesday.

Patel also noted that AI has been integrated across the entire continuum of health-

care from disease surveillance and prevention to diagnosis and treatment.

She highlighted how the Media Disease Surveillance System, an AI-enabled tool that monitors disease trends in 13 languages, generates real-time alerts, and strengthens outbreaks.

This system, she said, showcases the power of AI in augmenting India's disease control efforts and enhancing its surveillance capacity.

Under the One Health Mission, she said, the Indian Council of Medical Research has launched AI-based tools for genomic surveillance, capable of predicting potential zoonotic outbreaks even before transmission from animals to humans occurs.

She made the remarks while addressing a session on 'Innovation to Impact: AI as a Public Health Game-Changer' at the India AI Impact Summit 2026 at the Bharat Mandapam here.

The session spotlighted the transformative role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in advancing public health outcomes and strengthening India's healthcare delivery systems.

"AI for India, as our Prime Minister Narendra Modi envisions, is not merely Artificial Intelligence but All-Inclusive Intelligence," Patel said.

As India advances towards the vision of a Viksit Bharat by 2047, health forms one of the most critical pillars of development, she said.

Need to control way AI models function: MeitY Secretary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

The Government has invested in developing indigenous and sovereign artificial intelligence models to address concerns related to bias and to ensure that India has AI systems primarily trained on Indian data, a senior official said on Tuesday.

S Krishnan, Secretary in the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), said that sovereignty is a very important issue, and India needs to have AI models where "nobody else has the kill switch, and it was always with us".

According to him, a country of the size of India needs to necessarily have control over the way AI models function.

There was a debate initially whether India should actually invest in creating indigenous or sovereign models or should it use open source models which have been created elsewhere in the world, because creating an indigenous model was

felt to be expensive and time-consuming, the secretary said. But after some discussion and debate, India went ahead and created its own AI models for certain important reasons.

"First and foremost is to address the issue of bias... Making sure that we have models which are based primarily on Indian data and data which is created in a multiplicity of Indian languages. That is very critical," Krishnan said.

The problem of deepfakes is growing rapidly and requires stronger regulation to protect children and society at large, IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Tuesday, adding that the Government has begun consultations with the industry on additional safeguards beyond those already in place.

He said discussions are underway with social media platforms on tackling deepfakes and age-based restrictions, to determine the most appropriate way forward on the issue.

The minister said any company — be it Netflix, YouTube, Meta, or X — must abide by the legal framework and the Constitution of India. Vaishnaw said the problem of deepfakes is growing

Regulations for artificial intelligence to help innovations thrive: Jitin Prasada

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

The regulations for artificial intelligence are not meant to over-regulate but to ensure enough regulation for innovations to thrive in the country, Union Minister Jitin Prasada said on Tuesday.

Speaking at the Amazon Web Services (AWS) New Delhi Symposium 2026, the minister emphasised that everyone should be able to reap the benefits of technology transformation.

India is a fast-growing market that offers opportunities for various technological innovations, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) solutions. "Scale, speed, innovation

will not call itself successful until all (those in) the bottom-up segment reap the benefits of the technology transformation that is happening," Prasada said. The transformation, the minister said, should be able to increase productivity of individuals as well as levels of income and also improve the standard of living. The benefits should reach one and all, he added.

AWS India & South Asia President Sandeep Dutta said India's success with AI would truly depend on the ability to democratise technology and one of the pillars that would underpin this success would be the scope and expanse of the digital public infrastructure.

Talking about AI, he said, as far as the policy for regulations goes, they are not aimed at over-regulating and that the regulations are enough for innovations to thrive. "India

and inclusion" are the strengths of India, Prasada said.

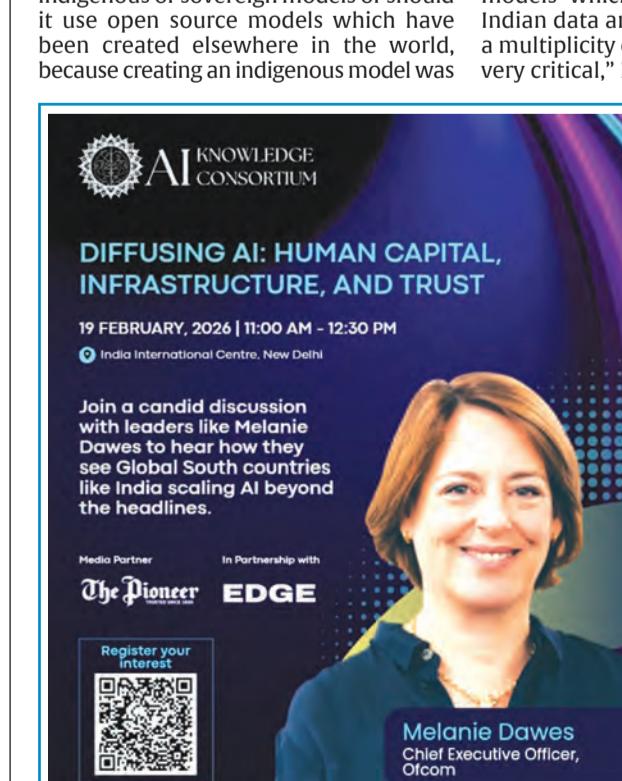
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The parliamentary committee, too, has studied the issue in depth, he said.

"We need much stronger regulations on deepfakes and we must definitely create that consensus within Parliament for creating those significantly stronger restriction on deepfakes so society can be protected from these harms," the Minister said during a briefing during the AI Summit.

He pointed out that many countries have accepted the need for age-based restrictions.



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■ New Delhi

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Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw addresses a press conference on the sidelines of India AI Impact Summit 2026 in New Delhi

PTI

day by day and asserted that stronger regulation is needed. "I think we need a much stronger regulation on deep-

fakes. It is a problem growing day by day. Certainly there is a need for protecting our children and our society from these harms... We have initiated a dialogue with industry on what kind of regulation will be needed beyond what we already have," the minister said.

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A dead man walking—Rise and fall of Keir Starmer


SURJIT SINGH FLORA

As of mid-February 2026, the phrase "The Rise and Fall of Keir Starmer" captures two stories at once. It points to a growing literary theme, but it also echoes a real political crisis for the British Prime Minister.

Context and Current Crisis

Talk of a possible "fall" has spread because scandals and political setbacks keep piling up. As a result, Keir Starmer's premiership now looks fragile, and many supporters and critics alike sense the strain.

On July 4, 2024, Keir Starmer walked into Downing Street with a result that looked like a national reset. Labour gained 211 seats compared with the last election, and the early mood was strikingly calm. Many voters didn't sound thrilled, they sounded relieved, like someone had finally switched off a blaring alarm.

By February 2026, that relief has curled. Critics now call Starmer a "dead man walking," and polls put his approval at the lowest recorded for any prime minister since 1977. The story is not only about a sudden change in public feeling. It is also about why the

win was weaker than it looked, why the honeymoon ended so fast, and why Labour moved to block a popular internal alternative from returning to Parliament. Not all of that support was real loyalty.

The 2024 result looked huge because the seat count was huge. Yet the support underneath was thinner than the headlines suggested. Labour's vote share rose only about 1.6 percent, which is a small movement for a party that won such a large majority.

Britain's voting system can turn small shifts into big seat gains, especially when opponents split and collapse. When one side drops and another side concentrates its vote, the map can flip fast. That does not mean hearts and minds flipped at the same speed.

A big Commons majority can be built on a narrow emotional bargain: "please be different," not "please lead for a decade."

Relief, fatigue, and tactical votes did the heavy lifting

Campaigners often describe a familiar doorstep mood after long periods of turmoil. People are tired. They want quieter politics, fewer scandals, and a sense that Government can function again. That is not the same as excitement about a detailed program.

Tactical voting also mattered. In plain terms, many people voted for the candidate most likely to beat the Conservatives in their area, even if that candidate was not their first choice. For example, a voter might prefer the

Greens or Liberal Democrats, yet still back Labour to make sure the Conservative MP loses. That kind of vote is practical, not romantic.

Anger and exhaustion can move voters quickly, because they are trying to stop something, not start something. The country had lived through years of pressure on living costs and public services. In that climate, a steady, cautious leader can look safe enough to try.

A big majority can hide a small coalition of support

Seat totals can create an illusion of deep consent. In everyday terms, it is like a restaurant that looks packed because everyone arrived at once during a storm. When the weather clears, the room can empty just as quickly.

For governing, thin support changes the stakes. Mistakes cost more because fewer people feel invested in giving the Government time. Patience also runs out faster when daily life does not improve.

Early goodwill becomes a short loan, and the public can call it in without warning.

How the honeymoon ended in weeks, not years

After a dramatic election, many voters expect visible proof. They do not expect miracles, but they do expect signs. A new tone helps at first, yet tone can't lower a grocery bill or shorten an NHS waiting list.

By early 2026, disappointment has hardened into a broader judgment.

The criticism is less about one policy and more about a feeling that the country changed Governments but not conditions. When that happens, a leader's style becomes part of the problem. Starmer's caution may be meant to signal steadiness, but it can also sound like delay.

When prices, waits, and wages don't move, trust drops fast

Voters track Government performance using simple markers. Those markers show up at the kitchen table and on the walk to work. Speeches matter less than the monthly budget because the budget is real.

A perception gap opens fast in modern politics. A leader may think he is being careful. However, the public can hear hesitation, especially when problems feel urgent. As a result, critics reach for brutal labels, and "dead man walking" spreads because it fits a mood.

Modern media accelerates this. A clip or headline can travel faster than a policy paper, so frustration collects speed. That does not mean the public is fickle. It means attention is scarce, and patience is tied to lived results.

Why blocking a popular Labour alternative can backfire?

Internal party pressure rises when public support falls. Parties protect leaders because they fear chaos, and sometimes that instinct is reasonable. The trouble starts when protection looks frightened.

In early 2026, a by-election offered a clear route back to Parliament. Andrew Gwynne stepped down for health reasons after winning 50.8 percent in 2024 with a 13,413 majority. That seat matters because it could give Andy Burnham a Westminster platform again, along with daily visibility and momentum.

At moments like this, the people around a prime minister matter as much as the prime minister. A leadership circle built for message control may struggle when the challenge is trust, not discipline.

Returning to Westminster changes a politician's power. It brings airtime, regular questions in Parliament, and a stronger claim to speak for the party's future. That does not require a "plot" or secret meetings.

Tension can rise on its own because incentives shift.

For a leader polling badly, that shift feels personal even when it isn't. Colleagues start to compare voices. Donors and members start to ask who can win next time. Meanwhile, journalists look for a storyline, and they often pick the simplest one: successor versus incumbent.

Internal rivals don't always scheme. Still, a weak leader can make every capable colleague look like a threat.

Stopping the comeback can look insecure to members and voters.

Trying to block a popular figure's return carries risks. Members may read it as a lack of confidence, and swaying voters may see a party policing

choices instead of earning support. At the same time, the Government cannot afford a fresh internal fight when its standing already looks brittle.

That is the double bind. If Labour clamps down, it can spark the drama it fears. If it allows an open contest, it risks headlines about division. A confident party usually chooses a third route: it competes with a clearer offer, stronger delivery, and a willingness to share space.

Conclusion

Starmer's arc is stark: a huge win, a fragile foundation, and a rapid collapse as daily life stayed hard. The 2024 majority looked like a mandate for change, yet it rested on relief and tactical choices as much as trust. When prices, waits, and services did not shift fast enough, disappointment moved in, and it spread quickly.

Inside Labour, that mood turns routine personnel decisions into tests of confidence, especially with a by-election path that could bring Andy Burnham back to Westminster. All of this adds up to a leadership test that no amount of message discipline can fix on its own.

If Labour wants to stop the slide, it needs visible improvements people can feel and a calmer approach to internal debate. Confidence travels faster than slogans, and voters notice the difference.

The writer is a veteran journalist and freelance writer based in Brampton Canada

US to boost missile presence in Philippines amid China tensions

JIM GOMEZ

■ Manila

The United States plans to deploy more high-tech missile systems to the Philippines to help deter aggression in the South China Sea, where the treaty allies on Tuesday condemned what they called China's "illegal, coercive, aggressive, and deceptive activities."

The US and the Philippines outlined in a joint statement Tuesday specific defense and security plans for this year, including joint military exercises, Washington's support to help modernize the Philippine military and efforts "to increase deployments of US cutting-edge missile and unmanned systems to the Philippines."

The longtime allies "under-scored their support for preserving freedom of navigation



and overflight, unimpeded lawful commerce and other lawful uses of the sea for all nations," the Statement said. "Both sides condemned China's illegal, coercive, aggressive and deceptive activities in the South China Sea, recognizing their adverse effects on regional peace and stability and the economies of the Indo-Pacific and beyond," it added. Confrontations between Chinese and Philippine coast guard forces have spiked in the disputed waters in recent years.

Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan are also involved in the territorial standoffs. Neither side elaborated on the planned missile deployments but Philippine ambassador to Washington, Jose Manuel Romualdez, who

took part in Monday's talks, said US and Filipino defense officials discussed the possible deployment this year of "upgraded" types of US missile launchers that the Philippines may eventually decide to purchase.

"It's a kind of system that's really very sophisticated and will be deployed in the hope that, down the road, we will be able to get our own," Romualdez told *The Associated Press*.

The Typhon missile system that the US Army deployed to the main northern Philippine region of Luzon in April 2024 and an anti-missile launcher called the Navy Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System that was deployed in April last year also to Luzon have remained in the Philippines, Romualdez said. (AP)

Australia won't repatriate 34 women from Syria

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Melbourne

The Australian Government will not repatriate from Syria a group of 34 women and children with alleged ties to the Islamic State group, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Tuesday.

The women and children from 11 families were supposed to fly from the Syrian capital Damascus to Australia but Syrian authorities on Monday turned them back to Roj camp in northeast Syria because of procedural problems, officials said. Only two groups of Australians have been repatriated with Government

help from Syrian camps since the fall of the Islamic State group in 2019. Other Australians have also returned without Government assistance.

Albanese would not comment on a report that the women and children had Australian passports.

11 security personnel, child killed in attack in Pakistan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Peshawar



Militants from the banned TTP rammed an explosive-laden vehicle into a checkpoint in northwest Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, killing 11 security personnel and a child, the military said on Tuesday.

TTP claimed responsibility for the deadly suicide attack on the FC check post in the Bajaur district bordering Afghanistan. According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), "On February 16, a cowardly terrorist attack was attempted on security forces and law enforcement agencies' joint check post in Bajaur District by Khawarij belonging to Fitna

al Khawarij". Fitna-al-Khawarij is a term that the state uses for the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The statement by ISPR added that 12 terrorists were eliminated after security forces retaliated and "engaged the fleeing khawarij with precision". "In their desperation, the attackers rammed an explosive-laden vehicle into the perimeter wall. Due to the impact of the

blast, infrastructure collapsed killing eleven..."

ISPR elaborated that the blast affected residential buildings in the area as well, "leading to the killing of one innocent young girl".

Another seven people were injured, including women and children, the ISPR said. "Sanitisation operations are being conducted to eliminate any other sponsored khawarij found in the area as a relentless Counter Terrorism campaign under vision "Azm e Istejkam" (as approved by Federal Apex Committee on National Action Plan) by security forces and law enforcement agencies of Pakistan will continue at full pace to wipe out menace of foreign sponsored and supported terrorism from the country," the statement added.

"The sacrifices of our brave soldiers and innocent civilians further reinforce our unwavering commitment to safeguarding our nation at all costs," the statement concluded.

NORTHERN RAILWAY NOTICE FOR E-AUCTION

Senior Divisional Commercial Manager/FS, Delhi Division, Northern Railway, in terms of Railway Board letter no. 2022/TC/CMY/10/04 dated 13.06.2022, invites bids through e-Auction (www.irps.gov.in) for the contracts of Management and Operation of Cloakrooms (on RMT basis) situated at New Delhi Railway Station (NDS) separately for Pahar Ganj Side at Platform No.-1 and for Ajmeri Gate Side at Platform No.-16 as per detail and schedule given below:-

S.No.	Date & Time of e-Auction	Assets to be auctioned
1	03.03.2026 at 11:00 Hrs.	Site for Cloak Room at NDS (PF-1), Pahar Ganj Side: The contract of Management and Operation of Cloakroom (on RMT basis) situated at New Delhi Railway Station (Platform no. 1), Pahar Ganj Side (Area 120 Sq. Mtrs.) for a period of 02 (two) years.
2	03.03.2026 at 11:00 Hrs.	Site for Cloak Room at NDS (PF-16), Ajmeri Gate Side: The contract of Management and Operation of Cloakroom (on RMT basis) situated at New Delhi Railway Station (Platform no. 16), Ajmeri Gate Side (Area 128.53 Sq. Mtrs.) for a period of 03 (three) years.

Important notes:

- For more information, requirement and various aspects regarding these e-Auctions, interested bidders are advised to visit <https://www.irps.gov.in/html/helpdesk/learningcentre.html>. (E-Auction/leasing section).
- Earnest Money Deposit (EMD): 10% of the total contractual bid value to be deposited online during the auction. EMD of the successful bidder will be retained as Security Deposit.
- Railway Administration reserves the full and absolute rights to short terminate these contracts at any point of time and/or for taking any decision regarding the discontinuation/ continuation of these contracts with modified/additional terms and conditions depending upon the situations.

542/2026

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER::P.W.D::SILCHAR BUILDING CIRCLE, SILCHAR

No-SBC/CS/2025-26/10/637

PRESS NOTICE

The Superintending Engineer, PWD, Silchar Building Circle, Silchar, Assam on behalf of the Governor of Assam, invites Bids of approximate Bid price (1) Rs. 26,86,240.00 (Rupees twenty six lakhs eighty six thousand two hundred forty) only for the work "Construction of toilet blocks for persons with disabilities (PWD) & transgender in the Court building under the establishment of the District & Sessions Judge, Cachar, Silchar as per model design of Public Toilet Block approved by the Hon'ble Gauhati High Court" (ii) Rs. 37,08,377.00 (Rupees thirty seven lakhs eight thousand three hundred seventy seven) only for the work "Installation of Transparent Roof at Path Way between New Court Building at the Office of the District & Sessions Judge, Cachar, Silchar & District Bar Association, Silchar." for/Firm/Pvt. Limited Co. of Class I(A,B,C) and Class-II (Registered under Silchar Building Circle). Details of the Bid and Details Notice inviting Bid may be seen in the office of the Superintending Engineer PWD Silchar Building Circle Silchar as well as P.W.D. portal www.assamtenders.gov.in. The bidders must be registered with the E-tendering system (ETS) of the Govt. of Assam. ([website :http://www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in))

The Press Notice will be a part of the bidding Documents.

1. NIT value may be changed during uploading of tender in the website, which may seen in Detailed NIT of the bid document.
2. Bidder must submit a completion certificate of a 100% completed similar nature of works in Barak valley.
3. Bidders must have to submit Site verification report from the Executive Engineer, P.W.D., Silchar, Udharpur, Sonai & Dholai (SC) Territorial Building Division, Silchar with the Bid.
4. Contractor must complete the work within the stipulated time irrespective of payment received or not.
5. Bidder must submit Financial Turnover of at least Rs50.00 Lakh in any financial year within the required periods of Financial Years mentioned in the Technical Bid

 Sd/-
Superintending Engineer PWD
Silchar Building Circle Silchar

Nepal's electoral body on Tuesday urged media not to disclose results of opinion polls before the general elections as it may damage a "healthy competitive environment." Nepal is set to hold the House of Representatives elections on March 5, the first since last year's deadly Gen-Z protests that toppled the K P Sharma Oli-led coalition Government.

Nepal's acting Chief Election Commissioner Ram Prasad Bhandari said: "Media should not disclose the results of such opinion polls ahead of the March 5 election, as it may disillusion voters and spoil a healthy competitive environment by discouraging the candidates." He was speaking at a voter education and election awareness campaign in

Kathmandu, attended by social media users, bloggers and actors.

Bhandari also cautioned social media users towards the possibility of distorting the neutral environment of the election through the misuse of technology.

He urged them not to spread misleading content created through artificial intelligence on social media sites during the election campaign. In a separate development, the printing of all ballot papers required for the election has been completed. Managing Director of the Government-owned Janak Education Material Centre Limited, Yadu Nath Poudel,

said that the ballot papers would be dispatched to printing of 20.3 million ballot papers under the first-past-the-post electoral system on Monday evening," he added.

The Bid price may vary at the time of detail tendering for which no claim will be admissible.

 Sd/-
Chief Engineer (Health & Education),
PW(H&E) Deptt., Chandmari, Guwahati-3

No. CE/TB-IV(H&E)/24/2026/2
PRESS NOTICE
The Chief Engineer, P.W.D. (Health & Education), Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3 on behalf of the Governor of Assam, invites fresh Bids online e-tenders in two



PROSPECT



CM Himanta Biswa Sarma with Finance Minister Ajanta Neog and the other members of his Council of Ministers at Assam Legislative Assembly before the presentation of the Vote on Account Budget

Haryana uploads over 40 crore revenue records

In a landmark push toward transparent and technology-driven land governance, Haryana has uploaded more than 40 crore revenue record images under the Modern Revenue Record Rooms initiative, marking one of the largest digitisation drives in the State's administrative history. The progress was reviewed during a meeting of all Deputy Commissioners, chaired by Financial Commissioner, Revenue & Disaster Management Department, Misra, an official statement said. Misra described the digitisation effort as a structural reform aimed at preserving historical land records, ensuring data security, providing citizens seamless access to certified documents.

CAG pulls up NLC for operating mine without environmental clearance

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Government auditor CAG has pulled up NLC India for operating one of its mines without a valid environmental clearance. In its report, recently tabled in Parliament, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) said that NLC India (Neyveli Lignite Corporation of India Limited) operated its Mine-II without a valid Environmental Clearance (EC) due to the company's delay in seeking EC re-validation.

The audit highlighted that the delay in seeking EC re-validation post a Supreme Court order in August 2017 and a Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) notification in April



2018 resulted in unauthorised operations at the mine. The Audit Report, which contains results of the Performance Audit on 'Operational Performance of NLC India Ltd' covering the period from 2017-18 to 2022-

23, was laid on the table of the Rajya Sabha and on the table of the Lok Sabha during the Budget Session. The lack of coordination between the Corporate Environment Cell and the Mine-II Planning Department led to the lapse,

restricting NLC India from production and sale of minor minerals, pointed out the CAG report.

NLC India Ltd, under the Coal Ministry, operates major open-cast lignite mines and pit-head thermal power stations, primarily at Neyveli, Tamil Nadu and Barsingsar, Rajasthan. As of March 2023, lignite mining capacity and power generation capacity of NLC India were 27.10 MTPA and 3,640 MW, respectively.

Audit included assessment of lignite production of three lignite mines at Neyveli viz. Mine-I, Mine-IA and Mine-II and review of the operational performance of thermal power station-I (TPS) expansion, TPS-II and TPS-II expansion located at Neyveli.

Indo-Japan cold chain tech IceBattery launched in Delhi



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

alongside Senior Advisor Tadama Ishida, emphasised the importance of scalable, low-carbon solutions aligned with India's sustainability goals.

Sanjay Swarup of CONCOR highlighted the technology's relevance in strengthening rail-based freight and reducing energy consumption.

The event was graced by Katsuhiko Murayama (Former Director, METI Japan), Takashi Suzuki (JETRO), Shailendra Singh (Former Director, Ministry of Railways), Dr. Prabhakar (Commissioner, Ministry of Agriculture), and Sanjay Sharma (Director, SECI).

The programme, which commenced with Saraswati Vandana and Buddhist chanting, concluded with a technology showcase and a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

"This initiative is a significant step towards reducing post-harvest losses and ensuring food security," stated Deepak Kalia during the vote of thanks.

The partnership reinforces the Indo-Japan commitment to building a modern, emission-efficient supply chain for the country's agricultural and pharmaceutical sectors.

Maruti Suzuki expands product range; drives in first electric model e-Vitara

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi



Suzuki India Senior Executive Officer (Marketing and Sales) Partho Banerjee told reporters at a virtual press conference.

The EV penetration in the domes-

tic market has been hovering around 4-5 per cent for the last two years, and it is time that this market takes an exponential leap, he added. The auto major has launched e

Vitara at 10.99 lakh with BaaS (Battery-as-a-Service) ownership plan. Banerjee noted that the e-VITARA comes with 61kWh and 49kWh battery pack options with a drive range of up to 543 km.

Banerjee said the every e-VITARA owner will receive a complimentary 7.4 kW AC Wall Box Charger along with installation. He noted that before launching the model in the domestic market, the company built EV ecosystems to systematically take care of every barrier to EV adoption.

"Be it the public charging infrastructure, be it the concern of resale value, be it the after sales and service network, be it the product range, we feel it is not the product but an overall package that makes the difference," he stated.

He noted that Maruti Suzuki's EV strategy has been developed to ensure that the e-VITARA becomes the primary EV choice for cus-

tomers. "The e-VITARA offers a commendable driving range of over 543 km, supported by 'e' for me' charging ecosystem that mirrors the reliability our customers have trusted for decades. With over 1,500 EV-ready service centres, specifically trained NEXA EV relationship managers and dedicated charging managers, the e-VITARA offers complete peace-of-mind," Banerjee said.

The company is also introducing flexible ownership plans with BaaS, alongside exclusive benefits for early adopters, he added. In December last year, Maruti Suzuki India MD and CEO Hisashi Takeuchi had noted that aligned with Suzuki's global vision, Maruti Suzuki plans to introduce multiple EVs in the country. "And to support this, our aim is to enable a network of over 1 lakh charging points across India by 2030, along with our Dealer and CPO partners," he had stated.

Joint operations continue to douse forest fire in Walong for fifth consecutive day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Itanagar

Firefighting operations to contain the massive forest fire that broke out on 13 February 2026 in Walong, Anjaw district, are continuing for the fifth consecutive day with sustained intensity and coordination.

Troops of the Indian Army (Spear Corps), in close coordination with the Indian Air Force and the local civil administration, remain fully committed to dousing residual flames, preventing flare-ups, and securing affected areas. Over the past five days, relentless efforts have been undertaken through the synergised deployment of manpower, specialised firefighting equipment, heavy machinery, and helicopters providing aerial reconnaissance and water-dropping support. Operations are being carried out round-the-clock under challenging terrain and weather condi-



tions to ensure complete extinguishing of the fire.

GOC 2 Mountain Division visited the affected area to review the ongoing firefighting efforts and commended troops for their dedication and response. Significant progress has been achieved in containing the

blaze, and continuous monitoring is underway to prevent re-ignition.

The coordinated response reflects the steadfast resolve of the Armed Forces and civil authorities to safeguard lives, protect property, and support the local community during this crisis.

CRPF Raising Day Parade on February 21

TONY DAS

■ Guwahati



Gyanendra Kumar Verma, IPS, IG Ops, Raja Srivastava, IPS, SDG, NE Zone, Deepak Kumar IPS, SDG Training DTE, addressing the press regarding 87th CRPF Day Parade in Guwahati

From the supreme sacrifice of its personnel at Hot Springs in 1959 to the heroic defence of Sardar Post in the Rann of Kutch and its role in the 1971 war, the CRPF has built a distinguished legacy of valour and service.

Over the decades, the Force has played a pivotal role in tackling militancy in Punjab, countering insurgency in Northeast India, responding to major terror incidents including the

attack on the Indian Parliament and managing sensitive deployments in Ayodhya, Mathura, Varanasi and Vaishno Devi. The Force has also contributed to peacekeeping efforts in Sri Lanka and participated in missions under the United Nations.

With specialized formations such as the Rapid Action Force for riot control and humanitarian response and COBRA units for jungle

warfare and anti-Naxal operations, along with signal and VIP security units, the CRPF remains a modern, versatile and highly capable force. It continues to maintain peace and law and order in Jammu and Kashmir and the North East under challenging conditions.

2,270 personnel of the Force have made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty, and personnel of the Force have received 2,256

gallantry medals for exceptional bravery in operations, reflecting an unmatched record of courage and dedication. Reaffirming the national resolve against Left Wing Extremism, the CRPF remains committed to the eradication of Naxalism by March 2026. Sustained, intelligence-driven operations, including major missions such as Ops Black Forest (KGH) and Ops Megaburu, have delivered decisive blows to extremist networks and substantially curtailed their capabilities.

The Raising Day Parade will feature grand ceremonial marching contingents from various CRPF formations, a synchronised band display and a showcase of modern operational equipment and capabilities, reflecting the Force's preparedness to meet emerging security challenges. The occasion will celebrate the CRPF's proud history, operational excellence and unwavering dedication to safeguarding the nation.

Quality as nation-building: The wood panel industry's new chapter



RAJESH MITTAL

■

RAJESH MIT



BRIEFLY

Brentford face West Ham in fifth round of FA Cup



Brentford will face West Ham in the fifth round of the FA Cup after dispatching Macclesfield 1-0 on Monday, an own goal ending the fairy tale run of the sixth-tier giant-killer. The Macclesfield part-timers knocked out cup holder Crystal Palace in the last round and were hailed for pulling off one of the greatest shocks in the competition's long history. But they could not match Brentford, which progressed thanks to a 70th minute own goal from Sam Heathcote. The big defender dived to cut out a cross from Aaron Hickey but instead diverted the ball past his own keeper. It was a cruel denouement for Macclesfield, which held the Premier League club throughout an even first half before tiring in the second 45 minutes. "I couldn't be any prouder," Macclesfield coach John Rooney told TNT Sports. "The lads were outstanding and the shape was really good. We train two times a week and we've put that performance on against a Premier League side."

Don't think Bumrah will rest against the Dutch: Kotak



India batting coach Sitanshu Kotak, on Tuesday, stated that pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah will not be rested for the final Group A match against the Netherlands here despite the hosts having already qualified for the Super 8 stage of the tournament. Bumrah played a pivotal role in Sunday's high-voltage clash against Pakistan, striking crucial blows by removing opener Saim Ayub and captain Salman Ali Agha. His timely breakthroughs derailed the arch-rivals' chase, which eventually collapsed in a 61-run defeat.

With an eye on preserving his fitness, the BCCI's sports science team has carefully managed Bumrah's workload, resting him on several occasions whenever the team management deemed it necessary. "Don't think Bumrah will rest. We will decide later," Kotak said during the pre-match press conference on Thursday. Speaking about opener Abhishek Sharma's fitness after a stomach bug forced him to get hospitalised and also miss the game against Namibia, Kotak remained optimistic. Abhishek returned for the Pakistan clash but was dismissed for a duck. Kotak, however, expressed confidence in the youngster's temperament, describing him as a self-assured player who is certain to bounce back stronger. "He wasn't well. Last game he got out in first over. We don't want to overanalyze. He has his plans sorted," Kotak said when asked if teams have decoded the flamboyant opener's game.

Asia Cup Rising Stars: India A beat Nepal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bangkok

Senior India national team bowlers Tanuja Kanwar and Minnu Mani dished out a dominating display to guide India A to a seven-wicket victory over Nepal and seal their semifinal spot in the Women's Asia Cup Rising Stars on Tuesday.

Left-arm spinner Tanuja ran through Nepal with 4/12, while Minnu wreaked havoc with 3/8, as the two spinners bundled Nepal out for just 78 in 18 overs.

India A, powered by an unbeaten 39 off 18 balls from Dinesh Vrinda, chased down the target in just 7.5 overs for the loss of three wickets,



securing two points and topping Group A with four points and a strong net run rate of +3.042.

The second semifinal spot from the group will be decided after UAE face Pakistan A later in the day.

The UAE sit on four points, but a Pakistan win would tie both teams on four, leaving net run rate to decide who

advances. If the UAE win, they'll top the pool with six points, pushing India to second. India dominated in all departments, with their spinners weaving a web around a struggling Nepal batting lineup. Openers Bindu Rawal (11) and Samjhana Khadka (28) offered a brief resistance, but it disappeared once they were dismissed.

After reaching 56 for 3 in the 10th over, Nepal collapsed to 65 for 9 by the 16th, with left-arm spinner Radha Yadav adding 2 for 17 to the carnage. It was only a matter of time before India chased the target, doing so with ease as Dinesh Vrinda played daring strokes, hitting nine boundaries to finish the job with eight overs to spare.

Sreejesh re-applies for India junior men's chief coach position

SAUMOJYOTI S CHOWDHURY ■ New Delhi

Legendary goalkeeper PR Sreejesh, whose contract as India's junior men's hockey team chief coach ended in December last year, has re-applied for the position, which is set to be decided in a fortnight's time.

Sreejesh, a two-time Olympic bronze medallist, was appointed as the chief coach of the junior men's team in August 2024, and the talismanic custodian guided India to a bronze medal finish at the FIH Men's Hockey Junior World Cup in Chennai last December.

That effort ended a nine-year wait for a podium finish at the event, with a dramatic

come-from-behind 4-2 victory over Argentina. But his contract expired on December 21, and Sreejesh, who has his eyes set on becoming the senior team's coach in the future, has applied again for the position. "Yes, my contract expired after the World Cup, precisely on December 21 last year and after that I am in my hometown in Kerala. But I have re-applied when the advertisement came. I knew some six to seven others have also applied.

Let's see what happens now," Sreejesh told PTI. Talking about his coaching journey with the junior team, Sreejesh said, "It has been a wonderful learning experience where I gave them

back to the game, and what better than passing on my knowledge and experience to the junior players."

"Let's see what happens when the interview and screening starts but I am hopeful." Hockey India sec-

retary general Bhola Nath Singh said at least half a dozen more candidates are in the fray but did not divulge specific names. "Yes, as per due procedure an advertisement has been put out for junior men's team coach as

World Cup. He said chief coach Craig Fulton is experimenting with the squad to find the best combination. "There is nothing to be worried about. We were just trying out some young and new players along with seniors in the Pro League ahead of the important tournaments. We have got the feedback and the results will be reflected in future," Bhola Nath said.

India will next depart for the Hobart leg of FIH Pro League matches from February 20 to 25, where they will play hosts Australia and Spain. Mid-fielder Hardik Singh will lead the embattled team after regular skipper Harmanpreet Singh was potted out "due to personal reasons." (PTI)

India tour helped adapt to conditions: Phillips

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chennai

New Zealand all-rounder Glenn Phillips believes playing a T20I series against hosts India has helped them learn and adapt to the conditions in the ongoing T20 World Cup. The Black Caps played a white-ball series comprising five-match T20Is and three ODIs in India before the T20 World Cup.

On Tuesday, New Zealand qualified to the Super Eights from a tricky group that included South Africa, Afghanistan, Canada and UAE. The Kiwis won three of their four games with their only loss coming against the Proteas. "We had a good lead

up with India and learned a lot over there about the conditions. And we've had a couple of conditions that have changed over here as well, which is fantastic.

"We've had to be adaptable. And credit to the teams that we've played, they've obviously batted very well on all occasions, which is great. And it's put us under a bit of pressure," Phillips said after New Zealand's eight-wicket win over Canada.

"But I think that's really good for us going forward into the next Super 8 phase."

New Zealand, who played their group games in Chennai and Ahmedabad, will now fly to Sri Lanka for their Super Eight matches.



"Understanding the (conditions in) Sri Lanka is going to be obviously different again," Phillips said. "I guess that part of the tournament starts coming down to who's going to keep their calm the most and I guess who can — not necessarily play the long game per se, because it's obviously T20 cricket, but who can hold their nerve for the longest, especially if pitches start deteriorating."

Against Canada, Phillips scored an unbeaten 36-ball 76

and shared a match winning 146-run partnership with Rachin Ravindra, who roared back to form with a 39-ball 59.

"Yeah, he's a fantastic cricketer. And it's one of those things where class is permanent and form is temporary," Phillips said when asked about Ravindra.

"So it was only a matter of time before he was going to come right again, and the beauty of this team is that selection is given for over a long period of time, and we trust our players, and we have a great group of guys where we're giving to something bigger than ourselves."

The associate nations have impressed in the ongoing tournament with Zimbabwe

defeating Australia and Nepal and Italy almost defeating England. Phillips said competing against associate teams can be nerve-wracking as there is an element of the unknown, along with the pressure to win.

"Yeah, actually I think it would be fantastic. For me personally, they're the most nerve-wracking games because you're playing guys that you haven't seen before," he said.

"You know on their given day they're all quality as well, but then there's also the stigma that you should beat them and that becomes quite tough, especially on the world stage where people tighten up."

Real Madrid to play Benfica in Champions League

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

With Kylian Mbappe back, Real Madrid returns to Portugal looking for some payback against Jose Mourinho's Benfica in the Champions League.

Three weeks after Mourinho's team stunned his former club in a 4-2 win that allowed Benfica to qualify and kept the Spanish giant from automatically reaching the round of 16, the teams meet again on Tuesday at the Stadium of Light in the first round of the knockout stage.

"Benfica did not surprise me last time at all because I know what all of Jose Mourinho's teams are like," Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa said. "It's a new match, nothing like the one three weeks ago. We've analysed it and we're ready. I can't ask for more from the players than what they have shown so far."

Benfica got the goal it needed to qualify thanks to a last-minute header by goalkeeper Anatoliy Trubin against Madrid, allowing it to grab the 24th- and final-spot for the knockout stage on goal difference.

Mourinho said Madrid was "wounded," and "a wounded king is dangerous."

"We will play the first leg with our heads, with ambition and confidence. We know what we did to the kings of the Champions League," he said.

The coach acknowledged that Madrid remained heavily favoured and it would take a near-perfect series for Benfica to advance. "I don't think it takes a miracle for Benfica to

eliminate Real Madrid," he added. "I think we need to be at our highest level. I don't even say high, I mean maximum, almost bordering on perfection, which does not exist. But not a miracle."

Arbeloa praised his former coach and said beating Benfica wouldn't be about revenge. "They have an incredible leader, and that's their coach," Arbeloa said. "Our goal isn't to take revenge on Benfica, our goal is to win the Champions League, and beating Benfica is a step in that direction."

The rematch highlights a knockout round that also includes defending champion Paris Saint-Germain against Monaco and Inter Milan, last year's runner-up, facing Norwegian outsider Bodø/Glimt.

Mbappe returns: Mbappe, who already has 38 goals for Madrid this season, will be available after he missed the Spanish league match against Real Sociedad at the weekend because of a knee issue.

He has nine goals in his last six matches with Madrid, including both goals in the loss to Benfica.

PRATIKA ADDED TO INDIAN SQUAD FOR AUSTRALIA ODI SERIES



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Having recuperated from an ankle injury, batter Pratika Rawal was on Tuesday added to India's women's cricket squad for a three-match ODI series against Australia beginning February 24 in Brisbane.

Rawal picked up the injury during the World Cup last year while fielding during a game against Bangladesh. She was replaced by Shafali Verma in the tournament that India went on to win for the first time.

"The Women's Selection Committee has added Pratika Rawal to India's squad for the three-match ODI series against Australia women, which is part of the ongoing multi-format tour of Australia," read a statement from the BCCI.

Pratika has completed her rehabilitation at the BCCI Centre of Excellence and has fully recovered from her ankle injury sustained in October during the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2025, it added.

After the opening game in Brisbane, the other two ODIs of the series will be held in Hobart on February 27 and March 1.

La Liga: Girona stun Barcelona

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Girona



Lamine Yamal missed a penalty as Barcelona lost at Girona 2-1 on Monday and passed up a chance to overtake Real Madrid at the top of La Liga.

The defeat was the second in less than a week for Barca and left it second in the table, two points behind Madrid. A win would have taken it above its archrival but, instead, a crisis brewed for coach Hansi Flick, whose side lost to Atletico Madrid 4-0 in the Copa del Rey last week.

The second loss came even though Barcelona took the lead early in the second half. Yamal hit the

post with his spot kick on the stroke of halftime but 14 minutes into the second period Pau Cubarsi met Jules Kounde's cross from the right and placed his header perfectly into the top corner.

The goal was

Barcelona's 100th in all

competitions this season

and made it the second club in Europe's big five

to hit the century after Bayern Munich.

However, Girona roared back into the game just three minutes later.

Barcelona's Joan Garcia

was already the busier of the two goalkeepers but he

could not stop Thomas Lemar side-footing home

from close range after nice work from Vladislav Vanat

on the left wing.

Sreejesh re-applies for India junior men's chief coach position

SAUMOJYOTI S CHOWDHURY ■ New Delhi

ic come-from-behind 4-2 victory over Argentina.

But his contract expired on December 21, and Sreejesh, who has his eyes set on becoming the senior team's coach in the future, has applied again for the position. "Yes, my contract expired after the World Cup, precisely on December 21 last year and after that I am in my hometown in Kerala. But I have re-applied when the advertisement came. I knew some six to seven others have also applied.

Let's see what happens now," Sreejesh told PTI. Talking about his coaching journey with the junior team, Sreejesh said, "It has been a wonderful learning experience where I gave them

back to the game, and what better than passing on my knowledge and experience to the junior players."

"Let's see what happens when the interview and screening starts but I am hopeful." Hockey India sec-

retary general Bhola Nath Singh said at least half a dozen more candidates are in the fray but did not divulge specific names. "Yes, as per due procedure an advertisement has been put out for junior men's team coach as

World Cup. He said chief coach Craig Fulton is experimenting with the squad to find the best combination. "There is nothing to be worried about. We were just trying out some young and new players along with seniors in the Pro League ahead of the important tournaments. We have got the feedback and the results will be reflected in future," Bhola Nath told PTI.

Bhola Nath also talked about the senior Indian men's team's dismal performance in the Rourkela leg of the FIH Pro League, where the side suffered four consecutive defeats against Belgium and Argentina, including a 0-8 drubbing against the Los Leones. But the Hockey India secretary general said there is nothing to worry about ahead of a busy season, which includes the Asian Games and the

World Cup. He said chief coach Craig Fulton is experimenting with the squad to find the best combination. "There is nothing to be worried about. We were just trying out some young and new players along with seniors in the Pro League ahead of the important tournaments. We have got the feedback and the results will be reflected in future," Bhola Nath told PTI.



Gavaskar, Kapil seek fair treatment for jailed Imran Khan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Displaying sporting camaraderie and cross-border solidarity, Indian cricket greats, including Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil Dev, have expressed "deep concern" over jailed cricketer and former Prime Minister Imran Khan's deteriorating health. Along with 12 other former cricket captains, they urged the Pakistan government to provide adequate medical care and dignified conditions in line with international standards.

This appeal came in the backdrop of reports that the 1992 World Cup-winning skipper Imran has lost approximately 85 per cent of vision in his right eye due to medical

neglect while in custody at Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail. In 2023, Khan, the former Pakistan prime minister, was sentenced to 14 years in prison in a corruption case. He served as Pakistan's Prime Minister from 2018 to 2022.

As many as 14 former captains wrote a letter titled "Appeal by former International Cricket Captains" to the Pakistan government, asking for fair treatment for Khan.

"We, the undersigned former captains of our national cricket teams, write with deep concern regarding the reported treatment and incarceration conditions of Imran Khan, the distinguished former captain of Pakistan and a legendary figure in

world cricket," the letter said. "Recent reports concerning his health — particularly the alarming deterioration of his vision while in custody — and the conditions of his imprisonment over the past two and a half years have caused us profound concern.

"As fellow cricketers who understand the values of fair play, honour, and respect that transcend the boundary rope, we believe that a person of Imran Khan's stature deserves to be treated with the dignity and basic human consideration befitting a former national leader and a global sporting icon."

The letter has also been signed by Michael Atherton, Allan Border, Michael Brearley, Greg Chappell, Ian Chappell,

Belinda Clark, David Gower, Kim Hughes, Nasser Hussain, Clive Lloyd, Steve Waugh and John Wright.

In the letter, the group of former captains asked for proper medical attention, transparent legal procedures and dignified treatment for the 73-year-old Khan.

"We respectfully urge the Government of Pakistan to ensure that Imran Khan receives immediate, adequate and ongoing medical attention from qualified specialists of his choosing to address his reported health issues."

"Humane and dignified conditions of detention in line with international standards, including regular visits by close family members. Fair and transparent access to legal processes without undue delay or hindrance.

"Cricket has long been a bridge between nations. Our shared history on the field reminds us that rivalry ends when the stumps are drawn and respect endures. Imran

Khan embodied that spirit throughout his career."

The letter called on authorities to uphold the principles of "decency and justice". This appeal is made in the spirit of sportsmanship and common humanity, without prejudice to any legal proceedings."

The letter highlighted Khan's contributions to cricket and also as a politician. "Imran Khan's contributions to the game are universally admired. As captain, he led Pakistan to their historic 1992 Cricket World Cup victory, a triumph built on skill, resilience, leadership, and sportsmanship that inspired generations across borders."

"Many of us competed against him, shared the field with him, or grew up idolising

his all-round brilliance, charisma, and competitive spirit. He remains one of the finest all-rounders and captains the sport has ever seen, earning respect from players, fans, and administrators alike.

Beyond cricket, Imran Khan served as Prime Minister of Pakistan, leading his nation during a challenging period. Regardless of political perspectives, he holds the honour of having been democratically elected to the highest office in his country."

Gavaskar spoke about his long-time rival and friend. "It's terrible what they are doing to him. We have been friends since he was trying to qualify as an overseas player for Worcestershire and not just rivals on the field."

with another maximum to move to 39 off 19 balls.

The right-hander brought up a 22-ball fifty in style, hammering Patel for a straight six and then pulling one over deep midwicket.

He continued the assault in the 13th over, hitting Zafar for two sixes, including a switch-hit over deep midwicket. The partnership reached its fifty in just 30 balls as New Zealand powered to 106 for 2 at the halfway mark.

Rachin, meanwhile, completed his half-century off 35 balls, smoking Shivam Sharma over deep midwicket for a six, before pulling Jaskaran through midwicket to seal the chase with 29 balls to spare.

Phillips, Rachin fifties power NZ into Super-8 with win over Canada

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Chennai

Glenn Phillips was back at his best, blasting the fastest fifty for New Zealand in T20 World Cup history, as he and Rachin Ravindra struck fluent half-centuries to power them to an eight-wicket win over Canada and seal their Super 8s berth from Group D on Tuesday.

In a must-win contest for both teams, Canada, opting to bat, was powered by Yuvraj Samra's record-breaking 110 — the youngest century-maker in T20 World Cup history — but the 146-run unbroken Rachin-Phillips stand and an undisciplined bowling effortulti-

mately overshadowed the milestone knock.

Chasing 174, New Zealand rode on Rachin and Phillips' stand that came off just 73 balls, overhauling the target in 15.1 overs.

Phillips remained unbeaten on 76 from 36 balls with six sixes and four fours, while Rachin was 59 not out from 39 balls (4x4, 3x6) in their statement win.

The Kiwis finished their league campaign with six points and a net run rate of 1.227. Having already qualified, South Africa lead the group on net run rate and face UAE in their last league match. Canada remain winless from three matches and next face Afghanistan in their final league fixture.

New Zealand's Glenn Phillips and Rachin Ravindra during the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 cricket match between New Zealand and Canada at the MA Chidambaram Stadium, in Chennai

Canada struck early after a wayward opening over 8) counter-attacked before from Jaskaran Singh cost 14 falling to a stunning diving catch by Shivam Sharma,

while Tim Seifert departed soon after as New Zealand slipped to 30 for 2 in 3.1 overs. However, Rachin and Phillips quickly turned the tide as New Zealand raced to 60 for 2 in the powerplay as Rachin cut and drove with authority, including a six over deep point and two boundaries in a 15-run fifth over.

Phillips, who was five off four balls at one stage, shifted gears after the powerplay. He struck Saad Bin Zafar for consecutive boundaries — a sweep and a back-foot cut — before launching skipper Dilpreet Bajwa over long-off for six.

He then cleared Ansh Patel straight down the ground and followed it up with another maximum to move to 39 off 19 balls.

The right-hander brought up a 22-ball fifty in style, hammering Patel for a straight six and then pulling one over deep midwicket.

He continued the assault in the 13th over, hitting Zafar for two sixes, including a switch-hit over deep midwicket. The partnership reached its fifty in just 30 balls as New Zealand powered to 106 for 2 at the halfway mark.

Rachin, meanwhile, completed his half-century off 35 balls, smoking Shivam Sharma over deep midwicket for a six, before pulling Jaskaran through midwicket to seal the chase with 29 balls to spare.

Canada's Yuvraj becomes youngest to hit century in T20 World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chennai

Canada's Indian-origin batter Yuvraj Samra became the youngest to score a hundred in the T20 World Cup's history when the 19-year-old smashed a career-best 65-ball 110 against New Zealand in a Group D match here on Tuesday. The youngster, who was named after Indian swashbuckler Yuvraj Singh by his cricket fan father Baljit Samra, was playing in only his 19th T20 International since making his debut in March last year.

Samra struck 11 fours and half a dozen sixes during his whirlwind knock, which became the foundation of his team's 173-run total against the higher-ranked opponents.

He was dismissed in the final over while attempting another big hit against Jacob Duffy.

Canada's Yuvraj Samra plays a shot during the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 cricket match between New Zealand and Canada at the MA Chidambaram Stadium, in Chennai

His innings is also the highest individual score for an Associate team's batter in the biennial showpiece.

The record for the fastest hundred in

the T20 World Cup was previously held by Pakistan's Ahmed Shehzad, who was 22-year-old when he touched the milestone in 2014.



India look to improve spin play against Netherlands

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Ahmedabad

old, his high-risk play has resulted in multiple wins for India and perhaps it is only a matter of time before he makes the best of bowlers look ordinary again.

However, four ducks in his last six innings do suggest that he may need to review his plans in the powerplay. Considering his intimidating credentials, it is clear that teams have spent extra time in preparation to tackle the India opener.

By his own admission, Abhishek doesn't have the wide range of shots possessed by others in the line-up and he relies on the use of crease and his free flowing bat swing to scare the daylights out of the opposition.

He likes to target the deep cover boundary in powerplay and starting with the USA game, teams have been smart to deploy a fielder in that region.

Pakistan also had set a similar field for him on Sunday that also included a deep mid-wicket, mindful that he doesn't attempt shots behind the wicket often.

Openers

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and

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order, will also need to show

greater

application.

Pace spearhead

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