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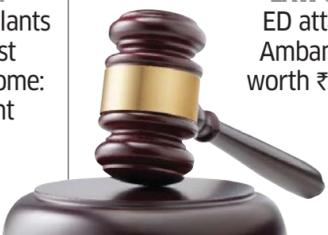
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India need to rethink about team composition: Ravi Shastri



PIONEER IN SHORT

PM MODI CONFERRED WITH 'SPEAKER OF THE KNESSET MEDAL'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was on Wednesday conferred with the 'Speaker of the Knesset Medal' in recognition of his exceptional contribution to strengthening strategic relations between India and Israel. The Indian Prime Minister is the first leader to receive this medal, which is the highest honour of the Knesset - the Israeli Parliament. Knesset Speaker Amir Ohana conferred the award on the prime minister after his address at the Israeli Parliament. The medal was conferred in recognition of the prime minister's exceptional contribution, through his personal leadership, to strengthen strategic relations between India and Israel. PM Narendra Modi is a rare world leader who has received top awards from both Israel and Palestine. In 2018, PM Modi was conferred the Grand Collar of the State of Palestine, which is the highest Palestinian honour for foreign leaders. It is PM Modi's second visit to Israel in nine years. The India-Israel relationship was elevated to the level of a strategic partnership during his first visit to that country in July 2017.

No double standards on terrorism: PM in Israel

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

Addressing the Knesset (Israeli Parliament), PM Modi emphasised India's solidarity with Israel in the face of terror, saying, "No cause can justify the murder of civilians. Nothing can justify terrorism. India has also endured the pain of terrorism for a long time, and we have a consistent and uncompromising policy of zero tolerance with no double standards." Recalling attacks such as the 26/11 Mumbai strikes, which also claimed Israeli lives, he highlighted the shared challenges both nations have faced and the need for coordinated global action against terrorism.

Opening his speech with warm greetings to the leaders and members of the Israeli Parliament, he highlighted the long-standing ties between India and Israel, paying tribute to victims of terror worldwide, including those lost in the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, where Israeli citizens were



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing the gathering at the Knesset, Israeli Parliament in Israel

INDIA STANDS WITH ISRAEL WITH FULL CONVICTION. NO CAUSE CAN JUSTIFY THE MURDER OF CIVILIANS. NOTHING CAN JUSTIFY TERRORISM

also among the casualties. PM Modi emphasised the need for coordinated global action against terrorism, noting that violence anywhere threatens peace everywhere. He praised Israel's historic Abraham Accords and expressed India's support for the Gaza peace initiative endorsed by the UN Security Council, highlighting its potential to foster durable peace and address the Palestinian issue.

Beyond security, the PM celebrated the rich cultural and historical links between the two nations. He recalled centuries-old trade connections, the contributions of Jewish communities in India, and Indian soldiers who sacrificed their lives in the region during World War-I.

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NCERT removes Class 8 textbook from website after SC's objection

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Hours after the admonishment by the Supreme Court, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) on Wednesday pulled a Class 8 textbook from its website. The council, responsible for school education curriculum, is also considering the removal of the controversial portions from the books already printed, said officials.

A three-judge bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi has taken suo motu cognisance of the "objectionable" statements about the judiciary in NCERT textbooks after senior advocate Kapil Sibal, alongside Abhishek Singhvi, mentioned the matter for urgent consideration. CJI Kant strongly objected to a chapter on judicial corruption in the NCERT's Class 8 curriculum, saying nobody on earth will be allowed to defame the judiciary and taint its integrity.

"Justice delayed is justice denied"

On account of multiple reasons, such as a lack of an adequate number of judges, compromised legal procedures, and slowdown in the judicial system in our country have a major bearing. Look at the data from the National Judicial Data Grid given below (as of March 2025).

| Number of pending cases (Approximate) | Value |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|
| Supreme Court | 81,000 |
| High Courts | 62,40,000 |
| District and other subordinate Courts | 4,70,00,000 |

Corruption in the Judiciary

Judges are bound by a code of conduct that governs not only their behaviour in court but also how they conduct themselves outside it. This code, known as the Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct, was framed by the Supreme Court in 2008. It emphasises that judges must be seen by the public as fair and impartial. They must avoid any action, in their personal and professional lives, that could cause the public to question their integrity.

When judges fail to uphold these standards, the judiciary has an essential mechanism to maintain accountability and ensure that judges follow the values of judicial life. There is an established procedure for receiving complaints through the Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) between 2017 and 2023, for example, 1,00,000+ complaints were received. In cases where the allegations are serious, the Parliament can take action and require a judge to pass a motion of impeachment. Such a motion is considered only after a proper inquiry, during which the judge is given a fair opportunity to present their side of the case.

In a recent judgment made in July 2025, the Chief Justice of India, R. G. Kar, said, "Selfly

NOBODY ON EARTH WILL BE ALLOWED TO DEFAME THE JUDICIARY AND TAINT ITS INTEGRITY

CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA
SURYA KANT

The NCERT's new social science textbooks for Class 8 say corruption, a massive backlog of cases, and the lack of an adequate number of judges are among the challenges faced by the judicial system. Meanwhile, the NCERT is said to have called an internal meeting to review the recommendations of the subject experts involved in the chapter and the officials who approved it. NCERT Chairman Dinesh Prasad Saklani did not respond to queries from the media.

The CJI said, "I will not allow anybody to defame the institution. Law will take its course." He added, "As head of the institution, I have done my duty and have taken cognisance... This seems to be a calculated move. I won't say much."

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The ByStander

Kerala to become keralam

E. Smeeth

Rahul faces flak from BJP over anti-India remarks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi/Patna

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday drew flak from top BJP leaders who charged him with being "anti-India and pro-Pakistan". The ruling party at the Centre also attacked Congress Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi and did not spare UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi by blaming her for ruining the tenure of Manmohan Singh.

BJP president Nitin Nabin accused Rahul of taking foreign trips without notifying central security agencies, while Union Minister Piyush Goyal claimed the Congress leader and his party are "compromised" and spreading "falsehoods" to undermine the country's progress for anti-India interests.

Nabin charged the Leader of Opposition with being on a "compromised mission" that began with his great-grandfather and first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and "continued through generations". The BJP president's



THE CONGRESS LEADER AND HIS PARTY ARE 'COMPROMISED' AND SPREADING 'FALSEHOODS' TO UNDERMINE THE COUNTRY'S PROGRESS FOR ANTI-INDIA INTERESTS

UNION MINISTER PIYUSH GOYAL

THE LEADER OF OPPOSITION WITH BEING ON A 'COMPROMISED MISSION' THAT BEGAN WITH HIS GREAT-GRANDFATHER AND FIRST PRIME MINISTER JAWAHARLAL NEHRU AND 'CONTINUED THROUGH GENERATIONS'

BJP PRESIDENT NITIN NABIN

comments come amid a row over the Indian Youth Congress activists staging a shirtless protest at the AI Summit in Delhi last week, with the slogan "PM is com-

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Delhi couple sent to 14-day judicial custody over racial slur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A city court on Wednesday sent a couple accused of hurling racial slurs at their neighbours from Arunachal Pradesh to 14 days of judicial custody.

The accused, Ruby Jain and Harsh, were produced before Additional Sessions Judge Samar Vishal, who remanded them to judicial custody till March 11. The married couple was arrested earlier in the day by Delhi Police for allegedly hurling racial slurs at three Arunachali women in south Delhi's Malviya Nagar area.

Meanwhile, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta has strongly condemned the racial abuse incident involving three young women from the Northeast in South Delhi's Malviya Nagar, asserting that "Delhi belongs to everyone" and that discrimination will not be tolerated.

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J&K Deputy CM's brother in ACB net

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jammu

The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) wing of the Jammu and Kashmir Police early on Wednesday morning swooped down on multiple locations, including the residence of a serving police officer, Vijay Singh Choudhary, brother of Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Kumar Choudhary, in connection with a disproportionate assets probe.

Vijay Choudhary is serving as an Inspector in the Jammu and Kashmir Police. He was sent on deputation for a period of two years to Ladakh in September 2025.

The raid commenced early in the morning at his residence in the Santokh Vihar-Kalochak area of the city.

Several other locations, including a private unit of his son, were also raided by the sleuths of the Anti-Corruption Bureau. "We are searching the residence of Vijay Choudhary. The search is being conducted in connection with "disproportionate assets", officials said. According to a statement

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SC settles dispute over pujari rights at Amoghasiddha temple

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday brought the curtains down in a century-old dispute over ancestral *pujari* rights at a temple in Karnataka, including the right to perform puja of the deity Amoghasiddha and receive offerings from devotees.

A bench of Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and K Vinod Chandran upheld the Karnataka High Court's October 2012

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Lights, Camera, Action: Delhi to host first-ever International Film Festival

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The national Capital is ready to steal the spotlight! Lights, Camera & Action... Delhi is buzzing with filmy whispers, starry dreams, and big global ambitions as it prepares for its very own international film festival. City is set to host the first-ever International Film Festival of its own, akin to prestigious Cannes and Toronto festivals.

The excitement is already spilling onto social media, film circles, and coffee-table gossip alike as Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Wednesday unveiled the curtain-raiser for International Film Festival Delhi (IFFD) 2026.

Scheduled from March 25-31, 2026, the CM described it as a historic opportunity to establish the national Capital as a global cultural and cin-

ematic centre. The city-wide festival will be hosted at prominent venues across New Delhi, including Bharat Mandapam.

The event is expected to open new avenues in film tourism, talent development, AVGC, creative industries and employment. More than 125 Indian and international films will be screened during the festival. The programme will also feature gala premieres, master classes, industry dialogues, workshops and cultural performances.

Stating that the festival would mark a significant milestone for the capital, Rekha Gupta said it is not merely a film event, but a celebration of Delhi's creative strength, cultural heritage and modern outlook. It will be a public festival ensuring participation from all sections of society, bringing



world cinema closer to citizens. The platform will also provide local filmmakers and technicians with international exposure and opportunities for dialogue with national and global talent.

The festival's key attractions will include grand gala premieres and star-studded special screenings, offering audiences a unique experience of cinematic brilliance and creative excellence.

Special showcases dedicated to digital and emerging cinema will provide a platform for innovation and experimentation driven by new technologies.

The high-octane CineXchange Film Market and Cineverse Expo will create fresh opportunities

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for networking, distribution and investment for professionals from across the film industry.

In addition, master classes by distinguished filmmakers and experts, along with industry panel discussions, will offer participants in-depth insights and practical understanding. Cultural evenings and live performances will further enrich the event, transforming it into a multi-dimensional celebration where art and entertainment converge.

Among the festival's key features will be a strong emphasis on promoting film tourism, strengthening the city's cultural identity and local economy. Young talent will be provided with opportunities to showcase their creative potential and engage directly with the industry.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

verdict and junked the claim of the appellants who, it said, had rested their claim almost entirely on a 1901 decree whose effect was demonstrably undone by their predecessor by instituting the suit for possession in 1944.

A party in settled possession does not sue for possession, and the suit is a categorical admission that the possession was not with them at the relevant point in time, the bench said. "The present list before us is a protracted dispute spanning over a century, wherein the respondents/plaintiffs and the appellants/defendants lay competing claims to the ancestral *pujari* rights and the right to perform *puja* of the deity Amoghasiddha — a saint who passed away 600 years ago and his Samadhi was built as a reverence at the temple situated in Mamatti Gudda, Jalgeri, Arkeri, Karnataka," the bench noted.

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BJP MP seeks Indraprastha name for national Capital

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi A political debate over historical identity has resurfaced in the national Capital after BJP MP Praveen Khandelwal on Wednesday wrote to Union Home Minister Amit Shah requesting that the national Capital, Delhi, be renamed Indraprastha, following the Centre's recent approval to rename Kerala as 'Keralam'.

Chowk constituency said that the name Delhi reflects only a later historical phase, whereas Indraprastha connects the city to its ancient civilisational roots. This is not the first time Khandelwal demanded renaming the national Capital. Vishwa Hindu Parishad also demanded this in the past. "As such, the name 'Delhi' reflects a limited historical period rather than the deeper and more enduring legacy of the city. Restoring the name Indraprastha would therefore reconnect the Capital of modern India with its ancient civilisational foundation. It would symbolise that the seat of the world's largest democracy stands upon the legacy of one of humanity's oldest cultural traditions," Khandelwal wrote.



BJP MP Praveen Khandelwal

its local and international names and officially christen it Dilli. Delhi was neither a colonial-era city, such as Bombay — now Mumbai — or Madras — since renamed Chennai — with a strong local political demand to decolonize its name, nor a prominent Hindu site, such as Prayagraj, which subsequently acquired unambiguous Muslim nomenclature (Allahabad). The name Delhi is local, old, well-established, and internationally prominent, and it would be difficult to rebrand such a large city without significant economic disruption, say historians. They argued that Delhi is the most historically sensible and inclusive name for the city.

The name Delhi itself, which is pronounced dilli, is likely to be of local, Indian origin, and may either refer to a local ruler, Raja Dillu, or the fact that the famous Iron Pillar of Delhi is loose (deela in Hindi). The MP highlighted historical and archaeological evidence linking modern Delhi to the Pandavas' Capital described in the Mahabharata. "It is also supported by the Archaeological Survey of India's excavations at Purana Qila. Excavations at Purana Qila have revealed settlement layers dating back to around 1000 BCE, along with artifacts associated with that era, supporting the city's ancient heritage", Khandelwal claimed.

"Historical literature, archaeological findings and long-standing civilizational traditions establish that the present-day Delhi corresponds to the ancient city of Indraprastha, the grand Capital established by the Pandavas as described in the epic Mahabharata," he said in the letter to the Union home minister. The epic describes Indraprastha as a magnificent city built on the banks of the Yamuna river, precisely matching the geographical setting of modern Delhi, he pointed out. Khandelwal also outlined specific proposals, including renaming Old Delhi Railway Station as "Indraprastha Junction" and Indra Gandhi International Airport as "Indraprastha Airport." He suggested installing statues of the Pandavas at prominent locations to educate younger generations about the city's historical and cultural significance.

"Delhi holds a very special place among India's oldest cultural heritages. It is not merely a metropolis, but has been the Centre of Indian civilisation, embodying the traditions of religion, governance, and democracy," Khandelwal wrote. "Renaming it would reconnect us with our roots and mark the beginning of a new chapter in cultural revival." A day earlier, the Union Cabinet, chaired by PM Modi, approved the proposal to rename Kerala as 'Keralam'. The move to rename Kerala has sparked a political row, with West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee questioning why a similar proposal for her State remains pending.

2 held for murder over ₹4 lakh loan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi Two brothers allegedly abducted a man they had borrowed ₹4 lakh from, killed him with a butcher's knife and dumped his body here in the Najafgarh drain. The victim, Ajay Kumar, who was known to lend money to people, had been missing since February 19, the day the brothers allegedly carried out the crime. Police arrested the duo on Tuesday. Kumar, who had had many financial dealings with the brothers previously, was last seen leaving a house in Prem Nagar on his motorcycle, police said.

in Sector-20 in Delhi's Rohini. "Despite sustained efforts, no immediate clue about his whereabouts was found," Additional Commissioner of Police (Rohini) Rajeev Ranjan said. The officer said that on February 23, on the statement of the Kumar's brother, an FIR under section 140(3) (kidnapping) was registered and a special team was constituted. "During the investigation, CCTV footage and local inquiries revealed that a man with his face covered was seen parking Kumar's motorcycle near an abandoned spot in Prem Nagar. This development raised suspicion of foul play," the additional CP said. Based on intelligence and technical surveillance, police zeroed in on Sonu (24) and Mehboob Ali (20) who were



brothers and detained them for questioning.

ing debt. Mehboob allegedly stabbed Kumar to death with a butcher's knife, police said. The brothers then allegedly disposed of the body in the Najafgarh drain in Nilothi Extension in an attempt to destroy evidence and mislead investigators. "We have arrested both the accused in connection with the case. At the instance of the accused, the body was recovered from the drain. The crime team and forensic science laboratory (FSL) officials examined the spot and collected evidence. "The body was later sent to Sanjay Gandhi Memorial (SGM) Hospital for post-mortem examination," the officer said. Subsequently, BNS sections 103(1) (murder) and 238 (causing disappearance of evidence) were added to the case.

Assembly Speaker Gupta stresses constitutional values at SAMVAAD

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta on Wednesday said "service to the nation must be anchored in an understanding of our constitutional journey and the institutions that safeguard it," while inaugurating the Coffee Table Book Stall of the Delhi Legislative Assembly Secretariat at SAMVAAD 2026. It is the annual three-day flagship conclave organised by the NSS Unit of Hindu College, University of Delhi. The event was attended by the Principal, Vice Principal, senior faculty members and a large number of students of Hindu College. On the occasion, Gupta inaugurated the display of the commemorative publication "Shatabdi-Yatra: Vithalbhai Ki Gaurav Gatha". Addressing students and faculty members, the Speaker emphasised that democracy thrives when young citizens engage meaningfully with its history and processes. He observed that the life of



Vithalbhai Patel reflects principled leadership and unwavering commitment to parliamentary values.

Vithalbhai Patel reflects principled leadership and unwavering commitment to parliamentary values. The documentary screening attracted considerable interest, offering students visual insight into the legacy of Vithalbhai Patel and the growth of legislative institutions. On the occasion, Hindu College honoured the Speaker by presenting him with its commemorative coffee table book, "Virasa", which reflects the institution's distinguished legacy, academic journey, and contribution to nation-building.

Classroom ceiling collapses at Dyal Singh College; no injuries

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi A gypsum panel ceiling of a portable cabin classroom collapsed at Dyal Singh College of Delhi University on Wednesday while a class was in progress, officials said. Dyal Singh College principal VK Paliwal confirmed that no one was injured. College authorities attributed the incident to ageing infrastructure, noting that several classes are currently being held in makeshift porta cabins. Mrs. Santosh Kumari intends to transfer the ownership of above-mentioned floor by way of Sale Deed to Mr. Aman Rastogi and Mrs. Anjali Yadav. Subsequently, Mr. Aman Rastogi and Mrs. Anjali Yadav are in the process of mortgaging the said floor with SMIIF India Home Finance Co. Ltd. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 07 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 07-day period will not be considered binding with respect to the said property or the interests of our client. If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 07-days period by contacting Law Veritas: North (Advocates & Legal Consultants) at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-4/A, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301; Landline: +91012-04499711; e-mail: accounts@northline.in

DKVIB clears Khadi Kaushal Vikas Yojana

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi The 55th Board Meeting of the Delhi Khadi and Village Industries Board (DKVIB) on Wednesday formally passed the resolution for the implementation of the Delhi Khadi Kaushal Vikas Yojana. Minister for Industries and Chairperson, DKVIB Manjinder Singh Sirsa presided over the meeting. The Delhi Khadi Kaushal Vikas Yojana was earlier approved by Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta. Sirsa said "The Delhi Khadi Kaushal Vikas Yojana is a comprehensive empowerment initiative. By combining skill develop-

ment, financial support, tool kits, and digital market access through the e-Catalogue, we are ensuring that our artisans become self-reliant entrepreneurs. This scheme will bring dignity, sustainable income, and long-term economic security to more than 16,000 families in Delhi. The scheme will be imple-

Man slits throats of pregnant wife, 3 daughters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi A man allegedly slit the throats of his two-month pregnant wife and three daughters at their residence in outernorth area of the national capital, with police suspecting that his preference for a son could be behind the killings. First responders at the Prem Chand Park area house on Wednesday morning witnessed a grisly sight 27-year-old Anita and her daughters, aged three, four and five years, lying in a pool of blood. "All four victims had their

throats slit with a sharp-edged weapon. The injuries were so deep that their windpipes were cut," a senior police officer said, describing the crime scene as "extremely brutal". "This morning, when my brother-in-law's son came with his uncle to go to the market, he was crying. I came down and asked him



inquiry suggests that the gruesome killings may have been triggered by the couple's three girl children and the lack of a son, police said, adding that the suspect, Munchun Kewat, has been missing from the house. Police said a PCR call was received at 8.07 am on Wednesday regarding the bodies lying inside a room on the ground floor of the house. The bodies were first noticed in the morning by relatives and neighbours. "While investigators are probing all possible angles, including a suspected extramarital affair, preliminary

relative, said. "He said aunt and cousins' throats have been slit," Rubi said. "When I asked around, I found out that there had been a murder. No one knew anything about it last night." Prima facie, it appears that Kewat, allegedly intoxicated his wife and daughters before attacking them. He has been missing since early morning and is the prime suspect in the case, police said. "No specific reason has come to light yet, but it has been learned that they had a dispute around 9 pm last night," a police officer said.

"Many of the porta cabins in the college where classes are being conducted are old, and it's hard to ascertain the current conditions of these porta cabins. We are trying to develop college infrastructure as soon as possible and have signed several MoUs for it," Paliwal said. Students said the six-semester BA History class was underway in room number 36 when the ceiling gave way. "This porta cabin classroom was not in good shape like many others and is situated behind the college library," a student said.

PUBLIC NOTICE This is to inform general public that Mrs. Savita has acquired Entire Ground Floor portion with roof rights, area measuring 100 sq. yds. Part of Property bearing No. B-21, out of Kharsa No. 31/13, situated in the abadi known as Gali No. 2, Hardev Nagar, area of village Jharoda Maara, Barari, Delhi on POA basis vide GPA, ATS & Will dated 27.10.2025. Now, Mrs. Savita intends to sell said property to Mrs. Puja Baweja and she is availing a loan on above said property from Truhome Finance Limited (earlier known as Shivam Housing Finance Ltd) in case anyone has any objection, the same may be raised within 7 days of this publication to Mr. Ajit Sharma (Advocate), Partner of Acculaw Service LLP, Unit No. S-2/4, 2nd Floor, built on Plot No. 4 and 5, Ansal Utility Commercial Center, Paschim Vihar, New Delhi-110063 or contact: +91 9890309909 (M).

PUBLIC NOTICE Known to all that my client Sh. Inder Mohan owner of the Plot Pvt. No. 69, Area 100 Sq. Yds., Kharsa No. 94/23, B-Block, Baba Colony, Barari, Delhi-110084, and My Client Purchase aforesaid property from Smt. Sarvesh vide Notarized GPA, ATS and Will Dated 31.01.2026, Now My Client wants to sell aforesaid property. It is informed that my deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property, shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 08 days of this publication. AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION Ch. No. 760 - Dwarka Court Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-75 Mobile :- 9899013918

OFFICE OF MUNICIPAL CORPORATION KORBA e-Procurement Tender Notice Main Portal: <http://eproc.cgstate.gov.in> KORBA NIT No:- 332/2026 Dated:- 21.02.2026

| S/N | System Tender No. | Name of Work/Description of Work | Probable Amount of Contract |
|-----|-------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. | 186083 (1st Call) | Construction for Gaurav Path Four lane B.T. Road From CSEB Chowk to Jain Chowk to ITI Chowk to Kosabadi Chowk in Korba (C.G.) | Rs. 3356.30 Lakh |

The details can be viewed directly from the Government of Chhattisgarh <http://eproc.cgstate.gov.in> from 21.02.2026 at 15.30 Hours. (IST) onwards. Sd/- Commissioner Municipal Corporation Korba (C.G.)

उत्तराखण्ड लोक सेवा आयोग हरिद्वार विन कोड-249404 संख्या: 638/83/02/डीआर(अधी0)/सेवा-1/2024-25 दिनांक : 25 फरवरी, 2026 विज्ञापित

एतद्द्वारा सूचित किया जाता है कि उत्तराखण्ड महिला सशक्तिकरण एवं बाल विकास विभाग के अंतर्गत अधीक्षिका, महिला कल्याण विभाग के रिक्त 01 पद पर सीधी भर्ती के माध्यम से चयन हेतु जारी विज्ञापन संख्या:-A-1/DR/S-1/2025 दिनांक 11 जुलाई, 2025 के सापेक्ष अधीक्षिका (महिला कल्याण विभाग) स्वीणिम परीक्षा (वस्तुनिष्ठ प्रकार)-2025 का आयोजन दिनांक 22 मार्च, 2026 (रविवार) को परीक्षा केन्द्र-परीक्षा भवन, उत्तराखण्ड लोक सेवा आयोग, हरिद्वार (केन्द्र कोड-101) में किया जायेगा। उक्त परीक्षा हेतु औपबन्धिक रूप से अर्ह अर्थवर्षी दिनांक 06 मार्च, 2026 (शुक्रवार) से आयोग की वेबसाईट psc.uk.gov.in से प्रवेश-पत्र (Admit-Card) डाउनलोड कर सकते हैं। अर्हार्थियों को डाक द्वारा पृथक से प्रवेश-पत्र (Admit-Card) प्रेषित नहीं किये जायेंगे। (अशोक कुमार पाण्डेय) सचिव।

IN THE COURT OF SH. ABHILASH MALHOTRA LD. PO-MACCT-02, NEW DELHI DISTRICT, PATIALA HOUSE COURTS, NEW DELHI DEFENDANTS (Order 5 Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure)

TRIPATI SINGH VS. KAKARLAPUDI CHIRANDEVI & ORS MACT 52/22 Next Date of Hearing: 06.03.2026 at 10.00 A.M

BABA FARID UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES, FARIDKOT E-Tender Notice Online bids are invited through E-Procurement portal of Government of Punjab for the procurement of Books in physical form and E forms for University Library, College Library and Departmental Libraries. The last date for submission of online bids is 18/03/2025 Registrar 3108/12/2025-26/8743 Dated CHD :- 25/02/2026

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, PWRD DARRANG ROAD CIRCLE:DARRANG No.1314 PRESS NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER Superintendent Engineer PWRD, Darrang Road Circle on behalf of Governor of Assam invites bids for the work "Periodic Renewal of BhakatparaPandaghat Road (From Ch 0.00 km to 2.00 km)(L=2.00 km) & SarabariHatimara Road (From Ch 0.00 km to Ch 1.00 km)(L=1.00 km) under MukhyaMantrir Path NabikaranAchani for the year 2023-24 under Sipajhar LAC (Balance Work)" amounting to Rs 40.75Lakh (Approximate). Details may be seen in the website <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours from 28.02.2026. Amendment /Addendum to the SBD, if any, and further notifications shall appear in this website and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours. The contractor/bidder must be registered with the Electronic Tendering System (ETS) of PWD, Assam website <http://assamtenders.gov.in>. N.B.: The NIT value includes 12% GST and 1% LabourCess. Sd/- Superintending Engineer PWRD, Darrang Road Circle Mangaldai, Darrang DIPRC/PIO/919/26-Feb-26

PUBLIC NOTICE CATEGORICAL DISASSOCIATION & LEGAL DISCLAIMER BY M3M GROUP AND ITS PROMOTERS The M3M Group has come across certain media reports, digital content, social media posts, YouTube videos, WhatsApp forwards and speculative commentary attempting to link the M3M Group, its promoters directors group entities affiliates employees or representatives with the ongoing or proposed Rajya Sabha elections in Haryana or with any political party candidate, electoral process funding or political arrangement. The present public notice is being issued for a categorical clarification in response thereto to clarify that the M3M Group has absolutely no role involvement or participation of any kind in the said election process or in any political activity connected thereto. Neither the M3M Group nor its promoters, their family members or any group entities have sponsored, funded, endorsed or contributed to any person's candidature or electoral process. Further, no promoter of the M3M Group or their family members are participating in the election process. Any suggestion portraying the M3M Group or its promoters as political financiers, backers, influencers or kingmakers is entirely false and without any factual foundation. The M3M Group does not engage in political campaigning, funding, lobbying, advocacy or any form of political negotiation or interference. The nature of such unfounded reports appears to be motivated and driven by vested interests, including possible business competitors, with an intent to malign the reputation and goodwill of the M3M Group. The public and media are hereby advised not to believe, rely upon or circulate such unverified and misleading content. The M3M Group unequivocally disassociates itself from all such speculations and reserves its right to initiate appropriate civil and criminal proceedings including actions for defamation and other remedies available under applicable law, against any person or entity disseminating false or defamatory material. This clarification is issued in order to protect the reputation of the M3M Group and to prevent the spread of misinformation. Issued by: M3M India Pvt Ltd. Dated: 26.02.2026 Place: Gurugram

AXIS BANK LTD. RETAIL ASSET CENTRE: AXIS HOUSE, JAYPEE GREEN WISH TOWN, TOWER-2, 4TH FLOOR, SEC-128, NOIDA EXPRESSWAY, NOIDA-201301

CORPORATE OFFICE: 'AXIS HOUSE', BLOCK-B, BOMBAY DYEING MILLS COMPOUND, PANDURANG BUDHKAR MARG, WORLI, MUMBAI-400025, REGISTERED OFFICE: 'TRISHUL', 3RD FLOOR, OPPOSITE SAMARTHESWAR TEMPLE, LAW GARDEN, ELLISBRIDGE, AHMEDABAD-380006, ALSO AT: AXIS BANK LTD. HIMALAYA HOUSE, UPPER FLOOR & FIRST FLOOR, K3 MARG, CONNAUGHT PLACE, NEW DELHI-110001

POSESSION NOTICE UNDER SARFAESI ACT 2002 Whereas the undersigned being the Authorized Officer of Axis Bank Ltd. under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 9 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, issued demand notice upon the Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)/ Mortgagee(s) mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)/ Mortgagee(s) having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)/ Mortgagee(s) and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)/ Mortgagee(s) in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of Axis Bank Ltd. The Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)/ Mortgagee(s) attentions is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

| S. N. | Name of Borrower/ Co-borrower | Date of Demand Notice | Date of Possession |
|-------|--|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. | M/S. GTM Consulting, Apartment No. 404, Block No-21, 4th Floor, Ph-2, Heritage City, Gurgaon 122002. Also At: Mr. Rahul Chaudhry, H No-404/21, Heritage City, Sarhau, Gurgaon 122002. Also At: M/S. GTM Consulting Pvt Ltd Apt No 404, 4th Floor, Block-21, Heritage City, Phase-2, Gurgaon 122002 | 18-Jul-2023 | 23-Feb-2026 |
| 2. | M/S. GTM C Pvt Ltd H No-404/21, Heritage City, Sarhau, Gurgaon 122002. Also At: Mr. Rahul Chaudhry, H No-404/21, Heritage City, Sarhau, Gurgaon 122002. Also At: M/S. GTM Consulting Pvt Ltd Apt No 404, 4th Floor, Block-21, Heritage City, Phase-2, Gurgaon 122002 | 18-Jul-2023 | 23-Feb-2026 |

Description of mortgaged Property- Apt No 404, 4th Floor, Block-21, Heritage City Phase-2 Gurgaon 122002

The above-mentioned Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)/ Mortgagee(s) are hereby given a 30 days' Notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days' from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002. Date: 26-Feb-2026, Place: Noida Sd/-, Authorized Officer, Axis Bank Ltd.

OFFICE OF THE PROJECT MANAGER, CONSTRUCTION UNIT, UTTARAKHAND PEYJAL NIGAM GHINGARIKHAL, RANIKHET, DISTT.-ALMORA 263645 Letter No.: 414/Nvida /22 Date : 24-02-2026 E-Tender Notice

| Sl. No. | Name of the work | Tender Value without GST (Rs. In Lakh) | Period of Completion |
|---------|---|--|----------------------|
| 1. | Construction Work of Classroom Building For Sarvodaya Inter College Joint, District- Almora | 69.12 | 12 Months |

2. Date and Time of availability of Bid documents in the portal: 25-02-2026 (17.00 hrs) 3. Online Bid submission: End date :- 12-03-2026 (17.00 hrs) 4. Date & Time of Technical bid Opening :- 18-03-2026 (11.00 hrs) 5. Name and Address of the Officer inviting bid: - Project Manager Construction Unit, Uttarakhand Peyjal Nigam, Ranikhet. 6. Pre-bid meeting details (if required) Date & Place :- 28-02-2026 (11.00 hrs) Project Manager Construction Unit, Uttarakhand Peyjal Nigam, Ranikhet. 7. For further details, details of subsequent Amendment / correction documentation etc. may be obtained from the e-Procurement portal www.uktenders.gov.in PROJECT MANAGER



Government extends current excise policy for 2026-27

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

With a new excise policy yet to be finalised, the Delhi Government has issued orders asking Hotels, Clubs and Restaurants (HCRs) to renew their licence under the existing policy for the next financial year 2026-27, officials said on Wednesday.

In June last year, the Delhi Government extended the duty-based excise policy, which has been in effect from the licensing year 2022-23, for the 2025-26 fiscal.

"The Competent Authority has granted approval for renewal and grant of new Hotel, Club and Restaurant (HCR) and Medicinal and



Toilet Preparations (M&TP) licences for licensing year 2026-2027 on the same terms and conditions as that of excise year 2025-26,"

an excise department's order said.

Necessary circulars may be issued in this regard by the concerned branches

dealing with all the above licences and permits under the Delhi Excise Rules, 2010, the order added.

The department has also increased the licence fee by 10 per cent for L-17/L-17F, L-18/L-18F, L-19/L-19F and L-20/L-20F, under the HCR category.

"The department reserves the right to review the licence fee, and in case the same is increased, the licensee shall be liable to pay the increased amount within the stipulated time period, failing which the department shall have the right to stop the transport permit of the unit or take any other suitable action," the order said.

CM Gupta releases one-year report card

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

On the third day of her outreach programme marking one year in office, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Wednesday addressed a public gathering in East Delhi. She released her Government's one-year report card, highlighting achievements across various sectors as the BJP-led administration completed its first year in office.

The event underscored the Government's progress amid ongoing public engagement initiatives. Addressing a gathering, the chief minister stated that the Government is working continuously to fulfil the resolve of building a 'Viksit Delhi'. Marking one year of the BJP-led Delhi Government, she reiterated the message: "First Step



Towards Change, One Year of Development."

She noted that the Government has presented its report card to the public and encouraged citizens to register complaints through the provided contact number if they feel any work has not been done.

She further remarked that Delhi does not have a three-engine but a four-engine Government, with the organisation being the fourth engine. The Chief Minister

said that her Government is not merely focused on governance, but on serving the people. She highlighted that over the past year, sustained efforts have been made at the grassroots level, with priority given to essential services such as healthcare, education, smooth transport connectivity and access to clean drinking water.

"These 365 days were the days that changed the course of Delhi, and the coming 4 years will change the condi-

tion of Delhi," she said.

During the 'Pravas' programme, emphasis was laid on the fact that this one-year development journey has laid the foundation of an 'ideal capital', prosperous, progressive, green and equipped with modern amenities. In this vision, the East Delhi parliamentary constituency will play a pivotal role and will, in the coming years, be firmly placed on the global development map.

Union Minister of State Harsh Malhotra, Member of Parliament from North West Delhi Yogender Chandolia, MLA from Vishwas Nagar Om Prakash Sharma, MLA from Gandhi Nagar Arvinder Singh Lovely, MLA from Jangpura Tarvinder Singh Marwah, MLA from Krishna Nagar Anil Goyal, MLA from Shahdara Sanjay Goyal.

Delhi CP issues new rules for pairvi officers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Seeking to plug procedural gaps that often slow down court proceedings and delay justice to victims, Delhi Police Commissioner Satish Golchha has issued a Standing Order, defining the role, responsibilities and accountability of pairvi officers posted in courts across the national Capital.

The February 3 order aims to strengthen coordination between investigating officers, prosecutors and courts, and ensure that lapses such as non-appearance of officials or delayed compliance with court directions do not hamper the judicial process.

The order said that court proceedings are often delayed due to the non-appearance of investigating officers (IOs) or failure to comply with court directions in time. It mandates pairvi officers to act as a crucial link between the courts, prosecution, police stations, investigating units and witnesses to ensure that such lapses are minimised.

"It has been observed that several cases or Court proceedings are delayed due to the non-appearance of the Investigation Officers (IOs) or the lack of timely compliance with the directions of the Court. The Pairvi Officer needs to ensure better pairvi of the cases, which are fixed for hearing in the Courts and to reduce the burden of the IOs of the cases," the order stated.

According to the order, the primary objective behind appointing pairvi officers is to ensure effective follow-up, coordination and representation in legal, administrative and institutional processes for smooth and timely case management in courts.

Under the new guidelines, pairvi officers in the High Court must immediately inform the legal cell in writing about admission of writ petitions, appeals, bail applications or miscellaneous applications. They are required to maintain a daily-updated pairvi register, coordinate with standing counsels and prosecutors for



pairvi of vakalatnama (authorisation letter given to lawyer by client), counter affidavits and status reports, and ensure that replies are prepared well before the next date of hearing.

They must also record court orders on each date of hearing and promptly communicate adverse orders to senior officers, including the joint commissioner of police concerned, Legal Cell (PHQ), deputy commissioner of police of the district/unit and the station house officer (SHO). In cases where an IO fails to appear in court, the pairvi officer is required to immediately inform the SHO and escalate the matter to the ACP and DCP in important cases. The officer must also ensure that victims, particularly in sexual offence cases, are informed in advance about hearings.

For district and subordinate courts, the Standing Order directs pairvi officers to prepare advance lists of cases fixed for hearing, ensure timely service of summons and warrants, facilitate production of case property, coordinate with public prosecutors and personally brief witnesses if required.

They are also tasked with ensuring that processes such as e-summons and video conferencing platforms like 'Nyaya Shruti' are utilised wherever operational. The order further mandates maintenance of specific registers as per Annexure-A (High Court) and Annexure-B (District Courts), to be checked regularly by the inspector, Legal Cell. Once exhausted, the registers are to be deposited with the Legal Cell for record.

Only 43% of ₹300 crore pollution Budget spent so far: RTI reply

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi has utilised only 43 per cent of the funds of ₹300 crore allocated under Pollution Control and Emergency Measures in the Budget for 2025-26.

In response to a Right to Information (RTI) application, the Delhi Government's environment department has said that ₹129.83 crore has been spent under Pollution Control and Emergency Measures during the period.

The expenditure was largely on short-term air pollution mitigation measures carried out with funds disbursed to the Public Works Department by the Environment Department. According to the response, ₹23.37 crore was spent on the installation of mist spray systems on electric poles and central verges along road stretches in Delhi.

Around ₹58.83 crore was used for hiring 200 truck-mounted anti-smog guns, and ₹47.12 crore was spent on another batch of 200 truck-mounted anti-smog guns



hired in 2024-25. Additionally, the environment department was allotted ₹506 crore for FY 2025-26.

Out of the total allocation of about ₹473.02 crore across schemes, ₹152.59 crore had been utilised till January 20, 2026.

The RTI also showed zero expenditure till January 20 under several

major allocations. These included ₹70 crore allocated to the Delhi Pollution Control Committee for remediation of environmental damage caused by illegal extraction of groundwater, and ₹64.40 crore allocated to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi for engagement of mechanical road sweeping

machines, water sprinklers and anti-smog guns.

Allocations worth ₹1.75 crore for real-time pollution source apportionment studies, ₹1 crore for the e-waste eco park project, and ₹1 lakh each allocated for technical setup in the environment department, sewage treatment plants and smog towers also remained completely unutilised.

Scheme-wise details in the RTI response showed that ₹5.91 crore was utilised out of ₹9.34 crore allocated to the Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Climate Change and Communication.

A cloud seeding pilot project with IIT Kanpur saw expenditure of ₹38 lakh out of ₹3.80 crore allocated. Delhi Parks and Garden Societies utilised ₹14.18 crore out of ₹20 crore, while eco-clubs in schools and colleges spent ₹80 lakh of the ₹2-crore allocation.

For environment data generation, survey and research activities, ₹97.92 lakh was utilised out of ₹1.80 crore, while public environmental awareness and publicity activities recorded ₹4.24 lakh

expenditure out of ₹2 crore allocated. Pollution control and hazard management saw utilisation of ₹1.88 lakh out of ₹10 lakh.

Water bodies and wetlands recorded ₹25 lakh expenditure against an allocation of ₹10 lakh. Carbon credit facilities related to climate change initiatives saw utilisation of ₹19.75 lakh out of ₹50 lakh allocated.

On air pollution mitigation, the RTI reply stated that the environment department coordinates with multiple agencies, including urban local bodies, Delhi Development Authority, Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation, Delhi Pollution Control Committee, Delhi Jal Board, Central Public Works Department, National Highways Authority of India, National Capital Region Transport Corporation, besides other departments of the Delhi Government. It added that regular senior-level review meetings are held, and an implementation committee for control of air pollution has been constituted to review actions taken.

3 more Congress workers held in AI summit protest case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Three more Congress workers have been taken into custody in connection with the "shirtless" protest at the AI Impact Summit, taking the total number of those arrested in the case to 11, an official said on Wednesday.

Saurabh, Siddharth and Arbaz were apprehended by the Special Cell of Delhi Police from a hotel in Rohru subdivision of Shimla district in Himachal Pradesh. They were produced before a local court, which granted transit remand to enable the police to bring them to Delhi for further questioning, he said. However, the arrests led to a dramatic turn of events after Himachal Pradesh Police intercepted the Delhi Police team while they were transporting the accused to the national capital.

According to sources in Himachal Pradesh Police, the team from Delhi carried out the operation in Shimla without informing the local police. Acting on this, Himachal police



intercepted three vehicles carrying the accused - who are reportedly not residents of Himachal Pradesh - and Delhi Police personnel.

Two vehicles were stopped in Shimla, while the third was intercepted near Dharampur in Solan district. Around 20 people, including police personnel, were detained, the source said.

The "shirtless" protest at Bharat Mandapam on February 20 had triggered a major security response, with police earlier invoking charges including rioting and promoting enmity under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

Officials said the Special Cell acted on specific inputs and technical surveillance to trace the accused, who were allegedly involved in coordinating and assisting the protest at the high-profile international event attended by dignitaries and delegates. There was no immediate response from the Delhi Police to the reports. Indian Youth Congress president Uday Bhanu Chib and former national spokesperson Bhudev Sharma were arrested in connection with the case on Tuesday. Both were produced before a Delhi court and remanded to police custody for interrogation.

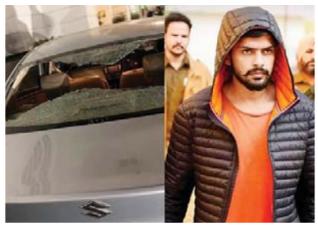
Gangster Naveen Boxer blames attack on Bishnoi's lawyer

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

An FIR has been registered in connection with a late-night firing at a car carrying a lawyer associated with jailed gangster Lawrence Bishnoi near the ISBT in Kashmir Gate, police said on Wednesday. Gangster Naveen Boxer allegedly claimed responsibility for the attack through a social media post purported to be from him.

The case has been registered at Kashmir Gate Police Station under sections 109(1) (attempt to murder) and 3(5) (criminal conspiracy) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the Arms Act at the complaint of advocate Deepak Khatri, the police said.

Khatri had earlier received threats of violence, a police source said. On Tuesday at around 10.10 pm, a car came under gun attack near the Marghat Wale Hanuman Temple close to ISBT. There were five occupants in the vehicle at the time of the incident. One of the occupants sustained a bullet injury to his shoulder and was admitted to a hospital. He is stated to be stable and out of danger, an officer said. Deputy Commissioner of Police (North) Raja Banthia said the occupants of the car have given varying



accounts regarding the number of assailants involved in the attack.

Meanwhile, a social media post surfaced shortly after the incident in which gangster Naveen Boxer purportedly claimed responsibility for the firing.

The post, shared from a profile bearing his name and photograph, stated that the attack was carried out by him and his associates and also issued threats to Khatri. He acts as an informant and middleman for Lawrence. "You arrange extortion deals and bring information during meetings; stop doing this. Otherwise, your actions will be punished, and your entire family will have to suffer the consequences," the post read. The police said they are verifying the authenticity of the social media account and the claim.

NCRTC offers loyalty points for Meerut Metro, Nammo Bharat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Passengers travelling on the Nammo Bharat trains and the Meerut Metro can now earn loyalty points on every journey by using the National Common Mobility Card (NCMC) or booking digital QR tickets through the Nammo Bharat Connect mobile application. Under the loyalty programme operated by the National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC), commuters earn one loyalty point for every rupee spent on travel, with each point valued at 10 paise, according to a statement.

It stated that once a minimum of 300 points is accumulated, passengers can redeem them for free journeys on both Nammo Bharat and Meerut Metro services. For NCMC card users, accumulated loyalty points are credited to their account at the end of each operational



day and can be checked the following day. For instance, a passenger spending ₹100 on travel earns 100 points worth ₹10, it stated.

As per the statement, to reduce the need for frequent redemptions, the system also

allows passengers to redeem points for up to five trips at one time. These redeemed trips remain valid for seven days and must be used within the stipulated period.

Passengers using NCMC cards can check their accumu-

lated points at ticket vending machines, ticket readers or ticket counters. Any NCMC card issued by a metro rail corporation, transport authority or financial institution across the country can be used for travel on Nammo Bharat trains

and the Meerut Metro, a facility that has been available since the start of operations. For passengers booking tickets through the Nammo Bharat Connect app, checking and redeeming loyalty points is simpler. By selecting the 'Loyalty Points' option and choosing 'Redee', users can book tickets using their accumulated points equivalent to the fare between the selected stations, it mentioned.

Additional details are available in the FAQ section under the 'Nammo Bharat' segment within the app's 'My Account' section, it added.

According to a statement, all earned loyalty points remain valid for one year from the date of credit. The passenger-centric initiative reflects NCRTC's continued efforts to make public transport more affordable, convenient and efficient for regular commuters using the Nammo Bharat and Meerut Metro services, it added.

Delhi Assembly summons Punjab DGP over Atishi video row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Assembly has summoned Punjab officers, including the State Director General of Police (DGP), to appear before its privileges committee on Friday in connection with the alleged remarks of Leader of Opposition Atishi against Sikh Gurus.

The issue was related to a video clip of the Assembly's Winter session proceedings in January, based on which BJP legislators accused Atishi of making "derogatory" remarks against Sikh Gurus.

The Assembly secretary, in a letter to the Under Secretary of the Punjab Government's Home Department, said the senior officers of the state would be provided an adequate opportunity to explain their stand before the committee on February 27.

"It has also been conveyed that the Committee cannot be repeatedly expected to respond to the Department's queries and clarifications, and that if any clarification is required by the Committee from the Department, the same shall be sought as and when required. Accordingly, the concerned officers, namely the Additional Chief Secretary (Home-II), the DGP (Punjab) and the



Commissioner (Jalandhar), have been advised to comply with the directions of the Committee of Privileges and to appear in person before the Committee as per the date and time mentioned in the Notice / Summons issued to them," the Delhi Assembly secretariat wrote.

The panel has summoned Additional Chief Secretary (Home II), DGP and the Commissioner of the Jalandhar Police to appear in person before it.

After a row erupted over the alleged remarks of Atishi, the AAP Government in Punjab moved quickly, and a case was registered in Jalandhar over the video clip shared by the BJP leaders.

IN FOCUS



Visitor clicks photographs amid blooming tulips during the Delhi Tulip Festival along the Shanti Path lawns in New Delhi

MoUs worth ₹11,000 cr signed with Japanese firms

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Tokyo/Lucknow

Memoranda of understanding (MoUs) worth about ₹11,000 crore were signed with several Japanese companies during the first day of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's visit to Japan on Wednesday.

The agreements were signed with firms, including Kubota Corporation, Minda Corporation, Japan Aviation Electronics Industry, Nagase & Co, Ltd, Seiko Advance, O&O Group, Fuji Japanese JV, and Fujisilverttech Concrete Pvt Ltd, as per an official release. The partnerships span sectors such as agricultural equipment



UP CM Yogi Adityanath meets Kazuki Shimizu, Managing Officer and COO of Infrastructure Projects Business Unit at Mitsui & Co, and senior team members to discuss investments in Tokyo, Japan

manufacturing, industrial machinery, water and environmental infrastructure solutions, automobiles, electronics, industrial printing and graphics, hospitality and real estate. Officials said the agreements are expected to boost manufacturing capacity and deepen industrial collaboration between India and Japan. Founded in 1890 and headquartered in Osaka, Kubota Corporation is a

leading multinational known for agricultural and industrial machinery.

Minda Corporation, part of the Spark Minda Group, is a major automotive components manufacturer providing mechatronics, wiring harnesses, plastic interiors, sensors and electric vehicle solutions. Japan Aviation Electronics Industry, also known as JAE, specialises in advanced connectors and electronic interface solutions for automotive and aerospace sectors.

Nagase & Co, Ltd is a diversified Japanese trading and technology company engaged in chemicals, advanced materials, mobility solutions and electronics. Officials said collabora-

tion among these companies is expected to promote automotive electronics and advanced component manufacturing. Seiko Advance, a Japan-based firm known for high-performance screen printing inks and coating solutions, supplies products used in automotive decals, industrial graphics, electronic panels, glass printing and consumer appliances, including through its manufacturing presence in India.

Meanwhile, O&O Group has signed an agreement to invest in the hospitality and real estate sector. Officials described the agreements signed are expected to give fresh momentum to bilateral industrial cooperation.

Baramati air crash: Rohit files complaint against VSR Ventures

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Mumbai

NCP (SP) MLA Rohit Pawar on Wednesday filed a complaint at a police station against VSR Ventures and its directors in connection with the January 28 plane crash in which his uncle and then Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar died.

As the matter is linked to the accidental death report registered at Baramati following the crash, the complaint was being forwarded to the Crime Investigation Department (CID), Pune, said a police official. VSR Ventures operated the ill-fated Learjet-45 plane which crashed in Baramati in Pune district with Nationalist Congress Party chief Ajit Pawar and four others on board. On Tuesday,



the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) ordered the grounding of four aircraft of VSR Ventures over non-compliance of approved procedures in the area of airworthiness, air safety, and flight operations. Earlier in the day, Rohit Pawar, who has been questioning the circumstances surrounding the plane crash, alleged that the Mumbai police refused to register a First Information Report in the case.

I-T searches BSP MLA residences in UP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

The Income Tax Department on Wednesday conducted searches at the Lucknow and Ballia residences of Bahujan Samaj Party's lone MLA in Uttar Pradesh, Uma Shankar Singh, an official said.

The officials did not disclose the reasons for the searches or their outcome till Wednesday afternoon.

Singh, 55, a three-time MLA, represents the Rasra Assembly constituency in Ballia district. He was earlier associated with private construction business activities.

Meanwhile, Dinesh Singh, a BJP leader and minister in the Yogi Adityanath government who is related to the BSP legislator, objected to the action through posts on social media. "Today,



the Income Tax Department is conducting a raid at the house of Shri Uma Shankar Singh, MLA from Rasra in Ballia district, whose family is related to mine through marriage," he posted on Facebook, X and Instagram. He said leaders in the state and the country, as well as authorities, including the Income Tax

Department, were aware that the BSP MLA has been battling serious health issues for over two years.

"For more than two years, he has been struggling between life and death. In the present circumstances, all his time and money are being spent not on earning but on saving his life. Almost all his businesses have

come to a standstill," Dinesh Singh said.

The minister said that the BSP MLA is currently in isolation at his residence and has been unable to attend the Assembly session. "The Assembly session is important for an MLA, but he has not been able to attend even for an hour," Dinesh Singh said.

29 police officers transferred ahead of Bengal election

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Kolkata

Ahead of the Assembly polls, the West Bengal government on Wednesday transferred 29 senior police officers across various districts, an official notification said.

The move follows the reshuffle of 10 IPS officers earlier this month and 23 IPS officers in January.

According to the notification, ACP Howrah Akhtar Ali has been posted as Khatra SDPO in Bankura district, while Deputy SP, CID, Mottakanur Rahaman, was shifted to South Bengal as SDPO Canning under the Baruipur police district.

Another ACP of Howrah, Jay Prakash Pandey, has been transferred as Deputy SP, DIB, Paschim Medinipur.



Manishankar Sengupta, Deputy SP (DEB), Diamond Harbour police district, has been asked to take over as ACP, Howrah. Deganga SDPO Utpal Purkait has also been directed to assume charge as ACP, Howrah, considered a sensitive belt from the law and order perspective.

There are two assistant commissioner of police (ACP) posts in the commissionerate. Asansol-Durgapur ACP Sandip Nandi has been transferred as Deputy SP, Traffic, Hooghly Rural.

No double standards on terrorism: PM in Israel

Honouring acts of humanity during the Holocaust, PM Modi acknowledged the Maharaja of Nawanagar's efforts to rescue Jewish children, with a statue recently unveiled in Moshav Nevatim commemorating this bravery.

Concluding his address, the Prime Minister extended greetings from 1.4 billion Indians and reaffirmed India's commitment to peace, development, and mutual respect in the region.

The visit marked a landmark moment in India-Israel relations. PM Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to make a standalone official visit to Israel and address the Knesset, strengthening bilateral ties established over two decades ago. India formally established diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992, under then-Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao. However, no Indian Prime Minister had visited the Jewish state until Modi's historic trip in 2017, making this a long-awaited milestone in the diplomatic history of the two nations.

Welcoming PM Modi, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hailed India as "a gigantic power of almost one and a half billion people," emphasising Israel's strategic role as a "gigantic" partner. "The alliance between us is an enormous multiplier of our individual powers," Netanyahu said, highlighting the synergy between the two nations.

Netanyahu also referenced the now-famous "Modi hug," remarking, "Prime Minister Modi's personal embrace is something special... it reflects the warmth of the tie between our two peoples." Addressing the Knesset, Netanyahu described PM Modi as "a great friend of Israel, a great champion of the Indian-Israeli alliance, and a great leader on the world stage," calling the moment "unprecedented and deeply moving." Knesset Speaker Amir Ohana welcomed the Indian PM in Hindi, saying, "Jerusalem mein aapka swagat hai, Knesset mein aapka swagat hai," prompting enthusiastic chants of "Modi, Modi" from Israeli lawmakers.

The visit not only marked a historic first but also symbolised the deepening strategic, cultural, and economic ties between India and Israel, decades after the two nations formalized diplomatic relations. In the years that followed, the two leaders have maintained close communication. PM Modi congratulated Netanyahu on his re-election as Israel's Prime Minister for a sixth term on January 11, 2023, and Netanyahu extended his congratulations to PM Modi on the successful Chandrayaan-3 lunar mission on August 24, 2023. The leaders have also coordinated closely during crises. Netanyahu called PM Modi on October 10, 2023, to provide updates after the October 7 terror attack, and again on April 24, 2025, to offer condolences following the Pahalgam terror incident. During the Israel-Iran conflict that erupted on June 13, 2025, the two Prime Ministers spoke multiple times, underscoring their ongoing strategic dialogue.

Their communications have also covered broader regional and diplomatic developments, including discussions on the Gaza peace initiative in October 2025 and updates on regional security on December 10, 2025. Most recently, the two leaders exchanged New Year greetings on January 7, 2026, while discussing the regional situation and reaffirming the importance of their close partnership. These interactions highlight not only the personal rapport between PM Modi and PM Netanyahu but also the evolving India-Israel partnership, built on shared strategic interests, technological collaboration, and mutual support during times of crisis.

Lights, Camera, Action: Delhi to host...

A single-window facilitation system for filmmakers will streamline and bring greater transparency to shooting and production-related processes. By ensuring access to world cinema in public spaces, the festival will introduce wider audiences to high-quality international films. In doing so, the event will serve as a dynamic bridge between art, culture and industry, while accelerating the growth of the creative economy.

The Chief Minister noted that in alignment with the Delhi Government's Film Policy, initiatives such as single-window clearances, production support and industry facilitation are making Delhi an attractive filming destination. IFFD marks a decisive step towards positioning Delhi as India's cinematic capital.

She expressed confidence that IFFD 2026 would provide fresh momentum to Delhi's cultural landscape and secure the capital a distinguished place on the global cultural stage. Emphasising Delhi's longstanding role as a city that shapes cultural discourse, she said the International Film Festival Delhi would be a truly public celebration belonging to the people of the city. The event is being organised by the Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation. Conceived as a long-term cultural project. On the occasion, Tourism Minister Kapil Mishra stated that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Delhi is emerging as a creative capital at both the national and global levels. In this spirit, the city's first international film festival is being organised.

He informed that distinguished filmmakers, actors, directors and technical experts from India and abroad will participate. The festival will not only showcase the diversity and creativity of Indian cinema globally but also serve as a significant step towards establishing Delhi as a vibrant film and cultural hub.

He further remarked that the event will provide young talent with an international platform, promote dialogue on new technologies and evolving cinematic practices, and further strengthen Delhi's cultural identity. It will also energise tourism, employment and the creative industries.

Rahul faces flak from BJP over anti-India remarks

"Today, I intend to reveal the compromised mission of the Nehru-Gandhi family, which has exchanged national interests for personal gains. I want to unmask Rahul Gandhi, who is strutting about like a Babbar Sher (lion)," said the 45-year-old Bihar MLA, who became BJP president a month ago. Nabin raked up Nehru's alleged reference to the country's burgeoning population as a "liability" and the defeat in the 1962 war with China, and charged Indira Gandhi with "giving up Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, after defeating Pakistan in 1971" as examples of the "compromised mission". He also alleged that Rajiv Gandhi, the father of Rahul and a former Prime Minister, had made use of the Bofors gun deal to "fatten up his personal bank balance".

"The compromised mission continued under Rahul's mother Sonia Gandhi, who functioned as a 'super prime minister' from 2004 to 2014, compromising the authority of the top constitutional post," the BJP president asserted.

Nabin slammed Rahul Gandhi for "undertaking 247 foreign visits, without informing security agencies back home". Addressing a Press con-

FROM PAGE - 1

ference at the BJP headquarters, Goyal alleged that Gandhi and the Congress are playing "petty politics" to "weaken, hurt and destabilise" the country's economy and its progress.

"He is nothing but a puppet of anti-India forces, anti-India organisations and anti-India Governments. The Gandhi family is a completely compromised family and the Congress a completely compromised political party," the Union Minister said. The Minister's attack came in the backdrop of the Congress attacking the Prime Minister over the India-US interim trade deal, calling it a "wholesale surrender" and "betrayal" of national interest. Goyal rejected the Congress leader's claim as "falsehood" and accused him of misleading people to destroy the country's interest at the behest of anti-national forces.

Goyal alleged that the Gandhi family has always compromised the country's interests, starting with the first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.

While Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi compromised with India's interest in running the Manmohan Singh government as "super PM" through the National Advisory Council, Rajiv Gandhi also did not remain behind in compromising the country's interest during his term as the prime minister, he alleged.

"We all know how attempts were made to stop investigations into the Bofors scandal... A fair probe was not allowed to happen to save Ottavio Quattrocchi (accused in the Bofors scam)," he added. "Former US Ambassador Daniel Patrick Moynihan confirmed that the CIA provided funds to Congress for elections. The Mitrokhin Archives mentions that the KGB delivered suitcases full of money to a compromised Indira Gandhi," he charged. "In the 1971 Shimla Agreement, 93,000 Pakistani soldiers were released without securing PoK. What forces were exerting pressure on Indira Gandhi that led to a compromise of national interest?" Goyal said.

The BJP leader alleged that Nehru also "repeatedly compromised" national interests when he was the prime minister.

Goyal alleged that in 1954, India's interests were compromised before China on Tibet and under the Panchsheel Agreement, Aksai Chin was ceded to China during Nehru's tenure.

NCERT removes Class 8 textbook from website...

Justice Bagchi said the book seemed to be against the basic structure of the Constitution.

The CJ said, "Please wait for a few days. Bar and Bench are all perturbed. All high court judges are perturbed. I will take up the matter suo motu. I will not allow anybody to defame the institution. Law will take its course." Later, Justice Kant said that the top court has taken suo motu cognisance of the matter.

The Supreme Court is slated to hear on Thursday a suo motu case over the "objectionable" statements about the judiciary in NCERT textbooks. Former law minister Ashwani Kumar hailed CJ Surya Kant for taking suo motu cognisance of the chapter and said the prompt action would help bury the propaganda against the judiciary.

J&K Deputy CM's brother in ACB net

Verification revealed that more than 10 properties in the shape of houses, shops & plots of land in 100 kanals valued in crores have been raised

by him, mostly in the name of family members, his relatives and others.

Based on the verification conducted, a prima facie case of criminal misconduct was found made out against the accused Vijay Singh Choudhary, Inspector J&K Police, under offences punishable U/S 13(1)(b) r/w Section 13 (2) of the PC Act 1988. Accordingly, a formal case FIR No 02/2026 was registered at PJS ACB Central, and an investigation was taken up.

During the course of the investigation, search warrants were obtained for conducting searches of the Court of Special Judge Anti-Corruption, Jammu. Thereafter, searches were conducted by the ACB teams at different locations, which include his residential houses at Santokh Vihar, Kaluchak, Jammu, residential house at Nonial, Nowshera, Rajouri, business premises Stone Crusher and Tile Factory situated at Tutte di Khui, Bajalta, and Jammu. Also, on the basis of information revealed during the investigation, some other locations of Jammu were searched in terms of Section 185 BNSS.

During the search, incriminating documents have been recovered and seized in the case. Further investigation of the case is going on. Meanwhile, reacting strongly to the ongoing raids at the residence of his brother, Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Kumar Choudhary passionately defended his brother and said the action was driven by revenge.

"This fight has begun, and we will fight it legally. We have faith in India's judiciary and in many good officers in Jammu and Kashmir who will ensure justice. If Vijay Singh is wrong, then he should be punished," Choudhary told reporters here. Defending his brother's service record, Choudhary said the officer had fought militancy in Gursai, Thanamandi, Doda, and Supwal, and built a reputation for taking on militants and criminals wherever he was posted.

"He is an officer whose entire career, background and service record reflect a consistent fight against militancy and crime. Wherever he served, he earned a name for his courage and professionalism," Choudhary said. The National Conference leader termed the raid an attempt to "intimidate and malign" his family.

He alleged that internal rivalry within the police department was behind the stalling of his brother's promotion. "Those sitting at the top who think that some hidden treasure will be found in this house will find nothing. You saw the actions taken earlier - what has been recovered so far? Many files come to me where people are caught red-handed and later cleared. So this is a debate", he said.

"We are not afraid. We know who we are and what we stand for. Truth will ultimately prevail," Choudhary added.

SC settles dispute over pujari rights...

It said the core controversy centred on who amongst the feuding families constitutes the hereditary 'wahiwardar' pujari entitled to conduct religious ceremonies, receive the offerings from devotees, and hold annual Jatra celebrations at the temple.

The bench said the genesis of the dispute dates back to 1944, when predecessor-in-interest of the appellants, along with others, filed a suit for possession of the temple and other properties.

They had alleged that the other side had entered into possession of the temple property by force and had asserted the right to perform puja. Noting the history of the case, the bench said both the high court and the first appellate

court had rendered concurrent findings on the aspect of pujari rights over the temple and held in favour of the respondents.

It noted the appellants had contended that the pujari rights of the temple lie with them as their predecessor had a decree in his favour in a 1901 suit. The bench said both the first appellate court and the high court, while dealing with this issue, had held that though the appellants claim that they have a decree in their favour, they seem conspicuously silent on the fact that they have filed a suit seeking possession and pujari rights in the 1944 suit. "A party in settled possession does not sue for possession. The very institution of that suit is a categorical admission by the appellants/defendants' predecessor that possession of the suit temple was not with them at the relevant point in time," the bench said.

It said a party setting up a competing claim to hereditary pujari rights is obligated to plead specifically as to when they came into possession of the suit temple, when they commenced performing puja, when and how the respondents began obstructing them, and what steps, if any, they took to vindicate their rights during the long intervening period.

"The written statement of the appellants/defendants is reticent on each of these material particulars. They contend themselves with a bare denial and a reference to the 1901 decree. This is wholly insufficient," the bench said. It noted the respondents have established their claim throughout, through consistent documentary evidence, revenue records and others, that they have been performing puja at the temple as hereditary 'wahiwardar' pujaris.

"The appellants/defendants, on the other hand, rest their claim almost entirely on a century-old decree, the effect of which was demonstrably undone by their own predecessor's subsequent conduct in instituting a suit for possession in 1944," it said.

Finding no perversity in the high court's judgment, the bench dismissed the appeals.

Delhi couple sent to judicial custody over...

In a video message shared on X, Gupta said the dignity, respect and safety of every citizen is paramount. "Here, the dignity, respect and safety of every citizen is paramount. I will meet them personally. The police are taking legal action with full responsibility, and we will ensure that the strictest possible action is taken against the culprits. Harassing, discriminating against, or humiliating any daughter will not be tolerated at any cost," she said. "We are all one, and the safety of every daughter is our utmost responsibility," she added.

Responding to the incident, Union Minister Kiren Rijiju and Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu have said that atrocities on people from the Northeast will not be tolerated and strong action will be taken against those committing any such crime.

The controversy erupted after a video went viral showing a couple allegedly hurling racial abuses and issuing threats at the women during a dispute over dust from electrical work being carried out at their rented accommodation in Malviya Nagar.

According to the police, Ruby Jain allegedly hurled abusive and derogatory remarks at three women from Arunachal Pradesh during a row over repair work at their rented accommodation on February 20.

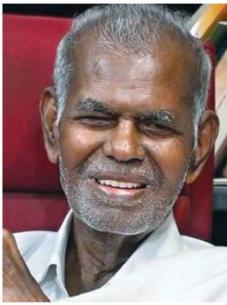
Maharashtra records 41 tiger deaths in 2025



A total of 41 tigers died in Maharashtra in 2025, with the majority of them dying due to natural causes, a State minister told the Assembly on Wednesday. The Government is intensifying efforts to curb the deaths of tigers due to accidents, electrocution, and poaching, State Forest Minister Ganesh Naik said.

Veteran CPI leader, freedom fighter Nallakannu dies at 101

Veteran leader of the CPI and freedom fighter, R Nallakannu, died in Chennai on Wednesday at a Government hospital where he had been treated for age-related ailments. He was aged about 101, party sources said. CM MK Stalin, paying glowing tributes, announced full state honours at the funeral of the departed leader. Condolences poured in from across the political spectrum, paying rich tributes to the Left leader.



Jagannath's Ratna Bhandar inventory to start in March



Odisha Minister Prithviraj Harichandan on Wednesday said an exercise to make the inventory of valuables and ornaments of Ratna Bhandar of Shree Jagannath Temple in Puri is likely to begin in the first week of March.

Goa unveils Seahorse floating rescue stations

Tourists visiting beaches in Goa can now enjoy outings without safety worries, with floating rescue stations named "Seahorse" coming up along the coastline in the State. The floating units, equipped with jet skis positioned on ramps, are aimed at ensuring that rescue operations begin within seconds during emergencies on the beaches, which attract millions of visitors annually.



Govt to initiate ministry selection talks with Opposition

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

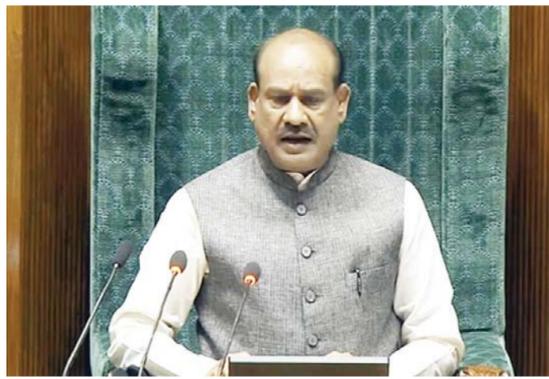
The Government will initiate discussions with the Opposition on the selection of ministries for debates on the demands for grants in the Lok Sabha in the second part of the Budget session, as Speaker Om Birla refused to be part of the process due to a pending notice of motion of no-confidence against him.

There will be discussions related to the demands for grants in about five ministries in the Lok Sabha. Sources said a decision has to be taken on the ministries to be covered under the exercise.

They said normally the Lok Sabha speaker initiates the process of the selection of the ministries, but since the notice submitted by Opposition MPs for the removal of Birla is yet to be decided, he refused to take part in any discussion on it.

Therefore, an initiative will be taken by the Parliamentary Affairs Ministry for discussions with the Opposition parties for the selection of the ministries on which the debates on demands for grants will be taken up, they said.

On February 15, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju had said that the debate and subsequent voting on the no-confi-



dence motion moved by the Opposition against Birla will be taken up on March 9, when the House reassembles after the recess.

The second part of the Budget session is scheduled to be held from March 9 to April 2.

The first part of the Budget session was held from January 28 to February 13.

In the first part of the session, Lok Sabha witnessed disruptions since February 2, after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was disallowed by the chair from quoting from an article based on excerpts of former Army chief MM Naravane's "unpublished

memoir", which has references to the India-China conflict of 2020.

On February 4, Prime Minister Narendra Modi could not reply to the debate on the Motion of Thanks due to Opposition protests.

In an unprecedented move, the Motion of Thanks was passed on February 5 without the customary speech by the prime minister.

The speaker read out the Motion of Thanks to the President for her address, and it was passed by a voice vote, amid sloganeering by Opposition members.

Birla had said he received concrete information that many Congress MPs could carry out an

"unexpected act" by reaching the spot where PM Modi sits, and, therefore, he asked him not to come to the House to deliver his address. Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra refuted this.

Eight Opposition members were suspended for the remainder of the Budget session for unruly behaviour in the House.

During the session, a no-confidence motion was initiated by the Opposition parties against Birla, alleging that he had acted in a "blatantly partisan" manner, following which he decided to step aside from his role as the presiding officer of the House.

Mamata vows to support citizens wrongly excluded from voter list



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee addressing a gathering during inauguration of several development projects at Bhabanipur in Kolkata PTI

PIONEER TRUST OF INDIA
Kolkata

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday vowed to continue her fight against the omission of citizens' names in the ongoing Special Summary Revision (SIR), saying she apprehended that there is a conspiracy to delete over 80 lakh names, citing logical discrepancies.

Noting that 58 lakh names of voters were omitted after the first phase of the SIR exercise, Banerjee said, "By the name of logical discrepancies, at least 20 lakh more genuine voters were surreptitiously left out by February 14".

There is a conspiracy to remove 80 lakh names from the final electoral rolls by deleting an additional two lakh voters, she alleged while addressing a gathering after inaugurating several projects from her Bhawanipore constituency in the city.

Banerjee said she had gone to the Supreme Court to take up the issue of Election Commission of India (ECI)'s move to delete names of lakhs of voters and, despite the SC's order, the poll panel has not

stopped its "diabolical game-plan" by regularly issuing new directives on WhatsApp.

"I want justice. I don't want to see whether those citizens left out of the rolls are (voters of) the TMC, Congress, CPI(M) or the BJP. I am against the deletion of anyone's name... It does not matter to me whether the victims are Hindus or Muslims, or members of any other community. I will pray for them, stand by them and fight for them. I want to say live and let live," she said.

On the cosmopolitan culture of Bhawanipore, the chief minister said that members of various communities live in the constituency peacefully and celebrate their festivals together.

Underscoring her commitment to every community, she said, "I understand Gujarati, Assamese, Odiya etc. Some words are different, but the warmth, love and bonding are the same; the spirit is the same. I also relish *roti, chapati, litti* from Bihar, *dhokla* from Gujarat and other delicacies. In Bengal, we respect all languages, religions, customs, culture and food habits."

Bill to remove PM, CMs over corruption: Panel seeks State view

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The parliamentary committee examining the Bills that seek to allow the removal of the prime minister and chief ministers from office for corruption would invite the views of Opposition-ruled States like Karnataka and Telangana.

The panel, chaired by BJP MP Aparajita Sarangi, on Wednesday heard the views of the State of Madhya Pradesh, which fully endorsed the 'The Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill, 2025'.

The State was represented by Madhya Pradesh's chief secretary, who stated before the panel that the State "fully agreed" to the provisions of the Bill. Representatives of

PRS Legislative Research and Indian Law Institute also appeared before the parliamentary committee and are learnt to have made some suggestions to the panel.

Sources said the panel heard the views of the two legal research organisations, which said that they did not fully agree with the provisions of the proposed law and suggested amendments. However, they told the panel that the intent of the Government of India in bringing the Bill is not under question. Sources said the panel members unanimously agreed to seek the views of Opposition-ruled States and agreed to call the States of Karnataka and Telangana.

The panel also said it wanted to invite the States of Kerala and West Bengal,



which are ruled by Opposition parties, to present their views on the matter. The States would be invited at a later date, as Assembly elections are due in the States in the next few weeks. Wednesday's meeting lasted around three hours, with each representative given an hour to present their views. Panel chairper-

son Sarangi said this is the sixth meeting of the committee, and the next meeting would be convened on March 10. So far, 14 organisations and two states have deposited before the committee in its six sittings held so far. Earlier, the State of Rajasthan appeared through its chief secretary before the panel and gave its views

endorsing the key provisions of the proposed legislation.

The Joint Committee on the Constitution (130th Amendment) Bill, The Jammu & Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill and The Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Bill has decided to seek the views of constitutional experts, retired judges, lawyers and bar association members, besides law institutes and states.

The first sitting of the Committee was held on December 4, 2025, after the Joint Committee on The Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill, 2025; The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2025 and The Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Bill,

2025 were published on November 12, 2025.

The Constitution amendment Bill seeks to provide for the removal of the Prime Minister, a Chief Minister of a State, or any other Minister in the Central or a State Government, if he or she is arrested and detained in custody on account of serious criminal offences that draw five years of jail or more.

So far, the law allows the removal of public representatives only if they are convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for two years or more. The proposed law states that nothing shall prevent a PM, Ministers, the CM or the Ministers from being subsequently appointed as PM or a Minister on their release from custody.

'Prahaar' a decisive step for national security: Chowna Mein

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Itanagar

Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein on Wednesday described 'Prahaar', India's first-ever comprehensive counter-terrorism policy, as a "decisive step" towards strengthening the country's national security architecture, asserting that it reinforces zero tolerance for terror.

The Central Government on Monday unveiled the country's first counter-terrorism policy, Prahaar, setting out a multi-layered strategy based on "zero tolerance", intelligence-led prevention and disruption of extremist violence that aims to deny terrorists, their financiers and



supporters access to funds, weapons and safe havens.

In a social media post outlining the framework of the policy, Mein said, "Prahaar marks a decisive step in strengthening India's national security architecture."

He added that as the country navigates an evolving and complex security

landscape, the policy "reinforces our commitment to preparedness, coordination, and swift response to emerging threats."

The framework reflects a modern and resolute doctrine anchored in the principle of "Nation First", Mein said. "Prahaar reflects a modern, resolute approach

to safeguarding our citizens and protecting India's sovereignty," the deputy chief minister added.

The policy framework highlighted in the visuals revolves around a multi-dimensional strategy aimed at prevention, response, recovery and coordinated national action.

He underlined that counter-terror operations under Prahaar would be rooted in "evidence-driven investigations, not impulse," and that "constitutional values will be upheld at every step." The framework stresses cutting the roots of terrorism by dismantling radicalisation networks and recruitment ecosystems, he said. Highlighting the global

dimension of the strategy, Mein pointed to the emphasis on aligning international efforts. "Unite the world and isolate terror," the policy asserts, calling for global consensus against terror in all forms, binding international legal frameworks, and stronger multilateral intelligence cooperation. It also focuses on countering cross-border terror financing and digital radicalisation, he said.

The response pillar of Prahaar calls for swift, coordinated and precision-led action. "Strike fast, strike smart, strike together," the framework States, stressing seamless coordination across agencies and immediate action against emerging threats, Mein said.

Hardeep Gill, Karm Singh Karma take charge as NCSK members



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Social workers Hardeep Singh Gill and Karm Singh Karma have assumed charge as members of the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK) with effect from February 23, an official statement said on Wednesday.

According to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Gill has been engaged with social and organisational activities at the district and national levels, contributing to community development initiatives. He has participated in campaigns on social issues, including drug abuse prevention, social awareness, community mobilisation and youth empowerment. He has been involved in cleanliness drives and grassroots engagement programmes.

Karma is the president of the Akhil Bharatiya Safai Mazdoor Sangh, Delhi Pradesh, and has been associated with initiatives concerning the welfare of sanitation workers and marginalised communities.

He has advocated for the rights, dignity, occupational safety and social security of safai karamcharis and has raised issues related to education, healthcare access, livelihood support and policy representation, the statement said.

Shah kicks off 3-day Bihar tour with Land Ports Authority meeting

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Patna

Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday chaired a meeting of the Land Ports Authority of India, a statutory body functioning under the ministry responsible for creating, upgrading, maintaining and managing border infrastructure.

The meeting took place in Kishanganj district of Bihar, where Shah arrived on the first leg of his three-day tour of the Seemanchal region, falling in the state's north-east, bordering Nepal and West Bengal.

He is also likely to hold a meeting with officials of the departments responsible for guarding the porous border with Nepal. "The Union Home Minister is likely to brief officials on measures needed for putting a check on smuggling of drugs," Bihar DGP Vinay Kumar had said on Tuesday.

Mizoram to pursue decentralisation, financial reforms: CM Lalduhoma



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Aizawl

Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Wednesday announced in the assembly that his Government is set to aggressively pursue a policy of decentralisation to streamline governance and correct long-standing development disparities.

While participating in the discussion on the Mizoram State University (Amendment) Bill, 2026, Lalduhoma, who also holds the finance portfolio, revealed that a comprehensive plan for financial decentralisation would be rolled out.

Under the proposed reforms, the state will bypass the traditional bottleneck of seeking constant finance department clearance for routine activities.

"In the very near future, we will roll out financial decentralisation. We will authorise department secretaries to grant administrative approvals and expenditure sanctions directly, removing the requirement to seek permission from the finance department," he said.

The chief minister characterised the proposed shift as a significant transformation in the state's administrative machinery.

"Similarly, we believe that it is best to continue decentralising various institutions across different locations within the state," he said.

Lalduhoma also stated that his Government aims to address the existing regional imbalances and uneven development by ensuring a more equitable distribution.

CITU slams NMP 2.0 as blueprint for national plunder

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) has vehemently condemned the Union Government's National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) 2.0, terming it a "draconian blueprint for national plunder." In a scathing statement issued on Wednesday, the trade union body called for massive resistance against the proposed ₹16.72 lakh crore public asset stripping.

The second phase of the NMP (FY 2026-2030), launched by the Union Finance Minister on February 23, follows the Union Budget 2025-26. CITU alleged that the plan is designed for the systematic dismantling of India's public sector and the wholesale transfer of national assets to monopoly private corporations.

"By setting a staggering target of ₹16.72 lakh crore - a figure 67 per cent higher than the initial estimate and over 2.6 times the scale of NMP 1.0 - the Government has signalled an unprecedented acceleration in asset stripping," said Elamaram Kareem, General Secretary of CITU.

The union rejected the



Government's celebratory claims regarding the success of NMP 1.0, which achieved 89 per cent of its target. What the Government calls success, the working class recognises as the "daylight robbery" of assets across mining, highways, coal, and ports, the statement noted.

CITU argued that the pipeline formalises a "private rent-seeking model" where the State abdicates its role as a provider of public goods. It claimed that brownfield infrastructure, built over decades with public money, is being handed over to private entities with guaranteed cash flows from 12 strategic sectors.

The union warned that the privatisation of highways, railways, and ports would turn essential

movement into rent-collection points. It further cautioned that handing over power assets to private players would lead to skyrocketing electricity tariffs, while the auctioning of the coal sector would surrender sovereign control over mineral wealth.

"The public pays twice - first to build the asset through taxes, and then to a private monopoly for the right to use it," Kareem stated, adding that the 'Viksit Bharat' rhetoric is a hollow cover for a corporate-controlled economy. Demanding the immediate scrapping of the pipeline, CITU called upon citizens and the working class to unite in resistance to save national assets from the "parasitic grip" of NMP 2.0.

States Focus

BJP accuses CM Siddaramaiah of misleading public on Govt job figures

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bengaluru

Karnataka BJP president BY Vijayendra on Wednesday lashed out at Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, accusing him of "misleading" the public on Government recruitment figures and "failing" to address the concerns of unemployed youth in the State.

In a detailed post on his social media handle, Vijayendra alleged that the Congress-led Government was attempting to deflect accountability by blaming the previous BJP administration instead of initiating concrete steps to fill vacant posts. "Chief Minister, please refrain from misleading the people. Do not attempt to shift the blame for all your shortcomings onto the BJP and evade responsibility.



Karnataka BJP president BY Vijayendra



Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah

Your administration has earned a reputation for arrogance, corruption and mismanagement," Vijayendra said, adding that students and youth were not naive enough to be swayed by what he termed as "exaggerated claims". Vijayendra's response came following Siddaramaiah's statement on Tuesday, blaming the BJP for the huge backlog of

Government job vacancies. The CM had said that when Congress assumed office in 2023, over 2.64 lakh Government posts were vacant. The backlog resulted from prolonged inaction under the previous BJP Government, which failed to initiate timely recruitment or create a structured roadmap, he said. As thousands of Govern-

ment job aspirants staged a massive protest in Dharwad on Tuesday, demanding filling the vacant posts immediately, Siddaramaiah accused BJP leaders of "misleading students for political gains" and said recruitment irregularities and alleged corruption between 2019 and 2023 had eroded trust in the system, leading to the current crisis.

"According to the official figures presented by your own Government in the Legislative Assembly, only 8,157 Government recruitments have been completed during your three years in office. Yet publicly claiming that 40,000 posts have been filled raises serious concerns. Does this not amount to misleading the unemployed youth of the State?" the Shikaripura MLA asked.



TRIPURA'S CRIME RATE HITS 2-DECADE LOW IN 2025: CM

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Wednesday asserted that the northeastern State recorded the "lowest crime rate" in two decades in 2025, with an 8 per cent fall in criminal cases compared to 2024. Addressing the police week day parade, Saha said the number of cases registered with the police reduced from 4,033 in 2024 to 3,698 in 2025. "It is straightaway an 8.30 per cent fall, the lowest in the past two decades in the State. The credit must go to the State police and other law enforcement agencies," he said. Saha also highlighted the decrease in cases of crimes against women in Tripura.



MEGHALAYA TOPS HIV CASELOAD: MINISTER W SHYLLA

Meghalaya has the highest HIV caseload in India with over 10,000 patients on treatment, Health Minister W Shylla told the Assembly on Wednesday, informing that the State has already approved a ₹25-crore five-year intervention plan to address the situation. The minister said currently, 10,293 people living with HIV are receiving Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) in the State. Replying to a question by NPP legislator Mehtab Chandee A Sangma, he said the Government has sanctioned ₹25 crore for a mission-mode programme over the next five years to tackle the "alarming rise" of HIV/AIDS cases.

Maharashtra to make money-lending regulation law stricter

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

The Maharashtra Government has launched a Statewide crackdown on unauthorised moneylenders, and it will make the existing law stricter that regulates money-lending activities to curb illegalities, a State minister told the Legislative Assembly on Wednesday.

Minister of State for Home Pankaj Bhojar said the Maharashtra Money-Lending (Regulation) Act, 2014, will be amended. He was replying to a



debate in the House on the incident in which a farmer from Chandrapur was forced to sell his kidney to repay ₹8 lakh loan. "The existing laws will be

examined, and the demand to book the accused money lenders under the stringent Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) will be considered," Bhojar

said. Six money lenders arrested in the case of the Chandrapur farmer, who was taken to Cambodia for the removal of his kidney, were all unlicensed, and orders have been issued to seize their properties, he said.

In the wake of the incident, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) was formed, and it has been probing an international organ trafficking syndicate. It was found in the investigation that despite paying ₹48.53 lakh against the principal amount of ₹9.15 lakh, the victim was coerced into the organ trade.

Medicinal plants will boost farmer income: President



President Droupadi Murmu with Maharashtra Governor Acharya Devvrat and Union Minister of State Prataprao Jadhav during inauguration of National Arogya Fair 2026 in Shegaon, Maharashtra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Buldhana

President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday made a strong pitch for medicinal plants, saying their cultivation improves not only the financial condition of farmers but also boosts soil health.

Speaking after inaugurating the National Arogya Fair 2026 at Shegaon in Maharashtra's Buldhana district, she said the "valuable wealth" of medicinal plants is important not only for providing raw materials for medicines but also for environmental balance.

Describing good health as the ultimate happiness in life, she said healthy citizens play a key role in making the country strong, and added that disease prevention is beneficial for individuals and also reduces the burden on the country's health care system.

The Union Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy), in collaboration with All India

Ayurvedic Congress, has organised the National Arogya Fair in Buldhana between February 25 and 28.

The President said she promotes Ayurveda and leads an Ayurvedic way of life. She was born and brought up in the lap of nature, she said.

"It is said that nature takes care of all the needs of the body. But time has now changed, and we have to depend on others for medicines as jungle are vanished today. Jungles are being burnt, and ayurvedic herbs and medicinal plants are also getting finished. Hence, today I feel that not only the Government but everyone should think about it and work towards the growth of medicinal plants for better health," President said.

Even Ayurveda researchers are finding it hard to get medicinal plants, President Murmu said.

She stressed the need for the cultivation of medicinal plants without depending on the Government.

Punjab Police kill one, nab another in cop murder case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Chandigarh

Police arrested one and killed in an encounter another of the three people allegedly involved in the murder of two policemen in Gurdaspur, an officer said on Wednesday.

The three carried out the killings at the behest of their Pakistan-based handlers backed by spy agency ISI, the officer said.

The third accused is still at large, and a hunt for him is on, the officer said. The Punjab Police identified the three as Ranjit Singh (19), Inderjit Singh (21), both residents of Adhian village, and Dilawar Singh (19), a resident of Alinangal village.

On Sunday, assistant sub-inspector Gurnam Singh and home guard Ashok Kumar were found dead with gunshot wounds inside a checkpoint in Adhian village, about 2 km from the international border.

Speaking to reporters in Gurdaspur, Deputy Inspector General of Police (Border Range) Sandeep Goel said they had arrested Dilawar Singh and Ranjit Singh in connection with the murder and found that they were in touch with Pakistan-based and ISI-backed handlers to kill the policemen.

He said that Ranjit told the police that he had concealed the weapon used in the crime in an area under the Behrampur Police Station jurisdiction.

When a team of police



was taking him for the recovery of the weapon, the police car overturned near Galrhi village because of fog.

Taking advantage of it, Ranjit managed to flee, Goel said. After the escape, police sounded a red alert in the area, he said.

The officer said that a police team at around 3 am flagged a motorcycle near Purana Shala area on the Gurdaspur-Mukerian road, but the rider tried to speed away and opened fire.

The police shot Ranjit in retaliation. He was taken to the Civil Hospital, where he succumbed to his injuries, said the DIG.

A policeman also sustained a bullet wound in his arm in the encounter, he said. Goel said Dilawar Singh was offered by his handlers ₹20,000 for the task, and he had received ₹3,000.

On Sunday, at about 8.15 am, Adhian village sarpanch Kamaljeet Singh visited the local checkpoint and found the ASI and the home guard dead with bullet wounds.

He had earlier called the Dorangla SHO, telling him that the two policemen were not answering his calls.

Delhi to Katra in 6 hours: New Expressway to be ready by 2027

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jammu

Come March 2027, the Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway, India's fifth major expressway project, will slash the travel time from the national Capital to Katra, the base camp for the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine, from the current 14 hours to just six hours.

Once completed, the project is expected to considerably enhance regional connectivity, promote religious tourism and facilitate faster mobility for the armed forces, a senior National Highway Authority official said.

The expressway will reduce the distance from Delhi to Katra from 727 to 588 kilomet-

tres, cutting travel time from 14 to about six hours, he said.

Briefing media persons, Rajiv Kumar, project director, NHAI (Project Implementation Unit Jammu), said, "Construction of the expressway was hit badly last year in the aftermath of Operation Sindoor and later by heavy rains and flooding. But the work has gathered pace again. The deadline for its completion has been fixed for March next year." Kumar said.

"It will connect two of the most prominent pilgrimage destinations, Sri Harmandir Sahib, also known as the Golden Temple or Darbar Sahib in Amritsar (Punjab) and Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Katra (Reasi district, Jammu



and Kashmir)," he said.

A large number of devotees visit Mata Vaishno Devi annually, the official said, explaining that they currently rely on rail and air travel. The expressway would provide a third option, enabling Delhi-Katra travel in approximately six hours.

"We had only five to six months of effective work last year. One of the biggest challenges was retaining manpower during tense security situations. Many workers left due to safety concerns and had to be persuaded to return. Additionally, heavy rains

washed away two bridges, severely disrupting supply lines," Kumar said.

Strategically, the NHAI official said, the expressway is significant for Jammu and Kashmir due to its proximity to the International Border.

"Running parallel to sensitive border areas, the corridor is expected to facilitate faster deployment and improved mobility for defence forces," he said.

Keeping the upcoming annual Amarnath Yatra in mind, the official said, a target has been set to complete nearly 30 kilometres of the Jammu-Kathua stretch before the start of the pilgrimage later this year.

2,599 arrested in Chattisgarh drug bust drive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Raipur

A total of 2,599 accused were arrested for illegal narcotics trafficking in Chhattisgarh over the last 13 months, with the recovery of 20,089 kg of ganja, more than three lakh psychotropic drugs and other contraband, the Assembly was informed on Wednesday.

Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma, who also holds the Home portfolio, said police have been taking continuous and effective action to curb illegal trafficking of drugs, rejecting the charge of laxity raised by some senior BJP MLAs against the administration.

He was replying to a query raised by BJP MLAs Ajay Chandrakar and Dharamlal Kaushik through a calling attention motion over the alleged rise in drug abuse and narcotics addiction in the State.



Chandrakar alleged that it has become nearly impossible to curb the trafficking of narcotic substances such as charas, ganja, brown sugar, heroin, opium, doda, and intoxicating tablets.

Incidents of illegal smuggling are rising, and the administration has failed to formulate a concrete plan to stop it, he claimed.

He further alleged that drug traffickers have expanded their network across Chhattisgarh, leading to a rise in crime.

Citing recent national survey data by AIIMS and the Union Ministry of Social Justice, Chandrakar said the number of users of opium and injectable drugs in Chhattisgarh ranges between 1.5 lakh and 2 lakh, while the count of ganja addicts is estimated between 3.8 lakh and 4 lakh.

He also claimed that over 40,000 children in the 10-17 age group are addicted to inhalants and cough syrups, and that 250 to 300 deaths or suicides occur annually due to addiction and mental stress. Responding to the allegations, Sharma said it is incorrect to claim that no action is being taken to curb the trafficking of narcotic substances.

The Government is firmly committed to preventing the smuggling and sale of illegal drugs and other narcotic substances, he said.

"In 2025, a total of 1,288 cases related to narcotics were registered,

and 2,342 accused were arrested. Seizures included 16,999.7 kg of ganja, 141 grams of brown sugar, 1,259 grams of opium, 2,039 kg of heroin, 27.68 grams of charas, 23.56 grams of cocaine, 70.46 grams of MDMA, 1,524 kg of doda, 0.432 kg of hashish oil, and 2,41,138 intoxicating drugs," he said.

Sharma stated that in 2026 (till January 31), 146 cases were registered and 257 accused arrested.

Seizures included 3,090 kg of ganja, 8.85 grams of brown sugar, 277.2 grams of opium, 123.8 grams of heroin, 15.29 kg of doda, and 59,270 intoxicating drugs. He said strict legal action was also taken against officials found to be involved in drug trafficking.

In Raipur and Durg districts, special drives are being conducted against the sale of drug consumption accessories such as gogo pipes, smoking cones and rolling papers, he said.

Omar Abdullah backs West Bengal name change demand

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Srinagar

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Wednesday said the Centre should accept the West Bengal Government's demand to rename the State, following the Union Cabinet's approval of a similar proposal for Kerala.

The Union Cabinet on Tuesday approved the Kerala



Government's proposal to change the State's name to Keralam. Following the approval, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee expressed dissatisfaction that her state's renaming proposal has remained pending with the Centre for a long time despite the move for Kerala.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an event, Abdullah said, "Other States have also proposed name changes. If the West Bengal Assembly is seeking to rename the State, the Centre should accept this demand."

"If a similar proposal was to be moved in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly in the future, the Centre should also give it due consideration," he added.

₹4.27 crore cash seized from Odisha officer's flat

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Bhubaneswar

Stacks of notes packed in trolley bags, totalling over ₹4.27 crore, were allegedly recovered from the house of an Odisha Mines Department officer, who was arrested in a corruption case, officials said on Wednesday.

The cash was seized from the Bhubaneswar flat of Deputy Director of Mines Debabrata Mohanty, arrested by the State Vigilance Department on Tuesday night, they said.

Vigilance Director Yeshwant Jethwa said this is the highest-ever cash seized by the anti-corruption agency in the State.



Bhubaneswar division's Vigilance SP Saroj Kumar Samal said that so far, cash worth ₹4.27 crore has been counted. "Mohanty was booked in a similar corruption case in 2009, and the trial against him is still going on at a court in Mayurbhanj district," he added. Attacking the ruling BJP, State Congress

president Bhakta Charan Das alleged that the recovery of the cash exposed the staggering scale of corruption flourishing right under the watch of "the so-called double-engine Government" in the State.

Mohanty was apprehended while allegedly accepting a bribe of ₹30,000 from a

licensed coal vendor in exchange for facilitating smooth operations, officials said. Following his arrest, the Vigilance Department conducted simultaneous searches at his Bhubaneswar flat, his parental house in Bhadrak district, and his office in Cuttack, and made the seizures, they said.

Additionally, ₹1.20 lakh in cash was recovered from Mohanty's office drawer, they added. Other assets detected so far include a palatial double-storey house in Bhubaneswar and approximately 130 grams of gold.

Besides, there is a 2,400 sq ft plot in his name where a two-storied building is being constructed, officials said.

"Mohanty has 10 bank accounts and lockers in his name. Those are also being verified," the SP said.

A case under the Prevention of Corruption Act has been registered, officials said. Mohanty entered Government service as a junior mining officer at a salary of ₹8,000 in 2004. He worked in Bolangir, Baripada, and Berhampur before being transferred to Cuttack, where he is posted at present, they said.

The previous highest cash seizure made by the agency was ₹3.4 crore, found at the residence of an assistant engineer in the Minor Irrigation Division in Ganjam district on April 7, 2022.

Andaman tribal home guards felicitated for drug haul

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Sri Vijaya Puram

Police in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands have felicitated two home guard volunteers for recovering 6.9 kg methamphetamine from a remote jungle, in the first instance of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group members contributing to a major narcotics seizure, officials said.

DGP Har Gobind Singh Dhaliwal felicitated Raja and Jhaj during a special ceremony on Tuesday for their "pivotal role" in detecting and recovering 6.97 kg of



methamphetamine near Pagla Mundi under the Hut Bay police station on January 16. Methamphetamine, also called the "crazy drug", is a highly addictive drug that is banned in India.

"This is the first instance of members from PVTG being inducted into active field operations and contribut-

ing to a major narcotics seizure. Their familiarity with the local terrain, better understanding of jungles, alertness, keen observation, and active participation significantly aided the detection and recovery of the concealed contraband," Dhaliwal said.

"Their timely support and involvement reflect the growing strength of inclusive and community-integrated policing in the Islands," he said. The DGP presented the home guard volunteers with a cash reward of ₹10,000 each along with a Commendation Certificate.

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Societal fault lines still run deep in country: Justice Ujjal Bhuyan



Citing an example of his daughter's Muslim friend being denied accommodation because of her religious identity, Justice Ujjal Bhuyan of the Supreme Court said such instances show how far the country remains from the benchmark of constitutional morality. Justice Bhuyan, speaking at a seminar organised by the Telangana Judges' Association and the Telangana State Judicial Academy, said constitutional morality must outweigh public morality, "even if it is the majoritarian view."

He also noted that although court costs in India are relatively low compared to other countries, associated expenses, including lawyers' fees, make it nearly impossible for ordinary citizens in remote areas to approach courts. He said constitutional morality is the benchmark the statute expects citizens to adhere to, adding that the Constitution's objective is fraternity and brotherhood. "The emphasis on constitutional morality is grounded in the premise that the morality we practise at home or within communities may fall short of, or differ from, the morality the Constitution expects us to uphold," he said.

Such differences are particularly visible in matters of marriage and renting out premises, he added. He cited the example of his daughter's friend, a PhD scholar, who was denied accommodation by a landlady running a working women's hostel in Delhi because of her Muslim identity. Referring to media reports, Justice Bhuyan cited another instance of parents protesting aggressively against a Dalit cook preparing food under the mid-day meal scheme. "These are just random examples-only the tip of the iceberg. They reveal how deep our societal fault lines run and show how far we still are from the benchmark of constitutional morality, even 75 years into our Republic," he said.

Referring to the Delhi High Court's judgment in the Naz Foundation case, he noted that the court held that popular morality and public disapproval are not valid grounds to restrict fundamental rights under Article 21.

He said popular morality is distinct from constitutional morality, as the latter is rooted in constitutional values.



ED attaches Anil Ambani's Abode worth ₹3,716 cr

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) attached Reliance Group chairman Anil Ambani's Mumbai house, 'Abode', worth ₹3,716 crore under the anti-money laundering law, official sources said on Wednesday. The luxurious house, which is 66-metre high with 17 floors with a helipad on top, is located in the Pali Hill area of Mumbai.

A provisional order has been issued under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to attach the multi-storied house in the case linked to an alleged bank fraud by his group company Reliance Communications (RCOM), said ED officials, adding that the attached asset's value is ₹3,716.83 crore.

Anil Ambani (66), is expected to appear before the federal probe agency here for his second round of questioning. He first deposed before the ED in August 2025 and had his statement recorded under the PMLA. The agency again summoned after the recent orders of Supreme Court. ED has also summoned Anil Ambani's wife Tina Ambani.

With the latest order, the total value of the attachment in this case stands at about ₹15,700 crore in past six months. As per Supreme Court direction, CBI and ED are also probing bank frauds by Anil Ambani led companies like Reliance Communication.

Supreme Court on February 4, directed the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to constitute a Special Investigation Team (SIT) dedicated to investigat-



Anil Ambani's home 'Abode' in Pali Hills, Mumbai

ing allegations of large-scale bank fraud by Reliance Communications (RCOM), its group entities and Anil Ambani. The apex court ordered CBI to probe into the nexus and collusion with bank officials in siphoning and diverting of the bank loans of more than ₹40,000 crore by Anil Ambani's firms.

A Bench of Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul Pancholi passed the order. "ED is well advised to constitute a SIT comprising senior officers and take all the measures so that the ongoing probe is taken to a logical conclusion," the Court said. "It is imperative for CBI to probe the conduct of bank officials to check if funds were released with the collusion of bank officers. We direct that ... the CBI must look into the

nexus, collusion, conspiracy, if any, and for that purpose, all lawful measures to take the investigation to its logical end (must be) adopted," the Court's order stated.

The apex court was hearing the petition filed by retired Government Secretary EAS Sarma. Representing Sarma, Prashant Bhushan pointed out that FIR was registered only in 2025, when the bank frauds came on public domain in 2020.

"First arrest was affected yesterday. This is the largest corporate fraud. Anil Ambani's companies having bank dues of more than ₹47,000 crore was taken over by brother Mukesh Ambani for just Rs.430 crore, argued Bhushan. "The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code is being misused like anything," the CJI said.

HC gives clean chit to former Haryana CM Bhupinder Hooda in National Herald's Panchkula case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chandigarh

The Punjab and Haryana High Court on Wednesday set aside criminal charges against Associated Journals Limited (AJL) and former Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda in a case related to irregularities in re-allotment of an institutional plot to the company in Panchkula. CBI charge sheeted only Hooda and AJL's managing director Motilal Vora.

Justice Tribhuvan Dahiya said that Hooda's 2005 decision to re-allot the plot, which had originally been given to AJL in 1982 for establishment of the office of National Herald and publication of a Hindi newspaper, was unanimously ratified by the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) ex-post facto in 2006. It added that no court has declared the decision illegal till date.

"The allotment is valid as on date, it has also not been cancelled, nor declared illegal or arbitrary. Instead, the AJL after payment of re-allotment price as well as the extension fee has raised construction, and has been given occupation certificate by the Authority on August 14, 2014. No grievance has been raised regarding any loss to the Authority; nor has the AJL or



National Herald Panchkula office

any other accused been called upon to make good any perceived harm. Even the Government auditors have dropped their objection regarding financial loss to the Authority on account of this re-allotment," the Court said.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had earlier filed a chargesheet under Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act against the AJL, Hooda — who was the Chairman of HUDA, and Congress leader and former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Moti Lal Vora, who has since passed away. Subsequently, the trial court framed charges against AJL and Hooda in 2021. AJL's major shareholders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi having 76 percent shares in AJL was not made part of the case by CBI.

Meanwhile ED has attached the Panchkula building in the main case.

The case was initially registered in 2016 by the Haryana Janata Party (BJP) Government later transferred the probe to CBI. It was alleged that the plot was re-allotted to AJL in 1982 rates despite the cancellation of the original allotment. However, the High Court opined that the material brought on record by CBI does not even prima facie disclose the existence of essential ingredients of the alleged offences against them.

"Continuation of prosecution will be an abuse of the process of Court. Consequently, both the petitions are allowed. The impugned orders, dated

April 16, 2021, framing charges against the petitioners as well as dismissing the discharge application, are hereby set aside along with all subsequent proceedings arising therefrom, and the petitioners stand discharged," the Court ordered. The Court said Hooda's decision had not been questioned by anyone, including the State government and HUDA. Even the FIR was registered on the basis of a source, it added.

"Ignoring these vital facts of the matter, the CBI has taken upon itself to term the re-allotment illegal being violative of the 1977 Act which would, in its view, attract criminal liability under the provisions of the IPC and the PC Act invoked against the petitioners. It is unfathomable as to how the investigating agency can consider the re-allotment of plot unlawful on its own, and proceed to register a criminal case on the basis. This is absolutely illegal, and far from any procedure known to law," the Bench said.

"Although there has been a request from the AJL seeking restoration of the plot to it, there is no material forthcoming to indicate that it was in concurrence with BSH [Hooda] to fraudulently or dishonestly get the plot restored at original rates," said the court.

SC stays trial in criminal case for not obeying summons by ED

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

In a relief to Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, the Supreme Court on Wednesday stayed the trial in a case related to wilful disobedience of summons issued by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with the money laundering case registered against him.

A Bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi issued notice to the Enforcement Directorate on the plea of Soren seeking quashing of the case. In his plea before the top court, Soren also challenged the repetitive summons issued to him by the ED in the money laundering cases related to stone-chip illegal mining scam.

Senior advocates Mukul Rohatgi, Arunabh Choudhary, and advocate Pragya Baghel, appearing for Soren, said the ED has been issuing summons after summons to him.

Additional Solicitor General Anil Kaushik, appearing for the ED, said Soren was issued seven summons, but he did not appear before the agency.



Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren

He added that the trial against him was almost complete and only one witness remained to be examined.

CJI Kant told Kaushik, "We were reading in the newspaper, you (ED) have filed some bulk complaints. You should concentrate and spend your energy on those complaints. You will have some constructive outcomes."

Justice Bagchi added, "You should focus on effective prosecution. These are in terrorism (in fear) prosecution. Purpose has been served."

Soren has challenged the recent Jharkhand High Court's decision refusing to quash the case against him.

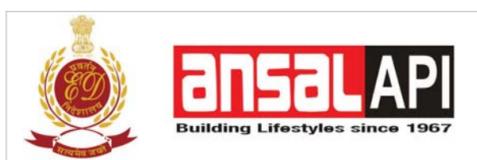
ED attaches ₹598- cr worth of assets in case against Ansal properties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday said it has attached land worth ₹598 crore in Uttar Pradesh's Agra district as part of a money laundering investigation against realty company Ansal Properties and Infrastructure Ltd. (APIL).

The case pertains to "large-scale" irregularities in the acquisition and subsequent release of land in sectors 58-63 and 65-67 in Gurugram, Haryana.

The federal probe agency said in a statement that it issued a provisional order under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)



to attach land in Agra worth more than ₹598 crore.

These properties are held in the names of associate companies and individuals acting on behalf of APIL. These entities were created and used as land-holding vehicles, while the entire funding, control and beneficial ownership vested with the company, the ED said.

According to the case, land was originally notified for acquisition under the Land

Acquisition Act, 1894, for stated public purposes such as development by HUDA and creation of a land bank. "However, most of such land was subsequently released to private colonizers through a fraudulent and collusive process," the ED alleged.

Such action "undermines" the statutory safeguards governing land acquisition and compromised the transparency expected in matters involving public purpose by

the state government, it said. The money laundering case stems from a January, 2019 FIR filed by the CBI against APIL, some Government officials and private developers and colonisers. The CBI registered the case on the Supreme Court's directions.

The ED found that APIL entered into collaboration agreements and obtained General Power of Attorneys (GPAs) from individual landowners in respect of land already notified for acquisition.

These agreements suffered from "serious" irregularities, including absence of consideration prior to issuance of Section 4 notification, lack of essential contractual terms,

and post-facto alterations, it said. "Following the issuance of acquisition notifications by the State Government, the notified status of the land created uncertainty and directly weakened the bargaining position of individual landowners.

"In such circumstances, transfers were facilitated in favour of private colonizers at rates substantially below prevailing market value, resulting in wrongful gain to the company and corresponding financial detriment to the affected landholders," the ED said. The licenced land, as per the agency, has been utilised for development of projects named "Esenca" and "Versalia."

ED files chargesheet against Ranya Rao, associates in gold smuggling case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bengaluru

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday filed a chargesheet in Bengaluru in a money laundering case against Kannada actor Ranya Rao and two others linked to alleged gold smuggling. Besides Rao, the federal probe agency named Tarun Konduru, the actor's associate, and Bellari-based gold dealer Sahil Sakariya Jain in the prosecution complaint, an ED equivalent of a chargesheet.

Harshavardini Ranya, also



Ranya Rao

known as Ranya Rao (32), was arrested by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) on March 3, 2025, at the Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru after she arrived there from Dubai. Officials recovered 14.2 kg of gold

bars worth ₹12.56 crore from her possession. According to the ED, the probe found that 127.28 kg of gold valued at ₹102.55 crore was smuggled into India during March 2024-March 2025.

The smuggled gold was disposed of in the domestic market through a network of handlers and jewellers, it said. Assets worth ₹34 crore of Rao were attached by the ED during the investigation.

The proceeds of the sale were generated in cash and settled through "hawala" channels in India and abroad, according to

Class 10 admit cards with pass certificates can be used as ID: Supreme Court in West Bengal SIR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday clarified that Class 10 admit card accompanied by pass certificate can be produced as supplementary documentation for identity verification in the ongoing SIR exercise in West Bengal.

A bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi passed the order after senior advocate DS Naidu mentioned the matter.

The lawyer expressed concerns about whether such admit cards can be permitted to be a standalone identity document.

The top court said it has already directed that the admit card will only be a supplementary document.

"All documents mentioned in para 3(iii) of order dated February 24, 2026 which are not uploaded so far and received before February 15, shall be submitted by the Electoral Registration Officers, Assistant Electoral Registration



Mamata Banerjee

Officers to the presiding judicial officers by tomorrow 5 pm.

"Similarly, para 3(iii)(c) is clarified to the effect that Madhyamik (Class 10) admit cards may be submitted along with pass certificate for the purpose of birth certificate and purposes of parentage," the bench said.

The apex court on Tuesday allowed the deployment of West Bengal civil judges, in addition to 250 district judges, and the requisitioning of judicial officers from Jharkhand and Odisha to handle 80 lakh claims and objections of those facing deletion from the electoral roll in the ongoing SIR exercise in the State.

LS Speaker to reject Opposition move to impeach Madras HC judge GR Swaminathan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

According to highly placed sources, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla is expected to reject the Impeachment notice against Madras High Court Justice GR Swaminathan. "A judge cannot be removed by Parliament for a judicial pronouncement, parliamentary sources said on Wednesday questioning the opposition's move to impeach a Madras High Court judge over his lamp-lighting ruling, said sources.

They said that corruption, misconduct and misdemeanour can be criteria to remove a Supreme Court or a High Court judge. In December last year, more than 100 opposition MPs, led by the DMK and Congress, had given a notice to remove Madras High Court judge GR Swaminathan following his ruling that allowed Hindu devotees to light a lamp at 'Deepathoon' pillar atop Thirupparankundram hill. The site which is located near a dargah was



Justice GR Swaminathan

deemed to be a temple land by the judgment. The DMK Government in Tamil Nadu had argued that the verdict caused communal tension. A two-judge bench had later upheld the verdict. While giving notice for

removal, the opposition had claimed that the order violated long-standing practices and threatened public peace. Recently, Supreme Court upheld the decision of Justice GR Swaminathan.



Editor's TAKE

Ukraine War: Four years, no end in sight

A war meant to quickly overpower a neighbour has redrawn the global order, leaving Ukraine scarred yet resolute and the world less secure

When Voltaire said, "It is forbidden to kill; therefore all murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets," he could well have been talking about the Ukraine war that has raged for four long years. It is a war that goes unabated. With both sides digging in their heels, the conflict now appears to be more about ego clashes and superpower rivalry than about the people who continue to pay the price. Four years ago, on February 24, 2022, Vladimir Putin launched what he called a "special military operation" against Ukraine. He had no idea it would stretch for years, as he wanted to wrap it up by claiming the border areas of Ukraine which he feels belong to Russia. But it is a stalemate – costly, grinding, and far from resolution. Four years on, the goals set by Russian President Vladimir Putin are yet to be achieved, but the cost of the war has been huge on both sides. It is a human tragedy unfolding every day. The United Nations estimates that more than 15,000 civilians have been killed and over 40,000 injured. Military casualties on both sides are estimated to run into the hundreds of thousands, with some believing the figure could go between 1.8 and 2 million. The economic toll has been equally severe. Direct damage to Ukraine's infrastructure and property has exceeded \$195 billion. When broader economic losses are taken into account, the overall cost of the war is assessed at more than \$2 trillion. It is a war no one is winning, yet all are paying the price.

Russia now controls significant swathes of eastern and southern Ukraine, yet it has failed to subdue the country or topple its government. Ukraine, with the help of Western military aid and resilience, has reclaimed territory, but the human cost is immense. The battlefield has evolved into a war of attrition – artillery duels, drone swarms, trench warfare reminiscent of the early 20th century, and relentless missile strikes on cities. After Donald Trump became President of the United States, he has been pressing Kyiv to consider territorial concessions in pursuit of peace, but Ukraine is in no mood to oblige. War fatigue is visible, yet no one wants to blink first.

Energy shocks, inflationary pressures, and the strain of sustaining military aid have tested alliances. For Ukraine, the war is existential – about sovereignty, identity, and survival.

Equally damaging has been its impact on geopolitics. The post-Cold War belief that large-scale wars would not happen no longer holds. The war has redrawn security contours, expanded NATO, and the world is once again moving towards war preparedness. Global food and energy systems have been badly impacted, as grain exports from the Black Sea became bargaining chips and gas pipelines turned into geopolitical weapons. Developing nations have been paying the price through higher food bills and fuel shortages.

Yet through all this, Ukraine's resilience remains exemplary and will endure long after the war is over. Zelensky's bunker address was a reminder that in modern war, morale is as critical as missiles. It is also a warning to nations harbouring imperialistic ambitions that no matter how small a country may be, if its people resolve to fight back, it becomes invincible.

Bangladesh's Presidential flip-flops

Bangladesh's presidency is once again under scrutiny as Mohammed Shahabuddin openly criticised the outgoing interim government of Muhammad Yunus. Shahabuddin now appears to be recalibrating his stance amid the resurgence of the BNP



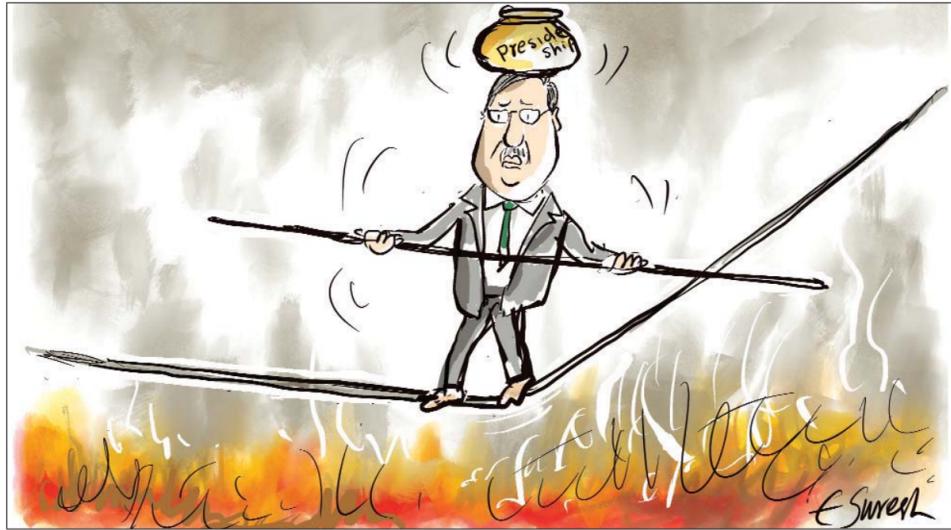
BHOPINDER SINGH

Recently, the President of Bangladesh, Mohammed Shahabuddin, made scathing comments about the outgoing interim government of Mohammad Yunus. He described himself as a "palace prisoner" and went as far as suggesting that there were attempts to oust him. However, President Shahabuddin had been a lifelong member of the Awami League before assuming supposed neutrality upon assuming the presidency in 2023. He had been personally chosen by Sheikh Hasina, and naturally the then opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) had not supported his candidature.

Under Shahabuddin's watch, months of chaos involving protests, violence, suppressive clamp-downs, and ultimately the resignation of Sheikh Hasina took place. Even attempts to rein in the situation – such as announcing Sheikh Hasina's resignation – were left to the Bangladesh Army Chief, Waker uz-Zaman. Whereas the President and, more importantly, the Commander-in-Chief, Mohammed Shahabuddin, sounded wishy-washy. The President's meek plea that he could not secure Sheikh Hasina's resignation was slammed by the likes of Asif Nazrul (Interim Government's Adviser for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs): "The President's statement that he did not receive Sheikh Hasina's resignation letter is a lie, and it is a violation of his oath."

It is very likely that the Mohammad Yunus dispensation did treat him lightly and relegated him to a rubber stamp (as is the sub-continental term) – but throughout the year and a half of Yunus's administration, Shahabuddin did not make a squeak of protest when his presidential status certainly afforded him that opportunity. Shahabuddin secured his continued presidency by knowingly accepting what he now calls a violation of the Constitution by silently passing 133 ordinances.

Today, as the Tarique Rahman-led Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has stormed the electoral hustings, President Shahabuddin is now singing incredulous hosannas in favour of the BNP, a sworn rival of his own ideological past, i.e., the Awami League. Shahabuddin obsequiously praised the incoming government and its leader Tarique Rahman: "They had expressed their willingness to uphold the Constitution all through that time. I had a lot of curiosity about BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman, but with time, I got to know him as a genuine person. He was so cordial. BNP's support was 100% there in my bad time." Obviously, the exiled Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina (leader of Shahabuddin's original



THE FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH (1971-72) AND LATER OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH, SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN (SHEIKH HASINA'S FATHER), WAS ASSASSINATED ALONG WITH HIS FAMILY MEMBERS

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party) must be cringing at his flip-flop.

Now, as the new Prime Minister Tarique Rahman goes about reshuffling the Bangladesh military leadership and curbing the powers of the Army Chief, Waker uz-Zaman, the ostensible Commander-in-Chief, President Shahabuddin yet again signs all decrees sycophantically. Incidentally, earlier, when marauding student mobs were baying for President Shahabuddin's blood in the wake of Sheikh Hasina's ouster, it was the same Army Chief, General Waker uz-Zaman, who had saved the life and presidency of Mohammed Shahabuddin.

Now abandoning his ideological fountainhead, the Awami League, bad-mouthing the outgoing Mohammad Yunus government, and ingratiatingly praising the incoming government of his one-time ideological rival – Tarique Rahman's BNP – appears par for the course for Mohammed Shahabuddin.

There are personal reasons for this volte-face by Mohammed Shahabuddin. The Bangladeshi presidential term is for five years, with a maximum of two terms possible. However, in the relatively short span of 55 years of independence, there have been 17 Presidents. Only four of them were able to complete full terms. The other 14 were subjected to premature removals, coups, and even assassinations.

The first President of the Provisional Government of Bangladesh (1971-72) and later of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Sheikh Hasina's father), was assassinated along with his family members. His successor as Acting President, Syed Nazrul Islam, was also assassinated in mysterious circumstances in what is dubbed the Jail Killing. The

third President, Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, later carried out an infamous partisan flip-flop by supporting the coup-led government of Mostaq Ahmad. Mostaq Ahmad himself became President, only to be ousted in yet another coup. Mostaq's successor, Abu Sadat Mohammad Sayem, took over until he too was removed in a stunning coup by General Ziaur Rahman (father of current Prime Minister Tarique Rahman). The curse on the Bangladeshi presidency continued with the assassination of General Ziaur Rahman in 1981. Thus, the saga of partisan vendetta and presidential flip-flops continued as

Bangladesh remained on tenterhooks of instability with an estimated 25 coup attempts. The current President, Mohammed Shahabuddin, needs to look at the fate of his own predecessor, Mohammad Abdul Hamid (the longest-serving President with two terms). The July Revolution in 2024 led to charges of Mohammad Abdul Hamid assaulting protestors, and later his house was vandalised during the Bulldozer Programme. But the lawyer in Mohammed Shahabuddin knows that he must flip-flop and renege on his past partisan affiliation. He was once the coordinator in the case filed over the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He also served as chairman of the Judicial Inquiry Commission set up after the 2001 General Polls to investigate murders, rapes, looting and inhumane activities committed by BNP leaders.

Today, as he has sworn in the Tarique Rahman-led BNP government, Shahabuddin – with over two years of residual presidency still left – must dance to a completely different tune if he does not wish to suffer the fate of 14 out of the 17 Presidents of Bangladesh.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

PIC TALK



A group of grey-headed swamphens searches for food near a field in Nagaon district, Assam.

PHOTO: PTI

Rediscovering the soul's eternal divine connection



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

2ND OPINION

Let us pause and remember who we truly are. We are not merely fragile material bodies moving through a temporary world; we are eternal souls inhabiting these bodies for a brief span of time. In the Bhagavad Gita (15.7), Lord Krishna declares that every living being is His eternal fragment. This single truth has profound implications. If we are parts of the Divine, then our natural position is to reconnect with Him. Just as an orphan finds security and belonging when adopted into a loving family, the soul finds fulfilment when it accepts its relationship with God.

Yet, despite this divine invitation, we hesitate. We continue wandering through cycles of birth and death, searching for stability in a world that offers none. Why do we avoid taking shelter in the Supreme when He is omnipotent, omniscient, and ever-present? The answer lies in our

misplaced faith. We seek refuge in wealth, status, power, and relationships, hoping they will grant lasting peace. Money has its utility, but it cannot purchase inner tranquility. Power may command obedience, but it does not silence anxiety. Even those who appear outwardly successful often struggle inwardly. The modern world, despite its comforts, is restless. Sleepless nights, fearful dreams, and the haunting sense of insecurity remind us that something essential is missing. Lord Krishna provides the solution with clarity. He explains that the soul is sat, chit, and ananda – eternal, conscious, and blissful by nature. Eternity (sat) means that while bodies perish, the soul never dies. In the Gita (2.17), He affirms that the soul is indestructible and cannot be annihilated. Death is merely a transition – a change of garments. Understanding this dissolves much of our fear. We are not extinguished at death; we continue our journey. God patiently waits for us to turn towards Him and promises that by taking His shelter (18.62), we can attain supreme peace and the eternal abode.

The second quality, chit, refers to consciousness. We are aware, but our awareness is misdirected. We identify with temporary labels – name, nationality, profession – forgetting that these dissolve with the body. We also misuse our free will, chasing desires under the illusion that unrestricted enjoyment will bring happiness. Instead, we encounter frustration, anger, and wounded pride. Our ego, built on

false identity, becomes the source of suffering.

Then comes ananda, bliss. We confuse fleeting pleasures with true joy. Sense indulgence often carries hidden consequences – physical discomfort, mental agitation, or emotional emptiness. What we call enjoyment frequently leaves us more disturbed than satisfied. Real bliss is not dependent on external stimulation; it arises from harmony with our spiritual nature. The turning point begins when we consciously accept: "I am a soul, a part of God."

With this understanding, free will is used wisely. We cultivate remembrance of the Divine through prayer, mantra, sacred study, and contemplation. The senses, once restless and outward-driven, become disciplined and purposeful. The mind, trained through practice and detachment, gradually rests in divine awareness.

As this connection deepens, insecurity fades. Guidance begins to flow from within, illuminating decisions and correcting missteps. Life becomes anchored in dharma. One feels protected – not by circumstance, but by divine presence. This is the beginning of jeevan mukti – liberation even while living. The journey is gradual, yet transformative. Soul consciousness reshapes priorities, instils peace, and awakens hope for the ultimate destination: a spiritual existence beyond death, in eternal communion with the Divine.

The writer is a spiritual teacher

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METRO TRAGEDY RAISES SERIOUS QUESTIONS ON SAFETY

The recent metro accident in Mulund, Mumbai, is a deeply tragic incident that has claimed innocent lives. It has also exposed serious concerns about mismanagement in metro construction work.

The project has reportedly been awarded to a contractor named Milan Road Build Tech. When Mumbai has several established infrastructure companies with proven expertise, it is a valid concern how such a critical project was entrusted to a relatively lesser-known firm.

Metro construction continues round the clock, often with inadequate adherence to safety norms. Noise and dust pollution have increased significantly, adversely affecting the city's air quality. Questions must be raised regarding the criteria

used to assess the contractor's competence and the standards applied while awarding the contract.

Imposing a penalty of five crore rupees on the contractor while offering only five lakh rupees as compensation to the families of the deceased raises troubling ethical concerns. When safety norms are repeatedly violated, why are timely preventive actions not enforced? Across Mumbai, construction work continues with visible disregard for safety regulations. Citizens are therefore left to safeguard themselves, as public confidence in enforcement appears to be weakening.

Public safety must never be compromised in the pursuit of rapid infrastructure development.

D SHIRODKAR | MUMBAI

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

Politics behind State renaming decision

While the Centre's approval of the Kerala government's 2024 proposal to rename the state 'Keralam' deserves appreciation, it simultaneously raises a serious question regarding the Union Cabinet's continued inaction on the West Bengal government's 2018 proposal to rename the state 'Bangla'.

It must be clarified why 'Keralam' is considered reflective of the will of the people and a strengthening of cultural identity, while 'Bangla' is not treated similarly. Does Bengal lack a glorious cultural heritage? Mamata Banerjee's charge that the BJP displays anti-Bengali tendencies finds resonance in such developments. West Bengal continues to be deprived of significant economic dues, while the Bangla language has been derisively labelled "Bangladeshi". Reports of vulnerable Bengalis being detained or harassed in certain states under suspicion further deepen this perception.

The BJP remains electorally marginal in Kerala, whereas Bengal has emerged as a key political battleground. Electoral calculations may explain why 'Keralam' was accepted, while 'Bangla' remains pending. Renaming decisions should reflect federal fairness rather than political convenience.

KAJAL CHATTERJEE | KOLKATA

US tariff ruling impacts India

The United States Supreme Court has struck down sweeping tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump, ruling that the International Emergency Economic Powers Act does not authorise such measures. While dissenting opinions noted alternative legal avenues, the judgment significantly curtails executive overreach.

This ruling presents India with an opportunity to revisit the proposed tariff framework under the Interim Agreement with the United States.

A reassessment would reflect strategic clarity and protect India's long-term trade interests. Equally concerning is the reported suspension of crude oil imports from Russia in alignment with unstated trade expectations. In recent years, discounted Russian oil enabled India to save billions of dollars. Abrupt shifts risk upsetting energy budgets, trade balance stability and domestic fuel prices.

Policy responses driven by external pressures may also complicate diplomatic relations with longstanding partners. A balanced approach is therefore essential.

India must carefully calibrate its trade and energy decisions to safeguard economic stability while preserving strategic autonomy.

HARIDASAN RAJAN | KOZHIKODE

Supreme Court boosts election credibility

The Supreme Court's recent intervention in the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in West Bengal marks a significant step towards ensuring credible elections.

In its February 24, 2026 hearing, a Special Bench expanded the verification mechanism to address nearly fifty lakh discrepancy claims. The Court authorised the Calcutta High Court to draw upon judicial officers from neighbouring states to expedite the process.

Invoking Article 142, the Bench permitted publication of the final electoral roll on February 28, while ensuring that subsequent updates remain legally valid.

It reaffirmed Aadhaar cards and Madhyamik certificates as acceptable identity documents submitted within the stipulated timeline.

Additionally, the Election Commission's deployment of Central Armed Police Forces from March 1 aims to reinforce public confidence during the transition from roll revision to the electoral phase.

This judicially supervised framework helps bridge institutional trust gaps and promotes voter inclusion while strengthening electoral integrity.

VIDYASAGAR REDDY KETHIRI | WARANGAL

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



India's ascent and Congress culture of self-flagellation

For when political opposition degenerates into habitual self-flagellation, it ceases to function as a corrective mechanism within democracy and begins, inadvertently, to serve as an amplifier of narratives that question the very legitimacy of national progress

FIRST Column



BALBIR PUNJ

Even as the world begins to acknowledge India's rise as an economic, digital, and diplomatic power, sections of its own political class seem gripped by an impulse to self-flagellate — a compulsive urge to diminish, discredit, and deconstruct national achievements before a global audience. Political frustration and hate are now refashioned as politics.

This sordid phenomenon was starkly visible during the recently concluded five-day (Feb 16-20, 2026) 'AI Impact Summit 2026' held in New Delhi — an event that was neither routine nor ceremonial, but one that signified India's arrival as a principal stakeholder in the global technological order.

Under the leadership of Rahul Gandhi, the Congress ecosystem chose to transform a global diplomatic and technological congregation into a theatre of ridicule and derision, for itself and the country.

The now-infamous "shirtless protest" orchestrated by members of the Congress youth wing within the precincts of Bharat Mandapam was not an act of democratic dissent in any meaningful constitutional sense. Rather, it was an exhibition of built-in hostility and hatred towards Prime Minister Modi, which turned into an act that sought to undermine India's global standing.

This sordid drama was not staged by some local Congressmen on their own. It obviously had support from the top. Rahul expressed support for the Youth Congress protest, describing the participants as "Babbar-sheer" (lion-hearted) on February 24.

However, to understand the deeper civilisational implications of this conduct, one must turn to a historical analogy nearly a century old.

In 1927, American author Katherine Mayo published 'Mother India', a text that purported to offer a sociological portrait of Indian civilisation. In reality, the book assembled selectively negative data — child marriage, sanitation deficits, caste discrimination — into a sweeping indictment of India's moral and institutional



CONTEMPORARY INDIA, STANDING AT THE THRESHOLD OF TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION AND GEOPOLITICAL CONSOLIDATION, APPEARS TO BE CONFRONTING PRECISELY SUCH A PARADOX

The writer is an eminent columnist, former Chairman of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), and the author of 'Tryst with Ayodhya: Decolonisation of India' and 'Narrative ka Mayajaal'

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capacity for self-governance. Its implicit argument was clear: a society so afflicted by internal pathologies was unfit for political independence.

Writing in Young India on 15 September 1927, Mahatma Gandhi famously dismissed the work as a "drain inspector's report". This phrase was not a rhetorical flourish but a methodological critique. Gandhi did not deny the existence of social problems within Indian society; rather, he objected to their selective amplification and colonial framing as evidence of civilisational inferiority.

Gandhi's approach was deeply rooted in a vital political insight: true internal reform must come from within a civilisation itself, rather than being exploited by external or domestic forces to undermine its right to self-determination. The colonial authorities aimed to twist India's social issues into moral justifications for imperial domination.

Today, the political formation that self-claimed genealogical and ideological descent from Gandhi's legacy — the Congress leadership centred around Rahul Gandhi — appears increasingly inclined to replicate the very epistemic framework that Mahatma Gandhi sought to dismantle.

The controversy involving Galgotias

University at the AI Summit — wherein an allegedly Chinese-manufactured robotic dog was displayed as an indigenous innovation — was swiftly extrapolated by Rahul Gandhi into a sweeping denunciation of the summit as a "disorganised PR spectacle" in which Indian data was ostensibly being commodified.

The resemblance to Mayo's methodological strategy is hard to ignore. In both cases, episodic shortcomings are generalised into systemic incapacity; isolated institutional lapses are reframed as civilisational deficiencies.

While Mayo's narrative served colonial interests by portraying India as unfit for self-rule, contemporary political rhetoric risks portraying India as unprepared for technological leadership in the emerging digital order.

This is hardly unprecedented. During the 2020 visit of then United States President Donald Trump, sections of the anti-CAA lobby mobilised protests that escalated into violence in parts of Delhi, thereby projecting an image of internal discord before an international audience. The parallels with the present moment are instructive: in both instances, domestic political contestation was internationalised in ways that risked compromising India's strategic

narrative.

It is instructive, in this regard, to recall the exemplary conduct displayed in 1994 when Pakistan sought to internationalise the Kashmir issue at the United Nations Human Rights Commission through the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. Then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao rose above partisan considerations and entrusted the leadership of India's delegation in Geneva to Opposition leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The resulting diplomatic intervention successfully neutralised Pakistan's resolution, securing support even from countries such as China and Iran. The episode remains a testament to a political culture in which national interest superseded party rivalry.

In contemporary India, however, that culture appears increasingly attenuated. The AI Impact Summit, hosted at Bharat Mandapam, attracted global technology leaders from companies such as Google, Microsoft, Amazon, OpenAI, and Anthropic, alongside heads of state including Emmanuel Macron.

Hotel tariffs across Delhi surged dramatically during the summit — five-star accommodations reportedly exceeding ₹1 lakh per night — reflecting both the scale of participation and the economic opportunities generated by such international engagements.

The summit culminated in the adoption of the New Delhi Declaration, endorsed by nearly ninety countries and international organisations, emphasising the democratic diffusion of AI resources, secure system development, and equitable access to technological innovation. Investment pledges exceeding \$250 billion for infrastructure and \$20 billion for deep-tech venture capital further underscored global confidence in India's digital trajectory.

At the same time that Congress operatives chose theatrics over statesmanship, India's innovators were quietly rewriting technological history. Bengaluru-based startup Sarvam AI — born in 2023 to fulfil the vision of sovereign AI — launched Indus, a 105-billion-parameter large language model-powered AI chat application, at the India AI Impact Summit 2026.

This home-grown chatbot, now available on web and mobile platforms,

enters a competitive field dominated by global giants like OpenAI, Google, and Anthropic, and distinguishes itself with deep localisation, multilingual support, and Indian-context fluency.

Instead of celebrating how an Indian startup is challenging entrenched tech hegemonies and providing alternatives to Western-centric AI tools, the Congress rhetoric focused on denigrating the summit as a "PR spectacle". Such responses reveal a worldview that is unable to perceive national achievement as anything other than a prop for partisan critique — a stark contrast to nations that celebrate and reinforce indigenous innovation as a core pillar of sovereign strength.

The persistent portrayal of global engagements as public-relations exercises, or of technological collaboration as a compromise of sovereignty, reflects not constructive scepticism but personal prejudices overshadowing principled politics. In the decades following Independence, the world often associated India with mysticism, abject poverty, starvation, snake charmers, and elephant-riding Maharajas. Today, the same nation hosts the G20 Summit and convenes global forums on artificial intelligence governance. That transformation — from a subject of anthropological curiosity to a shaper of technological norms — ought to make every Indian proud.

Ultimately, the challenge confronting India is not merely technological or diplomatic; it is psychological. A nation that aspires to lead cannot afford an internal discourse that equates self-critique with self-denigration, or dissent with disruption.

For when political opposition degenerates into habitual self-flagellation, it ceases to function as a corrective mechanism within democracy and begins, inadvertently, to serve as an amplifier of narratives that question the very legitimacy of national progress.

Nations, much like civilisations, are not undone merely by external adversaries; they are often weakened by an internal elite that develops an inexplicable discomfort with their own country's success.

Contemporary India, standing at the threshold of technological transformation and geopolitical consolidation, appears to be confronting precisely such a paradox.



PRAHAAR: Thunderbolt strike on terrorism



RAMANAND GARGE

In a significant decision with major implications for India's overall approach to national security, the Ministry of Home Affairs strengthened its 'zero tolerance policy' against terrorism by unveiling 'PRAHAAR' (Policy for Response Against Hostile Activities and Radicalism). It is India's first comprehensive national counter-terrorism policy and strategy envisioning a 'whole-of-government' approach to dismantle the terror ecosystem. Prahaar literally means a thunderbolt strike against terrorism. It is the first policy document released by the largest democracy on the planet in its 77 years of existence and evolving continuous battle against the menace of terrorism in all its manifestations.

The strategy reflects the mature, evolved policy orientation, emphasising targeting technological threats like misuse of drones, crypto wallets, the dark web and encrypted messages for terror funding and recruitment. It further prioritises security of critical infrastructure and comes heavily on disruption of terror networks by cutting off access to funds and weapons for terrorists. The strategy aptly focuses on integration of the legal framework, ably strengthening the anti-terror mechanism of India that has evolved over seven decades, addressing the 21st-century threat profile, aptly summarised through its core seven pillars as:

- P - Prevention: Intelligence-led disruption of violence across land, air, and sea. It prioritises intelligence gathering via the Multi-Agency Centre (MAC) and Joint Task Force on Intelligence (JTFI).
- R - Response: Ensures swift, proportionate action through a tiered architecture involving local police (first responders), state special forces, and the National Security Guard (NSG) as the nodal strike force.
- A - Aggregating Internal Capacities: Modernises security forces with advanced technology (AI/ML-driven analytics) and weaponry while standardising training across states.
- H - Human Rights & Rule of Law: Anchors operations within constitutional frameworks, using the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and new criminal laws (Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita) as primary legal tools.
- A - Attenuating Conditions: Focuses on counter-radicalisation through community engagement, youth outreach, and prison programmes to address poverty and unemployment exploited by extremists.
- A - Aligning International Efforts: Strengthens global cooperation through extradition treaties, Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLATs), and pushing for UN terrorist designations.

● R - Recovery & Resilience: Adopts a "whole-of-society" approach, involving doctors, psychologists, and NGOs to reintegrate affected communities and promote faster recovery.

The strategy document is not mere jargon but a reflection of India's vast experience of handling the menace of terrorism since 1947, underscoring the genuine intent of the government to transform the anti-terror mechanism through an able policy framework backed by budgetary allocation.

Before declaring this policy, the Ministry of Home Affairs strengthened internal security through reforms including newly enacted criminal laws, technology-enabled justice mechanisms, and police modernisation backed by budgetary support — transforming the khaki into a smart force. Proactive capability was enhanced through data integration via the Multi-Agency Centre (MAC), enabling real-time intelligence sharing with privacy safeguards. While MAC acts as the integrator, NATGRID powers seamless coordination through systems like GANDIVA, reinforcing neural transformation and strengthening India's proactive anti-terror mechanism across states and UTs through effective state-centre synergy.

What has changed?

India, which was once tagged as a 'soft state' after the 26/11 terror strike, has seen qualitative transformation in its anti-terror mechanism characterised by intelligence-based prevention, pre-empting threats coupled with real-time data sharing. It further highlights Indian capabilities of going beyond neutralising terrorists to dismantling their ecosystems and lifeblood like finances and logistics. While doing so, the Ministry of Home Affairs is aptly addressing modern hybrid threats such as drone-based smuggling, cyber radicalisation, crypto wallet funding and potential use of CBRNED (chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, explosive and digital) materials.

The comprehensive vision of the Home Minister to strengthen state as well as central entities' capabilities through cooperative federalism has reinforced state police capabilities and today they are more than just a 'law and order' machinery — equipped with state-of-the-art surveillance infrastructure, modern communication, speedy transport and modern armament.

The budgetary allocation of ₹4,846 crore from 2021 to 2026 for modernisation of police highlights the government's intent. These reforms have enabled surveillance sovereignty and ended international vetting, prioritising fait accompli over diplomatic requests and sanctions. Backed by a stringent legal framework and advanced forensic capabilities, this transformation has strengthened inter-agency coordination, bringing local police and elite units like NSG into synchrony — a decisive feature of anti-terror operations.

India as a global leader

The Indian anti-terror mechanism evolved across

decades, and the recent transformation and decisive success achieved against the menace of terrorism in various facets makes India a dependable partner to collaborate with.

India's counter-terror cooperation includes Joint Working Groups with 26 countries and MLATs with 50 countries. Its leadership in multilateral forums - BIMSTEC, QUAD, ASEAN, SCO, BRICS and G20 - reflects growing credibility. The policy signals firm intent to lead the global war on terror by holding both terrorists and their sponsors equally responsible.

Post Op Sindoor, doctrinal change established the principle that any future terror attack will be treated as an act of war - clarifying policy directives from ambiguous sub-conventional and conventional aggressions formalised in PRAHAAR.

Through global cooperation and policy push via the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) at the UN, India is pushing for universal standards.

The new policy document provides a roadmap envisioning a terror-free India through structural and geopolitical shift by 2030 and beyond.

The new CT strategy outlined by the MHA is distilled into four prominent force multipliers transforming national security DNA:

- Neural Transformation — predictive intelligence through technology integration.
- Kinetic Transformation — developing offensive non-contact lethality without boots on the ground.
- Legal Transformation — enabling smart police into trial-ready policing.
- Social Transformation — de-weaponising minds, moving away from a 'one size fits all' prison approach to graded response through deradicalisation centres and proactive cyber capabilities.

India's transformation from a defensive shield into a precision scalpel capable of removing the menace of terrorism with surgical accuracy — while the rest of the country continues to function normally — defines its decisive capabilities.

The ongoing Operation Sindoor is the direct military expression of this strategic shift formalised in the Prahaar strategy, serving as field validation of India's move from reactive restraint to deterrence by punishment.

The globally acknowledged Operation Sindoor and its battlefield verdict proved India's 'zero tolerance' policy is now active and an operational reality. It showcased India's evolution from being a 'soft target' nation seeking global sympathy to a 'proactive hunter' who enforces an immediate and high-tech price for any hostility — aptly named 'Prahaar', the thunderbolt strike ending the era of 'strategic restraint' and paving the rise of 'predictive lethality'.

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When welfare turns into freebies



ASHA GUPTA

Recently, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu announced ₹5,000 in 1.31 crore women's accounts. In January 2026, the Supreme Court of India drew a clear line of demarcation for the first time between political freebies and welfare provisions. Speaking in response to a petition by Ashwini Kumar Upadhyaya, Chief Justice Surya Kant held that freebies could not be equated with welfare largesse by the state. The Supreme Court was found shifting its stance from the earlier judgement in the S Subramaniam Balaji versus Tamil Nadu case in 2013, which held that electoral promises in the form of freebies did not amount to bribery under Section 123 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

In this petition, the question before the Court was whether untenable electoral promises made by various political parties during elections to lure voters amounted to bribery or not. Could these be allowed for being related to the Directive Principles of State Policy and falling under the category of 'public purpose'? This issue was further reviewed in a PIL in support of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remark on 'revadi culture'. Fiscal prudence demands responsible management of government finances, ensuring sustainability and avoidance of excessive deficits. Earlier, in advanced economies, social development was seen as an end in itself and the state was viewed as an agent of social responsibility. The focus was on resource inputs as a symbol of progress and commitment, often to the neglect of outputs. Modern states in developing countries are required to promote equity, fairness and justice on the one hand, and maintain high standards of efficiency, accountability and democracy on the other. This has led to pulls in opposite directions.

In fact, we find convergence of welfare goals in both the Global North and Global South. Despite different ideologies and worldviews, rulers are willing to assist the elderly and needy. Nobody wants to alienate vast majorities in order to retain power. Consequently, there has been a shift in paradigm from 'social security' to 'social insurance', social assistance and social protection' worldwide. In India, many freebies and welfare benefits are announced just before elections by both central and state governments, often without protection or accountability. Most schemes are eulogised and personalised to reap votes without mentioning the source from which such expenditure would be met. The term 'freebie' is used in electoral politics in the name

of welfare benefits because a very thin line exists between the two. Whereas freebies are seen as one-time assistance to gain immediate electoral support, welfare measures aim at equitable and sustainable development through properly designed socio-economic policy.

Freebies are viewed as politically motivated interventions to reap immediate benefits in terms of votes without addressing the underlying causes of socio-economic distress. These are not sustainable due to the financial burden, resulting in a rise in the fiscal deficit in the long run. Unlike welfare benefits that seek to lift recipients out of poverty, freebies are likely to inculcate a dependency culture. Most recipients are unaware that expenditure on free electricity, free bus rides for women, subsidised food, cycles or laptops is met from their own tax money.

Unlike welfare measures, freebies do not aim at long-term socio-economic development of marginalised sections of society. While the public sees freebies as a quick fix for immediate problems, welfare policies aim at structural changes rather than short-term gratification. Welfare provisions require adequate funding, whereas freebies are often pre-election promises made by political parties in manifestos simply to lure swing voters.

According to the Reserve Bank of India, a freebie is defined as a public welfare measure provided free of charge, such as electricity, water, public transport, farm loan waivers or subsidies. However, in practice, it remains difficult to differentiate between freebies and welfare measures. All freebies are not welfare measures and vice versa. Welfare expenditure through public funding is justified as appropriate and desirable for uplifting the poor and needy, whereas expenditure on freebies is often considered irrational. Despite a national debt nearing ₹200 lakh crore, many political parties

splurged public funds on gold chains, TVs, cash and liquor during elections prior to 2014. In 2023-24, the top 11 states spent about ₹4 lakh crore (1.7 per cent of their GDP) on social welfare, including direct cash transfers and distribution of goods. Ambivalence persists due to the absence of a precise definition.

Today, clientelist politics has given rise to populism, replacing the state-based welfare model with a patronage model. Drastic measures are required to safeguard India's electoral democracy. The state must prioritise welfare schemes, ensure efficient allocation of resources, strengthen fiscal management, encourage informed decision-making, and engage civil society. This calls for renewed democratic consensus, recognising that the prevalence of freebies reflects failed politics and vulnerable voters rather than genuine welfarism.



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BLASÉ CAPITAL

IS SMALL BEAUTIFUL?



You can decide whether this bottle full of stocks is half-full, or half-empty. A recent study shows that half of the small-cap stocks, which have respective market caps between ₹2,000 crore and ₹34,700 crore, are currently quoted at prices that are more than 40 per cent lower than their peaks. For many, this may imply that investors, especially those who purchased these mostly-penny stocks nearer to their peaks, have incurred huge losses. Possibly, they need to stay away from them, and focus on less-risky stocks, which have clearer financial and operational journeys. However, Abakkus Mutual Fund, which conducted this study, feels that these steep downward corrections may "create a potential accumulation window to acquire high-potential businesses at more sustainable valuations before the next growth cycle begins. This will also create opportunities for the investors to make strategic long-term investment allocations in the small-cap space."

Normally, small-cap stocks offer higher risks due to several factors. For example, they are highly-volatile, and highly-sensitive to market movements, news, and macroeconomic trends. When the indices go up, small-caps can rise faster than the mid-caps, and large-caps. But when the indices go down, the smaller stocks fall more sharply than the others. Small-caps, obviously, have lower public float and, in most cases, the promoters and large shareholders own the bulk of the share capital. Hence, lower trading volumes implies that buyers can struggle to sell without major impacts on stock prices. Despite promises, small-cap firms face challenges to expand, grow, and scale up. According to AI tools, "Limited analyst coverage, and media attention make it harder to conduct thorough research, with less accessible data compared to the large-cap companies." Smaller stocks face high compliance costs, and regulators look at them more carefully, and regularly.

"Investors have an opportunity to accumulate fundamentally strong businesses at sustainable valuations before the next growth cycle unfolds. A meaningful portion of (small-cap companies... are now available at improved risk-reward levels. Most important, exposure to sunrise industries and varied sectors that are difficult to access in the large-cap space, are majorly available in the small-cap category," counters Vaibhav Chugh, CEO, Abakkus Mutual Fund. According to the fund, small-caps offer exposure to the emerging ad sunrise sectors, which shape the nation's growth story. These include areas such as defence, aerospace, pharma, biotech, electronics, electric vehicles, batteries, AI-led services, renewables, and medical devices. Most of these sectors are driven by small firms, especially in India which does not have tech giants like Google and Apple, and start-ups. Hence, the opportunities to invest in such sectors lie only through small-cap stocks, which may have just entered the stock market.

One can look at the small-caps in another way. One can look at the slightly long-term returns from them, and compare it with those from the mid-caps, and large-caps. According to Abakkus, "Small-caps are typically associated with higher volatility, compared to large-caps. However, the study shows that despite the higher standard deviation, Nifty Small-cap 250 SIP returns has delivered superior long-term growth with a CAGR (compounded annual growth rate) of 17 per cent in comparison to the Nifty 50 SIP returns of 12 per cent, since September 2016, or a 10-year." The Nifty Small-cap 250 beats the Nifty 50 even on three-year, and five-year comparisons. The former recorded a CAGR of 21 per cent, and 22 per cent, respectively, compared to 13 per cent for both periods. However, the 10-year period starts on September 1, 2016, and lasts till January 31, 2026. One is not sure what will happen to returns if the start date is shifted to January 1 or 2, 2016.

"The better long-term return delivered by the small-caps reinforces the importance of staying invested through cycles rather than attempting to time the market," explains Chugh. However, most experts contend that while small-caps may provide better returns in the long run, the fact is that they are not guaranteed to beat large-caps in every market condition. Hence, the periods when these small and penny stocks are purchased, and when they are sold. Due to high volatility, the variations between the highs and lows of the small stocks can be higher than the differences in mid-caps, and large-caps. It may be better to invest in small-cap mutual funds, rather than small-cap stocks, as the average cannot overrule the specifics. While on average the small-cap index may give superior returns, individual stocks can plummet, and become either penny stocks or worthless, which cannot be sold. Amateur investors are generally saddled with such stocks.

A question that creeps up is a logical one. If the average returns from small-caps are better, why does one invest in the latter category? There are two answers. One, the average does not equate with specifics. The average may be positive, but the stocks an investor holds may tank. Small-cap mutual funds may be a better option, but in unsteady times, they perform worse, and that may be the time when you need the money. The second is because of higher volatility, the stress levels are high. If a small-cap tanks, one may pump more money, get good money to chase after the bad, and the stock may never recover. The chances of a recovery is higher in the cases of mid-caps, and large-caps.

Words trip Trump's trade tariffs

In the second part, we analyse the 'letter' behind the laws

As mentioned in Wednesday's column, the US Supreme Court established that the spirit of the constitution, and of the law that President Donald Trump used to impose tariffs do not allow the actions. The Court then went into specific words, or the letter, of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA). It said that after a president declares an emergency, he has powers under the Act. She or he can investigate, block, regulate, compel, nullify, prevent, and withhold, or use, transfer, withdraw, and transport, and deal with imports (importation) and exports (exportation) to act against a right, power, or privilege related to transactions and property of a foreign nation.

But the beauty is that the words tariffs or duties are absent from the nearly five-dozen words in the relevant part of the crucial sentence. So, while the law specifies several powers, there is no mention of the one to impose new tariffs. This "omission is notable," and signifies that the Congress, which wrote the law, deliberately did not take the trouble to name it in any form, even as taxes or duties. If the legislature wanted to include tariffs, or the "distinct and extraordinary power to impose" them, "it would have done so expressly," or in those many words.

This is exactly what the Congress did in the case of other laws, which explicitly mention tariffs, or duties, or taxes. However, as Trump lawyers, or the Department of Justice (DoJ) argued, the specific words like "regulate," and "importation (imports)," which are separated by 16 other words, implicitly embed the powers to impose tariffs. The assertion was that they give the president "independent power" to do so on goods "from any country, of any product, at any rate, for any amount of time." The Court felt that the two words do not fill the legal void, and vacuum. The two words "cannot bear such

weight" of the claim.

According to Black's law dictionary, which is used by most courts across the globe, including in India, the term regulate means to "fix, establish, or control; to adjust by rule, method, or established mode, to direct by rule or restriction; to subject to governing principles of law." This does not indicate the fixing of tariffs. Indeed, if 'regulate' was as expansive as the DoJ or president claimed, the other verbs included in the pertinent sentence in IEEPA "are simply wasted ink." There was no need to use words like investigate, compel, nullify, prevent, and others.

Based on the dictionary definition, and other examples, despite the breadth of the word regulate, there is a strong hint of what it does not usually include, i.e., taxation. According to the Court, even the government lawyers could not identify a single law in which the power to regulate included the power to tax. In the case of the Securities and Exchange Commission, for example, it can regulate securities, but cannot tax the trading of securities. This distinction explains why when the Congress wishes to include both regulate and tax, it does so "separately and expressly," as is the case with the other laws. There is no ambiguity, or the need to second-guess, and interpret the intentions.

Not to give up so easily, the DoJ and president's lawyers insisted that the word regulate lies next to importation and exportation. In effect, IEEPA allows the president to "regulate... importation." But the Court stated that there were other words between regulate and importation, which suggest that such a reading was not what the Congress implied. Regulate is one of nine verbs in the relevant part of the sentence in IEEPA, and each authorises a different and distinct action.

She or he can block imports, or prohibit transactions, for instance. But none of the verbs allow the president to raise revenues. This power does not exist.

In legal terms, the power to regulate commerce is not the same, and does not include the power to levy a tax. In any case, the Supreme Court felt that it is irrelevant whether "tariffs can ever be a means of regulating commerce." The real question is whether the Congress meant to give the president the power to impose tariffs at "his sole discretion," without the involvement of the legislature. The pattern from the other laws is clear: When the Congress means it, it does so clearly, and with careful constraints." In the case of IEEPA, it does

neither.

Another logic that the president used was within the relevant part of the sentence in the Act, the word, regulate, lies between two extreme poles of compel, which is on the affirmative end, and prohibit, which is on the negative one. Hence, 'regulate' includes the "less extreme, more flexible" tool of tariffs." The Court countered that unlike compel, prohibit, and regulate, tariffs raise revenues for the government. Taxes may be "less extreme," as claimed, but this does not "follow that tariffs lie on the spectrum between those two poles (compel and prohibit)."

Historically, before IEEPA, an American court interpreted the earlier law differently. In an earlier incarnation, a lower court ruled that the powers under "regulate... importation" did allow President Richard Nixon to impose "limited tariffs." Hence, Trump's lawyers maintained that when the Congress enacted the IEEPA two years after this order, it kept the powers intact, and expanded them to "without the limits." This is evident from the IEEPA House Committee Report, which helped the making of the new law. The wordings prove that the Congress "indisputably knew of" the lower court's interpretation.

Of course, the Supreme Court agreed that sometimes it "assumes" that the Congress includes earlier interpretations into new laws. But this happens "only when (the) term's meaning was 'well-settled' before the adoption." A single order, exception, or interpretation is not enough. In addition, the IEEPA Committee Report explains that "successive Presidents have seized upon the open-endedness of (the then pre-IEEPA Act) to turn... (it) into something quite different from what was envisioned in 1917 (when the earlier law was made)." As the Supreme Court caustically noted, "This is not exactly a stamp of approval."

So, while the pre-IEEPA Act, as interpreted by a single lower court in a single order, may be said to give tariff-setting powers to the president, they were limited, as per the order. The House Committee, which set the standards and benchmarks for the new IEEPA, was worried about the misuse of these tariff-setting powers. One can logically argue that if the Congress did not mention the words like tariff, taxes, and duties in the new law, it did not intend to give such powers to the president.

OUR TAKE



Recently, the Supreme Court raised concerns over the trends of states giving freebies, and doles ahead of assembly elections, and questioned if these practices amount to appeasement, rather than genuine welfare. It took on the political parties and governments that either dole out, or promise freebies and direct cash transfers to woo the voters. It wondered how long this might last, and whether it would hamper the nation's development, growth, and livelihoods (jobs). The observations of the apex court came during the

hearing of a case that involved the state-owned Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation.

The distribution firm aims to provide free electricity to consumers, regardless of their financial status. The three-judge bench, headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant, said that while it was understandable to provide relief to the poor, doing so

without distinguishing between those who can afford it, and those who cannot, or those who need it, and those who do not, could lead to economic perils and dangers. The warning is a reminder that the states, and Centre, need to focus on long-term growth, and development plans, rather than short-term electoral gains.

Like most states, and the national regimes, Tamil Nadu has a long history of grandiose announcements that sometimes erase the line between true welfare (subsidies), and doles or freebies. Four years ago, Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court to challenge freebies. He argued that they unfairly influenced the voters, and even amounted to a form of 'electoral bribery.' He wanted the Court to urge the Election Commission to add a clause to the Election Symbols Order, 1968. This would effectively bar the political parties from using the public funds to fund the freebies.

As an explainer to the PIL, the Supreme Court Observer, which privately archives the court's proceedings, stated that experts had concerns that such practices posed a danger to the economy. The 'Observer' referred to an article (June 2022) that was published by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). It highlighted "a financial crisis (that was) developing in the various states due to

Smudged lines; welfare vs freebies

Focus on long-term development, not electoral promises



Covid-19, and the Russia-Ukraine war," partly due to free cash and food distributed during the pandemic. There was a widening gap, it added, between the revenues and expenditures, which was exacerbated by the freebies.

"In the 2021-22 financial year alone, State governments' expenditure on subsidies grew at 11.2 per cent. In highly debt-ridden states such as Andhra Pradesh and Punjab, freebies have crossed two per cent of the (respective) states' Gross State Domestic Product," stated the RBI article. Politically, the line between populism (freebies), and upliftment (welfare and development) tends to be thin. India's rapid growth has coupled with a rise in populism. This leads to a focus on short-term benefits rather than long-term development. The challenge lies in finding a middle ground that addresses the immediate needs, and ensures that the economy can sustain the promises.

For example, the direct benefit transfer scheme, which was launched in 2013, aims to directly transfer subsidies into the beneficiaries' bank accounts. However, over the years, the facility allows the ruling regimes to push cash into the accounts of the poor, farmers, and women. This can happen via schemes that run for years, or specific ones that are announced just before the elections. The PM-KISAN scheme offers financial support

of Rs 6,000 to the small and marginal farmers, and the money is debited to them each year in three installments. But there were no protests; rather, there was a demand to increase the amount.

Critics, however, questioned the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana, a flagship scheme in Bihar that was launched by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar ahead of the Bihar assembly elections last year. Under it, Rs 10,000 is transferred directly into the bank accounts of 25 lakh women. The objective: Women empowerment through self-employment, and livelihood opportunities. Similar criticisms were echoed this year when the West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee increased the amount under the Lakshmi Bhandar scheme from ₹1,000-1,200 by ₹500 each. This initiative provides monthly financial assistance to women from the economically-weaker families.

According to the Opposition, the move was linked to the forthcoming assembly elections, which are expected in April or May. Such issues raise questions over which schemes are truly welfare-oriented, and which ones are aimed to woo the voters before the elections. The latter may be wasteful, and considered by some as transgressing the delicate legal lines. Possibly, the nation needs new codes and guidelines to

identify such demarcations. At present, such schemes are not allowed after the Election Commission has announced the election dates. Yet, there are ways out. There are no obstacles if they are launched a few weeks before the dates are expected, or if the schemes are announced by the Centre, but are directed at specific states in the annual budgets.

The Economic Survey (2025-26) warns that while the rapid expansion of unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) across States raises the incomes of the beneficiaries, they pose fiscal risks, and can crowd out public investments linked to growth, unless they are redesigned and better targeted. The aggregate spending on UCTs (notably those for women) was Rs 1.7 lakh crore in 2025-26. The Survey conducted a study that concluded that UCTs can amount to 0.19-1.25 per cent of the respective states' GSDPs, and 0.68-8.26 per cent of the budgetary expenditures.

Persistent UCTs, especially where the percentage is as high as eight per cent of the annual budgets, create fiscal rigidity, and reduce the ability to invest in infrastructure, human capital, and other growth-enhancing public goods. The Survey urged the states to rethink the UCT design so that the transfers are targeted to the needy, and integrated with the existing welfare schemes. The sixteenth Finance Commission report (2026-31) flagged the rapid rise of UCTs, which accounted for 20.2 per cent of the total subsidies in the 2025-26 Budget Estimates, up from a mere three per cent in 2018-19. During the period, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Jharkhand showed huge jumps in UCT spending.

The Representation of People Act, 1951, which aims to ensure free and fair elections, views pre-election freebies as corrupt practices. Section 123 views "bribery" or "undue influence" as "any gift, offer or promise... to any person... with the object, directly or indirectly of inducing" a voter. However, the Election Commission told the Supreme Court during the PIL in 222 that it had no powers to regulate promises or distribution of freebies by political parties. It stated that the decisions are in the realm of party-specific policies, and need voters' judgment.

Government mandates sale of E20 petrol from April 1

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

The Government has mandated the sale of petrol with up to 20 per cent ethanol and a minimum Research Octane Number (RON) of 95 across all States and Union Territories from April 1, 2026.

The oil ministry in a February 17 notification, said, "the Central Government hereby directs that oil companies shall sell ethanol-blended motor spirit (petrol) with percentage of ethanol up to 20 per cent as per the Bureau of Indian Standards specifications and having minimum Research Octane Number (RON) of 95, in States and the Union Territories".

The Central Government can allow exceptions in special situations, for specific regions and for a limited time.

Ethanol is made from sugarcane, maize, or grain. It is renewable, domestically produced and has cleaner burning than pure petrol.

The Government has mandated ethanol blending in petrol to help cut oil imports as also reduce emissions. Such a mandate also supports farmers as it boosts demand for sugarcane, maize and agricultural surplus.



Most vehicles manufactured in India from 2023-2025 onward are designed to run on E20 and no major issues are expected, industry officials said.

Older vehicles may however see a slight drop in mileage (3-7 per cent). Also rubber/plastic component may wear. The insistence on minimum RON 95 is to prevent engine damage.

RON, or Research Octane Number, is a measure of a fuel's resistance to engine knocking (pre-ignition).

Knocking happens when fuel burns unevenly inside the engine, causing ping sound, loss of power and possible engine damage over time. The higher the RON, the more resistant the fuel is to knocking.

In simple terms, octane is like a fuel's 'self-control under pressure' — higher RON means fuel stays stable under high compression.

Ethanol naturally has high octane value (around 108 RON). Blending 20 per cent ethanol in petrol, increases

knock resistance. Encouraged by India achieving 10 per cent ethanol doping in petrol in June 2022 — five months ahead of the target date — the Government advanced 20 per cent blending to 2025-26 from 2030. Most pumps in the country now sell E20 or petrol blended with 20 per cent ethanol.

According to the oil ministry, since 2014-15 India has saved more than ₹1.40 lakh crore in foreign exchange through petrol substitution.

India's auto, renewable energy sectors compliant with WTO norms: Official

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

India's support measures to promote manufacturing in the automobile and renewable energy sectors are fully compliant with World Trade Organisation (WTO) norms and the country will strongly defend them at the WTO's dispute settlement panel meetings, an official said.

Following a request by China, the WTO dispute settlement body on Tuesday announced the setting up of a panel to hear the case. The official said that India regrets China's decision to proceed with panel establishment despite extensive bilateral consultation on the matter in good-faith, during which India provided detailed explanations and clarifications on the measures.

"India is of the view that China's request for panel establishment reflects an incorrect understanding of both the design and operation of the measures at issue. India maintains that the measures challenged by China are fully consistent with India's rights and obligations under the WTO Agreements, including the GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) 1994



and the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures," the official said. The country will participate constructively in the panel proceedings and will "vigorously" defend its measures and it is confident that the panel will find the measures to be consistent with WTO rules, the official added.

In October last year, in a complaint to the WTO Beijing alleged that certain conditions in India's Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes for advanced chemistry cell batteries, automobiles and the policy to promote the manufacturing of electric vehicles violate global trade rules by discriminating against Chinese goods and exporters. China is a major exporter of these products. Seeking consultation is

the first step of the dispute settlement process as per WTO rules. If the consultations requested by the complainant do not result in a satisfactory solution, it can request that the WTO set up a panel in the case to rule on the issue raised.

India and China are members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). If a member country believes that a support measure under a policy or scheme of another member nation is harming its exports of certain goods, it can file a complaint under the dispute settlement mechanism of the WTO.

China is the second-largest trading partner of India. In the last fiscal, India's exports to China contracted 14.5 per cent to \$14.25 billion against \$16.66 billion in 2023-24.

FITCH AFFIRMS RATINGS OF PNB, BOB; OUTLOOK STABLE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Fitch Ratings on Wednesday affirmed ratings of two public sector banks — Punjab National Bank (PNB) and Bank of Baroda (BoB) at 'BBB-' with a stable outlook.

PNB and BoB's long-term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) reflects Fitch's expectation of a high probability of extraordinary State support for the bank, if required, the global rating agency said in two separate statements.



The Government holds 70 per cent and 64 per cent in PNB and BoB, respectively.

PNB's large size and market share, and the assessment that the state has a strong propensity to support the banking system in general supports its rating.

The Stable Outlook on the IDR mirrors that on India's sovereign IDR.

Stock markets end marginally higher after volatile day of trading

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Mumbai

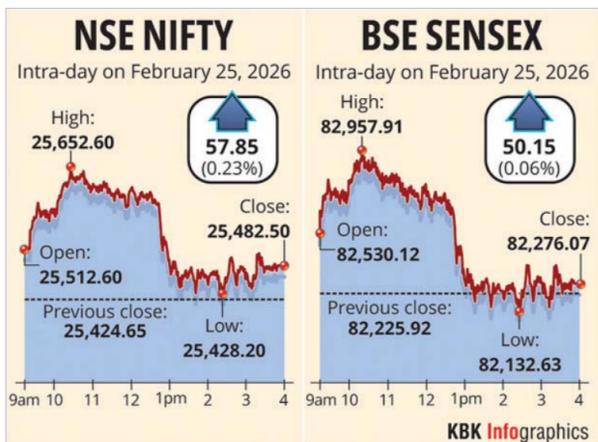
Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty ended marginally higher on Wednesday, trimming most of their sharp intra-day gains, amid profit-taking. After a volatile day of trading, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 50.15 points or 0.06 per cent higher at 82,276.07. During the day, it jumped 731.99 points or 0.89 per cent to 82,957.91.

The 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 57.85 points or 0.23 per cent to settle at 25,482.50.

From the Sensex pack, HCL Tech, Tata Steel, Tata Consultancy Services, InterGlobe Aviation, Sun Pharma, Mahindra & Mahindra, Maruti Suzuki and Tech Mahindra were among the biggest gainers.

Reliance Industries, State Bank of India, Adani Ports and Eternal were among the laggards.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Shanghai's SSE Composite index, Japan's Nikkei 225 and Hong



Kong's Hang Seng index ended significantly higher. Markets in Europe were trading in positive territory. The US market ended higher on Tuesday.

"Indian equity markets ended the

session on a cautious note after a volatile day of trade. Despite a positive start, benchmark indices gradually pared early gains as profit-taking at higher levels weighed on

sentiment. "The broader undertone remained measured, as investors refrained from aggressive positioning amid the absence of strong domestic triggers and mixed global cues," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹102.53 crore on Tuesday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth ₹3,161.22 crore, according to exchange data.

"Indian markets opened with a gap-up, driven by upbeat global cues and a rebound in US tech stocks as AI-related uncertainty eased. Additionally, dovish signals from the BoJ supported regional sentiment, keeping Asian markets firm.

"However, the initial strength tapered off as renewed tariff-focused comments from the US President reignited global trade concerns, limiting the day's gains with depreciation in INR," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

AI, creators and messaging driving omnichannel retail boom: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Chandigarh

Artificial intelligence (AI), short-form video, creators and messaging platforms are reshaping India's retail landscape and accelerating omnichannel shopping, according to a report by Meta and the Retailers Association of India (RAI).

The report said 77 per cent of retail brand and product discovery now happens on social media, with Meta platforms accounting for 96 per cent of such discovery. According to the findings, consumers who shop across online and offline channels spend 2.5 times more than single-channel shoppers and up to 73 per cent more when



engaging across multiple touchpoints.

The report noted a shift from search-based shopping to scroll-led discovery, with 97 per cent of consumers watching short-form videos daily.

Nearly 60 per cent of time spent on Facebook and Instagram is now on

video content. Meghna Apparao, Director, E-Commerce and Retail (India), Meta, said retail leaders should focus on leveraging Reels and creators for engagement, adopting omnichannel performance marketing, and using WhatsApp as a personalised commerce channel.

TCS not afraid of AI, fine with revenue cannibalisation as well: CEO Krithivasan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Mumbai

Country's largest IT services company TCS is "not afraid" of artificial intelligence and is also fine with revenue "cannibalisation" through the deployment of AI tools by its associates, a top official said on Wednesday.

TCS is finding that senior level employees are slower in building AI-based solutions compared to the "proficient" younger staff, its Managing Director and Chief Executive K Krithivasan said at the annual NTLF event here.

"We encourage our associates to go out (to the customers and use AI), even if it means cannibalising our revenues," Krithivasan said.

TCS is "insisting" that each of its over 6 lakh staffers are AI fluent, Krithivasan said, insisting that the company is not "afraid" of the new technology taking away livelihood. As part of the same efforts, the company has



asked associates to explore how it can use AI in projects, even if it means forgoing some part of revenues, he said. Krithivasan said everybody wants to learn the new AI skills, and there is no case of creating incentives for them to learn. However, as people climb up the hierarchy and become senior level employees, they tend to read a lot but do not build anything on it, Krithivasan said.

It is not about just giving a few prompts to a generational AI platform like ChatGPT, he said, adding that staffers have to get their

hands dirty and build solutions using the AI tools.

He termed AI as a "civilisational shift", pointing out that it is democratising knowledge, which is solving problems which were unsolved for 60 years. AI is becoming a board-level agenda now, wherein the chief information officers are being directed to scout for solutions, he said. The new technology will increase productivity, but TCS also focuses on the benefits that can accrue to its customers while looking at the technologies.

Amid heightened concerns over governance around the use of AI, Krithivasan said TCS is looking at a situation where AI itself can govern AI by usage of multiple agents.

Speaking at the same event, Kotak Mahindra Bank's Chief Executive and Managing Director Ashok Vaswani said the private sector lender aspires to be a "fast follower" on the AI front and leave "the tech to technologists".

Rupee dips 1 paise to settle at 90.96 against US dollar

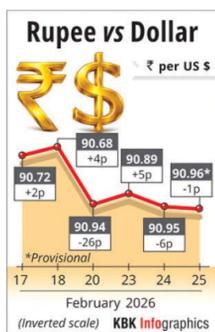
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Mumbai

The rupee stayed range-bound for the second consecutive day on Wednesday and settled 1 paise lower at 90.96 (provisional) against the US dollar amid higher global crude oil prices and foreign fund outflows.

A weaker greenback and positive sentiments in domestic equity markets prevented the rupee's losses, according to forex traders.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 90.94 against the greenback and traded in a narrow range through the session before settling at 90.96 (provisional), down 1 paise from its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee settled 6 paise lower at 90.95 against the US dollar.

"Rupee rose in early trades on a weak dollar and a positive start to the domestic



markets. However, it gave up gains on elevated crude oil prices and geopolitical tensions," Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said. "We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias amid geopolitical tensions between the US and Iran, as well as the ongoing trade tariff uncertainty. Negotiations between the US and Iran are likely to take

place on Thursday, and markets now expect that the US may opt for a limited attack on Iran," he said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.05 per cent down at 97.79.

"A soft dollar, along with RBI intervention, may support the rupee at lower levels. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of ₹90.70 to ₹91.20," Choudhary said. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.06 per cent to \$70.76 per barrel in futures trade. The domestic equity markets rebounded on Wednesday with Sensex climbing 50.15 points to settle at 82,276.07, while the Nifty was up 57.85 points to 25,482.50.

On Tuesday, foreign institutional investors offloaded equities worth ₹102.53 crore, according to exchange data.

Cricket season drives domestic travel beyond metros in India: Airbnb

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

India's cricket season is playing a part in fuelling domestic travel with demand across match-hosting cities, particularly beyond metros growing significantly year-on-year, according to online accommodation hosting platform Airbnb.

Searches by Indian guests for several match-hosting cities like Ahmedabad, and beyond — such as Ranchi, Thiruvananthapuram — during the cricket season rose significantly compared

to the same period last year, Airbnb said in a statement.

Some of the strongest growth recorded in emerging cricket centres were beyond the metro circuit, it said. Ranchi saw nearly a 120 per cent increase in searches year-on-year, while Thiruvananthapuram recorded over 110 per cent growth in searches year-on-year, it added.

Jaipur and Lucknow witnessed increases of over 70 per cent and 60 per cent in searches year-on-year respectively. Currently, India is co-hosting the ICC men's T20



World Cup with Sri Lanka with the final slated to be played on March 8. This will be followed by India's domestic league IPL, the full schedule for which is yet to be

announced. Airbnb said as per its data, high-profile fixtures are accelerating travel into tier-2 locations, broadening the geographic distribution of visitor demand beyond India's traditional gateway cities.

Commenting on the findings, Airbnb's Country Head for India and Southeast Asia, Amanpreet Singh Bajaj said, "Cricket has long united the country in spirit. What we're seeing now is that same energy translating into travel, with fans building meaningful trips around the game." Increasingly, these moments

go beyond the stadium, people are extending their stays, travelling with friends and family, and exploring destinations more deeply, he added.

"On Airbnb, we're seeing this shift firsthand, as travellers choose homes that allow them to stay together, experience neighbourhoods more authentically, and turn match days into fuller, more memorable getaways. It's a powerful example of how culture shapes travel and creates meaningful impact for local communities," Bajaj noted.

Smartphone now India's top export category: Vaishnaw



Union Electronics and IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Smartphone has become India's top export category with overseas shipments worth \$30 billion in 2025, Union Electronics and IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Wednesday. The minister shared the development in a social media post. "Becoming the smartphone manufacturing factory for the world," Vaishnaw said. The photo post titled Smartphones India's No. 1 export category displayed that there were exports worth \$30 billion in January-December 2025.

Mobile phones worth ₹5.5 lakh crore (\$60 billion) were produced in the country, and exports from the segment were worth around ₹2 lakh crore (about \$22 billion) in 2024-25. Electronics exports from the country have crossed ₹4 lakh crore (\$44 billion) in 2025 and are expected to grow when four semiconductor plants begin production this year.

Neil Shah, Co-Founder and VP for Research at market research and analysis firm Counterpoint, said Apple has

become a poster child for India by expanding its manufacturing post-US tariffs on China and with exports from India reaching a record high.

"India will be touching almost 30 crore units of mobile phone production, and one in four smartphones produced in India are estimated to have been exported in 2025.

"High ASP (average selling price) or premium USA market is one of the largest export destinations driven by Apple, Samsung, and Motorola, also boosting the export value reaching highest ever," Shah said. According to the International Data Corporation's Worldwide Quarterly Mobile Phone Tracker for the third quarter of 2025, Apple clocked its highest-ever supplies of 50 lakh iPhones for the domestic market in a quarter.

Apple leads both premium (smartphones priced in the range of ₹53,000-71,000 apiece) and super-premium segment (priced above ₹71,000 apiece), which drove the growth of the country's smartphone market in the September quarter.

FROM THE WORLD

US CIA offers help to Iran

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) offered help to potential informants in Iran, providing Farsi-language instructions on ways to safely contact the US spy agency as President Donald Trump mulls possible military strikes.

VENEZUELA 3,200 people released

A special commission of Venezuela's National Assembly announced Tuesday that over 3,200 people have been fully released since the amnesty law took effect four days ago.

Iran pushes back against Trump ahead of Geneva talks

JON GAMBRELL Dubai

Iran pushed back on Wednesday against US President Donald Trump's pressure tactics ahead of critical talks in Geneva over Tehran's nuclear programme, alternating between calling his remarks "big lies" and saying negotiations may yield an agreement through "honourable diplomacy."

following nationwide protests last month.

If the negotiations fail, Trump repeatedly has threatened to attack Iran — something Mideast nations fear could spiral into a new regional war as the embers of the years-long Israel-Hamas war still smoulder.



Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei

the US gave his annual State of the Union speech, touching on Iran and the nuclear negotiations. "They've already developed missiles that can threaten Europe and our bases overseas, and they're working to build missiles

that will soon reach the United States of America," Trump said. "They were warned to make no future attempts to rebuild their weapons programme, and in particular nuclear weapons, yet they

continue. They're starting it all over." Satellite photos earlier analysed by the AP showed Iran beginning to rebuild its missile production sites and doing some work at the three nuclear sites attacked by the US in June. Iran has long maintained that its nuclear programme is peaceful.

sought to compare him to Joseph Goebbels, Adolf Hitler's propaganda minister. He accused Trump and his administration of conducting a "disinformation & misinformation campaign" against Iran.

believes the death toll is far higher. Iran's Government, which has long downplayed death tolls in other unrest, offered its only toll on Jan. 21, saying 3,117 people were killed. Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, Iran's parliament speaker, separately said the US could either try diplomacy or face Iran's wrath.

German Chancellor presses China for fair trade seek help on Ukraine war

ASSOCIATED PRESS Beijing

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz called on Wednesday for deepening ties with China, while pushing for fairer trade rules between the two countries and seeking Chinese help on Ukraine.



German Chancellor Friedrich Merz

there is also great potential for further growth of both our economies." Both Europe and China have been buffeted by US President Donald Trump's

tariffs, and Europe further by his demands that it take more responsibility for its own security and cede control of Greenland to the US. Shifting geopolitics Merz,

on his first trip to China since taking office last May, has championed building a stronger Europe both economically and militarily to assert itself in an emerging new world order.

Before landing in the Chinese capital, Merz indicated he would press for a fair economic playing field for German companies and China's assistance in bringing about an end to Russia's four-year-old war in Ukraine.

including that in Ukraine, he said, noting that "Beijing's voice is heard, including in Moscow." Many European Governments have been frustrated that China hasn't done more to pressure Russia to end the fighting.

support from other nations to push back against Trump's use of tariffs to demand concessions from trading partners, and his challenges to the United Nations and the global order that has governed international and economic relations in the post-World War II era.

Russia opens criminal investigation against Telegram app

ASSOCIATED PRESS Moscow

Pavel Durov, the founder of the Telegram messaging app, said that the Russian Government had opened a criminal investigation against him on charges of "aiding terrorism."

Durov, who was born and began his career in Russia, accused Moscow of fabricating pretexts to restrict access by Russians to the Telegram service as part of an attempt to "suppress the right to

Bill Gates apologises to foundation staff over Epstein ties: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA New York

American tech entrepreneur Bill Gates has apologised to the staff at the Gates Foundation over his ties with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein but maintained that he did "nothing illicit," according to a media report.



Bill Gates

files — last month by the US Justice Department. In a town hall on Tuesday, Gates acknowledged that he had two affairs with Russian women that Epstein later discovered, but that they didn't involve Epstein's victims.

meetings. "To be clear, I never spent any time with victims, the women around him," Gates said.

minor for prostitution.

Gates said he didn't "properly check" Epstein's background even when he was aware of some "18-month thing" that had limited Epstein's travel and added that he continued meeting with Epstein even after his then-wife Melinda French Gates expressed concerns in 2013.

Sri Lanka's ex-intel head arrested in connection with Easter attack probe

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Colombo

Sri Lanka's former State intelligence service chief Suresh Sally was arrested on Wednesday in connection with the 2019 Easter bombings, police sources said.



Suresh Sally

Governmental organisation, they said.

local militant group. There were allegations that the defence establishment had prior intelligence about the impending attacks, including warnings shared by India, but failed to act in time.



privacy and free speech." "A sad spectacle of a state afraid of its own people," Durov wrote on social media.

Russian media outlets had begun circulating unconfirmed reports earlier in the day that a criminal investigation had been opened against Durov by Russia's Federal Security Service, or FSB.

The Microsoft co-founder also admitted that he had two affairs with Russian women and that he made mistakes that had cast a cloud over the philanthropic group while insisting he didn't participate in Epstein's crimes.

In a town hall on Tuesday, Gates acknowledged that he had two affairs with Russian women that Epstein later discovered, but that they didn't involve Epstein's victims.

"It was a huge mistake to spend time with Epstein" and bring Gates Foundation executives into meetings with the sex offender, Gates said. "I apologise to other people who are drawn into this because of the mistake that I made," The Wall Street Journal quoted Gates as saying.

The Wall Street Journal further said that Gates told staff on Tuesday that he continued meeting with Epstein through 2014, flew on a private jet with Epstein and spent time with him in Germany, France, New York and Washington. "I never stayed overnight," he said, or visited Epstein's island.

The arrest is linked to the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings, which killed 270 people, including 11 Indians, at churches and five-star hotels in Colombo, according to the sources.

The then Government, led by president Maithripala Sirisena, was accused of inaction to prevent the attacks despite intelligence shared by India. The current National People's Power Government reopened the Easter terror attack investigations in late 2024, stating that political influence had earlier led to a cover-up.

It comes two weeks after Russia's communications watchdog, Roskomnadzor, said it was restricting the Telegram app, accusing the company of refusing to abide by Russian law.

The move triggered a rare wave of public outcry, including widespread criticism from pro-Kremlin military bloggers, who warned that Telegram was widely used by Russian troops fighting in Ukraine and restricting its service would derail military communications. However, Russian officials have continued to portray Telegram as a security risk.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER, PWD (ROADS) ASSAM, CHANDMARI, GUWAHATI-03. PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER. The Chief Engineer, P.W.D (Roads), Assam on behalf of the Governor of Assam invites Bid from approved and eligible contractors registered with Assam PWD (Roads) for 2 (Two) no. of project for construction of Guwahati city roads/ drain etc.

PUBLIC NOTICE. It is for general information that I, Mahima Panchal D/o Sudhir Kumar R/o H-55, Near Dharm Market, Krishan Vihar, Nihar, PO: Sultanpuri Block, DIST: North West Delhi, Delhi - 110086, declare that name of my father and mother have been wrongly written as Om Parkash in my Pan Card No. AAJPM1263G and K. Murali Mathur in my school Transfer Certificate. The actual name of my deceased father is Kishan Murali Mathur which may be amended accordingly.

PUBLIC NOTICE. Notice is hereby given on behalf of Mr. Abhay Kumar Sharma to inform to the public at large that Mrs. Chanti Sharma is purchasing the Sult-Lip Property Bearing Plot No. 195-B, Area Measuring 35 Sq. Yds., Out Of Khara No.29/8, Situated in the Revenue Estate Village, Jessal, Delhi State, Delhi and the Colony Known as Sainik Enclave, Vikas Nagar, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi-110059 from Mr. Ashok Kumar & Mr. Vinod Kumar Singh Finance Ltd., Noida. This is a public notice. Any objection/Notarized G.P.A, ATS & Will dated 07.07.2025 executed by Mrs. Billma and same to be financed & mortgaged by Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd., Noida. There is no title document available in the name of Mr. Ashok Kumar & Mr. Vinod Kumar. Soni. So, to comply the requirements of BANKING & W.L. in public notice that if any Person having any type of claim/right/interest/creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 15 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. Lucem LLP B-93B, Second Floor, Opp. SBI Bank Sector 2, Noida UP-201301>Contact:0120-4269379

COURT NOTICE. In the court of Sh. Hem Singh, LD. 03-01, East District Court No.109 Kki, Courts Delhi PC. NO. 25/2025. Rajeev Gupta S/o Late Sh. Shanti Swaroop Gupta R/o H.No.27, shop plot, near D-type park, near mother dairy, Pandav Nagar, Delhi-110092. Verses. R-1 THE STATE Represented Through The Chief Secretary Players Building, Delhi Secretariat, GTO of Delhi, Indraprastha Marg, ITC, New Delhi-110002. R-2 SH. SANJEEV GUPTA S/o Late Sh. Shanti Swaroop Gupta R/o H.No. 27, Shop Plot, Near D-Type Park, Near Mother Dairy, Pandav Nagar, Delhi-110092. R-3 SMT. SUMAN LATA GUPTA W/o Sh. Pradeep Gupta R/o 452, Niti Khand-2, Indrapuram, Ghaziabad-201014. PETITIONER UNDER SECTION 276 OF THE INDIAN SUCCESSION ACT 1925 for grant of probate or letter of administration in respect of will dated 22.06.2018 registered on 20.07.2018 executed by late shanti swaroop gupta in respect of his estate.

GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA TENDER NOTICE. This is to inform the general public that Mrs. Kusum (Process) Mrs. Leena Singh are the OPA Holders of Eastern Portion of Part of Plot No. 41 & Plot No. 42 (Entire), area measuring 22275 Sq. Mtrs., out of Khara No. 234/2m, situated at Village Manpur Raji (Presently known as Durga Vihar Colony), Pargana & Tehsil Dhampur, District Bijnor, U.P. 110099 through Sale Deed dated 07.12.2007 doc. no. 16855 executed by Mr. Prem Chand in favour of Mrs. Kusum Lata and Mrs. Leena Singh in respect of Eastern Portion of Part of Plot No. 41 & Plot No. 42 (Entire), area measuring 22275 Sq. Mtrs., Out of Khara No. 234/2m, in favour of Mrs. Leena Singh and Mrs. Kusum Lata and Mrs. Leena Singh in favour of Mr. Prem Chand, in respect of Eastern Portion of Plot No. 42, land area measuring 195.17 Sq. Mtrs. Out of Khara No. 234/2m, (2) Original Sale deed dated 07.12.2007 doc. no. 16855 executed by Mr. Prem Chand in favour of Mrs. Kusum Lata and Mrs. Leena Singh in favour of Mr. Prem Chand, in respect of Eastern Portion of Plot No. 41, land area measuring 22275 Sq. Mtrs., Out of Khara No. 234/2m, for which complete is Regd. vide Application No. 030, registered at P.S. Nehtaur, Bijnor, UP on 22.02.2026. Anyone who finds the above-mentioned documents, kindly handover the same to the Manager of Axis Finance Limited, R.K Ashram, Delhi Mrs. Kusum Lata and Mrs. Leena Singh are in the possession of the said property with Axis Finance Ltd. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 10 days from the date of this public notice. Any objection submitted after the completion of this 10-days period will not be considered binding with respect to the said property or the interests of our client. If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 10-days period by contacting Law Offices: North (Advocates & Legal Consultants) at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-44A, Sector 16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301; Landline: +910120-4499711, e-mail: accounts@jvnorth.in

PUBLIC NOTICE. Be it known to all that we, Sh. Brahmmand Singh (Aadhaar No. 6431 7635 XXXX) and Smt. Munda Vati (Aadhaar No. 7266 9955 XXXX), residents of Mohd. Alipur Chauhand, Afzalgarh, District Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh - 246722, have debarred and disowned our son Mr. Gajendra Singh (Aadhaar No. 2022 9812 XXXX) from our life and from all our movable and immovable properties. We have no concern or relation with him henceforth. Any person dealing with him shall do so at his or her own risk and consequences. Date: 16.02.2026 Place: Uttar Pradesh Sd/- Brahmmand Singh (Father) Smt. Munda Vati (Mother) Shaileendra Singh (Advocate), Ch. No.F-601B, District Courts, Karkardooma, Shahdara, Delhi-110032



Strategic Synergy: Modi and Netanyahu Deepen Bilateral Bonds

Trade & economic growth; bilateral ties on agenda



ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to hold wide-ranging talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with defence cooperation expected to dominate the agenda. The visit underscores the growing strategic depth between India and Israel, as both sides prepare to sign multiple agreements across key sectors.

Defence collaboration will be the central focus of discussions, reflecting a security partnership that dates back to the Kargil War, when Israel extended critical support to India. Since then, defence ties have evolved into a cornerstone of bilateral relations, encompassing advanced weapon systems, joint research, and technology transfers. Talks will also cover counter-terrorism cooperation, cyber security coordination, and broader national security challenges. Both nations face complex regional threats and are expected to deepen intelligence-sharing mechanisms and operational collaboration.

Prime Minister Modi was among the first world leaders to stand firmly with Israel following the October 7 attacks, a gesture Israeli officials say "will never be forgotten," reinforcing mutual trust during times of crisis.

Technology, AI and Quantum cooperation
Beyond defence, emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing will feature prominently. The two countries aim to build joint innovation platforms, encourage research partnerships, and facilitate industry-to-industry collaboration in high-tech sectors.

Trade and Economic Expansion
Economic ties are also poised for expansion, with negotiations around a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) expected to gain momentum. Officials indicate that several bilateral agreements will be signed during the visit, strengthening trade, investment, and technological collaboration.

Strategic Frameworks: I2U2 and IMEC
The leaders are also expected to review progress under multilateral strategic initiatives such as I2U2 Group and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, both seen as transformative platforms for regional connectivity, economic integration, and strategic cooperation.

Strong people-to-people ties
Beyond geopolitics, officials highlighted the "great people-to-people relationship" between the two nations. India has historically seen no anti-Semitism, a fact frequently acknowledged by Israeli leaders as a foundation of goodwill.

Israelis, particularly after completing mandatory military service, continue to view India as a peaceful, safe, and welcoming destination. Cultural exchanges, tourism, and educational partnerships have further strengthened societal bonds. Agricultural cooperation remains another flagship success story. There are currently 34 Centres of Excellence across India established with Israeli collaboration, with plans underway to open 16 more — advancing innovation in water management, horticulture, and sustainable farming. Diplomatic engagement between the two governments has intensified, with seven high-level visits recorded in 2025 alone — a clear indication of the importance both sides attach to the partnership. Officials note that the two prime ministers share a close working relationship, helping accelerate decision-making across sectors.

When Narendra Modi visited Israel, the optics went far beyond symbolism. The trip unfolded against the backdrop of deepening instability in the Middle East, sharpening great-power rivalry, and renewed strategic competition in South Asia. For New Delhi, the engagement was not a diplomatic courtesy call but a calibrated signal of India's evolving geopolitical posture: one that is increasingly defined by strategic autonomy, technological ambition, and multi-vector partnerships.



PRASHANT TEWARI

The Middle East remains marked by persistent volatility. The Israel-Palestine conflict continues to inflame regional opinion, with spillover risks affecting global energy markets and maritime security. Iran's expanding regional footprint and its shadow contest with Israel have added layers of unpredictability to an already fragile environment. Meanwhile, the normalisation process initiated under the Abraham Accords faces strains amid domestic political pressures across the region. For India, which imports a substantial share of its energy from West Asia and is home to millions of expatriate workers in the Gulf, such instability carries immediate economic and security implications.

It is within this complex matrix that India-Israel relations have steadily matured since the establishment of full diplomatic ties in 1992. Today, Israel stands among India's most important defence partners. Cooperation spans missile systems, drones, cybersecurity, artificial intel-

ligence, water management, and agricultural innovation. At a time when India confronts persistent security challenges along its western and northern borders, Israeli defence technology provides cutting-edge capabilities. Joint development and co-production initiatives dovetail with India's push for domestic manufacturing, strengthening indigenous capacity while reducing long-term dependency. Modi's visit reinforced this convergence, particularly in counter-terrorism and intelligence-sharing, areas where both nations face common threats and share strategic clarity.

The outreach to Israel also carries implications for India's western front. Pakistan has been actively consolidating defence cooperation with Saudi Arabia through military exercises, training arrangements, and security agreements. While Riyadh has expanded economic engagement with India, its historical ties with Pakistan's military establishment remain structurally deep. For New Delhi, strengthening technological and strategic collaboration with Israel serves as a quiet counterbalance, enhancing India's qualitative edge without provoking overt confrontation. Simultaneously, India has broadened engagement with Gulf partners, particularly the UAE and Saudi Arabia, ensuring that closer ties with Israel do not come at the expense of its Arab relationships.



Another critical layer shaping India's calculus is China's expanding footprint. Through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a flagship of the Belt and Road Initiative, Beijing has entrenched itself in Pakistan's strategic landscape. China's defence assistance and economic backing provide Islamabad with sustained leverage. At the same time, Beijing has deepened long-term economic engagement with Iran and even positioned itself as a diplomatic broker between regional rivals. For India, this westward push raises concerns about strategic encirclement. Strengthening

ties with Israel: an innovation-driven economy and a state deeply attuned to regional security dynamics allow India to hedge against shifting power alignments while accelerating its own modernisation trajectory.

The broader global trade environment also informs this outreach. The protectionist turn during the presidency of Donald Trump disrupted established supply chains and injected uncertainty into global economic governance. For countries like India, the lesson was clear: diversify partnerships, avoid overdependence, and build resilient coalitions.

Deepening defence and technology cooperation with Israel complements India's engagement with the United States while preserving policy flexibility. It reflects a pragmatic doctrine-align on issues, not blocs.

Crucially, Modi's Israel visit does not signal abandonment of India's balanced West Asia policy. New Delhi continues to support a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine issue and maintains robust ties with Gulf monarchies vital to its energy security and investment flows. The emphasis remains pragmatic, secure energy routes, protect diaspora interests, expand trade, and enhance security cooperation. This calibrated approach distinguishes India's diplomacy from ideologically driven alignments. It reflects a steady recognition that in a fractured geopolitical landscape, agility is strength.

Ultimately, the visit symbolised more than bilateral warmth. It underscored India's navigation of a rapidly shifting geopolitical environment shaped by Middle Eastern volatility, Pakistan-Saudi defence linkages, China's expanding regional footprint, and the aftershocks of global protectionism. By strengthening ties with Israel while sustaining engagement with Arab states and preserving autonomy in global alignments, India is positioning itself as a confident, independent pole in an increasingly multipolar world. The message was unmistakable: strategic diversification is not hedging born of hesitation; it is insurance crafted for an uncertain century.

Author is a prominent columnist and public policy expert

Enthusiasm marks welcome in Tel Aviv

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Narendra Modi was greeted with extraordinary enthusiasm by the Indian community in Tel Aviv on Wednesday as he commenced his two-day state visit to Israel.

Braving tight security and winter chill, members of the diaspora gathered in large numbers outside the Prime Minister's hotel, waving the Tricolour and raising patriotic slogans. The atmosphere turned celebratory as traditional dance troupes and musicians presented cultural performances reflecting India's diverse heritage.

PM Modi acknowledged the gathering with folded hands and interacted briefly with performers, drawing loud cheers from the crowd.

The high-energy reception set the tone for a visit focused on consolidating what both sides describe as a "robust and multifaceted strategic partnership."

PM Modi last visited Israel in 2017 — a land-



mark trip that elevated bilateral ties to new heights. His current visit is being viewed as the next significant step in deepening cooperation across strategic and economic domains.

For the Indian diaspora in Israel, however, Wednesday's scenes were less about geopolitics and more about pride and connection. As chants of support echoed through Tel Aviv's streets, the message was unmistakable: The India-Israel partnership rests not only on policy alignment, but also on strong people-to-people bonds.

Modi's saffron moment sets tone for historic Israel visit

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi touched down in Tel Aviv on Wednesday, greeted warmly by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his wife, Sara Netanyahu, in a moment that blended diplomacy with a dash of cultural symbolism. As the leaders exchanged greetings at the airport, a charming detail drew attention: PM Modi's saffron pocket square perfectly matched the color of Sara Netanyahu's pantsuit. Noticing the coordination, PM Netanyahu gestured toward the matching hues, prompting a lighthearted response from Modi, who laughed and said, "It's saffron!" The moment, while playful, also reflected the warmth and camaraderie between India and Israel.

Dressed in a cream-colored kurta paired with a white *churidar* and a grey patterned half-jacket, Modi's ensemble combined traditional Indian elegance with subtle sartorial diplomacy. Sara Netanyahu's choice of saffron created a visual link that symbolically underscored the meeting of two cultures and the spirit of friendship between the nations.

The lighthearted exchange occurred amid broader affirmations of mutual respect. Sara Netanyahu described India as a "wonderful country," while PM Netanyahu called Modi "a wonderful leader," setting a cordial tone



ahead of the historic parliamentary engagement. Later, PM Modi will address the Knesset, becoming the first Indian Prime Minister to speak at the Israeli Parliament.

While the "saffron moment" may appear lighthearted, it resonates as a visual metaphor for the vibrant diplomacy, personal warmth, and cultural respect at the heart of India-Israel ties, signalling that this visit is about more than politics—it is about friendship, symbolism, and shared aspirations.

The Ebullient 'Benjaminarendra' Spirit Reverberates Throughout the Holy Land!



ANOOP BOSE

On 15th February, 2026, the redoubtable Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin 'Bibi' Netanyahu, whilst addressing the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations in Jerusalem, prophetically announced, "Parliament address on the anvil. Who's coming here next week? Narendra Modi." And at exactly 10.48 am on 25th February, 2026, our Prime Minister Narendra Damodardas Modi enthusiastically tweeted, "I will be undertaking a State Visit to Israel today and tomorrow. Our nations share a robust and multifaceted Strategic Partnership. Ties have significantly strengthened in the last few years. I will be holding talks with PM Netanyahu, in which we will discuss ways to strengthen cooperation across diverse fields. I will also meet President Isaac Herzog, President of Israel. This evening, I will be addressing the Israeli Parliament, Knesset. This is a

tribute to the strong parliamentary and democratic ties that connect us. I will also interact with the Indian diaspora, who have made a big contribution in strengthening the India-Israel friendship." Modi has since landed in the holy city of Jerusalem, the capital of Israel (described in ancient Egyptian execration texts as "Rusalimum" and famous the world over as the "City of David"), and the ebullient "Benjaminarendra" spirit reverberates throughout the Holy Land!

The genesis of India's relationship with Israel took place when India formally recognised Israel on 17th September, 1950. Soon thereafter, an immigration office was established in Bombay by the Jewish Agency. This was later converted into a Trade Office in 1953 and thereafter into a Consulate. At the peak of the 1962 India-China war, Prime Minister David Ben Gurion expressed Israel's "fullest sympathy and understanding", and supplied weapons to the Indian forces aboard Israeli ships proudly flying the Israeli flag. And Prime Minister Golda Meir, in an unprecedented gesture, diverted arms meant for Iran to India during the 1971 Indo-Pak war. Reverting to the 1971 war, my very dear friend General Jack Farj Rafael Jacob, the first

Jewish General in the Indian army, who is hailed as the "Lion of Juda" in Israel, captured Dhaka after a decisive battle and took 93,000 Pakistani prisoners! Prime Minister Pamulaparti Venkata Narasimha Rao (whom I affectionately called "Uncle PV"), the grand architect of our globalised, liberalised economy, established formal Indo-Israeli diplomatic relations on 28th January, 1992. I was a part of Uncle PV's innermost circle and had striven tirelessly with General Jacob behind the scenes in making that happen. Since the upgradation of Indo-Israeli relations in 1992, defence and agriculture emerged as the main pillars of our bilateral ties. In recent years, the ties have expanded to areas such as Science and Technology, education and homeland security. Israeli exports to India reached a staggering figure of US\$116 million in November, 2025. Israel remains one of India's top three defence suppliers, consistently ranking as the second-largest alongside Russia and France, with annual arms deals reaching approximately US\$ 8.6 billion as of February, 2026. There has been a transformational shift in Indo-Israeli relations under the inspiring stewardship of Modi. The Israeli President Reuven Rivlin visited India for a week-long state visit in November, 2016. And

Modi's Israel visit in July 2017 represented a momentous milestone in Indo-Israeli relations. It was the maiden visit of an Indian Prime Minister to the Holy Land! In January, 2018, Netanyahu visited India to commemorate 25 years of Indo-Israeli relations. On 7th October, 2023, after Hamas terrorists stealthily waged the deadliest attack on Jews since the Holocaust along Israel's southern fence with Gaza — slaughtering babies, raping women, burning whole families alive and taking hundreds of innocent civilians hostage and snuffing out the lives of 1,159 innocents, Modi tweeted, "Deeply shocked by the news of terrorist attacks in Israel. Our thoughts and prayers are with the innocent victims and their families. We stand in solidarity with Israel at this difficult hour". On 24th April, 2025, Netanyahu called Modi to offer his condolences on the spine-chilling 22nd April, 2025 Pahalgam terror attack. On 9th October, 2025, Modi called Netanyahu to congratulate him on the progress made under the monumental American President Donald John Trump's Gaza peace plan. My association with the Israeli Embassy in Delhi goes back to the heady days of

Uncle PV when Ephraim Doweck was the first Israeli envoy to India with whom, I distinctly remember, Uncle PV used to converse fluently in chaste Arabic. I have had the rare privilege of working closely with Israel's distinguished former Ambassadors Mark Sofer, Daniel Carmon and Naor Gilon in diverse areas ranging from business and international politics to music and law. The present Israeli Ambassador to India Reuven Azar is a very dear friend and we have a very special relationship! I have actively interacted with a number of important Israeli companies, including the Marathon group headed by my venerable friend Hezi Bezalet. One of Israel's top actresses Efrat Oppenheimer, who was also the celebrated Brand Ambassador of the prodigious Israel Aircraft Industries Ltd (IAI), is an old friend. Significantly, I have had the unique privilege of meeting Israel's honorific former President Shimon Peres on his last and final visit to India in the context of "creating a second green revolution in India". India is the only country in the world where Jews have never been persecuted and the first Jews came to India long before the birth of Jesus Christ.

During the Second World War, over a thousand Jewish orphan children from Poland were given refuge by the giant hearted Maharaja of Nawanagar, Digvijaysinhji Ranjitsinhji Jadedja, who set up a "peaceful haven" for Polish children at Balachadi, a village in Jamnagar in the State of Gujarat. I am a close friend of the Jewish community and have a very close association with Rabbi David Shlomo Rosen (an Englishman who is the Special Advisor to the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi, the former President of the American Jewish Committee and Rabbi of Ireland) and the Elijah Foundation and it's founder Alon Goshen-Gottstein (a home grown Israeli), based out of Jerusalem. I am very close to the Jewish community in India and the Rabbi of Delhi Ezekiel Isaac Malekar and the former President of the Mumbai Synagogue Ralphy Jirad are very special friends. Very often on Fridays, I am invited by the Rabbi of Delhi to read excerpts from the Torah at the Judah Hyam Synagogue in Delhi. The city of my birth Kolkata has some of the most beautiful synagogues in the world, including the iconic Beth-El and Magen David Synagogues whose architectural splendour is breathtaking. More than a century ago, the pews of

Kolkata's majestic synagogues were filled with members of a thriving Indian Jewish community. Significantly, the first Jew to migrate to Kolkata was a Syrian jewel trader named Shalom Cohen way back in 1798. Today, the congregants are missing and only two dozen Jews reside in Kolkata, according to an article published in the New York Times. And even that number is fast dwindling! In this connection, I venture to mention proudly that General Jacob was my closest Jewish friend from Kolkata. In Israel, there is a special room dedicated to him in the iconic Latrun Museum (Yad Lashir). His mother's wedding dress is housed in one of the museums in Tel Aviv. She was a Cohen! And the most distinguished Kolkata Barrister Elias Meyer (who was a member of the Bar Library Club of which I am also an active member!) was a dear friend of my guru and senior Asoke Kumar Sen, who was the undisputed leader of the Indian Bar for over 60 years. I have Jewish friends all over the world and many of them are important Rabbis like my most reverend friend Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp, the Rabbi of the Reform Jewish Community of The Hague and the Rabbi of the Union of Dutch Reform Jewish Communities, who has been active in a wide

variety of progressive, humanitarian and interfaith organisations like the Anne Frank Foundation, the World Economic Forum, the World Council of Religious Leaders, the Earth Charter and the Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders. And here I am irresistibly drawn to the timeless words of Sir Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill "Some people like the Jews, and some do not. But no thoughtful man can deny the fact that they are, beyond any question, the most formidable and most remarkable race which has appeared in the world."

In conclusion, I am highly emboldened to turn to the fitting and effusive tribute paid by Netanyahu to Modi on 15th January, 2018, "You are a revolutionary leader in the best sense of the word 'revolution'. You are revolutionising India. You are catapulting this magnificent state into the future and you have revolutionized the relationship between Israel and India... Indians and Israelis know too well the pain of terrorist attacks. We remember the horrific savagery in Mumbai. We grit our teeth, we fight back, we never give in."

The author is an internationally reputed senior lawyer practising in the Supreme Court of India and various High Courts and Tribunals in India

PROSPECT



CM Himanta Biswa Sarma inaugurates Lovlina Borghain Sports Arena in Lakhimpur, Assam

HSBC India profit rises 11% to \$1.9 billion in 2025



HSBC India on Wednesday reported an 11 per cent increase in profit before tax (PBT) at \$1.9 billion (about ₹17,000 crore) during 2025. The subsidiary of the UK-based HSBC Plc earned a profit before tax of \$1.7 billion in the preceding year. India is the second-highest contributor in Asia to the group's profit after Hong Kong. During the year, the corporate and institutional banking segment, including cross-border transaction banking and capital markets, contributed the highest \$1.5 billion to PBT of India.

"In India, we reported a profit before tax of \$1.9 bn and continued to be the largest foreign bank. We are the leading bank for multinational companies, of which around 50 per cent bank with us," according to the annual report released by HSBC Plc. The bank launched HSBC Innovation Bank with a \$1 billion financing pool and launched new digital propositions in payments and trade. During the year, the bank expanded to four new cities with wealth and international potential, remained the top wealth manager across foreign banks and was the first bank to launch international wealth solutions in GIFT City.

CM Himanta kicks off Atmanirbhar Asom Abhiyan 2.0



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Guwahati

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday ceremonially launched the distribution of the first installment of financial assistance under Mukhya Mantrir Atmanirbhar Asom Abhiyan 2.0 for selected entrepreneurs from Jorhat, Golaghat and Majuli districts. The programme was held at the playground of Jorhat Institute of Science and Technology in Sotal.

Altogether 5,958 entrepreneurs received financial assistance amounting to over ₹59 crore. Of them, 2,366 are from Jorhat, 2,995 from Golaghat and 597 from Majuli. The beneficiaries include 10 under the professional category and 5,948 under the general category.

Under the second phase, the State Government has initiated steps to extend financial support exceeding ₹1,495 crore to 74,444 prospective entrepreneurs across Assam, with ₹2 lakh for each beneficiary in the general category and ₹5 lakh for those in the professional category.

Addressing the gathering, the Chief Minister said nearly five lakh students appear for matriculation examinations in Assam every year with aspirations for Government jobs. However, given the

limited scope of public employment, many youths are compelled to seek low-paying jobs outside the State. He noted that around 20 lakh youths from Assam are currently working outside due to limited opportunities at home.

Sarma stated that prolonged political and social challenges in the past had slowed industrial growth, creating a negative investment climate and limiting employment generation. He highlighted that over 1.6 lakh youths have been provided Government jobs in the last five years.

Referring to major upcoming projects such as the semiconductor plant at Jagiroad, the bio-refinery at Numaligarh, the urea-ammonia project at Namrup and the thermal power project at Bilasipara, he said these initiatives are expected to generate direct and indirect employment for nearly two lakh youths.

Union Minister of State for External Affairs Pabitra Margherita, Ministers of the Assam Government Atul Bora, Ajanta Neog and Bimal Bora, MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa and MLAs Hitendra Nath Goswami, Pradip Hazarika, Rupjyoti Kurmi, Bhabendra Nath Bharali, Mrinal Saikia, Biswajit Phukan and Bhujan Gam were present on the occasion.

20 cadres held, cache of IEDs seized in Manipur operations



TONY DAS ■ Imphal

In a major crackdown on insurgent activities, security forces have apprehended 20 cadres from various hill and valley-based groups during a week-long intensified operation across Manipur. The joint operations, conducted between 15 and 21 February, led to the recovery of a significant cache of weapons, explosives, and narcotics.

The operations were carried out by the Indian Army and Assam Rifles under the Spear Corps, in close coordination with the Manipur Police. The sweeps spanned the districts of Tengnoupal,

Imphal East, Imphal West, Churachandpur, Thoubal, and Chandel.

According to a defence spokesperson, the week began with the apprehension of two KYKL cadres near the international border in Tengnoupal on February 15. On the same day, a female cadre of the UNLF (K) was nabbed in Imphal East, while three active members of the KNF (Zogam), allegedly involved in extortion, were picked up in Churachandpur.

The relentless pressure by the forces saw the arrest of a veteran KCP (Noyon) cadre on February 16 in Sawombung.



The individual had reportedly undergone training in Myanmar. On February 17, the Chandel district witnessed a double success as Assam Rifles intercepted a narcotics consignment of 40,000 'WY' tablets valued at ₹16 crore and later detected 12 IEDs and Chinese grenades during an area domination patrol near Yangoubung.

The momentum continued through the week with the arrest of cadres belonging to the RPF/PLA, PREPAK (PRO), and UPPK from various locations, including Imphal West and Thoubal. On February 19, four more IEDs were recovered near the border in

Tengnoupal, averting potential attacks on security convoys.

The final phase of the operation on 20 and 21 February focused on the KCP factions, resulting in the arrest of three more cadres from Tera Lukram Leirak, Takyel Khongbal, and Langol Ningthou Leikai.

A senior officer stated that these intelligence-driven operations have dealt a severe blow to the logistics and manpower of the proscribed outfits. The recovered war-like stores and explosives have been handed over to the police for further investigation.

SBI Life ropes in Rishabh Pant, Ravindra Jadeja as brand ambassadors

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

In a bid to blend ambition with family duty, SBI Life Insurance on Tuesday launched a new campaign featuring cricketers Rishabh Pant and Ravindra Jadeja as brand ambassadors 'Jolly' and 'Polly', embodying the modern Indian's push-pull between dreams and responsibilities.

The TVCs highlight how life insurance empowers bold moves — like career switches or chasing passions — once loved ones' futures are secured. Rooted in SBI Life's mantra "Apne Liye, Apno Ke Liye" (For Self, For Family), the ads use relatable household banter to normalise protection as a confidence booster, not a chore.

Pant, as the instinctive 'Jolly', urges living fully with optimism, showing planning protects freedom. Jadeja, the steady 'Polly', stresses composure and long-term security, balanc-



ing personal goals with family care. "Today's consumers chase aspirations but weigh family duties," an SBI Life spokesperson said. "Pant and Jadeja mirror those inner family debates."

The campaign zeroes in on ambitious youth, who juggle independence with filial obligations. It skips jargon for real-life scenarios — career pivots, kid's dreams — proving early planning unlocks fearless pursuits.

"Young Indians aren't shirking responsibility; they're harmonising it with passion," the spokesperson added. For first-time buyers,

the message: Secure family first, chase dreams second — with peace.

Rishabh Pant and Ravindra Jadeja naturally embody these complementary approaches to life. Introduced as Jolly and Polly, they do not appear as conventional celebrity endorsers, but as representations of two approaches which drive individuals to take life's decisions.

Together, 'Jolly' & 'Polly' mirror the inner conversations common in Indian households, balancing the desire to move forward with the responsibility of caring for loved ones.

Major Jyotin Singh Memorial Football Trophy starts in Bishnupur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Imphal

Maj (Dr) Jyotin Singh, Ashok Chakra (P) Memorial Football Tournament 2026 commenced on 25 February 2026 at DSA Ground, Bishnupur, Manipur, under the aegis of the Indian Army and with the support of the All Manipur Football Association.

Scheduled from 25 February to March 03, 2026, the week-long tournament features participation from 16 teams representing various parts of the region, bringing together young footballers in a spirited display of talent, discipline and sportsmanship.

Organised in honour of Major (Dr) Jyotin Singh, Ashok Chakra (P), the tournament pays tribute to his supreme sacrifice and enduring legacy. His exemplary courage, unwavering dedication and selfless service to the nation continue to inspire generations.

The ceremonial inauguration was conducted in the

presence of civil and military dignitaries, local representatives and enthusiastic members of the sporting fraternity. The event was attended by approximately 600 spectators and invitees.

The opening match between Loktak FC and Sangai FC set an energetic tone for the tournament. In a closely contested and exciting encounter, Loktak FC emerged victorious with a 2-1 win, displaying remarkable teamwork and determination.

Beyond the competitive spirit, the tournament reflects the unifying power of

sport in bringing together youth from diverse communities on a common platform of shared values and mutual respect.

The collaborative efforts of the Indian Army and the All Manipur Football Association convey a strong message of harmony, cooperation and constructive engagement through sport.

Through this memorial tournament, the Indian Army reaffirms its commitment to honouring national heroes, strengthening civil-military relations and contributing towards a peaceful, progressive and inclusive environment in Manipur.



Support and save higher education in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, urge students

VIPUL DHASMANA
■ Sri Vijaya Puram

Protesting against the education policies of the Union Government, students supported by their parents and politicians, on the call of 'Joint Action Forum Against Deemed University' staged their protest peacefully by taking out a joint candle light march, late Wednesday evening, amidst heavy guard of the police, demanding establishing of a Central University which would be a catalyst for the development of Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

The Central University through an act of Parliament, is the need of the hour for Andaman & Nicobar Islands. It has more autonomy than a deemed-to-be-university, in delivering quality higher education, voiced the all-party protest marchers.

Expressing their doubts, the group of protesting students said that the deemed-to-be-university may not have a full-fledged autonomy in dealing with the creation of teaching and non-teaching posts, new courses and programmes, establishment of new departments and centres of excellence, as compared to the Central University.

It will not only lack funds in order to manage its day to day affairs as compared to the regular funding received by Central University, but it will also lack in the grant of affiliation to the colleges in their respective jurisdiction. The Central University has more recognition and repu-

tation than deemed-to-be-university.

Students belonging to Central University will have wider opportunities to collaborate on their course with students from global institutions. This will not only enable the Central University students to discover their innate potentialities but also will pave the way for honing their learning skills and research aptitude from the international exposure, said a protesting parent, adding that the National Education Policy 2020 advocates towards a more holistic and interdisciplinary perspective in higher education, it speaks about more about autonomy for the Higher Educational Institutions and not to the merger of colleges to much inferior Deemed to be University.

Central University will be in a better position to achieve this milestone before 2030 in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, where people face geographical isolation and transportation difficulties as compared to those in mainland.

Flared with anger, another protesting student said that the Andaman and Nicobar Administration have decided to convert the Andaman Nicobar Islands Legal Education Society (ANILES) into Andaman Nicobar Islands Education Society (ANIES) to establish a deemed-to-be-university in Sri Vijaya Puram (Port Blair).

The ANILES society will be governed and managed by senior-level bureaucrats; however, the Central



University will be managed by eminent professors who are experts in their fields. If a society is registered specifically for the establishment of a deemed-to-be-university, it may not have full autonomy to govern its own academic activities.

The Central Universities are providing a monthly fellowship to all eligible students after getting admission into various departments of the university, while the deemed-to-be-universities will not pay at par with the Central Universities in India. The infrastructural facilities also differ greatly between the Central Universities and deemed-to-be-university as Central Universities have state-of-the-art facilities with excellent library access, both in online and offline resources, sufficient hostel facilities for both boys and girls, 24x7 Wi-Fi-enabled campus, 24x7 reading room and other amenities which are lacking in deemed to be Universities in India, said a parent.

Ironically, all the colleges, be it Jawaharlal Nehru

Rajkeeya Mahavidyalaya (JNRM), Andaman Law College, Andaman College (ANCOL), Andaman and Nicobar Islands Institute of Medical Sciences (ANIIMS), Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar Institute of Technology (DBRAIT), Tagore Government College of Education (TGCE) and Mahatma Gandhi Government College (MGGC), which are presently affiliated to Pondicherry University, are mostly managed by temporary posts, and a significant proportion of sanctioned teaching and non-teaching posts are lying vacant. As a result, most of the colleges in Andaman & Nicobar Islands lack infrastructural facilities such as insufficient classrooms, lack of modern library, insufficient hostel accommodation, lack of free Wi-Fi to students, no proper playground and lack of proper canteen facilities.

Furthermore, DBRAIT, a lone engineering college, has been under de-affiliation from 2019 to till to date from Pondicherry University due to a lack of such facilities and many more. In such a sce-

nario, if the existing colleges are brought under the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Education Society (ANIES), run as a deemed-to-be-university, it will further deteriorate the quality of higher education in Andaman & Nicobar Islands, as expressed by a student who wants to undertake higher professional education to compete with the rest of the students of the country.

All the stakeholders of higher education in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, including students, teachers, parents and academicians, strongly oppose the merger of all the existing colleges under the deemed-to-be-university governed by a Society. According to the Pondicherry University Act (1985), colleges in the jurisdiction of Andaman and Nicobar Islands have to be affiliated to Pondicherry University only till any amendments to its effect.

Therefore, until an amendment is passed to dis-affiliate all colleges from Pondicherry University, the merger of all colleges of Andaman and Nicobar Islands presently affiliated to Pondicherry Central University with the proposed inferior deemed university will not serve any purpose. It will be a suicidal step for the higher educational system of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Either continuation with Pondicherry Central University or a new Central University will only be the right move to be established in Andaman & Nicobar Islands, said a retired profes-

sor, adding that while most of the Union Territories in India have a Central University or a State University but we do not have any university. When the Central Government proposed to set up a Central University in Ladakh, why not in the Andaman and Nicobar islands? The present population of Ladakh is approximately 2.80 lakhs only, while in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, it is around 5.5 lakhs. Considering our geographical isolation, social and educational backwardness, people are forced to migrate to the mainland for quality higher education, costing a huge sum of money.

Where would the poor people go? If a Central University is established at Andaman and Nicobar Islands, it will give a fillip and solace to the youth in general and overall development of these Islands.

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Institute of Higher Learning is the proposed deemed-to-be-university to be established in Andaman and Nicobar Islands by the Union Government but at what and whose cost, said a retired officer, adding that the Andaman and Nicobar Administration, did not have any formal written approval given by the Ministry as well as UGC for deemed-to-be-university under DE-NOVA category, then on what grounds the establishment of deemed-to-be-university was announced by the Prime Minister on December 30, 2018 at Netaji Subhash Stadium, Sri Vijaya Puram.

Tripura conducts investors' roadshow in Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Department of Industries & Commerce, Government of Tripura, successfully organised Destination Tripura – Business Meet 2026, an investors' roadshow, on February 24, 2026 in collaboration with Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) at Federation House.

The programme witnessed strong participation from industry stakeholders, investors, policymakers, and members of the diplomatic community.

According to a Press release, the Roadshow was organised as a precursor to Destination Tripura: Business Conclave 2026, scheduled to be held later this year in Agartala. The programme effectively showcased Tripura's evolving industrial ecosystem, ongoing infrastructure initiatives, and emerging opportunities across priority sectors. The event facilitated meaningful engagement between the State Government and industry representatives, reinforcing Tripura's position as an



emerging investment destination.

Minister for Industries & Commerce, Government of Tripura, Santana Chakma, graced the event. She briefed participants on the vast potential of investing in Tripura across multiple sectors. The Minister also highlighted the progressive reforms being undertaken by the State Government to ensure hassle-free investment processes and to strengthen further the Ease of Doing Business ecosystem in Tripura.

Senior officials of the State Government were also present and actively engaged with participants on policy initiatives, sector-specific incentives, and investment facilitation mechanisms being implemented across the State.

BRIEFLY

Pakistan captain's family threatened online



Upset at Pakistan's defeat against England in the T20 World Cup Super Eights match, cricket fans posted threatening messages directed at the family of captain Salman Agha. Salman's wife, Sabe, posted on her Instagram account that by abusing and threatening her or her son, Pakistan will not win the T20 World Cup. The fans also resorted to posting abusive language to other players after Pakistan lost the match by two wickets in Pallekele, Sri Lanka, on Tuesday. Meanwhile, many social media users condemned the use of abusive and threatening language against players and their families with former captain Moin Khan recalling similar experiences when Pakistan had lost the final of the 1999 World Cup. "It is totally unacceptable and the cyber crimes wing should investigate these threatening posts and punish them," he said. Pakistani cricket fans have been known to get hyper emotional whenever the team lost in a major ICC event. In 1996, when Pakistan lost in the quarterfinals to India, angry protesters had attacked the residences of some players, including captain Wasim Akram.

Craig Tiley to be CEO of US Tennis Association



Craig Tiley will take over as the CEO of the US Tennis Association (USTA) this year, the group that runs the US Open has announced. Tiley is leaving his post as the head of Tennis Australia and the tournament director of its Grand Slam tournament, the Australian Open. The USTA said in a news release on Tuesday that Tiley will start the new job in the coming months. He replaces Lew Sherr, who left the USTA last year to join the New York Mets as their president of business operations. Sherr had been the USTA's CEO since 2022. Tiley, who is from South Africa, was the head coach of men's tennis team at the University of Illinois from 1994 to 2005, including an NCAA championship and 32-0 record in 2003. He was the Australian Open's tournament director since 2006 and oversaw its expansion to a 15-day event, breaking attendance and revenue records. Tiley became the CEO of Tennis Australia in 2013. "Craig brings a rare combination of global credibility at the highest level of the sport and a proven commitment to growing the game at the grassroots. That balance is exactly what this moment requires," said Brian Vahaly, the USTA Board chair and the USTA's interim co-CEO.

J&K in control as sparks fly post Dogra head-butt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Hubballi

Skipper Paras Dogra made a gutsy 70 but his intentional head-butting of Karnataka substitute KV Aneesh overshadowed an otherwise solid batting performance from Jammu and Kashmir, who reached 527 for 6 at stumps on the second day of the Ranji Trophy final.

Dogra along with keeper batter Kanhaiya Wadhawan (70), Sahil Lotra (57 batting) all made handsome contributions as it became a real toil for the Karnataka bowlers save Prasidh Krishna (3/90 in 29 overs) didn't make much of an impact.

However it was 21-season Ranji veteran Dogra's boorish behaviour that surprised one and all as he was captured on camera head-butting the silly point fielder Aneesh after getting a streaky boundary when Prasidh had literally squared him up.

It wasn't clear if any of Aneesh's words would have hurt the domestic legend, who confronted Aneesh and butted on Aneesh's helmet prompting his senior teammate Mayank Agarwal to interject and stand between the two.

An animated Agarwal was seen exchanging words with Dogra as on-field umpires Rohan Pandit and Ulhas Gandhe rightly intervened. After some point, even Karnataka skipper Devdutt Padikkal was seen talking to the umpires, complaining about Dogra.

Since it was an altercation that involved touching of



Jammu and Kashmir's captain Paras Dogra plays a shot during the second day of the Ranji Trophy 2025-26 final cricket match between Karnataka and Jammu and Kashmir at KSCA Stadium in Hubballi, Karnataka

opponents, Dogra should face some sanctions from BCCI match referee Narayan Kutty. The day started off well for Karnataka as overnight centurion Shubham Pundir (121 off 247 balls) was quickly dismissed.

A flick from southpaw Pundir off medium pacer Vidyadhar Patil (1/104) went straight into substitute Aneesh's hands, ending a fine 124 run-stand. Pundir's innings had 12 fours and two sixes.

Abdul Samad (61), who also had smashed his way to a half-century on opening day, got one from Prasidh that just moved enough from length to take the outside edge.

At 307 for 4, just when Karnataka smelt an opening, veteran Dogra and J&K's find of the season Wadhawan got together to add 110 runs in 32 overs.

Prasidh, who was spitting fire with semi-new ball and was bowling quick was hit for

some streaky boundaries behind square by Dogra and Wadhawan who found extra pace too hot to handle.

However they showed a lot of temperament in not giving away the wicket to the Indian Test pacer.

They didn't score runs at a breakneck pace but once leg-spinner Shreyas Gopal (1/130 in 33 overs) and left-arm spinner Shikhar Shetty (1/112 in 32 overs) were in operation, the duo didn't

Dogra set to be fined 50% of his match fees

Hubballi: Jammu and Kashmir skipper Paras Dogra is all set to be fined 50 per cent of his match fees for intentionally head-butting Karnataka's substitute fielder KV Aneesh during an ill-tempered second day of the Ranji Trophy final here on Wednesday.

While the official announcement from BCCI match referee Narayanan Kutty will only come after the end of the game, physical handling of opposition player obviously leads to sanctions and match bans. In this case, the doyen of domestic cricket is set to escape with a mild punishment.

Dogra, who had retired hurt on 9 on the opening day, came back on the second day at the fall of J&K's third wicket Abdul Samad.

Prasidh Krishna, who was in the midst of a fiery spell, welcomed the 41-year-old J&K skipper with a barrage of short balls and some chirping from the close-in

fielders, including Aneesh who was stationed at silly-point. In the 101st over of the innings, Dogra awkwardly fended at a fast rising delivery from Prasidh as he was literally squared up. The ball flew through vacant third slip region for a boundary.

However, it was seen that Dogra, after drawing on-field umpires Rohan Pandit and Ulhas Gandhe's attention, rushed towards Aneesh and gently head-butted Aneesh, who incidentally was also wearing a helmet while fielding close-in.

An animated Mayank Agarwal ran from his position and got into the middle, getting into an argument after which an unhappy Karnataka skipper Devdutt Padikkal was also seen talking to the umpires.

While the content of Aneesh's alleged sledging wasn't known, Dogra sought to downplay the incident by stating that it was something that happened at the "heat of the moment".

have problems farming the strike.

While Dogra's 166 ball knock had eight fours, Wadhawan's 109-ball knock comprised of nine hits to the fence.

Once Wadhawan was caught by KL Rahul in the slips off Shetty, Dogra added another 54 with Lotra who also helped himself to a half-ton.

With four overs left for the third new ball, Karnataka

bowlers would like to keep the total below 600 and expect its batting line-up filled with former and current Test stars to do the job for them in a game of an innings each.

Brief Scores

Jammu and Kashmir 527/6 in 156 overs (Shubham Pundir 121, Yawar Hassan 88, Paras Dogra 70, Kanhaiya Wadhawan 70, Sahil Lotra 54 batting, Prasidh Krishna 3/90) vs Karnataka.

Portuguese soccer federation monitoring situation in Mexico

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Lisbon

The Portuguese soccer federation said it was monitoring the situation in Mexico amid a surge in violence ahead of its friendly against the Mexican national team in March. The federation on Tuesday said it was "closely monitoring the delicate situation currently unfolding in Mexico" following the killing of the country's most powerful drug lord by the Mexican army on Sunday.

The killing sparked a surge in violence and put the country on edge. The World Cup warmup match is scheduled for March 28 at the renovated Azteca Stadium,



which is scheduled to host the opening match of the World Cup between Mexico and South Africa on June 11.

Mexico is set to play Iceland in a friendly Wednesday in Queretaro, with the Icelandic soccer federation saying Tuesday that it expects the game to go ahead as planned.

The Portuguese federation said it was honoured by the invitation to participate in the reopening of the renovated venue, but noted that "the recent evolution of events requires continuous evaluation of the conditions" that the national team and its delegation will find.

NRAI's National Judges Course receives record response

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

As many as 47 participants took part in the largest-ever National Judges Course which concluded at the at Karni Singh Shooting Range here on Wednesday.

The course, which started on February 21, was conducted under the aegis of the The National Rifle Association of India (NRAI).

The five-day course equipped participants with essential skills in ISSF rules, range management, scoring protocols, and ethical judging practices. "This record-breaking batch underscores NRAI's com-



mitment to building a robust cadre of skilled judges who will ensure fairness and excellence in Indian shooting sports.

Their dedication today paves the way for India's continued success on the global stage," NRAI secretary general Pawankumar Singh

said in a statement. Building on this momentum, NRAI will host the prestigious ISSF B Judge Course in next month, where select judges from this national program will receive advanced training to earn their international license, enabling them to officiate at world level events.

Turmoil-hit 2030 French Alps Olympics lose CEO Cyril Linette in leadership shake-up

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Paris

Organisers of the 2030 French Alps Olympics confirmed on Wednesday the departure of their chief executive officer following weeks of internal turmoil.

They said the exit of Cyril Linette — who was at loggerheads with Edgar Grosperon, the former Olympic champion freestyle skier who leads the organizing committee — was formally acknowledged during a meeting of the executive board last weekend. Organisers said the decision reflected a collective desire for a "new momentum through renewed gover-



nance" ahead of a key phase of their project.

Tensions have multiplied in recent months, against a backdrop of several resignations, culminating in open conflict between Grosperon and Linette. Their feud was just the latest episode in a saga of turbulences that

have weakened the project.

It followed the successive resignations of chief operating officer Anne Murac, communications director Arthur Richer, as well as the departure of Bertrand Meheut, who was in charge of the remuneration committee.

Inter slumps from Champions League finalist to playoffs exit

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Milan

What a difference a year makes. Or nine months to be precise. Last season, Inter Milan reached the Champions League final and did so in style, with thrilling victories over Bayern Munich and Barcelona.

On Tuesday, the Italian giant limped out of the competition with a disappointing 2-1 loss at home to Bodø/Glimt — knocked out in the playoff round 5-2 on aggregate — in what is being labeled as one of the biggest upsets in Champions League history. It wasn't the first major upset the tiny Norwegian team has pulled off this season after wins over Manchester City and Atletico Madrid and a draw against Borussia Dortmund. "We know there's a lot of competitiveness in the Champions League. If teams get to this stage it means they have



something," Inter coach Cristian Chivu said. "And they have proved that. They showed it against Dortmund, against Madrid, against City, against us twice.

"It's a team which has energy. We could have done better in Norway, we could have done better today, too, but unfortunately it didn't go how we wanted. We gave everything to try to advance, that's football."

The signs were there last season that not all was right at Inter.

Champions League playoffs: Bodø/Glimt pulls off stunning upset against Inter Milan

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Milan

Bodø/Glimt pulled off one of the biggest upsets in Champions League history by knocking out three-time winner Inter Milan.

The tiny Norwegian team won 2-1 at the San Siro on Tuesday to seal a 5-2 aggregate victory in the playoffs and secure its place in the round of 16 in spectacular fashion.

"Can you believe it?" coach Kjetil Knutsen said to TNT Sports. "A team from a small town up north. It's unbelievable." In its first season in European club soccer's top competition Bodø/Glimt has produced one shock after another following wins

against Manchester City and Atletico Madrid at the end of the league phase. But victory over two legs against last year's Champions League finalist and current Serie A leader Inter was its biggest feat yet.

Second-half goals from Jens Petter Hauge and Hakon Evjen stunned the home fans in Milan and set Bodø/Glimt on course for a clash with City or Sporting Lisbon in the next round. Alessandro Bastoni pulled a goal back for Inter, but by then the damage had already been done.

"We're disappointed. We want to go as far as possible in every competition. We tried, but they were better than us," Inter midfielder



Nicolo Barella told Sky Sport. Atletico beat Club Brugge 4-1 and completed a 7-4 aggregate win. Newcastle won 3-2 against Qarabag (9-3) and Bayer Leverkusen advanced 2-0 on aggregate against Olympiacos after 0-0 draw in the second leg.

Bodø/Glimt's stunning run

goes on: To put Bodø/Glimt's run into context: by the start of January it had yet to win its first game in the Champions League. In a whirlwind few weeks it has taken down 2023 European champion City, Inter — a two-time runner up in the last three

years — and Spanish giant Atletico. According to stats firm Opta, a month ago Bodø/Glimt had a 0.3 per cent chance of advancing to the round of 16 having picked up three points from six games in the league phase.

But those victories against City and Atletico have propelled its Champions League campaign and over two legs it was too good for an Inter team that tops the Italian league by 10 points.

"I can't actually believe it," Knutsen said. "The players are amazing. They take the steps, they believe, they're working hard. ... I'm so proud." Defending a 3-1 first leg win, Bodø/Glimt soaked up pressure until a mistake from Manuel Akanji

was seized on by Ole Didrik Blomberg in the 58th minute. His shot was saved by Inter goalkeeper Yann Sommer, but Hauge was there to convert the rebound. Hauge now has six goals in this year's tournament. Akanji hit the post as Inter tried to mount a fight back, but Evjen lashed in a second for the visitors in the 72nd to send around 3,000 traveling fans wild.

Bastoni's goal, which marginally crossed the line, never looked like being the start of a comeback for the Italians. "We were unlucky. The ball simply didn't want to go in. They did what they had to do, and all I can do is congratulate them," Inter defender Yann Bissec said.

The Pioneer Classified

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Shyamrati Devi, Mother of No.16015255A Hav Rajesh Kumar Yadav, R/o- Vill- Mundera, PO- Phulvaria Laxchhy, Dist- Deoria, U.P.- 274001, declare that in my Son's service record my name is wrongly recorded as Shyamrathi Devi whereas my correct name is Shyamrati Devi, which may be amended accordingly.

PD(361)C

I, Rekha Das, Mother of JC-778515Y Sub Joyanta Kumar Das, R/o- Vill- PO- Bheturia, Teh- Tamluk, Dist- Purba Medinipur, WB- 721650, have changed my name from Rekha Das to Rekharani Das, vide affidavit dated 25/02/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(362)C

I, Papasi, Mother of No.16014017F Hav Bhupendra Singh, R/o- Vill- Deengli, PO- Thirpali Bari, Dist- Churu, Rajasthan- 331305, have changed my name from Papasi to Patasi Devi, vide affidavit dated 25/02/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(363)C

I, Nagabhushnam, Mother of No.2610384X Hav Perumal N, R/o- Vill- Bangarapet, PO- Andersonpet, Dist- Kolar, Karnataka- 563113, have changed my name from Nagabhushnam to Nagabhushannam N, vide affidavit dated 25/02/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(364)C

I, Deepa Lakshmi, W/o- No.2610384X Hav Perumal N, R/o- Vill- Bangarapet, PO- Andersonpet, Dist- Kolar, Karnataka- 563113, have changed my name from Deepa Lakshmi to S Deepalakshmi, vide affidavit dated 25/02/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(365)C

New Zealand thrash Sri Lanka, one step closer to semis

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Colombo

Co-hosts Sri Lanka were on Wednesday knocked out of T20 World Cup as Rachin Ravindra grabbed a career-best 4/27 in a splendid all-round display to power New Zealand to a comprehensive 61-run victory in their Super Eights clash here.

Cole McConchie justified his selection with a composed unbeaten 31 off 23 balls (3x4, 2x6) while skipper Mitchell Santner came into his own with a 26-ball 47 (2x4, 4x6) as the duo stitched a match-defining 84-run seventh wicket stand off 47 balls to lift New Zealand to 168/7 after Sri Lanka opted to bowl. After allowing the Kiwis

to score 70 runs in the last four overs, Sri Lanka, who had collapsed for 95 against England in their Super Eights opener, suffered yet another batting meltdown.

Chasing 169, Sri Lanka could only score 107/8 with Ravindra — who also made 32 with the bat — leading the spin charge after pacer Matt Henry rocked the islanders in the powerplay with a sensational bowling display of 2-1-3-2. The emphatic victory margin not only sealed two crucial points for New Zealand but also put them firmly on the brink of a semi-final berth. Pakistan will now need a massive win in their final game against Sri Lanka to keep their semifinal qualification hopes alive.



New Zealand's Matt Henry, centre, celebrates with teammates the wicket of Sri Lanka's Charith Asalanka during the T20 World Cup cricket match between Sri Lanka and New Zealand in Colombo Sri Lanka on Wednesday

New Zealand next face England in their concluding Super Eights fixture here on Friday, while Pakistan take on the already-eliminated Sri Lanka in Pallekele on Saturday. Defending 168, New Zealand strangled Sri Lanka in the powerplay through Henry. The pacer struck with the first ball of the opening over, dismissing in-form Pathum Nissanka for a golden duck with a 137kph delivery that pitched on a length outside off, jagged back in and crashed into the stumps. In the first ball of his next over, Henry removed Charith Asalanka (5), this time he took the pace off and induced a mistime shot that resulted to a simple catch. Sri Lanka looked devastat-

ed and limped to 20 for two in the powerplay with a flurry of dot balls.

Ravindra then took control, and in his first over, he dismissed Kusal Mendis by pulling his length back and spinning the ball away as the batter stepped out, leaving the wicketkeeper to complete a sharp stumping.

Two balls later, Pavan Rathnayake charged down the track only to be beaten in flight again and was stumped. The left-arm spinner struck again in his next over, deceiving skipper Dasun Shanaka in the air to force a miscued stroke before removing Dushan Hemantha with another delivery that gripped and turned. Santner quietly completed

his quota, returning with 1/19, taking the Lankan top-scorer Kamindu Mendis (31) and virtually sealing Sri Lanka's fate and their exit.

Invited to bat, New Zealand lost four wickets for nine runs between 9.3 and 12.1 overs as wily offspinner Maheesh Theekshana (3/30) and pacer Dushmantha Chameera (3/38) turned the contest on its head in the middle overs. But McConchie teed off in the 17th over taking on Chameera smashing him two sixes and a four in an 18-run over. Santner then took on Sri Lanka's best bowler Theekshana, striking a four and two sixes in the 18th over that yielded 21 runs to seize the momentum in the back end.

Players must not be excluded on grounds of nationality: ECB

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and franchises of The Hundred have issued a joint statement to assert that players must not be excluded on grounds of nationality amid fears that Pakistani cricketers could be deliberately ignored by at least four Indian-owned teams at next month's auction.

Four out of the eight franchises — Manchester Super Giants (RPSG Group), MI London (Reliance), Southern Brave (GMR) and Sunrisers Leeds (Sun Group) — are linked to team owners in the IPL and according reports in the British media, all of them would avoid Pakistani players.

However, even without any Indian presence among the owners, only two Pakistani players were a part of The



Hundred last year and overall just nine have managed to feature in the first five seasons. The new owners will take charge of the operations from this season onwards.

"The Hundred was established to reach new audiences, grow the game of cricket and ensure that everyone — regardless of their ethnicity, gender, faith, nationality or other — can feel they belong in our sport. Players must not be excluded on the grounds of their nationality," asserted the joint statement from the ECB and all eight owners, including the ones with IPL links.

"As the governing body responsible for running the tournament, the ECB is committed to ensuring there is no place for discrimination, and has regulations in place to take robust action to tackle any such conduct.

"All eight teams commit to selection being based solely on cricketing performance, availability, and the needs of each team," the statement added.

Brook played best innings of his life: Shaheen Afridi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Pallekele

Pakistan pacer Shaheen Afridi praised England captain Harry Brook for playing "the best innings of his life" after the big-hitter's sensational hundred took his team into the T20 World Cup semifinals here. Shaheen had found Brooks' stumps with a yorker a ball after the England skipper slammed a 50-ball century in the Super-8 fixture here on Tuesday.

"I think this will be his best innings of his life. He should be credited for playing a proper cricketing shot. The wicket was not easy.

"If we look at his batsmen, they were all struggling. But if we look at his knocks, he should be credited," said



Shaheen whose four for 30 in four overs went in vain as Pakistan failed to defend 164 resulting in an England win by two wickets.

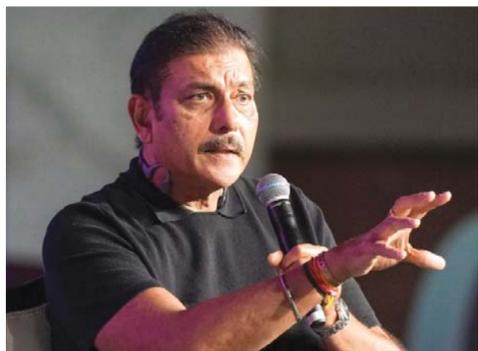
During the match, Shaheen walked towards Brook and shook his hand in a show of appreciation for his special effort.

"He deserved it, it was a world class innings. Harry and me had a very good friendship as well when we played together in PSL. He played with us for Lahore Qalandars," said the pacer when asked why he approached Brook for a handshake.

Pakistan's chances of making the semifinal now hang by a thread. But Shaheen, who made a comeback on Tuesday after being dropped for the last two games, remains hopeful.

These things happen in cricket. But we are still in the tournament, anything can happen. We are thinking that we get this one opportunity firstly we should win this match (against Sri Lanka).

"Hope New Zealand loses their match. Yes, you said I was dropped out, but my focus is to work on my bowling, how to come back, how to work on my bowling, and maintain my normal things, so that I can give good results in the match," he added.



India need to rethink about team composition: Ravi Shastri

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Chennai

The heavy loss to South Africa in their Super 8 opener was the "shakeup" title favourites India needed going into the business end of the T20 World Cup, said former head coach Ravi Shastri.

India will be desperate to make a strong comeback against Zimbabwe here on Thursday after the heavy 76-run defeat at the hands of South Africa in their Super 8 opener in Ahmedabad on Sunday. The loss against the Proteas, incidentally, was India's first defeat after 12 successive victories across the last two editions of the T20 World Cup.

"You win 12 matches on the trot, there's bound to be an off day. And I'm glad it has come early. It might just be the shakeup India needed," Shastri told on the latest episode of The ICC Review.

"It might also make them rethink their strategy as to the composition of the side going ahead. "They would have learned from that last experi-

ence that they're not going to take things for granted because in this Super Eight if you lose one more (match), then you're really putting yourself under serious pressure."

Talking about the team composition for Thursday's crucial match, Shastri advised India to play an extra spinner keeping in mind the spin-friendly Indian conditions.

He is in favour of bringing in vice-captain Axar Patel, who was replaced by Washington Sundar in the last match.

"They have to bring him (Axar Patel) back. You need that experience. I would say play both (Patel and Sundar). Give yourself that extra option. Because on a given day, you're bound to have one bowler who's going to have an off day. Like for example, Varun Chakravarthy on Sunday," Shastri noted.

"If Axar Patel is playing, he might be batting at No.8. You have got Hardik Pandya at No.5, you've got Shivam Dube at No.6, you've got Washington Sundar at No.7. Axar can go at No.5 as well.

India face must-win Super 8s game against Zimbabwe

G UNNIKRISHNAN ■ Chennai

Bogged down by top-order brittleness and under pressure after a heavy loss, defending champions India would need every ounce of resilience they can muster when they take on a tricky Zimbabwe in their second Super 8 match of the T20 World Cup on Thursday.

Winning this contest by a big margin is critical to India's existence in the ICC showpiece given the beating their net run rate (-3.80) took after the 76-run defeat to South Africa on Sunday.

But for that, India need to fix the issues surrounding the opening and No.3 slots.

Coming into this World Cup, the reigning champions



rode on excellence from Ishan Kishan and Abhishek Sharma at the pole position to quell the bilateral challenges against South Africa and New Zealand at home.

But light seems to have gone out of Abhishek's batting after a stomach infection. A combination of dull pitches and off-spinners, who took the ball away from his

hitting arc, has reduced the left-hander's firepower.

He is certainly a better batter than his current numbers — 15 runs from four matches at an average of 3.75

made at a strike-rate of 75.

However, the real question is can he set aside the desire to play his natural game, and grind some runs against his name? It may not look flashy, but one needs to look ugly, at times, to win.

The changes that England skipper Harry Brook, a batter in Abhishek's mould, made to adapt to the decks got him a match-winning hundred last night in Pallekele. Watching him will perhaps give the Indian opener an example to follow.

Playing spin was never Brook's forte, but the Yorkshire man sunk Pakistan's spin armada at Pallekele, superbly pacing himself between defence and aggression.

Tilak Varma too needs a course correction, but of a different nature.

One can argue that Abhishek's lean patch has necessitated Tilak to play a more supportive role to Kishan, who continues to impress with a strike-rate of 193 amid the top-order ruins around him.

But even then, a strike-rate of 118 is too less for a batter playing in the Power Play segment as per the modern T20 template. He generally strikes around 141 in T20Is.

Suryakumar Yadav has 180 runs but those have come at 127, way less than his T20I career strike-rate of 161. It has left Kishan with the job of doing all the heavy-lifting by himself. (PTI)

India stun Australia in shoot-out to register maiden win in FIH Pro League

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Hobart

The Indian men's hockey team ended a prolonged losing streak in the FIH Pro League, upstaging world Number 3 Australia 3-1 in a shoot-out after both sides were locked 1-1 at the end of regulation time, on Wednesday.

It was a close battle between the two teams in the first three quarters, which ended goalless but the win in their final game of the Hobart leg of the Pro League should be a confidence booster for the Indians.

Australia finally took the



lead in the 49th minute through a penalty corner conversion by Jeremy Hayward. But the home team's joy was short-lived as Shilanand Lakra (51st) scored a fine field goal two minutes

later to draw level.

Thereafter, both teams tried hard to score the all-important winner but failed as the match went into the shoot-out, where India emerged victorious to take

two points while Australia pocketed one point.

In the shoot-out, Lakra, Maninder Singh and Vishnukant Singh scored for India, while Australia's lone goal was scored by Hayward as India custodian Mohith Shashikumar Honnenahalli produced a superb show under the post.

After a disastrous Rourkela leg of the Pro League where India had lost all four matches, India had made a losing start to the Hobart leg.

India had lost 0-2 to Spain in the first leg match before going down 4-5 in shoot-out against Australia following a 2-2 draw.



West Indies' batting firepower to face Proteas' pace test

AMANPREET SINGH
■ Ahmedabad

The West Indies' big-hitting ability will face a stern test from South Africa when the two unbeaten teams square off in a Super 8 clash of the T20 World Cup on Thursday, looking to tighten their grip on a semifinal spot.

South Africa come into the contest after a commanding 76-run win over home-favourites India in Ahmedabad, while the West Indies hammered Zimbabwe by 107 runs in their previous outing in Mumbai to underline their batting firepower.

West Indies' line-up, packed with power-hitters, has shown the ability to take the game away in a matter of overs.

However, they will now be up against a balanced South African bowling attack

that dismantled India here on Sunday.

It was a collective effort from the bowling unit comprising Marco Jansen, Keshav Maharaj, Kagiso Rabada and Lungi Ngidi, whose pace variations have foxed the best of batters in the tournament thus far.

South Africa's batting too has done the job consistently. David Miller remains the crisis man for the Proteas and he showed that with a match-winning effort against India after the setbacks in the powerplay.

Key match-ups: The contest promises intriguing individual battles. Hetmyer's aggressive strokeplay against Rabada's pace and bounce could set the tone, while Powell's ability to dominate spin will be tested by Maharaj's accuracy and changes of pace. (PTI)

Playing most games in Ahmedabad not a big advantage : Keshav Maharaj

AMANPREET SINGH
■ Ahmedabad

Left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj does not believe that staying put at one venue offers South Africa any significant advantage, saying the key lies in adapting quicker than the opposition as they gear up for a crucial T20 World Cup Super 8 clash against the West Indies here on Thursday.

The Proteas have travelled outside Ahmedabad only

once so far when they clashed with the UAE in New Delhi and will do one more time to compete against Zimbabwe on March 1.

"It's nice to not travel, but from a pitch point of view every game has been very different. The four matches that we've played here, conditions have varied throughout. I won't see it too much as an advantage. It's about adapting quicker rather than later and focusing on execution," Maharaj said on the eve



of the contest. South Africa head into the contest high on confidence after a morale-boosting win over India, but Maharaj maintained that the team is not getting carried away.

"There was a real energy and buzz in the camp after beating probably the best side in the competition. But we're not getting carried away. There's still a lot of cricket to be played. It's about dusting ourselves off, doing things better and

focusing on the positives."

With both teams unbeaten in the Super 8 stage, a win could virtually seal a semi-final berth for South Africa. Maharaj, however, stressed the importance of taking it one game at a time.

"It was a huge game for us against India. West Indies played an amazing game against Zimbabwe. It's back to the drawing board. We know the danger they possess from an explosive point of view." (PTI)