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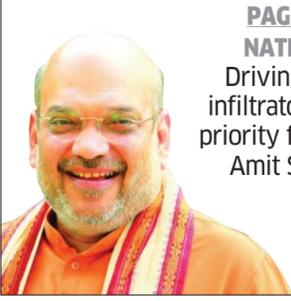
GREAT OFFERS!



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Own platform, not hardware



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Gukesh draws with Niemann in Prague chess



PIONEER IN SHORT

DGCA TO HIRE 38 CONSULTANTS

Aviation regulator Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), which is facing a significant staff shortage, is looking to hire 38 consultants for airworthiness, air safety and other directorates. Applications have been sought for 24 consultants at the Directorate of Airworthiness and 6 consultants at the Directorate of Air Safety, according to a public notice. Besides, 5 senior consultants and 2 consultants would be hired at the Directorate of International Relations and Legal Affairs (DIRLA). The DGCA would also be taking a consultant at the Directorate of Flying Training, as per another public notice. All these consultants would be recruited on a contract basis, initially for one year, subject to certain conditions. The upper age limit for the applicants is 63 years. The regulator has been facing a staff crunch as nearly half of the sanctioned posts are lying vacant. On February 5, the civil aviation ministry told the LS that there were 1,630 sanctioned posts at the regulator as on January 15 and out of them, 787 positions were vacant.

India's UPI set to go live in Israel

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

From neighbourhood kirana stores to international markets, India's digital payments revolution is crossing borders. In a landmark development, Israel is set to adopt India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI), marking another milestone in New Delhi's growing global fintech footprint. The announcement came during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's State visit to Israel, where both nations elevated their ties to a "Special Strategic Partnership for peace, innovation, and prosperity."

The agreement to link UPI with Israel's payment ecosystem will enable Indian travellers to make seamless, QR-based transactions directly from their bank accounts while in Israel. The linkage will be facilitated through cooperation between NPCI International Payments Limited and MASAV, Israel's interbank payments operator.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being greeted by his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu as he concludes his visit to Israel

The move is expected to enhance cross-border financial connectivity, reduce transaction friction, and promote digital interoperability between two economies. UPI, widely regarded as one of the world's most efficient real-time payment platforms, is already live for merchant payments in several countries, including the UAE, Singapore, France, Bhutan, Nepal, Mauritius,

Sri Lanka, and Qatar. Its expansion into Israel signals rising international confidence in India's digital public infrastructure model.

Addressing the media, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri described the visit as "incredibly rich in outcomes," emphasising that digital payments and emerging technologies formed a central pillar of discussions.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

SC imposes ban on NCERT Class 8 book

Summons Secretary and Director

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday imposed a "complete blanket ban" on any further publication, reprinting or digital dissemination of NCERT's Class 8 social science book as it contains "offending" contents on corruption in the judiciary, saying they have fired a gunshot and the judiciary is "bleeding."

Observing that there appeared to be a "deep-rooted conspiracy" and "calculated move" to undermine the institution and demean the dignity of the judiciary, the apex court directed that all copies of the book - physical and digital - currently in circulation be immediately seized and removed from public access without any delay.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant issued show cause notices to the NCERT director and the secretary of the Department of School Education, asking them to explain why suitable

PM Modi seeks accountability over controversy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi/Jamshedpur

The NCERT textbook controversy snowballed on Thursday as Prime Minister Narendra Modi is learnt to have taken a strong exception to the Class 8 textbook chapter on "Corruption in the Judiciary", which has now been banned by the Supreme Court.

Sources said during the last Cabinet meeting at Seva Teerth, Modi sought to know from Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan about the controversy related to the NCERT textbook and asked the con-

There was no intention to insult the judiciary. An inquiry will be conducted and accountability fixed. Action will be taken against those involved in drafting the chapter

— Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan

What are we teaching our children? What are we teaching class eight students? Who is monitoring it?

— Sources

cerned to fix the responsibility. "What are we teaching our children? What are we teaching class eight students? Who is monitoring it?" sources said, PM sought to know. On the sidelines of an event at Jamshedpur, Pradhan promised to fix

accountability and take action against those involved in drafting the controversial portion. He also underlined that the Government has full respect for the judiciary and has no intent of disrespecting the institution.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

The ByStander



Fly easy: DGCA allows free changes within 48 hours

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

Passengers can breathe easy as they can now cancel or change air tickets without paying an additional charge within 48 hours of booking, subject to certain conditions. The option would not be available for domestic flight reservations where the departure date is less than seven days, and in the case of international bookings, the departure date should be not less than 15 days.

This major relief was announced by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Thursday as it revised air ticketing rules to introduce more passenger-friendly measures, introducing a "look-in option" for a period of 48 hours after booking.

During this period, passengers can cancel or amend the ticket without any additional charges, except for the normal prevailing fare for the revised flight for which the ticket is sought to be amended. The

new norm, as per the aviation regulator, was brought in to curb the "grievances among airline passengers" regarding delays in the refund of unused tickets and the amount refunded by airlines against cancelled tickets.

Coming out with the amended norms that are more passenger-friendly, DGCA also said that airlines should not levy any additional charge for correction in the name of the same person when the error is pointed out by the passenger within 24 hours of making the booking, when the ticket is booked directly through the airline's website.

"In case of purchase of a ticket through a travel agent/portal, the onus of refund shall lie with the airlines as agents are their appointed representatives. The airlines shall ensure that the refund process is completed within 14 working days," the DGCA said.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

CBI registers fresh case, raids Anil Ambani's home

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The CBI has registered a fresh case against industrialist Anil Ambani and Reliance Communications (RCOM) for cheating the Bank of Baroda during 2013-17, causing a wrongful loss of more than ₹2,220 crore to the bank, officials said on Thursday. The case stems from a complaint received from the bank on Tuesday, they said. Meanwhile, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday grilled Anil Ambani for more than nine hours during the

second round of questioning. He has been called again for questioning on Friday in a separate case linked to an alleged loan fraud against the Yes Bank, they said.

"After registration of this case, the CBI has conducted searches at the residence of Anil Ambani and the registered offices of Reliance Communications Ltd. Various documents connected with these loan transactions have been recovered," a CBI spokesperson said.

"The allegations in the FIR are that Bank of Baroda has suffered a loss of more than



₹2,220 crore due to the loans availed by Reliance Communications, which were allegedly diverted and



ED GRILLS ANIL AMBANI FOR 9 HOURS; CALLS HIM AGAIN TODAY

misutilised by creating fictitious transactions with related parties," the spokesperson said.

According to the officials, the account was declared a non-performing asset in 2017 itself.

"However, based on the petition filed by Anil Ambani before the Hon'ble High Court of Bombay, there was a stay on the declaration of the accounts as a fraud by the Hon'ble High Court. The stay was vacated on 23.02.2026 after which the Bank of Baroda lodged this complaint, and the CBI has taken up the case immediately," the spokesperson said.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Carney's India visit aims to reset strategic ties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In a significant diplomatic development, Canada appears to be recalibrating its position on extremism and regional violence as Prime Minister Mark Carney embarks on a four-day visit to India beginning Friday. The trip — his first to India as Prime Minister — is being viewed as a crucial step toward restoring stability and trust in India-Canada relations after nearly three years of turbulence.

India on Thursday said the upcoming talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Carney will offer an opportunity to



advance a "forward-looking partnership" anchored in mutual respect, economic cooperation, and shared democratic values.

Carney's visit comes at a pivotal moment in the normalisation of bilateral ties

that were severely strained following the 2023 diplomatic row over the killing of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar. At the time, allegations by then Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of a potential

Indian link to the incident were firmly rejected by New Delhi as "absurd." The fallout led to reciprocal expulsions of diplomats and a freeze in high-level engagement. However, diplomatic channels have gradually reopened over the past year. Following Carney's electoral victory in April, both nations have taken calibrated steps to de-escalate tensions, including the reappointment of high commissioners in each other's capitals. Observers say Ottawa's evolving tone on addressing extremist elements operating from its soil has played a role in rebuilding confidence.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

INDIA BEAT ZIMBABWE BY 72 RUNS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chennai

Abhishek Sharma and Hardik Pandya struck blazing half-centuries as India thrashed Zimbabwe by 72 runs in their must-win Super 8 match to keep their semifinal hopes alive in the T20 World Cup, on Thursday.

Abhishek smashed a brisk 30-ball 55 to provide early momentum, adding 48 runs for the opening wicket with



Sanju Samson (24) after T20 Zimbabwe opted to bowl.

Ishan Kishan (38) and Suryakumar Yadav (33) chipped in with quick-fire contributions before Pandya hammered an unbeaten 23-ball 50 at the death to power India to 256 for four, the highest total of this edition.

Tilak Varma contributed 44 not out from 14 balls as he and Pandya put on an unbroken 84-run stand off just 31 deliveries. In reply, Brian Bennett top-scored with an unbeaten 97, but Zimbabwe were restricted to 184 for six in their 20 overs.

FULL REPORT ON >> P16

Women's empowerment top priority: Rekha Gupta at The Pioneer, CRF event

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Thursday said women empowerment remains the top priority of her Government and the Narendra Modi-led Centre, as she addressed The Pioneer-Research Foundation (CRF) 'Sashakt Nari-Viksit Bharat' Women Empowerment Conference in the national Capital.

The CM said the conference aimed to take firm and practical steps for a brighter future for women. Through a virtual address as the special guest of honour, Delhi CM



Delhi CM Rekha Gupta addressing the audience virtually at the Sashakt Nari-Viksit Bharat conference on women empowerment held jointly by leading national daily The Pioneer and CRF on Thursday



Union Minister for Women and Child Development Annapurna Devi, Adani Foundation Chairperson Priti Adani and Chintan Research Foundation President Shishir Priyadarshi at the inauguration ceremony of the day-long Sashakt Nari-Viksit Bharat conference on women empowerment held jointly by leading national daily The Pioneer and CRF

greeted all distinguished guests, accomplished women and young participants attending the event

and said that empowering women means giving them equal and better opportunities in every field. She added

that it is not limited to welfare schemes. It is about leadership, dignity and self-reliance, she added.

Delhi CM further said women's empowerment has always been a key focus of her Government and of

Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Referring to the Nari Shakti Mission, she said the initiative aims to ensure equal participation of women in all sectors.

The event was inaugurated by Union Women and Child Development Minister Annapurna Devi as the chief guest, while Adani Foundation Chairperson Priti Adani was the guest of honour.

The Chief Minister said her Government has completed one year in Delhi, and in this duration, several women-focused schemes have been implemented in the capital.

She credited the leadership of Prime Minister

Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and the support of Union Women and Child Development Minister Annapurna Devi.

She said the Government is firmly committed to ensuring respect and safety for women. Equal opportunity, she said, is a clear promise of the administration.

The Chief Minister expressed confidence that the conference would inspire women who have brought change through courage and determination. She urged everyone to take a pledge to take the Nari Shakti Mission to greater heights.

CONTINUED ON >> P4



CM Rekha inaugurates power infrastructure projects

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Thursday inaugurated a slew of major projects to transform the power infrastructure in the national Capital and preserve the heritage of historical places like Chandni Chowk.

She launched the project to place overhead electricity cables underground in the Chandni Chowk area. This will enhance the locality's visual appeal and improve the safety and reliability of power supply.

In addition, the Chief Minister laid the foundation stone for a 66/11 kV GIS grid sub-station at Mandoli and four Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) projects at Shivalik, Dwarka and Goyla Khurd.

She stated that the Delhi Government is committed to advancing development while safeguarding heritage, ensuring that modern and efficient facilities are provided across the Capital. South Delhi MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, Cabinet Minister Ashish Sood, Councillor Suman Gupta and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

As regards Chandni Chowk, dangling overhead wires across 28 historic streets and lanes of the area will be removed by the Delhi Government and BSES Yamuna Power Limited (BYPL).

At an estimated cost of approximately ₹159.75 crore, around 52.5 kilometres of overhead power lines will be laid underground.

The project includes installation of 500 new feeder pillars, decorative street light-



ing poles, and the use of modern 'digital twin' technology for monitoring.

The work will be carried out in phases during night hours to minimise disruption to daily life and traffic move-

ment. Around 10,000 consumers will directly benefit. The initiative is expected to reduce fire hazards and weather-related power disruptions, enhance safety, improve supply reliability and

significantly beautify the historic precinct.

Rekha Gupta observed that Chandni Chowk is not merely a marketplace but a living symbol of India's cultural, historical and commercial her-

itage. For years, overhead wiring had not only marred its appearance but also posed safety risks. Through this project, the area will become safer, more organised and aesthetically refined.

The chief minister also said that while an earlier assurance of ₹100 crore had been made for development works in the Chandni Chowk Lok Sabha constituency, the allocation could now rise to ₹1,000 crore based on emerging needs.

Redevelopment of 28 roads has already commenced under the current phase. The Chief Minister reiterated her commitment to the comprehensive development of Old Delhi.

Rekha Gupta noted that she has retained charge of the Shahjahanabad Redevelopment Board to ensure effective resolution of

issues related to roads, parking, encroachments, public conveniences and other civic amenities.

The objective is to transform this historic area into a well-planned, tourism-friendly and commercially vibrant zone equipped with modern infrastructure.

On power projects, a 66/11 kV GIS grid sub-station is being constructed at Mandoli with a capacity of 63 MVA. The project involves an investment of approximately ₹55.5 crore and is targeted for completion within 18 months. Around 1.5 lakh consumers are expected to benefit.

Residents of Mandoli, Harsh Vihar, Bank Colony and adjoining areas will receive more stable and reliable electricity supply. Key institutions such as Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital, Mandoli

jail and the DTC EV bus depot will also receive assured power. The commissioning of the grid will significantly reduce voltage fluctuations and frequent outages.

In view of rising electricity demand during the summer months, the Chief Minister also laid the foundation for four new BESS projects under BRPL. These projects will add a total capacity of 55.5 MW / 111 MWh, benefiting approximately 2.22 lakh consumers.

Beneficiaries include around 50,000 consumers in Shivalik, 1,28,000 in Dwarka (G-5), 16,000 in Dwarka (G-7), and 28,000 in Goyla Khurd. All projects are targeted for commissioning before March 2027. These battery systems will help reduce peak-hour load shedding, improve voltage stability and strengthen the grid.

Shirtless protest: Delhi, Himachal Pradesh Police standoff over 3 arrested Youth Congress activists

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

What should have been a procedural arrest has turned into a major jurisdictional flash point. Delhi police officials in plain clothes picked up three Youth Congress activists, in connection with the 'shirtless' protest during the India AI summit at Bharat Mandapam, from a resort in Shimla, triggering an FIR by Himachal Pradesh police alleging abduction and procedural violations.

The high-voltage drama, which saw vehicles detained, an FIR registered, and officers questioned on procedure, has triggered a rare public face-off between the Delhi Police and Himachal Pradesh Police over the manner of arrest and seizure of CCTV footage from a private resort in Rohru.



The confrontation saw the Delhi Police team stopped multiple times by Shimla Police despite securing a transit remand from a local court. The confrontation between Delhi Police and Himachal Pradesh Police lasted nearly 24 hours before ending early Thursday, when the Delhi team was finally allowed to leave with three Youth Congress activists.

After medical examina-

tions at Deendyal Upadhyay Zonal Hospital late Wednesday night, the three accused and Delhi Police personnel were taken to the residence of Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate (ACJM II) Ekansh Kapil at around 1.30 am. The court granted transit remand, clearing their movement to Delhi. But early Thursday morning, Shimla Police again intercepted the convoy in the city and told

some officers to stay back and cooperate in a kidnapping case registered against the Delhi Police team.

The Shimla Police told the Delhi Police that only three of its personnel can move the accused back to the national capital, while the rest would have to stay in Shimla to help in the investigation over the kidnapping case registered against them.

Delhi Police refused, saying the safety of the accused was their responsibility. The convoy was then stopped again at the Shoghi border around 4 am. Shimla Police barricaded one of the Delhi Police vehicles, saying it contained CCTV footage and other digital evidence linked to the case. During the standoff, the Shimla police sought the keys to the barricaded vehicle, but the Delhi Police refused to hand them over.

Several members of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU) were detained after they tried to take out a protest rally towards the Ministry of Education on Thursday afternoon. According to sources, JNUSU president Aditi Mishra, former JNUSU president Nitish Kumar and several other protesters have been detained. However, there was no immediate confirmation from the Delhi Police on the detentions.

The protesting students assembled at Sabarmati T Point on the campus on Thursday afternoon and began moving in groups carrying placards and banners. As they tried to take the rally outside the campus, they were stopped by the heavy security deployment at the strongly barricaded university gate. The organisers said the

march was aimed at addressing the alleged "institutional neglect" in higher education institutions. Security personnel have been deployed inside and outside the university amid continuing tensions after a JNUSU protest turned violent on Monday. The protest had led to incidents of stoneling and physical altercations between the JNUSU and the ABVP.

Delhi Police has also registered an FIR against JNUSU office-bearers in connection

JNU protest: Several student leaders detained

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

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Delhi Police has also registered an FIR against JNUSU office-bearers in connection

with the incident. The JNUSU had been protesting over allegations of caste discrimination on campus and seeking stronger implementation of University Grants Commission regulations. They have also demanded enactment of the "Rohith Vemula Act", increased funding for public institutions, and the resignation of the JNU Vice-Chancellor.

The Rohith Vemula Act is proposed legislation aimed at eliminating caste-based discrimination in higher educa-

tion institutions. Reacting to the developments in JNU, RJD's Rajya Sabha MP Manoj Jha said on X that reports of a sudden security deployment in and around the university have understandably caused anxiety among students and faculty.

"I have said it earlier and repeat that universities are spaces of ideas, not uncertainty, and any such action without clear communication unsettles the academic environment. At this moment, the authorities owe the campus community clarity and dialogue. A confident democracy governs its universities through trust, not opacity. Jai Hind," Jha said.

According to visuals shared on social media, the university gate could be seen strongly barricaded amid heavy security deployment even as the protesters were trying to take the rally outside the campus.

From the Last Mile to Every Smile: Rekha Government Realizing PM Modi's Antyodaya Vision, ₹5 Meals with Dignity at 'Atal Canteens'

From Smart to Sensitive Delhi: One Year of Service and Good Governance

"With everyone's support, we are committed to development for all. The past 11 years have been dedicated to public welfare. Bringing a smile to the face of the poor is my true worship and my resolve"

- Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi
Embracing this very mantra of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the 365 days of the present Delhi Government have not merely marked the passage of time—they stand as a living testament to positive change in the lives of ordinary citizens. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Smt. Rekha Gupta, it has been proven that when policy is clear and intent is sincere, even long-pending tasks can be accomplished.

The Rise of Antyodaya: Dignity Through 'Atal Canteens'

"Inspired by the mantra of service, good governance, and welfare of the poor given by Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, Atal Canteens will ensure that no one in Delhi goes to bed hungry"

- Rekha Gupta, Chief Minister, Delhi
One of the flagship achievements of the Delhi Government is the launch of the 'Atal Canteen' initiative. Through this scheme, lakhs of workers across the city are being provided hygienic and nutritious meals for just ₹5, bringing real relief and meaningful change to the lives of the poor and working class.

To ensure corruption-free operations, each canteen is equipped with CCTV surveillance and a digital token system. The government has set a target of establishing 100 Atal Canteens; 46 are already operational, with the remaining being rolled out in phases.

Food with Dignity - A Promise Fulfilled

Providing nutritious meals at just ₹5 is not merely assistance—it is the protection of self-respect.

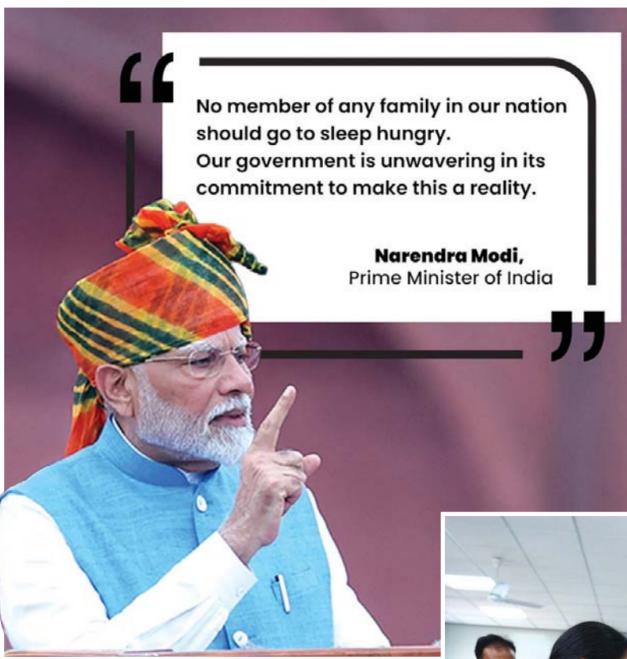
- Each plate includes:**
- Fresh rotis
 - Dal
 - Seasonal vegetables
 - Rice
 - Pickle

With an average of 700-800 calories and 20-25 grams of protein, the meal provides essential energy to workers while ensuring their right to eat with dignity. The symbolic ₹5 contribution reinforces that this is not charity, but respectful support.

Every Plate Ensures Quality and Nutrition

The grand launch of the 'Atal Canteen' scheme took place in Delhi on the 101st birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The Chief Minister and Union Minister Shri Manohar Lal personally dined at the canteen, sending a strong message of transparency and quality assurance.

Each canteen follows a standardized menu including nutritious staples such as dal, rice, roti, and vegetables. Facilities include modern kitchens, LPG-based cooking systems, and industrial RO water plants.



No member of any family in our nation should go to sleep hungry. Our government is unwavering in its commitment to make this a reality.

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India



that citizens receive safe, nutritious, and high-quality meals every day.

From a Smart City to a Sensitive City

In the past year, Delhi has not only advanced infrastructure development but also set an example of sensitive and citizen-centric governance. The government has allocated ₹700 crore for the development of slum clusters and ₹5,000 crore for metro expansion. Special emphasis has also been placed on improving public transport and environmental protection.

At the heart of this broader vision lies the 'Atal Canteen' initiative—ensuring that development reaches the last person in the line: the poor, the laborers, and the working class. The scheme reflects that Delhi's progress is not limited to physical infrastructure, but is equally committed to improving lives and expanding opportunities for all.

Under the leadership of Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, the government has demonstrated that Delhi is not merely a concrete metropolis, but a compassionate city that cares for its most vulnerable citizens. Instead of resources being spent on symbols of excess, public funds are now directed toward welfare and strengthening Delhi's infrastructure.

This first year marks only the beginning—the resolve to make Delhi the best city in the world continues.



A PLATE OF DIGNITY FOR WORKERS

- Target of 100 canteens
- 71 operational
- Nutritious meal at ₹5
- Digital transparency and quality monitoring

UP CM Yogi, Governor Kotaro hold talks to boost ties

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday held discussions with Yamanashi Prefecture Governor Kotaro Nagasaki to further strengthen UP-Yamanashi cooperation.

In a post on X, Adityanath said, "In Yamanashi Prefecture, Japan, held meaningful deliberations with Kotaro Nagasaki, Governor, to further strengthen Uttar Pradesh-Yamanashi cooperation and advance our growing strategic partnership." An MoU was signed to deepen collaboration in industry, tourism and vocational education, with a strong focus on green hydrogen, clean energy innova-



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during a visit to Fanuc Corporation in Yamanashi in Japan PTI

tion, and technology exchange, the post said. "Uttar Pradesh is actively developing IIT Kanpur as a Centre of Excellence in Green

Hydrogen to enhance energy self-reliance and advance Prime Minister Shri @narendramodiji's vision for a sustainable future," the

post added. "I welcome the Honourable Governor's proposal to lead a delegation of 200 CEOs to Uttar Pradesh in August, which will further

accelerate industrial partnerships and investment momentum", the post said.

During the 'UP Investment Road Show' in Yamanashi, Adityanath presented the State's new development policies and investment potential to the global industrial community.

In his address, he said UP has transformed its governance approach from reactive to proactive and this transformation has become the foundation of the state's rapid economic progress.

During the programme, he said that a historic MoU has been signed between Uttar Pradesh and Yamanashi on green hydrogen technology. Under this agreement, students from higher technical institutions

of UP will receive training in Japan and the technology will be implemented in the state's industry, public transport and energy sectors.

Adityanath said that the state's delegation participated in several Government-to-Government and Government-to-business level meetings in Tokyo, where, with the support of the Indian Embassy, extensive dialogue was held with Japanese industry groups.

He further expressed confidence that cooperation between UP and Yamanashi will take India-Japan relations to new heights and play an important role in achieving energy self-reliance and making technology accessible to the common people.

AP crackdown intensifies as adulterated milk kills 5

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Amaravati

The Andhra Pradesh (AP) Government stepped up surveillance and enforcement measures across the State following the detection of a cluster of acute renal failure cases in East Godavari district, allegedly linked to adulterated milk.

The inspections and surveillance follow five deaths and hospitalisations reported in Rajamahendravaram.

Preliminary epidemiological investigations indicated milk consumption as the probable source of exposure in the reported cluster of cases. "The Andhra Government has intensi-

fied surveillance and enforcement measures after detecting a cluster of acute renal failure cases in Rajamahendravaram, East Godavari district, with preliminary epidemiological findings indicating milk consumption as the probable source of exposure," said an official release on Thursday.

The State Government has launched inspections at milk sales and storage centres, collecting around 150 samples from across the State for laboratory testing.

Food safety officials have also sent 150 samples from various centres to recognised laboratories in Hyderabad, Chennai and Kakinada for detailed analysis.

Most Tamil Nadu parties request Assembly polls in single phase, says ECI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Chennai

Ahead of the Tamil Nadu Assembly polls, CEC Gyanesh Kumar on Thursday held consultations with political parties and most of them requested that the elections be conducted in a single phase, EC officials said.

Parties sought stringent measures to curb the use of money power and distribution of freebies during elections, they said.

Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, Election

Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu, Vivek Joshi, along with State Chief Electoral Officer Archana Patnaik and senior officials of the Commission, held discussions with recognised national and state-level political parties.

Most political parties appreciated the EC for the peaceful and smooth conduct of the Special Intensive Revision of the electoral rolls in Tamil Nadu, the officials said. "Most political parties requested the EC to conduct elections in single phase," they added.

Organ donation supreme service to humanity: CM Rekha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Propagating the noble cause of organ donation, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Thursday said it is not merely a medical procedure but the greatest gift of giving new life to another. A pledge taken by one individual can bring a new ray of hope to many families, she added.

The Chief Minister made this assertion after attending the 'Vardaan' film festival organised by the Dadhichi Deh Dan Samiti.

Rekha Gupta said raising awareness in society about sensitive subjects such as organ and body donation through art and cinema is



both inspiring and commendable. Such initiatives foster progressive thinking in society and strengthen the spirit of service and dedication towards humanity.

and more and more people should draw inspiration from it and associate themselves with this noble cause.

She further stated that at the national level, the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO) is working to facilitate organ donation.

However, Delhi previously lacked a structured and official mechanism in this regard.

Recognising this need, the Delhi Government established the State Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (SOTTO), which has emerged as a robust platform for those willing to pledge for organ donation. She informed that since

September, more than 800 individuals have registered on this platform. Nevertheless, there remains a need for widespread public awareness in this field.

The Chief Minister appealed to those present at the programme to become aware themselves and to spread awareness within society so that more and more people may become part of this noble service.

She reiterated that organ donation is the highest service to humanity and the most sacred means of giving life even after one's own.

Praising the Dadhichi Deh Dan Samiti for its years of public awareness efforts, she said that the dedication of its

volunteers is a source of inspiration for society. This initiative to take the message to the masses through art and films will undoubtedly play a significant role in transforming organ donation into a true people's movement.

Union Minister of State Harsh Malhotra, Om Prakash Sharma of Vishwas Nagar, Padma Shri awardee Manoj Joshi, Narendra Thakur, Akhil Bharatiya Sah Prachar Pramukh of the Rashtriya Swayam sevak Sangh Alok Kumar, Patron of the Dadhichi Deh Dan Samiti Mahesh Pant, President of the Samiti, and other distinguished guests also attended the festival.

India's UPI set to go live in Israel

He noted that the agreements reflect India's commitment to leveraging technology for inclusive growth while strengthening trusted global partnerships. During wide-ranging talks in Jerusalem with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the two leaders agreed to elevate their long-standing strategic partnership. They also welcomed progress in negotiations toward a mutually beneficial Free Trade Agreement, aimed at unlocking new trade and investment opportunities. Beyond digital payments, the visit saw the signing of multiple Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) across artificial intelligence, cyber security, defence, agriculture, education, water management, fisheries, geophysical exploration, and cultural exchange. A key highlight was the launch of a new initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies, to be steered by the National Security Advisors of both countries. Cooperation is set to deepen in AI, quantum computing, semiconductors, biotechnology, and space technologies.

The leaders also welcomed ongoing collaboration between ISRO and the Israel Space Agency, with a focus on expanding joint research and encouraging greater industry participation in space innovation. In cyber security, both sides endorsed the establishment of an India-Israel Cyber Centre of Excellence in India and agreed on a structured roadmap for strengthening cyber resilience, including in the financial sector.

Agriculture and water management — long-standing pillars of India-Israel cooperation — received renewed attention. The two leaders reviewed the progress of 35 Centres of Excellence operating across India, which have trained more than a million farmers in advanced irrigation and crop management techniques. New fellowships and innovation platforms are expected to further accelerate research collaboration and sustainable farming practices.

On the geopolitical front, both nations strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms and reaffirmed their shared resolve to combat extremism. In his statement, Prime Minister Modi stressed that India's security interests are closely tied to peace and stability in the Middle East. Expressing support for ongoing peace efforts in Gaza, he said humanity must never become a casualty of conflict.

The leaders also discussed connectivity initiatives such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and cooperation under the I2U2 framework involving India, Israel, the UAE, and the United States. These platforms are expected to bolster regional trade, infrastructure, and technological collaboration.

Prime Minister Modi's two-day visit — his second to Israel in nine years — included interactions with members of the Indian Jewish community and engagements with cultural and business leaders, underscoring the people-to-people dimension of the partnership.

With UPI poised to enter yet another international market and a broad spectrum of agreements signed, the India-Israel relationship is entering a technology-driven phase. As digital rails connect economies and innovation bridges continents, India's fintech architecture is no longer a domestic success story — it is becoming a global standard. From local QR codes to global corridors, India's digital revolution is fast transforming into a worldwide transaction.

SC imposes ban on NCERT Class 8 book

The bench said it was "nearly shocked" when one of the newspapers published an article regarding the release of the social science textbook with the chapter. It said that after the media report

was published, the apex court's secretary general was asked to verify whether such a publication was released by NCERT.

"Instead of having an introspection of what had been written in the book in the most reckless, irresponsible, contemptuous and motivated manner, the director (of NCERT) responded in writing defending the contents of the book," the bench said. It said on a prima facie examination of the book's content and read in conjunction with the administrative response received from the director, it seemed "there is a calculated move to undermine the institutional authority and demean the dignity of the judiciary".

It said that if allowed to go unchecked, it would erode the sanctity of judicial office and the estimation of the public at large and more importantly, within the impressionable minds of youth. The bench observed that the narrative contained in the book chooses not to dwell into any of the transformative initiatives and measures pioneered by the court, including streamlining the ease of access to justice, and the substantive contribution made by the judiciary towards the preservation of the democratic fabric. "This silence is particularly egregious given the sheer volume of high-ranking officials who have been censured by this very court in the past for corrupt practices, fraudulent activities and siphoning of public funds, etc," it said.

The bench said the choice of words and expressions in the book might never be a simplicit in inadvertence or bona fide error.

"We may, however, hasten to add that we do not propose to initiate the suo motu proceedings to stifle any legitimate critique or with a view to stop any individual or organisation from exercising their right to scrutinise public institutions, including the judiciary," it said.

"Given the serious consequences and an everlasting adverse impact on the independence and autonomy of the judiciary, such a misconduct would fall within the definition of criminal contempt under section 2(c) of the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971," it said.

It said that if found to be a deliberate move, it will undoubtedly amount to interfering with the administration of justice, besides scandalising the institution.

The bench asked the director of NCERT to produce the original records of minutes of meetings where the offending chapter was deliberated and finalised, and the names and credentials of the textbook development team responsible for drafting the chapter.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta tendered an unconditional and unqualified apology on behalf of the Department of School Education.

Mehta said the two individuals who prepared the chapter would never be associated with any activity of the ministry.

"There are 32 books that went into the market and which are being withdrawn. The rest of the books we are not circulating. The entire chapter would be re-visited by a new team," the top law officer said, adding, "We can't teach our class 8 students that justice is being denied in the country." The bench posted the matter for further hearing on March 11.

The National Council of Educational Research & Training apologised on Wednesday for "inappropriate content" in the social science textbook and said it would be rewritten in consultation with appropriate authorities. A section titled "Corruption in the Judiciary" in the new textbook says corruption, a massive backlog of cases, and the lack of an adequate number of judges are among the challenges faced by the judicial system. It also states that judges are bound by a code of conduct that governs not only their behaviour in court, but also how they conduct themselves outside it.

FROM PAGE - 1 PM Modi seeks accountability over...

Pradhan was in Jamshedpur to take part in a ceremony where President Droupadi Murmu laid the foundation stone for a Jagannath spiritual centre. "I am very sad at what has happened and express regret... There was no intention to insult the judiciary. An inquiry will be conducted and accountability fixed. Action will be taken against those involved in drafting the chapter. As soon as we got to know (about it), the circulation of the textbooks was put on hold. In a democratic country like India, the judiciary is supreme and we have utmost respect for it. We have taken the issue very seriously. The court's directives will be complied with," he told reporters in Jamshedpur.

NCERT also apologised for "inappropriate content" after facing the Supreme Court's ire over the chapter and said the book will be rewritten in consultation with appropriate authorities.

Women's empowerment top priority: Rekha...

"Every woman should become self-reliant. Every woman should live with dignity. Every woman should lead in her chosen field," she said.

She also thanked The Pioneer and CRF for organising the conference on women's empowerment. She said such platforms help strengthen public awareness and policy focus. The conference focused on increasing women's participation in social, economic and public life. The Chief Minister said a collective effort is needed to build a more inclusive and empowered Delhi.

On the occasion earlier in the day, Annapurna Devi said that women-led development remains at the centre of the Government's policy framework to ensure greater access to opportunities, financial independence and improved quality of life for women across the country. Addressing the inaugural session of the 'Sashakt Nari-Viksit Bharat', Annapurna Devi highlighted several Government initiatives, like Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, Startup India and PM SVANidhi, which have strengthened women financially and enhanced their confidence and self-reliance. She also said that the proposed SHE-Mart initiative will provide a dedicated marketing platform for women and promote their products under the 'Local for Global' vision.

The Pioneer Group Chairman Prashant Tewari, Director Kushan Mitra and CRF President Shishir Priyadarshi were also present on the occasion.

CBI registers fresh case, raids Anil Ambani's...

In its complaint, the Bank of Baroda has accused Ambani and RCOM of systematic misutilisation of borrowed funds contrary to sanctioned purposes. Ambani and RCOM were also accused of manipulation of books of account to conceal irregularities and misrepresent financial health, diversion of loan proceeds and recycling and layering of funds to camouflage true fund flows, among others.

"RCOM, Reliance Infratel Ltd (RITL), and Reliance Telecom Ltd (RTL), all related parties, cumulatively received ₹31,580 crore from banks and financial institutions. "Of these, ₹6,265.85 crore was utilised for repayment of other banks' loans and ₹5,501.56 crore for payment to related/connected parties, while ₹3,674.85 crore was invested in fixed deposits and mutual funds. These investments were liquidated immediately and utilised for payments to related and non-related parties, which indicated that utilisation of the loan amount was not as per the terms of sanction," the complaint alleged. The bank has alleged loan funds of ₹1,783.65 crore raised by RITL were utilised by

RCOM through Reliance Communications Infrastructure Ltd (RIL) to pay its liability or transferred to related parties.

"The account was classified as NPA wef June 5, 2017, due to persistent defaults in repayment obligations and irregularities in fund utilisation. Subsequent forensic investigation confirmed diversion and misappropriation of funds, establishing fraudulent intent," it alleged. The complaint, now part of the FIR, also alleged there were transactions between RCOM, Reliance Infratel and Reliance Telecom which amounts to a clear diversion of funds obtained as a loan from multiple banks.

"There are suspicious transactions related to and non-related parties. There are numerous assignments in the books of Reliance Communications Limited, Reliance Infratel Limited and Reliance Telecom Ltd wherein high-value receivable and payable balances were transferred to corresponding parties to the assignment," it alleged. "...it is submitted that the borrower company (Reliance Communications) along with its Promoter and Chairman (Anil Ambani) in pursuance of a well knitted criminal conspiracy and with dishonest intention of causing wrongful loss to our bank and wrongful gain to themselves diverted/siphoned off the funds disbursed to them, dishonestly misappropriated the loan amount," said CBI.

The CBI has already registered a case against RCOM based on a complaint lodged by the SBI, which is the lead bank of a consortium consisting of 11 banks. "However, the Bank of Baroda was not part of the said consortium, and this is a different loan availed by the Reliance Communications from Bank of Baroda, the then Vijaya Bank, and the then Dena Bank," the spokesperson said.

Earlier in the day, Reliance Group chairman Ambani appeared before the Enforcement Directorate here for a second round of questioning in connection with an alleged bank fraud-linked money laundering case. Officials in the agency said they have recorded his statement under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). Ambani was first questioned by the ED in August 2025.

The probe pertains to an alleged over Rs 40,000 crore worth bank fraud by his group company, Reliance Communications.

Fly easy: DGCA allows free changes within 48...

Besides, there are changes with respect to norms for ticket cancellations due to a medical emergency faced by the passenger. The amendments to the Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR) for 'Refund of Airline Tickets to Passengers of Public Transport Undertakings' come against the backdrop of the rising passenger complaints about not receiving refunds on time.

The ticket refund issue also got highlighted during the IndiGo flight disruptions in December 2025 and at that time, the civil aviation ministry had directed the airline to complete the refunds within a specified timeline. The revised CAR was issued on February 24. Now, the airlines have been asked to provide a 'Look-in option' for a period of 48 hours to passengers after booking tickets.

"During this period, a passenger can cancel or amend the ticket without any additional charges, except for the normal prevailing fare for the revised flight for which the ticket is sought to be amended. "This facility shall not be available for a flight whose departure is less than 7 days for domestic flights and 15 days for international flights from the booking date when the ticket is booked directly through the airline's website," the regulator said. Beyond 48 hours of initial booking time, this option would not be available, and the passenger would have to pay the relevant cancellation fees for amendment.

In a significant move, the DGCA said that airlines should not levy any additional charge for correc-

tion in the name of the same person when the error is pointed out by the passenger within 24 hours of making the booking, when the ticket is booked directly through the airline's website.

According to DGCA, in the event of ticket cancellations due to a medical emergency, where the passenger or a family member listed on the same PNR gets admitted/hospitalised during the travel period, airlines may provide either a refund or a credit shell. "For all other situations, refunds will be issued once an opinion on the passenger's fitness to travel certificate is received from an airline's Aerospace Medicine specialist/ DGCA empanelled Aerospace Medicine specialist," it said.

In December 2025, scheduled airlines received a total of 29,212 passenger-related complaints and 7.5 per cent of them were related to refunds. During that month, domestic carriers carried over 1.43 crore passengers, as per DGCA data.

India is one of the world's fastest-growing civil aviation markets, and domestic airlines carried over 16.69 crore passengers in 2025.

Carney's India visit aims to reset strategic ties

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) described the visit as taking place at an "important juncture" in bilateral relations. It said the two leaders will review progress across key pillars of the India-Canada strategic partnership and exchange views on regional and global developments. Trade, energy, and technology are expected to dominate the agenda. Officials indicate that cooperation in critical minerals, clean energy transitions, artificial intelligence, agriculture, higher education, and research innovation will also feature prominently in discussions. Carney's first stop will be Mumbai, where he is scheduled to engage with leading Indian and Canadian corporate executives, financial leaders, and innovators. The visit underscores Ottawa's interest in strengthening commercial ties with one of the world's fastest-growing major economies.

The Canadian Prime Minister will arrive in New Delhi on Sunday, with wide-ranging bilateral talks set for Monday. Both leaders will also participate in the India-Canada CEOs Forum, signalling a push to translate political goodwill into tangible economic outcomes.

The MEA noted that Modi and Carney had previously interacted on the sidelines of global summits in Kananaskis and Johannesburg last year, laying the groundwork for renewed engagement. Their forthcoming meeting is expected to reaffirm a shared commitment to a "constructive and balanced partnership."

Security cooperation and counter-extremism are likely to form a sensitive yet crucial part of the dialogue. India has consistently emphasised that freedom of expression cannot extend to supporting separatism or violence against another sovereign nation. Canada's recent signals indicating a firmer stance against extremist activities are being interpreted in New Delhi as a positive step toward rebuilding trust.

Strategic analysts say the reset in ties reflects broader geopolitical realities. With global supply chains shifting and democratic nations seeking resilient partnerships, both India and Canada stand to benefit from closer coordination in trade diversification, clean energy, and critical mineral supply chains. Prime Minister Modi's visit to Canada last year for the G7 Summit in Kananaskis marked the first high-level breakthrough after months of diplomatic chill. The upcoming visit by Carney is expected to consolidate that momentum. As both nations seek to move beyond past friction, the renewed dialogue carries symbolic and strategic weight. If successful, it could signal not only a thaw in bilateral ties but also a shared resolve to curb extremism, deepen economic integration, and strengthen democratic cooperation in an increasingly uncertain global order.



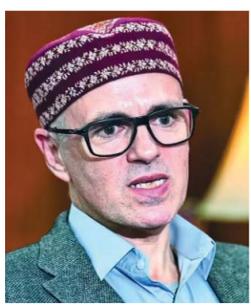
Modi's Israel visit not good for India: Mehbooba Mufti



PDP president Mehbooba Mufti on Thursday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel was against the country's policy and not a good sign for Mahatma Gandhi's India. She called Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu a "criminal" who is afraid of visiting many countries lest he be arrested.

Development needs oxygen of peace: CM Omar Abdullah

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday said peace is crucial to development, asserting that places in the Union territory that were once synonymous with conflict, are now beacons of harmony. "Development requires the oxygen of peace. My Government's primary objective is to provide you with a transparent, and stable environment," CM said.



Congress starts organisational restructuring in Nagaland



The Opposition Congress is aiming to transform its organisation in Nagaland through a grassroots-driven, time-bound restructuring process, a senior leader said on Thursday. Congress Seva Dal chief organiser Lalji Desai said efforts are being made as a part of the 'Sangathan Srijan Abhiyan'.

Mizoram CM tables ₹17,470 crore budget for 2026-27

Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Thursday presented a ₹17,469.91 crore Budget for the 2026-2027 fiscal in the State Assembly, with focus on improving social infrastructure, connectivity and the agriculture sector. Presenting his third Budget, Lalduhoma, who also holds the finance portfolio, said his Government will continue to implement its flagship *Bana Kaih* (hand holding) scheme to improve livelihoods of farmers.



NCERT issue a sensitive matter: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The BJP on Thursday termed the controversial chapter in an NCERT textbook about "offending contents" on corruption in the judiciary a "sensitive matter", and said it respects the country's judiciary and takes pride in its impartial functioning.

The comments came after the Supreme Court imposed a blanket ban on the Class 8 NCERT book carrying a chapter on this issue and ordered the seizure of all physical copies, along with the takedown of its digital forms. It observed that there appeared to be a "well-orchestrated conspiracy" to defame the judiciary.

Asked about the issue, BJP national spokesperson Sabmit Patra said, "So far as the NCERT issue is concerned, it's a sensitive matter. I would like to put forth the party's stand as its spokesperson that there is no other institution, I would say not only in India but in this whole world, that is as

Justice denied

Multiple reasons, such as a lack of an adequate, complicated legal procedures, and poor judicial system in our country has a massive impact on the National Judicial Data Centre (March 2025):

Pending cases (approximate):	Courts
81,000	
62,40,000	
4,70,00,000	

need not be memorised.

If pending cases shows part of the problem, long time it takes to resolve a case in court, for example, nearly three-fourths of pending cases resolved for over a year, and half of them or more than three years. Some cases have been solved for more than 50 years!

People feel that their case has been heard if justice has been delivered in a timely manner, not resolved within a reasonable time.

independent and as deserving as the Indian judiciary is." "We all have a feeling of great respect and pride towards the Indian judiciary, and this is the feeling in everyone's heart," he told reporters at the BJP headquarters here.

Patra said that during the hearing of the matter in the Supreme Court on Wednesday, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta also asserted that the

Government is with the judiciary and stands by it. "And, we also do 'pranam' to the judiciary. Given the impartiality with which the Indian judiciary functions, we should always respect and stand with the judiciary of the country," the BJP leader added.

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Wednesday strongly objected to the chapter in the NCERT's Class 8 social science curriculum, complaint



ing the syllabus-setting body to withdraw the contentious textbook from its website. A three-judge bench comprising the CJ and justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi took suo motu cognisance of the "objectionable" statements about the judiciary in the new textbook after senior advocate Kapil Sibal, alongside Abhishek Singhvi, mentioned the matter for urgent consideration. The NCERT on Wednesday

apologised for "inappropriate content" after facing the Supreme Court's ire over a chapter talking about judicial corruption in a Class 8 textbook and said the book concerned will be rewritten in consultation with appropriate authorities. The council, responsible for school education curriculum, also put on hold the circulation of the textbook, hours after it took the book off its website.

Rahul slams PM over Youth Congress action, says India is not North Korea

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday strongly criticised the police action against his party's youth wing activists over the "shirtless protest", drawing a sharp parallel between the Government and the authoritarian regime in North Korea. "This is India, not North Korea," Gandhi, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, said in a social media post in Hindi and asserted that peaceful protest is the soul of democracy and not a crime.

He said the world's largest democracy is being slowly pushed in a direction where dissent is labelled as treason and asking questions is called a conspiracy.

When those in power start seeing themselves as the nation and dissent as the enemy - that is when democracy dies, Rahul Gandhi said. "In today's India, under the rule of a compromised PM, peaceful protest has been



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi

turned into the biggest crime. The world's largest democracy is being slowly pushed in a direction where dissent is labelled as treason and asking questions is called a conspiracy," the former Congress chief said. "Think about it, no matter the issue, if you raise your voice against those in power through constitutional means, then batons, lawsuits, and jail are almost a certainty," he said. Youth tormented by paper leaks raised their voices for

their future and were met with blows from batons, he claimed.

"The country's proud women wrestlers demanded a fair investigation into serious allegations against a powerful BJP leader. Their cries were defamed, their movement crushed, and they were forcibly removed from the streets.

"A peaceful demonstration took place at India Gate in support of a rape victim. The demand for justice was deemed an inconvenience to the system and dispersed," Rahul Gandhi said.

When the Youth Congress peacefully protested against a US Trade deal harmful to the country, they were branded "anti-national" and arrested, he said.

When ordinary people stood up against poisonous air, even concerns for the environment were dismissed as "politics" and suppressed, Rahul Gandhi said, adding that when farmers protested for their rights, they too were labelled anti-national.

Speaker Birla reconstitutes panel probing charges against Justice Yashwant Varma

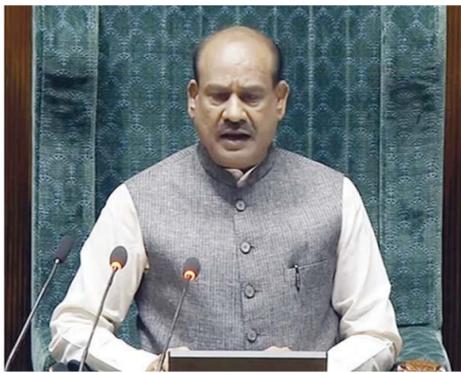
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has reconstituted a three-member committee set up to probe the grounds for the removal of Justice Yashwant Varma after burnt wads of cash were recovered from his residence here in March last year.

The committee has also been granted a three-month extension beginning February 26, a Lok Sabha secretariat official said on Thursday.

The speaker had constituted the committee on August 12 last year after admitting a multi-party notice for the removal of the Allahabad High Court judge, setting in motion the process of his impeachment.

"In partial modification of the notification... the Speaker, Lok Sabha, has reconstituted with effect from the 6th March, 2026, for the purpose of making an investigation into the grounds on which the removal of Justice Yashwant Varma of the Allahabad High Court is prayed for, a Committee consisting of the following three Members: 1. Hon'ble Justice Aravind Kumar, Supreme Court of India; 2. Hon'ble Justice Shree Chandrashekhar, Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court; and 3. Shri BV Acharya, Senior Advocate, Karnataka High Court," a notification issued by Lok Sabha



Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla

Secretary General Utpal Kumar Singh said on Wednesday.

While Justice Kumar and Acharya were also part of the previous committee, Justice Chandrashekhar is a new member. He has replaced Madras High Court Chief Justice Manindra Mohan Shrivastava.

Justice Shrivastava demits office on March 5 on attaining the age of 62 years, the retirement age of high court judges.

Separately, Union law ministry sources said the probe committee has sought the assistance of one more advocate in completing the task.

The committee proceedings are held in the way courts function, where the accused are at liberty to defend themselves.

Following the recovery of

cash, Justice Varma, then a judge of the Delhi High Court, was repatriated to the Allahabad High Court, his parent high court.

The Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968 provides the legal framework in India for investigating allegations of misbehaviour or incapacity against Supreme Court and high court judges and provides for a probe committee to investigate the charges.

The Supreme Court and high court judges, besides the chief election commissioner (CEC), can only be removed by Parliament through a legal framework prescribed in the Judges (Inquiry) Act. So far, no judge or CEC has been removed, though there were attempts in the past to sack two high court judges.

Digital platforms must take responsibility for online content: Vaishnav

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnav on Thursday asserted that digital platforms must take responsibility for the content they host and ensure fair revenue sharing with content creators and news organisations, cautioning that innovation will suffer if creators are denied due compensation.

Addressing the Digital News Publishers Association (DNPA) Conclave here, Vaishnav also underlined the need to regulate the use of AI-generated content, saying such material should not be generated without the consent of the person whose face, voice or personality is used.



Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav

"Platforms must take responsibility for the content that is hosted by them. The online safety of children and all citizens is the responsibility of the platforms," Vaishnav said, underlining that digital intermediaries have transformed

into powerful media outlets.

He stressed that intellectual property must be respected and fairly compensated, noting that society's progress in science, technology, arts, and literature depends on it. Digital platforms, he said,

should ensure fair revenue sharing not just with news organisations but also with independent creators in remote areas, influencers, professors, and researchers.

"I request all platforms to rethink their negotiation policies. If voluntary action is not taken, many countries have already shown that legal pathways exist," he said.

He said digital platforms need to "wake up" and understand the importance of reinforcing trust in the institutions that human society has built over thousands of years.

The minister for Information and Broadcasting, Railways and IT said the society is struggling with several issues that need to be addressed in the next decade - online safety,

authenticity of news content, safety of the children, protection against obscenity, protection against synthetically generated fake content.

"All these issues require decisive steps today because they are challenging and even destroying the fundamental tenets of our society: trust in institutions built over centuries," he said.

Similarly, Vaishnav said, every institution is based on the fundamental tenet that mutual trust defines the entire core of the institution. However, the way the world is evolving, that core tenet is under threat, particularly from emerging technologies such as deepfakes that can make people believe in events that never occurred, he said.

Telecom sector to be contributor; not just a consumer of high-speed data

GYANESHWAR DAYAL
New Delhi

The telecom sector is one of the fastest-growing sectors as India caters to 1.2 billion consumers. Union Minister for Communications Jyotiraditya Scindia on Wednesday gave a blueprint of the telecom sector. He highlighted rapid 5G expansion, the Government's preparations for rolling out 6G, and its approach to spectrum distribution. The Government also plans to rein in companies that fail to provide quality services.

In an informal interaction with the media, Scindia said India's 5G rollout has been among the fastest globally, with services now available in the vast majority of districts. He noted that the focus is now on its use in healthcare, education, agriculture, and manufacturing.

On 6G, the minister said India is positioning itself not just as a consumer but as a contributor to next-generation standards and intellectual property. He pointed to ongoing research collaborations between academia, startups, and telecom companies under a national 6G vision framework. He also said that the Government would look carefully at the health aspects associated with 6G, and only after a clean chit would it roll out the services, though it is going to take a few years.

The Government was also mulling satellite internet to bridge connectivity gaps in remote and underserved regions. Safeguarding national security and fair competition was a top priority. Satellite-based broadband, he added, would complement terrestrial networks rather



Union Minister for Communications Jyotiraditya Scindia

than replace them. On spectrum distribution, the minister reiterated the Government's commitment to transparent and market-driven mechanisms. He maintained that the spectrum is a national asset, and its allocation must balance revenue considerations with sectoral growth and consumer welfare.

Responding to concerns over call drops and inconsistent data speeds, the minister said the quality of telecom services remains a priority. He emphasised stricter monitoring, infrastructure upgrades, and accountability measures for service providers. The interaction underscored the Government's push to consolidate India's digital infrastructure while preparing for the next wave of technological transformation.

There were calls for stronger regulations and international partnerships to reduce emissions from industry and shipping. UN-Habitat Executive Director Anaclaudia Rossbach said rapid urbanisation and climate change are deepening inequality. She stressed that technology is essential for better planning and resilient cities. UNEP's Asia-Pacific Director Dechen Tsering said the real challenge is finance and called for reforming financial systems to align investments with climate and nature goals. As WSDS 2026 second day concludes, the message from global leaders is clear: the era of incrementalism is over. The decade demands transformative action grounded in science, solidarity and scalable solutions.

From Stocktake warning to Himalayan coalition: WSDS 2026 calls for transformative climate action

ABHINAV KUMAR JHA/GYANVI SHARMA
New Delhi

Global leaders, ministers and climate experts called for faster and deeper climate action at the 25th World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) in New Delhi, warning that incremental progress will not be enough to meet global targets.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a special message read out at the event, underlined India's civilisational ethos of living in harmony with nature.

He called for decisive and equitable climate action rooted in climate justice and support for the Global South.

The Silver Jubilee edition of the summit, organised by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI),

was inaugurated by Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav on Wednesday with the theme for this year as "Transformations: Vision, Voices and Values for Sustainable Development", signalling a shift from gradual change to systemic reform.

In his inaugural address, Yadav said the first Global Stocktake under the Paris Agreement shows the world is not on track to limit warming to 1.5°C. "This is not a crisis of science, but of speed and scale," he said.

He stressed that transformation must reshape energy systems, economic models and governance frameworks. He also launched HIM-CONNECT, an initiative to strengthen climate resilience and innovation in the



Himalayan region. Nitin Desai, Chairman of TERI, said the challenge today is not awareness but action. He urged regional Governments, corporates and households to focus on

implementation. TERI Director General Vibha Dhawan said the summit continues to bridge science, policy and practice while amplifying Global South voices. On second day of summit,

multilateralism and regional cooperation dominated discussions. Ministers from Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives highlighted the urgency of collective climate action.

Nepal's Environment Minister Madhav Prasad Chaulagain warned that the fragile Himalayan ecosystem is under severe stress. "Our mountains are melting, ecosystems are devastated, and people are suffering," he said.

A flagship session on building a Himalayan coalition stressed that climate risks in the region go beyond national borders.

With the Himalayas warming at nearly twice the global average, speakers called for joint biodiversity monitoring, coordinated conservation and a struc-

tured regional framework. Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla said technology, data and community participation must work together to build resilience.

The Montreal Protocol was cited as a successful example of global environmental cooperation. Participants noted that cutting short-lived climate pollutants such as methane, HFCs and black carbon can slow warming faster than many long-term measures.

Reducing methane was described as one of the quickest ways to limit temperature rise in the near term.

In another key session on greening manufacturing and trade, leaders discussed carbon pricing, emissions trading systems and cleaner technolo-

gies. There were calls for stronger regulations and international partnerships to reduce emissions from industry and shipping.

UN-Habitat Executive Director Anaclaudia Rossbach said rapid urbanisation and climate change are deepening inequality. She stressed that technology is essential for better planning and resilient cities. UNEP's Asia-Pacific Director Dechen Tsering said the real challenge is finance and called for reforming financial systems to align investments with climate and nature goals.

As WSDS 2026 second day concludes, the message from global leaders is clear: the era of incrementalism is over. The decade demands transformative action grounded in science, solidarity and scalable solutions.



States Focus

Driving out infiltrators top priority for BJP: Amit Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Araria (Bihar)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday exuded confidence that the BJP will win the upcoming Assembly polls in West Bengal, and drive out every single infiltrator from the State, which was among the ones worst affected by demographic change.

Shah said this in Araria district of Bihar, where he launched projects worth ₹175 crore of the Sashstra Seema Bal (SSB) and dedicated to the nation a couple of new border outposts.

It is the top priority of the BJP Government to drive out every single infiltrator from the country, who are not just a threat to national security, but also feed on welfare benefits meant for people, thereby diluting the impact schemes run by the Government could make, he said.

"Infiltration on a large scale also results in encroachments in bordering areas. We are committed to demolishing these. Infiltration also poses the threat of demographic change, which can wreak havoc with the culture, and even geography, of a region," Shah said.

The Narendra Modi Government at the Centre has decided to set up a high-powered committee to study and undo demographic change by identifying the most vulnerable areas, the Union home minister said.



Union Home Minister Amit Shah with Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary and others during a review meeting for the progress of the Vibrant Villages Programme in Araria district

"Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal are the states worst affected by demographic change. West Bengal goes to the polls soon. We are confident that the BJP will win the elections. And, it is the top priority of every BJP Government to drive out infiltrators," he asserted.

The BJP, which had been a marginal power in West Bengal until a decade ago, has over the years expanded its footprint and emerged as the principal challenger to the Trinamool Congress headed by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who seeks a fourth consecutive term in office.

The elections to the 294-member Assembly in West Bengal are likely to be held in March-April.

"The beginning of the crackdown on infiltrators, though, will be made in this

Seemanchal region of Bihar, where I had the chance to stay for four days during the assembly elections held a few months ago. I thank the people of the state for their resounding mandate to the NDA," Shah said.

The BJP had contested the polls on the issue of infiltration, notwithstanding the criticism from the opponents, he said.

"Flushing out infiltrators is as much a part of our agenda in Bihar as the welfare of people. I promise to the people of the state and the entire country that every single infiltrator would be driven out before we next approach them for a fresh mandate," Shah said.

The SSB has an important role to play in checking infiltration, he noted.

Responding to Shah's statement, Opposition parties alleged that it was

tantamount to "targeting Muslims" ahead of the polls in West Bengal, where the minority community has a sizeable population.

"We always knew that the Home Minister had West Bengal polls in mind while touring Seemanchal. But he must not defame the people of the State, who remained loyal towards India during the traumatising Partition, by branding them as infiltrators," said AIMIM State president and MLA Akhtarul Iman.

CPI(M) Liberation MLA Sandeep Saurav said, "Why is Amit Shah still whining about infiltration when not a single infiltrator could be traced in the mammoth SIR? He just wants to insult Muslims".

Shah also said at the Araria function that guarding the borders is easy where proper fencing is in place, and relations with the neighbouring country are friendly. However, a different approach is needed when the boundary is porous, he said.

"I would, therefore, urge top officials of the SSB and other agencies concerned to sit together and prepare an SOP for such areas. It is essential that our jawans manning the borders maintain good relations with the inhabitants of villages situated along the borders. Their feedback would come in handy to check smuggling and narcotics trade." Shah said.

Shah to address rally in Punjab on March 14

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Chandigarh

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will address a 'Badlav' rally in Punjab's Moga on March 14, State BJP working president Ashwani Sharma said on Thursday.

Addressing the media, Sharma said everyone in Punjab sees the BJP as a reliable and credible alternative to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which, he said, the people have decided to throw.

He said the BJP is committed

Punjab, far from fulfilling electoral guarantees and promises, the AAP Government has failed to ensure the rule of law in Punjab, taking "U-turns" on each of its promises, Sharma alleged.

Sharma alleged that drugs, illegal mining and corruption are "rampant" in the State. "The health and education systems are deteriorating, and employees are not receiving salaries and pensions on time. Due to pending reimbursements, the State power utility and the Punjab Roadways are



to serving the people of Punjab, taking the State on the path of development, freeing it from the drug menace, bringing change in the lives of farmers and providing a corruption-free regime.

The rally is being seen as the beginning of the BJP's poll campaign in Punjab, where Assembly elections are due in early 2027.

Lashing out at the Aam Aadmi Party Government in Punjab, Sharma alleged that the Bhagwant Mann dispensation had "failed" on every front.

In its four years of power in

facing heavy losses and have been unable to pay salaries for months," he claimed.

Culprits in sacrilege cases have not been punished yet, he said. Sharma also called into question the Mann dispensation's sincerity for failing to get the farmers a minimum support price on their crops. Traders are distressed by what Sharma described as "tax recovery terror" of the Punjab Government.

In four years, the AAP Government has neither built new roads in cities, towns, and villages nor even repaired potholes, he claimed.



CM MAJHI LAYS STONE FOR NEW ODISHA BHAVAN

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Thursday laid the foundation stone for a new Odisha Bhavan in New Delhi's Chanakyapuri area, an official statement said. The proposed building, to be constructed at an estimated cost of ₹93.27 crore, will reflect the State's rich history, art and culture. The previous structure was demolished as it had become old and unsafe, the statement by the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said. The new building will have three basements, a ground floor, and six stores. It will house 45 suites equipped with modern facilities.



BIHAR GOVT TO PROBE PATNA METRO TUNNELLING CRACKS

Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Sinha on Thursday assured the Assembly that cracks, which have appeared in several buildings along the Ashok Rajpath following the tunnelling work for Patna Metro, will be examined on priority.

Cracks have appeared in a number of structures in the area, including the iconic Wheeler Senate House of Patna University. The building, known for its Doric columns framing the entrance, was inaugurated on March 20, 1926.

Andhra Pradesh working towards intra-linking of rivers within State: CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Amaravati

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday said that the Government is working towards the intra-linking of rivers within the State, as per Prime Minister Narendra Modi's advice.

Addressing the Assembly, the chief minister highlighted that PM Modi observed that achieving intra-linking of rivers would finally make interlinking of rivers easy at the national level.

"When I spoke to the PM, he said intra-river linking, interlinking all the rivers in your (Andhra) State, then finally, it will be easy to link at the national level. We are working with that spirit," Naidu said.

Observing that the Government is very clear on this front, the CM said intra-linking rivers from Vamshadara to Penna will solve problems to a great extent in the southern State.

Naidu gave an assurance to the House to achieve intra-linking of all the rivers in Andhra Pradesh, adding that the Government will also take the responsibility of offering 'jala harati' (ritual) to Telugu Talli (Telugu mother) after accomplishing this goal.

On the importance being accorded to irrigation, the TDP supremo said ₹68,000 crore was spent on this sector during the previous TDP Government between 2014 and 2019 and another ₹20,000 crore until now in



Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu

the NDA Government. Naidu reminded that the people in the Godavari districts still pay their respects to British engineer Sir Arthur Cotton, who had irrigated swathes of the region by building a barrage on the Godavari River.

According to Naidu, "all irrigation projects" in the State were initiated during the NDA Governments, but not under Congress rule. He promised to supply water through the first phase of the Veligonda Project by July.

Accusing the previous YSRCP Government of neglecting irrigation projects in the North Andhra region, the CM said they will cost ₹2,000 crore and promised to complete them.

He also vowed to complete the Polavaram Project before Pushkaralu (Kumbh Mela-like pilgrimage) in 2027. Naidu said nearly 800 TMC

of water is available in the State as of today in all the irrigation projects, whose total capacity is over 1,300 TMC, amounting to 60 per cent of the total capacity.

Noting that rainfall forecasts are not rosy, he said water will be released from May 15 to enable early sowing of crops.

Hinting at Telangana, the CM emphasised that nobody would be at a loss with Andhra Pradesh's Polavaram Project and Nallamala Sagar. He said both the Telugu States will benefit. Reminding that he did not oppose Telangana's Kaleshwaram project, Naidu observed that it is not fair for the neighbouring Telugu State to oppose the Nallamala Sagar project now. Further, Naidu stressed that water security is the Government's responsibility, observing that there is no bigger development than providing tap water.

state," he said. The Chenab rail bridge across the river is a marvel, being the highest railway bridge, he added.

"There are many other infrastructure projects that send out a bigger message. These projects are more than engineering achievements. They are the instruments of social harmony. When places are connected, people are connected. And when people are connected, hearts are closely connected," he said. The vice president said these initiatives also create new opportunities for the youth, like the ones graduating today.

"PM special scholarship schemes for students of Jammu and Kashmir act as a great opportunity, aspira-

Rahul Gandhi lays foundation stone for 100 houses in Wayanad

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Wayanad (Kerala)

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday laid the foundation stone for 100 houses to be constructed by the party for victims of the 2024 landslide.

Congress is constructing 100 houses, each measuring 1,100 sq ft and 8 cents of land. The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha assured the affected families that he and his family would always stand with those who had lost everything in the tragedy.

He recalled witnessing two major landslides and how people responded to them. "You have lost a lot, but you have not lost your spirit.



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi being greeted upon his arrival at Kalpetta in Wayanad, Kerala

You never lost your courage. Most importantly, you did not lose your compassion," Gandhi said.

Rahul said that Priyanka Gandhi Vadra had pointed out alleged delays in the

process of constructing houses for the victims.

"There were complexities related to permissions, land and other issues. Now, I hope it will be completed soon," he said.

He described the ceremony as a "symbol and a message" to the affected families.

"In this process of recovery and healing, we are with you. We will stand with you whenever you need us," he said.

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said she had witnessed the hardship of people who lost everything, including their families.

She mentioned Anyan and Hanni, who lost their farms and family members in the landslide.

"We have tried our best to raise your voice in Parliament again and again. All our MPs met the Home Minister to demand that it be declared a national disaster. We wrote to the Prime

Minister and held protests outside Parliament," she said.

She said what struck her most after the tragedy was the courage of the people.

"The way you all stood together, no matter what religion or section you belong to, you gave love and courage when it mattered most," she said.

She said she was not the MP when the tragedy struck, but had since become a daughter, sister and part of the family.

Vadra said all political parties had contributed to the rehabilitation process.

As the people's struggle continues, the party would stand with them to overcome it, she added.

5 per cent crucial land records missing: Bihar Deputy CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Patna

Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Sinha on Thursday informed the Assembly that at least five per cent of original crucial documents were removed from the official records of the revenue and land reforms department, prompting the authorities to launch an investigation.

Sinha also said that the names of the original owners of plots were "deliberately changed" in certain cases. "It's a matter of serious concern. These documents have been removed or stolen from the records with an ulterior motive by individuals with vested inter-

ests. Available inputs suggest the involvement of the land mafia and officials. At least five per cent of crucial documents are missing from the records," he said.

The department has launched a drive to identify the culprits, including Government officials, and strict action will be taken against them, said Sinha, who also holds the revenue and land reforms portfolio.

"Even in certain cases, names of the original owners of the land were deliberately changed in some areas by people with vested interests. The State Government will certainly recover missing documents, and those responsible for it will be



Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Sinha

published," he said.

Raising the issue during question hour, JD(U) MLA Rahul Kumar Singh alleged that at least 60 per cent of

names of the original land owners in his Dumraon constituency were deliberately changed in 1989 by the department officials.

"The original owners of such land are facing difficulties in getting it corrected. How did it happen? The matter must be looked into, and action should be taken against those responsible for it," Singh said.

Several MLAs of the ruling as well as the Opposition parties also supported Singh's statement and said that people of their constituencies too have been facing the same situation.

Responding to this, the deputy CM said, "Officers have already been instructed to ensure that any land, including those belonging to the Government, should not be encroached by mafia or people based on forged documents."

Shed colonial mindset and focus on Swadeshi innovation: VP Radhakrishnan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jammu

Vice President CP Radhakrishnan on Thursday said the nation needs to let go of its colonial mindset to emerge as a global leader in innovations.

Radhakrishnan was addressing the 21st convocation of the University of Kashmir in Srinagar.

"As a graduating student, I urge you all to focus on Swadeshi innovation and solutions that are rooted in Indian knowledge, resources, and needs. We need not be worried; we need not be inferior. We are to throw out our colonial mindset first," he said.

Modi has made the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the country more vibrant and more supportive than ever before, he said.

"My best wishes to you to share the next big innovation, the next way of sustainable development, the next chapter in India's prize as a global leader," the vice president added.

Radhakrishnan said recently the Central Government has approved the development and expansion of the Srinagar International Airport, at an estimated cost of ₹1600 crores. "It was mentioned by our chief minister, Omar Abdullah, that tourism is to be expanded, but it has to be expanded without affecting the ecosystem of our great

state," he said. The Chenab rail bridge across the river is a marvel, being the highest railway bridge, he added.

"There are many other infrastructure projects that send out a bigger message. These projects are more than engineering achievements. They are the instruments of social harmony. When places are connected, people are connected. And when people are connected, hearts are closely connected," he said. The vice president said these initiatives also create new opportunities for the youth, like the ones graduating today.

"PM special scholarship schemes for students of Jammu and Kashmir act as a great opportunity, aspira-



Vice President CP Radhakrishnan during the 21st Convocation of the University of Kashmir in Srinagar

tion, and national integration by enabling students to study in institutions across the country," he said.

Urging students to stay away from drugs, Radhakrishnan said, "Your parents are depending on

you that you will take care of them in their old age...They want you to be successful in your life." Every religion treats narcotics as the most sinful product, so keep away from drugs, he added.

"Advise your friends, family members, and whoever you are meeting, to stay away from drug use," he said.

The vice president also advised the youth to be mindful of social media usage. "This has to be controlled. Social media will not help you to come out more successful in your life. Everything should have its own limits," he said.

Radhakrishnan said he wanted to tell the students three lines: "Three lines I want to tell you. *Mera*

Kashmir nahi, tumhara Kashmir nahi, Hamara Kashmir. That is what I want from all of you."

Addressing the 21st convocation ceremony of the University of Kashmir, Sinha expressed happiness over the large number of female students taking top honours from the institution.

"The only priority should be country first. You should remember that when you build the country, the country builds you back. When the nation rises, so do you," he said.

Sinha said the nation has set a goal that by 2047, India will become a developed nation.

"This is not just a dream but a goal based on realities.

It will need incessant efforts. The question is whether technology becomes a tool for profits or the development of humanity," he added.

The Lieutenant Governor expressed happiness over the large number of female students taking top honours at the convocation.

"I am happy that out of 239 gold medals, 186 are won by girls. Out of 164 PhDs, 108 are awarded to girls. This is not an ordinary statistic," he said.

"This sends a signal that the women are not only participating but excelling; they are setting the new standards. That is why Prime Minister Narendra Modi is stressing women's empowerment," he added.

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Order Order

**Kerala High Court stays
release of 'The Kerala
Story 2-Goes Beyond'**



In a setback for the makers of 'The Kerala Story 2-Goes Beyond', the Kerala High Court on Thursday stayed the release of the film, saying that prima facie there was a manifest non-application of mind to the requirements of law by the CBFC.

The court also noted that "the possibility of communal disharmony or denigration of a community is prima facie involved in the movie," and that its release without scrutiny by higher authorities would be legally improper.

Justice Bechu Kurian Thomas further observed that the content of the film's teaser has "a prima facie potential to distort public perception and disturb communal harmony."

Therefore, the court said, it may be necessary to carry out "a comprehensive assessment of the film to identify the existence of sensitive thematic content, including its treatment of interfaith dynamics and visual presentation," as required under the provisions of the Cinematograph Act, 1952.

It further stated that dissemination of content with the tendency to create discord, disturb law and order, or undermine social harmony cannot fall within the ambit of freedom of speech and expression enshrined in Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India.

For this reason, the Centre, in its guidelines for film certification, has laid down clauses stating that "visuals or words contemptuous of racial, religious or other groups are not to be presented," and that visuals or words promoting communal, obscurantist, or anti-national attitudes must not be shown, and public order must not be endangered, the court noted.

"Prima facie, these guidelines do not appear to have been considered by the Central Board of Film Certification while granting certification, showing a manifest disregard for applicable law and necessitating intervention by this court," Justice Thomas said.

The court further observed that the "repeated portrayal" of the theme in the sequel, nearly identical in name and concept to its prequel, as evident from admitted scenes, "can tend to create contempt for a religious group in the state, promote communal and fanatical attitudes, and even endanger public order."

"There is a possibility that the state of Kerala, otherwise known for its communal harmony and friendly natives, may be perceived by viewers globally as a hub of fanaticism and communal divide," the court added.

"There is nothing to indicate that the CBFC considered any of these factors while certifying the movie for release, granting it a UA16+ rating," the court said.

While staying the film's release, the court directed the central Government to consider and pass orders within two weeks from Thursday on a revision petition filed by petitioner Sreedev Nambodiri against the certification.

The court said the Centre must provide an opportunity of hearing to the petitioner, the CBFC, and the producer, Vipul Amrutlal Shah, before passing any order on the petition.



SC directs Centre to meet on lack of functional CCTVs in police stations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Centre and others to participate in a meeting for the creation of a centralised dashboard and standardisation of CCTV infrastructure in police stations. A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta passed the order after a submission by senior advocate Siddhartha Dave. Assisting the court as amicus curiae, Dave told the court that pursuant to an order dated January 29, a meeting was held on February 21, but the Union, the Delhi Government and some other States did not participate in it, and as such, he could not file the report as required.

Taking note of the submission, the court ordered, "Counsel for the Union of India already apologised that



due to some communication gap, it could not participate in the meeting. He, however, assures us that in the next meeting they will extend all cooperation."

The bench added, "The amicus has suggested March 14, 2026, as the next date for a meeting. Let the meeting be held as directed earlier on March 14, 2026." The matter is

now posted for hearing on March 23.

The top court had earlier directed registration of a suo motu public interest litigation over a lack of functional CCTVs in police stations after taking cognisance of a media report.

The apex court had in 2018 ordered the installation of CCTV cameras across police stations to check human

rights abuses. In December 2020, the top court directed the Centre to install CCTV cameras and recording equipment at the offices of investigating agencies, including the CBI, the ED and the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

It said that states and Union Territories should ensure that CCTV cameras were installed at every police station, at all entry and exit points, main gate, lock-ups, corridors, lobby and reception, as well as in areas outside the lock-up rooms so that no part was left uncovered.

The top court said that CCTV systems must be equipped with night vision and have audio as well as video footage. The court made it mandatory for the Centre, states, and UTs to purchase such systems which allow storage of data for at least one year.

Gauhati High Court issues notice to Assam CM in PILs alleging hate speech

TONY DAS
Guwahati

The Gauhati High Court on Thursday issued a notice to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in connection with a bunch of PILs, accusing him of giving "hate speech" and making "communal comments" against the 'Miya' community. Notices were also issued to the State Government and the DGP in connection with three different petitions on the matter.

A division bench comprising Chief Justice Ashutosh Kumar and Justice Arun Dev Choudhury heard the three petitions.

The court fixed March 21 as the next date of hearing.



Himanta Biswa Sarma

The Court at one point remarked that the speeches of Sarma cited by the petitioners did show a "fissiparous tendency."

One petition was filed by Assamese litterateur Hiren

Gohain, former DGP Harekrishna Deka and senior journalist Paresh Malakar on February 24.

The CPI and CPI(M) had also filed separate petitions on February 21, seeking to

restrain the CM from making such comments. Adv. CU Singh, arguing for the petitioners, told Court that Sarma had openly said that he would steal Miya Muslim votes ("vote chori") and that many Muslim voters will be deleted from the voter's list.

"Each and every statement, they don't co-locate with the earlier statement. What 'vote chori, why we call it chori, we want to steal votes' — these appear to be blusters. Other statements you can say, but not every part of it. There is a fissiparous tendency, it appears, from what you are showing. Let us see what they are saying," the Chief Justice observed.

Bandhavgarh reserve lost 8 tigers in 2.5 months: Report to HC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Jabalpur

Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve lost eight tigers, including four due to electrocution, over two and a half months spanning 2025 and early 2026, according to a report submitted to the Madhya Pradesh High Court.

The status report submitted by the field director of the protected forest said that four tigers died within the tiger reserve, and as many lost their lives in the "general forest area".

The cause of death for all four tigers within the tiger reserve was natural, while electrocution killed the remaining four in the general forest area, the report said, adding that the carcasses of all the big cats were completely intact.

The report was submitted

to a division bench of the HC on Wednesday in response to a petition that claimed big cat deaths under suspicious circumstances in MP's forests.

The court directed the petitioners to submit a response to the status report and scheduled the next hearing for March 25.

As per the report, eight tigers died in the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve between November 21, 2025, and February 2 this year.

Inside the reserve, two tigers died due to mutual conflicts. While one big cat drowned in a well, another succumbed to a disease, it said. In the forest area, four tigers were killed due to electrocution, it said.

Sharing information about power lines inside the core and buffer zones, the report said letters have been sent periodically to the electricity



Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve

department to strengthen power lines and adhere to wildlife protection standards in sensitive areas of the tiger reserve.

It also provided information regarding patrolling. The Government also submitted a response to the main petition. Bhopal-based wildlife

activist Ajay Dubey had filed the petition. According to the petition, the tiger population in the world is 5,421, of which 3,167 are in India. As per the latest census, Madhya Pradesh has 785 tigers, it said. Despite being a tiger state, 54 tigers died in Madhya Pradesh in

2025, said the petition. The State had reported 43 tiger deaths in 2022, 45 in 2023, and 46 in 2024, Dubey said. The highest number of tiger deaths in the state since the launch of Project Tiger occurred in 2025, the petitioner claimed.

India launched Project Tiger in 1973 to protect and increase the dwindling population of Bengal tigers. MP has nine tiger reserves, including Kanha, Pench, Bandhavgarh, Panna, Satpura, Sanjay-Dhubri, Veerangana, Durgavati, Ratapani and Madhav.

Six tigers died in the state in the first week of this year alone, Dubey said.

Though the Government declared that tiger numbers have gone up, big cats are dying mysteriously and often under suspicious circumstances in the forests, the

petition said, adding that forest officials attribute such losses to territorial conflicts.

Wildlife experts believe that a large number of leopards are being killed in the state, along with tigers, the petitioner said. Poachers are operating within the reserve using electric wires, and the Forest Department's surveillance and intelligence systems are failing, the petitioner claimed.

During the last hearing, the petitioner informed the HC that 10 tigers had died in the state so far this year, including seven in Bandhavgarh. Most of these deaths were due to electrocution and other unnatural causes, Dubey had said.

Following the hearing, the court had directed the field director of the Bandhavgarh reserve to submit a detailed report regarding the tiger deaths, the petitioner said.

Sanjay Raut acquitted in defamation case filed by Kirit Somaiya's wife

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Mumbai

A sessions court here on Thursday allowed the revision application of Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut, acquitting him in a defamation case filed by BJP leader Kirit Somaiya's wife Medha Somaiya.

The BJP leader's wife had dragged the Rajya Sabha member to court, claiming he made baseless and completely defamatory allegations in the media against her and her husband, accus-



Sanjay Raut

ing them of being involved in a ₹100 crore scam related to the construction of public toilets in the Mira-Bhayander Municipal Corporation area. A magistrate court last year convicted Raut and sentenced him to 15 days in jail in the case.

The Sena (UBT) leader later filed an appeal before the sessions court, challenging the magistrate's ruling.

After hearing the arguments of both sides, the court allowed his plea on Thursday.

ED seeks expedited trial against Chidambaram in 2 PMLA cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday said it wants an expeditious trial against Congress leader P Chidambaram in two money laundering cases, Aircel-Maxis deal and INX Media, as it has submitted the required sanction for prosecution against the former Finance Minister before a designated court.

The ED had filed a chargesheet in the Aircel-Maxis case in 2018 and in the INX Media case in 2020 at the special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Delhi (Rouse Avenue) and the court took their separate cognisance in 2021.

However, in November 2024, the Supreme Court directed (in the ED vs Bibhu Prasad Acharya case) that sanction for prosecution is mandatory in a PMLA chargesheet, similar to such an approval furnished while filing a chargesheet under the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC).

Subsequent to this judge-



P Chidambaram

ment, many accused charged under PMLA challenged the proceedings in multiple legal forums, leading to a delay in the trial including in these cases against P Chidambaram.

"To counter such delay and to comply with the judgement of the Supreme Court, ED has swiftly initiated remedial actions by seeking prosecution sanctions in all such prosecution complaints involving public servants," the ED said in a statement.

The agency said it sought the sanction for prosecution of Chidambaram from the competent authority which

was obtained on February 10 along with a required order under Section 197 of CrPC (Section 218 of Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita) for prosecuting the former Union minister in the two money laundering cases.

"The prosecution sanction order has been placed before the Hon'ble Special Court, Rouse Avenue by ED to expedite the trial in the case," the agency said.

P Chidambaram is named as accused in Aircel-Maxis scam and INX Media bribery case, along with his son Karti Chidambaram and senior officials worked in Finance Ministry.

The ED filed a PMLA case in 2015 taking cognisance of a CBI FIR. It has filed two chargesheets in the case.

The agency charged that the former Finance Minister granted FIPB approval to Aircel-Maxis in lieu of quid pro quo as foreign investor (Maxis) applied for its foreign direct investment (FDI) approval to the tune of \$800 million (₹3,565.91 crore).

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			Date	Time	Time	Time
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2.	GS02/AASC/095	Upgradation of IT Infrastructure of AASC Training Facilities	27 February 2026	27 March 2026	14:00 Hours (IST)	
3	IT05	RFID Library Automation with Digital Library System	27 February 2026	27 March 2026	14:30 Hours (IST)	

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Development of North Dock Complex-4 (NDC-4) Berth for handling Dry Bulk Cargo on Captive basis
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Editor's TAKE

Signals from Modi's Knesset address

As tensions in West Asia deepen, India must ensure that its strategic partnerships are matched by a consistent moral stance

West Asia is a quagmire very few world leaders are keen to step into. The situation here is complex and the reality so twisted that it is difficult to identify the perpetrator, let alone judge the situation. When Prime Minister Narendra Modi touched down in Israel, he had a very difficult task at hand: to strengthen relations with Israel but at the same time remain steadfast in India's West Asia policy that has supported Palestine's right to self-determination. Modi's historic address to the Knesset, a first by an Indian Prime Minister, was indeed a defining moment in India's West Asia diplomacy.

Modi's message – that "no cause can justify the murder of civilians" – was multilayered; it was directed at all concerned without naming anybody. Modi condemned violence and kept his pitch generic, stating that India was for peace in the region and that nothing whatsoever could justify the killing of innocent people. Modi's visit is also filled with realism, though it is loaded with rhetoric. Standing alongside Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Modi described Israel as a "trusted partner" and reaffirmed India's support "with full conviction". It was a razor-edge walk, as Modi in the same breath reiterated India's backing of the UN Security Council-approved Gaza peace initiative, signalling that India was not shunning its well-articulated and practised West Asia policy. This dual messaging – solidarity with Israel's security concerns while endorsing a pathway to "just and durable peace" – encapsulates India's balancing act.

The India-Israel partnership today is both strategic and substantive. Since Modi's landmark 2017 visit – the first by an Indian prime minister – ties between the two countries have improved significantly. India is Israel's largest arms buyer, and defence cooperation has become the backbone of the relationship. From advanced missile systems to surveillance technologies, Israeli defence exports have played a critical role in modernising India's military capabilities. Beyond security, both countries are deepening collaboration in artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, water management, and agriculture. The recent Bilateral Investment Treaty further institutionalises economic engagement.

However, India has traditionally championed Palestinian self-determination in multilateral forums and continues to endorse a two-state solution. Indeed, New Delhi recently joined over 100 countries in criticising Israeli moves in the West Bank. The tension between principle and pragmatism is therefore unmistakable. What has now changed is that India's West Asia policy is interest-driven rather than ideological. Security cooperation, technology partnerships, and geopolitical convergence matter more than symbolic posturing. Finally, the future of India's West Asia policy will depend on its ability to sustain this delicate balance. Moral consistency – particularly on civilian protection – must complement strategic partnerships. Modi's Knesset address was more than a ceremonial milestone. It was a statement that India seeks to be both a steadfast partner and a principled actor – navigating West Asia not through binaries, but through calibrated conviction.

Decoding the politics of protests

Democracy protects dissent, but a rising nation must also protect the sanctity of its institutional platforms – the AI summit disruption forces India to draw that line clearly



JAGMOHAN SINGH RAJU

Democracy gives citizens the right to protest. It does not confer the right to disrupt the nation's institutional platforms. That distinction is not technical; it is civilisational. A republic survives not merely because dissent is permitted, but because institutions function with authority, continuity and public trust. When that order is deliberately breached, the issue is no longer only about grievance; it becomes a question of national responsibility. The shirtless protest staged by members of the Indian Youth Congress inside Bharat Mandapam during the recent AI summit in New Delhi was not an ordinary expression of dissent in a public square. It was a calculated disruption inside a secured international event designed to project India's technological ambition before global delegates, investors and policymakers. The venue was chosen for impact. The optics were chosen for virality. The disruption was chosen for maximum visibility.

That choice demands scrutiny. India's Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and peaceful assembly. These guarantees form the backbone of democratic life. The Opposition is fully entitled to question the government's AI strategy, trade posture, economic direction or employment record. Dissent is not anti-national; it is intrinsic to democratic accountability. Yet constitutional freedoms operate within a framework of reasonable restraint. When the security perimeters of an international summit are breached and proceedings are interrupted from within, the character of protest changes. The debate shifts from policy substance to procedural violation. It ceases to be merely expressive and becomes obstructive.

A democracy must protect protest. It must also protect order. These principles are complementary. Without order, rights cannot be exercised meaningfully. Without rights, order degenerates into control. The strength of a republic lies in balancing both.

When India hosts a global summit on artificial intelligence, it is not organising a routine conference. It is signalling strategic intent. Artificial intelligence will shape industrial competitiveness, national security, governance models and economic power in the coming decades. Hosting such a summit asserts that India seeks to help shape technological norms, not merely adapt to them. Bharat Mandapam, in that moment, was more than architecture. It was a national stage. It reflected confidence in India's capacity, ambition and stability. To stage a shirtless protest inside the arena converted that moment into spectacle. The imagery ensured headlines. Yet the clarity of argument was far less visible. If the



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objective was to highlight youth unemployment, technological displacement or inequality, those concerns required detailed articulation, structured alternatives and sustained engagement. A dramatic gesture cannot substitute for policy seriousness.

There is a decisive difference between protesting outside a venue and breaching proceedings within. Outside, dissent confronts power while respecting institutional space. Inside, it risks undermining the very platforms that represent the nation before the world.

Across established democracies, high-level summits attract protesters. In the United States and Europe, climate meetings, economic forums and global conventions draw vocal opposition. Authorities designate protest zones, negotiate boundaries and maintain firm security. Demonstrations occur – sometimes intensely – but secured proceedings continue.

The principle is clear: visibility without paralysis. Authoritarian systems respond differently. In 1989, at Tiananmen Square in Beijing, dissent was met with tanks. Debate was extinguished by force. That is how insecure regimes react.

India is not that system. The AI summit protest occurred. It was reported, debated and legally processed. That itself reflects democratic openness. But openness must not be confused with permissiveness. A state that cannot secure its international platforms signals fragility, not freedom. Order is not the enemy of liberty; it is its guardian.

Artificial intelligence raises profound national questions. Will automation displace workers faster than reskilling mechanisms can respond? How will India protect data sovereignty in a world dominated by global platforms? What regulatory architecture will ensure algorithmic accountability? How can technological growth remain inclusive rather than exclusionary? These questions deserve rigorous parliamentary debate, expert consultation and alternative policy frameworks. They demand persistence and intellectual seriousness. Democratic influence is built through argument, documentation and sustained mobilisation – not

through fleeting spectacle. When protest becomes performative, it risks diminishing the gravity of the issue it claims to elevate. A viral moment may dominate one news cycle; it rarely shapes legislation or regulatory design.

India today stands at a pivotal moment. It seeks to position itself as a technological power and a responsible global actor. Investors assess stability. Diplomatic partners assess institutional coherence. Global perception carries economic and strategic consequences.

Disruption inside the arena of a global summit shifts attention from substance to theatrics. It hands critics an easy narrative. It distracts from national ambition. Political actors must ask whether such conduct strengthens India's voice in the world or dilutes it. Democratic politics does not exist in isolation from national interest. In a competitive global environment, internal conduct influences external credibility.

There are moments in history when dramatic protest becomes morally imperative – when institutions close and avenues of accountability disappear. In such contexts, extraordinary tactics gain legitimacy because the system has failed. That is not India's present reality. Parliament functions. Courts intervene. Media debates flourish. Opposition leaders campaign freely. Elections remain fiercely contested.

In such an environment, political capital is earned through persuasion, not provocation. Disruption of secured national platforms is neither necessary nor constructive. It confuses noise with influence and visibility with credibility.

A rising nation requires maturity from both government and Opposition. The government must act firmly yet proportionately. Overreach weakens democratic authority; indifference weakens institutional strength.

The Opposition must calibrate tactics to context. Passion is understandable. Accountability is essential. But seriousness is indispensable. Democracy is not measured by how dramatically proceedings are interrupted. It is measured by how effectively public opinion is shaped and policy is influenced.

The AI summit protest will pass. What must remain is a principled standard: protest is legitimate; breach of secured national platforms is not. India's democratic space is expansive. Its global aspirations are rightful. Protecting both requires discipline as much as freedom, restraint as much as resolve.

Patriotism and protest are not adversaries. But when protest diminishes national platforms without elevating democratic reasoning, it ceases to serve the republic.

A confident nation does not silence dissent. It expects dissent to rise to the level of the nation itself. India deserves politics that matches its stature – firm in conviction, responsible in conduct, and conscious that national dignity is not a partisan asset but a shared inheritance.



Connected online, silent within our own home



SAKSHI SETHI

2ND OPINION

In one of my seminars, a student once beamed while checking her phone and said, "My brother sent me a meme." Then she paused and added quietly, "We don't talk much though." Her statement reflects a peculiar truth of modern households. Many siblings today share reels, memes and forwarded jokes almost every day, but rarely share their real thoughts, fears or emotions. They live under the same roof, eat at the same table and celebrate the same festivals, yet somewhere along the journey from childhood to maturity, conversations become formal, constrained and sometimes altogether absent.

Childhood tells a different story. Siblings are our earliest companions. They share secrets under blankets, fight over television remotes, complain about parents and defend each other fiercely in front of outsiders. They grow

up in the same environment, shaped by the same values and memories. They know each other's strengths, weaknesses and vulnerabilities better than anyone else. Yet, as years pass, something changes. Responsibilities increase, careers begin and marriages happen. Individual identities take precedence over shared ones. Slowly, without any dramatic conflict, emotional distance replaces emotional intimacy. In Indian families, this silence is often misunderstood. Parents feel relieved that their children are no longer fighting and interpret silence as maturity. But silence is not always peace. Sometimes, it is simply unexpressed emotion.

One of the most overlooked reasons behind this silence is emotional conditioning. From a young age, children – especially boys – are rarely taught to express affection openly towards siblings. Love is shown through duty rather than words. A brother may ensure that his sister reaches home safely but never tell her he misses her. A sister may worry endlessly about her brother's well-being but may never articulate that concern.

Technology has further complicated this dynamic. Digital communication has created an illusion of connection. Sending birthday wishes on a family WhatsApp group or reacting to a social media story appears to sustain relationships. Yet these small gestures often replace deeper, meaningful conversations, resulting in reduced emotion-

al exchange. Implicit childhood roles also play a part. Labels such as the 'responsible one', the 'rebellious one', the 'sensitive one' or the 'successful one', assigned consciously or unconsciously, continue to shape sibling relationships in adulthood. Sometimes, distance is not created by present circumstances but by past perceptions.

Despite this quiet distance, the emotional tie rarely disappears. In moments of crisis, siblings often stand beside each other without hesitation. They may not speak daily, but their presence carries a familiarity and security that few other relationships offer. Unlike friendships, sibling relationships are not chosen.

Unlike parental relationships, they exist on equal ground. But like all relationships, they require nurturing. Emotional connection does not survive on memories alone; it demands effort in the present. Breaking the silence does not require grand gestures. Bridging the sibling gap is less about logistics and more about intimacy.

In a society where individuals are constantly connected yet emotionally distant, the most meaningful conversations may be waiting within our own homes. Sometimes, the person who has known us the longest is also the one we speak to the least. And sometimes, one honest conversation is enough to revive a lifetime of connection.



The writer is an educator

PICTALK



A participant performs with a traditional circular acrobatic prop during the Nagar Devi Yatra of Goddess Bhadra Kali in Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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STRENGTHENING SYSTEMS CAN PREVENT FUTURE AVIATION ACCIDENTS

The recent accidents underline how fragile aviation safety becomes when procedures are treated casually. While investigations often highlight pilot error, the deeper issue lies in systemic lapses – training, oversight and enforcement. Practical steps can help. The DGCA must ensure that Standard Operating Procedures are not just written but actively monitored through routine audits and transparent reporting. Airlines should invest in recurrent training, not as a formality but as a culture of safety. Equally important, the Pilot-in-Command must be free from commercial pressure, with decisions respected even if they cause delays.

One area that deserves greater attention is weather assessment. Several accidents in

India have involved poor visibility or adverse conditions that were either underestimated or ignored under operational pressure. Strengthening pre-flight meteorological briefings and equipping smaller aircraft with updated navigation aids should be a regulatory priority. Crew fatigue, inadequate rest protocols and poor cockpit communication have contributed to accidents worldwide. India must align its crew duty-hour regulations with international standards and enforce them strictly.

Public confidence in air travel depends on visible accountability. Aviation safety cannot be compromised; it must remain the first priority, not the last consideration.

A MYLSAMI | COIMBATORE

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A pragmatic diplomatic move

The visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Israel is significant in view of the evolving relationship between the two nations, which gained momentum after his landmark 2017 visit.

Historically, ties between India and Israel remained cautious, shaped by India's vote against the creation of Israel in 1947 and its delayed establishment of full diplomatic relations in 1992, despite recognising Israel in 1950.

India's consistent support for Palestine often restrained open engagement with Israel. PM Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to move beyond this hesitancy while continuing to support Palestinian concerns without allowing them to restrict bilateral cooperation.

The warm reception extended by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu symbolised the growing warmth between the two countries. By addressing the Israeli Parliament, PM Modi reinforced India's commitment to strengthening strategic cooperation despite ideological differences. The visit reflects a pragmatic shift in India's foreign policy, signalling that national interest and regional stability now guide engagement in West Asia.

SUNIL OKHADE | INDORE

Conflict continues without clear resolution

Four years after its outbreak, the war between Russia and Ukraine shows no credible path towards resolution. What began as a strategic confrontation has now hardened into prolonged attrition, leaving civilians to endure displacement, destruction and insecurity.

Despite repeated mediation efforts by the United Nations, negotiations remain constrained by mistrust and uncompromising positions. President Vladimir Putin continues to frame the conflict in existential terms, limiting scope for compromise, while President Volodymyr Zelenskyy maintains that sovereignty and territorial integrity remain non-negotiable.

External military assistance has sustained Ukraine's resistance but has also deepened global polarisation. Energy markets and food supply chains continue to experience instability, disproportionately affecting developing economies.

The conflict today represents not strategic manoeuvring but a test of endurance. Neither side appears capable of achieving decisive advantage without risking dangerous escalation.

Even when hostilities eventually cease, rebuilding confidence across Europe and beyond will remain a formidable challenge.

N SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU

Cultural identity needs equal recognition

The Union Cabinet's approval to rename Kerala as "Keralam" marks an important step towards restoring linguistic authenticity and cultural identity. The decision, announced on February 24, 2026, initiates the constitutional process under Article 3.

While this recognition of Malayalam identity is welcome, it revives the unresolved case of West Bengal's long-pending proposal to rename itself "Bangla".

Passed unanimously by the State Assembly in 2018, the proposal continues to await approval.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has repeatedly highlighted the delay as discriminatory, especially when similar requests from other states have been accepted. State renaming is not merely symbolic. It reflects cultural self-definition and addresses practical concerns, including representation in official forums.

If Keralam's adoption is celebrated as a victory for linguistic heritage, consistency demands that similar aspirations be treated equally. A transparent and non-partisan approach to such proposals is essential to uphold the spirit of cooperative federalism. Cultural identity must not be subject to selective recognition.

VIDYASAGAR REDDY KETHIRI | TELANGANA



Towards qualitative democracy: Need for poll reforms

Parliamentarians should be required to compulsorily fill in all particulars in their biodata, including details of their assets and the name of spouse(s), to be placed in the public domain on the websites of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha

FIRST
Column

**SUBHASH C
AGRAWAL**



Wide-ranging poll reforms are necessary to make quantitative democracy qualitative as well, in such a manner that such an ideal democratic system may be followed by other countries too. It is ridiculous that such well-educated officers from the IAS and allied services are at times ruled by uneducated political leaders. It is shameful to note that invalid votes exist even in elections to the posts of President and Vice-President, where MPs and MLAs vote.

There must be at least some minimum educational qualification to contest any election. It would be best to constitute an "Indian Political Service" on the lines of the "Indian Administrative Service (IAS)". The system will automatically abolish the faulty practice of family politics, where politicians often misuse politics like a family business rather than as a tool for service to the people. Experience reveals that senior bureaucrats have done remarkably well when appointed as ministers. On the contrary, there are cases where less-educated ministers were not given a repeat chance due to non-performance.

Other wide-ranging poll reforms are also urgently needed to be implemented simultaneously without requiring any never-to-be-achieved political consensus. The case of George Fernandez being elected to the Rajya Sabha despite having lost his memory even calls for medical fitness certificates before allowing candidates to contest elections. An RTI response reveals that even the oath for his membership of the Rajya Sabha was read by a party colleague of George Fernandez.

Simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies should be three-tier, with elections to municipal bodies also included in the ideal system. Elections for the President and Vice-President should also be held simultaneously by all MPs and MLAs in the same manner as the President is elected, but through EVMS equipped with VVPAT on nominations signed by at least 34 per cent of MPs to ensure direct elections. In case of a vacancy caused in the post of President, the Vice-President may be made President for the remainder of the term. However, in case of a vacancy in the

TO AVOID THE USUAL DELAY IN APPROVING POLL REFORMS BY PARLIAMENT, THE ELECTION COMMISSION SHOULD BE EMPOWERED TO IMPLEMENT REFORMS BY GIVING ONE YEAR'S NOTICE TO PARLIAMENT.

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post of Vice-President, an interim Vice-President may be elected by MPs only for the rest of the term. If both the regularly elected President and Vice-President are not in office, fresh simultaneous elections for both posts should be held without waiting for the five-year period.

The Prime Minister/Chief Ministers, along with the Speakers and Deputy Speakers of the Lower Houses, should be elected through a secret and compulsory vote of members of the Lower Houses through Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) equipped with VVPAT on nominations signed by at least 34 per cent of members. Such an elected Prime Minister/Chief Minister may be removed by the same process, but with the compulsion of naming an alternate leader in the same motion. Members not opting to vote may lose their voting rights in the House, even while retaining membership. Without adopting such a system, the aspect of "One Nation, One Election" can never become a reality because of mid-term elections caused due to a hung Lok Sabha/State Assembly or the fall of governments in between. Even the present Prime Minister, Chief Ministers, Speakers and Deputy Speakers may be re-elected along the lines suggested above.

Since a person cannot represent two constituencies or become a member of both Parliament and a State Assembly, no person should be allowed to contest from more than one constituency or for both Parliament and a State Assembly. A sitting

MP or MLA should first resign from his/her earlier seat before filing nomination for another. Membership of a Parliamentarian must be auto-terminated upon taking oath in a State as a Minister (or Chief Minister) and vice versa, to prevent situations such as the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government falling due to the single controversial vote of the then Odisha Chief Minister Girdhar Gomango, who did not resign from the Lok Sabha even after being sworn in as Odisha Chief Minister.

Secret voting for Rajya Sabha elections should be restored, but through EVMS equipped with the VVPAT system, with simultaneous elections for full-time and part-time members. Persons receiving more votes should be declared elected for full terms, while those with fewer votes may be declared elected for part terms. The Constitution should be amended to abolish the useless provision of Legislative Councils, which practically serve as political assignments to favourites and relations of political leaders. Only those who have not contested any election in their life should be appointed as nominated members of the Rajya Sabha. No MP or MLA should retain any type of post in their party or even in society. Ministerial strength should be reduced to 10 per cent of the strength of the Lower House. The post of Parliamentary Secretaries should be abolished.

Persons losing security should be barred

from contesting elections for the next six years. The 'None of the Above' (NOTA) option should be made practically useful. All candidates receiving fewer votes than NOTA may be barred from contesting any future election, even though, in case NOTA wins in any constituency, the candidate next to NOTA may be declared elected, but only for that term. Thereafter, he may lose the right to contest any election in his lifetime.

An absconding Parliamentarian from court summons/warrants, if present at Sansad Bhawan even for attending the session, should not be allowed to leave until police authorities arrive for execution of the warrants. Parliamentarians and legislators with attendance of less than, say, 75 per cent in the House should not be allowed to contest any election for the next six years. Immunity to elected representatives should be withdrawn even from legislative proceedings because, in the infamous JMM bribery case, even the Apex Court expressed its inability to act against the guilty, as their bribed act to vote for the Narasimha Rao government was considered immunised under Parliamentary proceedings. Usually, Chairpersons of the Lok Sabha/Rajya Sabha/Parliamentary Committees are ultra-soft on impropriety by

Parliamentarians. Rules of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha should be re-written in a stringent manner by encoding fixed punishments for Parliamentarians for not following rules and norms, removing discretionary powers of Chairpersons and Parliamentary Committees. The Lok Sabha mildly punished its member Rajesh Manjhi for taking his lady friend as his wife on a foreign trip at government expense by merely barring him from a few sittings, even though such an act was not immunised under Parliamentary proceedings. Parliamentarians should be required to compulsorily fill in all particulars in their biodata, including details of their assets and the name of spouse(s), to be placed in the public domain on the websites of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

This can check several malpractices, such as hiding the name of an additional spouse, as was done by Dharmendra when he did not disclose the name of Hema Malini as his wife.

Rules should mandate that all deductions of government dues such as water, electricity, telephone, rent, or any other

charges be made from salary/perks/pensions payable to them. Pensions should be withheld until former Parliamentarians/Ministers vacate government accommodation. Defaulters should be barred from contesting any future election until all dues are cleared and unauthorised accommodation is vacated. Since even persons posted as Prime Minister have been defaulters of dues for using Indian Air Force aircraft for non-official purposes, either the Prime Minister or the political party sponsoring the Prime Minister should deposit advance payment for such use.

Since political parties are not complying with the CIC verdict bringing them under the purview of the RTI Act, all direct or indirect government funding - including tax exemptions, subsidised land, leased government accommodation, free voters' lists, and free Doordarshan/Radio time - should be abolished. Political parties not contesting any election in the last five years should be de-recognised. Sections 13A, 80GGB, and 80GGC of the Income Tax Act regarding contributions received by and made to political parties should be abolished to prevent the whitening of black money through registered but inactive parties. Live TV debates between prominent leaders and Prime Minister/Chief Ministerial candidates should replace mega-budget rallies and roadshows, which should instead be banned. Corruption-generating MPLADS should be abolished. Pensions for MPs and MLAs have no logic when they have been abolished for government servants. Persons with more than two children should not be allowed to contest elections. To avoid lifelong ambitions to remain in power, there may be an upper age limit of 65 years to contest direct elections. Experienced persons, if needed in ministries, can be elected as Rajya Sabha members. Retired judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts must not be given post-retirement assignments or allowed to enter politics for two years after retirement, or else they may lose post-retirement benefits or appointment as arbitrators.

To avoid the usual delay in approving poll reforms by Parliament, the Election Commission should be empowered to implement reforms by giving one year's notice to Parliament. If Parliament does not disapprove of the reforms proposed within the stipulated one year, these should be deemed approved.

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Coal belt climate reform starts with women



**JIWESH
NANDAN**

**ARPITA
VICTOR**

At sunrise in a village in Sundargarh along the highway in eastern India's Odisha, 32-year-old Sushila walks half a kilometre to fetch water. She uses her sari to shield her face from the coal dust that settles on her skin and in her lungs as coal-laden Tata Hyva trucks drive past. These trucks ply day and night, transporting coal dispatched for thermal power from the big open-cast coal mine five kilometres from Sushila's village. Her daily walk illustrates how far removed women like Sushila are from the climate negotiations that affect them; that women and marginalised communities in India's coal regions are already living the future the world is trying to avoid. Their everyday struggles are part of the realities of coal production in India, exacerbating the effects of climate change felt globally - polluted water, degraded forests, insecure livelihoods, rising care burdens, and the social stresses of an economy in transition.

This is why the adoption of the Belém Gender Action Plan (GAP) at COP30 deserves attention in India. For the first time, UNFCCC signatories have agreed on a nine-year, legally anchored global framework that places women and girls at the centre of climate action. UN Women called it a "blueprint for action". For countries like ours, where the transition away from coal is inevitable to achieve net zero, the Belém GAP provides the policy scaffolding to ensure the shift is not only low-carbon but also socially just.

A reality India cannot ignore

In India's coal-bearing districts - from Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh to Odisha - women face layered risks that national climate policy has yet to fully confront. Water sources remain compromised. Forest products that tribal women rely on for income have declined because of environmental degradation. As men migrate in search of work due to the shifting economy following old coal mine closures, women bear the full weight of caregiving, farming, managing household debt, and coping with a power dynamic skewed against them.

These are not isolated anecdotes. They mirror exactly the challenges the Belém GAP identifies: deteriorating health, increased violence, unequal access to decent work, and the compounding effects of discrimination on Indigenous, rural, disabled and marginalised women. Importantly, the new plan introduces explicit provisions on

women's health, gender-based violence, decent work, and protection for women environmental defenders - issues that have long remained at the periphery of climate policy.

India's transition plans must now catch up. India has taken important steps towards just transition planning, and the adoption of the Belém Gender Action Plan offers an opportunity to strengthen this work further.

The Plan provides a clear roadmap for ensuring that women are not only included but actively supported in shaping transition strategies. It encourages countries to anchor climate policy in human rights, recognise unpaid care work as a factor that limits women's participation in the labour force, and advance meaningful representation and leadership of women at every level of decision-making.

The Belém GAP also sets out commitments



to safeguard women environmental defenders - who frequently lead community efforts to address pollution and land-use concerns - and to expand gender-responsive finance that can enhance women's livelihoods, mobility, enterprises and local institutions.

For India's coal districts, these provisions are not abstract principles. They mirror what women have been consistently asking for: clean water, safe homes, stable livelihoods, recognition of their labour, and a seat at the planning table.

A transition that works for women works for everyone

There is compelling evidence that when women are included in climate and energy governance, policies are more ambitious, equitable and durable. TERI's recent work in Giridih illustrates this potential: through the People-Centric Transition initiative, women's groups in four coal-adjacent villages established micro-enterprises - from mop and wiper units to incense stick production, home décor manufacturing and beautician services - after receiving financial literacy, business ideation and technical training. Forty-nine women and adolescent girls

are now running enterprises that were set up through group and individual models, supported by joint liability groups and seed capital.

These experiences show that with targeted investment and structured capacity-building, women in coal regions can move from informal, low-productivity work to managing viable businesses that strengthen local economies and support a more people-centred transition. India has an opportunity to align its district-level just transition plans with the Belém GAP, turning global commitments into local action. This means earmarking funds - especially District Mineral Foundation (DMF) resources and the ESCROW funds for coal mine closure - for women's health, mobility, skill development and entrepreneurship. It means measuring the impacts of transition on women as rigorously as emissions are tracked. And it means redesigning governance mechanisms so that women are not merely present but influential.

The cost of ignoring women is too high

Evidence from global climate programmes consistently shows that gender-responsive approaches lead to stronger outcomes across mitigation, adaptation and resilience. By incorporating the provisions of the Belém Gender Action Plan into national and state-level strategies, India can strengthen transition governance, reduce social risk, and expand economic opportunity in regions that have historically borne the costs of extraction. It means earmarking District Mineral Foundation (DMF) and coal mine closure ESCROW funds for women's health, mobility, skills and enterprise development; tracking gender-differentiated impacts with the same rigour as emissions; and redesigning local governance so that women are not merely present but influential in decision-making.

The adoption of the Belém GAP sets a clear global benchmark for embedding gender justice in climate governance. For India, the real test lies in translating these commitments into district-level action that protects livelihoods and expands opportunity for women in coal regions. These questions - on finance, leadership and accountability - will be central to discussions at the forthcoming Silver Jubilee edition of TERI's flagship World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS), where leaders will examine how to ensure the energy transition is not only low-carbon, but genuinely inclusive.

Jiwesh Nandan, Distinguished Fellow & Advisor, World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) 2026, TERI; Arpita Elishaba Victor, Research Associate & Contributor, WSDS 2026, TERI

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AI and the progress paradox



**KAJLEEN
KAUR**

With the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as the harbinger of technological reformation, the world is set to be reshaped. An advanced restructuring encompassing all arenas - from finance, manufacturing, healthcare, services and education - has already taken off. The recently held India AI Impact Summit 2026 starkly reflected India's ambition to be a global AI hub. The event brought together world leaders, policymakers, researchers and innovators from across the globe to discuss and derive the potential benefits of AI and also the unavoidable need for inclusive AI development.

While every economy is ready to reap the benefits AI offers in terms of promising productivity and innovation, there is also a flip side. AI poses a paradox of serious long-run challenges in terms of negative externalities. There is a grave threat to the future course of human development and the widening of the economic and digital divide among nations. Human brains adapt to environmental changes, and therefore human traits of curiosity, ideas and focus are indispensable to critical and analytical minds. In an AI-driven world, this is expected to diminish, as software may limit the inquisitiveness required for mental growth. The next generation, born and growing in such an environment, is at higher risk as it faces serious challenges to cognitive development and the trajectory of human evolution. The digitally smart world has already created a revolution, where the comfort of easy availability, access and convenience has replaced the need for hard work, exploration and creativity, especially among young minds. Moreover, AI, which offers virtual assistants, reduces human interactions and interdependence necessary for social development. This, in the long run, may create an isolated environment as empathy, communication skills and cultural understanding slowly decline, impacting overall well-being and holistic human development.

Macroeconomic models identify growth as a function of labour force expansion, technological progress and human capital formation. India, and other countries in the developing stage, with population pressure and high unemployment, face an additional risk of structural shock. AI undeniably enhances productivity, but it has the capacity to develop technologies of such a nature and pace that can substitute labour, causing a displacement effect which can intensify the problem of unemployment. In a labour-surplus economy like India, this can have severe repercussions. Furthermore, the ubiquity of AI in every sphere means that the nature of unemployment may

widen, affecting even the educated class. India is presently enjoying a demographic distribution, with the maximum population centred around the earning age; such structural disruptions and the resulting unemployment can be detrimental to long-term sustainable growth.

Further, there is a possibility of deepening income inequality, with favourable returns accruing to digital literates, technology developers, data controllers and established entrepreneurs able to incorporate the latest AI-driven technologies. Internationally, emerging economies attempting to enter global value and supply chains may face setbacks. Developed economies with technological advantages may further dominate and create digital dependencies for developing economies, aggravating the economic gap and concentration of economic power. The restructuring of the world due to the AI revolution is inevitable, and the way forward is not to resist or avoid it but to find ways to embrace it judiciously for the benefit of society.

The education system, especially schools, needs to take maximum responsibility for keeping curiosity alive among children and reducing dependence on technology. AI should rather be used to augment human capability with customised learning mechanisms and adapt to both fast and slow learners. Higher education institutions, at the same time, should invest in skilled education, which will make the younger generation competent and market-ready. The future of education has to be a hybrid and blended learning curriculum at every level, with a focus on AI and technology as assistive tools to provide students with a higher platform for learning. The Indian Knowledge system, which aims to conserve a cultural and value-based society, will play an important role in the evolution of posterity.

Governments and policymakers, at the same time, need to frame strategies and provide incentives for promoting indigenous innovation to reduce digital dependence. India's dream of becoming a manufacturing-driven growth economy, following China, will now have to be integrated with AI-based development, which can also help accelerate the rate of growth. Additionally, India should innovate ways to incorporate AI technologies to mitigate environmental degradation and waste management resulting from rapid industrialisation and urbanisation.

The key to AI as a paradox lies neither in escaping nor becoming dependent on it, but in complementing human development with technological advancement and using it as a catalyst to activate progress.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

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As most investors, especially the smart and savvy ones, know from experience, making profits depends on the chemistry of investments. This is exactly what a recent study, 'Chemistry of Investing,' tries to examine. It looks at how the various permutations and combinations of debt, equity, and bullion influence portfolio-related risks, and returns. Do not take it as a search for an ideal portfolio. Instead, consider it to be an exercise that sheds light on the "structural aspects" on how to design a portfolio that suits the risk-and-return appetite of an investor. It is more about what can offer 'You' the best outcome.

In search of the best design, the study calculates returns from a risk-free portfolio to the riskiest one. Obviously, the former includes one where 100 per cent of the money is locked up in bonds, which are generally considered the safest bet. Between September 2001 and January 2026, such a portfolio generated a decent annual return of nearly seven per cent, with a volatility of 6.4 per cent. The earnings are closer to what fixed deposits offer, with the large state-owned banks being 'too big to fail,' and volatility seems to be under control.

However, as the study shows, adding 10 per cent equity to the portfolio, and reducing the bond component by the same, hikes the returns to just over eight per cent, or addition of more than a percentage point. Surprisingly, and shockingly to some, the 90:10 portfolio reduces the volatility to less than six per cent. Bizarre as it may sound, adding risky instruments in the form of stocks, reduces the risks. Even if the ratio changes to 80:20, or 20 per cent equities, the annual earnings shoot up further to more than nine per cent, even as volatility remains below 6.4 per cent for the so-called safer all-debt portfolio.

It is only when the equity portion rises to 25 per cent, and higher, the returns improve considerably, and the risks skyrocket. In a reverse portfolio, where 100 per cent is held in equities, the annual returns are an unbelievable more than 19 per cent, but the annual volatility is more than 25 per cent. So, while returns are 2.7x higher, volatility is up by almost four times. A similar trend is visible in a 10:90 portfolio, with 90 per cent of the money locked up in stocks. The annual return is nearly 18 per cent, with a yearly volatility of just under 23 per cent.

According to the study, "Introducing a modest allocation to equity altered the risk-return profile relative to this baseline (100 per cent debt) It is also notable that an 80 per cent bond and 20 per cent equity combination represents almost similar volatility as a 100 per cent bond portfolio on average.... Which means the asset allocation portfolio has delivered a better risk-adjusted return than a 100 per cent bond portfolio." Of course, there is a caveat that most experts warn about. "Past performance may or may not be sustained in the future, and is not a guarantee of any future returns," states the study in its fine print.

To stretch the study to commodities, it adds the bullion sheen. If 20 per cent of the portfolio is allocated to gold, with 80 per cent debt, the annual return is nearly 8.5 per cent, or higher than under seven per cent for 100 per cent debt one, and volatility is lower at just over six per cent. Gold reduces the risks, and hikes the earnings. But if the gold component remains the same, and the debt part is incrementally replaced by equities, the returns zoom, and so does volatility. The debt-equity-gold mix behaves essentially the same as debt-equity mix.

In a portfolio with 20 per cent gold, and 80 per cent equity, the annual returns are higher than 18 per cent, and volatility is more than 20 per cent. In a 10:70:20 scenario, with 10 per cent allocation to debt, and 70 per cent to stocks, the returns are just over 17 per cent, with 17.4 per cent volatility. Of course, the addition of gold reduces the returns compared to one where only equities and debt are considered. This is reasonable as stocks are riskier compared to gold.

"Gold has provided some downside protection in many of the years when domestic equity has delivered negative returns, and vice versa. Various asset classes have varied degrees of correlation with each other. Economic cycles and markets across the globe are very dynamic, and it is not possible to consistently time the winning asset class, but a right mix of these asset classes may help investors achieve optimum level of risk-adjusted return to attain their long-term financial goals," concludes the study. In effect, while one cannot buy low-cost, and sell highest in each class, one can make reasonable profits through a mix.

However, we need to add a couple of warnings. In the past few years, especially after the pandemic, the rise in gold prices was phenomenal. It is obvious that this has skewed the returns in gold's favour. Similarly, the Indian stock indices zoomed thousands of times since September 2001. The Sensex rocketed by more than 27 times, or just under 80,000 points. In the autumn of 2001, it was just over 3,000 points.

Twirled tales of tangled TNCs

Two empires, and one has-been one, find themselves in a quicksand

Successful corporate histories can be unmade as easily as they are made. In some cases, the undoing is permanent. In others, it is temporary, but nerve-wracking, and leaves dark scars. Two Indian transnationals (TNCs), and one that was a TNC more than 15 years ago, find themselves in corporate swamps. One of them is sinking deeper into a quicksand, inch by inch, every day. The other two are in a mess, but their chances of pulling through are high. In any case, the trio will dent not just their business empires, but the economy. In some ways, the former hints at the pulls and pressures on the latter.

For the one, who is virtually neck-deep in the marsh-with-little-escape, may need to blame himself. His unbridled ambition, almost-fantastical plans, rush to talk-the-walk rather than walk-the-talk, and animosity with family members and outsiders may be responsible for the near-demise. Today, the official investigating agencies have seized assets worth ₹12,000 crore, including his grand home in Mumbai's Pali Hills. He has had to plead to the Supreme Court that he will not leave the country without permission. For the second time on Thursday, he was summoned for interrogations by the Enforcement Directorate.

Anil Ambani, who was on the verge of being the richest Indian in 2008, and possibly on the way to be the richest Asian, is in the dumps. A few years ago, he declared personal bankruptcy in a London court. Since then, his empire, which was on the downhill path, has almost vanished. Most of his firms are bankrupt, and the investigating agencies seem to show no mercy, either to his existing businesses, him, or family members (including wife Tina, a former

Bollywood actress).

Perhaps, in the same red corner as Anil Ambani stands Noel Tata, the successor of the Tata empire, who is in the middle of several intimate, personal, and do-or-die battles. Sometimes, even the most ardent and sympathetic observers feel like these are more like do-and-die fights. No one, not even a Tata, can come out of boardroom brawls, and corporate clashes without tell-tale marks. These tussles will leave several wounds and scabs, some of which will never heal. Like it or not, believe it or not, the 'Tata' name has lost its sheen, if some was still left.

Within months after he took over the mantle, or months after the death of Ratan Tata, Noel was in a fight mode. After inculcating his children in some of the Tata trusts, which own a majority in Tata Sons, the holding company of the group, Noel trained his guns on some of the trustees. He believed that their allegiance lay with the dead Ratan, and not him. The trustees too wished to impose their authority. In an open war, which involved the home minister and finance minister, apart from corporate chieftains, and influential Parsis, Noel triumphed.

With Tata Trusts under his thumb, his ownership over Tata Sons and, by default, Tata Group, was complete. But there was another war on the horizon, which was in the making for years, even when Ratan Tata was alive. Noel, the half-brother, was invariably seen as a half-achiever, the one who had no flair for business. So, when he became the group head, Noel was dying to show his mettle (pun intended). One of the ways was to prove that the vision of N Chandrasekaran,

Tata Sons' chairman who was handpicked by Ratan, was wrong.

Hence, Noel pointed fingers at the losses incurred in new acquisitions like Air India, and other ventures. He wanted assurances, sorry, guarantees from the chairman. Tata Sons would never be listed on the stock exchange. Its debt would be zero, and its cash coffers would be always full to fund the philanthropic work of Tata Trusts. Or else, Chandrasekaran's third tenure, which will begin in 2027, was in danger. Until a few months ago, Chandrasekaran was untouchable in the sense no one could have even thought of removing him as the chairman.

One can see irony in the Tata tangles. When Ratan became the group chairman in 1991, he was considered a softie, someone who had never proven himself as a businessman. Within a few years, he got rid of the satraps, the feudal lords who were deeply entrenched in large firms like Tata Steel, and Tata Chemicals. Once he declared himself as the Tata Emperor, Ratan built the empire his own way. Noel possibly wishes to do the same, and establish his own legacy that he can safely and securely leave for his children. He knows what can happen in a succession battle at the Tatas. Remember Ratan versus Cyrus Mistry!

Succession is possibly the last thing in the mind of Gautam Adani, the patriarch of the sprawling Adani Group, which hopes to be bigger than the Tata or Ambani clan. His problem stems from external missiles that are regularly aimed at him, rather than internal tensions and dissensions. After the Hindenburg report that decimated his stocks, he rebuilt the empire quite quickly. But the report has a larger-than-life after death. The regulator, Sebi convinced the Indian Supreme Court that there were no truths in the Hindenburg allegations. The stocks recovered.

But it marked the beginning of new innings on a wetter wicket. The US stock market regulator alleged that bribes were paid to secure solar power contracts, and summoned Gautam Adani. An Italian bank investigated some of the charges in the Hindenburg report. The US launched an investigation on the imports of solar panels, including from India, and asked Gautam Adani to appear for questioning. When he did not, the miffed Uncle Sam imposed a 166 per cent tariff on solar panels. In essence, the corporate events escalated into an economic war.

To be fair, the Adani fortunes were intricately linked with that of the nation. The Indian Government saved him from repeated summons from the American stock market regulator. In the Indian courts, the policy-makers acted to demolish the Hindenburg charges. Many openly claimed that this was the foreigners' way to discredit India. In some senses, India became Adani, and Adani India. So, when the scales are reversed, it is logical to assume that mud slung on Adani will stick to the nation's image. However, as experiences prove, the Adani group has resilience and strength to withstand any attack. Gautam Adani consistently faced corporate missiles, global guns, business drones, and online sniping, and came out largely unscathed.

OUR TAKE



The Tech Wrecker

When Samsung recently unveiled the Galaxy S26 Ultra, experts and social influencers were not talking about features such as a camera upgrade, or faster-super charging. Despite the talk of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the buzz was not about it as a feature of the phone. Instead, the South Korean giant presented it as an operating layer that ran across phones. The current Ultra generation will come with Agentic AI, which implies that unlike chatbots that respond to prompts, the former acts proactively, and uses reason, planning, and tools to achieve complex goals with minimal human oversight.

For many, this AI move shows that Samsung is in a reassessment mode, and feels that scale in hardware will not be enough to maintain dominance in smartphones. Hence, there is a repositioning strategy that is in play. What the company now describes as an "AI OS" is not a replacement for the former operating system, Android. The former is more like an intelligence (intelligent) layer that sits across one user interface, and connects other devices. Thus, the AI-OS works within, and across devices, and cumulates data in a single place.

In other words, while the phone is positioned as the primary interface, intelligence travels from and to various places and destinations. For example, health data may come from a Galaxy watch to the handset, or content discovery may shift from the phone to a Samsung TV. Hence, the so-called contextual controls extend to connected appliances in two-way directions. The logic mirrors the operational-intelligence strategy that Apple has adopted for years. In both cases, the ecosystem that comprises the smartphones and other devices matter more than the individual products. Connectivity is, and holds, the key.

However, there are several factors to contend with. First, the Samsung strategic shift comes at a time when a structural change has engulfed the global smartphone business. Annual shipments have plateaued at 1.15-1.2 billion units, with growth increasingly concentrated in premium devices. In premium, ecosystem continuity, and software-led experiences outweigh incremental hardware improvements. Samsung, which ships around 250 million smartphones a year, and remains the world's largest vendor by volume, hopes to transform breadth into stickiness. In effect, once the OS works across devices, customers will be ready to stick to the company, and its products.

TM Roh, president, Samsung's mobile business, said earlier that the Galaxy AI is intended to be "meaningful and practical across

Own platform, not hardware

AI is not just a phone's feature; it is the operating layer



devices." It is an articulation of intent that underlines the firm's movement beyond phone-centric thinking. Remember, apart from hundreds of millions of smartphones, Samsung sells tens of millions of TVs, and operates one of the world's largest appliance businesses. Given this breadth of the ecosystem, AI, it hopes will provide the long-missing glue (or link) between the various categories that hitherto functioned in silos. Buy a Samsung, and get hooked to its S26 Ultra, and wearables.

Some experts feel that while the promise sounds grand, and vision seems futuristic, Samsung may arrive at the destination without the benefit of full-scale vertical integration. For, the ambition runs against a constraint that the firm cannot resolve easily. The AI-OS vision, for example, sits on top of Google's Android platform. The former, thus, relies heavily on Google's AI models. Of course, Samsung controls the hardware, display tech, semiconductor integration, and the user interface. But, at the same time, Google is in-charge of the OS, app ecosystem, and foundational intel-

ligence (user experiences).

Although, this division of powers traditionally had several benefits, including costs and tech-sharing. But today, as overall and complete control matters more in the smartphone cycles, it seems like a burden. As AI becomes the primary interface through which users search, create, and interact, the value migrates upward from the hardware to platform. In essence, the platform owners gain leverage. Hardware firms risk becoming the makers of 'commodities', regardless of scale. In this scenario, owning a platform is critical for future growth, and owning both the platform and hardware is a killer strategy.

One needs to remember that Google is no longer a neutral platform provider. Its Pixel smartphones may account for only low single-digit market share globally. But they shape the Android's AI narrative. Pixel devices are often the first receivers of Google's latest AI tools, and set expectations that the competitors, even the most dominant Samsung, need to match. This seems like a role reversal. The largest smart-

Goyal meets Lutnick, discusses trade and economic partnership

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday said he has held a meeting with US Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick and US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor and discussed ways to expand trade relationship between the two countries.

"Hosted US Secretary of Commerce @HowardLutnick & @USAmbIndia Sergio Gor. Engaged in very fruitful discussions to expand our trade and economic partnership," Goyal said in a social media post.

The meeting holds immense importance as both countries are looking to finalise the legal text for the first phase of a bilateral trade agreement.

Chief negotiators of both sides were scheduled to meet this week in Washington to finalise the legal text for the pact but it was postponed following the US Supreme Court order striking down President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs.

After the court order, the US imposed 10 per cent tariffs on all the countries for 150 days with effect from February 24. Trump has announced to increase it to 15 per cent, but there is no official order on that yet.

Goyal on Tuesday had said "as soon as" there is more clarity on the tariffs front in the US, India will resume trade talks with America.

In a major setback to Trump's pivotal economic agenda in his second term,



Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal, centre with US Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick, left, and US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor during a meeting

the US Supreme Court ruled that the tariffs imposed by Trump on nations around the world were illegal and that the president had exceeded his authority when he imposed the sweeping levies by using the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977.

The US had imposed a 25 per cent reciprocal tariff on India in August 2025. Later, an additional 25 per cent duty was imposed for buying Russian crude oil, taking the total tariffs on India to 50 per cent.

India and the US, earlier this month,

agreed on a framework to finalise an interim trade deal, under which Washington will cut down the tariffs to 18 per cent. To sign and implement the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement, the framework has to be converted into a legal document.

During 2021-25, the US was India's largest trading partner in goods. The US accounts for about 18 per cent of India's total exports, 6.22 per cent of its imports, and 10.73 per cent of its bilateral trade.

In 2024-25, bilateral trade were \$86.5 billion in exports and \$45.3 billion in imports.

Carbon trading platform likely to be functional by September: Govt official

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

The carbon trading platform is likely to be functional in India by September, which will be a driver for renewable energy transition, a senior official said on Thursday.

This assumes significance in view of India's ambitious target of having 500GW of renewable energy by 2030. This may also help make renewable energy more viable in the backdrop of the slow pace of signing of power purchase agreements (PPAs) in the country.

"Carbon trading platform is on track and most likely by September, you'll find that also happening in the country. Probably that will be another driver for RE (renewable energy) to pick up, and particularly in the C&I (commercial and industrial) segments that will be a big driver," said Central Electricity Authority Chairman Ghanshyam Prasad, addressing the India Energy Summit.

He noted that PPAs (for RE projects) are not happening. "We found that PPAs are not happening, and if PPAs are not happening, that means we need to have



some other construct to do it, and that's how we are trying to explore some kind of a market construct where more and larger capacity can come, and the market can support that," he said.

He also talked about a new scheme which will incentivise reduction of plant load factor or capacity utilisation by thermal power plants so that renewable energy can be fed or balanced in the national electricity grid.

He said, "We are now at a very fix that if all (power producers) of you say that we cannot flex (adjust power production), then who will flex? So even if you store that energy, somewhere it has to

be balanced." He stated that it is technically possible and the only thing is, we need to train the people properly.

"We are also thinking that we can give them some more incentive for the coal-based generator because they are the big brothers and they have been supporting so far... So we are trying to think some kind of an incentive scheme."

Prasad said that one such scheme has been suggested to the Power Ministry, and hopefully that will go through. That will address some of their concerns and people in the thermal sector as well. They would like to do their flex (adjust PLF) on their own. On this occasion,

Minister of State for Power and New & Renewable Energy Shripad Yesso Naik stated that India's energy transition is not just an aspiration but is an ongoing transformation, anchored with clear targets with decisive decisions.

"Under the Prime Minister Mr Modi's vision, India has set an ambitious goal of 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030 and progressing towards Net Zero by 2070," he added.

Naik stated that today, the total power installed capacity has crossed 520 GW with more than half coming from non-fossil sources.

Solar capacity has more than tripled in recent years and renewable energy is now mainstream and not marginal.

"This progress reflects the policy clarity, transparent competitive bidding, expansion of green energy corridors, promotion of ultra mega renewable energy parks, rooftop solar through PM Surya Ghar Yojna, agricultural solarisation through PM KUSUM Yojna, along with a strong push for domestic manufacturing," he noted.

Rupee dips 1 paisa to settle at 90.92 against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Mumbai

The rupee slipped 1 paisa to settle at 90.92 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, weighed down by a rise in global crude oil prices and a firm greenback against major rivals.

However, foreign fund inflows supported the local unit and prevented the decline, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 90.86 against the greenback and traded in a narrow range of 90.81-90.93 during the session. Eventually, it closed at 90.92 (provisional), down 1 paisa from its previous close. The rupee stayed range-bound and settled with a gain of 4 paise at 90.91 against the US dollar on Wednesday. "We expect the rupee to trade

India's 8th Trade Policy Review at WTO in July

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

India's 8th Trade Policy Review at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) will take place in July 2026, which will involve a comprehensive peer-review of the country's national trade policies, an official statement said on Thursday.

An Indian delegation led by Central Board of Indirect Taxes (CBIC) and Customs (Member-Customs) Surjit Bhujabal showcased India's digital Customs reforms and Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) implementation ahead of India's Trade Policy Review in July 2026, the finance ministry said.

India's 7th Trade Policy Review (TPR) took place in January 2021, at the Geneva-headquartered WTO.

CBIC and Permanent Mission of India had already organised Special Trade



Facilitation Sessions at WTO on February 24.

The finance Ministry said the special trade facilitation sessions at WTO witnessed wide participation from WTO Members and Secretariat, with delegates from around 40 countries, reflecting strong interest in India's experience and best practices. Having achieved compliance with WTO TFA commitments, India has moved towards "TFA Plus" mea-

asures under the National Trade Facilitation Action Plan (NTFAP 3.0), aiming to go beyond the minimum requirements and align with evolving global best practices, the ministry added.

During the session on trade facilitation, Indian Customs delegation highlighted 'whole-of-Government approach' in Customs reforms, and pioneering efforts in creating a faceless, contactless and paperless

Customs ecosystem through extensive digitalisation and process re-engineering.

India has notified 100 per cent of its TFA commitments within the stipulated timelines. The progress reflects India's sustained commitment to enhancing transparency, improving inter-agency coordination, and simplifying cross-border trade procedures.

Bhujabal said that India's digitisation and modernisation of customs procedures over the past decade have contributed meaningfully to trade growth, and deeper integration into global value chains.

Indian Customs digital ecosystem connects traders, customs authorities, banks and logistics operators, facilitates electronic processing of customs documentation, leading to reduced transaction costs and faster clearance times.

India's GDP to grow between 6.8-7.2% in FY27: EY Economy Watch report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

India's GDP could grow between 6.8-7.2 per cent in the next fiscal, EY Economy Watch report said on Thursday.

It suggested that to attain the Viksit Bharat goal by 2047, India may have to increase its tax-GDP ratio largely by improvement of tax compliance as major tax reforms have already taken place.

"In the background of India's extensive bilateral trade agreements with other major economies or economic groups, India's medium-term prospects have brightened up. We estimate India's real GDP growth to be in the range of 6.8-7.2 per cent in FY27," EY India Chief Policy Advisor DK



Srivastava said. The EY Economy Watch report said that major tax reforms were undertaken in the current fiscal, in particular relating to personal income tax (PIT) and the GST.

Both these reforms involved a considerable amount of revenue forgone aimed at increasing household disposable incomes so that private consumption

demand could be supported. "These tax reforms involved considerable sacrifice of Gol's Gross Tax Revenues (GTR), which were expected to fall short of the budget estimates for FY26.

In spite of the apprehension of this revenue shortfall, the Gol was widely expected to adhere to its budgeted fiscal deficit target for FY26," the report said.

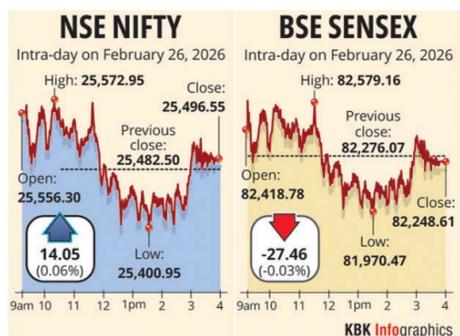
Stock markets end flat in volatile trade

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Mumbai

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended almost flat after a volatile day of trading on Thursday, dragged down by HDFC Bank and other blue-chip stocks. Also, caution ahead of the US-Iran talks made investors stay on the sidelines.

Paring morning gains, the 30-share BSE Sensex dipped marginally by 27.46 points or 0.03 per cent to settle at 82,248.61. During the day, it hit a high of 82,579.16 and a low of 81,970.47, gyrating 608.69 points. The 50-share NSE Nifty eeked out a marginal gain of 14.05 points or 0.06 per cent to end at 25,496.55.

From the Sensex pack, Trent, Eternal, Power Grid, HDFC Bank, Asian Paints, UltraTech Cement, NTPC and Axis Bank were among the biggest laggards. Bharat Electronics, Sun Pharma, Adani Ports, Maruti and



Bharti Airtel were among the gainers.

"The domestic market surrendered its early gains amid mixed global cues and increased caution ahead of the US "Iran nuclear talks, as well as key data releases including US initial jobless claims and India's GDP print, which triggered profit-taking," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹2,991.64 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) also bought stocks worth ₹5,118.57 crore.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi jumped 3.67 per cent. Japan's Nikkei 225 also ended in positive territory, while Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended lower.

Govt plans grade-based driving licence system to encourage responsible driving, curb accidents

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

To promote responsible driving and prevent road mishaps, the Government is planning to introduce a grade-based driving licence system with stricter provisions, including licence cancellation for certain traffic rule violations.

Every year, around 1.8 lakh people die across the country due to factors such as using a mobile phone while driving, over speeding, wrong-side driving and drunken driving, Union Minister for Road, Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari said.

People's lives are extremely important, and the Government is taking various measures towards road safety, he said, addressing the National Conclave on Road Safety organised by industry body CII in the national Capital.

The Government has already increased penalties for traffic violations, but the biggest issue is the enforcement, Gadkari said, adding that there is no fear or respect for the law.

"We are bringing a graded point system in driving licences," he said.



Explaining the concept, Gadkari said some points may be deducted for traffic offences. When all the points are deducted, the driving licence of the offender may be suspended for six months or even cancelled for repeat offences. The minister said, "We are going to launch the scheme soon."

Road safety is one of the most important subjects for the country. Every year, India is witnessing 5 lakh accidents and 1.8 lakh deaths, Gadkari

noted. He said 72 per cent of deaths are of people in the age bracket of 18-45 years, the number of accident victims below 18 years is 10,119, while deaths due to non-use of helmets are 54,122.

Non-use of seat belt caused 14,466 deaths, while deaths due to over speeding were 1.2 lakh. Other major causes of death are wrong-side driving, drunken driving and usage of mobile phones.

Customs procedures must help exporters: Revenue Secretary

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Revenue Secretary Arvind Srivastava on Thursday said customs procedures must actively enable Indian exporters to access global markets with speed and certainty, with India's increased focus on expanding domestic manufacturing, and supporting MSMEs and entrepreneurs.

Stating that the two mainstays of the customs reforms announced in Budget are "trust in stakeholders" and "effective use of technology", Srivastava said the Customs department will make efforts

in building systems and enhancing capacities, both on the human resource as well as on the technology side.

Speaking at the National Symposium on Customs Reforms-2026, Srivastava said the thought process of relationship between revenue department and stakeholder is changing such that instead of an authoritative and adversarial relationship "between the tax department and the industry, we are building a relationship of partnership, of collaboration, and of cooperation".

India today stands at an



Arvind Srivastava

important juncture in its economic journey, he said, adding that expanding trade volumes, deeper integration into global value chains, growing digital commerce ecosystem, and the rising aspirations of citizens require

governance systems that are efficient, transparent, and responsive.

"Equally significant is the focus on export opportunities. As India seeks to expand manufacturing, and support MSME, digital entrepreneurs and startups, customs procedures must actively enable the exporters to access global markets, with speed and certainty," the Revenue Secretary said.

He said that Customs administration is not merely a regulatory authority, but also an institution that enables economic growth, strengthens supply chains,

protects society, and enhances India's global competitiveness.

Observing that the tax department has started putting draft rules in public domain for stakeholder consultation, Srivastava said this also indicates open-mindedness that we are willing to listen and incorporate those suggestions which are to the good of everybody. "This approach is not just about improving our systems. It is also about redefining the relationship between the authority, the tax department, and these stakeholders, which is the industry," he said.

False narrative on processed food harming sector: Paswan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Food Processing Industries Minister Chirag Paswan on Thursday said social media influencers are spreading a "false narrative" that processed food is harmful, and called for a collective effort to counter it, warning the misinformation was impeding the sector's growth.

Addressing the inaugural session of ANVESH-2026, a three-day international conference organised by



Chirag Paswan

NIFTEM-K, Paswan said the perception that "processed food means not good" was being actively promoted online. "We are facing this challenge not only in our country, but also globally as

well — the kind of false narrative through the influencers on processed food. Processed food means not good — such narrative is being set. I don't know the intention behind it. But this is being done," he said.

"This is impacting the sector and it will increase further. We need to counter this narrative," he added.

The minister said ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat products have become integral to modern lifestyles with the rise of nuclear families and working couples.

FROM THE WORLD

JORDAN Prince Harry visits camp

Prince Harry and Meghan visited a refugee camp and hospital in Jordan to kick off a trip spotlighting organisations that help civilians affected by war and displacement. The Duke and Duchess of Sussex also joined World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus for a roundtable with the WHO's regional leaders, some of their humanitarian partners and key donors. "It is an honour and a privilege to be in a room full of people with such big hearts," Harry told the group. "I don't know how many times you get thanked for all the work that you do - probably not enough." Since stepping aside as working royals in 2020, the couple has prioritised support for projects that assist civilians affected by war, especially injured and displaced children.

UNITED NATION UN sanctions four officers

The UN Security Council imposed sanctions on four commanders of Sudan's warring paramilitary force suspected of atrocities against civilians that UN experts said showed "hallmarks of genocide." The four commanders in the Rapid Support Forces, which have been at war with the Sudanese military since 2023, were added to the blacklist for their activities in el-Fasher, especially on October 26, the day the paramilitary force took over the North Darfur Capital. The UK imposed sanctions on the four commanders in December, and Tuesday's designations follow a report last week by UN-backed human rights experts. They reported that the RSF carried out mass killings and other atrocities in el-Fasher after an 18-month siege, during which they imposed conditions "calculated to bring about the physical destruction" of non-Arab communities.

Russia launched major aerial attack, says Zelenskyy

ILLIA NOVIKOV
Kyiv

Russia launched a barrage of 420 drones and 39 missiles at Ukraine overnight, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Thursday, as US and Ukrainian envoys prepared to hold more talks in Geneva on ending the war that is now in its fifth year.

The nighttime bombardment, which included 11 ballistic missiles, targeted critical infrastructure and residential areas across eight regions of Ukraine, Zelenskyy said. Dozens of people, including children, were injured, officials said, though authorities did not immediately publish a confirmed total.

Zelenskyy said late on Wednesday he had spoken by phone with US President Donald Trump and thanked him for his "efforts and engagement" in pursuing peace negotiations.

The US-brokered talks between Moscow and Kyiv are continuing but are deadlocked on the issue of the future of Ukrainian territory that Russia claims as its own.

Trump representatives Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, who were also discussing nuclear negotiations with Iran in Geneva before turning to the war in Europe, were due to meet with Rustem Umerov, the head of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council. They also joined Trump's call



Local residents walking a dog near a damaged apartment building hit by Russian drone in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine

with Zelenskyy. Washington is looking to keep momentum in its yearlong push to stop the fighting and overcome deep enmity between the warring countries.

Ukrainian and European officials have accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of feigning interest in peace negotiations, hoping to avoid punitive US measures such as additional sanctions while pressing forward with the invasion.

On Thursday's talks between the American and Ukrainian envoys were to address details of a possible postwar recovery plan for Ukraine and discuss preparations for an upcoming trilateral meeting with Moscow officials, perhaps next week, according to Zelenskyy.

He said he has also tasked Umerov with discussing a possible prisoner exchange.

Russia returned 1,000 bodies of fallen soldiers to Ukraine, and got back 35 bodies of its fallen troops, Vladimir Medinsky, the head of the Russian delegation at previous talks with Ukraine, said Thursday. He did not say when the exchange happened.

Russia struck gas infrastructure in the Poltava region and electrical substations in the Kyiv and Dnipropetrovsk regions, Zelenskyy said. Emergency

crews responded in five other regions, as well as in the capital. Ukraine's air defences shot down most of the Russian missiles, Zelenskyy said, crediting Western partners for timely delivery of additional air defence interceptors. Ukraine needs foreign help to sustain its fight against Russia's bigger forces. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha urged allied countries to provide more military aid.

"When the whole world demands Moscow to finally stop this senseless war, Putin bets on more terror, attacks and aggression," Sybiha said in a post on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website. (AP)

Kenyan police arrest man accused of recruiting fighters for Russia war

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Nairobi

Police in Kenya have arrested a man named in the alleged scheme that duped Kenyans with promises of skilled work in Russia, only for them to end up on the front lines of the fighting in Ukraine.

Festus Omwamba was arrested on suspicion of human trafficking in the northern Kenyan town of Moyale, near the border with Ethiopia, and will be transported to the capital, Nairobi. Police spokesperson Michael Muchiri said Omwamba was fleeing after returning from Russia.

Omwamba, who was identified by three Kenyan recruits who spoke to The Associated Press, had gone missing after families started protesting the disappearances and deaths of their relatives in the war in Ukraine.

The Kenyan Government last week said more than 1,000 Kenyans were recruited to fight for Russia in Ukraine and that at least 89 Kenyans were still on the front line, 39 were hospitalised, 28 were missing in



action, and others had returned home. At least one person was confirmed dead.

An intelligence report presented to Kenya's Parliament by the majority leader, Kimani Ichung'uwah, said Kenyan and Russian Government officials colluded with rogue job recruitment agencies to lure Kenyans to the front lines.

The Russian Embassy in Nairobi denied the allegations, saying in a statement on Thursday that it never issued visas to anyone intending to travel to Russia to fight in Ukraine.

4 killed in speedboat shooting: Cuba

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Havana

Cuba's Government said late Wednesday that the 10 passengers on a boat that opened fire on its soldiers were armed Cubans living in the US who were trying to infiltrate the island and unleash terrorism.

The announcement came hours after Cuba said its soldiers killed four people and wounded six others aboard a Florida-registered speed boat that had entered Cuban waters and opened fire on the soldiers first, injuring one Cuban officer.



Cuba's Government said the majority of the 10 people on the boat "have a known history of criminal and violent activity". US Secretary of State Marco Rubio had told reporters earlier that he

was made aware of the incident and that the US is now gathering its own information to determine if the victims were American citizens or permanent residents.

"We have various different elements of the US Government that are trying to identify elements of the story that may not be provided to us now," Rubio said while at the airport in Basseterre, St Kitts, where he was attending a regional summit with Caribbean leaders. The Cuban Government identified two of the boat passengers.

Hong Kong court quashes fraud conviction of ex-media mogul Jimmy

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Hong Kong

A Hong Kong appellate court on Thursday quashed fraud convictions against onetime media magnate Jimmy Lai, a rare victory in the prominent activist's legal battles.

Lai, 78, an outspoken critic of China's ruling Communist Party who founded the now-defunct *Apple Daily*, will stay in prison because he was sentenced to 20 years weeks ago after being convicted in another case brought under a China-imposed national security law.

That came more than five years after he was arrested under the law, which was used in a yearslong crackdown on many of Hong Kong's leading activists.

His plight has evoked grief over the city's loss of press freedom and sparked an international outcry, though the



city's authorities insist his case had nothing to do with media independence. The conviction that was overturned Thursday was from an earlier fraud case in which prosecutors alleged that a consultancy firm controlled by Lai had used office space that his media business rented for publication and printing purposes.

Lai was sentenced to five

years and nine months in prison in 2022 after being found guilty of two fraud charges. A lower court judge found that Lai and his co-defendant Wong Wai-keung had concealed that the firm was occupying space and had violated the lease agreement, saying he had used his media organisation as a protective shield.

Jaishankar urges UN to act against terror

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Geneva

India remains firm and uncompromising in its opposition to terrorism in all its forms, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said, asserting there can be no justification, especially when innocent lives are targeted.

"Confronting terrorism requires collective resolve," Jaishankar said and urged the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to "advocate zero-tolerance for terrorist acts."

Jaishankar was virtually addressing the High-Level Segment of the 61st session of the UNHRC when he pointed out that India seeks to find and expand common ground in a world marred by conflict, polarisation and uncertainty.

"We have consistently underlined dialogue over confrontation, consensus over division, and human-centric development over narrow interests," he said. "We remain firm and uncompromising Mr



President in our opposition to terrorism in all its forms and manifestations as well. Terrorism is among the most egregious violations of human rights and there can be no justification, especially when innocent lives are targeted.

"Confronting terrorism requires collective resolve, and we look at this Council and to the United Nations at large to advocate zero-tolerance for terrorist acts," Jaishankar said.

Asserting that India's vision is rooted in the understanding that the insecurity of any region, or the margin-

alisation of any group, eventually undermines the rights and well-being of all, the minister said, "India approaches this Council with the conviction that human rights are best advanced through dialogue, capacity-building and genuine partnerships, and not by politicisation, selectivity or double standards."

Jaishankar said India's humanitarian outreach has been guided by empathy rather than just geography. Whether through disaster relief, medical supplies, vaccines, food grains or development partnerships, India has

been a dependable partner of first resort for many, he added.

At the outset, Jaishankar drew attention to how India began the current High Level Segment as an elected member of the Human Rights Council, and said, New Delhi's mandate reflects the trust and expectations of the international community, especially of partners in the Global South.

"For us, human rights are not abstract ideals, but an integral part of our civilisational ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam that sees the world as one family," he added.

The minister underscored how in recent years, the devastating impact of pandemic, climate change, geopolitical tensions and economic stress have exacerbated existing inequities, and how, for many communities, these translate into lost years of schooling, pressures on food and fuel security, and mounting debt burdens. "All these erode the promise of human rights and backsliding on the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals," Jaishankar added.

NORTHERN RAILWAY CORRIGENDUM

Ref: Tender Notice No. 89/2025-26 dated 24.02.2026 S. No. 04 Tender Number 772269037RGC Opening date 06.04.2026.

In reference to above, corrigendum in tender Eligibility criteria has been issued. All other terms and conditions remain unchanged.

The corrigendum has been published on website www.treps.gov.in.

Note: This is the First Corrigendum in above referred tender.

Date: 26.02.2026

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

CHANGE OF REGISTERED OFFICE

Notice is hereby given that **TECHJM SOLOUTION LLP**, a Limited Liability Partnership registered under the Limited Liability Partnership Act, 2008, has changed its Registered Office address from: House No. 215 1st Floor BLK D Pundrik Vihar Pitampura, Delhi-110034 To **New Address: Flat 003, Plot No. 95K, Bharat Residency, Chander Nagar, Gurugram, Haryana - 122001.** The above change is effective from 01 February 2026.

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is publicly notified that the PLOT NO. 046, BLOCK-D, SECTOR-55, NOIDA, DISTT GAUTAM BUDDH NAGAR (UP) has been allotted in the name of MRS. (DR) SUDARSHAN GOEMER W/O DR. J. S. GOEMER R/O 2126/4, PREM NAGAR BEHIND DELHI MILK SCHEME, NEW DELHI-110008 had sold the said property on the basis of GPA to the following person:-

A. GPA was executed in favour of SH PAWAN KUMAR BANSAL S/O SHRI OM PRAKASH BANSAL executed at Delhi vide Book No. IV/Volume No. 89, on Pages 91 to 92, at Document No. 3315 dated 15/05/1996 but Agreement to Sell was not registered. So with the help of this notice, it is informed that the transfer of the above plot/gas in favour of SH. NEERAJ BANSAL S/O SH. PAWAN KUMAR R/O E-98 SECTOR 55 NOIDA, if any one has/have any objection, he/she/they may submit his/her/their objection in the Residential Plots Department of NOIDA Authority along with sufficient proofs within 30 days from the date of publication of this notice.

Naveen Chandra Sharma (Advocate)
Dadri Noida (G.B Nagar)

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, PWRD
DHEMAJI ROAD CIRCLE, DHEMAJI

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER NO. 03 OF 2025-26

The Superintending Engineer, PWRD, Dhemaji Road Circle, Dhemaji on behalf of Governor of Assam invites Bids for the "Construction of Road for 3 (Three) nos of work Amounting to Rs.465.97 Lakhs (Approx.) under SOPD-G for the year 2025-26" in Dhemaji District under Dhemaji Territorial Road Division, Dhemaji Details may be seen at Website <https://assamtenders.gov.in> from 05/03/2026 and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours.

Superintending Engineer, PWRD
Dhemaji Road Circle
Dhemaji

DIPR/C/PIO/923/27-Feb-26

PUBLIC NOTICE

We, (1) Suresh Kumar Verma son of Shri Radhey Shyam Verma and (2) Kiran Verma W/o Shri Suresh Kumar Verma both resident of G-67, Gali No. 7, West Guru Angad Nagar, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi-110092, do hereby solemnly affirm and inform that we both had adopted a Girl Child named KAVITA VERMA when she was 5 Years old, VITA an Adoption Deed dated 8/2/1989, duly Regd. as Document No. 2301 Book No. 3 Volume No. 69 on pages 150-153 dated 8/2/1989 in the Office of SR-1-Delhi. Now we Disown/Debar KAVITA VERMA from all our Movable and Immovable Properties with immediate effect, due to her misbehavior with her parents. That in future she shall have no right or claim in any of our movable and immovable properties.

Suresh Kumar Verma

PUBLIC NOTICE

To be known to all that my client Mr. PRANAI AGARWAL, son of Mr. Sanjiv Agarwal has lost/misplaced the (1) ORIGINAL SPECIAL POWER OF ATTORNEY DATED 16.09.2008 EXECUTED BY MR. ATUL KAPUR IN FAVOUR OF MRS. SWARN KAPUR AND (2) ORIGINAL SALE DEED DATED 24.12.2008 DULY REGISTERED AS DOCUMENT NO. 18579 ON 24.12.2008 IN RESPECT OF FLAT NO. A-604 RISHI APARTMENTS ALAKNANDA NEW DELHI. An FIR to this effect has been lodged in PS-Crime Branch, Delhi bearing LR No. 132940/2026 dated 26/02/2026. Any person claiming any right, title, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original document, may write/contact the above named persons at above address / phone no. 9810221449, within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice.

ACHIN SHARMA (ADVOCATE)
(Regd. No. D/5425/2021); G-2/10, Tuli Tower, Alaknanda Shopping Comp. New Delhi-110019.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to the general public, all government departments, and advertising agencies that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) dated 10 March 2004 between CMYK Printech Ltd. (Publisher of "THE PIONEER") and M/s Ideal Multi-Media Network Private Limited (formerly Reliable Multimedia & Entertainment Pvt. Ltd.), having its office at 152, Saif Complex, 2nd Floor, MP Nagar, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, stands terminated with immediate effect as of 17 February 2026. Accordingly, M/s Ideal Multi-Media Network Pvt. Ltd., its directors, officers, employees, and agents are no longer authorized to use the name "THE PIONEER" or any deceptively similar mark or brand for printing, digital platforms, or any other business activity, and any such use hereafter by M/s Ideal Multi-Media Network Pvt. Ltd. is strictly unauthorized, illegal, and without any valid license or approval from CMYK Printech Ltd. or any competent government authority; the Bhopal edition and any other editions printed, published, or managed by the said entity under the name "THE PIONEER" are unauthorized and illegal; the public, advertisers, and all agencies are cautioned not to make any payments, including revenue, subscription, or advertisement fees, to M/s Ideal Multi-Media Network Pvt. Ltd. or its representatives on behalf of "THE PIONEER"; and all sub-franchisee agreements entered into by the said company in the State of Madhya Pradesh for the promotion or distribution of "THE PIONEER" stand terminated. Any person or entity dealing with M/s Ideal Multi-Media Network Pvt. Ltd. in relation to "THE PIONEER" does so at their own risk, and CMYK Printech Ltd. shall not be liable for any consequential damages, financial losses, or legal liabilities arising from such unauthorized dealings. Further, CMYK Printech Ltd. expressly disclaims and waives any liability for any mis-statement, error, omission, or any act, conduct, or representation made by M/s Ideal Multi-Media Network Pvt. Ltd. or any third party in connection with "THE PIONEER", whether prior to or after the date of this notice.

By Order of: Authorized Signatory, CMYK Printech Ltd. (Publishers of "THE PIONEER"), Date: 25.02.2026

GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA TENDER NOTICE

SR. NO.	NAME OF BOARD/CORP./ AUTH	NAME OF WORK NOTICE TENDER	OPENING DATE CLOSING DATE (TIME)	AMOUNT / EMD (APPROX) INRUPRES	WEBSITE OF THE BOARD CORP./ AUTH	NODAL OFFICER/CONTACT DETAILS/ EMAIL
1.	HSIIDC	REPAIR OF ROAD (POTHOLE/PATCHES) AT VARIOUS LOCATION IN A-BLOCK, PHASE-I AT IE RAI	23.02.2026 04.03.2026	Rs. 7.97 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	9996161651 ia.raih@hsidc.org.in
2.	HSIIDC	PROVIDING LAYING JOINTING FIXING OF 500 MM I/D RCC NP-3 PIPE FOR STORM WATER LINE FROM PLOT NO.713-A TO EXISTING NALLAH PLOT NO. 744 IN PACE CITY-II SEC-37, GURUKHULA	02.03.2026 09.03.2026	Rs. 24.86 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	01242398418 ia.gurugram@hsidc.org.in
3.	HSIIDC	ENGAGEMENT OF SURVEYOR FOR CIVIL AVIATION RELATED SURVEY FOR CALCULATION OF PERMISSIBLE MAXIMUM HEIGHT FOR THE GLOBAL CITY PROJECT, GURUGRAM	20.02.2026 03.03.2026	Rs. 30.00 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	01242398418 ia.gurugram@hsidc.org.in
4.	HSIIDC	WORK OF SUPPLY & INSTALLATION OF 01 NO. NEW DG SET WITH CAPACITY 58.5 KVA - 62.5 KVA ALONG WITH ASSOCIATED MATERIAL AT HSIIDC HEAD OFFICE BUILDING, SECTOR-6, PANCHKULA	25.02.2026 05.03.2026	Rs. 6,47,118/-	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	0172-2567482 se.electrical@hsidc.org.in
5.	HSIIDC	SUPPLY, ERECTION, TESTING AND COMMISSIONING OF 06 NOS. 200 KVA TRANSFORMER FOR RELEASE OF LT CONNECTION AT HSIIDC IE NARWANA	25.02.2026 05.03.2026	Rs. 27,07,167/-	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	0172-2567482 se.electrical@hsidc.org.in

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION KINDLY VISIT : www.haryanaeprocurement.gov.in or www.etenders.hry.nic.in RO 43377-I-27-8

PUBLIC NOTICE

Be it known to all that my clients Shri Mast Ram Thapliyal S/o Late Shri Bholu Dutt and Shrimati Bhagyashri W/o Shri Mast Ram Thapliyal Both R/o, C-633, Third Floor, Sector 1, Avantika, Rohini, Delhi-110085 have severed their all relations with their Son Shri Rishabh @ Monk presently residing at House No. 165, Sayad Mohalla, Dehradun, U.K. My clients also debarred and disowned their Son Shri Rishabh @ Monk from their entire moveable and immovable properties due to his unsocial and uncooperative behavior. If anybody dealing with him or any cause created by him, he/she shall be liable at his/her own cost and risk, my clients shall not be held responsible in any manner for any kind of his deed, act and conduct.

Sd/-
Rajendra Kumar Kasana (Advocate)
Chamber No. B-86, B.G.S. Block, The Hazari Courts, Delhi-110054.

PM Modi pays tribute to victims of Holocaust

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Jerusalem

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday visited Yad Vashem memorial and paid tributes to the victims of the Holocaust.

PM Modi was accompanied by his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu. At the start of the visit, the two leaders toured the Hall of Names, during which Netanyahu showed Modi the names of his wife Sara's relatives who perished in the Holocaust. Following the tour, a memorial ceremony was held, in which Prime Minister Modi laid a wreath and placed a stone to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust.

"Honouring the memory of victims of the Holocaust

PM MODI WAS ACCOMPANIED BY ISRAELI COUNTERPART NETANYAHU

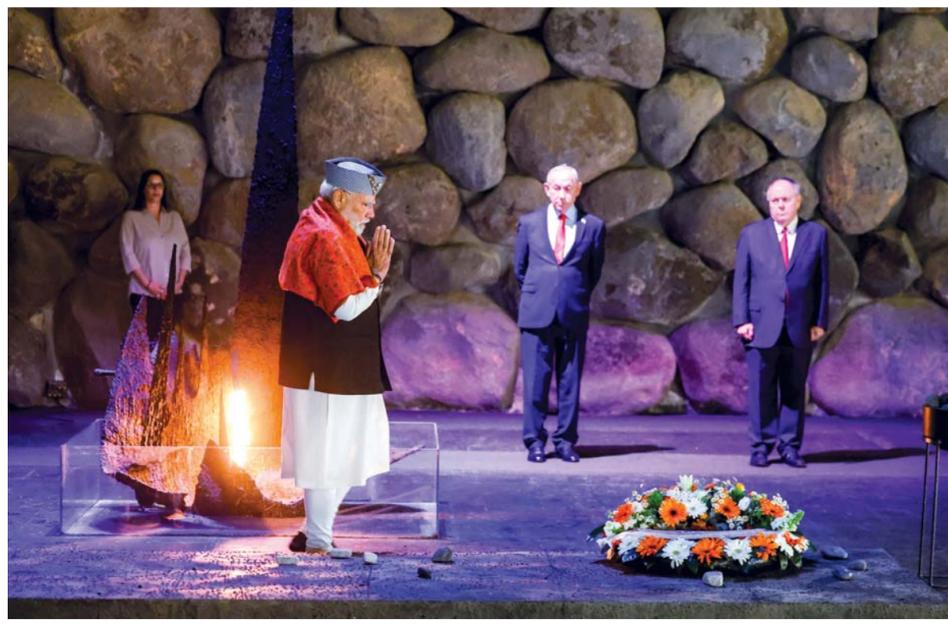
and renewing our shared commitment to uphold peace and human dignity. PM @narendramodi visited Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in a post on X.

Modi laid a wreath and paid homage to the victims of the Holocaust. He also visited the poignant Book of Names Hall, a powerful tribute preserving the memory of millions who perished during the holo-

caust. "The memorial stands as a solemn reminder of the brutality of the past and our collective resolve to stand against injustice and create a better world," Jaiswal said.

This was the second visit of Prime Minister Modi to Yad Vashem. Established in 1953 by an act of the Knesset (Israeli Parliament), Yad Vashem is entrusted with Holocaust commemoration, documentation, research and education.

Modi arrived in Israel on Wednesday on a two-day visit to the country. It is his second visit to Israel in nine years. The India-Israel relationship was elevated to the level of strategic partnership during his first visit to that country in July 2017.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a visit to Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre in Jerusalem, Israel

Hebrew University thanks Modi for his courageous words

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Jerusalem

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem on Thursday thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his "courageous words" delivered in the Israeli Knesset (parliament), emphasising that it translates "diplomatic milestones into deep academic collaborations."

"Thank you, Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, for the warm and courageous words you delivered this evening from the podium of the Knesset", the Israeli university said.

Re-iterating India's uncompromising policy of "zero tolerance" against terrorism, Modi, amid a standing ovation from Israeli lawmakers, said, "We feel your pain. We share your grief. India stands with Israel, firmly, with full conviction, in this moment, and beyond."

"No cause can justify the

Modi visits Israeli tech innovation exhibition, invites firms to invest in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Jerusalem

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has invited Israeli technology companies to invest in India and partner with Indian youth as he visited an exhibition here showcasing pioneering innovations in areas such as artificial intelligence, healthcare, and agriculture.

Modi was accompanied by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during the visit to the exhibition.

In a social media post on Thursday, Modi said the exhibition showcased "special innovations" from the world of technology.

"Got a glimpse of pioneering work by Israeli youth in areas such as AI, Quantum, healthcare, cyber security, water resources, agriculture and more. Urged Israeli companies to invest in India and work with our talented youth," he said.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during an interaction with Indian community in Israel

According to a press release, the exhibition featured leading Israeli companies and research entities specialising in agri-tech, water-tech, climate-tech, health-biotech, smart

mobility, AI, cybersecurity, and quantum technologies. "Innovation and technology partnership is a key pillar of India-Israel bilateral ties. The two countries are working together to build

solutions to address modern-day challenges through the 'India-Israel Innovation Bridge' initiative," it said. During the walk-through, PM Modi interacted with scientists, tech entrepreneurs

and chief executives of several companies.

Addressing the innovators, the Prime Minister said the cutting-edge technologies on display hold immense potential to scale up India-Israel cooperation in innovation, start-ups and business partnerships, particularly in agriculture, water management, healthcare and digital services.

He urged Israeli companies to explore opportunities in India to invest, manufacture and build technology partnerships, and to work with India's talented youth to jointly develop solutions for global challenges, the release said. In the area of quantum and deep tech, the Prime Minister was briefed by Quantum Machines on the Israeli Quantum Computing Centre (IQCC) and by Classiq, which focuses on simplifying quantum software development. In health-tech and AI, start-

up AISAP demonstrated its AI-powered point-of-care ultrasound system that provides real-time diagnostic guidance, while the Horizon Scanning Division of Israel's Ministry of Science and Technology presented "Tech Scout", an AI-driven tool for strategic risk detection and trend analysis.

Smart mobility solutions were showcased by Mobileye, which presented its sensor and chip technology aimed at reducing road accidents. In cybersecurity, Check Point Software Technologies highlighted its advanced threat prevention solutions and collaborations in India.

In the water and agriculture sector, WaterGen demonstrated technology to produce drinking water from air, while N-Drip showcased gravity-powered micro-irrigation systems. Natural Offset Farming presented post-harvest in-field

solutions to reduce food loss without the use of electricity. Climate and biotech innovations included Remilk's precision fermentation technology for lab-produced milk proteins and BarAlgae's machine-learning-based microalgae cultivation. Mynora Bio displayed plastic waste management solutions using specialised bio-conversion additives.

In the energy and natural resources segment, the Geophysical Institute demonstrated high-resolution modelling for quantifying mineral resources, while Israel Aerospace Industries presented miniaturised communication satellites and integrated Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) technology in the space sector.

PM Modi, who arrived in Israel on Wednesday, is on a two-day visit to the Jewish nation. It is his second visit to Israel in nine years.



murder of civilians. Nothing can justify terrorism," he added. Last week, the Hebrew University signed an MoU with Nalanda University. A delegation led by Prof Guy Harpaz, the Vice President of Hebrew University for International Affairs, visited India to strengthen academic ties with institutions across the country.

"The deep partnership between our nations is also reflected in the academic sphere," the university stated.

Syrian Government forces and Druze fighters exchange prisoners

GHAITH ALSAYED
Al Matuna

Syrian Government forces and Druze militiamen who control areas in the southern Sweida province on Thursday exchanged prisoners taken in clashes last summer, a rare step toward a possible political resolution of simmering tensions in the country.

The exchange was the first major sign of progress in attempts by the United States and Jordan to broker a political settlement between the two sides.

The Syrian Government side handed over 25 prisoners while local authorities in the Druze-run parts of Sweida released 61 at a checkpoint in the al-Matuna area in northern Sweida.

The exchange was facilitated by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Syrian Interior Ministry spokesperson Nouredine al-Baba told journalists that the exchange deal was reached "through the combined efforts of international and local parties, and it reflects the Syrian state's commitment to all its citizens, from all backgrounds and affiliations and across all provinces." Stephan Sakalian, head of the ICRC delegation in Syria, expressed "hopes that this operation will pave the



way toward possible further releases and dialogue between all parties on other humanitarian concerns," including the fate of people who went missing during the violence.

In mid-July, armed groups affiliated with Druze leader Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri clashed with local Bedouin clans, spurring intervention by Government forces, which effectively sided with the Bedouins. Hundreds of civilians, mostly Druze, were killed, many by Government fighters. Tens of thousands of people, both Druze and Bedouins, were displaced in the fighting. Since then, a large group of the militias banded together under

al-Hijri, creating a de facto anonymous area in large swaths of the province, backed by neighboring Israel.

Since former Syrian President Bashar Assad was ousted in an offensive by Islamist-led insurgents in December 2024, the new authorities in Damascus have struggled to unify the country and consolidate control over the territory.

A deal reached last month with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces that have controlled much of the country's northeast was a significant step toward consolidation - and also left Sweida as the main area left outside Government control. (AP)

Danish PM calls parliamentary election on March 24

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Copenhagen

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen announced on Thursday that the Scandinavian country will hold a parliamentary election on March 24. Voters will determine who sits in the Folketing, or parliament, for its next four-year term. It has 179 seats - 175 of which go to lawmakers representing Denmark and two apiece to lawmakers from the kingdom's two semiau-



tonomous territories, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. A general election must be held at least every four years but the prime minister can call one at any time.

The last election was held on November 1, 2022, and resulted in a three-party coalition that crosses the left-right divide. Frederiksen, a centre-left Social Democrat, has led Denmark since mid-2019. She currently leads a Government with the Liberal Party of Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen and the centrist Moderate party of Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, a former prime minister.

US, Iran holds hours of nuclear talks as more American forces deploy to Mideast

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Geneva

Iran and the United States held hours of indirect talks Thursday in Geneva over Tehran's nuclear negotiations viewed as a last chance for diplomacy as America has gathered a fleet of aircraft and warships to the Middle East to pressure Tehran into a deal.

US President Donald Trump wants a deal to constrain Iran's nuclear programme, and he sees an opportunity while the country is struggling at home with growing dissent following nationwide protests last month.

Iran meanwhile has maintained it wants to continue to enrich uranium even as its programme sits in ruins, following Trump ordering an attack in June on three of the Islamic Republic's nuclear sites, part of a bruising 12-day war last year. If an American attack happens, Iran has said all US military bases in the Mideast would be considered legitimate targets, putting at risk tens of thousands of American service members. Iran has also threatened to attack Israel, meaning a



regional war again could erupt across the Middle East. "There would be no victory for anybody - it would be a devastating war," Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told India Today in an interview filmed Wednesday just before he flew to Geneva. "Since the Americans' bases are scattered through different places in the region, then unfortunately perhaps the whole region would be engaged and be involved, so it is a very terrible scenario."

Geneva talks are the third meeting since June war Araghchi again is passing

messages to Steve Witkoff, a billionaire real estate developer and friend of Trump who serves as a special Mideast envoy for the president. The two men held multiple rounds of talks last year that collapsed after Israel launched its war against Iran in June.

These latest talks are again being mediated by Oman, a sultanate on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula that's long served as an interlocutor between Iran and the West. Araghchi met Oman's Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi after arriving in Geneva on Wednesday night.

The men "reviewed the views and proposals that the Iranian side will present to reach an agreement on the Iranian nuclear programme, based on the guiding principles agreed upon in the previous round of negotiations," a report from the state-run Oman News Agency said.

Al-Busaidi will pass on Iran's offer to American officials on Thursday, it added.

An Associated Press journalist saw al-Busaidi after he met with the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United Nations' nuclear watchdog. The Omani diplomat flashed a thumbs-up to a question about whether he was hopeful for the talks.

Al-Busaidi returned Thursday to the Omani diplomatic residence on the shores of Lake Geneva. A convoy believed to be carrying American diplomats later arrived to the compound, followed by another believed to be carrying Iranian diplomats.

Oman later published images of Witkoff and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, meeting with al-Busaidi at the residence, signalling the start of the talks.

Pak court to hear appeal by Imran in corruption case

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
Islamabad

A Pakistan high court on Thursday fixed March 11 for the hearing of appeals by incarcerated former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi for the suspension of their sentence in the Al-Qadir Trust case of corruption.

The former first couple was convicted in January 17, 2025 in the case when Khan was sentenced for 14 years



and Bushra for seven years in prison. Earlier, the couple were indicted on February 27, 2024. The couple had

launched an appeal in the Islamabad High Court (IHC) after conviction but the case was not fixed for hearing, prompting further pleas for early hearing.

A two-member panel of Chief Justice Sarfraz Dogar and Justice Muhammad Azam Khan heard miscellaneous applications seeking an early hearing of the sentence suspension pleas.

Barrister Salman Safdar appeared before the court on behalf of Khan who

informed the court about ailment of the former prime minister's right eye, while arguing that the applications for suspension of sentence had remained pending for nearly a year.

He also pointed out that Bushra's petition had similarly been pending for a year.

The court accepted a plea for an early hearing and directed that the sentence suspension petitions of Khan and Bushra should be fixed for hearing on March 11. (PTI)

NORTHERN RAILWAY NOTICE FOR E-AUCTION

Senior Divisional Commercial Manager/FS, Delhi Division, Northern Railway, in terms of Railway Board letter no. 2022/TC (FM)/ 10/04 dated 13.06.2022, invites bids through e-Auction (www.ireps.gov.in) for the contract of 05 years invited for the work of provision and installation of 04 parcel scanner machines (at prescribed locations as per the site map uploaded) and to carry out the work of scanning of outward parcels i.e. leased and Railway booked at New Delhi Railway Station as per detail and schedule given below:

Date & time of e-Auction	12.03.2026 at 11:00 hrs.
Assets to be auctioned	A contract invited through e-Auction for the work of provision and installation of 04 parcel scanner machines and to carry out the work of scanning of outward parcels i.e. leased and Railway booked at New Delhi Railway Station at prescribed 03 locations (as per the site map uploaded) i.e. (i) 02 scanners, at the entry gate of parcel office, adjacent to the partition railing between Ginger Road and parcel entry road; (ii) 01 scanner at the entry of NE1, near parking cum stacking parcel site; (iii) 01 scanner at NE2, near parking cum stacking parcel site.

Important notes: 1. For more information, requirement and various aspects regarding these e-Auctions, interested bidders are advised to visit https://www.ireps.gov.in/html/helpdesk/learning_centre.html. (E-Auction leasing section). 2. Earnest Money Deposit (EMD): 10% of the total contractual bid value to be deposited online during the auction. EMD of the successful bidder will be retained as Security Deposit. 3. Railway Administration reserves the full and absolute rights to short terminate these contracts at any point of time and/or for taking any decision regarding the discontinuation/continuation of these contracts with modified/ additional terms and conditions depending upon the situations.

SERVING CUSTOMER WITH A SMILE 653/2026

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER P.W.D. NALBARI DISTRICT TERRITORIAL BUILDING, DIVISION, NALBARI

No.EE(N)/ HG/03/2025-26/2060

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER

The Executive Engineer, PWD, Nalbari District Territorial Building Division, Nalbari on behalf of Governor of Assam invites item rate bids in electronic tendering system for the work- "Construction of RCC G+1 Office building for accommodation of the District Commandant, Home Guards Office, Nalbari with provision of store at the Ground floor" with an approximate value of work Rs. 1,15,21,595.00 from APWD (Building & Electrical) Class-I (A/B/C) Registered contractors having experience in similar nature of works.

Details of the bid may be seen at e-procurement portal website; www.assamtenders.gov.in and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours. The bidders must be enrolled in www.assamtenders.gov.in for participating in the bidding process.

The intending tenderers are advised to visit the site and familiarize themselves with site conditions before submitting their tenders at their own cost and responsibility.

Executive Engineer, PWD, Nalbari District Territorial Building Division, Nalbari
Date: 20/02/2026
DIPR/C/PIO/922/27-Feb-26



PROSPECT



Ambassador of Japan to India, Ono Keiichi called on to Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma in Shillong. PIONEER PHOTO

M3M Group denies baseless political affiliation

Further to the public notice published on February 26, 2026, M3M Group on Thursday reiterated unequivocal denial of all attempts – across social media platforms, digital publications, and messaging applications – to falsely link the Group, its promoters, or management with any political party, electoral process, political funding, or political activity of any kind.

According to a Press Release, M3M Group also categorically denies speculative reports and online commentary suggesting any proposed or contemplated nomination of its promoters or representatives to the Rajya Sabha. These claims are entirely unfounded, purely speculative, and lack any factual basis.

"M3M Group has no affiliation, direct or indirect, with any political party. Neither the Group nor its promoters, directors, senior management, or employees have participated in, endorsed, financed, supported, or contributed to any election campaign, political candidature, or election-related event.

The Group maintains a strictly professional and business-oriented focus, operating in full compliance with all applicable laws and regulatory frameworks, with no involvement – direct or indirect – in political activities," said a statement.



Gajraj Corps holds avalanche rescue drills in Arunachal

TONY DAS
Guwahati

In a significant move to enhance operational preparedness along the nation's frontiers, troops of the Gajraj Corps successfully conducted specialised avalanche safety and rescue drills in the remote regions of Arunachal Pradesh. The intensive training, held across the rugged expanses of the Eastern Himalayas, was carried out in collaboration with expert trainers from the Tiranga Mountain Rescue (TMR) team.

The programme was conducted at altitudes exceeding 14,000 feet, focusing on the complexities of life-saving operations in extreme high-altitude environments.

The curriculum included comprehensive modules on avalanche risk assessment,

rapid response protocols, casualty location and extraction techniques, and snow survival strategies.

Crucially, the drills also tested the troops' ability to maintain effective decision-making under severe weather and punishing terrain conditions.

According to a press brief, the immersive exercises simulated real-world high-altitude emergencies, enabling personnel to sharpen their crisis response efficiency. Great emphasis was placed on coordinated team



manoeuvres and the proficient use of specialised rescue equipment to ensure operational sustainability in snow-bound and avalanche-prone sectors. This joint ini-



tiative has significantly boosted the operational readiness of the Gajraj Corps, reinforcing its capability to conduct safe, swift, and sustained missions in some of the most formidable terrains along the Line of Actual Control.

The training ensures that the "Sentinels of the East" remain prepared to mitigate natural hazards while maintaining their strategic vigil.

Himanta launches DBT schemes and tech centres

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Guwahati

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday ushered in a significant chapter for Assam's youth by launching a series of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) initiatives and advanced technology centres. At a ceremony held at Jyoti-Bishnu Antarjatik Kala Mandir, the Chief Minister rolled out the 'Mukhya Mantri Jibon Prerana', 'Jibon Anuprerana', and 'Mukhya Mantri Nijut Babu' schemes.

Under the Jibon Prerana initiative, 48,319 graduates from public institutions will receive ₹2,500 monthly for a year to assist their transition into employment or entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the Jibon Anuprerana scheme provides one-time grants of ₹25,000 to general research scholars and ₹40,000 to specially-abled researchers. To combat higher education dropouts, the 'Nijut



Babu' scheme was introduced for male students from low-income families, offering monthly stipends of up to ₹2,000. This follows the success of the 'Nijut Moina' scheme for girl students.

In a major boost to technical education, Sarma inaugurated 31 'Industry 4.0' Technology Centres across ITIs and Polytechnics, developed in collaboration with Tata Technologies at an investment of approximately ₹3,000 crore.

He also announced that Dassault

Aviation would establish a centre at Assam Engineering College for aeronautical training, including Rafale aircraft maintenance.

Education Minister Ranoo Pegu, Skill, Employment and Entrepreneurship Minister Prasanta Phukan, Additional Chief Secretary B Kalyan Chakravarty, Principal Secretary Skill, Employment and Entrepreneurship Department Gyanendra Dev Tripathi, Commissioner and Secretary Higher Education Department Narayan Konwar, Professor Emeritus IIT Guwahati Gautam Barua, Professor IIT Guwahati Parameswar Iyer, Vice President of Tata Technologies Limited Arvind Kumar, and several other dignitaries were present on the occasion. Moreover, nearly five thousand beneficiaries of the schemes were present physically, while many others from different parts of the State participated virtually.

BCU strengthens UK-India education and innovation ties

ASHOKE RAJ
New Delhi

Birmingham City University (BCU) has reinforced its long-term commitment to India during a strategic visit to New Delhi, engaging with students, parents, academic leaders and policy-makers to deepen collaboration between the United Kingdom and India.

Leading the delegation, Vice-Chancellor Professor David Mba highlighted the need for the UK-India education partnership to evolve beyond traditional student mobility. He emphasised a future-focused model built on co-creation, research collaboration and industry-driven innovation. According to university officials, India remains central to BCU's Strategy 2030 vision, which



aims to develop future-ready talent and drive economic prosperity through knowledge exchange.

Currently, more than 2,000 Indian students are enrolled at BCU's Birmingham campus, making India one of the institution's largest international student communities. The University has positioned itself as a practice-led institution, with programmes developed in collaboration with global industry leaders such as

Microsoft, Amazon, Cisco and Jaguar Land Rover.

These partnerships help ensure students gain hands-on experience in high-growth sectors including artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, digital infrastructure, advanced manufacturing and sustainable mobility.

Beyond teaching, BCU is actively expanding research and innovation partnerships across India. Collaborative projects focus on areas such as climate resilience, smart cities, digital security and the creative industries.

Several initiatives are supported by leading UK institutions including UK Research and Innovation and the British Council, reflecting the strength of bilateral academic ties.

University leaders also addressed common con-

cerns raised by prospective students and parents, including visa pathways, post-study work opportunities and graduate employability.

They reiterated that the UK continues to welcome genuine students and highlighted the structured Graduate Route that enables international graduates to gain work experience after completing their studies.

The visit also marks efforts to expand alumni engagement in India, with plans to strengthen professional networking and mentoring platforms in New Delhi.

As global competition for international students intensifies, BCU's India engagement signals a clear intent to build a long-term, innovation-led partnership that benefits students, industry and both nations alike.

VIT-AP hosts global dialogue on innovation and sustainability

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Amaravati

The VIT-AP School of Business (VSB), in collaboration with the University of Newcastle, Australia; Heriot-Watt University, UK; and Birmingham City University, UK, inaugurated its two-day international conference, 'Innovation and Sustainable Business Practices in the Digital Era' (ICISD'26), on Thursday.

Thursdays the event, Dr P Arulmozhivarman, Vice-Chancellor of VIT-AP University, described the convergence of digital transformation and sustainability as a "turning point for humanity." He emphasised that innovation and sustainability are the dual pillars of modern economic growth.

Highlighting the role of academic institutions as incubators for ethical leadership, the Vice-Chancellor urged scholars and students to "innovate with purpose" and embrace interdisciplinary research to create value for all stakeholders.

The Chief Guest, R Venkateswaran, General Manager of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), addressed the global nature of climate challenges. He noted that these must be tackled through robust digital infrastructure and sustainable innovation.

Venkateswaran further aligned the conference goals with the Government's 'Vikshit Bharat 2047' vision and the National Guidelines on Responsible Business



Conduct (NGBR). He also briefed participants on SEBI's Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) framework, which tracks ESG performance in the corporate sector.

International perspectives were provided by Guests of Honour Dr Francesco Paolucci of Newcastle Business School and Professor Edward Sweeney of Heriot-Watt University.

While Dr Paolucci discussed the role of AI-driven applications in solving global challenges, Professor Sweeney advised a holistic approach to sustainability that integrates environmental, social, and economic development through disruptive technology. Additionally, Professor Arun Sukumar from Birmingham City University addressed the gathering virtually, lauding the initiative as a "need of the hour."

Earlier, Dr Arun Kumar, Siva Kumar, Dean In-charge of VSB, welcomed the delegates, noting the conference's focus on the intersection of innovation and the digital landscape. Dr Madhu smita Mohanty, the conference convener, provided an overview of the two-day schedule, which includes keynote speeches, panel discussions, and interactive sessions.

The conference serves as a platform for 149 research papers, to be presented across nine technical sessions. The event concluded its inaugural session with a vote of thanks by Dr Navaneetha Krishnan K.

Nadda inaugurates Yashoda's AI-enabled E-ICU centre

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Ghaziabad

In a significant boost to critical care infrastructure, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, JP Nadda, inaugurated Yashoda Medicity's AI-enabled E-ICU Command Centre on Tuesday.

This CSR initiative by Yashoda Foundations connects the specialist hub at Yashoda Medicity to the ICU at MMG District Hospital, Ghaziabad.

The centre uses Artificial Intelligence to monitor real-time patient data, providing early warnings for clinical deterioration.

This allows a super-specialised team from Yashoda to provide 24/7 remote supervision and evidence-based decision-making for patients



at the district hospital, ensuring high-quality intensive care is accessible to economically weaker sections. Inaugurating the facility, Nadda

praised the power of technology in strengthening healthcare, noting that such platforms encourage hospitals to extend expert oversight to broader communities. Dr PN Arora, Chairman and Managing Director of Yashoda Group of Hospitals, stated that the vision is to combine intelligent monitoring with expert clinical oversight to reach patients far beyond hospital walls.

Executive Director Shubhang Arora added that the project focuses on scalable, technology-led delivery to standardise care across connected hospitals.

The integration aims to improve clinical outcomes through risk stratification and proactive coordination.

Yashoda Medicity plans to expand this AI-driven model to additional district hospitals, further bridging the gap in specialised medical access across the region.

Tourism now central to national development under PM Modi: Gajendra Singh Shekhawat

GYANESHWAR DAYAL
New Delhi

Of late, India as well as South Asia has emerged as a major tourist attraction the world over. Its natural beauty, culture, and affordability make it one of the chosen destinations.

In the last few years there have been tremendous advancements in the infrastructure and facilities for the tourists, including connectivity and accommodation and other amenities. Facilitating tourism in South Asia is the South Asia Travel and Tourism Exchange (SAATE) is a major travel trade

show held in India. This year it opened with much fanfare at Yashobhooni, New Delhi. It was inaugurated by Union Tourism and Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, who said tourism has moved "from the margins of policy to the centre of national development" under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He hailed the efforts made by SAATE to promote tourism, saying that in three decades, SAATE has evolved into a platform shaping industry conversations across India and the Asia-Pacific region. The Exposition began with partic-



Gajendra Singh Shekhawat

three-day exhibition began with buyer-seller meetings, policy dialogues, and strong international engagement.

Highlighting key initiatives, Shekhawat referred to Swadesh Darshan 2.0 as a driver of sustainable destination development rooted in local culture and ecology. He also pointed to the revival of spiritual circuits in Ayodhya, Ujjain, and Kashi, and the success of the Dekho Apna Desh campaign.

Suman Billa, Director General and Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, lauded India's growing stature in tourism. He said India is entering a long-term tourism

growth cycle, citing 20 million inbound visitors, 30 million outbound travelers, and nearly 3 billion domestic journeys. He emphasised reforms to improve ease of travel and ease of doing business.

Special Advisor to the UN Tourism Secretary-General Anita Mendiratta highlighted India's rising leadership in shaping global travel narratives. She stressed that the future of tourism lies not just in scale, but in authenticity, community, and purpose.

Representatives from Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh showcased the growing appeal of

emerging destinations, backed by improved connectivity and infrastructure. Ladakh's development, including the transformative Zoji La Tunnel project, was cited as enabling year-round access.

This year SAATE has participation from 28 Indian states and tourism boards from Thailand, Malaysia, Maldives, Jordan, Egypt, Hong Kong, Nepal, Jamaica, and Vietnam. Participants in Tourism Vision 2047, MICE readiness, AI-driven travel solutions, sustainability, and public-private collaboration, reinforcing tourism's expanding role in economic growth and employment generation.

Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
Engineering Department
Tender Notice
Tender Reference No. GNDU/ENGG/2026/02/06
The Engineering Department of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar invites online bids for:
1) Construction of Hi-tech Polyhouse (556.80 Sqm) in department of Agriculture Department
Closing date & time: 09-03-2026 upto 04:00 pm
For details log onto www.eproc.punjab.gov.in
Note: Any Corrigendum/Addendum to the tender notice shall be published on the above website only.
2426/12/2025-26/8803
Dated CHD - 26/02/2026



BRIEFLY

Scotland fans get FIFA approval to don traditional sporrans



Scotland supporters can wear their kilts in all their customary glory at the World Cup. The Scottish Football Association told The Associated Press on Wednesday that it had reached agreement with FIFA for sporrans — the traditional fur or leather pouch worn in front of the kilt — to be permitted at games despite contravening security limits for entry into stadiums in the United States, which is co-hosting the June 11-July 19 tournament with Canada and Mexico. Scotland has been drawn in Group C with Brazil, Morocco and Haiti with two games in Boston and one in Miami. "FIFA have confirmed that sporrans will be permitted into the stadiums following the standard search and inspection procedures and will continue to work together with the Scottish FA to educate their matchday staff as they prepare to welcome fans to Boston and Miami," Scottish FA spokesperson Graeme Thewlis said. Officials are restricting World Cup ticket holders to only bringing clear see-through bags, or small bags that are about half the size of a typical sporran.

Gymnast Simone Biles becomes Laureus ambassador



Seven-time Olympic gold-winning American gymnast Simone Biles has become a Laureus ambassador, joining a star-studded group that also features Indian javelin thrower icon Neeraj Chopra and World Cup-winning former cricketer Yuvraj Singh. Biles, the most decorated gymnast in the sport's history and a four-time winner of the Laureus Sportswoman of the Year Award, kicked off her new role during a visit to Milan, where she visited Polisportiva Garegnano, a Laureus-supported gymnastics and multi-sport project. It provides opportunities to young people, particularly girls, to "grow in confidence, build resilience and develop life skills through sport". During her visit, she spent time on the mats with the young athletes, offering encouragement, and sharing her experiences. "Polisportiva Garegnano is one of over 300 Laureus Sport for Good programmes that uses the power of sport to help young people overcome violence, discrimination and inequality across the world...," the Laureus academy stated in a press release. Biles said Laureus has played a meaningful role in her journey for many years. "I am honoured to help support Laureus as I share the big idea at the heart of everything Laureus does: that sport has the power to change the world. "I've seen that power in action - how sport can open doors, build confidence and help young people feel seen and supported."

Gukesh draws with Niemann in Prague chess

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Prague

World champion D Gukesh survived some anxious moments in the early middle game before finally drawing with Hans Moke Niemann of the United States in the first round of the masters section of the Prague International Chess Festival here.

The Berlin defence that went wrong for white could be a perfect heading for the encounter between the world champion and Niemann, who is walking his way to the elite chess circles after being indirectly accused of foul play.

It may be recalled that the American infamously won a

game against world number one Magnus Carlsen, which will now be documented in a forthcoming Netflix series.

Niemann came all guns blazing and sacrificed a piece with a black piece as early as on move 13 to put Gukesh on the back foot despite having the white pieces.

The Indian was down but not out, which he proved as the game progressed, and even though, black seemed like pushing for more with his extra pawns in exchange for the sacrificed knight, Gukesh ensured that he stayed in the game. The eventual outcome was a draw, the lone one in the 10-player, nine-round tournament that saw everyone with white pieces



triumph in contrasting styles. Defending champion Aravindh Chithambaram of India turned out to be on the wrong side of a position against Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan. The Philidor defence by

the Indian generated enough evidence that every opening could be playable only till he walked into a deft manoeuvre. Aravindh lost in the rook and minor piece endgame after losing one of his pawns, and if that was not enough,

top-seeded Vincent Keymer of Germany was blown away by a resurgent Jorden van Foreest of the Netherlands.

It was another Berlin defence wherein Forest came out with a new idea that perplexed Keymer. As the opening concluded, the Dutchman had an advantage, and he picked up a handful of pawns to register a comprehensive victory.

Also ending on a winning note was Abdusattorov's namesake and teammate Nodirbek Yakubboev, who put it across David Anton Gujjarro of Spain, while in the other encounter of the day local favourite Navara David proved stronger against Iranian Parham

Maghsoodloo. In the challengers section, women's World Cup winner Divya Deshmukh drew with top-seeded Benjamin Gledura of Hungary from a position of strength, but Surya Shekhar Ganguly ended on the receiving end against Thomas Beerdsen of the Netherlands.

Results after round 1 Masters: D Gukesh (IND) drew with Hans Moke Niemann (USA); Nodirbek Abdusattorov (UZB) beat Aravindh Chithambaram (IND); Jorden van Foreest (NED) beat Vincent Keymer (GER); David Navara (CZE) beat Parham Maghsoodloo (IRI); Nodirbek Yakubboev beat David Anton Gujjarro (ESP).

Hakimi starts for PSG against Monaco

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Paris

Defender Achraf Hakimi was included in Paris Saint-Germain's (PSG) starting lineup in the Champions League playoff return leg against Monaco a day after being ordered to stand trial in a rape case.

A date for the trial has not been set. Hakimi's lawyer Fanny Colin said she will appeal the judge's decision.

The 27-year-old Morocco international has denied any wrongdoing and said on X that he "calmly awaits" a trial. "Today, an accusation of rape is enough to justify a



trial, even though I contest it and everything shows that it is false," he posted on X on Tuesday. "This is as unjust for the innocent as it is for genuine victims."

PSG coach Luis Enrique was asked ahead of the Monaco match about Hakimi's case. "This is in the hands of the justice system," Luis Enrique said.

PSG into Champions League last 16

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Paris

Mamadou Coulibaly's red card cost his side dearly as Monaco drew 2-2 at defending champion Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) in the second leg of their Champions League play-off on Wednesday and went out 5-4 on aggregate.

Monaco was leading 1-0 and the aggregate score was level at 3-3 when the 21-year-old midfielder was shown a second yellow card in the 59th minute following a foul on tricky winger Khvicha Kvaratskhelia.

PSG captain Marquinhos equalised from the ensuing free kick, and then six minutes later, Kvaratskhelia



put PSG 2-1 up and in command. Jordan Teze's stoppage-time equaliser came too late for Monaco. "Yes, I think it was (a turning point) as was the (red) card in the first match," Monaco coach Sébastien Pocognoli said. "For me, the (sending off) was not deserved. The two

yellow cards happen quickly within five minutes. The second one was harsh."

PSG won the tournament for the first time last year, but prior to that, they had been eliminated from the last 16 five times in eight years. Until Coulibaly's sending off, PSG had looked jittery, and Monaco was

beginning to take control of the game. "We're starting to know them. We beat them (1-0 in the league) and lost and drew against them with 10 players," he said, referring to Monaco's red card early in the second half last Tuesday. "We're searching for their weaknesses amid their immense qualities. I think we did that pretty well; we made the most of what they gave us." But Coulibaly's late tackle on Kvaratskhelia near the touchline turned the momentum PSG's way.

Moments later, PSG were level. A quick free kick was played down the right, and Marquinhos poked home Desire Doue's cross from close range.

Madrid hopes for injured Mbappe to return soon

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Madrid

Real Madrid is hoping Kylian Mbappe will be back in "a matter of days" after he missed its 2-1 victory over Benfica in the second leg of the Champions League play-offs. The result sent Madrid to the round of 16 with a 3-1 aggregate result.

Mbappe was not included in the squad for the game at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium because of a left knee injury he has been nursing for some time.

"He had to leave training and had been feeling some discomfort," Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa said. "We



spoke with the doctors and with him, and we agreed that the best thing was for him to stop for a while. Now we'll have to wait. Hopefully, it's just a matter of days."

The France star, who scored nine goals in his last

eight matches for Madrid, was replaced in attack by Gonzalo Garcia. The other forwards in the starting lineup were Arda Guler and Vinicius Junior, who scored the team's second goal in the 80th minute.

Juventus captain felt like crying after CL comeback falls short

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Madrid

Juventus captain Manuel Locatelli felt like crying after seeing his team's remarkable Champions League (CL) fight-back fall just short against Galatasaray on Wednesday.

Trailing 5-2 after the first leg, Juventus went 3-0 up in the return match — despite playing almost the entire second half with 10 men following Lloyd Kelly's sending-off — to take the game to extra time.

Galatasaray scored twice in extra time to lose 3-2 on the night but win 7-5 on aggregate. Juventus fans applauded their team after the match despite getting



eliminated. "It almost makes me want to cry for how much we believed," Locatelli said. "I think we gave our heart — and more." "These are the kinds of matches," he added, "that stay with you."

Juventus defender Federico Gatti, who scored

the team's second goal, felt the qualification was thrown away last week. "It's frustrating because we reached extra time a bit drained," he said. "We had really put the game back on track, but I'll say it again — we let it slip in the first leg."

Vinicius helps Real Madrid advance into round of 16 of Champions League

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Madrid

With the winning goal and another corner-flag dance, Vinicius Junior fittingly had the final say in an emotionally charged rematch with Benfica to guide Real Madrid into the round of 16 of the Champions League on Wednesday.

Defending champion Paris Saint-Germain also advanced out of the playoffs — but only after narrowly getting past Monaco — while Atalanta pulled off a remarkable comeback against Borussia Dortmund with a dramatic last-second goal to maintain Italian involvement in the competition. Juventus fell short of completing its own stunning second-leg recovery, though, eliminated by Galatasaray after extra time.



fans: Playing a week after being the target of alleged racial abuse in the first leg against Benfica, Vinicius wrapped up Madrid's 2-1 win over the Portuguese team — and a 3-1 victory on aggregate — with his team's second goal in the 80th minute at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. The Brazil star slotted a low finish into the corner and celebrated his goal like he did last week by dancing beside the corner flag.

Vinicius was loudly booed by Benfica fans nearly every time he touched the ball, a hangover from the first leg when he accused Benfica player Gianluca Prestianni of calling him a "monkey".

Prestianni has denied racially insulting Vinicius while confronting him with his jersey over his mouth, but did not play Wednesday's game after being provisionally banned for one match by UEFA. Benfica coach Jose

Mourinho, who previously led Madrid, was also suspended for the game so didn't take his place in the dugout. Benfica opened the scoring in the 14th minute through Rafa Silva to briefly bring the score level at 1-1 on aggregate, only for Aurelien Tchouameni to equalise two minutes later for Madrid.

Madrid maintained its record of playing in the round of 16 every year this century and will play either Manchester City or Sporting Lisbon next.

PSG keeps title defence alive: PSG also survived an early scare in the second leg to advance out of the playoffs for a second straight season. Protecting a 3-2 lead from last week, the titleholder went behind to Maghnes Aklouch's 45th-minute goal but was then boosted by a red card to Monaco's Mamadou

Coulibaly in the 58th. Goals by Marquinhos and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia put PSG in front in the game. Jordan Teze's stoppage-time equaliser came too late for Monaco.

PSG's reward is a meeting with either Barcelona or Chelsea. PSG right back Achraf Hakimi played a day after being ordered to stand trial in a rape case.

Juve comeback stamped out by Galatasaray: Juventus almost pulled off one of the great Champions League recoveries. Trailing 5-2 from the first leg, Juve went ahead against Galatasaray when Manuel Locatelli converted a penalty before halftime and overcame a red card to its defender Lloyd Kelly by scoring more goals through Federico Gatti and Weston McKennie to take the game to extra time. It could have been worse for Galatasaray,

with Kenan Yildiz also hitting the post for Juventus in regulation. Galatasaray fought back in the added 30 minutes with an extra man, scoring through Victor Osimhen and Baris Yilmaz as Juve won 3-2 on the night but lost 7-5 on aggregate.

Atalanta the only Italian team standing after wild finish: With Juventus out, Italy's record of having at least one team in the round of 16 since that stage was reintroduced to the Champions League in 2003-04 was only maintained thanks to Atalanta's remarkable fight-back against Dortmund. Atalanta substitute Lazar Samardzic converted a penalty with the last kick of the game in the eighth minute of stoppage time following a video review to seal a 4-1 win on the night and a 4-3 victory on aggregate.

VINICIUS STARS FOR MADRID AGAIN

Madrid: After being loudly booed, Vinicius Junior danced again. This time in front of Real Madrid supporters while leading his team to the round of 16 of the Champions League, a week after accusing a Benfica opponent of racially insulting him. Vinicius scored an 80th-minute goal to give Madrid a 2-1 victory and a 3-1 aggregate win over Benfica at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in the second leg of the Champions League playoffs on Wednesday. Vinicius celebrated by dancing by the corner flag just like in the first leg — then in front of Benfica fans — which ignited a confrontation with Benfica players and the accusation that Gianluca Prestianni called him "monkey." "That's our Vinicius," said Madrid midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni, who scored Madrid's first goal in the 16th, a couple of minutes after Benfica had taken the lead through Rafa Silva. Prestianni, who has denied racially insulting Vinicius and has been defended by Benfica, was provisionally suspended one match by UEFA and did not play on Wednesday even though the Argentine traveled to the Spanish capital. UEFA earlier Wednesday rejected Benfica's last-minute appeal against the provisional suspension. Last week's match was halted for nearly 10 minutes after the referee installed the anti-racism protocol following Vinicius' complaint to him. On Wednesday, Vinicius scored on a breakaway, calmly sending a low shot past the goalkeeper for his sixth goal in his last five matches for Madrid.

Atalanta coach celebrates unforgettable night after late drama seals Champions League comeback

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Atlanta

Two red cards, a VAR overturn and a decisive converted penalty with the last kick of the game.

All of that happened in the final seconds of a Champions League thriller between Atalanta and Borussia Dortmund on Wednesday — and it ultimately ensured there will still be Italian representation in Europe's top club competition.

Atalanta advanced to the round of 16 by capping an unlikely turnaround when Lazar Samardzic curled a

penalty into the top corner in the eighth minute of stoppage time to clinch a 4-1 win on the night and a 4-3 victory on aggregate.

Dortmund, the runner-up in 2024, had arrived with a 2-0 lead from the first leg.

"Everyone had written us off," said Davide Zappacosta, one of Atalanta's scorers, "but... We always believe and we never give up."

Still, Atalanta needed a helping hand.

Extra time was looming when a mistake by Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel allowed Atalanta to launch one last attack after the allot-



ted three minutes of stoppage time had been played. A cross into the area was about to reach Nikola

Krstovic for a simple header into an empty net when Dortmund defender Remy Bensabaini flicked out his

boot and caught the Atalanta substitute on the top of his head, drawing blood.

A corner was initially given

but after a VAR check, a penalty was awarded, unused Dortmund substitute Nico Schlotterbeck was shown a red card on the bench for complaining, Bensabaini was shown a second yellow card for his foul, and Samardzic dispatched his spot kick, sparking joyous scenes inside the stadium in Bergamo.

The referee blew for full time before Dortmund could restart the match. "It's an unforgettable night," Atalanta coach Raffaele Palladino said, "a dream come true." Italy's record of having at least one team in the round of 16 since

that stage was reintroduced to the Champions League in 2003-04 was under threat after Serie A champion Napoli didn't even make the playoffs after finishing in 30th place in the 36-team league phase and Inter Milan was eliminated by tiny Norwegian team Bodø/Glimt in the playoffs on Tuesday.

That left Atalanta and Juventus, which trailed Galatasaray 5-2 after the first leg. Atalanta is back in the last 16 for the first time since the 2020-21 season and will play either Arsenal or Bayern Munich. The draw is on Friday. Dortmund gives up

first-leg lead: Atalanta got the fast start it needed after losing the first leg, with Gianluca Scamacca netting in the fifth minute and Zappacosta also scoring before halftime.

Mario Pasalic then headed in the third in the 57th minute to put the hosts ahead on aggregate. Karim Adeyemi came off the bench for Dortmund to make it 3-3 on aggregate but there was time for late drama. According to UEFA, it marked the first time Dortmund has failed to convert on a two-goal, first-leg lead in a two-legged European matchup.

Abhishek, Hardik help India defeat Zimbabwe by 72 runs

G UNNIKRIKSHNAN ■ Chennai

Abhishek Sharma rediscovered his form with a blazing fifty, Hardik Pandya bludgeoned a half-century, and Tilak Varma allayed strike-rate worries in India's massive 72-run victory over Zimbabwe, keeping them alive in the race to the T20 World Cup semifinals here on Thursday.

Along with that ticking of several boxes in their must-win Super Eight match here, India posted an imposing 256 for four - their highest ever total in T20 World Cups, and also the highest in this edition of the ICC showpiece. In the tournament's scenario, India's win ensured South Africa's (4 points) entry

into the last four from Group 1, leaving the hosts and the West Indies locked in a virtual knockout match at Kolkata on March 1. Both India and the West Indies now have two points, going into their last group stage encounter.

But all of it could not have happened without contributions from Abhishek (55, 30b, 4x4, 4x6), Pandya (50 not out, 23b, 2x4, 4x6) and Tilak Varma (44 not out, 16b, 3x4, 4x6), which shaped India's recovery from a debilitating 76-run defeat to the Proteas in the previous match.

In reply, Zimbabwe could only garner 184 for six. Opener Brian Bennett, who clobbered Shivam Dube for 26 runs in an over, offered lone resistance with an



unbeaten 59-ball 97, a well-conceptualised knock but destined to be a mere footnote. Cutting back to India's innings, each of those three aforementioned knocks afforded a significance of its own, but the lead act was Abhishek.

Abhi-shakes off rust Since returning from a stomach bug, the Punjab batter looked a distant shadow of his dominating self, registering three ducks in a row.

But on a smooth Chepauk pitch, the left-hander found his bearings, also easing the worries of the Indian team management over the sudden slump in his form.

The 25-year-old was involved in two excellent partnerships - a 48 for the

opening wicket with Sanju Samson and then a 72 off 42 balls with Ishan Kishan (38) for the following wicket - that gave the hosts a strong platform.

Re-drafting Samson into the eleven was predominantly to break the sequence of left-handers at the top, but pairing him with Abhishek proved a good move eventually. The Kerala right-hander smoked 24 off 15 balls to ease any nerves that his partner had.

Once Samson departed, lofting pacer Blessing Muzarabani to Ryan Burl in the deep, Abhishek took charge of the Indian innings.

He hammered Tino Mafoso, Brian Bennett and Richard Ngarava for sixes as

India stormed to 80 for one in the Power Play segment, their second best after the 86/1 made against Namibia in a group match.

The bat flow, feet movement and the eye-hand coordination, which were missing in this interim, and he fetched his first fifty off just 26 balls with a single off spinner Sikandar Raza. But more importantly, Abhishek looked assured against off-spin, his nemesis in previous matches, in this game, putting his feet to better use.

Abhishek's belligerence and the largesse of Zimbabwe fielders helped India maintain the tempo even after the Power Play, scoring 81 runs between overs seven and 14. (PTI)



New Zealand spinners set to test England team

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo

New Zealand spinners, led by their mercurial skipper Mitchell Santner, will pose some difficult questions to an English line-up spearheaded by the marauding Harry Brook when the two sides clash in a Super Eight game of the T20 World Cup on Friday.

The match is of greater significance to the Black Caps as they bid to seal a semi-final spot, while England are already through to the last four stage after logging two consecutive wins.

The huge 61-run win over Sri Lanka has elevated New Zealand's net run rate to +3.050, and to ensure that they progress, the Kiwis have to just avoid a heavy defeat.

Pakistan, after their defeat to England, has a net run rate of -0.461 and would not only need New Zealand to lose badly but also have to beat Sri Lanka by a heavy margin to eclipse the Black Caps' NRR.

New Zealand have shown that they are comfortable playing against as many as six spinners in the match versus Sri Lanka. They actually beat the co-hosts in their own game. While Brook and Will

Jacks have both been comfortable against the likes of Saim Ayub, Mohammed Nawaz and Shadab Khan, New Zealanders Santner, Rachin Ravindra, Glenn Phillips and Cole McConechie could prove to be more handy on a slightly tackier Premadasa track compared to Pallekele.

Brook is in good form, as demonstrated by his match-winning hundred against Pakistan, and the team would expect veteran Jos Buttler to up his game after having a quiet tournament so far. A good start by Buttler will put England in a strong position.

At the other end, the off-spin of Jacks and the left-arm spin of Liam Dawson could be equally challenging for the Kiwis. At Premadasa, anything in the range of 165 to 175 can be considered a winning score if the spinners are in operation.

"You're always confident going into these fixtures, especially when we know what the surface is going to be like, but I think it'd be silly to underestimate England at any point," Black Caps all-rounder Rachin Ravindra said after his match-winning performance against Sri Lanka on Wednesday.

T20 WC: South Africa hammer West Indies by nine wickets

AMANPREET SINGH ■ Ahmedabad

A clinical South Africa outclassed West Indies by nine wickets in their Super 8 clash to stretch their unbeaten run and all but seal a place in the semifinals of the T20 World Cup on Thursday.

A dominating show by the Proteas pacer was followed by authoritative batting. Yet again, South Africa executed their plans perfectly to further their cause, racking up their sixth win on the trot and halting West Indies' unbeaten run in the tournament.

With South Africa taking two vital points off the West Indies, hosts India now have their qualifica-

tion hopes firmly in their own hands, as a Proteas defeat would have dented their chances severely.

The loss hurt the Caribbean side's net run rate that came down to 1.791 from a healthy 5.350.

First it was South Africa's pacers that rocked the West Indies' batting line-up before a lower-order fightback from Romario Shepherd (52 not out) and Jason Holder (49) lifted the two-time champions to 176 for eight.

Then skipper Aiden Markram (82 not out), Quinton De Kock (47) and Ryan Rickelton (45 not out) batted with authority as the Proteas overhauled the target in 16.1 overs.

By collecting 69 runs from



the six Powerplay overs, the South Africans had demoralised the Windies attack. Except for a few hit-and-miss shots, the two openers controlled the proceedings.

They struck both pacers and spinners with equal ease and raised a quick 95-run stand in 7.5 overs, hitting 16 boundaries, including six shots over the rope.

De Kock hit four sixes and as many fours in his 24-ball knock before offering a catch to Jason Holder at long-on. Markram raised his fifty with a single off Gudakesh Motie.

With Rickelton, Markram raised an unbeaten 82-run stand and finished the game in style with a straight four off pacer Jason Holder.

Earlier, from the high of their dominant win over Zimbabwe, the West Indies were in for a rude shock as Kagiso Rabada (2/22) and Lungi Ngidi (3/30) got the ball to bounce from good length to trouble the batters, reducing the big-hitting West Indies line-up to 83 for seven.

Holder (49 off 31) and Romario Shepherd (52 not out off 37) then stitched together a record 89-run stand for the eighth wicket to prevent a complete collapse of the innings.

Opting to bowl, South Africa opened with spinner Keshav Maharaj but Shai Hope (16 off 6) showed early intent, launching him for two sixes and a four. (PTI)

Rachin Ravindra praises skipper Santner

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo

Mitchell Santner is a protective shield around his teammates and finds a way to make them feel bigger in stature, New Zealand opener Rachin Ravindra said in effusive praise of his captain after the Black Caps beat Sri Lanka by 61 runs to enter the T20 World Cup semifinals here.

While Ravindra scored 32 and also scalped 4 for 19 to win the Player Of The Match award, it was skipper Santner's 26-ball 47 that propelled New Zealand to 168 for 7 after being down and out at 84 for 6.

He also bowled a miserly spell of 1/19 in four overs with half a dozen dot balls in Sri Lanka's 107 for 8.



According to Ravindra, the greatest attribute of Santner is showing the way with game-changing performances like the one against Sri Lanka on Wednesday.

"Obviously, we all know how chill he (Santner) is but also how his mind works; like, what ball to bowl from what end is fantastic. But I think more than anything he leads through

his performances and his work ethic," Ravindra said at the post-match press conference.

"He backs you and he pumps your tyres a lot, and I think it's great to have a leader like that. Makes you feel ten feet tall and bulletproof every time you go out onto the field, and he's just a great presence to have around the group," he added. It is not just about motivating players, but Santner's vast experience of bowling on subcontinental tracks also helps the spin bowling unit.

"You've obviously got Santner, who's one of the best white-ball spinners in the world, who tells you what to bowl, so that helps having that extra cover, and we've got guys with a lot of experience," Rachin added.



Shanaka apologises for another disappointing WC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo

Sri Lanka captain Dasun Shanaka has apologised to his country for another disappointing World Cup outing after being knocked out of the T20 showpiece by New Zealand in the Super Eight stage.

Co-hosts Sri Lanka lost to New Zealand by 61 runs and before that by 51 runs to England, thus making their last game against Pakistan inconsequential.

"We feel very sorry about this. The England match was also a match that we could have won. I'm not saying that, but if we were more sensible, we could have won that. This match was a one-sided game. For the spectators, I don't have anything to say; we have not given them any win that can be happy about," a heartbroken Shanaka said at the post-match press conference.

"So, we have one match pending, and I hope to at least finish the tournament well as the captain."

He said the wickets here didn't behave the way he expected. "Before the start of the tournament, I also mentioned that I expected the wickets to be good. So, the best batsmen in Sri Lanka are here. The players who have a good strike rate and the ability have been picked from domestic cricket. No one is forced to play cricket here. We also want to do something for the country."

"So honestly, we are very sorry for what happened. No one goes out there to fail; everyone goes with the intention of playing well and winning for the team."

"Unfortunately, we don't always get the conditions we want; sometimes we lose games from the things that we don't even think of, from the small changes. So, we are so sorry about that; as players, we feel very sad about it," Shanaka said.

Shanaka also felt that the fitness of Sri Lankan players were not up to the standards that world cricket demands now, and injuries also played a part.

Sri Lanka skipper Shanaka wants Govt to stop negativity against players

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo

Fitness and form were not the only areas in which Sri Lanka failed, said captain Dasun Shanaka, as he also blamed the "negative environment created outside" for his team's ouster from the T20 World Cup and oddly urged the government to protect the players from criticism.

Shanaka apologised to his country for the disappointing ouster from the Super Eight stage after a 61-run loss to New Zealand following a 51-run defeat at the hands of England. However, he was not too happy with the criticism that his players were

facing due to underwhelming performances.

"As players, it's very hard for us to control the outside noise. So, most of the time, we mainly hear negative stuff, so no matter how positive we are as players, there is a negative environment created from the outside," he said after the loss to New Zealand here on Wednesday.

"So that's a disadvantage for cricket in Sri Lanka, we only have this game, and I don't think this could be saved. So, why is the negativity being spread like this? Okay, we lost a World Cup, we know the reasons. We all have concerns."

"So, I think we'll play and go, but at least for the players



coming up next, if the government could interfere and stop those, I believe that will be a great help for better mental health," he added in

an unprecedented request.

In his apology to the country, Shanaka said his team just could not deliver in the Super Eights after a fairly

good group campaign in which the co-hosts ousted Australia.

"We feel very sorry about this. The England match was also a match that we could have won... If we were more sensible, we could have won that. This match was a one-sided game. For the spectators, I don't have anything to say; we have not given them any win that they can be happy about," Shanaka said.

Elaborating on the reasons for the team's downward spiral after the group stage, he said the wickets here didn't behave the way he expected.

"Before the start of the tournament, I also mentioned that I expected the

wickets to be good. So honestly, we are very sorry for what happened. No one goes out there to fail; everyone goes with the intention of playing well and winning for the team," he asserted.

"Unfortunately, we don't always get the conditions we want; sometimes we lose games from the things that we don't even think of, from the small changes. So, we are so sorry about that; as players, we feel very sad about it," Shanaka said.

Half a dozen injuries: Shanaka also conceded that the fitness of Sri Lankan players was not up to the mark and the list of injuries also kept getting longer as the tournament progressed.

FIFA confident of Mexico to host WC games despite cartel violence

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Mexico City

The violence that erupted in Mexico after the death of a powerful drug lord has left many questioning whether the country will be able to co-host the World Cup in just over three months.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino thinks it can. "Of course, we are monitoring the situation in Mexico



these days, but I want to say from the outset that we have complete confidence in

Mexico, in its president, Claudia Sheinbaum, and in the authorities, and we are convinced that everything will go as smoothly as possible," Infantino said late on Tuesday in a press conference in Colombia.

"Mexico is a great country, like in every country in the world, things happen; we don't live on the moon or another planet," Infantino added.

Indian women eye improved batting show

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Hobart

Outplayed in the series-opener, reigning world champions India would aim for an improved batting effort in the second women's ODI against Australia to keep the three-match rubber alive on Friday.

Having won the T20 series 2-1, a below-par India started the ODI contests on a disappointing note, losing by six wickets in Brisbane. The Indian women's team has

never won a bilateral ODI series against Australia.

Australia have dominated the rivalry against India in this format, having won all 11 of the bilateral ODI series between the two sides, including a 3-0 win in late 2024 and a 2-1 victory in September 2025.

But India will look to draw inspiration from their five-wicket win over Australia in the 2025 Women's ODI World Cup semifinals.

In the lung-opener here, India were not upto the chal-



lenge and were bundled out for a paltry 214.

Barring vice-captain Smriti Mandhana (58), skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (53) and Kahvee Gautam (43), no other Indian batter could produce substantial knocks and struggled against Australia's disciplined bowling.

Opening the batting, Pratika Rawal made a duck, while Shafali Verma, Jemimah Rodrigues and Deepti Sharma also failed to rise to the occasion.