

The Pioneer TRUSTED SINCE 1865

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GREAT OFFERS!



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PIONEER IN SHORT

SANJU'S 97 SECURES SEMIS SPOT FOR INDIA

Sanju Samson's unbeaten 97 powered India to a thrilling five-wicket win over West Indies in a must-win Super 8 clash of the T20 World Cup on Sunday...

Khamenei, aides assassinated as west Asia explodes

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Dubai

Iran vowed revenge Sunday after the killing of its supreme leader and traded strikes with Israel as part of a widening war prompted by a surprise US and Israeli bombardment a day earlier.

Blasts in Tehran sent a huge plume of smoke into the sky in an area where there are Government buildings. Iranian authorities say more than 200 people have been killed since the start of the US and Israeli strikes that killed Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and other senior leaders.

Earlier, Iran fired missiles at an ever-widening list of targets in Israel and Gulf Arab States in retaliation while Israel pledged "non-stop" strikes against Iran's leaders and military.

In Israel, loud explosions

caused by missile impacts or interceptions could be heard in Tel Aviv. Israel's rescue services said eight people were killed and 28 wounded in a strike that hit a synagogue in the central town of Beit Shemesh, bringing the overall death toll in the country to 10.

The US military said three service members have been killed and five others seriously wounded since the operations began. They are the first known American casualties from the fighting.

Meanwhile, Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said in a pre-recorded message aired on State television that a new leadership council had begun its work, and Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said a new supreme leader would be



Iranian supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei AP

chosen in "one or two days."

The strikes and counterattacks underscored how the killing of Khamenei, and US President Donald Trump's calls for the overthrow of the decades-old Islamic Republic, carried the poten-

tial for a prolonged conflict that could envelop the Middle East.

It's the second time in eight months that the US and Israel have teamed up to use military force against Iran, and a startling show of military might for an American president who swept into office on an "America First" platform and vowed to keep out of "forever wars."

In the 12-day war in June, Israeli and American strikes greatly weakened Iran's air defences, military leadership and nuclear program. But the killing of Khamenei, who had ruled Iran for more than three decades, creates a leadership vacuum, increasing the risk of regional instability.

"You have crossed our red line and must pay the price," Iran's parliamentary

speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, said in a televised address Sunday. "We will deliver such devastating blows that you yourselves will be driven to beg."

Trump warned that any retaliation would only lead to further escalation.

"THEY BETTER NOT DO THAT," Trump fired back in a social media post. "IF THEY DO, WE WILL HIT THEM WITH A FORCE THAT HAS NEVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE!"

In a sign of how the attack could stoke regional unrest, hundreds of people stormed the US Consulate in Pakistan's port city of Karachi on Sunday. Police and paramilitary forces used batons and fired tear gas to disperse the crowd, and at least nine people were killed in the clashes, authorities said.

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A plume of smoke caused by an Iranian strike rising in the background as planes are parked at Dubai International Airport after its closure AP

India advises stranded foreigners to seek relief

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

In view of widespread flight cancellations triggered by the escalating security situation in West Asia, the Government of India on Sunday advised foreign nationals currently in the country to approach the relevant authorities for visa extensions and assistance in regularising their stay.

Hundreds of flights across the Middle East and other

regions, including India, have been disrupted following airspace restrictions imposed after coordinated strikes by the United States and Israel on Iran on Saturday. According to the civil aviation ministry, Indian carriers are expected to cancel as many as 444 international flights on March 1 as a result of airspace restrictions and safety concerns in the region.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

ANTI-US PROTESTS CLAIM 10 LIVES IN PAKISTAN

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Islamabad/Karachi/Lahore

At least 10 people were killed on Sunday after violent clashes and arson took place in different cities of Pakistan during protests over the killing of Shiite supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

All 10 people were killed in firing in Karachi when protesters tried to storm the US Consulate in the port city.

Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei was killed on Saturday in a coordinated US-Israeli airstrike on Tehran with his death confirmed on Sunday, prompting an outburst of anger by Pakistan's Shiites, who are about 20 per cent of the 240 million population.

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PLEASE ACCEPT MY DEEPEST CONDOLENCES IN CONNECTION WITH THE ASSASSINATION OF THE SUPREME LEADER OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, SEYYED ALI KHAMENEI, AND MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY, COMMITTED IN A CYNICAL VIOLATION OF ALL NORMS OF HUMAN MORALITY AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

VLADIMIR PUTIN, RUSSIAN PRESIDENT



WE ARE WITNESSING A GRAVE THREAT TO INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY. MILITARY ACTION CARRIES THE RISK OF IGNITING A CHAIN OF EVENTS THAT NO ONE CAN CONTROL IN THE MOST VOLATILE REGION OF THE WORLD

ANTONIO GUTERRES, UN SECRETARY-GENERAL



WE ARE STOPPING EXTREMISM BEFORE IT BECOMES UNSTOPPABLE. WE WILL ENSURE THAT NO RADICAL REGIME ARMED WITH NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND BALLISTIC MISSILES CAN THREATEN OUR PEOPLE OR THE ENTIRE WORLD.

DANNY DANON, ISRAEL'S UN AMBASSADOR



IRAN JUST STATED THAT THEY ARE GOING TO HIT VERY HARD TODAY, HARDER THAN THEY HAVE EVER HIT BEFORE. THEY BETTER NOT DO THAT, HOWEVER, BECAUSE IF THEY DO, WE WILL HIT THEM WITH A FORCE THAT HAS NEVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE!

DONALD TRUMP, US PRESIDENT

The Bystander



NAGPUR FACTORY BLAST KILLS 18

At least 18 workers died and 24 were injured in a massive blast at SBL Energy Limited's detonator packing unit in Raulgao, Katol tehsil, Nagpur district, on Sunday morning, police said. Most of the injured are in critical condition at two hospitals in Nagpur.

ZIMBABWE STRANDED AFTER WC EXIT

Zimbabwe are awaiting clarity on their travel plans after the closure of Dubai airport amid escalating Middle East tensions. The Zimbabwe national cricket team, led by Sikandar Raza, had completed their ICC Men's T20 World Cup campaign and were scheduled to depart Delhi in three batches from Monday.

PM flays attack on UAE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday night spoke to the President of the UAE, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and strongly condemned the attacks on the Gulf nation, saying India stands in solidarity with the UAE in these difficult times.

PM ALSO THANKED THE UAE PRESIDENT FOR TAKING CARE OF THE INDIAN COMMUNITY LIVING IN THE GULF NATION

Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Strongly condemned the attacks on the UAE and condoled the loss of lives in these attacks. India stands in solidarity with the UAE in these difficult times. "Thanked him for taking care of the Indian community living in the UAE. We support de-escalation, regional peace, security and stability."

PM sounds poll bugle in TN, Puducherry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Puducherry/Chennai

Sounding the poll bugle in southern States of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday alleged that the State and the Union Territory (UT) were marked by political instability and corruption of the Congress and the DMK.



PM Narendra Modi addressing an NDA election rally in Madurai, Tamil Nadu PTI

back on track on development and said that he hoped to see a NDA Government in Puducherry for bringing back the UT

"Congress had made Puducherry an ATM for one family that sits in Delhi," he said at an event in Puducherry to mark the launch of new projects and foundation stone laying for new initiatives.

"Now the same forces are hungry for power again," he said in his address after unveiling projects worth over ₹2,700 crore.

In his second rally during the day, the PM slammed the ruling DMK dispensation in Tamil Nadu allegedly for "stealing" from the poor, youth, farmers and said such a Government had no moral right to continue.

Addressing the rally, the PM said the people have decided to bring the NDA to power in Tamil Nadu and he assured clean, efficient governance.

Modi also visited the Arulmigu Subrahmanya Swamy temple at Tirupparankundram amidst tight security arrangements. The PM who arrived at around 4.15 pm was accorded purna-kumbha honours by the temple administration. Clad in dhoti, kurta and adorned with a shawl, the Prime Minister went around the temple and later offered his worship.

DELHI LAUNCHES PINK CARD FOR WOMEN

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The Delhi Government will launch a Pink National Common Mobility Card (NCCM) on Monday, aimed at providing free bus travel to women in the national Capital and enabling seamless access to multiple public transport systems through a single smart card.

The scheme will be formally launched by President Droupadi Murmu at a programme titled Sashakt Nari, Samridh Delhi at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium. At the same event, the President will also formally launch a scheme to provide two free LPG cylinders annually to all ration card-holding families in Delhi on the occasions of Holi and Diwali and Chief Minister Rekha Gupta's flagship scheme Delhi Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana. Under the scheme, a total of ₹56,000 will now be deposited in stages in the name of the girl child, and with accrued interest, the maturity value is expected to exceed ₹1 lakh by the age of 21.

The Pink Card would allow women residents of Delhi to travel free of cost on Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) buses, while also being usable for paid travel on the Metro, Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) and other public transport services.

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Containment today, regime change tomorrow? Lessons from history



UTTAM KUMAR SINHA

As tensions escalate in west Asia, the US stands at a familiar crossroads. Is the goal calibrated deterrence aimed at neutralising "imminent threats" from the Iranian regime, or the opening move in a far more perilous pursuit of regime change?

The debate unfolding today cannot be understood without examining a century of US foreign policy, where containment and regime change have alternated as

preferred instruments of power. Neither carries an unblemished record but have been justified in the language of security, democracy and stability.

After World War II, containment became the US strategy. Popularised by George Kennan, it held that hostile ideologies, particularly communism, must be prevented from expanding. Alliances such as NATO and a network of military partnerships emerged from this thinking.

But containment was rarely passive. When Governments appeared too independent or ideologically suspect, Washington often moved beyond deterrence



Rescue workers and residents search through the rubble in the aftermath of an Israeli-US strike on a girls' elementary school in Minab, Iran PTI

toward direct or covert regime change. Over time, the rationale expanded beyond communism to

include counterterrorism, nuclear proliferation and regional dominance.

One of the most conse-

quential early interventions occurred in Iran in 1953, when the CIA, working with British intelligence, engineered the overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh after he nationalised the country's oil industry.

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah, returned, ceded a significant share of Iran's oil fields to American firms, and ruled with growing authoritarianism. The backlash culminated in the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which installed the very regime Washington now seeks to restrain.

A similar trajectory played out in Guatemala in 1954, where US support helped topple President Jacobo Arbenz amid Cold War anxi-

eties and corporate lobbying. The result was not democratic consolidation but decades of violence and repression.

These early interventions revealed two enduring truths. First, external interference often erodes domestic legitimacy. Second, the long-term consequences frequently outlast and outweigh the perceived short-term threat.

During the height of the Cold War, such interventions became almost routine. In Chile in 1973, American backing for forces opposing President Salvador Allende contributed to his overthrow and paved the way for General Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship.

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BJP's countdown has begun, says Kejriwal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Forty-eight hours after being discharged by a Delhi court in the liquor policy case, AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday, claiming that and said the countdown for the BJP Government's end has begun. "Aaj ke din se BJP ki ulti ginti shuru hogayi hai," Kejriwal said.

Addressing the party's rally at Jantar Mantar, Kejriwal accused the prime minister and Shah of conspiring to frame him in the excise policy case, saying both Modi and Amit Shah have for many years said that Kejriwal is corrupt and that he has taken bribes. But the judge told Modi, "You're wrong, Kejriwal is kattar imaandaar (hardcore honest person)," he said, adding that the trial court's order was a tight slap on the BJP.

A trial court on Friday granted the relief to Kejriwal,

his deputy Manish Sisodia and 21 others in the case and criticised the CBI, saying the charge sheet "suffers from internal contradictions, striking at the root of conspiracy theory."

Kejriwal alleged that the prime minister feared everyone and asserted that when a "tyrant" is scared, it signals the end of his reign.

"People were frustrated with Congress and then voted the BJP to power in 2014. I want to ask, '12 saal hogaye Modi ji ko. Kuch badla aapne?' Education, employment, ... all sectors have been destroyed. They have destroyed the whole country," he said, adding that while other countries had reached the moon, India was still struggling with open drains.

"He sent Sonam Wangchuk to jail, who is a big scientist and worked for the education of children. Modi ji did not go to Parliament one day, fearing women MPs would assault him. He is scared of Trump, too, Kejriwal stated. "Inhe desh nahi chhalana, unhe sirf



AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal addressing the gathering at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Sunday

satta ki hawas hai (They do not want to run the country; they are driven only by the desire for power)," Kejriwal targeted Modi and Shah.

The former Delhi chief minister also alleged that in 12 years of BJP rule in the country, all the sectors were ruined and the condition of roads, healthcare, education

and sanitation, among others, was in bad shape.

Taking a dig at the "Viksit Bharat" vision of the Prime Minister, Kejriwal said people want a *Rahne Layak Bharat* (liveable India) and also took a swipe at the *Pariksha Pe Charcha* programme addressed by Modi, saying he should stop the "drama" and

focus on preventing paper leaks in exams.

Kejriwal also slammed the BJP Government in Delhi, saying the party ruined the city in its one-year rule, alleging that the roads are broken, the water supply is contaminated, and people are facing difficulty in breathing due to air pollution. He said the

prime minister had nothing to do with the country, and he was after power only through "conspiracies" and manipulation in voter lists. "Modi ji, you can continue to work for power, and I will continue to work for the country," Kejriwal said.

"I passed from IIT with good numbers and could have gone to America. But I thought if everyone went abroad, who would take care of the country? When I served as an income tax commissioner, people used to swear on my honesty," he said. The AAP supremo said that on April 4, 2011, people gathered at Jantar Mantar had roared and the Congress was swept from power.

He said that the AAP rally marked a historic day, and the countdown of the BJP's removal from power has begun. Several senior party leaders, including Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, Manish Sisodia, Atishi, Sanjay Singh, and Saurabh Bharadwaj also addressed the gathering at Jantar Mantar.

Delhi Police arrests people for cyber fraud of ₹1.5 crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Delhi Police has arrested 27 men in connection with cyber fraud cases involving more than ₹1.5 crore, from 11 States, following a week-long pan-India operation.

According to the police, the accused were involved in at least 10 major cyber fraud cases amounting to more than ₹1.5 crore, while scrutiny of their suspected bank accounts revealed transactions of over ₹13.91 crore.

Around 150 complaints lodged on the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (NCRP) have been linked to the mobile numbers and bank accounts allegedly operated by the accused, police said. The cyber syndicates were engaged in investment fraud, APK file fraud, social media impersonation, credit card fraud, task-based fraud and visa-related fraud.

The police constituted multiple teams to trace and apprehend them and conducted



simultaneous raids in 11 states, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Bihar and West Bengal, leading to the arrest of 27 accused, they said.

According to the police, the syndicates lured victims by promising high returns through fake investment schemes, sent malicious APK files posing as bank officials to gain remote access to devices, and created fake social media profiles to impersonate officials. In task-based frauds, they induced victims to complete online tasks with the promise of commissions and duped them of large sums, police said.

Kejriwal delivered zero development in 11 years: Virendra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva on Sunday launched a sharp attack on Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal. The BJP President claimed that the former chief minister's 11-year tenure in Delhi and 3.5 years in Punjab delivered "zero development", while the one-year-old BJP Government in Delhi has ushered in visible change.

Addressing a press interaction in New Delhi, Sachdeva said it was ironic that AAP leaders were questioning the performance of a Government that has completed just one year. "After ruling Delhi for 11 years and now governing Punjab for three-and-a-half years, they have delivered zero development. Yet they want to question a one-year-old Government," he said.

He also alleged that



Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva

Kejriwal raises questions about the BJP Governments in Gujarat and Goa despite being repeatedly rejected by voters there. "The problem with Arvind Kejriwal and AAP is that whenever they get some political space, they start blaming the BJP for everything from Delhi and Punjab to Gujarat, Goa, and even international matters," Sachdeva said.

Highlighting the BJP Government's first year in Delhi, Sachdeva said Chief Minister Rekha Gupta has

set a national example by presenting her Government's report card across all seven parliamentary constituencies within seven days. He described it as a unique outreach initiative aimed at transparency and accountability.

The Delhi BJP chief said that through departments such as the Public Works Department (PWD), Delhi Jal Board, Flood Control Department and Transport Department, the Delhi Government has initiated development works

worth thousands of crores of rupees. He added that an allocation of ₹100 crore has been made as separate development funds for each Assembly constituency, giving public representatives greater scope to execute projects.

Contrasting the previous regime with the current one, Sachdeva alleged that Kejriwal's 11-year tenure was marked by corruption, scams and controversies such as the "Sheesh Mahal". In comparison, he claimed, the BJP's one year has been defined by development and systemic reform. He said the Government has introduced nearly ₹1 lakh crore worth of new schemes. These include new sewage treatment plants (STPs), a new sewer master plan and initial steps toward cleaning the Yamuna. He also cited improvements in road infrastructure, induction of new buses and citizen-oriented

reforms in house tax and Jal Board schemes. Sachdeva maintained that the BJP Government is focused on governance and infrastructure rather than political rhetoric. He said the allocation of substantial funds to each Assembly constituency reflects the administration's intent to decentralise development and empower elected representatives.

The remarks came in response to recent statements made by Arvind Kejriwal, who has criticised the BJP-led Government's performance in Delhi. There was no immediate response from the AAP to Sachdeva's latest comments.

The political exchange signals an intensifying war of words between the BJP and AAP, even as the BJP Government completes its first year in office and positions itself as a development-focused administration.

Delhi Police busts multi-State job scam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi Police has arrested a proclaimed offender allegedly involved in a multi-State job scam, cheating several aspirants of crores of rupees by promising Government jobs in the Ministry of Home Affairs, officials said on Sunday.

The accused, identified as Suresh, was apprehended on Saturday near the Dwarka Expressway after a brief chase, they said. "According to the complaint lodged by Yogesh, a resident of Gurugram, the accused had allegedly taken ₹8.55 lakh between 2021 and 2022 on the pretext of securing him a Lower Division Clerk (LDC) post in the Ministry of Home Affairs. When the promised job did not materialise, and the



complainant approached the police," police said in a statement. Based on the complaint, a case was registered under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code at the Indira Gandhi International Airport on November 15, 2025.

During the investigation, it was revealed that Suresh targeted job seekers by promising them high-demand posts in various Government departments. Further investigation is underway, police added.

Delhi Police top national CCTNS Pragati Dashboard

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi Police has retained the top position among all States and Union territories in the implementation of the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS), securing the first rank on the Pragati Dashboard for January 2026, an official said on Sunday.

The force had achieved a 100 per cent score for three consecutive months — October, November and December 2025. It has continued its performance streak into the New Year, reaffirming its leadership in technology-driven policing and data governance.

According to officials, the ranking is based on parameters monitored by the Ministry of Home Affairs

Every reading room, computer centre step towards Viksit Bharat: Speaker

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta on Sunday inaugurated the Savitri Devi Goyal Institute of Computer Education and a Reading Room in Nangloi. The Speaker said that every reading room and computer centre is a step towards building a Viksit Bharat.

The facility has been set up at Raghunath Dharamshala by Seva Bharati to provide computer education and study space to children and youth, especially from economically weaker sections. The centre has been equipped with 15 computers and a dedicated reading room to support students preparing for academic and competitive examinations.

Addressing the gathering, Gupta said computer education is no longer a luxury but an essential requirement in the digital age. "True literacy today must include digital literacy," he said, adding that almost every profession and Government service now requires basic computer



Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta

knowledge. He said the inauguration was not merely about opening a building but about creating new opportunities for talented youth who often fall behind due to a lack of resources. Offering computer education at a nominal cost within the community will benefit students who cannot afford expensive private institutes, he added.

Gupta linked the initiative to the larger national vision, saying India is witnessing a digital revolution comparable to the industrial revolution of earlier times. He referred to initiatives such as Digital India and the growing role of Artificial

Intelligence, stating that these developments are strengthening India's position as a leading global economy.

Shri Vishal, Prant Pracharak of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, who was present at the event, said the reading room would help shape dreams, discipline and determination among young minds. He appreciated the efforts of Seva Bharati in establishing the institute and expressed confidence that it would play a significant role in empowering students from economically weaker backgrounds. He said by providing computer education and study facilities at a

nominal cost, the centre would open new avenues for deserving students and help them pursue academic and professional goals with confidence.

Recalling his own student days, Gupta said he often searched for quiet places to study and found libraries helpful for concentration. He mentioned studying at the Ratan Tata Library in Timarpur near the Delhi School of Economics. He said reading rooms are especially important for aspirants preparing for competitive exams such as the civil services.

The Speaker also praised Seva Bharati for its social service initiatives, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when volunteers delivered rations, medicines and essential supplies to those in need for several months.

Calling the centre a community initiative, Gupta urged residents to contribute by donating books, volunteering time or providing financial support. He expressed hope that similar centres would be established in other areas.

Undertrial inmate dies in Mandoli jail; family alleges foul play

ABHINAV KUMAR JHA
New Delhi

A 35-year-old undertrial prisoner died under suspicious circumstances in Mandoli jail on Sunday. The family members of the prisoner alleged that he was beaten inside the jail and that the assault led to his death. Police said an inquiry is underway.

The deceased has been identified as Mohammad Azad, also known as Rakal, a resident of E-382, New Seemapuri in East Delhi. He had been lodged in Mandoli jail since 2022 after being arrested by the Krishna Nagar police in a case.

According to police, information was received on March 1 from GTB Hospital that an undertrial prisoner, Mohammad Azad, had been brought from Mandoli jail in an unconscious condition. Doctors at the hospital declared him dead, and his body has been sent for a post-mortem. A senior police officer stated that proceedings have been initiated under Section 196 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS). The exact cause of death will be known



after the post-mortem report.

Family members have raised serious allegations. Azad's brother-in-law, Milan, said that on February 24, Azad was beaten inside the jail premises. He claimed that when the family came to know about the alleged assault, they gathered outside the Mandoli jail gate and informed the police through a PCR call.

According to Milan, the investigating officer at that time told the family that Azad was fine and that nothing serious had happened. On Sunday morning, a neighbour informed the family by phone that Azad's health had worsened and that he had been taken to GTB Hospital. When the family reached the

hospital, they were told that he had already died.

Milan also said that Azad had a court date on February 28 at Karkardooma Court. During that hearing, he allegedly told his mother to arrange some money, saying he needed to pay someone inside the jail. The family suspects foul play and has demanded a proper investigation into the incident. They have alleged that the death was not natural and that jail authorities should be questioned. Police officials stated that the matter is being examined in accordance with legal procedure. According to the rules, cases of custodial death are subject to investigation. Further action will depend on the post-mortem findings and the outcome of the investigation. It is also reported that another inmate named Tony, who was lodged in the same jail, has fallen ill and has been admitted to GTB Hospital. Police have not yet linked the two cases.

The incident has once again raised questions about inmate safety and medical care inside prisons. Authorities said further details will be shared after the medical report and inquiry findings are available.



(MHA) and the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) through the Pragati Dashboard, which evaluates states and UTs on quality, quantity, timeliness and accuracy of data uploaded on national-level applications.

The assessment covers governance and performance indicators across 15 key parameters, including connectivity of police stations under CCTNS, establishment of Disaster Recovery (DR) centres, entries in key modules of the Core Application Software, migration of legacy data, and data synchronisation at the State Data Centre (SDC) with replication at the National Data Centre (NDC).

Other parameters include electronic submission of FIRs to courts, provision of citizen services through the State Citizen Portal, and regular meetings of ICJS State Empowered and Apex Committees.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given that my clients Mr. Dinesh Kapoor, Mrs. Rajni Kapoor and Mr. Ghanshyam Kapoor are in the process of availing a LAPF from (Suryoday Small Finance Bank Ltd) against the property bearing No. 94, area measuring 186.53 sq. yds. (i.e., 150 sq. mtrs.), situated in the layout plan of Public Sector (P.S.) Employees Centre, Co-operative House Building Society, now known as Sandesh Vihar, Pitampura, Delhi-110034. It is hereby informed that the following original document pertaining to the said property has been lost/misplaced. An FIR in respect of the loss of the below-mentioned document has already been lodged on 31/1/2026.

1. Original Relinquishment Deed certificate no. JN/DL92/07/1125351627 executed by (1) Ms. Ritu Agarwal and (2) Ms. Monika Katyal in favour of Mr. Dinesh Kapoor, bearing Document No. 7927. All persons having any claim against or in respect of the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise howsoever, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to the undersigned at the address mentioned below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned.

Kamalkant Gupta (Advocate)
Unit No. FF-2, First Floor, Mahalaxmi Metro Tower
Sec-4, Vaidhali, Gzb., U.P. Mob. 9810063351

22-year-old wanted in recent firing case in north Delhi arrested

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Crime Branch of Delhi Police has arrested a 22-year-old man who was wanted in a recent firing case in north Delhi and had been absconding since the incident.

The accused, identified as Krish alias Kinni, was apprehended by the Northern Range-I team during a special drive against desperate and wanted criminals.

Krish, a resident of E-Block, Jahangirpuri, was wanted in FIR No 60/26 dated January 25, 2026, registered at Mahindra Park police

station under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the Arms Act. He had allegedly opened fire in the area along with an associate to settle a personal enemy.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime Branch) Pankaj Kumar said the arrest reflects the firm commitment of Delhi Police towards maintaining law and order and bringing absconding criminals to justice.

He said the accused was arrested after due legal procedure under Section 35(1)(b) of the BNSS and in compliance with Supreme Court guidelines.



Police said the accused and his associate had fired at two persons, Anmol and Salman, on January 24. Fortunately, no one sustained bullet injuries. After the incident, both accused fled and were evading arrest.

On February 28, acting on DD No 74A, a Crime Branch team was in the Jahangirpuri area to gather information about criminals on the run.

At around 11.15 am, police received specific input that Krish had been seen near Shah Alam Bandh Road.

After obtaining necessary permission from senior officers, a

raiding team was formed. The accused was identified at the instance of a secret informer and was apprehended after swift action.

During interrogation, Krish admitted that he and his associate had opened fire due to personal rivalry.

He also disclosed that he had been hiding at different locations to avoid arrest.

Verification of his criminal record revealed that he was previously involved in a similar firing case registered at the Jahangirpuri police station.

In May 2025, he had allegedly

fired gunshots in the area along with his friends and was sent to jail in that case.

Police said Krish studied up to Class 10 but dropped out and later fell into bad company. He also became addicted to alcohol. His associate in the January firing case is still being traced.

Officials described the arrest as a major success in the ongoing drive against offenders involved in violent crimes.

The Crime Branch said efforts are on to apprehend other absconding accused and curb incidents of firing linked to personal rivalries.



President Murmu to launch Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

In a significant step towards the economic empowerment of women and girls, President Droupadi Murmu on Monday will formally launch the Delhi Government's ambitious 'Delhi Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana,' at a special programme titled 'Sashakt Nari, Samridh Delhi.' Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Sunday stated that the programme symbolises the Delhi Government's commitment to women's empowerment. The event is being organised by the Department of Women and Child Development. She explained that in view of changing times and the rising cost of higher education, there was a need for an effective and future-oriented

scheme for girls. With this vision, the existing Ladli Scheme has been expanded and restructured into the 'Delhi Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana'. Under the previous structure, ₹11,000 was deposited in the name of each eligible girl child in case of an institutional birth and ₹10,000 in case of a home birth. Additionally, ₹5,000 was deposited at key educational milestones: admission to Classes I, VI and IX, passing Class X, and admission to Class XII. The accumulated amount, along with interest, could be withdrawn at the age of 18. The Chief Minister clarified that under the new scheme, both the financial assistance and the overall vision have been significantly enhanced. A total of



₹56,000 will now be deposited in stages in the name of the girl child, and with accrued interest, the maturity value is expected to exceed ₹1 lakh by the age of 21. The objective is to ensure that completing graduation or a professional diploma becomes the norm rather than the exception. The new scheme will be entirely digital. The funds will be managed by SBI Life Insurance Company Limited and invested under SBI Life Dhanrashi Sadhan. The amount deposited by the Department will grow with the girl's age, and upon maturity, the entire accumulated sum will be transferred directly to the beneficiary's Aadhaar-linked bank account. This will ensure transparency and direct financial inclusion.

The scheme will benefit families with an annual income not exceeding ₹1.20 lakh and who have been residing in Delhi for the past three years. The girl child must have been born in Delhi. Registration may be completed within one year of birth or at designated educational milestones. The benefit will be limited to two living girl children per family. Importantly, the scope of the scheme has been expanded to include girls pursuing graduation or a professional diploma at any Government-recognised or UGC-recognised institution in India. The maturity benefit will be payable only upon fulfillment of educational conditions. Chief Minister Rekha Gupta stated that the scheme is inspired by the broader

vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which seeks to place daughters at the centre of nation-building through education, dignity and self-reliance. She said the Prime Minister's clear message is that when daughters are educated and empowered, society and the nation prosper. The Chief Minister expressed confidence that the 'Delhi Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana' will serve not merely as financial assistance but as a guarantee of confidence, higher education and a secure future for daughters. She added that the Delhi Government aims to ensure that every eligible girl in the capital receives the opportunity to fulfill her aspirations and actively contribute to building a self-reliant India.

₹100 CRORE PAYOUT FOR 40,642 GIRLS
A special highlight of the 'Sashakt Nari, Samridh Delhi' programme is that 40,642 eligible beneficiaries under the Delhi Ladli Scheme who had long awaited their maturity amounts will receive ₹100.25 crore through digital Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). The amount will be disbursed under the initiative titled 'Meri Punji, Mera Adhikar'. Launched in 2008, the Ladli Scheme aimed to promote the birth and education of the girl child and to address gender disparities through structured financial assistance. The maturity amount, including accrued interest, will be transferred directly to accounts via DBT.

100 flights cancelled at IGI Airport amid west Asia crisis

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Travel chaos erupted due to airspace restrictions over Iran and parts of the Middle East. Flight cancellations at Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport have increased sharply, with 60 departures and 40 arrivals, totalling 100 flights, being cancelled so far. "Due to the evolving political situation in the Middle East, west-bound international flights may experience disruptions or schedule changes," DIAL said in a post on X.



Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) operates the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) in the national capital. It is also the country's largest airport, handling more than 1,300 flight movements daily. Earlier, the Civil Aviation Ministry said 444 international flights are expected to be cancelled by domestic carriers on Sunday. "In view of airspace restrictions arising from geopolitical developments in the Middle East, a total of 350 flights operated by Indian domestic carriers have been cancelled on March 1, 2026," the civil aviation ministry said in a post on X at 4:34 pm on Sunday.

At 12:25 am, the ministry in an X post said that 444 international flights were expected to be cancelled on Sunday due to airspace restrictions over Iran and parts of the Middle East. On February 28, the ministry said 410 flights of domestic carriers were cancelled. "The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is main-

taining close coordination with airlines to ensure full compliance with safety and operational regulations," the ministry stated. At Delhi airport, several long-haul and Middle East-bound services have been affected. IndiGo has cancelled multiple flights from Delhi on Sunday, citing "airspace restriction". These include services to Ras Al Khaimah, Kuwait, Doha, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Athens, Manchester, Jeddah, Riyadh, and Dammam. The airline also suspended select international flights that use Middle East airspace till 11:59 pm on March 2. Some airlines also cancelled Monday flights that use the Middle East airspace. Although several flights were cancelled, airport operations remained relatively smooth as live flight tracking website Flightradar24 showed an average departure delay of just 14 minutes, within the normal range.

Karan Aujla's show: India's 2nd biggest concert

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Over 75,000 fans gathered at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium to catch a glimpse of Punjabi star Karan Aujla, turning it into India's second-highest-attended single-day concert after Coldplay. Aujla, known for delivering hit tracks such as "Tauba Tauba", "Chitta Kurta" and "Softly", among others, performed in Delhi on Saturday. The performance was a part of his "P-POP CULTURE India Tour 2026", which debuted in the Middle East. It is produced by Team Innovation. The singer said it was not just a concert but "a celebration of culture and a moment where we all connected through the one language of love, passion and unity." "Delhi, you made history with me tonight, and this is just the beginning of the 'P-POP CULTURE' revolution. "Pind ton ithe takk, eh



ik sapna hai jo sach ho gaya," he said in a statement. Mohit Bijlani, founder of Team Innovation, added, "What we achieved tonight in Delhi is nothing short of revolutionary. The scale, technological innovation and fan engagement redefine what live music can be in India, creating a massive cultural and economic impact." The concert opened with a high-octane DJ set by DJ Chetas, following which Aujla took over the stage.

Midway through the show, he further wowed fans with a zipline traverse across the stadium, connecting with audiences on multiple tiers and the stadium floor, creating a full 360-degree immersive experience, according to a press release. Aujla's setlist was a masterful journey through his biggest hits and fan favourites, beginning with the high-energy opener "MF Gabhru", followed by "Boli", "52 Bars", "Take It Easy",

"Boyfriend" and others. Prior to Aujla, Coldplay collected over 134,000 fans during the performance in Ahmedabad in January 2025. Besides Delhi, the 11-city India leg tour will have the singer perform in Mumbai and Pune on March 3, Ahmedabad on March 7, Chandigarh on March 14, Indore on March 21, Bengaluru on March 29, Kolkata on April 3, Jaipur on April 5, Lucknow on April 10 and Ludhiana on April 12.





TRIBES ART FEST 2026
A Painting Exhibition

2 - 13 March 2026

Travancore Palace, K.G. Marg,
New Delhi

Inaugural Ceremony

on **02** March
2026
05:30 PM onwards



“Our government is committed to preserving tribal heritage. Tribal art forms, languages, and traditions are not just part of the past; they are the living heritage of our present and future.”

नरेंद्र मोदी
Narendra Modi
Hon'ble Prime Minister

30+
Art Forms

70+
Artists

1000+
Artworks

HIGHLIGHTS

- Live Painting & Demonstrations**
Enabling citizens to understand artistic processes firsthand
- Curated Exhibitions & Thematic Dialogues**
Promoting academic and institutional collaboration
- Workshops & Cultural Performances**
Engaging youth in experiential learning
- Buyer-Artist Interaction Platforms**
Facilitating long-term market linkages and sustainable livelihoods

Through these initiatives, the festival contributes to cultural awareness, economic empowerment, and stronger integration of tribal art into mainstream national discourse.

Chief Guest

Shri Jual Oram
Hon'ble Union Minister of Tribal Affairs

Guest of Honour

Shri Durgadas Uikey
Hon'ble Union Minister of State for Tribal Affairs

A NATIONAL CELEBRATION OF INDIA'S TRIBAL ART & CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs, GoI, is organizing Tribes Art Fest 2026 to provide a national platform for India's rich tribal art traditions and cultural legacy.

This national initiative enhances public access to tribal heritage while strengthening sustainable and aspirational livelihood opportunities for tribal artists across the country.

Exhibition: 03-13 March 2026 | 11 AM - 07 PM (open for all)

Collaboration with




CBC 43101/13/0029/2526



IN FOCUS



People use colours during celebrations ahead of the Holi festival at the ISKCON Temple in Amritsar on Sunday

Delhi CM presented report card to Chandni Chowk

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Sunday reached out to residents of Chandni Chowk and presented her Government's one-year report card. The Chief Minister asserted that long-pending works in the constituency have finally begun moving forward after a 27-year gap.

The Chief Minister visited the Chandni Chowk Lok Sabha constituency under the 'Pravas Programme', and interacted with local residents. She highlighted key achievements of the BJP Government's first year in office. She said the administration has laid a strong foundation for systemic change and visible development across Delhi.

Addressing a public gathering, the Chief Minister said Chandni Chowk, once marked by neglect and pending civic issues, is now witnessing a new phase of development. She termed the project to lay overhead electricity wires underground as a historic step. The move aims to preserve the heritage aesthetics of



the area while improving infrastructure and safety.

The Chief Minister said her government is working with full commitment towards its five-point resolve to make Delhi clean, healthy, safe, green, and equipped with strong basic infrastructure. She added that the vision of a 'Viksit Delhi' is no longer limited to announcements but is now visible on the ground. "Within one year of receiving the people's mandate, we have begun

completing works that were pending for decades," she said. The Chief Minister maintained that the transformation is evident in every street, colony, and Assembly constituency.

Describing Chandni Chowk as a cultural and heritage hub of the Capital, Chief Minister said integrating modern amenities with its historic character is a priority. She stressed that development in such areas must be balanced with preservation.

The programme was attended by Member of Parliament Praveen Khandelwal and Yogender Chandolia. MLAs Tilak Ram Gupta and Ashok Goel were also present, along with senior public representatives and party office-bearers.

The outreach forms part of the government's broader effort to directly engage with citizens and present its performance record after completing one year in office.

Varanasi plants 2.5 lakh trees in one hour, claims record

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Varanasi

More than 2.5 lakh saplings were planted in less than one hour in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Lok Sabha constituency Varanasi on Sunday, a feat officially recognised by the Guinness World Records, officials said.

The Varanasi Municipal Corporation (VMC) undertook the "historic" initiative, which saw the participation of more than 20,000 citizens, they said.

The achievement — a true example of public participation at its best — has been officially recognised by the Guinness World Records, the officials said.

The VMC is developing an urban forest named 'Namo Van' on about 350 bighas of land near the ghats in the Domari area.

As part of the project, 3 lakh saplings are being planted, including 2.5 lakh Miyawaki-method saplings, 10,000 timber trees and 40,000 fruit-bearing trees, the officials said.

The project will also feature a 4 km walking pathway, meditation and yoga plaza, a 4-hectare flower park, a 2-hectare herbal park, a children's play zone and a gymnasium.

On Sunday, 2.51 lakh Miyawaki saplings were planted in just one hour, breaking China's record of planting 1.53 lakh saplings in the same time period, and securing a new Guinness World Record tag, the officials said.

The urban forest will enhance biodiversity, strengthen the Ganga riverbank, and improve ecological balance, they said.



Bengal's inhabitants will become minority due to infiltration: Nadda

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Krishnanagar (WB)

Accusing the Mamata Banerjee Government in West Bengal of giving "shelter" to infiltrators, Union minister JP Nadda on Sunday claimed that the State's original inhabitants would become a minority if the trend continued.

Addressing a rally in Krishnanagar in Nadia district, from where one of the BJP's 'Poriborton Yatras' was flagged off, Nadda alleged that the ruling Trinamool Congress was trying to turn the state into a "hub of infiltrators". "Infiltration in Bengal has reached its peak. The state is being turned into a safe hub for infiltrators. The original inhabitants of Bengal will become minorities as infiltrators are being given shelter," he claimed.

Alleging a complete breakdown of law and order, Nadda said the TMC stood for "terror, Muslim appeasement and corruption". Nadda, the

once known as a land of industry, has witnessed a steady decline over the last 11 years. He alleged that around 6,628 investors have either left the State or shut down their businesses during this period.

"A total of 870 industrial units were closed in 2015, 918 in 2016 and 1,027 in 2017 and 2018. About 1,300 investors moved to Maharashtra and 1,057 shifted to Delhi," he said, noting that Britannia Industries also shut down its factory in the State.

The former BJP president claimed that West Bengal,

containment, especially when paired with diplomacy and multilateral engagement, may offer fewer immediate risks. But it demands patience, clarity of purpose and a willingness to accept imperfect outcomes. It is a strategy of management rather than transformation.

For Iran, the stakes are exceptionally high. The country is not a marginal state but a deeply rooted civilisation with strong institutions, a large population and significant regional networks. Any attempt at forced political reconfiguration would reverberate across the Gulf, Israel, Iraq, Lebanon and beyond. Energy markets would react. Proxy theatres could ignite. Domestic Iranian nationalism, historically sensitive to foreign interference, would likely intensify.

The historical record is sobering. American ambitions to remake foreign regimes have seldom delivered stable democracies. More often, they have deepened conflicts, hardened anti-American sentiment and created vacuums filled by forces more radical than those displaced.

None of this absolves the regime in Iran or its undemocratic and repressive treatment of the Iranian people. But strategic prudence requires recognising limits. Power can depose rulers. It cannot manufacture legitimacy.

As US-Israel recalibrates its Iran policy in the wake of air strikes, it would do well to heed the hard lessons of the past century. History does not guarantee that regime change will fail. But it strongly suggests that the costs, intended and unintended, are almost always higher than initially assumed.

(The writer is Senior Fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi)

Delhi launches pink card for women

Around 50 centres, including District Magistrate and Sub-Divisional Magistrate offices and selected DTC locations, will be set up for card issuance. Minimal documentation will be required to ensure a simple and transparent process. Each card will be linked to the beneficiary's mobile number and Aadhaar to verify age, gender and Delhi residency, it stated.

The Pink Card will replace the existing paper-based pink tickets, offering touch-free travel, digital records of journeys and improved transparency in revenue accounting, it mentioned.

NDMC's Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam campaign reaches Mandir Marg: Kuljeet Singh Chahal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam" plantation campaign gathered fresh momentum on Sunday as NDMC Vice Chairman Kuljeet Singh Chahal led a tree-planting drive at Gandhi Sadan, NDMC Housing Complex, Mandir Marg. The event saw active participation from Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), residents, and NDMC officials. Saplings were planted during the programme, and participants pledged to care for and protect the trees. NDMC Member Anil Valmiki was also present at the event.

Addressing the gathering, Chahal said the initiative is inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call to plant a tree in honour of one's mother and nurture it with responsibility. He said the campaign is being implement-



ed in mission mode to expand green cover across the structured and time-bound

manner. Chahal stressed that public participation is the backbone of the drive.

FROM PAGE - 1

Khamenei, aides assassinated as west...

As US and Israeli strikes have pounded Iran, the Islamic Republic has retaliated with missiles and drone attacks on Israel and nearby Arab Gulf countries hosting US forces.

The air war could rattle global markets, particularly if Iran makes the Strait of Hormuz unsafe for commercial traffic. Around 20 per cent of the world's traded oil passes through the vital waterway, and oil prices are already set for swings. In repeated barrages across Israel, at least 10 people were killed and more than 120 injured, according to authorities. Many missiles were intercepted, the military said.

Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz said Sunday that Israel will have "a non-stop air train" of strikes against military and leadership targets in Iran. Flights across the Middle East were disrupted, and air defense fire thudded over Dubai. The United Arab Emirates' commercial capital has long drawn business and expatriates by billing itself as a safe haven in a volatile region.

Shrapnel from Iranian attacks on the Emirates' capital of Abu Dhabi killed two people, state media said, and debris from aerial interceptions caused fires at the city's main port and on the facade of the iconic Burj Al Arab hotel.

Attacks also extended into Oman - Iran's long-time interlocutor with the West that hadn't been drawn into the fray previously.

Saudi Arabia condemned Iran's attacks on its capital, Riyadh, and eastern region, saying it had successfully intercepted them. The kingdom noted that it had not allowed its airspace or territory to be used to target Iran.

Jordan said it "dealt with" 49 drones and ballistic missiles. Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar also said they had intercepted projectiles Sunday morning.

Iran's foreign minister blamed such strikes on the U.S. and Israel for starting the war. He said Iran's military units are "somehow isolated" and acting on orders given in advance. He said he had spoken to his counterparts in the Gulf countries and urged them to pressure the U.S. and Israel to end the war. As supreme leader, Khamenei had final say on all major policies since 1989. He led Iran's clerical establishment and the Revolutionary Guard, the two main centers of power in the governing theocracy.

Though Trump called on Saturday for the Iranian people to "take over" their Government, there was no sign in Tehran or elsewhere of

unrest. In southern Iran, at least 115 people were reported killed when a girls' school was struck, and dozens more were wounded, the local governor told Iranian state TV.

Iran's state news agency IRNA said at least 15 people were killed in the southwest, quoting the governor of the Lamerd region, Ali Alizadeh, as saying a sports hall, two residential areas and a hall near a school were hit.

As reports trickled out about Khamenei's death, eyewitnesses in Tehran told The Associated Press that some residents were rejoicing, cheering from rooftops, blowing whistles and letting out ululations.

Mourners raised a black flag over the Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad and the Iranian Government declared 40 days of public mourning and a seven-day nationwide public holiday to commemorate Khamenei's death.

Citing unidentified sources, the semiofficial Fars news agency reported that several relatives of Khamenei were also killed, including a daughter, son-in-law, daughter-in-law and grandchild. Tensions have soared in recent weeks as the Trump administration built up the largest force of American warships and aircraft in the Middle East in decades. The president insisted he wanted a deal to constrain Iran's nuclear program while the country struggled with growing dissent following nationwide protests.

Official said intelligence showed that Iran had developed the capability to produce its own high-quality centrifuges, an important step in developing the highly enriched uranium needed for weapons.

Iran has said it has not enriched since June — though it has maintained its right to do so while saying its nuclear program is entirely peaceful. It has also blocked international inspectors from visiting the sites the US bombed. Satellite photos analyzed by AP have shown new activity at two of those sites, suggesting Iran is trying to assess and potentially recover material.

India advises stranded foreigners to seek relief

In an official statement, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) urged foreign nationals whose travel plans have been affected to contact their nearest Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO). "All foreign nationals in India, who have had to change their travel plans due to the ongoing developments in the West Asia region

and need assistance with extension of their visa or to regularise their stay, are requested to contact the nearest Foreigners Regional Registration Office," the ministry said.

The MEA added that FRROs concerned would provide necessary assistance on a case-by-case basis. However, authorities have not yet indicated how many foreign tourists or business travellers may be stranded in India due to the cancellations. Nearly 3,000 Indian students are reportedly stranded in Iran amid the escalating Iran-Israel conflict, with around 2,000 of them from Jammu and Kashmir. Of these, an estimated 1,100-1,200 students remain in high-risk conflict zones. Nasir Khuehami, National Convener of the Jammu and Kashmir Students Association, said a formal letter has been sent to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking an immediate evacuation operation.

Several students described a grim situation on the ground, reporting frequent air strikes, internet disruptions, and closure of universities and hospitals. One student in Tehran said the uncertainty and ongoing strikes have left them fearful, calling for a "quicker and clear evacuation." Another said airspace restrictions have made departures impossible despite advisories.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has advised students to move to safer areas and remain indoors. However, with Iranian airspace currently shut, evacuation efforts face significant logistical hurdles.

Meanwhile, Indians are also stranded in parts of the Gulf. In the UAE, over 700 travellers from Madhya Pradesh remain stuck in Dubai and Sharjah due to flight cancellations. The Indian Embassy in Kuwait said it is assisting nationals affected by temporary airspace closures and is coordinating with local authorities and airlines. The situation continues to evolve as tensions rise across the region.

Deterrence today, regime change...

The regime justified itself as a bulwark against communism, but it entrenched repression and polarisation that scarred Chilean society for decades. In the Congo between 1960 and 1965, US support for anti-Lumumba factions facilitated the rise of Mobutu Sese Seko. What followed was not stability but one of Africa's most corrupt and extractive regimes, sustained in part by Cold War calculations rather than domestic legitimacy. If these were Cold

War chapters, the post-9/11 era provided even more sobering lessons. The 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, launched with broad international backing after the September 11 attacks, successfully removed the Taliban from power. Yet two decades of occupation and state-building failed to produce a resilient political order. When American forces withdrew in 2021, the Taliban swiftly returned. The episode has become a cautionary tale of how externally engineered governance collapses once external force recedes. The 2003 invasion of Iraq was even more destabilising. Justified by claims that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction, the war dismantled the Iraqi state apparatus without a viable political successor. Sectarian violence surged, regional balances shifted, and the vacuum contributed to the emergence of ISIS. Iraq's continuing fragility underscores how regime change by invasion can unleash forces far beyond initial strategic calculations.

Libya offers another warning. The 2011 NATO intervention, strongly supported by Washington, removed Muammar Gaddafi but left the country fragmented. Rival militias seized territory and oil infrastructure, state institutions collapsed, and external actors turned Libya into a theatre for proxy competition. Even more indirect efforts have produced unintended consequences. In Syria, covert American assistance to rebel groups failed to unseat Bashar al-Assad and instead became part of a protracted civil war that displaced millions and destabilised neighbouring states.

If invasion has often proved costly, containment has appeared comparatively restrained. In West Asia, efforts to limit Iran's regional reach have included sanctions, diplomatic isolation and the forging of new alignments such as the Abraham Accords. These strategies aim to constrain rather than topple. Yet containment, too, carries limits. It may slow rival power projection but rarely addresses underlying grievances. In Yemen and Syria, containment has coexisted with proxy warfare, prolonging humanitarian catastrophe without resolving core disputes.

History shows that once military escalation begins, political aims often expand beyond their original mandate. Regime change, whether overt or covert, rarely delivers stability. Toppling a Government is far easier than building a legitimate successor, and the vacuum that follows breeds insurgency, factional conflict and regional spillover. Iraq and Libya remain stark reminders that the most dangerous phase of intervention begins after the regime falls.



18 killed in Nagpur factory blast

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Nagpur

At least 18 workers were charred to death, and 24 others were injured, most of them critically, in a powerful blast that tore through an explosives manufacturing factory in Maharashtra's Nagpur district on Sunday morning, police said.

The explosion occurred at the detonator packing unit of SBL Energy Limited, a mining and industrial explosives manufacturer, at Raugaon in Katol tehsil between 7 AM and 7.15 AM.

With one more person succumbing to injuries during treatment later in the day, the death toll has mounted to 18, a police officer said, adding that 24 injured workers are undergoing treatment at two hospitals in Nagpur.

The bodies were charred beyond recognition, and samples of the family members were being taken for DNA testing to ascertain



Security personnel and locals inspect the damaged premises after a blast at an explosives manufacturing factory in Nagpur district on Sunday

the identities of the deceased, police said.

Inconsolable family members of the victims thronged the factory compound, located about 50 km from the district headquarters, for some news about their loved ones.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis ordered a thorough investigation into the cause of the explosion.

Teams of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), along

with officials from Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO) and Defence Information System for Security (DISS), carried out rescue operations, Fadnavis said.

President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief over the incident.

"I am deeply saddened by the news of the loss of lives in the explosion at a factory in Nagpur, Maharashtra. I express my profound condolences to the bereaved fam-

ilies who have lost their loved ones and pray for the speedy recovery of those injured," Murmu said in a post on X in Hindi.

PM Modi announced an ex gratia of ₹2 lakh each for the kin of the deceased and ₹50,000 for the injured from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF).

"The explosion at a factory in Nagpur, Maharashtra, is deeply distressing. My condolences to the families of the deceased. I pray for the speedy recovery of the injured. The local administration is assisting those affected," Modi said in a post on X.

Fadnavis said the Maharashtra Government would provide ₹5 lakh each to the kin of the deceased, while the concerned firm will extend financial aid to the families of those affected.

Representatives of SBL Energy Limited said that the blast occurred at the company's detonator packing unit.

PM Modi offers prayers at Tirupparankundram temple

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Madurai

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday visited the Arulmigu Subrahmanya Swamy temple at Tirupparankundram near here amidst tight security arrangements.

The PM who arrived at around 4.15 pm was accorded "purna-kumbha" honours by the temple administration. Clad in dhoti, kurta and adorned with a shawl, the Prime Minister went around

the temple and later offered his worship.

Modi was accompanied by Governor RN Ravi, Union Minister L Murugan and BJP state chief Nainar Nagenthiran. Prime Minister's visit to the shrine follows a controversy last year over lighting of lamp on the hilltop with the matter reaching the court. The court ruled in favour of the devotees' right to light the lamp at the "deepathoon."



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a visit to the 'Arulmigu Subramaniya Swami Temple' in Tirupparankundram, Madurai

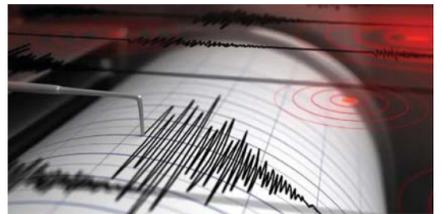
States Focus



PM Modi, Rahul greet MK Stalin on his 73rd birthday

President Droupadi Murmu, PM Narendra Modi, and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi were among a host of national leaders who extended birthday greetings to CM MK Stalin as he turned 73 on Sunday.

In a formal letter, President Murmu conveyed her best wishes for his good health and many more years of dedicated service to the nation. According to a Government press release, PM Modi spoke to the chief minister over the phone and personally conveyed his greetings. He shared a message on social media praying for his long and healthy life. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi also extended his wishes to Stalin via a social media post, wishing him a long life so that the DMK leader could dedicate his service to the people of Tamil Nadu.



Earthquake hits Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district

A 4.2 magnitude earthquake struck the mountainous Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir in the early hours of Sunday, officials said. There was no report of any damage from anywhere, the officials said.

An official of the Meteorological Department said the tremor was felt at 01.25 am.

The epicentre of the tremor was five kilometres below the surface of the earth at a latitude of 33.08 degrees north and longitude 76.17 degrees east, the official said.

India braces for hotter-than-normal summer with more heatwave days

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

As India braces for a 'hotter-than-normal' summer with more heatwave days, vulnerable populations such as the elderly, children, and outdoor workers are at heightened risk, with potential repercussions for public health, water supplies, power demand, and essential services.

Highlighting the concerns of India's vulnerable

segment, Martin Krause, Director of the Climate Change Division at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), told PTI Videos that access to cooling is not, and should not be, a privilege of the rich, as it is a matter of health and dignity.

According to the India Meteorological Department's (IMD) monthly forecast, above-normal heatwave days are expected over most parts of the country between



March and May.

"Vulnerable segments of the population are suffering more from the phenomenon of extreme heat. Access to cooling is not, and should not be, a privilege of the rich, as it is ultimately related to health and dignity," Krause said.

He noted that the productivity of outdoor workers declines under extreme heat conditions, and those working in the informal sector, including construc-

tion workers and street vendors, are most exposed and often lack formal social protection or insurance.

"Protecting the vulnerable requires practical and proven solutions that can be implemented," the UNEP official said, referring to measures such as heat action plans, early warning systems, cool roofs in informal settlements, fundamental worker protections, and parametric insurance.

IAF showcases might at Vayu Shakti-26

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Indian Air Force (IAF) showcased its capability to execute complex, integrated air operations within a dynamic and realistic battlefield environment during Exercise Vayu Shakti-26 at Pokhran, Jaisalmer.

President Droupadi Murmu was the chief guest at the mega drill, which demonstrated IAF's formidable combat readiness, operational synergy and technological prowess across the full spectrum of air operations.

For the first time, Exercise Vayushakti conducted on February 27 was executed along a defined operational storyline, transforming into simulated live combat theatre.

The drill seamlessly integrated offensive air strikes, air defence operations, special forces missions and humanitarian assistance, highlighting IAF's role as a multi-domain, integrated force and

nation's first responder.

Over 130 aircraft participated in a day and night exercise including Rafale, Su-30 MKI, Mirage-2000, MiG-29, Jaguar, Hawk, Mi-17, C-130J, C-295, C-17, the indigenous Advance Light Helicopter (ALH) Dhruv and Light Combat Helicopter (LCH) Prachand.

Fighter aircraft executed precision strikes on simulated enemy targets using advanced air-to-ground weapons, including precision-guided munitions and long range strike capabilities, underscoring IAF's ability to deliver decisive firepower with accuracy.

Air defence capabilities were demonstrated through coordinated engagements involving airborne platforms and ground based systems such as Akash and Spyder missile systems, supported by Army air defence assets, like L-70 and M-777 reflecting seamless jointmanship between air and ground forces.



A demonstration being executed by the Indian Air Force as part of Exercise 'Vayu Shakti' near the India-Pakistan border in Jaisalmer district, Rajasthan

Opposition condemns killing of Khamenei, questions Govt silence

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Opposition parties on Sunday condemned the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in US-Israel strikes and questioned the Centre's "silence", with the Congress saying that it shows the Modi Government's "abdication of moral leadership".

Opposition leaders also criticised the Centre's foreign policy and said the Government's response to the war unleashed on "friend" Iran has been a "betrayal" of India's values, principles and interests.

Slamming the killing of Khamenei, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said

the targeted assassination of the leadership of a sovereign nation by the "so-called leaders of the democratic world" and the killing of multitudes of innocent people is "despicable" and deserves strong condemnation.

She also took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying she hopes that, having "genocided" before Israeli premier Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump, the PM makes every effort to bring all Indian citizens in the affected countries back home to safety.

AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi termed the killing as an "immoral and unlawful act" and expressed hope that the



central Government would play a role in halting the war.

Questioning the Government's silence over the developments in West Asia, Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khera said it is a "complete betrayal" of all that India has stood for.

"The silence of the Modi

Govt on the targeted assassination of Ayatollah Khamenei and other Iranian leaders demonstrates its abdication of moral leadership and its reluctance to say anything remotely critical of the US and Israel. It is a complete betrayal of all that India has stood for. India has never before looked this weak," Khera said

in a post on X.

CPI leader D Raja said that the US-Israel "nexus represents evil in its most naked form". "To now assassinate a sitting head of state is to strip the so-called rules-based order of its last pretence. Sovereignty clearly applies only to those aligned with Washington," Raja said in a post on X.

"The silence of the Government of India and Prime Minister Modi is disturbing. Iran has been a friendly, time-tested partner, supportive of Kashmir and balanced within the OIC. India's strategic investment in Chabahar Port, crucial for access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan, is directly jeopardised by Iran's destabilisation," he said.

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav said the central Government should clarify its stance on the issue.

"Our country's Government should clarify its stance on this international issue and state whether it stands with war or with peace, and, as a neutral country, what diplomatic efforts it is making to stop the

RJD to field candidate for RS polls despite numbers crunch

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Patna

The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Bihar's main opposition party, on Sunday decided to contest the upcoming Rajya Sabha polls, challenging the ruling NDA's bid to win all five seats in the State without a contest.

The decision was taken at the central and state parliamentary boards' meeting of the party held at the residence of founding president Lalu Prasad, which continued till late in the evening, though leaders were tight-lipped about rumours that the supremo's heir apparent,



Tejashwi Yadav, could be the candidate.

"Both the central and the state parliamentary boards have authorised the national president and the national working president (Yadav) to take a call on the Rajya Sabha polls. Yes, it has been decided that we will contest the elections", party MLA Bhai Virendra told reporters.

Indian national among 58 who sustained minor injuries in Iranian strikes on UAE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

An Indian national is among 58 people who sustained minor injuries in Iranian military strikes targeting the United Arab Emirates, according to details shared by the UAE. The Indian embassy in Abu Dhabi said it is aware of the injury to the Indian national and is in touch with hospital authorities.

"The Indian national is out of danger. We are rendering all possible assistance," the mission said on social media.

The UAE Defence Ministry said three people were killed and 58 sustained minor



injuries in the Iranian strikes.

Iran has carried out a wave of attacks, mainly targeting Israeli and American military bases in several Gulf countries, after the United States and Israel attacked Iran on Saturday.

The Iranian retaliation increased after Tehran announced early on Sunday that the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, had been killed in the Israel-US strikes.

The UAE Defence Ministry

said its military has dealt with 165 ballistic missiles, two cruise missiles and 541 drones fired by Iran since the start of its attack.

"A total of 541 Iranian drones were detected, of which 506 were intercepted and destroyed, while 35 fell within the country, causing material damage," it said.

"The incidents resulted in three fatalities of Pakistani, Nepali and Bangladeshi nationalities, and 58 minor injuries among Emirati, Egyptian, Ethiopian, Filipino, Pakistani, Iranian, Indian, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Azerbaijani, Yemeni, Ugandan, Eritrean, Lebanese and Afghan nationals," it said.

PM, Mark Carney set to chart new course for bilateral ties

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Canadian counterpart Mark Carney are set to roll out a broad framework on Monday to deepen India-Canada ties in areas of trade, energy and critical technology in the face of increasing geopolitical upheavals.

The two prime ministers will hold wide-ranging talks as part of a "substantive agenda" amid efforts by both sides to reset the bilateral ties that came under severe strain following a diplomatic row over the killing of a Khalistani separatist in 2023.

Carney landed in New Delhi on Sunday after spend-

ing two days in Mumbai, where he met several industry leaders.

As Modi and Carney are meeting against the backdrop of an attack on Iran by Israel and the US, the two leaders are expected to exchange views on the overall situation in the Middle East.

It is learnt that there could be some forward movement towards civil-nuclear cooperation between New Delhi and Ottawa. India is keen to seal a proposed deal that will allow it to procure uranium from Canada.

"There's a rapidly growing demand across India for more energy, technology, and services — exactly what

Canada has to offer," the Canadian prime minister said on social media after arriving in the national capital.

"We're here to make sure our workers and businesses can seize these opportunities," he said.

The Canadian prime minister was received at the airport by Union Minister Jitin Prasad. Carney was also accorded a ceremonial reception.

"A substantive agenda awaits, including his official talks with PM @narendramodi tomorrow," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on social media.

It is learnt that following the Modi-Carney talks, the



two sides may announce their resolve to soon conclude the proposed comprehensive economic partnership agreement.

In the face of its frosty trade ties with the Trump administration, Canada is looking at building a stronger, independent, and

more resilient economy.

In the last few months, India and Canada have taken several steps to normalise relations.

The India-Canada relations hit rock bottom following then Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations in 2023 of a potential Indian link

to the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

India had dismissed Trudeau's accusation as "absurd".

In October 2024, India recalled its high commissioner and five other diplomats after Ottawa attempted to link them to the Nijjar case.

India also expelled an equal number of Canadian diplomats.

However, Liberal Party leader Carney's victory in the parliamentary election in April last year helped in beginning the process to reset relations.

Subsequently, both sides have already posted their high commissioners in each other's capitals.



Indian Naval Sailing Vessel (INSV) Kaundinya on the eve of its flagging-off ceremony into Mumbai Harbour



States Focus

Protests erupt across States after Khamenei killing



SHIVAKUMAR SEEKS HELP FOR KANNADIGAS IN WEST ASIA

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Sunday urged the Centre that Indians, especially Kannadigas, stranded in West Asia due to the conflict there, must be protected and assured that all efforts were being made to ensure their safety. He said the State Government was in touch with authorities and coordinating with elected representatives to gather information about those affected. "They (Indians) must be protected. We are urging the Central Government to ensure the safety of lakhs of people from Kerala and Karnataka and from other places stuck there," he said.

MOHIT KANDHARI
■ Jammu/Srinagar/Lucknow/
Agencies

Several parts of India, including the Kashmir valley and Kargil, on Sunday witnessed sporadic protests hours after the Iranian State media confirmed that the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had been killed in coordinated US-Israeli airstrikes on Tehran.

Protests also broke out in the old city area of Lucknow, New Delhi, Jammu, Ramban, and parts of Punjab, with hundreds of people from the Shia community condemning the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The Shia community in Ajmer also announced a three-day mourning over

the killing of Khamenei.

The announcement was made by Syed Asif Ali, a community leader, who appealed to members of the Shia community to observe mourning and refrain from celebrations during the period. Scenes of extreme distraught and sloganeering were also witnessed in Bihar, Jharkhand, and Telangana, where protesters, holding Khamenei's posters, voiced their anger against the US and Israeli military actions.

However, in Karnataka's Chikkaballapur district, where Khamenei once visited, observed silence, and shops and commercial establishments voluntarily closed.

Prominent clerics, including Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and spokesperson of the All India



People protest against the alleged killing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in a reported US-Israeli strike in Srinagar on Sunday

Shia Personal Law Board (AISPLB) condemned the attack while announcing a "national mourning" for three days. Shia Muslims organised a protest at Delhi's Jantar

Mantar in support of Ayatollah Khamenei. All India Imam Association (AIIA) President Sajid Rashidi said, "Ayatollah Khamenei wasn't just a Shia leader, he was a leader of all

J&K CM OMAR ABDULLAH CALLED FOR CALM, ASKING PEOPLE TO AVOID ANY ACTIONS THAT COULD LEAD TO TENSION OR UNREST

Muslims... Muslims across the world are mourning his death, and this is an achievement in itself because he broke all barriers between Shias and Sunnis, and his efforts will be remembered till times immemorial..."

Lal Chowk, the historic city centre of Srinagar, witnessed the largest gathering of mourners in the valley early Sunday morning. Large-sized posters of the

spiritual leader were hung around the iconic clock tower. Thousands of mourners raised anti-US and anti-Israel slogans against the killing of their spiritual leader.

The Central Kashmir district of Budgam and parts of north Kashmir's Baramulla district also witnessed protests in the valley. Director General of Police Nalin Prabhat, along with senior officers, took stock of the law and order situation and exercised restraint to contain the tempers.

The Union Territory administration also kept a close vigil to prevent any untoward incident. The internet speed was restricted to prevent the circulation of unverifiable content aimed at flaring up the passions.

50 lakh infiltrators removed from Bengal voter list: Nabin

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Cooch Behar

A day after the publication of West Bengal's post-SIR electoral rolls that saw 63.66 lakh names deleted, BJP national president Nitin Nabin on Sunday claimed that "more than 50 lakh infiltrators" had been removed from the voter list and asserted that "time is up for illegal immigrants" in the State.

Addressing a rally in Cooch Behar while flagging off the party's 'Poriborton Yatra', Nabin alleged that those removed from the electoral rolls were "infiltrators" who had been availing Government jobs and benefits of welfare schemes meant for genuine citizens.

"More than 50 lakh infiltrators have been removed from the voter list. These infiltrators were not only violating the rights of legitimate citizens, but also jeopardising the security of the country," he said.



BJP National President Nitin Nabin is being welcomed by party leaders and workers upon his arrival in Siliguri, West Bengal

Accusing Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of shielding illegal migrants, Nabin alleged that she had provided "protection to infiltrators by helping them obtain fake documents".

"Mamata Banerjee rushed to the courts to protect infiltrators in the voter rolls, as they are her party's vote bank. For the sake of these infiltrators, you even approach the courts at midnight.

Yet, when women face humiliation, you choose to look the other way," he said in a sharp attack on the All India Trinamool Congress leadership.

"Our message to the infiltrators is that the time has now come to drive them out from the soil of Bengal.

We must not only drive out infiltrators, but also establish a decisive Government that can connect the people here with development," he added.

The BJP chief alleged that several central schemes were not being implemented properly in the State.

"Those schemes that Mamata Didi treats with stepmotherly behaviour in implementing here, we will implement them here, come what may," he said.

Semicon 2.0 to focus on design and tech startups: Vaishnaw

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Gandhinagar

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Sunday said the Centre's Semicon Mission 2.0 will focus on bolstering deep-tech startups, prioritising the creation of a design ecosystem and getting equipment manufacturing and design facilities in the country.

Addressing the inaugural session of the Gujarat Semiconnect Conference 2026 here, the Union Minister for Electronics & Information Technology said that a talent gap of 20 lakh in the semiconductor sector will create huge opportunities for students.

"Semicon 2.0 will be totally the reverse of Semicon 1.0, which focused on getting manufacturing facilities in India. We got that. We have 10 plants, with the first starting commercial production yesterday. Very soon, the second plant will start commercial production," he said.

Vaishnaw said that the top priority for Semicon 2.0 — the second phase of India's Semiconductor Mission — will be to create a "design ecosystem", so that deep tech startups get the opportunity to develop the next Qualcomm, Broadcom, or Nvidia.

"And it is not going to be an easy journey; it's going to be a humongous task, and we understand the complexity of it. That's why we are very realistic and pragmatic about it," he said.



Ashwini Vaishnaw

The deep tech startups ecosystem will focus on semiconductor design and creating innovative products, which can then be manufactured in the fabs, he said, adding that the next priority will be getting the equipment manufacturing and design ecosystem in the country.

Vaishnaw pointed out that it is vital to have a material, machine, equipment, testing and validation ecosystem well established in the country for the foundation of the 20-year journey to be very strong.

He stated that talent, which has been a very big priority in Semicon 1.0, will remain a priority in Semicon 2.0. "In the first version, we promised 85,000 engineers would be trained in semiconductor design in 10 years. It has been achieved in 4 years itself," he said.

The Union minister further noted that as the semiconductor sector globally grows from \$800-900 billion to a trillion-dollar industry, a 20 lakh talent gap that the second phase creates will mean opportunities for students.

Tamil Nadu Government sets up helpline for Tamils in West Asia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chennai

Expressing concern over the prevailing situation in West Asia, Chief Minister MK Stalin has asked the Non-Resident Tamils Welfare and Rehabilitation Department to know the status of Tamils living in the Gulf countries.

A control room has been established at the Tamil Nadu House in New Delhi, and the situation is being monitored, he said.

Stalin, while maintaining that the Government is in constant touch with the Tamils living in the Gulf countries, asserted that his Government is ready to provide all the necessary assistance to them.

"If Tamils in the Gulf countries require any emergency assistance due to the prevailing situation, they or their family members in



Passengers stranded by the closure of Dubai International Airport wait for assistance in the airport parking lot in Dubai, United Arab Emirates on Sunday

Tamil Nadu can contact the 24x7 toll-free numbers of the Non-Resident Tamils Welfare Department or the control room of the Tamil Nadu House in New Delhi," the CM said in a statement issued late on February 28.

He appealed to the people seeking assistance to strictly follow the instructions issued by the Indian Embassy in their respective regions.

Stalin also shared the New Delhi Control Room Help Line Numbers 011-24193300, 09289516712 to people

who need assistance. The contact numbers of the Non-Resident Tamils Welfare Department is 1800 309 3793, overseas +91 80 69009900 +91 80 69009901, the release added.

Meanwhile, AIADMK general secretary and the Leader of the Opposition, Edappadi K Palaniswami, urged the Union Government to take appropriate measures for the safety of Tamils living in the Gulf countries.

"Taking into account the tense situation prevailing in Middle Eastern countries, including the United Arab Emirates, I request all our Indians and Tamil people living and working there to remain safe," he said. "I urge the Central Government to take appropriate measures to ensure the safety of the Tamils living there," Palaniswami said in a social media post.

PMK leader Anbumani Ramadoss,

whose party is an ally of the NDA, also appealed to the Centre to request the Governments of the Gulf countries to ensure the safety of Indians living there by adopting methods that are feasible.

He said nearly one crore Indians live in Gulf countries, which include 40 lakh people in the UAE and 28 lakh in Saudi Arabia. "Due to the situation, a great threat has arisen to the safety of Indians, including Tamils, living in the Gulf countries," Anbumani said in a statement on Sunday.

Observing that flight services to countries, including Dubai, have been cancelled, a situation has emerged where Indians cannot be rescued, he said. "I request Indians to remain safe by adhering to the advice provided by the Government and security agencies of those countries," he said.

More than 700 people from MP stranded in UAE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Indore

More than 700 people from Madhya Pradesh, including two former MLAs, are stranded in the United Arab Emirates due to flight cancellations amid the ongoing conflict in West Asia, an office-bearer of a travel agents' outfit said on Sunday.

Several people from the State had travelled to the UAE for tourism and business purposes, and the crisis in the region had left them stranded.



ed, Amol Kataria, chairman of the Travel Agents Federation of India's MP unit, said.

Many travellers from the State had cancelled their upcoming trips to Dubai and Sharjah, he added.

Kataria said that more than 700 people were stuck in the UAE, and among them, former MLA and BJP leader Sanjay Shukla is in Dubai.

"Due to the current international situation, our return to India today could not take place as Dubai airport was temporarily closed.

15 naxalites surrender in Chhattisgarh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mahasamund (Chhattisgarh)

Fifteen Naxalites, including veteran ultra Vikas, carrying a cumulative bounty of ₹73 lakh on their heads, surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Mahasamund district on Sunday, resulting in the outlawed movement getting dismantled in the Raipur-Sambalpur belt straddling the State's border with Odisha, police officials said.

The surrendered persons, including nine women, belonged to Balangir-Bargarh-Mahasamund (BBM) division of the Communist Party of India (Maoists) active along the Chhattisgarh-Odisha



border, they added.

They laid down arms at the Mahasamund district headquarters here in the presence of Chhattisgarh Additional Director General of Police (Anti-Naxal Operations) Vivekanand Sinha, Inspector General of Police (Northern Range) Sambalpur (Odisha),

Himanshu Lal, IGP (Rural Zone, Raipur) Amresh Mishra, among others, officials said.

With the surrender of these 15, the western sub-zone of the Odisha State Committee of Maoists has been completely dismantled, ADGP Sinha said at a press conference.

Singhvi set to retain RS Seat; Shyam Mohan, Sudhakar Goud strong contender for second berth from Telangana

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi/Hyderabad

With two Rajya Sabha seats from Telangana set to fall vacant in April, political activity has intensified within the ruling Congress as it weighs its nominees for the Upper House.

Sources indicate that senior Supreme Court advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, currently representing Telangana in the Rajya Sabha, is likely to retain his seat with the backing of the Congress high command.

Singhvi's legal acumen and articulate presence in Parliament are seen as key

assets for the party at the national level. The second seat, however, has triggered considerable interest within the State unit. And according to party insiders, veteran Congress leader Shyam Mohan Anantula, younger brother of Madan Mohan Anantula, who was a minister in the AP cabinet under multiple chief ministers in the 1970s, has emerged as one of the front runners to replace K R Suresh Reddy, who was elected on a Bharatiya Rashtra Samithi (BRS) ticket and whose term concludes in April.

Anantula participated in the 1960-61 All India Youth Congress convention



addressed by Indira Gandhi and played a role in the 1969 Telangana movement.

Anantula, now running 75, has had an expansive professional and international profile as he served on the Planning Commission working group on Food Security and Public Distribution, was a member of the Central Board of Film Certification, and led global delegations to China

and Latin America.

The second front runner for the second berth is Telangana Congress spokesperson Bandi Sudhakar Goud who has been in the grand old party for last 40 years and served in different capacities and had been in core team of former Congress chief ministers including the incumbent CM Revanth Reddy.

Will carry out eviction from 5 lakh bighas of land after Assam polls: Himanta

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

Accepting a 'bulldozer salute' during the BJP's 'Jan Ashirwad Yatra', Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday announced that eviction drives would be carried out on five lakh bighas (over 1.65 lakh acres) of land if he returns to power after the assembly polls.

Accompanied by Assam BJP president Dilip Saikia, Sarma began the second day of the party's march, from Jagiroad, and it passed through Morigaon, Raha and Nagaon before ending at Barhampur.

A 'bulldozer salute' was arranged at Jagiroad, with party workers atop 10 bulldozers showering flower petals on Sarma as he passed beneath them.



Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma being welcomed with Bulldozer Salute as BJP's Jana Ashirwad Yatra reaches Jagiroad on Sunday

"Next time, five lakh bighas will be cleared of evictions. This is the message we have

given to the people. No Bangladeshi infiltrator will live in peace in Assam," Sarma told

reporters from atop his open SUV in front of the lined-up bulldozers. He said all alleged encroachers

in the forests and tribal belt and blocks will be evicted if the BJP returns to power for the third consecutive term.

On February 19, Sarma informed the Assam Assembly that 1.5 lakh bighas (over 49,500 acres) of land across the State have been freed from encroachment in the last five years.

"You will see that many people will meet me during this yatra. Some will say that he got jobs, some will say he got land. Somebody will come to thank me for taking strong action against illegal infiltrators.

So, it is not an issue but multiple issues on which people are supporting us," Sarma asserted. He expressed satisfaction that people are "acknowledging" what the BJP-led Government has done in the last five years and hoped

people would give the party a very strong mandate this time.

"I hadn't thought that people would come out in such large numbers. I have seen many waves, but this time it is completely different," Sarma said.

The Assam Assembly elections are expected to take place in March-April this year.

This will be the first assembly election after the delimitation exercise, which was done in 2023.

Presently, the ruling BJP's strength in the 126-member assembly is 64, while its allies ACP has nine MLAs, UPPL has seven and BPF has three members.

In the opposition camp, the Congress has 26 MLAs, AIUDF has 15 members and CPI(M) has one MLA. There is an Independent legislator as well.



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Bar and Bench cannot be separated in justice delivery system: CJI Surya Kant



CJI Surya Kant at Tirupati temple on Sunday

Bar is an integral part of the justice delivery system and can not be separated, though people think that it is the sole responsibility of the court to deliver justice, which may be a myth, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said on Sunday. After laying the foundation stone for the District Courts Complex here, CJI Kant said the bar and the bench are not adversaries, but two hands of the same institution. A strong bar produces strong advocacy, and when there is strong advocacy, that challenges the judges to think harder, reason more carefully, and write more clearly. "My dear members of the bar, you are an integral part of the judicial and the justice delivery system. You cannot be separated, as sometimes people think that the delivery of justice is the sole responsibility of the bench only. That may be a myth, that may not be a true fact," Justice Kant said.

He further said that the quality of assistance which the bar provides is reflected in the overall work of the judge. The better the bar argues, the better the quality of the judgment and when there is a better reasoned judgment, public confidence is built in the rule of law.

Justice Kant said he strongly advocates that the court complexes need to behave and act like hospitals. When a patient goes, the first thing is to provide him with the first medical aid so that he feels that he is in safe hands, his life is not in danger. "The same thing should happen with a consumer of justice who comes to you. Once he enters this complex, he should have a feeling that he will leave this complex only after securing justice. And that, my dear friends in the Bar, it is an equal responsibility on the Bar and the bench both," he said.

He also said whichever part of the country he visits, he would appeal to all the state governments to provide judicial infrastructure that takes care of the next 50 or 100 years. Justice Kant said that after some time, good places may not be available for the judicial infrastructure as the lands are shrinking, the country is developing, population is also growing, industrialisation is developing, and urbanisation is swelling.

Supreme Court Judges PS Narasimha, Prasanth Kumar Mishra, SVN Bhatti and Joymalya Bagchi and Chief Justice of the Andhra Pradesh High Court Justice Dheeraj Singh Thakur, also attended the event.

Real estate company's CEO arrested for duping lawyers of ₹6 crore in Gurugram

The CEO of a real estate company has been arrested here for allegedly duping several lawyers of ₹6 crore on the pretext of investing their money in a project that he claimed would give good returns, police said on Sunday.

The accused, Puneet Beriwalla (62), CEO of Vipul Limited and resident of Gurugram's Sector 42, was arrested on Friday. A court sent him to two-day police custody on Saturday, police said.

In a complaint filed on October 1 last year, some lawyers alleged that they invested ₹6 crore in Vipul Limited in 2024 for a project after Beriwalla promised them good returns.

Red-faced CBI faces Herculean task to revive liquor scam case in High Court



**RANJIT KUMAR
SINHA**

The Delhi Liquor Scam Case - 2021-22 has collapsed in the Court of Law. All 23 accused persons, including Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supremo Arvind Kejriwal and his deputy Manish Sisodia, have been discharged from the case. The case arising from the scam crumbled even before it reached the stage of trial.

The outcome of the February 27 order has severe legal ramifications. The decision of the Rouse Avenue Court in New Delhi has left the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) red-faced, not only for the conclusion it arrived at but for the scathing remarks made against the agency and its investigating officer for framing an accused in the absence of material evidence.

The Special Court refused to frame charges against all accused persons, including those from the "South Group," a term coined by the probe agencies (CBI and Enforcement Directorate) to describe a cartel of liquor businessmen, politicians, and their associates, primarily based in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh K Kavitha, a prominent politi-

cian from Telangana and the daughter of former Chief Minister K Chandrababhan Naidu, was one of those who received relief in the alleged scam.

The demolition of the alleged scam at the first level of the judiciary, even before it was set for trial, has sent a shockwave through the Union Government and the CBI. Hours after the 598-page order was delivered, the agency officially stated its intention to seek a revision in the Delhi High Court.

A tough task lies ahead for the CBI to restore the case, in which the investigation was termed by Special Judge Jitendra Singh a "premeditated and choreographed exercise" rather than a fair investigation.

Further, a Herculean effort would be required on the part of the agency before the High Court to overturn the findings and observations of the Special Judge, who held that the probe agency failed to establish a prima facie case against any of the 23 accused. It was observed that the prosecution's case was based on "conjecture rather than concrete evidence" and failed to meet the judicial standard of "grave suspicion" required to frame charges.

The trial court noted that the formulation of the excise policy was a consultative process and that there was "no overarching conspiracy or criminal intent" in the policy itself. It

strongly criticised the CBI for repeatedly using the term "South Group" to describe a set of accused based on their regional origin. The judge remarked that this nomenclature was "plainly arbitrary and unwarranted," had no foundation in law, and posed a risk of regional prejudice.

The trial court raised serious concerns about the investigation's reliance on witnesses who were granted a pardon to become "approvers." The judge warned that using statements from approvers to fill gaps in the investigation is a "grave violation of Constitutional principles." The judge noted significant "internal contradictions" in the voluminous chargesheet filed by the CBI, stating it lacked corroborating evidence or witness testimony.

The order has given a new lease of political life to Arvind Kejriwal, who was the Chief Minister when the new Excise Policy was formulated and came under judicial scrutiny. Since the court did not find any cogent material linking him to the alleged conspiracy, the AAP chief has received a much-needed opportunity to resurrect his image. The same applies to the then Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, as the judge held that there was no material on record to show his involvement, nor was any recovery of illicit funds made from him. The last four

years have been eventful since the Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22 was implemented on November 17, 2021. It remained in force for just over eight months until it was officially withdrawn and the government reverted to the old regime on September 1, 2022. This happened as charges of corruption and kickbacks started emerging, centering on an alleged cartel from southern India known as the "South Group."

Investigative agencies alleged that a group of businessmen and politicians (referred to as the "South Group") paid ₹100 crore in advance bribes to leaders of the AAP. This money was meant to ensure they received favorable terms under the new liquor policy, such as higher profit margins and licenses for multiple zones. Separately, a report submitted to the Lieutenant Governor by the Delhi Chief Secretary alleged that the new policy caused a massive loss of over ₹580 crore to the Delhi government. The report claimed this happened because the Government lost revenue from license fees and granted undue benefits and waivers to private liquor companies.

Based on the Chief Secretary's report, Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena, who assumed office on May 26, 2022, swung into action, initiating the investigation into the Delhi Liquor Policy case. Saxena

recommended a CBI probe in July 2022, asserting that the policy was designed to benefit private liquor traders at the cost of the public exchequer. The case also gained momentum due to persistent allegations of a "multi-crore scam" raised by opposition parties, specifically the Delhi BJP and Delhi Congress, with the latter formally filing a complaint with the Delhi Police in June 2022.

Thus, the Special Court's decision to discharge all 23 accused in the case represents a significant setback for the position taken by Saxena. In the circumstances, the Lieutenant Governor has limited direct legal capacity to act compared to the central investigative agencies. The Lieutenant Governor can continue to maintain that the Chief Secretary's report established prima facie violations, even if the court found the criminal charges unsupported by evidence.

The Central Government's role now is focused entirely on managing the legal fallout of the trial court's decision. The discharge of high-profile opposition leaders like Kejriwal, Sisodia, and Kavitha from Telangana is a massive setback to the narrative of corruption promoted by the Central Government and the BJP.

The CBI, which operates under the Union Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, has immedi-

ately filed an appeal in the High Court. The Central Government will ensure the agency has all necessary legal resources to fight the appeal and try to revive the case.

The Delhi Liquor Policy case has several implications for the general public, ranging from political stability to questions about justice and governance. For the supporters of AAP, this decision is seen as a major victory, vindicating their leaders and reinforcing the narrative that the charges were politically motivated. This may strengthen the party's position in Delhi. For those who believed the corruption charges, the court's harsh criticism of the investigative agency's lack of evidence may lead to questions about the misuse of central agencies for political purposes.

The issues arising from the liquor scam have spurred significant legal drama, moving from the Special Court to the High Court and the Supreme Court over the last four years. Now, the discharge of the accused in no way means the case is closed.

The CBI's appeal against the order of the Special Court will be heard in the High Court in the coming days (March 9). This means the case will remain in the public eye, and finally may take a long time.

Writer is a senior journalist covering legal affairs



A nation that frees its women, frees its future: Justice Hima Kohli

We often speak of Lines of Control in geopolitical terms, visible demarcations between nations guarded by the army and shaped by history. But other invisible lines of control are far more intimate and intimidating. For women, they are drawn across their bodies, choices, ambitions and voices. They are enforced not by barbed wires but by regressive belief systems, not by the Constitution but by primitive customs.

The story of empowerment of women in India is therefore not a story of confrontation but of gradual expansion — expansion of education, of opportunity and of confidence. India is a Republic that gave itself the promise of equality under the Constitution of India. Let us remind ourselves that the Preamble of the Indian Constitution opens with the words "We the people of India". We have proclaimed under Article 14 that equality before the law would be the norm, not the exception. We have empowered the State under Article 15(3) to make special provisions for women. And yet, seventy-six years later, we must ask, have we truly broken the internal lines of control that keep half our population negotiating for basic freedoms? Historically, most laws were shaped in times when public life was largely dominated by men.

As a result, the laws often reflected the patterns, ideologies and experiences of that era where lived experiences of other genders were not adequately reflected. Women entered law not as authors but as subjects. The judiciary, in moments of courage, has recalibrated law to reflect constitutional morality rather than inherited patriarchy. In Vishakha v State of Rajasthan, the Supreme Court did not wait for the Parliament; it read international norms into domestic law to protect women from workplace harassment.

In Joseph Shine v Union of India, the Supreme Court struck down the offence of adultery as a patriarchal relic, premised on the archaic notion that a married woman was the property of her husband, a law entrenched in control disguised as protection.

In Vineeta Sharma v Rakesh Sharma & Ors, the Court affirmed that daughters are entitled to coparcenary rights by birth, clarifying that if a daughter was alive on the date of enforcement of the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005, she would be recognised as a



Justice Hima Kohli addressing a day long ceremony 'Sashakt Nari-Viksht Bharat' conference on women empowerment held jointly by The Pioneer and Chintan Research Foundation on Feb 26

coparcener even if born prior to the amendment.

In XYZ & Ors v State of MP & Anr, the Supreme Court clarified that in cases relating to crimes against women, imposing bail conditions like tying of rakhi, presenting gifts to the survivor or her relations, tendering apology or even proposing marriage are wholly unacceptable as it has the effect of diluting and eroding the sexual offence.

We have also seen the passage of progressive legislations that acknowledge and address structural inequalities. Statutes such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005; the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013; amendments to the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961; and the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 recognise that violence and exclusion are not private matters but public wrongs.

These are not merely cases and legislations; they are reminders that the law, at its best, can be a site of resistance. Equally transformative has been the constitutional recognition of education as a fundamental right.

In Unni Krishnan v. State of Andhra Pradesh, the Supreme Court affirmed that the right to education flows from the right to life under Article 21, recognising that dignity, equality and freedom cannot be realised in its absence.

This judicial vision found constitutional expression in the insertion of Article 21A through the Eighty-Sixth Amendment, followed by the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education

Act, 2009, whose validity was upheld in Society for Unaided Private Schools of Rajasthan v Union of India. For females in particular, education has been the most powerful instrument of empowerment, enabling entry into professions, institutions and leadership spaces that were once structurally denied. The classroom, therefore, becomes the first site where lines of control are not merely challenged but dismantled. These are signs of a society that is learning, adapting and improving. And the progress is visible.

The pandemic was a stress test for every institution. It destabilised economies, shut down running businesses and strained the financial resources of households.

Yet in the midst of uncertainty, something remarkable unfolded. Across urban and semi-urban India, women launched home-grown enterprises: food ventures, digital services, handicrafts, skincare brands, online tutoring platforms and wellness initiatives. Kitchen tables became workstations. Social media became marketplaces. Digital payments became tools of entry into formal commerce. Today, women are leading startups across India, nearly 76,000 women-led enterprises.

As per the Periodic Labour Force Survey monthly bulletin for January 2026, the female labour force participation rate stood at 35.1 per cent, maintaining the gradual rise recorded through 2025. At the same time, the share of women workers engaged in agriculture has increased from about 57 per cent in 2017-18 to nearly 64.4 per cent in 2023-24 and

female agricultural employment overall has risen from 73.2 per cent to 76.9 per cent during this period, even as male participation in agriculture has declined.

These trends suggest that while overall workforce participation among women is increasing, a substantial proportion of this expansion continues to be concentrated in agriculture and allied activities.

The challenge before policymakers is therefore not merely to increase women's participation in the labour force but to facilitate a transition towards diversified, non-agricultural and formal employment that ensures both economic security and long-term empowerment. In the corporate world, over 11.6 lakh women serve as Directors in companies and occupy around 20 per cent of leadership roles. In politics, women hold about 14 per cent of the seats in the Lok Sabha and 17 per cent in the Rajya Sabha and millions serve in Panchayats due to reservations under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment.

The 106th Constitutional Amendment, 2023 mandates one-third reservation in Parliament and State Assemblies, a recognition that representation is not charity but correction. In public administration, data indicates that between 1951 and 2020, women constituted only about 13 per cent of total IAS recruits, reflecting the deep structural barriers that shaped their entry. Encouragingly, this pattern has shifted in recent years.

The proportion of women directly recruited into the IAS has steadily risen from around 15 per cent in the 1970s and 25 per cent in the early 2000s to nearly 34 per cent by 2024. Today, women account for approximately 21 per cent of serving IAS officers, marking a significant, though still incomplete, movement towards gender balance in governance.

Even across the Armed Forces, barriers have begun to fall. Women have been granted Permanent Commission, inducted into the National Defence Academy and commissioned as fighter pilots. These steps signal that merit, dedication and professionalism know no gender.

Yet women still constitute only about 3-4 per cent of the Army, around 13 per cent of the Air Force and 6 per cent of the Navy. Coming to the judiciary, the change has been slow. The Supreme Court elevated its first woman judge only in 1989, nearly four decades after its

establishment. In 75 years, out of a total of 276 judges, only 11 women have served in the Supreme Court, which is approximately 4 per cent.

Of the 53 Chief Justices that the Supreme Court has had, none has been a woman and the first woman Chief Justice likely to serve will do so only for a brief tenure. In the year 2025, a significant part of the Supreme Court's docket consisted of matrimonial and family law appeals and matters in which women are the primary stakeholders.

Yet, as on date, with only one woman on the Bench of thirty-four judges, it is structurally impossible for women judges to be present across all such cases. Notably, till date, no woman lawyer has served as the Advocate General or Solicitor General of India.

At the level of the district judiciary, however, the picture is more encouraging. As of February 2025, there are 7,852 women judges serving in District and Trial Courts of India, constituting approximately 38.3 per cent of the district judiciary, a significant rise from about 30 per cent in 2017. Yet this encouraging base reveals a persistent "leaking pipeline".

While nearly two-fifths of the district judiciary is now comprised of women, their representation drops sharply at higher judicial levels, highlighting that entry into the profession does not always translate into elevation within it.

Progress is uneven and participation in the workforce varies across regions. But every generation has moved the line forward a little more than the last and that is worth celebrating. Because empowerment is not about replacing one voice with another; it is about ensuring that every voice is heard and has a space.

Today, Bharat stands at a remarkable point of inflection. We are a digital powerhouse, a demographic giant, a spacefaring nation with aspirations to be a five-trillion-dollar economy, a global manufacturing hub and a leader in technology and innovation.

Breaking lines of control is not about conflict. It is about cooperation, recognising talent, sharing responsibilities and building institutions where merit thrives. Breaking lines of control is not an act of defiance against the nation. It is an act of fidelity, because a nation that frees its women frees its own future.

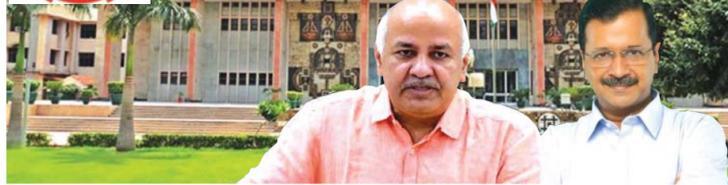
Speech by Justice Hima Kohli

Excise policy case: Trial Court's order illegal, suffers from errors, says CBI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has filed a revision petition running into 974 pages before the Delhi High Court challenging the trial court order discharging all 23 accused including Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia in connection with the Delhi excise policy case. The case is listed before Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma on March 9.

In its criminal revision petition, the CBI has said that the order passed by Special Judge Jitendra Singh on February 27 is "patently illegal, perverse



and suffers from errors apparent on the face". The petition said that the judge essentially conducted a mini-trial and dealt with separate limbs of

conspiracy in isolation. "The Ld Special Judge has passed the impugned order on a selective reading of the prosecution case, disregarding

the material showing the culpability of the accused." In its petition, CNI said that the judge's order directing departmental action against

the CBI officer who investigated the case is "shocking to say the least". The agency has sought a stay on the directions issued by the Court to initiate an investigation against its officer.

The CBI stated that while making observations in the court during pronouncing the discharge order, the judge orally stated that he had spent the last four months reading only the file of the case, which shows appreciation of evidence in great details and the same is not permitted at this stage of framing of charge.

The agency has argued that many observations by the judge are "unduly harsh on the prosecuting agency, espe-

cially when the same are made on incorrect understanding of law and incorrect facts."

The revision plea States that the trial court erred in analysing the role of Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia. "The Ld Special Judge has erred in not appreciating the conspectus of the conspiracy in its entirety.

Such piecemeal appreciation of evidence, rather than a conjoint reading of the case, has led to the passing of the Impugned Order, which needs to be set aside," the appeal states.

CBI's revision plea has been filed through advocates Manu Mishra and Garima Saxena.



Editor's TAKE

Gulf on the brink after Khamenei killing

As Iran weighs retaliation and Gulf states brace for fallout, the region stands at a dangerous crossroads between containment and full-scale war

Yet another war has started, this time predictably in the Middle East, the region which has been on tenterhooks for quite some time now. Despite the negotiations and peace parleys, the US attacked Iran on February 28 with a flurry of missiles which landed in Iran, causing heavy damage and reported killing its supreme leader, Ali Khamenei along with his family members. In a retaliatory action, Iran targeted various US military bases in the Gulf region. This is not going to be an easy or quick war, as presumed by the US, as Iran is not showing any signs of surrendering to the will of the US and, in fact, has become more resilient and is reportedly contemplating collateral damage on a massive scale. With this situation, the Middle East has entered one of the most perilous chapters in its contemporary history.

The killing of Ali Khamenei is not merely the elimination of a leader; it is the decapitation of a political system built around a clerical authority. For over three decades, Khamenei stood at the apex of Iran's theocratic state, shaping its nuclear ambitions and directing its regional proxies to take on the West and its sympathisers. His sudden death leaves not just a vacuum in Tehran, but a tremor across the Gulf.

Washington has legitimised an attack with failed nuclear negotiations and mounting regional instability. President Trump has openly urged Iranians to "take over" their government. Yet regime change is easier said than done. The Islamic Republic of Iran was never merely Khamenei though he was central to it. The Revolutionary Guards, the clerical establishment, and a vast patronage network remain intact - and potentially primed for retaliation. Above all, it is also suspected to hold a sizable nuclear arsenal.

As stated above, it is not an easy war as some analysts in the Pentagon might be thinking. The immediate danger is that this might spread in the region and beyond. The US attack has made Israel vulnerable with the looming danger of a nuclear attack if Iran plays suicidal. The US war room wrongly assumed that the people of Iran would come out to rebel against Iran's regime.

Iran's "axis of resistance" - Hezbollah, Hamas, and militias in Iraq and Yemen - may now become galvanise and launch localised attacks as some of them have already started doing. Missile strikes on Gulf infrastructure, shipping disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, or attacks on US bases are plausible.

This would indeed adversely impact the world economy, already going under strenuous period. Oil markets are already jittery; insurers are recalculating risk. Inside Iran, the picture is equally volatile. Years of economic collapse, sanctions, and brutal crackdowns have eroded the regime's legitimacy. Khamenei's death could embolden reformists and dissidents.

But it could just as easily empower hardliners within the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, who may consolidate power under emergency rule. Moreover, the covert involvement of Russia and China could further intensify the conflict, making it more violent, protracted, and reminiscent of a drawn-out war like the situation in Ukraine.

The forgotten power of philosophy

From Arthashastra to the teachings of Socrates, philosophy has long been described as the lamp that illuminates all sciences and the pillar that sustains dharma. Far from being abstract or impractical, philosophical thought has shaped leaders, guided nations, and nurtured human dignity.



RAJIB RAY

SATYENDRA SRIVASTAVA

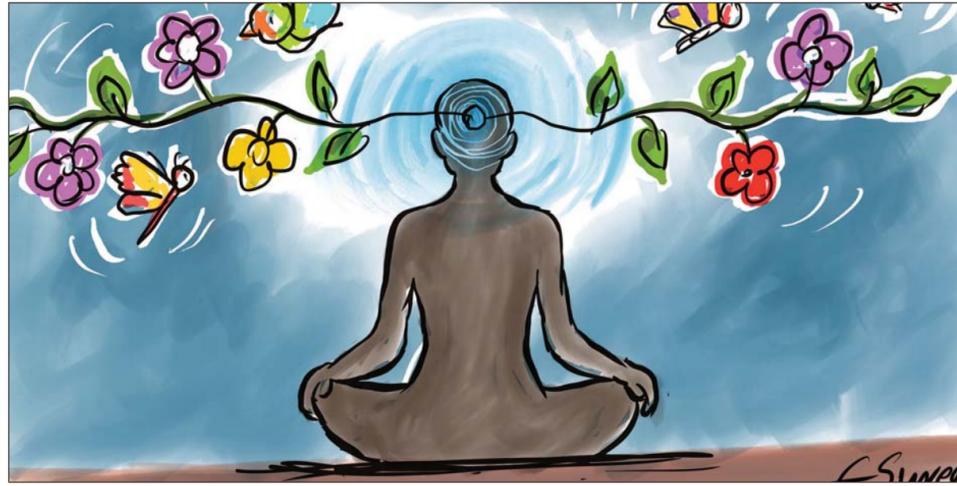
"Philosophy is the lamp that illuminates all sciences; it provides the techniques for all action; and it is the pillar which supports dharma." - Preface of the Arthashastra by Kautilya

Philosophy occupies a special place in academia because of its distinctive style. While in other subjects there is an answer to every question, in philosophy there is a question for every answer, so it is said that philosophy is the mother of all academic disciplines and is also the climax. The most striking speciality of philosophy is that it makes us wiser rather than intellectual or logical. Intelligence or logic can be misused, but not wisdom. We all know how some of the most logical sophist judges in Greek Philosophy awarded capital punishment to Socrates, one of the wisest figures in the world.

Some people allege that the world of philosophy and philosophers is imaginary. Their ideas are esoteric and do not have any concern with the problems of ordinary people in society. This allegation reflects a very superficial understanding of Philosophy. To realise how profound the role of the philosopher is, it is necessary to cite a few instances. Few of us know that on March 21, 1977, the then Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, declared the end of the Emergency on the suggestion of Jiddu Krishnamurti (as accounted in the biography of J. Krishnamurti, written by P Jayakar), a renowned humanist and philosopher, whose book 'Freedom from the Known' is considered a revolutionary work in academia. Similarly, on November 8, 2010, when the then US President Barack Obama addressed both Houses of the Indian Parliament, he cited the influence of four Indians - Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar. This acknowledgement underlines the global contribution of philosophers, and that of Indian philosophers.

A philosopher influences our inner self more than the external environment, which is why Socrates used to refer philosopher as a 'doctor of the soul' who prescribes proper attitudes and practices to nurture our mental health and happiness. In a world where high economic growth rates, intellectual skills, and advancement of technology are considered as criteria of a prosperous society, philosophers administer some new thought process to understand human life in a deeper sense.

John Dewey, whose ideas on philosophy of education work as a trailblazer, once said, 'Education is not preparation for life, education



ONE MUST KEEP IN MIND THAT PHILOSOPHY IS NOT JUST AN ACADEMIC SUBJECT RATHER ALSO CONCERNED WITH THE UPLIFTMENT OF HUMANITY. ITS ROLE IS VERY INTENSE AND WIDE.

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is life itself.' There is hardly anyone who can ignore its significance in the present rat-race competitive world. In the era of artificial intelligence and Chat GPT, teachings like "Appo Deepo Bhava" - Be your own lamp of Gautama Buddha, Socrates' proposition "An unexamined life is not worth living", or Swami Vivekananda's call "Strength is life, weakness is death" are the core values of our existence. No sensible society should neglect these insightful ideas. If most of us had been philosophical thinkers, we would not have been misled by scheming politicians and fake godmen all these years.

Philosophical ideas can play a very significant role in addressing these types of socio-political and ethical malaise in society. We evaluate Mahatma Gandhi as a champion of truth and non-violence, but his most impactful teaching is his unmatched emphasis on human dignity. As he writes in his autobiography- 'It has always been a mystery to me how men can feel themselves honoured by the humiliation of their fellow beings.' Unfortunately, we failed to understand this fundamental truth that our mind is the silent architect of our life.

So, if there is restlessness in our mind and shrewdness in our behaviour, then there will be complete chaos in our lives as well as in society. One can say that Philosophy unites a world which is deeply shattered in the name of region, religion, caste, race and ideology.

A major challenge for philosophy is its decline in academia because of fewer enrollments of students in this subject.

It is beyond comprehension why a subject which is considered the mother of all other subjects is losing its importance amongst students. Universities across the country face this dismal

condition, and the lack of opportunities in this field is one of the most important reasons. Our policymakers should take note of this. Even though the National Education Policy-2020 makes several references to the Indian Knowledge System and Philosophy, our lawmakers and educationists must make more efforts to address the problem of the dwindling popularity of this subject. One may suggest that this subject be introduced in the class 11th and 12th of the CBSE and ICSE Boards, as it's been done at the school level in some state boards.

One must keep in mind that Philosophy is not just an academic subject rather also concerned with the upliftment of humanity. Its role is very intense and wide.

As a mother of all subjects, it is indispensable for the intellectual and ethical growth of human beings. The value of philosophy should not be evaluated in getting final answers but in the very process of seeking them, which elevates human life and understanding. It helps individuals navigate life by fostering an unselfish, open-minded approach that reduces anxiety and increases the ability to understand, justice, and love.

As Nobel Laureate Bertrand Russell wrote in his well-known essay 'The Value of Philosophy' in 1912- "If all men were well off, if poverty and disease had been reduced to their lowest possible point, there would remain much to be done to produce a valuable society; and even in the existing world the goods of the mind are at least as important as the goods of the body.

It is exclusively among the goods of the mind that the value of philosophy is to be found; and only those who are not indifferent to these goods can be persuaded that the study of philosophy is not a waste of time."

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

PICTALK



An artisan gives finishing touches to an idol of Lord Krishna ahead of the Holi festival, in Nadia, West Bengal.

PHOTO: PTI

The faceoff: Success & failure in the corporate world



APS MALHOTRA

2ND OPINION

A couple of days ago, a childhood friend dropped in to meet me. Otherwise quite a jovial person, with a cutting-edge sense of humour and repartee, that day he looked dejected and worn down. Lines of stress and anxiety hovered on his brow like dark monsoon clouds. Immediately, I discerned that something was amiss. After some prodding, he broke down, and sobbing like a child, told me that he had been sidelined- once again- for progression in the corporation for which he had worked for close to four decades.

On hearing his plight, I found myself returning to an old, unsettling question: What is success, and what is failure? Are they merely opposite sides of the same coin, or are they far more complex than we admit? For centuries, sages and philosophers have wrestled

with this paradox, leaving behind a vast treasury of thought. While their reflections offer frameworks and metaphors, none can give a definitive answer. My own understanding of success has not been static. Rather, it has evolved with time-sometimes subtly, sometimes painfully.

At different stages, I have measured success against different yardsticks, in the process creating an edifice that rests on four core pillars: family, health, finances, and professional standing. Together, they form a balanced architecture of a well-lived life. Measured against these visible metrics of the corporate superstructure, my friend's journey seems grossly underwhelming.

The foremost reason is that institutions, by their very nature, lack warmth, compassion and transparency, leading to a cascading toxic downturn, where outcomes are declared without sufficient explanation and where, sadly, when progression stalls, clarity is rarely offered. This opacity makes self-assessment extremely challenging- as one is forced to ponder whether this is because of a shortfall in one's capability, or the unpredictable dynamics of a complex system? Amid all this, the metaphor that comes to mind is a race- perhaps, a rat race. In any race, performance matters, but so does the referee, so does the track, so do the

unseen rules that govern who advances and who remains sidelined, because when systems harbour unfairness- subtle or overt- careers can be quietly impacted, sometimes permanently, often ominously, leaving no scope for reclamation.

As for my friend, the story does not end here, because outside the narrow corridor of hierarchy, his life tells a different tale- he has fared well in education, his finances are stable, his family life is fulfilling and his health, for the most part, has been kind to him. To calm his frayed nerves, I explained that these are not minor footnotes, but that they are foundational achievements.

If success is viewed through this wider lens, the narrative shifts significantly, and success becomes less about podium finishes and more about the integrity of participation. It is about having run the race without compromising one's core ethics. It is about building a life that, when viewed in totality, feels coherent and meaningful.

And that the saga of success and failure is not epic because of victory or defeat. It is epic because of the lifelong effort to understand what truly counts.

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The writer is a Delhi based author, corporate coach and social activist

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A CALL TO CONDEMN ESCALATING WAR AND DEFEND HUMANITY

The world is witnessing a troubling escalation of violence that is devastating entire communities. This period may well be remembered as one defined by cycles of retaliation, with diminishing regard for culture, civilisation, and shared humanity. The recent joint military strikes by the United States and Israel against Iran raise serious concerns about respect for national sovereignty. The people of any country alone have the right to determine their system of governance and political future. Critics argue that U.S. foreign policy often reflects broader geopolitical and economic objectives. Past interventions in countries such as Venezuela, Iraq, and Libya are frequently cited as examples where internal political structures were deeply affected. In the Middle East, Israel is widely viewed as a key strategic ally

advancing American interests in a volatile region. The United States remains a leading global arms exporter, with a significant portion of its defence trade linked to the Middle East. This reality has prompted debate over whether military engagements align with economic priorities tied to the defence sector. Questions have also been raised about inconsistencies in addressing nuclear proliferation among different nations. At a time like this, many believe that countries capable of doing so should speak clearly against unilateral military actions. India, which aspires to global leadership, faces expectations to articulate its position firmly. Silence may be interpreted as acquiescence. The international community must act responsibly to uphold peace, sovereignty, and human values.

A. G. RAJMOHAN | ANANTAPUR

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

India needs real gender parity

International Women's Day, observed every year on March 8, is a tribute to the strength, talent and achievements of women across the globe. Yet, it must remain more than a symbolic celebration. It should continue to remind us of the urgent need to improve the condition of women everywhere. In our country, serious issues such as rape, domestic violence, lack of education and limited economic opportunities still affect millions of women. Empowerment means enabling women to make their own decisions and stand up not only for themselves but for others as well. Despite scientific and technological progress worldwide, no nation has achieved full gender equality. Millions of women still face legal and professional barriers. Women remain underrepresented in parliaments, experience wage gaps, and continue to endure gender-based violence.

The 2026 theme, "Give To Gain," reminds us that supporting women's rights benefits society as a whole. Women are the backbone of families and communities, contributing to social and economic development. International Women's Day should be a moment to reflect on progress, and celebrate the courage of ordinary women who create extraordinary impact.

JUBEL D'CRUZ | MUMBAI

Judicial fatigue and a system in distress

The near-dysfunctional state of our judicial system is an open secret. Allegations of corruption, staggering case backlogs, inadequate infrastructure, procedural delays, and concerns about efficiency in lower courts continue to erode public trust. Reports of a nexus between sections of the judiciary, political influence, and powerful interests only deepen this crisis. Recently, a judge of the Allahabad High Court, Justice Subhash Vidyarthi, candidly admitted to being "hungry, tired and incapacitated" after hearing nearly thirty cases in a single day, forcing him to reserve judgment. His statement was not merely personal exhaustion; it symbolised a system stretched beyond capacity.

Decades ago, Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer of the Supreme Court of India warned that India's justice delivery mechanism was nearing collapse under delays, inefficiency, and corruption. Nearly fifty years later, that warning appears prophetic. Strengthening infrastructure, increasing judicial appointments, improving accountability, and modernising procedures must become national priorities. A robust judiciary is the backbone of democracy. When courts falter, constitutional guarantees weaken. The health of our republic depends on restoring credibility and efficiency to this crucial pillar of governance.

AVINASH GODBOLEY | DEWAS

Federal norms & the imperative of due process

A recent controversy erupted after the Delhi Police detained two activists in Himachal Pradesh without formally informing the state authorities. Reports suggest that the Himachal Pradesh Police was not taken into confidence prior to the operation, prompting the Chief Minister to invoke established guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court of India on inter-state arrests. These guidelines require prior intimation and coordination between states to uphold federal principles, maintain administrative harmony, and prevent jurisdictional conflicts. The incident appears to have arisen either from a communication breakdown between police units or from external pressures influencing procedural decisions. Regardless of the cause, such lapses risk undermining cooperative federalism and eroding public confidence in law enforcement agencies. To prevent similar episodes, structured training at police academies and institutionalised inter-state coordination mechanisms must be strengthened. Clear protocols, regular communication channels, and strict adherence to due process are essential to ensure professionalism, transparency, and respect for constitutional norms across jurisdictions.

RS NARULA | PATIALA



Lessons from India's Maritime Footprint

At a time when shifting geopolitics and initiatives like the Maritime Silk Route are redefining influence in the Indian Ocean Region, India must reclaim its historical narrative through a coordinated transnational maritime heritage project that blends culture, connectivity and contemporary strategy.

FIRST
Column



RAGHVENDRA SINGH

India and the Indian Ocean have been inseparably connected by geography and history. This region has been a cradle of civilisations. Major religions and faiths of the world are all represented in the littoral and island nations of the Indian Ocean. We know how geography exerts great influence on politics and security, particularly in matters 'maritime'. It is in this context that the Indian Ocean acquires importance. On its waters are carried half of the world's container shipments, one-third of bulk cargo traffic and two-thirds of oil. About one-third of the world's population inhabits the littoral straits and islands of the Indian Ocean. Four of these countries have populations in excess of one hundred and forty million people, namely, India, Pakistan, Indonesia and Bangladesh.

Millennia before Columbus sailed the Atlantic and Magellan crossed the Pacific, the Indian Ocean was an active thoroughfare of cultural and commercial traffic. It was around 45 AD that the discovery was made of how to use the monsoon winds too directly cross the Arabian Sea instead of hugging the coast. The Indian navigators, though, had already sailed and discovered Sacotra long before the first century AD. They had navigated the Red Sea using the magnetic needle, the Matsya Yantra, for determining direction. The existence of prosperous Hindu colonies in Malaya, Sumatra, Java, Cambodia and modern-day Vietnam clearly indicates that the Bay of Bengal had been mastered long before the First Century AD. That peninsular India was maritime in its tradition is borne out by the writings of Fa Hien, a Chinese visitor to India between AD 400 and 410. He was transported by sea from Sri Lanka to Sri Vijaya along with 200 merchants. There are numerous references to the Mauryas and the Andhras about the Eastern Seas. The Chinese had an extensive sea trade along the Malabar Coast. Hieun Tsang, who visited India in the 7th Century AD describes the vast overseas trade during the Gupta period. There are numerous mentions of the Chola emperors and their powerful seafaring capacity.



OUR GOAL SHOULD ALSO BE TO REVIVE THE HISTORICAL TRADE ROUTES IN A LARGE GEOPOLITICAL AND GEO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT.

The writer is Advisor, Bharat Ki Soch and is former Culture Secretary, Govt of India

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A vibrant trade route through sea linked the east with the west, from the West Coast of Japan, through islands of Indonesia, India and to the land of the Middle East; and from there across the Mediterranean to Europe. The links were formed by traders through buying and selling from port to port. They traded mainly in spices. The use of monsoon winds in the Indian Ocean was a boon to sailing ships. It helped them in their travels to and from India.

Artefacts of the Saraswati-Sindhu Civilisation have been found in middle-east and Egypt dating back 5000 years. Large colonies of Romans lived in the port cities of India, especially on the eastern coast in Tamil Nadu, in the first millennium. Some of the earliest seafaring ships plied between the coast of Kerala and the Middle East. The second-oldest mosque in the world was constructed in Kodungalur in Kerala in 629 AD. Buddhism spread to all corners of Asia through sea and land routes. Centres like Sukhothai, Ayodhya, Angkorvat in the East, or Swat, Bamiyan or Dun Hwang, are manifestations of vibrant cultural links of India with the regions around the Indian Ocean. Ramayan was the most popular story told in this region. The

Hindu and Buddhist traditions provide some of the finest paintings, sculptures and reliefs across Asia.

Despite having footprints all across, India has failed to build a historical narrative around it. Sacotra hardly finds any mention, as do several other coastal world heritage sites across the Western Indian Ocean that show evidence of Indian maritime activity. In the Ajanta caves, the narrative of Simhala, a seafaring merchant is prominently depicted. Simhala was an incarnation of Siddhartha Gautama.

He, along with 500 merchants, had landed in Tamradweep (Sri Lanka). This is an interesting story that finds a connection with Sri Lanka. A great scope for collaboration exists amongst maritime museums. A collaboration with the maritime museum, currently being set up at Lothal in Gujarat, India, would prove very useful.

India has yet to highlight its historical connection across Africa, the Middle East and Southern Europe. While inaugurating the Kochi metro in June 2017, Prime Minister Modi had called Kochi, the queen of the Arabian Sea, an important spice trading centre. Our goal should also be to revive the historical trade routes in

a large geopolitical and geo-economic context.

How can India launch a project to sustain its cross-national connectivity with East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Indian subcontinent, Sri Lanka, and the South East Asian archipelagos? More than three dozen countries can be identified as partners if an Outreach Project gets mooted. India is a signatory to various UNESCO conventions. An outreach like this will provide a platform across the Indian Ocean world through a cross-cultural transnational narrative. It can seek a trans-national nomination under World Heritage by highlighting the links of the Indian Ocean Maritime route.

This will provide visibility to connectivity, encourage research, tourism, and develop heritage. The project could navigate through coastal architecture, maritime heritage, artefacts, maritime museums, underwater cultural heritage, industrial heritage, ship building, intangible cultural heritage, trade routes, cultural products, pilgrimage, religious travel, oral traditions and literary traditions.

A possible way forward would be to begin collecting data on historical exchanges in the field of both tangible and intangible maritime cultural heritage. This may include knowledge pathways related to art, philosophy, mathematics, geography and sciences. No project of this kind exists at the moment. This research could feed into proposing a World Heritage nomination to UNESCO. This will truly place the maritime cultural heritage of the Indian Ocean on a firm and independent footing.

The Maritime Silk Route (MSR) initiative is already impacting the strategic balance in the Indian Ocean region. It is common knowledge that MSR strives for an influence in the Indian Ocean. The new geopolitics of the Indian Ocean region is defined by America's declining influence. The old geo-politics of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), characterised by US hegemony as a leading force from the Middle East to the Pacific, is giving way to a new dynamic as America's focus shifts gradually from the Indian Ocean to the West Pacific region. Though India's economy is the biggest in the IOR, China is the biggest user of its sea lanes. The MSR initiative is an indication of increasing realisation of the growing salience of the Indian Ocean. MSR is aimed at allowing China's maritime military power to break free from the geographical constraints of the Western Pacific island chains.

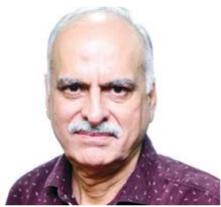
Nearly all of India's merchandise trade transit via the sea. Land based trade routes are unlikely to come up in the near future. India would necessarily have to rely on international shipping lanes. Security and safety of the shipping would remain a paramount concern for many years to come. The critical question is whether MSR shall impair this safety?

Belt Road and MSR offer thousands of scholarships, hold art and film festivals, book fairs, make it more convenient to apply for tourist visas, cooperate on epidemic information, treatment technologies, public health emergencies, technology transfer, maritime cooperation, cooperation among cities, and among non-governmental organisations.

India should implement an initiative that promotes understanding of common heritage and multiple identities. India needs to revive its lost linkages, provide a cross-cultural transnational narrative and evolve a relationship between natural and cultural heritage in the IOR.



Stability at the top, uncertainty below: The test before Modi 3.0



ANIL ANAND

A strong, dominant leader, Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi is in the midst of his third term as Prime Minister. The BJP's failure to secure even a simple majority in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls has not affected the stability of its coalition government.

With Mr Nitish Kumar in the Bihar chief minister's seat, notwithstanding his oft-repeated health issues, and Telugu Desam Party (TDP) chief and Andhra Pradesh chief minister, Mr N Chandrababu Naidu rushing every week to Delhi with fresh set of demands and returning satisfied, the Modi Government-03 has sailed smoothly so far, resting on the crutches of TDP and Janata Dal (U).

This is one dimension of the political stability which, of course, is directly related to a stable government at the Centre. Full marks to Mr Modi and his strategists for deftly managing the National Democratic Alliance's (NDA's) internal dynamics. Does it imply questioning the tools of statecraft used to achieve this stability? Yes, it does if the strategy overwhelmingly rests on weakening the pillars on which rests the edifice of democracy, using constitutional bodies and government wings to corner political rivals, and silencing opponents.

What must worry the nation, and more so Mr Modi is the uncertainty prevailing elsewhere outside the NDA arena? Beginning from Parliament, the uncertainty runs down to the lowest level of political and administrative structures. And equally or more worrying is the manner in which the foundations of the society, based on brotherhood and harmony, are systematically sought to be shaken in the name of religion, colour and cast with a political purpose.

Everyone knew that the Indo-US trade agreement was on its way and unstoppable. Even as its fine print is still to be deciphered in full detail to declare the winners and losers, the uncertainty on this front has also loomed large. The problem, ostensibly, lies in the strange attitude of the ruling diaspora at the helm to portray themselves as winners all the time, come what may. This phenomenon is at full play in the aftermath of the agreement happening.

No government can be right and win all the time. There are good and bad decisions and their fallouts. A dispensation could be a winner sometimes and a loser at others. The Godly approach



to declare an indispensable and no-wrongdoer image and stamping political rivals, dead or alive, and those having a different viewpoint as the fall-guys, stretching the definition to being anti-national, has added to the chaos and created a complex situation.

The situation demands some serious introspection while keeping the mind clear of electoral calculus. Again, the lopsided phenomenon of winning elections, from Lok Sabha to Panchayat, at any cost, should be kept aside for some time for the same of pulling the country out of this uncertainty and divisiveness.

The solution of resolving the crisis from top to the ground levels lies in adopting a grassroots approach akin to the one adopted by Mr Modi and Home Minister, Mr Amit Shah in running the BJP affairs, though the approach here is also monologues. Certainly, the principle of the grassroots approach here will be the same, but with debate and discussion as the fulcrum.

Mr Modi has shown the capacity to lead from the front. He must stand up and come out of his closet to face the issues head-on. No, it does not require a strong-arm tactic but a sober approach based on thrashing out the issues through negotiations and mutual agreements. Aggressiveness has proved beneficial for the BJP over the last over a decade but it has caused a lesion to the body structure of the nation.

A supermodel of negotiated settlement of issues should begin with the resolution of stalemates in Parliament. The two Houses of Parliament are under a cloud, with, unfortunately, aspersions being cast at the Chair; it is time for Mr Modi to act swiftly and take command in his own hands. This will help him deflect the opposition charge of giving a short shrift to Parliament and only making occasional brief appearances.

Defence Minister, Mr Rajnath Singh, Mr Modi's number two in the Union cabinet, seems to have been assigned the task to deputate for him in Parliament, barring replying

to debates on the Budget and the Presidential address. Under Mr Modi's dominance, he does not seem to be carrying full authority and a very limited role of heading the all-party meetings or remaining symbolically present in the two Houses of Parliament at crucial junctures as the Prime Minister's substitute.

Since the controversial Indo-US trade deal has now become a reality and an effervescent opposition gearing to corner the government, the ruling dispensation should act with utmost urgency to take the nation into confidence before the issue spills on the streets and in agricultural farms. The Minister of External Affairs and the Commerce Minister have played their customary role in the run-up to the deal being formalised; it is now up to the Prime Minister to take the nation, directly and through the opposition parties, into confidence and inform them about its nitty-gritty.

There is no harm in admitting mistakes, such as bowing before, which could be strategic-bullying tactics of US President Mr Donald Trump. Mr Modi must ensure that the country stands strong and united to resist any further US pressures and how to derive the best out of the Trade deal.

Likewise, Mr Modi has a big role to play in checking the tendency of communal polarisation, particularly before every election. It must be accruing electoral benefits to the BJP but at a greater cost to the nation. As is his wont, he must lead by example and not only carefully select words and adjectives while delivering speeches, but should also send a clear message to the fringe elements, within the BJP and outside, to stop misrepresenting the Sanatan Dharm.

Finally, a demarcation has to be made for use of the police and the security apparatus. It has been in the forefront in dealing with terrorism and anti-national and anti-social elements. This model, being replicated elsewhere in society for political messaging, is fraught with dangers, and the outcome is there for everyone to see. Wherever the force was used to quell opposition or a diverse point of view, which has at times led to communal overtones, it has disturbed societal harmony.

Even in a given theatre where tangible results have been achieved with strong security-related tactics, it has to be followed by a civilian-democratic approach. A prerequisite should be, which has been the case in the past, that political leadership, ruling and opposition, should have an upper hand and a final say. Not disbanding them behind bars.

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Need for a course correction in child protection Jurisprudence



RACHNA TYAGI

In recent years, a deeply concerning pattern has surfaced in the adjudication of sexual violence against women and children. Courts have, at times, diluted charges, discounted survivor testimony, or relied on hyper technical reasoning under the guise of legal caution. In some cases, minor survivors have been disbelieved for using vernacular language to describe abuse. In others, responsibility has subtly shifted toward the victim. When interpretation distances itself from lived reality, the justice system risks ceasing to be a shield for the vulnerable and instead becomes a barrier they must struggle to overcome.

This concern reached its most troubling expression in March 2025, when the Allahabad High Court modified charges in a child sexual abuse case. The Court held that grabbing the child's breasts, forcibly pulling down her clothing, and dragging her beneath a culvert did not amount to "attempt to rape." At the very threshold, the gravest charge was diluted. What was presented as definitional caution carried profound implications. It risked narrowing the meaning of attempt and weakening deterrence in crimes against children. The settled doctrine of criminal law is clear. Attempt begins where preparation ends. When overt acts are undertaken directly in furtherance of the intended offence, and completion is prevented only by external interruption, the law recognises it as an attempt. In this case, the accused forcibly assaulted the child, removed her clothing, and dragged her to a concealed location. The act was interrupted only by the arrival of a passerby. The intent was evident.

The steps were direct. The interruption was external. The law, by its own standard, required recognition of attempt. Equally troubling was the procedural failure preceding this interpretation. Despite the gravity of the offence, no FIR was registered for nearly four years. The child's mother approached the police authorities repeatedly, wrote to the Superintendent of Police, and ultimately invoked Section 156(3) of the CrPC (Now 175(3) of the BNS). Yet the burden of pursuit fell upon the victim's family.

Meanwhile, the child dropped out of school, lived in proximity to the accused, and endured continuing fear and psychological trauma. Delay in justice is not a mere procedural inconvenience, in cases of child sexual abuse, it compounds harm and deepens vulnerability. For just rights for children, this was not a mere disagreement over a narrow interpretation of the law. It

was a question of whether the justice system would permit dilution to define deterrence. More than 270 partner organisations across India supported a Special Leave Petition before the Supreme Court of India.

The pursuit was grounded in a simple constitutional belief that the law must protect the child and must be feared by those who violate her dignity. On 10 February 2026, the Supreme Court of India delivered a landmark judgment. The controversial order of the Allahabad High Court was set aside. The Court reaffirmed the foundational principle that justice must prevail over narrow and hyper technical interpretation. It held that the accused were liable for attempt to rape, emphasising that the crime remained incomplete only due to third-party intervention. The dilution of charges was found to be contrary to settled principles of criminal jurisprudence and inconsistent with the protective framework of child protection law. The judgment does more than correct a legal error. It restores coherence to child protection jurisprudence. It reinforces that courts must interpret sexual offences through the lens of harm, dignity, and statutory purpose, not through hyper technical thresholds. It affirms that judicial accountability is intrinsic to justice delivery and that interpretation must strengthen deterrence rather than weaken it.

By requesting the National Judicial Academy to constitute a Committee of Experts to examine ground realities and frame guidelines for adjudicating cases involving vulnerable victims, the Court elevated judicial sensitivity and accountability from aspirational ideals to institutional obligations. Inconsistent interpretation, personal bias, and absence of institutional accountability have too often resulted in re-victimisation.

Survivors are subjected to scepticism, minimisation, or blame instead of protection. Many withdraw from the pursuit of justice not because truth is absent, but because endurance becomes impossible. This judgment marks a decisive course correction for future generations. It restores balance between procedure and purpose, interpretation and justice. It also affirms a fundamental truth.

The burden of shame never belongs to the survivor. It belongs to the perpetrator and to any system that fails to protect the vulnerable. Justice is measured by how firmly it stands with the most vulnerable. In reaffirming that principle, the Supreme Court has not merely set aside a judgment. It has strengthened deterrence, restored faith in the rule of law, and ensured that child protection jurisprudence remains anchored in dignity, accountability, and justice.



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As expected, after the combined US-Israel strikes on Iran, and counter-attacks by the latter, global crude oil prices jumped. They inched upwards of \$70, the highest since August 2025, and almost a quarter up from the lowest level in December 2025. Indeed, the recent rise over the past several weeks was prompted by the fears that the US was likely to attack Iran, not if but when. Now that the missiles have hit Iran, its supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, is dead, and Iran has launched attacks on the US bases in the Middle East, and struck high-profile airports, ports, and landmark buildings in the region, the prices are likely to shoot up. A figure of \$100, say experts, is a distinct reality. If the war escalates for a few days, or several weeks, and if some oil-related infrastructure and ships are destroyed in the process, who knows what will happen. Think of crude oil at \$125, or even higher.

Such dire predictions stem from several factors. The most important is the disruptions in oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz, "a chokepoint that carries roughly 20 per cent of global oil supply. Tanker traffic through the waterway has already been significantly curtailed, heightening concerns," states a media report. If Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp (IRGC) escalates the war, the Strait will be on their radar. According to an analyst quoted on a website, "Though the IRGC may not be able to physically close the Strait of Hormuz, it could potentially still deploy small boats, mines, drones, and missiles to compel insurers and shipping companies to avoid the waterway." Another media report adds that oil tankers have begun to avoid the Strait since the attacks started on Saturday. "Historically, crude prices often jump whenever there are major oil supply issues at the Strait of Hormuz," it explained. Huge risk premiums will be added to oil prices.

Worse, the options for fresh and additional supplies from producer nations through alternate routes are limited. For one, the huge spare capacity in the Middle East will remain blocked, if Hormuz remains under siege, or fear of one. Couple this with the fact that most OPEC+ producers are "already near maximum output, leaving Saudi Arabia as the primary holder of meaningful spare capacity." Non-OPEC supplies can increase, but scaling up will require some time. The transport will happen only if the crucial sea lanes remain open and safe. Add to this the thinking among most producer nations, who wish to hike profits due to higher prices, and have suffered for long from subdued ones in the recent past. Even the US, saddled by the recent Supreme Court judgment on trade tariffs, may wish to boost export revenues via more expensive crude oil to make up for lower import revenues, and the inevitable refunds of earlier revenues collected at higher tariffs.

Technical charts forecast a coming bullish phase. According to a website, "The weekly timeframe chart shows... crude oil price has rebounded in the past few weeks. This rebound started after it formed a double-bottom pattern at \$55.15. A double-bottom is one of the most common bullish reversal signs in technical analysis." The prices have moved higher than the 50-week and 100-week averages, and the directional index on the charts has jumped to the highest level since August 2025. The same is the case with the relative strength index. "Therefore, the most likely scenario is where the price continues rising now that the war in Iran is escalated. The price may soar to over \$80 when the market opens today," states the website. Thus, there was a clear possibility of an upward movement, which got fresh impetus due to the Iran war. Remember, there is still a war on in Ukraine, and Pakistan and Afghanistan are at loggerheads on their borders.

According to some analysts, the Hormuz scare is horrifying, and the world is yet to come to grips with it. Most of the oil that passes through the Strait moves from the Middle East to the largest consumers such as China, India, Japan, and South Korea. Half of China's supplies pass through it. Hence, a prolonged closure of the Strait, says one analyst, is a "guaranteed global recession." He adds that if this happens, the Asian consumers will go crazy. "What you would see is hoarding, especially by Asian countries that were big importers of oil and gas when they realised that Hormuz is closed. You could see the mother of all bidding wars." The end-result: Prices will go through the sky. In the end, the duration of the war will matter, as it does during crises, and so will the scale of the war. In such situations, strategic stocks held by nations such as the US (inventory of more than 400 million barrels) and China will not matter. What will be evident is high prices.

Like in the case of the Russia-Ukraine war, there will be choices to make. Dependence on coal may go up, as it did in Europe in the past few years. Oil consumption may be curtailed, as happened in consumer nations. Renewables may get a boost. However, the oil giants will have a gala time, even as they aim to use the cash flows to discover more oil, acquire more oil reserves, or force production to meet future demand.



A third-time lucky seed bill?

Farmers fear that it will lead to political and corporate control

OUR TAKE



Jayanta Bhattacharya
Senior Journalist

After having failed to become a law in 2004 and 2019, a new seed bill may be introduced in Parliament in the second leg of the ongoing Budget session. As usual, it has reignited fresh controversies. The Government insists that it will ensure access to cheap but high-quality seeds, and protect farmers' losses. The industry feels that it will replace an outdated and ill-equipped law (1966). Farm unions counter that the proposed Act will centralise political control, empower firms, and diminish the growers' traditional rights and practices.

According to the agriculture ministry, the new law will regulate the quality of seeds, curb the sale of spurious and poor-quality seeds, liberalise imports to allow global varieties, safeguard the rights of the farmers, and ensure transparency and accountability in supply chains. In addition, it will decriminalise minor offences to promote ease-of-doing-business, reduce compliance burden, yet maintain clauses to penalise the serious violations. The industry welcomed the draft bill, which was available for public feedback in November 2025, and claimed that it could deal with the new scientific and commercial realities.

"The Draft Seeds Bill, 2025, is a timely, and much-needed step toward modernising India's seed regulatory framework. FSII (Federation of Seed Industry of India) welcomes the consultative approach, as replacing the Seeds Act, 1966, and the Seeds (Control) Order, 1983, has been long pending," said Ajai Rana, chairman, FSII. "An initial reading of the draft indicates the introduction of a recognition system for research-based companies, and enhanced ease of doing business. These measures will help streamline the sector while ensuring strong safeguards against serious violations," he added.

However, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), and other farmer entities criticised the draft, and continue to stick to their guns. They allege that it threatens seed sovereignty, and undermines the nation's food security. "We are committed to fight. If the bill is passed by Parliament, it will be against the will of the farmers, and there will be a sustainable struggle against it. We will con-

sider boycotting the multinationals, and their seeds," warned SKM leader P Krishnaprasad. The farmers point out several inconsistencies.

For example, the draft had a provision to create a Central Seed Committee to "controls all aspects of seeds, from production to testing, without representation from all the states." On an overall basis, it gives more power to the Centre, empowers corporations, and weakens the farmers' traditional autonomy. The small seed producers will need to register on par with the large seed firms, which will place the former at level with the powerful latter group. A clause in the seed rules (1983) banned black marketing, which will be upturned under the new law.

Since agriculture is a states' subject as per the Constitution, the draft does envisage both central and states' seed committees. The one in New Delhi will recommend standards for minimum germination levels, genetic and physical purity, traits and seed health norms, and additional quality parameters. The state ones will advise on the registration of producers, dealers, nurseries, and processing units. SKM had raised ten questions, which include one on the insistence on QR code facility, without an assurance of Internet access. Most of the small producers reside in remote areas with limited Internet.

However, the Government insists that these concerns were addressed. In a written statement in Rajya Sabha on February 6, 2026, the minister of state for agriculture, Ramnath Thakur, revealed that "extensive consultations have been held with the farmers' groups, seed experts, industry associations, and State Governments, including the Government of Punjab." He mentioned that the draft bill was "placed in the public domain as part of the pre-legislative consultation process, and over 14,000 suggestions, comments, and observations have been received and examined." He assured that they were considered "as prescribed to be followed for the finalisation of the Bill."

But even the RSS-affiliated Bharatiya Kisan

Sangh (BKS) red-flagged the draft, and is currently holding a meeting in Telangana to discuss it, as well as other farm-related issues like the India-US bilateral trade agreement. According to some members of the BKS, it has identified 20 contentious points, which will be passed on to the Government after discussing them at the Telangana meeting. Other experts point out that the seed bill will undermine other laws like the National Biodiversity Act (2002), and Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Right Act (2001).

Compulsory registration can dilute public-interest mandates.

An insistence on value for cultivation and use may be best to assess performance, but veers towards "uniform, high-input, corporate-bred hybrids."

This contradicts the biodiversity law, which seeks conservation and sustainable use of the country's genetic diversity. Despite required legal clearances for genetically-modified seeds, the draft merely categorises them as "spurious," and omits the mandatory clearance. "This regulatory blind spot downplays environmental and health risks by prioritising commercial penalties over adherence to biosafety standards," states an analysis on social media.

The Government claims that the final bill may remove such anomalies, and there are clauses for compulsory registration of varieties; accreditation of certification agencies to ensure uniform standards; registration of seed producers, seed processing units, and dealers and distributors; registration of plant nurseries; regulation of seed sale prices under emergent situation; compulsory labelling of performance of seeds; and mandatory on-boarding on central traceability portal. The portal is a centralised system to trace and track production and distribution. "These measures are intended to ensure the quality of seeds supplied to the farmers," explained minister Thakur.

"The provisions will ensure that quality seed reaches to farmers, especially small and marginal farmers, and result in increased production, higher income, and mitigation of risk associated with seeds," added the minister in his reply to a question in the Lok Sabha. "The Bill explicitly safeguards the rights of farmers to grow, sow, save, exchange, and sell their farm-saved seeds of any registered varieties. Further, the proposed Act will not be applicable to the farmers, and exemptions have also been provided for traditional varieties and farmers' varieties," he added in the same written statement.

Contrary to the fears, the draft does not create or confer intellectual property rights over the seeds. Issues relating to IPR are separately governed under the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act. The seed bill focuses on quality and regulation, and does not facilitate corporate control over the seeds. Thus, the draft seed bill, or its final version, may not contradict or dilute the existing laws that protect the farmers. It is an addition, not a substitution. One will not supersede the others, as critics wrongly maintain.

(The author has more than three decades of experience across print, TV, and digital media)



KS CHALAPATI RAO and KVK RANGANATHAN

India mostly measures success in the foreign direct investment (FDI) arena by a single number. How much capital (money) came in during a year. When FDI inflows rise, the credit is instantly given to the reforms, and other policy measures. When they fall, global uncertainty and external factors are blamed, further liberalisation is promised, followed by additional "Ease-of-Doing-Business" steps. States compete to host investors' summits, incentives multiply, and the country's rankings improve. Over the past two-three decades, wooing FDI has quietly become an objective rather than an instrument. Hence, there is little systematic assessment of the overall economic impact.

In the recent past, the phenomenon of high gross inflows, coupled with large repatriations or outflows, is interpreted by the policymakers as evidence that India not only attracts foreign capital but delivers strong returns. Foreigners bring in money to make money, a part of which they take out. This enhances India's reputation as a reliable investment destination. However, as the inflows come under serious pressures, due to stronger outflows, even resulting in net outflows, there is some thinking and introspection within the official circles.

According to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data, net FDI inflows fell sharply from \$44 billion in 2020-21 to less than \$1 billion in 2024-25, with preliminary estimates placing them at \$353 million, as reported under the balance of payments, which net inward and outward direct investment. The upward revision was mainly due to the revised estimates of reinvested earnings, which are from the profits earned by the foreign firms from their Indian operations. The figures in the four months (September-December 2025) remain negative.

Indeed, net FDI has turned negative, not merely because inflows slowed significantly, but larger amounts flowed out due to repatriations by the foreigners, sale of a part of their stakes, along with the rise in outward investments by the Indian firms. Even without considering the outward flows, net FDI fell in the recent past. During the four years from 2021-22 to 2024-25, gross FDI inflows were \$308 billion. Over the same period, repatriations, dividends, and royalty payments to the foreign promoters and shareholders came to \$296 billion (repatriations — \$154 billion, dividends — \$103 billion, and royalties — \$39 billion).

This left a mere balance of \$12 billion over the four years. This is after \$3 billion royalties are kept out of the calculations. In other words,

India's FDI palace of illusion

Record inflows mask problems of outflows and external claims



nearly 96 cents out of every dollar that came in went out via outward payments that were linked to the incoming FDI. If outward investments by Indian firms, which were \$75 billion, are added, the difference between what came in, and what went out is a huge negative \$63 billion during the same period. If one excludes reinvested earnings, which represent retained profits rather than an inflow of fresh capital, the picture becomes stark. The figure for gross inflows will be down to \$227 billion, and the net FDI deficit will be \$69 billion.

When India opened its economy in 1991, FDI was welcomed for clear reasons. The objective was to acquire technology, promote exports, and strengthen the domestic industry. In particular, the Industrial Policy (1991) emphasised building the country's capacity to earn foreign exchange. Entry was selective and linked, at least in intent, to capability creation in what were termed as high priority industries. Higher dividend payments to the foreign parents, due to an increase in their respective stakes up to 51 per cent that was allowed in most sectors, were to be balanced by companies' exports.

Automatic approval was extended to technology agreements related to high-priority

industries. Thus, liberalisation was directly linked to technology, exports, and conservation of foreign exchange. Even so, a tension remained between reforms and external sustainability. Gradually, the emphasis shifted. Restrictions were eased across sectors, performance requirements disappeared even before those were outlawed under WTO, and the distinction between types of investments faded. The concept of dividend balancing was removed, and royalty payments were liberalised. Instead of asking what the investments would do for the economy, the policy asked how easily it could enter.

By the early 2010s, foreign investment became a means to finance the current account deficits rather than to achieve the well-documented benefits that were reiterated by the Industrial Policy of 1991. The fact remains that capital inflows bring money today but create claims on the domestic incomes tomorrow. These appear as dividends, royalties, technical fees, and capital repatriations to the foreign parents. As foreign firms mature, these payments rise. In addition, there is invariably the important issue related to technology transfers.

A Discussion Paper (2017) suggested that a

review of the FDI policy was needed to "ensure that it (FDI) facilitates greater technology transfer, leverages strategic linkages, and innovation." Instead of issuing a new comprehensive industrial policy, the Government opted for a piecemeal approach. A decade earlier in 2008, an Expert Group under the National Manufacturing Competitiveness Council described how the liberal FDI policy had hurt Indian manufacturing. It observed, "Technology transfer is considered to be one of the most important benefits of permitting FDI... In India, however, in attracting FDI, the emphasis appears to be substantially on the amount of FDI flows."

Purchase of technology is costly, and in view of the liberal Indian policies, foreigners are reluctant to part with it. Even when the Indians are willing to buy it, there are apprehensions or unwillingness. In the pre-reforms days, the foreigners were skeptical about restrictions, and the policy environment. In the post-reforms period, they were eager to earn regular royalties, fees, and other compensations, rather than part with proprietary technology. This explains why the Group wanted a high-level technical committee to review the FDI policy.

Hence, the FDI arithmetic reveals only a part of the whole story. The deeper question is whether this investment trajectory was anticipated but not acted upon sufficiently. When one understands the overall architecture behind the FDI patterns, it becomes clear that the emerging imbalance is not the result of a single policy error or a sudden loss of investor confidence. There are contributory factors to the burgeoning outflows, and the trends are embedded in FDI's nature, India's liberalisation curve, and evolving character of global capital.

Understanding these shifts is essential if policy recalibration is to be deliberate rather than reactive and enthusiastic. A deep analysis can ensure that openness strengthens domestic capability rather than gradually expanding the external claims. We will examine these and other issues in the second part of FDI's magic show. Watch this space tomorrow for more insights, some surprises, and a few shocks.

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PIOTECH

Claude climbs to number 2 on app store amid Pentagon row



Anthropic's AI chatbot Claude has surged to the number two spot among free apps on Apple's US App Store, following controversy over the company's negotiations with the Pentagon. Claude ranks just behind ChatGPT by OpenAI, which holds the top position.

Google's Gemini is currently ranked third. Data from Sensor Tower showed that Claude was positioned just outside the top 100 at the end of January. Through most of February, it remained within the top 20. Its rise accelerated in recent days, moving from sixth place on Wednesday to fourth on Thursday and then to second on Saturday. The spike in downloads comes amid a public dispute between Anthropic and the US Department of Defense.

Anthropic had attempted to negotiate safeguards to prevent its AI models from being used for mass domestic surveillance or fully autonomous weapons systems. Following those negotiations, President Donald Trump directed federal agencies to stop using Anthropic products. Soon after, OpenAI announced a separate agreement with the Pentagon.

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman said the deal includes safeguards related to domestic surveillance and autonomous weapons. The developments appear to have drawn increased public attention to Anthropic and its chatbot, contributing to Claude's rapid climb in app rankings.

ChatGPT nears one billion weekly users, raises \$110 billion



ChatGPT has reached 900 million weekly active users, bringing the AI chatbot closer to the 1 billion mark. The company also said it now has 50 million paying subscribers. The new figure marks an increase of 100 million users since October 2025, when OpenAI reported 800 million weekly active users.

The growth reflects rising global adoption of the AI tool for learning, writing, planning and building. In a blog post, OpenAI said subscriber momentum has accelerated at the start of the year.

"January and February are on track to be the largest months for new subscribers in our history," the company said. It added that as usage grows, the product improves with faster responses, higher reliability, stronger safety and more consistent performance.

OpenAI shared the user data alongside news that it has raised \$110 billion in private funding.

The round is among the largest in history. It includes a \$50 billion investment from Amazon, and \$30 billion each from Nvidia and SoftBank. The funding values the company at a pre-money valuation of \$730 billion. The round remains open, and OpenAI expects more investors to participate.

The rapid growth in users and funding signals increasing demand for generative AI tools. With 900 million weekly users and rising subscriptions, ChatGPT is now within reach of becoming one of the most widely used digital platforms globally.

Google launches Nano Banana 2 after viral AI tool success



Google unveiled Nano Banana 2, the successor to its viral AI image generation model, as it steps up efforts to strengthen its position in the fast-growing artificial intelligence race. The new model is being rolled out across multiple products, including the Gemini app, AI Mode and Lens features on Search, and Flow, Google's AI-powered video tool. The company said Nano Banana 2 offers faster performance and improved image quality.

Nano Banana 2 runs on Gemini's Flash models, which are designed to be faster and more cost-effective. Google said the update enables quicker image generation and editing, better instruction-following, and sharper visual details. The original Nano Banana AI image editor, launched in August, quickly went viral.

It attracted 13 million first-time users to the Gemini app within four days in September. By mid-October, users had generated more than 5 billion images. Google followed up with Nano Banana Pro in November.

The latest launch is part of a broader push by Google to compete more aggressively with OpenAI's ChatGPT after facing early setbacks in the AI space.

The company's renewed AI focus has helped drive a 47 per cent rise in its stock over the past six months. In November, Google also released its Gemini 3 AI model. The model's success significantly boosted user engagement, helping the Gemini app surpass 750 million monthly active users by the end of December.

ALL INPUTS FROM AGENCIES

India's AI reckoning: The end of the labour-arbitrage era



NISHANT SAHDEV

The recent sell-off in technology stocks was treated by many as just another bout of market volatility. But instead of thinking of it as a random market panic, it shows something else.

In a matter of weeks, Indian IT companies lost nearly ₹6 lakh crore in market value. The Nifty IT index dropped more than 20 per cent, one of its sharpest corrections in decades. This was not triggered by a collapse in earnings. It was triggered by anxiety: AI is beginning to change the economics of the very model on which India's IT industry was built.

For more than three decades, the IT services sector has been one of India's greatest economic success stories. In FY 2024 — 25, exports touched roughly \$224 billion. The sector contributes around 7 per cent to India's GDP and employs close to six million people directly, with millions more indirectly dependent on it.

The model was straightforward and powerful. Indian firms offered skilled engineers at competitive cost. Global companies outsourced software development, maintenance, testing, and support to India because it was efficient, reliable, and scalable. Revenue was closely linked to effort — to billable hours. Time became money & AI started weakening that foundation.

Modern AI tools can write code, catch errors, generate documentation, run tests, and assist in system design. Companies using these tools are reporting productivity improvements of 30 per cent to 40 per cent in certain tasks. A project that earlier required 10 engineers working for six months can now be completed faster and with fewer people. On the surface, higher productivity sounds like good news. And in many ways, it is. But for a sector that prides its services based largely on time and manpower, productivity gains create pressure.

If a client can complete the same work in fewer hours, why should they pay the same amount? Unless pricing shifts from hours to outcomes, revenue will compress. Even a structural reduction of 20 — 30 per cent in billable time across parts of the industry would have significant implications for export earnings over the next decade. This is what markets are beginning to price in. The concern is not that Indian engineers are becoming irrelevant. The concern is that the traditional labour-arbitrage model — where scale and cost advantage drive growth — may no longer deliver the same returns in an AI-assisted world. This matters for three reasons.

First, employment

India's demographic dividend has long depended on the IT sector absorbing young engineering talent. Every year, hundreds of thousands of graduates look to technology firms for stable jobs and upward mobility.

If automation reduces demand for entry-level coding, testing, and support roles, the impact may not be immediate layoffs. Instead, it may show up as slower hiring, fewer campus placements, and tighter margins for mid-level employees. At the same time, new opportunities will emerge. AI requires data



ASHOK KUMAR

Artificial intelligence is becoming less a contest of algorithms than of electricity, chips and State capacity. The race for artificial intelligence is often portrayed as a contest over code. Increasingly, it is a contest over power supply, semiconductor access and institutional competence.

The material weight of "weightless" intelligence

From Arizona to Shenzhen to Navi Mumbai, data centres now anchor the AI economy. Some large facilities consume as much electricity as a town of 100,000 people. Training advanced models requires tens of thousands of specialised chips operating continuously. What is marketed as a cloud rests on land, cooling systems and high-voltage cables. Competitive advantage in AI will depend not only on designing better models, but on building and sustaining the infrastructure that runs them.

India's ambitions are expansive. The Government has committed funds under the IndiaAI Mission to expand domestic computing capacity, with tens of thousands of high-end graphics-processing units deployed and more planned. Subsidised access is meant to allow local firms to train and adapt models without relying entirely on foreign cloud providers.

The grid behind the cloud

Compute capacity is only as reliable as the grid beneath it. AI workloads require uninterrupted electricity and predictable pricing. India's power system has improved markedly over the past decade, yet transmission bottlenecks, distribution losses and uneven State finances remain constraints.

Expanding renewable generation adds further complexity. Data centres also require substantial water for cooling, raising questions about siting and environmental trade-offs. The economics are exacting. Building a



population-scale platforms can be developed domestically and deployed efficiently.

engineers, model supervisors, cybersecurity experts, AI ethics specialists, and professionals who can integrate AI tools into business workflows. The key question is not whether jobs will disappear. It is whether India can retrain and reposition its workforce quickly enough. Countries that move fast on reskilling will benefit from AI. Those that delay will face structural unemployment in certain segments.

Second, competitiveness

Indian IT companies are not ignoring this shift. Leaders at major firms have publicly stated that they are integrating AI across their operations. They understand that resisting automation is not an option. In fact, many are encouraging internal adoption even if it reduces short-term revenue. But adopting AI tools is not the same as owning AI platforms.

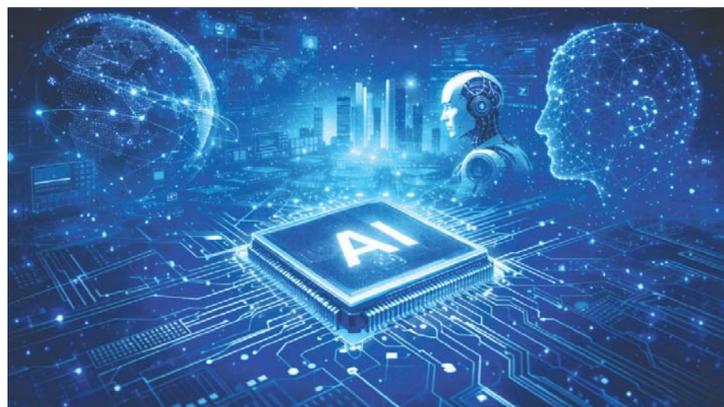
Today, the highest profits in the global AI ecosystem are being captured by companies that control foundational models, cloud infrastructure, and semiconductor design. These are capital-intensive areas dominated by the United States and, increasingly, China. Indian firms largely operate in the implementation layer — customising and deploying solutions built elsewhere. That role will remain important, but it carries thinner margins and less strategic leverage.

If India wants to capture more value from the AI economy, it must move up the stack. That means investing not just in services, but in intellectual property, proprietary platforms, and original research.

Third, strategic positioning

Artificial intelligence is not just another technology wave. It is becoming a layer embedded in finance, healthcare, defence, education, logistics, and governance. Countries that control AI capabilities will shape global standards, supply chains, and digital infrastructure.

India has demonstrated that it can build large-scale digital public infrastructure. Systems like Aadhaar and UPI show that



large data centre demands billions in capital expenditure and long planning horizons. Securing advanced chips involves navigating supply chains increasingly shaped by export controls and geopolitical rivalry.

If domestic power is unreliable or costly, firms will default to foreign infrastructure. Technology policy therefore intersects with energy reform, industrial policy and fiscal management. Public subsidies may accelerate early capacity building. They also create opportunity costs. Funds directed toward compute clusters compete with spending on universities, rural connectivity and semiconductor fabrication. The sequencing of investment will matter as much as its scale.

Adoption, not applause

Infrastructure is necessary but insufficient. The economic impact of generalpurpose technologies has historically depended on diffusion. Electricity raised productivity when factories reorganised around it. The internet transformed commerce when firms rebuilt supply chains and distribution channels. AI is unlikely to be different. India's digital public infrastructure provides a platform for diffusion. Aadhaar and the

population-scale platforms can be developed domestically and deployed efficiently.

The same ambition must now extend to AI. Currently, India depends heavily on foreign cloud providers and foreign-developed AI models. That is not unusual in a globalised world. But overreliance can limit bargaining power and long-term competitiveness.

Building sovereign AI capacity does not mean isolation. It means ensuring that India has domestic research clusters, computing infrastructure, and data governance frameworks robust enough to support innovation at scale. There are positive signals. The Government has increased focus on AI policy discussions. International companies are investing in data centres and AI hubs in India. Domestic startups are emerging in sectors such as multilingual AI systems, agricultural analytics, and health diagnostics.

India's diversity can also become an advantage. Training AI systems across hundreds of languages and dialects provides a testing ground that few countries can match. If properly supported, this could lead to globally competitive multilingual AI solutions. Yet optimism must be balanced with realism.

The global AI race is accelerating. The United States benefits from deep capital markets and dominant technology firms. China combines State coordination with industrial scale. Both are investing heavily in semiconductors, advanced computing hardware, and foundational research. India's window of opportunity lies in combining its software expertise, demographic strength, and policy agility.

To do that, three shifts are essential. The industry must move from billing hours to billing outcomes. Clients will pay for measurable business impact — cost savings, efficiency gains, revenue growth — not just manpower. That requires new pricing models and deeper integration into client strategy.

The education system must adapt quickly. Engineering curricula should incorporate AI tools as standard practice, not electives.

Continuous reskilling programs must become mainstream, supported by both Government and industry. And policy must focus on enabling infrastructure: affordable access to computing power, incentives for AI research, support for startups building foundational technologies, and clear regulatory guidelines that protect users without stifling innovation. None of this requires abandoning the services model overnight. The IT sector remains strong and globally respected. But relying solely on the old formula would be a strategic mistake. The recent market correction was a reminder that investors think in decades, not quarters. They are asking whether India's technology sector will remain a cost-efficient service provider — or evolve into a creator of indispensable AI systems.

The difference between those two futures is not academic. It affects export earnings, job creation, currency stability, and national competitiveness.

India's first IT revolution integrated the country into the global economy. The AI revolution demands a second transformation — from scale-driven growth to intelligence-driven growth. The opportunity is real. So is the risk. If India uses AI merely to work faster for foreign clients, the gains will be incremental. If it uses AI to build its own platforms, tools, and ecosystems, the gains could be transformative. This is not a moment for panic. It is a moment for clarity.

Markets have delivered their early warning. The question now is whether industry leaders, policymakers, and educators respond with incremental adjustments — or with structural ambition. India's technology story has never been about fear of change. It has been about adapting faster than expected.

Artificial intelligence is the next test. How India responds will determine whether the country remains a crucial participant in the global digital economy — or becomes one of its architects. The shift has already begun. The only real uncertainty is the speed at which India chooses to move.

Author is a theoretical physicist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, US, and the author of the forthcoming book *The Last Equation Before the Silence*

The grid, the chip and the future of AI

China. America hosts a large share of leading AI laboratories and benefits from deep capital markets and dominant cloud providers. China combines State direction with manufacturing scale and a formidable hardware ecosystem. India's comparative advantage lies in scale, digital infrastructure and a youthful workforce. Whether that proves sufficient will depend on the depth of research funding, the quality of universities and the ability to retain high-end talent.

The risk is bifurcation. A thin layer of advanced capability may coexist with limited diffusion into the broader economy. Bridging that gap requires not only elite research institutes but also managerial expertise and sector-specific knowledge across manufacturing, agriculture and services.

Capacity over ambition

As AI shifts from laboratory breakthrough to industrial system, administrative competence becomes as important as technical ingenuity. Expanding power capacity, attracting semiconductor investment, strengthening research universities and enabling enterprise adoption require coordination across ministries and between public and private actors. Regulatory predictability will shape capital flows as much as headline funding commitments.

The contest over algorithms will continue. Model performance will improve incrementally. But durable advantage will accrue to those able to align energy infrastructure, chip supply and institutional reform.

For India, as for others, the central question is not whether it can produce capable models, but whether it can build and operate the system that sustains them.

Clever code travels only as far as the grid allows. Artificial intelligence may be written in software, but it is forged in the fires of heavy industry, sustained by a middle class of applied talent, and protected by institutional firepower. The race for the smartest algorithm is over. The race for systemic capacity has just begun. And in this new industrial revolution, code is no longer the destination — it is merely the first step.

Writer is a General Secretary, PanIT Alumni India





FROM THE WORLD

AUSTRIA

Indian to head think tank

Veteran UN diplomat of Indian origin Siddharth Chatterjee has been appointed as CEO of Global Neighbours, a Vienna-based think tank upon his retirement as UN Resident Coordinator in China. Chatterjee, 62, retired as UN Resident Coordinator in China on Sunday. Chatterjee's appointment to head 26 UN offices in China in 2021 made headlines as it came in the midst of the India-China tensions over the eastern Ladakh standoff. During his tenure in China, he became a major draw for Chinese, Indian and global media making waves with his high-intensity fitness regime and yoga exercises. An alumnus of India's National Defence Academy, Pune, Chatterjee served in the Indian Army before joining the UN and was decorated for gallantry in 1995. He is married to Ban Hyun-Hee, the daughter of former UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon from South Korea. A press release issued by the Global Neighbours said Chatterjee has been appointed as its CEO effective from March 2.

UK

Elderly Indian couple conned

An elderly Indian-origin couple from Leicester, who were conned out of a large chunk of their savings when they booked a flight to Ahmedabad only to discover the tickets were fake, are publicising their experience as a cautionary tale for others. Dinesh, 80, and Shashikala, 78, realised they had lost over 2,500 pounds to an online fraud at the check-in desk at London's Heathrow Airport. In an interview with BBC Leicester, the couple revealed their shock and dismay at being told they had been tricked by a fake page that had moved the booking process to a WhatsApp conversation with an account dubiously named "Fly Expedia".

Airports, hotel hit in overnight strikes in UAE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Dubai

Several waves of Iranian attacks targeting the airport and several other sites across the UAE kept people awake on Saturday night.

Dubai's airport and the iconic Burj Al Arab hotel," and that it was among the places hit by what the UAE officials described as drone attacks.

A Government of Dubai media office statement said "drone caused its shrapnel to spark a fire at the Burj Al Arab hotel," and that it was brought under control. "No injuries" were reported.

Authorities in Dubai also revealed that debris resulting from air interception operations caused a fire at one of

the berths of Jebel Ali Port without causing any injuries.

"Dubai Civil Defence teams immediately responded to handle the fire, while their efforts continue to control it," it said.

The authorities also urged the public not to circulate video clips dating back to the Jebel Ali Port fire on July 7, 2021, and confirmed that more reliable information will be broadcast upon receipt.

Amid silent alerts sounded across the country for possible missile attacks, an incident of one such attack taking place at the airport was reported.

"Dubai Airports has confirmed an incident at Dubai International Airport (DXB)



just moments ago. Emergency response teams have been activated immediately, and the incident is being handled in coordination with the relevant authorities," the statement said.

It also said that the attack resulted in 4 injuries, and the necessary urgent medical assistance has been provided. "Updated information will be broadcast as soon as it is received," it added.

Because of the ongoing fasting month of Ramzan and this being the weekend, people stayed awake late at night, tormented by intermittent sirens on the streets and alerts issued by the authorities.

Local media reports claimed that Abu Dhabi's Zayed International Airport came under overnight attacks, resulting in the death of an unnamed Asian worker and seven injuries. The incident is yet to be confirmed by the Government.

A similar attack was reported at the Jebel Ali Port. However, no injuries were reported.

The UAE's Ministry of Defence announced that, since the onset of the Iranian

attack, the air force and air defence forces of the United Arab Emirates have successfully engaged and destroyed 137 ballistic missiles and 209 drones launched towards the country's territory, underscoring the high readiness of the air defence systems and their capability to address various threats.

"The Ministry stated that, since the beginning of the attack, 137 Iranian ballistic missiles launched towards the UAE had been detected, of which 132 were destroyed, while five fell into the sea. A total of 209 Iranian drones were also detected; 195 were intercepted, while 14 fell within the country's territory and waters, causing some minor side damage," it said in

a statement. Schools in Dubai and Abu Dhabi have been asked to move to distance learning till Thursday.

The UAE's General Authority of Civil Aviation has announced that the state will bear all costs of accommodation and sustenance for affected and stranded passengers, as the country's airports and national carriers have dealt with approximately 20,200 individuals impacted by the rescheduling of some flights.

"Temporary accommodation has been provided, along with meals and beverages, in addition to facilitating rebooking procedures in accordance with the approved operational plans," it said.

World leaders react cautiously

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Brussels

How long will it last? Will it grow? What will the conflict and the reported death of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei mean to us, and to global security overall? Those questions echoed across the Middle East and the planet Saturday as world leaders reacted warily to US and Israeli strikes on Iran.

US President Donald Trump said on social media that Khamenei was dead, calling it "the single greatest chance for the Iranian people to take back their Country." Iranian state media said early Sunday the 86-year-old leader had died without elaborating on a cause.

Israeli officials previously told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity that Khamenei was dead. And Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in a televised address, said there were "growing signs" that Khamenei had been killed when Israel struck his compound early on Saturday.

The apparent demise of the second leader of the Islamic Republic, who had no designated successor, would likely throw its future into uncertainty — and exacerbate already growing concerns of a broader conflict. The UN Security Council scheduled an emergency meeting.

Perhaps cautious about upsetting already strained relations with Trump, many nations abstained from com-



Keir Starmer

menting directly or pointedly on the joint strikes but condemned Tehran's retaliation.

Similarly to Europeans, Governments across the Middle East condemned Iran's strikes on Arab neighbors while staying silent on the US and Israeli military action. Other countries were more explicit: Australia and Canada expressed open support for the US strikes, while Russia and China responded with direct criticism. The US and Israel launched a major attack on Iran on Saturday, and Trump called on the Iranian public to "seize control of your destiny" by rising up against the Islamic theocracy that has ruled the nation since 1979. Iran retaliated by firing missiles and drones toward Israel and US military bases in the Middle East.

Some leaders urge resumption of talks: In a statement, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Friedrich

Merz called on the US and Iran to resume talks and said they favored a negotiated settlement. They said their countries didn't take part in the strikes on Iran but are in close contact with the US, Israel and partners in the region. The three countries have led efforts to reach a negotiated solution over Iran's nuclear programme.

"We condemn Iranian attacks on countries in the region in the strongest terms. Iran must refrain from indiscriminate military strikes," they said. "Ultimately, the Iranian people must be allowed to determine their future," they said.

Later, at an emergency security meeting, Macron said France was "neither warned nor involved" in the strikes. He called for intensified efforts for a negotiated solution, saying "no one can think that the questions of Iran's nuclear program, ballistic activity, regional destabilisation will be settled by strikes alone."

US, Israel clash with Iran in UNSC

YOSHITA SINGH
United Nations

The US and Israel clashed with Iran in the UN Security Council as Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned that military action in the Middle East risks igniting uncontrollable "chain of events" in the world's most volatile region.

"We are witnessing a grave threat to international peace and security. Military action carries the risk of igniting a chain of events that no one can control in the most volatile region of the world," Guterres told the emergency meeting of the UN Security Council Saturday.



Antonio Guterres

The powerful 15-nation UN body met just hours after the US and Israel launched military strikes against Iran and the subsequent attacks by Tehran.

Guterres condemned the massive military strikes by

the US and Israel against Iran as well as attacks by Tehran "violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity" of Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

"In Tehran, large explosions were reported in the district that includes the presidential palace and the compound of the Supreme Leader. Several high-ranking officials have reportedly been killed, including Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, that I am not in a position to confirm," Guterres said. As the UNSC meeting was underway in the UN headquarters in New York, US President Donald Trump, currently in his Mar-

a-Lago estate in Florida, announced the Ayatollah's death in a post on Truth Social. "Khamenei, one of the most evil people in History, is dead. This is not only justice for the people of Iran, but for all Great Americans, and those people from many Countries throughout the World, that have been killed or mutilated by Khamenei and his gang of bloodthirsty THUGS," Trump said.

Trump warned that the "heavy and pinpoint bombing" will continue, "uninterrupted throughout the week or, as long as necessary to achieve our objective of PEACE THROUGHOUT THE MIDDLE EAST AND, INDEED, THE WORLD!" (PTI)

Khamenei killed in precise, large-scale Israeli operation: IDF

HARINDER MISHRA
Jerusalem

Iranian Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was targeted in a "precise, large-scale operation" and the elimination of the leader of "terror axis" has brought to an end a "decades-long chapter," the IDF said on Sunday. The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) formally announced that it killed Khamenei in an airstrike in Tehran on Saturday and shared details of the attack.

Israel and the US launched joint strikes on Iran early on Saturday including attacks on "dozens of military targets" carried out as part



of a "wide, coordinated, and joint offensive" against the (Iranian) regime aimed at eliminating existential threats to the State of Israel over time.

On Sunday, the Israeli army said in a statement: "Ali

Khamenei was targeted in a precise, large-scale operation carried out by the Israeli Air Force, guided by accurate IDF intelligence, while he was in his central leadership compound in the heart of Tehran, where he was together with additional senior officials."

Khamenei, who served as the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic since 1989, "was directly responsible for the violent repression of Iranian citizens for many years," it said.

"Khamenei was the architect of the plan to destroy the State of Israel and was known as the 'head of the Iranian octopus,' extending

its arms throughout the Middle East and to the borders of the State of Israel," the IDF stated.

Foremost among them was the Lebanese Shi'ite Hezbollah terror organisation, it said.

"The Supreme Leader of the Iranian regime was responsible for terrorist attacks against the State of Israel, and the blood of many civilians from around the world was on his hands," the IDF stressed.

This has "brought to an end a decades-long chapter with the elimination of the leader of the Iranian terror axis," the Israeli army emphasised. (PTI)

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who led Islamic Republic since 1989, killed at 86

JON GAMBRELL
Dubai

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who assembled theocratic power in Iran over the decades as its supreme leader and sought to turn it into a regional powerhouse, bringing it into confrontation with Israel and the United States over its nuclear programme while crushing democracy protesters at home, has died. He was 86.

Iranian State media reported the death early Sunday, after a major attack launched by Israel and the United States. US President Donald Trump said hours earlier that Khamenei had been killed in the joint operation. Khamenei dramatically remolded the Islamic Republic since he took the reins after the death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989. Khomeini was the fiery, charismatic ideologue who led the overthrow of the shah and installed rule by Shiite Muslim clerics tasked with spreading religious purity. It fell to Khamenei, a stodgy figure with weaker religious credentials and a leaden demeanour, to turn that revolutionary vision into a state establishment.

He ended up ruling far longer than Khomeini. He greatly expanded the Shiite clerical class and built the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard into the most important body underpinning his rule. The Guard became a military and business behemoth, the country's most elite force and head of its ballistic missile arsenal, with hands across Iran's economic sectors.

But the strains became harder to contain. Political repression and the faltering economy fuelled successively bigger waves of mass protests. Anger over the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini, detained for not wearing her mandatory headscarf properly, escalated into demonstrations against social restrictions. In early January, hundreds of thousands marched in cities across the country, many chanting, "Death to Khamenei."

Khamenei responded with the deadliest crackdown seen in nearly 50 years of clerical rule as security forces opened fire on crowds, killing thousands. At the same time, the Mideast was sparked by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel set in motion the collapse of the region-wide "Axis of Resistance" built by Khamenei. Israel and Iran attacked each other directly for the first time in 2024. Israel struck Iran again in June 2025, as it and the United States targeted the country's nuclear program and killed top military officers and nuclear scientists. Iran retaliated by sending missiles and drones at Israel.

Khamenei's death raises questions about the future of the Islamic Republic.

The 88-seat Assembly of Experts, a group of mostly hard-line clerics, will choose Khamenei's replacement. But no clear successor is in place.

As he launched the bombing in February, US President Donald Trump called on Iranians to "take over your Government.



From a questioned start to a hard-line grip on Iran: Ali Khamenei was born into a religious family in the northeastern holy city of Mashhad, a hotbed of revolutionary fervor during the struggle against the Western-allied shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

Like many other Iranian leaders, he studied under Khomeini at the seminary in the holy city of Qom, south of Tehran, in the early 1960s, before the Khomeini's exile to Iraq and France.

Khamenei joined the anti-shah movement, facing time in both prison and in hiding. When Khomeini returned to Iran in triumph in February 1979 and proclaimed the Islamic Republic, Khamenei was appointed to the secretive Revolutionary Council. In 1981, he was elected Iran's third president; that same year, a bombing by opponents left him with one hand paralysed.

With his thick, heavy-framed glasses, Khamenei lacked the steely gaze and fiery aura of Khomeini, the father of the Islamic Revolution. He fell far short of Khomeini's religious scholarship, holding the relative-

ly low rank of "hojatolislam" in the Shiite clerical hierarchy.

After being named supreme leader after Khomeini's death, he bounded overnight to the level of grand ayatollah, at the top of the hierarchy, and for years had to deal with skepticism over his credentials. Khamenei acknowledged the doubts with humility. "I am an individual with many faults and shortcomings and truly a minor seminarian," he said in his first speech in his new post. Despite his lack of charisma, Khamenei stabilized Iran after the 1980s war with Iraq and governed for over three decades — far longer than Khomeini.

Hard-liners considered him second only to God in his authority. Khamenei created an ever-growing bureaucracy of Shiite clerics and Governmental agencies that blurred responsibilities and left him as the ultimate arbiter. As Iran questioned whether to keep the Revolutionary Guard after the war with Iraq, Khamenei came to its rescue and allowed the paramilitary force to gain a powerful grip

on Iran's economy. He also used a system of appointees to undercut the civilian Government elected by its people.

Nuclear programme advances to near-weapons-grade levels: The supreme leader remained deeply suspicious of the US, referring to it as the "Great Satan" even after President Barack Obama came into office in 2009, offering dialogue and a fresh start.

He shrugged off UN sanctions and pushed ahead with Iran's nuclear program, which the US and its allies say hid a secret project to build a nuclear weapon up until 2003. Khamenei issued a verbal fatwa, or religious ruling, that nuclear weapons are un-Islamic, but vowed the country would never give up its right to develop what he called a peaceful nuclear energy program.

Under Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, Tehran agreed to drastically reduce its stockpile and enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. But only three years later, Trump in his first term unilaterally withdrew Washington from the accord, arguing it didn't go far enough.

Protests and demands for change intensified: Khamenei's first major challenge came in 1997, when pro-reform politicians gained control of parliament and cleric Mohammad Khatami was elected president by a landslide, riding a large youth vote. The reformists demanded a loosening of the strict social rules imposed by the

revolution and called for improved ties with the outside world, including the US.

Khamenei-backed hard-liners moved to contain the liberal movement, fearing it would eventually call for an end to clerical rule. Khamenei stopped parliament from loosening restrictions on the media in an unusually overt intervention. Clerical bodies blocked other key liberal legislation and banned many reformist lawmakers from running for reelection, ensuring a return of hard-liner control in the 2004 elections.

Although Khamenei struggled to preserve the ideological purity of the Islamic Revolution, Iran's Government has largely failed to rid the country of Western influence. Satellite dishes, banned in theory, crowd Tehran's rooftops. Banned social media sites are widely used, even by some prominent politicians, despite being blocked.

Protests erupted again in 2022 over the death of Amini, a young woman detained for not wearing her hijab, or headscarf, to the liking of authorities. More than 500 people were killed and tens of thousands arrested when security forces crushed the demonstrations again. In late December 2025, new economic protests erupted and would grow into what appeared to be the biggest protest movement ever.

Hundreds of thousands across the country took to the streets, overtly demanding an end to the Islamic Republic. (AP)

Iran fires missiles at Israel and Gulf states

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Dubai

Iran fired missiles at targets in Israel and Gulf Arab states Sunday after vowing massive retaliation for the killing of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei by the United States and Israel, prompting US President Donald Trump to threaten Tehran against further escalation.

Iran acknowledged 86-year-old Khamenei's death in the joint Israeli-American airstrike Saturday at his Tehran office, which has thrown the future of the Islamic Republic into question and raised the risk of regional instability.

"This is the single greatest chance for the Iranian people to take back their Country," Trump said.

Iran's Cabinet vowed that this "great crime will never go unanswered" and the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard threatened to launch its "most intense offensive operation" ever, targeting Israeli and American bases.

"You have crossed our red line and must pay the price," Iran's parliamentary speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf said in a televised address Sunday. "We will deliver such devastating blows that you yourselves will be driven to beg."

"Iran just stated that they are going to hit very hard today, harder than they have ever hit before," Trump fired back in a social media post. "THEY BETTER NOT DO THAT, HOWEVER, BECAUSE IF THEY DO, WE WILL HIT THEM WITH A FORCE THAT HAS NEVER



BEEN SEEN BEFORE!" As Israel and the US targeted other top officials, an airstrike on a meeting of the country's defense council killed Iran's army chief of staff and defense minister, alongside the head of Iran's Revolutionary Guard and a top security adviser to Khamenei.

General Abdol Rahim Mousavi and Defense Minister General Aziz Nasirzadeh were killed at the meeting, along with Major General Mohammad Pakpour took over as the Guard's top commander after Israel killed its past commander in the 12-day war last June. The adviser, Ali Shamkhani, had long been a figurehead within Iran's security establishment. **Iran retaliates:** After the initial strikes, Iran immediately launched missiles and drones toward Israel and US military installations in Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar. The Israeli military said Iran fired dozens of missiles at Israel, with many intercepted. The Magen David Adom rescue service said Saturday night that a woman in the Tel Aviv area died after being wounded in an Iranian missile attack.



US Consulate in Karachi attacked, 10 killed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Karachi

At least ten persons were killed and several injured on Sunday after clashes broke out between police and protesters as they tried to storm the gates of the US Consulate in Pakistan's port city of Karachi.

The clashes broke out following the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Saturday in a joint US-Israeli air strike. Edhi Welfare Organisation's information wing confirmed that nine persons have been killed and several injured near Mai Kolachi Road during the firing and unrest.

They have been transferred to the Civil Hospital Trauma Centre, The Express Tribune reported.

At least thirty-two people have been injured and brought in and are receiving medical treatment, authorities at the Trauma Centre said. The identification of the bodies is currently underway, they added.

A large number of demonstrators were gathered around the consulate, and police opened fire on them while they were attempting to break into the US Consulate.



Sindh Minister for Interior Ziaul Hasan Langar has requested immediate details from the Additional IG Karachi, stressing that "No one will be allowed to take the law into their own hands."

He called for enhanced security at sensitive installations. He added that alternative routes should be determined to maintain traffic flow during the protests. "Law enforcement agencies are fully alert and monitoring the situation closely," the minister added. The minister concluded that action

will be taken against those disrupting law and order in accordance with the law. Shia organisations had announced a march towards the US Consulate in Karachi in protest of the Khamenei's death and voiced their intention to march towards the mission.

Edhi Information confirmed that several injured were shifted to Civil Hospital after reports of firing. A heavy police contingent remained deployed on MT Khan Road. Police fired tear gas shells to disperse the crowd, while protest-

ers responded with stone-throwing, according to reports. Traffic police said routes leading to Numaish Chowrangi had been closed and alternative routes were being provided to motorists.

Meanwhile, protests have also been reported in Islamabad and Lahore on Sunday following the assassination of Khamenei.

In Islamabad, Tehreek-e-Jafaria Pakistan announced a protest and a planned encirclement of the US Embassy. Authorities have responded by sealing the Red Zone and deploying additional personnel on all roads leading to it, the report added. Security checkpoints have been intensified, with every vehicle and motorcycle being thoroughly inspected. Armoured vehicles and extra forces have also been deployed. The Islamabad Police urged citizens not to travel towards the Red Zone.

Section 144 has been enforced in Islamabad, said the district administration. Under Section 144, all types of gatherings will be considered illegal. The district administration urged citizens not to participate in any gatherings or assemblies. It warned that strict legal

action would be taken in the event of any protest, demonstration, or gathering. In Lahore, protests have continued outside the Press Club against Israel and the United States' actions against Iran. Security at the US Consulate has been tightened, and fresh police units have arrived to reinforce the area.

Protesters began a sit-in, carrying placards bearing the image of Iran's Supreme Leader. Anti-US slogans were reportedly raised, while the Anti-Riot Force maintained a strong security presence at the protest site.

The United States and Israel said an air strike killed Khamenei as part of what they described as the most ambitious series of attacks on Iran in decades. Iranian state media confirmed the 86-year-old leader's death on Saturday.

US President Donald Trump said the air strikes on Iranian targets were aimed at ending a decades-long threat from Iran and ensuring it could not develop a nuclear weapon, as he sought to justify a risky move that appeared to go against his professed opposition to American involvement in complex overseas conflicts.

Three dead, 14 injured after shooting at bar in US



ASSOCIATED PRESS
Austin (US)

Authorities say three people were killed, and 14 others were wounded after a shooting at a bar in Austin, Texas.

Austin Police Chief Lisa Davis said at a press conference early Sunday that police received a call for reports of a "male shooting" at Buford's, a popular beer

garden in the city's entertainment district.

When police arrived at the scene, they confronted a man with a gun and then "returned fire, killing the suspect." EMS Chief Robert Luckritz said three people were found dead at the scene, and 14 people were injured and transported to hospitals. Of those injured, three were in critical condition.

One killed in UAE after Iran attack



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Dubai

At least one person was killed, and seven were injured after the United Arab Emirates intercepted several Iranian missiles on Saturday. Several waves of Iranian attacks targeting the airport and several other sites across the UAE kept people awake on Saturday night.

One person was killed, and 7 were injured in a drone interception incident targeting Zayed International Airport. Dubai's airport and the iconic Burj Al Arab were among the places hit by what the UAE officials described as drone attacks.

A Government of Dubai media office statement said "a drone caused its shrapnel to spark a fire at the Burj Al Arab hotel," and that it was brought under control. Authorities in Dubai also revealed that debris resulting from air interception operations caused a fire at one of the berths of Jebel Ali Port without causing any injuries.

"Dubai Civil Defence teams immediately responded to handle the fire, while their efforts continue to control it," it said. The authorities also urged the public not to circulate video clips dating back to the Jebel Ali Port fire on July 7, 2021, and confirmed that more reliable information will be broadcast upon receipt. Amid

silent alerts sounded across the country for possible missile attacks, an incident of one such attack taking place at the airport was reported.

"Dubai Airports has confirmed an incident at Dubai International Airport (DXB) just moments ago. Emergency response teams have been activated immediately, and the incident is being handled in coordination with the relevant authorities," the statement said.

It also said that the attack resulted in 4 injuries, and the necessary urgent medical assistance has been provided. "Updated information will be broadcast as soon as it is received," it added. Because of the ongoing fasting month of Ramadan and this being the weekend, people stayed awake late at night, tormented by intermittent sirens on the streets and alerts issued by the authorities.

Local media reports claimed that Abu Dhabi's Zayed International Airport came under overnight attacks, resulting in the death of an unnamed Asian worker and seven injuries. The incident is yet to be confirmed by the government.

The UAE's Ministry of Defence announced that, since the onset of the Iranian attack, the air force and air defence forces of the UAE have successfully engaged and destroyed 137 ballistic missiles.

Killing of Khamenei cynical violation of human morality, says Putin

VINAY SHUKLA
Moscow

The killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was a cynical violation of all norms of human morality and international law, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared in his message to his Tehranian counterpart, the Kremlin said on Sunday.

Khamenei was killed in an airstrike in Tehran on Saturday during a joint Israel-US attack on Iran.

"Please accept my deepest condolences in connection with the assassination of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Seyyed Ali Khamenei, and members of his family, committed in a cynical violation of all norms of human morality and international law," Putin said in his condolence message. Putin's condolence message to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian was published on the Kremlin portal. Earlier on Saturday,



Russia condemned the US-Israeli joint strikes on Iran qualifying it as an "unprovoked" aggression against a sovereign State in violation of international law and called for immediate return to diplomacy.

The Russian Foreign Ministry also described the US and Israeli forces' strikes against the Iranian territory as "a pre-planned" act of aggression against an independent UN member state.

Putin also conducted an emergency meeting of the National Security Council

online on Saturday to discuss the emerging situation following the US-Israeli strikes and Iran's retaliation.

Meanwhile, according to reports more than 2,00,000 Russians are stuck in the region due to closure of their airspaces by Iran and Gulf countries.

The situation in the Middle East and the airport closures have affected not only organised tourists from Russia registered with tour operators, but also those travelling on business trips and independently, State-run TASS

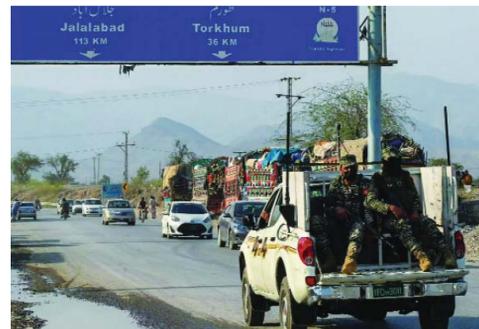
news agency reported. "Approximately 2,00,000 people are unable to leave the UAE or return from vacations in the Maldives and other countries," Alexey Volkov, president of the National Union of Hospitality Industry, told TASS.

UAE and its airports have become a main hub of access to Russia since the Ukraine conflict and closure of EU air space for civilian air traffic under sanction on Moscow.

"The situation remains complex and unpredictable: drone and missile strikes have hit key tourist locations in the UAE, including its most famous hotels.

"And then there are those who aren't counted as tourists at all, but are travelling around the world for business—the Middle East, for example, is currently a major business hub, home to a significant amount of Russian capital, investment, and business," Volkov said. (PTI)

Operation against Afghan Taliban still continuing: Pak



SAJJAD HUSSAIN
Islamabad

A Pakistan minister on Sunday announced that the operation against Afghan Taliban was continuing, refuting social media reports about the conclusion of the blitz.

Pakistan launched its operation on Thursday night in response to the Taliban operatives attacking 53 locations along the more than 2,600km long border, targeting military installations deep in the country through air strikes.

Federal Minister of Parliamentary Affairs Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhry refuted reports that Pakistan halted its

operations, saying that "false and fabricated news is being spread on social media that Pakistan has stopped its operations against Afghanistan".

"The reality is the opposite. In view of the current regional situation, the sharing of PAF and drone footage with the media has been temporarily suspended. The purpose of this decision is to safeguard national security and operational strategy, not to prevent operations," he wrote on X. He further said: "Operations are continuing. The operation against terrorist elements is moving forward with full intensity and wisdom." (PTI)

Trump talks regime change, but history shows that could be very hard

TIM SULLIVAN
Minneapolis

Barely an hour after the first US and Israeli missiles struck Iran, President Donald Trump made clear he hoped for regime change. "Now is the time to seize control of your destiny," he told the Iranian people in a video. "This is the moment for action. Do not let it pass."

Doesn't sound complicated. After all, with Iran's fundamentally unpopular government weakened by fierce airstrikes, some of its top leaders dead or missing and Washington signalling support, how hard could it be to overthrow a repressive

regime? Possibly very hard. So says history.

Washington has a long, complicated past when it comes to regime change. There was Vietnam in the 1960s and 70s, and Panama in 1989. There was Nicaragua in the 1980s, Iraq and Afghanistan in the years after 9/11, and Venezuela just weeks ago. There was also Iran. In 1953, the CIA helped engineer a coup that toppled Iran's democratically elected leader and gave near-absolute power to Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. But as with the shah, who was overthrown in Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution after decades of



increasingly unpopular rule, regime change rarely goes as planned.

Attempts to usher in US-friendly governments often start with clear intentions, whether to support democracy in Iraq or to back an

anti-Communist leader in Congo at the height of the Cold War.

But often those intentions stumble into a political quagmire where democratic dreams turn into civil war, once-compliant dictators

become embarrassments, and American soldiers return home in body bags.

That history has long been a Trump talking point. "We must abandon the failed policy of nation-building and regime change," he said in 2016.

"In the end, the so-called nation-builders wrecked far more nations than they built," he said in a 2025 speech in Saudi Arabia, deriding US efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. The "interventionists were intervening in complex societies that they did not even understand."

Now, after Saturday's actions, a key question emerges: Does today's US

government understand what it's getting into?

It's unclear what regime change would even mean: Iran's economy is in shambles, and dissent remains strong even after a brutal January crackdown on protests left thousands of people dead and tens of thousands under arrest. Many of the nation's key military proxies and allies — Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Assad government in Syria — have been weakened or eliminated. And early Sunday, Iranian state media confirmed Israel and the United States had killed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. (AP)

Airports closed, thousands of travellers stranded

ASSOCIATED PRESS
London

The attack on Iran by the United States and Israel disrupted flights across the Middle East and beyond Saturday as countries around the region closed their airspace and key airports that connect Europe, Africa and the West to Asia were directly hit by strikes.

Airports across the Middle East remained closed Sunday as the conflict moved into its second day. Emirates Airlines suspended all flights to and from Dubai until at least Sunday afternoon. The Qatar airport was closed until at least Monday morning, according to Qatar Airways. Israeli airspace also remained closed Sunday.

The closures have stranded tens of thousands of travellers around the world.

Hundreds of thousands of travellers were either stranded or diverted to other airports Saturday after Israel, Qatar, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait and Bahrain closed their air-



space. There also was no flight activity over the United Arab Emirates, flight tracking website FlightRadar24 said, after the government there announced a "temporary and partial closure" of its airspace.

That led to the closure of key hub airports in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha, and the cancellation of more than 1,800 flights by major Middle Eastern airlines.

The three major airlines that operate at those airports — Emirates, Qatar Airways and Etihad — typically have about 90,000 passengers

per day crossing through those hubs and even more travelers headed to destinations in the Middle East, according to aviation analytics firm Cirium.

Two airports in the United Arab Emirates reported incidents as the government there condemned what it called a "blatant attack involving Iranian ballistic missiles" on Saturday.

Officials at Dubai International Airport — the largest in the United Arab Emirates and one of the busiest in the world — said four people were injured,

while Zayed International Airport in Abu Dhabi said that one person was killed and seven others were injured in a drone strike. Strikes were also reported at Kuwait International Airport.

Though Iran did not publicly claim responsibility, the scope of retaliatory strikes that Gulf nations attributed to Iran extended beyond the American bases that it previously said it would target.

"For travelers, there's no way to sugarcoat this," said Henry Hartevelt, an airline industry analyst and president of Atmosphere Research Group. "You should prepare for delays or cancellations for the next few days as these attacks evolve and hopefully end."

Airlines that are crossing the Middle East will have to reroute flights around the conflict with many flights headed south over Saudi Arabia. That will add hours to those flights and consume additional fuel, adding to the costs airlines will have to absorb. So ticket prices could

quickly start to increase if the conflict lingers. The added flights will also put pressure on air traffic controllers in Saudi Arabia who might have to slow traffic to make sure they can handle it safely. And the countries that closed their airspace will miss out on the overflight fees airlines pay for crossing overhead.

But Mike McCormick, who used to oversee air traffic control for the Federal Aviation Administration before he retired and is now a professor at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, said over the next few days these countries might be able to reopen parts of their airspace once American and Israeli officials share with the airlines where military flights are operating and how capable Iran remains at firing missiles.

"Those countries then will be able to go through and say, okay, we can reopen this portion of our space but we'll keep this portion of our airspace closed," McCormick said.

Pak cancels nearly 184 international flights to West Asia after Iran attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Karachi

At least 184 international flights of different airlines from Pakistan to West Asia have been cancelled since Saturday, owing to the escalating situation after the US and Israel attacked Iran.

A spokesperson for the Civil Aviation Authority confirmed that flights to Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha, Muscat, Sharjah, Riyadh, Jeddah from Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Quetta, Sialkot, Peshawar, and Faisalabad had all been cancelled.

"The flights were on the schedule of different airlines," Hafeez Khan said.

International flights in West Asia have all been badly disrupted or suspended after the closure of the Dubai and Abu Dhabi airports, which serve as a major hub for connecting flights to Europe, the USA, Canada, South America, etc. Airline authorities have



suspended all air traffic in the region because of the increase in missile and drone attacks by Iran on the US bases in the region.

The spokesperson said at least 40 flights were cancelled from Islamabad and another 46 from Lahore.

The Pakistan airspace

remains open for domestic flights, he said. The attack on Iran by the US and Israel disrupted flights across West Asia and beyond as countries around the region closed their airspace, and key airports that connect Europe, Africa and the West to Asia were directly hit by strikes.



PROSPECT

Results of ACAD contest for February 2026 announced



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Results declaring outstanding achievers across four categories — ACAD Senior, ACAD, ACAD Plus, and ACAD Global were released by Extra C. The competitions witnessed enthusiastic participation from across the country, reflecting strong academic engagement and competitive spirit among students nationwide.

According to a Press release, in the ACAD Senior category, Jacob Brahmakulam secured 1st place, followed by Dhirendra Tripathi in 2nd place and Sree Prakash S in 3rd place. In the ACAD category, Dhairya Pandey achieved 1st place, with Saptak Gupta securing 2nd place and Gopal Kumar fin-

ishing 3rd. In the ACAD Plus category, Shradha Shree secured 1st place, Nikilesh Gudalur placed 2nd, and Samruddhi Salgaonkar earned 3rd place. In the ACAD Global category, Ramakrishnan Krishnan secured 1st place, followed by Harish Kamath in 2nd place and Samit Kallianpur in 3rd place.

The ACAD Competitions, an academic initiative of Extra-C, are designed to foster intellectual rigor, analytical thinking, and academic excellence among participants from diverse educational backgrounds.

States with notable participation include Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, with Bihar recording the highest number of registrations.

Iran crisis: No immediate oil disruption for India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

India is unlikely to face any immediate physical disruption in oil supplies despite escalating tensions around Iran and the Strait of Hormuz, but higher crude prices and broader macroeconomic pressures are expected in the near term, officials and analysts said. Indian refiners currently hold sufficient crude inventories to meet at least 10 days of requirements, with fuel stocks covering another 5-7 days, cushioning the impact of any short-duration disruption. Even as rapidly unfolding developments in West Asia raise geopolitical uncertainty, contingency plans - including tapping diversified suppliers in US, West Africa, Latin America and even Russia as well as strategic reserves - are in place, they said.

The Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most critical energy chokepoints, handles nearly 20 per cent of global petroleum liquids and about a fifth of global LNG shipments. About 2.5-2.7 million barrels per day, or roughly 50 per cent of India's crude imports, transit through the route, largely sourced from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait. Close to 60 per cent of India's LNG imports

and almost all of its LPG shipments also pass through the Strait, underscoring its importance to India's energy security.

While a short-lived disruption may have limited supply impact, the immediate fallout is expected to be reflected in oil prices. Brent crude closed near seven-month highs at around \$73 per barrel, up more than \$12 per barrel year-to-date amid rising geopolitical tensions. Traders are modelling heightened volatility, with some scenarios pointing towards \$80 per barrel if supply flows face credible threats.

Iran's state media said February 28 that the Islamic Republic has shut the Strait of Hormuz in response to US and Israeli military strikes.

The closure for a short duration will not have much impact on India as it already has supplies to meet fuel requirement, they said adding in the event of a prolonged disruption or closure of the narrow Strait of Hormuz, the country can recalibrate imports, tapping into its diversified supply sources, including increasing purchases of Russian oil.

Analysts, however, did not expect the Strait to be closed for long as regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Qatar will be economically hit by



such an act and could decisively act. "In case Iran were to force the closure for long, the possibility of a military action by the US and other powers in the region to physically take control of the coastal belt from where the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) exercises control of the sea lane, cannot be ruled out," an analyst said.

For now, India is working on the assumption that the closure will be short, lasting less than a week.

"Indian refineries put together hold anywhere between 10 to 15 days of crude inventories, both in tanks and in transit. Besides, all their fuel tanks are full that can easily meet 7-10 days of the country's fuel requirement," an official said.

"For now, we think the closure of the Strait of

Hormuz will not be very long." Another official said the world has enough crude oil supplies and India can tap sellers as far as Venezuela and Brazil, besides West Africa and the US.

"India had cut purchases from Russia in response to US pressure but we can go back to buying from Moscow in case there is disruption in the Middle East," he said. "The only question is transit time. It takes 5 days for a ship from the Middle East to travel to India while it takes at least a month for those coming from Russia. So it is a question of placing orders well in time." There is also the option of tapping into strategic reserves which hold inventories to meet a week's requirement, he said.

The situation on LNG supplies may turn precarious if

the closure lasts long. While near term supplies are secured, a prolonged closure of Strait of Hormuz may leave India with not enough alternatives. This is because unlike crude oil, most LNG volumes are locked in long-term contracts and only limited volumes are available in the spot or current market, another official said.

LNG prices may soar if India, or China - the other big import of fuel from the Middle East - were to tap into alternate supplies, he said.

Similar is the situation with LPG. The Government is closely monitoring the evolving situation and working on alternatives, another official said. "India's recent pivot back toward Middle Eastern crude has increased its near-term exposure to Hormuz-linked risks. Escalation would most immediately manifest through higher prices, freight and insurance costs and also at last outright supply shock (as of now probability of supply/production reduction is low)," said Sumit Ritolia, Lead Research Analyst, Refining and Modelling at commodity market analytic firm Kpler. He went on to state that while temporary disruptions cannot be ruled out, a prolonged full blockade remains low probability.

"Diversified sourcing,

Russian optionality and layered inventory buffers - including strategic petroleum reserves and commercial stocks - materially reduce the risk of sustained physical shortages. The principal near-term vulnerability is therefore price volatility and macro impact, not structural supply insecurity," he said.

Crude has climbed more than \$12 per barrel year-to-date amid rising geopolitical tensions. Brent futures settled at \$72.87 per barrel on February 27, after touching an intraday high of \$73.54 - the highest level since July 30, 2025. "In the current escalation scenario, the initial impact is likely to be price-driven rather than volume-driven. A geopolitical risk premium would lift Brent prices, alongside increases in freight rates and war-risk insurance costs," Ritolia said.

Even without physical shortages, higher landed crude costs would raise India's import bill and exert pressure on inflation and the current account deficit, he said. Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist at ICRA, said the extent and duration of the West Asia conflict will determine its impact on India's macroeconomic indicators, including inflation, fiscal and current account balances, and remittances.

Assam Rifles organises mega ex-servicemen rally at Salugara, West Bengal today



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Salugara, West Bengal

In a heartfelt tribute to the brave veterans of West Bengal and nearby centres, the Assam Rifles organized a mega Ex-Servicemen Rally under the aegis of the Headquarters Directorate General Assam Rifles at Gp Centre CRPF (Salugara), West Bengal. The rally, themed 'Serving Those Who Served Us', witnessed the participation of over 700 ex-servicemen, including Gallantry awardees, Veer Naris, widows, and their dependents from across the state.

The event aimed to honour the invaluable contributions of the veterans, strengthen bonds with them and address their concerns. Lieutenant General Vikas Lakhera, AVSM, SM, Director

General of Assam Rifles graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. In his address, the Director General Assam Rifles commended the unwavering dedication of the veterans and serving soldiers from West Bengal and its nearby centres, who have played a pivotal role in safeguarding the nation's security and prosperity.

The Director General described these Ex-Servicemen as ambassadors with a mission of working towards the betterment of the region and the locals of their respective villages.

He stressed that the experience these Ex-Servicemen carry in terms of a disciplined and trained soldier has the potential to make significant contribution in social development activities. He advised them not to



be proactive in the post retirement period and play an active role in Nation Building.

The Director General of Assam Rifles highlighted the various beneficiary schemes available to veterans at the venue to include Med Camps by (ECHS Empaneled Hospital), Grievance Cell by the Force and banking facilities which covered the various aspects related to DSP Accounts, update of KYC, queries related to debit/credit card and net banking etc. He also emphasised the efforts to revitalize the Assam Rifles Ex-Servicemen Association (ARESA) and introduced the monthly Samman Samaroh, to honour the esteemed service by our soldiers.

The rally concluded with a communal lunch, where the

ex-servicemen expressed their gratitude to the Assam Rifles for organising the event and reaffirming their commitment to their welfare.

This Assam Rifles Ex-Servicemen Rally brought together the serving and the retired fraternity of Assam Rifles like never before. The Ex-Servicemen of Assam Rifles were re-assured that the Assam Rifles remembered them for their contributions and would look after their welfare and redress their grievances genuinely and in a time bound manner.

The Assam Rifles remains dedicated to honouring the sacrifices of its veterans and ensuring their well-being through such initiatives, embodying the spirit of Serving Those Who Served Us.

Conference on Efficient and Effective Management of Litigation By Centre

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The National Conference of Union Secretaries and Ld Law Officers on "Efficient and Effective Management of Government Litigation" was held on Friday bringing together Secretaries, senior Government officials, Ld Law Officers, and representatives from various departments to deliberate on strengthening litigation practices and enhancing institutional efficiency.

The event witnessed the gracious presence of Arjun Ram Meghwal, Union Minister of State (I/C), Ministry of Law and Justice; Dr TV Somanathan, Cabinet Secretary; R Venkataramani, Attorney General for India; Tushar Mehta, Ld Solicitor General of India, Dr Niraj Verma, Secretary, Department of Justice; and Dr Rajiv Mani, Secretary, Department of Legal Affairs.

The Conference deliberated on litigation scenario across four major themes: service, pension and employment matters; infrastructure, compensation and contractual disputes; fiscal, taxation and revenue cases; and regulatory, enforcement and compliance-driven litigation. Participants noted key challenges such as repetitive service litigation due to non-uniform implementation of legal position, lack of due



consultation before filing counter affidavits, divergent positions taken by different ministries, lack of coordination between Departments and Panel Counsels, and a tendency to file appeals as a default reaction rather than as a considered policy decision, according to a PIB release.

In infrastructure and compensation matters, concerns were raised about escalating land compensation litigation and mounting interest liabilities, routine challenges to arbitral awards, technical complexity in infrastructure contracts leading to inadequate legal vetting, fragmented coordination between technical divisions and legal teams, and under-utilisation of ADR and pre-litigation mediation.

A central emphasis of the deliberations was on reducing avoidable litigation and delays in litigation filing

through robust filtering, better coordination and early dispute resolution. The Conference recommended clear appeal-filtering criteria in service and other matters, nomination of a designated officer in each department for coordinated handling of litigation, and mechanisms for time-bound implementation of court judgments so that repetitive and contempt litigation is minimised. Close and structured coordination with the Department of Legal Affairs and Ld Law Officers was emphasised for important and policy-sensitive cases so that a consistent legal position is taken across ministries.

For infrastructure, compensation and contractual litigation, the Conference endorsed institutionalising structured pre-litigation ADR, especially for land and infrastructure disputes, and struc-

tured settlements in compensation matters to avoid protracted court battles. Also, financial exposure thresholds be explored and examined before challenging arbitral awards, with consultations through committees, so that challenges are filed only in cases with substantial legal or financial implications. Early and mandatory legal vetting of termination, debarment and other high-value contract decisions, as well as stronger in-house mechanisms for quick and fair dispute resolution, were identified as critical steps to reduce fresh litigation.

The deliberations on fiscal, taxation, revenue, and regulatory/enforcement litigation highlighted the need to streamline enforcement strategies and compliance mechanisms so that disputes are resolved at earlier stages and unnecessary matters are not carried to higher forums.

Overall, the Conference reaffirmed the Government of India's commitment to responsible and disciplined litigation, with a focus on reducing avoidable cases, ensuring timely filing and implementation, and strengthening alternative dispute resolution to enhance ease of doing business and citizen trust in Government processes for achieving the goals of Viksit Bharat@2047, said the PIB release.

Deepak Gupta takes over as GAIL chairman

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Deepak Gupta, a seasoned energy sector executive, on Sunday assumed charge as chairman and managing director of GAIL (India) Limited, India's largest gas transmission and marketing company.

A mechanical engineer from Delhi College of Engineering, Gupta holds extensive experience in natural gas transmission, marketing and infrastructure development and held key leadership roles at GAIL across operations, business development and corporate management before this, according to a company statement.

"He brings a comprehensive blend of technical, strategic and board-level leadership. His expertise spans project and construction management, contracts and global procurement, technology selection, business development, operations and maintenance," said Gupta, who replaces Sandeep Kumar Gupta, superannuated on February 28, joined GAIL as Director (Projects) in February 2022. He will have a tenure up to February 28, 2029.

"Under his leadership, GAIL completed the Dabhol breakerwater project of Konkan LNG (subsidiary of GAIL), enabling all-weather operations," it said. "He has pioneered many digital transformation initiatives, enhancing operational agility & transparency in business areas."

During his career spanning 32 years at Engineers India Limited previously, he led many large cross-functional teams to execute landmark projects under complex and challenging conditions, such as the world's



largest single-train Dangote Refinery & Petrochemical Complex in Nigeria, HMEI's mega petrochemical complex at Bathinda, GAIL's petrochemical expansion at Pata. He also led the first greenfield refinery project in Mongolia, contributing significantly to India's global energy diplomacy. "A thought leader and prolific writer, Gupta, has authored several technical papers/articles on critical packages and fast-tracking project execution. His ideas on project acceleration, digitisation and excellence have been institutionalised as best practices," the statement added.

Third edition of Build India Infra Awards 2026 Honours projects' gems

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari has announced that the Centre is set to restructure the BOT model, with ₹2 lakh crore worth of projects to be tendered shortly.

Gadkari, Union Minister for Road Transport & Highways, said this while addressing the Third edition of the Build India Infra Awards 2026 in the national Capital on February 24.

The ceremony was organised by Build India Foundation with Primus Partners as Knowledge Partner and the event was graced by Union ministers CR Patil, Sarbanand Sonowal, Shipping & Waterways, said, "The Build India Infra Awards have grown into a meaningful national platform encouraging stakeholders in nation-building. Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India's infrastructure transformation - especially in ports, shipping and waterways - has gained unprecedented momentum. This is a golden opportunity for 140 crore Indians to work together and build Atmanirbhar Bharat".

Calling out for integrated



He noted that the strengthened BOT approach will drive sustainable infrastructure growth aligned with India's economic ambitions.

Addressing the grand award ceremony before giving the awards in Port Sector, Sarbanand Sonowal, Union Minister for Ports, Shipping & Waterways, said, "The Build India Infra Awards have grown into a meaningful national platform encouraging stakeholders in nation-building. Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India's infrastructure transformation - especially in ports, shipping and waterways - has gained unprecedented momentum. This is a golden opportunity for 140 crore Indians to work together and build Atmanirbhar Bharat".

Calling out for integrated

water management, CR PATIL, Minister of Jal Shakti, said that Water has become the new gold and drinking water access remain fundamental to improving rural livelihoods and long-term sustainability. He also launched the new initiatives River to Reef by EnviroVision - an integrated initiative connecting rivers, wetlands, and oceans into one shared national responsibility.

Congratulating the Build India Foundation, Shripad Naik, Minister of State for New & Renewable Energy said, "Institutions and experts working in roads, railways, aviation, ports, urban transport, water infrastructure, energy, and other critical sectors are accelerating India's development. It is imperative that we focus on aligning future infrastruc-

ture with clean energy adoption and climate resilience."

While V Somanna, Minister of State for Railways & Jal Shakti noted that railway modernisation, station redevelopment and multimodal connectivity are improving passenger experience while supporting regional economic growth, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Minister of Communications, addressed through Video link, spoke about digital connectivity as a foundational layer for smart infrastructure and inclusive growth.

The event also brought together leading policy voices and sector experts, in a panel discussion on Viksit Bharat with sectoral discussions focusing on technology-led infrastructure, sustainability and future urban connectivity, highlighting the

importance of collaboration between Government, industry and knowledge institutions.

Detailing on the third edition of the award, Vaibhav Dange, Co-Founder & Director, Build India Foundation, said that the initiative recognises infrastructure that improves connectivity, efficiency and quality of life, while inspiring the next generation of nation-building projects.

"The growing momentum of the awards is reflected in this third edition, which witnessed strong nationwide participation with 132 nominations evaluated through a rigorous and transparent jury process. The wide representation reflects growing industry confidence in the platform and a shift toward evaluating infrastructure through measurable public value, sustainability outcomes and innovation in execution," Dange added.

Amitabh Kant, G20 Sherpa & Jury Chair said the awards have evolved into a credible institutional platform that evaluates infrastructure not merely on scale, but on measurable outcomes and long-term public value.



BRIEFLY

Alex Ferguson special guest as Hearts wins to extend lead



Watched by Alex Ferguson, Hearts moved seven points clear in the Scottish Premiership after beating Aberdeen 1-0. Ferguson, the former Aberdeen and Manchester United manager, was invited to the match as a guest of Hearts coach Derek McInnes. Claudio Braga scored the decisive goal in the 28th minute for Hearts, which will be watching the Old Firm derby between Rangers and Celtic on Sunday with interest. Rangers is in second place, two points ahead of Celtic. McInnes said he was in his office with Ferguson ahead of the game and would be catching up with him again afterward. "It was nice for him to see Tynecastle the way it was and see a winning performance," McInnes said. "He's watched us a lot this season and he's quite tuned in to what we're doing so I'm grateful that he's made the effort to come and see us today." Not since 1985, when Aberdeen was champion under Ferguson, has a team other than Celtic or Rangers been Scottish champion.

Lamine Yamal scores first hat trick for Barcelona



Barcelona superstar Lamine Yamal scored the first hat trick of his career in a 4-1 win over Villarreal that moved his team four points clear atop La Liga. At 18 years, 230 days, Yamal is the youngest player to score his first hat trick in La Liga, according to Opta. His haul included a brilliant solo effort for his second goal, which saw him beat a player as he cut in from the right wing and curl a shot high into the far corner. "He's exceptional and he's here to make people happy," Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said on Saturday. "We need his goals to give him confidence. He's very young and he still has to improve, but everyone knows the quality he has. "Opponents put two or three players on him and that makes it difficult. Today I'm very happy for him. When he enjoys his football, it's perfect for him and for us." Substitute Robert Lewandowski added Barcelona's fourth in stoppage time at Camp Nou. Second-placed Real Madrid hosts Getafe on Monday with a chance to trim Barcelona's lead back to one point. Also on Saturday, Julian Alvarez scored a late winner as Atletico Madrid won at Real Oviedo 1-0 and moved to third place, level on points with Villarreal. Inaki Williams equalized for Athletic Bilbao in a 1-1 draw at Rayo Vallecano and Real Sociedad defeated Mallorca 1-0.

Kane scores 2 more as Bayern beats Dortmund

CIARAN FAHEYAP
■ Berlin

Harry Kane scored twice again and Bayern Munich opened an 11-point lead in the Bundesliga with a 3-2 win at Borussia Dortmund in Der Klassiker. Joshua Kimmich let fly with his left boot to score the winner with a volley in the 87th minute on Saturday, just four minutes after Daniel Svensson equalized for Dortmund with a brilliant volley inside the left post. Nico Schlotterbeck put Dortmund 1-0 up at the break, but Serge Gnabry set up Kane's response and the England star got his second from the penalty spot - after a foul by Schlotterbeck on Josip Stanisic - to take his

league tally to 30 goals this season. Kane has scored two goals or more for the fourth successive game and is threatening Robert Lewandowski's season record of 41.

Dortmund disappointed: It's the second painful defeat for Dortmund in as many games after its Champions League exit to Atalanta on Wednesday despite going into their playoff second leg with a 2-0 advantage.

Dortmund top scorer Serhou Guirassy and defender Ramy Bensebaini started as substitutes with coach Niko Kovac explaining that Ramadan fasting was impacting the Muslim players' fitness. "It takes a lot of energy if you can't eat and



drink all day," Kovac said. "That's why I couldn't bring the guys on today. We have the data. You can see that if the players can't eat and drink it has an impact on performance." Schlotterbeck headed the opener from a

free kick against the run of play in the 26th. The Dortmund defender was somewhat fortunate to be on the field after escaping with a yellow card for a bad challenge on Stanisic just minutes before. Dortmund captain

Emre Can had to go off before the break with a suspected left knee injury. Dayot Upamecano almost equalised after the break when he crashed against the post after just missing Gnabry's cross, and Kane finally got Bayern's reply in the 54th with an easy finish to Gnabry's cross.

Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel got his left hand to the ball but couldn't stop the penalty flying in under the crossbar for Kane's 30th goal of the season.

Kovac made three changes in the 75th, including sending on 17-year-old Italian forward Samuele Inacio for his Bundesliga debut.

Svensson celebrated with a somersault after drawing

Dortmund level, but Bayern wasn't finished. Ten rounds remain and only an improbable collapse will stop Bayern from making it 13 Bundesliga titles in the 14 years since Dortmund won it back-to-back in 2012.

Bremen ends winless streak: Werder Bremen finally ended its 13-game run without a win by beating relegation rival Heidenheim 2-0 in their bottom-of-the-table scrap. Bremen missed a host of chances before Jovan Milosevic scored from Romano Schmid's cross in the 57th minute, and an own goal from Hennes Behrens in stoppage time confirmed Bremen's first win after three defeats under new coach Daniel Thioune. (AP)

Balogun scores again in Monaco win

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Paris

American forward Folarin Balogun continued his excellent run of form with another goal as Monaco defeated Angers 2-0 in Ligue 1 while Paris Saint-Germain extended its lead.

PSG was four points ahead in the table after beating Le Havre 1-0. Balogun put the host in the lead in the 57th minute with his fourth goal in seven matches on Saturday. Luck was on his side when his header connected with a cross; the ball bounced back on an opponent then on his leg before crossing the goalline.

Monaco dominated and deservedly doubled its lead in the 62nd when Simon Adingra slotted home with a powerful curled shot from outside the box.

Monaco posted a third straight win and moved up



to seventh in the standings, with 12th-placed Angers lagging eight points behind.

PSG won thanks to Bradley Barcola, who headed the ball home in the 37th minute from winger Lee Kang-in's cross. PSG had several chances to add more luster to the scoreline but a shot from Khvicha Kvaratskhelia hit the post and a penalty by Desire Doue was saved by Le Havre goalkeeper Mory Diaw. PSG was without injured players

including star forward Ousmane Dembele.

Second-placed Lens drew at Strasbourg 1-1 on Friday. **Nordin's first goal for Rennes:** Having come back to Ligue 1, Arnaud Nordin scored his first goal for Rennes in a 1-0 win over Toulouse.

Nordin struggled for playing time in the Bundesliga with Mainz and joined Rennes on loan in January until the end of the season. The winger's goal in the 27th helped Rennes to a

third consecutive win. The Brittany club moved level on points with fourth-placed Marseille, which hosts Lyon on Sunday. On a five-match winless run, Toulouse remained in 10th place.

Nordin jumped higher than defender Charlie Cresswell and broke the deadlock with a header. Nordin previously played for Saint-Etienne and Montpellier. He has more than 200 French league games under his belt.

Rennes hired coach Franck Haise this month following Habib Beye's exit and was tasked with guiding the team to fourth spot and a place in the Champions League qualifying rounds.

Celebrating grandmas: On the occasion of Grandmothers' Day in France on Sunday, Rennes got players from both teams to walk onto the pitch accompanied by 22 grandmothers.

AFC Champions League postponed after Iran attacks

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Kuala Lumpur

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has postponed continental club championship playoffs scheduled in the Middle East this week in response to the US and Israel attacks on Iran.

Soccer's Asian governing body issued a statement Sunday saying the AFC Champions League Elite Round of 16 games scheduled for Monday and Tuesday in the West Region will be rescheduled. The AFC Champions League 2 and AFC Challenge League quarterfinals scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday in the West zone will also be postponed. No new dates have been set.

Cristiano Ronaldo's Saudi club Al-Nassr is among the



teams involved in the Asian Champions League Two competition. Matches in the East Region across all of the AFC's continental championships will continue as scheduled, organisers said.

"The AFC will continue to closely monitor this rapidly evolving situation and remains resolute in ensuring the safety and security of all players, teams, officials, and fans," the AFC said in a statement. The AFC is hosting the Women's Asian Cup in Australia starting Sunday.

World champion D Gukesh held by Navara in Prague Chess Festival

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Prague (Czech Republic)

World champion D Gukesh's hunt for his first victory continued as he was held to a draw by David Navara of Czech Republic in the fourth round of the Prague International Chess Festival here. On a day when Jorden van Foreest of Holland nosed ahead of the field with his third victory in four games, defending champion Aravindh Chithambaram went down fighting against Vincent Keymer of Germany.

Van Foreest defeated Nodirbek Yakubboev of Uzbekistan while the other two games in the 10-player round-robin tournament ended in draws.

American Hans Moke Niemann drew with Parham Maghsoodloo of Iran and David Antón Guijarro got the same result against Nodirbek Yakubboev of Uzbekistan.

With five rounds still to come and the event knocking on the doors of crossing the half-way barrier, van Foreest, on three points, is now followed by Abdusattorov and



Navara, who in turn are a half point ahead of Yakubboev, Keymer and Guijarro.

The remaining four participants — Chithambaram,

Gukesh, Niemann and Maghsoodloo — are all tied on the seventh spot on 1.5 points apiece. Navara may be past his prime but, having played

chess at a high level in the past, has helped him a great deal here. The Czech number one had to defend a difficult position against Gukesh out of a Ruy Lopez Berlin but he denied the world champion any decisive advantage.

The end result was a level rook and pawns endgame wherein Gukesh had to split the point when bare kings remained on board after 72 moves. Chithambaram's choice of sticking to the Philidor defense came as a surprise to Keymer who seized the initiative early

with a king side attack. The Indian lost a pawn in the tactical melee and then lost a Bishop without much counter play in this nearly one-sided encounter.

Van Foreest has been in great form recently and followed up with his victory over Gukesh by scalping for Yakubboev. The Dutchman was tenacious in a difficult middle game and hung in with his black pieces as white tried to penetrate with his heavy pieces and in the end was rewarded as Yakubboev blew his position away.

Lukaku's last-gasp goal ends Napoli's winless run

DANIELLA MATARAP
■ Milan

Romelu Lukaku's first goal of the season with the last kick of the match ended Napoli's winless run.

Lukaku, who had played just 41 minutes this campaign following a serious preseason thigh injury, pounced in the sixth minute of stoppage time to help Napoli win at bottom club Hellas Verona 2-1 on Saturday. He appeared to tear up when the final whistle blew seconds later. His last goal was on May 23 followed by a terrible few months. Shortly after his torn thigh, his father died suddenly in September at 58.

"On a personal level soccer gives you a lot. It has given



me everything but losing my father like I lost him weighs on me every day," Lukaku told DAZN while struggling to hold back tears.

"But it is what it is and I carry on for my daughters, for my brother and for Napoli which has given me so much. Because before arriving at Napoli I was dead. Last year we did something wonderful,

this year is a bit difficult for us, but we have to look forwards and do everything to finish as high as possible in the table," he said.

It was Napoli's first win in four matches in all competitions. The defending Serie A champion remained third in the league table, 14 points below leader Inter Milan after the Nerazzurri beat

Genoa 2-0. Verona remained nine points from safety.

Napoli got off to a great start as Rasmus Hojlund's looping header from 12 meters gave it the lead after less than two minutes.

However, Hojlund was also involved in the equaliser in the 65th. He attempted to clear a Verona corner but it came out to Jean-Daniel Akpa Akpro, whose shot was deflected in by Hojlund. The goal was credited to Akpa Akpro as the initial shot was on target.

Verona almost won it in stoppage time but Kieron Bowie couldn't keep his attempt on target after Napoli goalkeeper Alex Meret flapped aimlessly at a cross.

And instead it was Napoli which snatched the win. A

corner was played short and eventually crossed in by Giovane for fellow substitute Lukaku to follow in first time from close range.

Lucky 13 for Inter: Inter opened up a 13-point gap at the top of Serie A and rebounded from a disappointing Champions League exit to Bodø/Glimt midweek. Federico Dimarco started and ended the move in the opening goal in the 31st. Dimarco found Henrikh Mkhitaryan and raced into the box to receive the lofted, return pass and volley in from an improbable angle.

Hakan Calhanoglu drilled a spot kick into the bottom right corner in the 70th after Genoa midfielder Alessandro Amorim was penalised for handball.

ODI called off in Abu Dhabi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Karachi

The second one day match of the ongoing series between Pakistan Shaheens and England Lions was called off in Abu Dhabi on Saturday due to the prevailing security situation in the region.

A Pakistan Cricket Board official confirmed that the match, scheduled to be played today, was cancelled and all players and team officials have been instructed to remain indoors at their hotel as a precautionary measure.

The decision was taken following advice from the England and Wales Cricket Board in view of the escalating situation in Abu Dhabi.

"There will be no practice session as well and the team



has been advised to remain indoors," the official said, adding that the safety and security of players and support staff remains the top priority. The PCB is in regular contact with the ECB and continues to monitor the situation closely.

The board will decide on the future of the series once Middle East airspace reopens, including whether to bring the Shaheens squad back to

Pakistan or continue with the remaining fixtures depending on the security scenario. The disruption follows coordinated military strikes launched by the United States and Israel on Iran on February 28, which prompted retaliatory missile fire by Tehran across parts of the Gulf and forced several countries to shut or restrict their airspace.

3,500 runners take part in Chandigarh marathon

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Chandigarh

Ethiopia's Olbana Negasa Yadate and Meskerem Tesfaye Fikadu emerged winners in the men's and women's full marathon categories, respectively, as around 3,500 runners participated in the Chandigarh International Marathon on Sunday.

In the half-marathon (21 km), Harmanjot Singh of India and Ethiopia's Tsehay Desalegn clinched the men's and women's titles respectively.

The 10-km run saw Sahil Kapoor win the men's race,



while Soniya, also from India, finished first in the women's category.

Organised by the Chandigarh administration, the marathon featured four competitive categories: 42 km (full marathon), 21 km (half marathon), 10 km, and 5 km.

Savita opts out as Salima Tete to lead India in Hockey WC Qualifiers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Hyderabad

Veteran goalkeeper and former skipper Savita Punia has opted out of Women World Cup Qualifiers due to personal reasons as Hockey India on Sunday named a 20-member squad, to be led by mid-fielder Salima Tete.

The FIH Hockey World Cup 2026 Qualifiers is scheduled to be held in Hyderabad from March 8 to 14.

Hosts India, England, Scotland, Korea, Italy, Uruguay, Wales, and Austria will be competing for three qualification spots at the FIH Hockey World Cup Belgium & Netherlands 2026 set to be held in August. The teams are divided into two pools, with



England, Korea, Italy, and Austria in Pool A, while hosts India, Scotland, Uruguay, and Wales in Pool B.

According to sources, Savita has taken a break for family reasons. "Savita was

not part of the national camp ahead of the tournament as she opted out due to family reasons. That's why there was no reason to consider her," a source told PTI.

Seasoned Salima will continue to lead the side. The squad comprises of Bansari Solanki and Bichu Devi Kharibam sharing the goal-keeping responsibilities.

Sushila Chanu Pukhrabam, Nikki Pradhan,

Manisha Chauhan, Udita, and Ishika Chaudhary form the defensive unit while captain Tete, Neha, Sunelita Toppo, Sakshi Rana, Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, Rutaja Dadaso Pisal, and Deepika Soreng will occupy the midfield.

In attack, the team boasts flair and finishing prowess with Navneet Kaur, Ishika, Lalremsiami, Beauty Dungdung, Baljeet Kaur, and Annu in the line up.

"We are really looking forward to our first tournament together. We have been working on the fitness and the tactics, so everybody understands their tasks and role in the team. We will play two practice matches in Hyderabad to be fully ready for the matches ahead," chief

coach Sjoerd Marijne said. India will open their campaign against Uruguay on March 8, followed by matches against Scotland and Wales on March 9 and 11 March respectively.

Squad: Bansari Solanki, Bichu Devi Kharibam.

Defenders: Sushila Chanu Pukhrabam, Nikki Pradhan, Manisha Chauhan, Udita, Ishika Chaudhary.

Midfielders: Neha, Salima Tete, Sunelita Toppo, Sakshi Rana, Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, Rutaja Dadaso Pisal, Deepika Soreng.

Forwards: Navneet Kaur, Ishika, Lalremsiami, Beauty Dungdung, Baljeet Kaur, Annu.

Sanju's 97 not out seals India's semifinal berth

TAPAN MOHANTA ■ Kolkata

Perpetually under scrutiny, Sanju Samson rose above the noise to produce a match-winning 97 not out as India defeated West Indies by five wickets in their T20 World Cup Super Eights match to reach the semifinals, here on Sunday.

India face England in the semifinals at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on March 5. Asked to bat, West Indies chased Roston Chase's foundation before unleashing a late assault by Rovman Powell (34 not out; 19 balls) and Jason Holder (37 not out; 22 balls) to post an imposing 195 for 4.

In front of a packed Eden Gardens with over 65,000 in attendance, Sanju stood tall on a night when India's in-form batters faltered under pressure. His magnificent knock helped India reach 199 for 5 in 19.2 overs.

Abhishek Sharma (10 off 11 balls) endured a forgettable outing and also survived two dropped catches, while Ishan Kishan (10 off 6 balls) also got out cheaply.

Skipper Suryakumar Yadav (18 off 16 balls), the otherwise dependable Tilak Varma (27 off 15 balls) and Hardik Pandya (17 off 14 balls) also failed to convert their starts.

Amid that backdrop, Sanju, playing in only his third match of the T20 World Cup,



became the defining figure, striking 12 fours and four sixes in his 50-ball unbeaten knock. He batted through the chase with poise and authority to seal the win with four balls to spare.

Sanju brought the scores level in the 19th over by heaving Romario Shepherd's attempted yorker high over square leg for a towering six.

He then sealed the chase cleanly over a leaping mid-on for four to take India into the semifinals and end West Indies' campaign at the very venue where they lifted their second and last World Cup in 2016. As "Maa Tuihe Salaam" echoed the stands, Sanju dropped to his knees, removed his helmet and said

a quiet prayer in a moment of relief, gratitude and redemption while the BCCI top brass gave a standing ovation.

Sanju first steadied the innings in a 58-run third-wicket stand off 35 balls with Suryakumar, absorbing pressure before shifting gears.

After the captain's dismissal, India briefly stalled, but Sanju remained composed, shunning reckless strokeplay and keeping the chase on track. The decisive push came through a 42-run partnership off 26 balls with Tilak, which tilted the contest firmly India's way. Suryakumar fell against the run of play just after the midway mark, slicing Joseph to deep point where Sherfane Rutherford held a fine catch.

From being 98/2 needing just as many from the back end, India then drifted into a brief lull eating up 15 deliveries without a boundary and was further pushed back by the loss of their well-set captain. But there was no sense of panic as the duo batted with composure.

West Indies introduced their partnership-breaker Roston Chase with Tilak newly at the crease, the left-hander beginning watchfully. But Tilak exploded into rhythm against Joseph in his next over with three back to back boundaries.

After Sanju drilled the first ball straight down the ground for four, it was time for Tilak to take over with his sinewy

wrists. He crunched a lofted drive over mid-off, sliced one through point and then clipped a low full toss through square leg. The brief stagnation ended with a 17-run over to give India's run-chase the big impetus in the middle overs.

His 26-ball fifty reflected both control and intent.

Off Gudakesh Motie, he rocked back to cut a good-length delivery through point for four to reach the landmark, calmly acknowledging the applause before resuming his business-like approach. It has been a roller-coaster ride for Sanju who was sidelined more than once before regaining his place. (PTI)

Raza steals spotlight in losing game against Proteas

BHARAT SHARMA ■ New Delhi

Sikandar Raza singled-handedly kept Zimbabwe in the game with a special all-round performance before a shaky South Africa were able to steady the ship for a five-wicket win in their final Super Eights game of the T20 World Cup here on Sunday.

After opting to bat, Raza made a sublime 73 off 43 balls in an otherwise ordinary batting display as South Africa limited Zimbabwe to 153 for seven.

After removing the dangerous duo of Aiden Markram and Quinton de Kock in his first two overs in the power-play, Raza returned to dismiss a rampaging Dewald

Brevis (42 off 18 balls) leaving the Proteas at 101 for five in the 11th over.

With another 53 runs needed and the odd ball keeping low, South Africa felt the pressure but Tristan Stubbs (21 not out off 24 balls) and George Linde (31 not out off 21 balls) were able to get the job done in 17.5 overs.

Losing their first three wickets inside the power-play, Brevis and David Miller did what they are known for to take the wind of Zimbabwe's sails. A barrage of big hits and all of a sudden the momentum was back with South Africa.

There were few more hiccups in the run chase but Stubbs and Linde ensured



South African players shake hands with Zimbabwe players after winning in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 cricket match between Zimbabwe and South Africa, at Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi (PTI)

South Africa carry their unbeaten run into the semifinal against New Zealand in Kolkata.

Zimbabwe, on the other hands, lost all their three games in the Super Eights phase after topping the

group stage. Despite the loss, Raza stole the show in the afternoon game at Ferozshah Kotla. The Zimbabwe captain got the fours and sixes at will while the other batters struggled to find the same flow against high quality pace attack.

The batters, barring Raza, tried to attack the likes of Kwenza Maphaka, Anrich Nortje and the in-form Lungi Ngidi but were unsuccessful. Maphaka and Nortje are not even part of the usual South Africa eleven with Kagiso Rabada, Marco Jansen and Keshav Maharaj rested from the inconsequential game heading into the semifinal.

Having done well to reach the Super Eights, Zimbabwe

found it tough to replicate their league stage success against the bigger teams.

Raza knows what they need to do to consistently challenge the established teams but they are not there yet. Power-hitting is a critical aspect of the shortest format and the team needs more batters like Raza to put high quality attacks under pressure. On Sunday, openers Tadiwanashe Marumani (7) and Brian Bennett (15) began well against left-arm spinner George Linde but could not force the pace against the pacers.

Left-handed Marumani saw his leg-stump rattled as he attempted to smash left-arm pacer Maphaka out of the park. (PTI)



Exit from T20 World Cup casts gloom in Pakistan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Karachi

Pakistan may have ended their T20 World Cup campaign on a winning note but the team's overall performance in the mega event has cast a gloom over the country's cricket fraternity.

"You get one chance in two years' time to leave an imprint of your country's cricket excellence and you fail again. It is very disappointing to see all this," former captain and batting great Javed Miandad said on Sunday.

The batting maestro said the more he watched T20 cricket, the more he realises it is now a very methodical format and the Pakistan players are not able to keep up with the other teams.

Miandad said the team's performance against the higher-ranked teams is a matter of great concern, and the Pakistan Cricket Board needs to take some radical decisions now.

Former captain Mohammad Yousuf said a few players had been given too many opportunities to

establish themselves in T20 cricket and have failed to deliver in major events.

"It is time to move on and learn from our blunders," he said. Former skipper Moin Khan said that until Pakistan are not able to defeat higher-ranked teams, it would never win an ICC event.

"You can't win a major tournament unless you have the capability to beat top teams. Unfortunately, we have made too many mistakes in selection and on the field. More importantly, our main players didn't fire in the World Cup," he lamented. Former skipper Babar Azam, incumbent captain Salman Ali Agha and other senior players such as Shadab Khan, Shaheen Shah Afridi, and Mohammad Nawaz are facing intense criticism. Agha is expected to step down from leadership role after returning home.

Saqlain Mushtaq, who has also coached Pakistan in the past, has also faced lot of criticism for trying to defend his son-in-law Shadab's performances by putting the blame on head coach Mike Hesson.

Healy quits ODI cricket on a high

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Hobart

Captain Alyssa Healy bid adieu to ODI cricket on a glorious note, smashing a rampaging 158 as Australia whitewashed India 3-0 in the series with a 185-run thrashing of the world champions in the third and final match here on Sunday.

It was a fairy tale ODI swansong for the 35-year-old Healy as her 158 and Beth Mooney's unbeaten 106 powered Australia to a mammoth 409 for seven after being asked to bat. Chasing a massive target of 410, India were all out for 224 in 45.1 overs to lose the three-match series 0-3.

Healy will draw curtains to her illustrious international career after playing the one-off pink-ball Test in Perth against India from March 6.

She has accumulated 3777 runs from 126 ODIs, hitting eight centuries and 19 half tons. Australia lost Phoebe Litchfield (14) early but Healy and Georgia Voll (62 off 52) shared 134 runs for the second wicket to take Australia forward.

Healy and Mooney then

stitched 145 runs for the third wicket to hand Australia a launching pad for the big score. Playing in her 126th ODI, Healy decorated her eighth ODI century with as many 27 boundaries and two maximums from the 98 balls she faced.

Voll hit seven fours and one six during her knock, while Mooney's knock was studded with 10 hits to the fence and one six. Annabel Sutherland (23) and Nicola Cary (34 off 15) played good hands towards the end. For India, Sneha Rana (2/66) picked up two wickets while and Shree Charani (2/106) became only the third bowler to concede 100-plus runs in an ODI.

India never really got going in their run chase as they lost wickets at regular intervals. Vice-captain and in-form Smriti Mandhana was the first to depart in the second over before Pratika Rawal (27 off 21) and Jemimah Rodrigues (42 off 29) added 54 runs for the second wicket.

But the floodgates opened once Rawal departed in the eighth over, caught plumb in front of the wicket by Annabel Sutherland.

Jayasuriya to quit as Sri Lanka head coach after team's elimination from T20WC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo

Sanath Jayasuriya has decided to step down as Sri Lanka's head coach in the wake of his team's abysmal performance in the T20 World Cup.

Co-hosts Sri Lanka lost all their games in the Super 8s stage. In the preliminary stage they were beaten by Zimbabwe and recorded wins against Australia and the lowly Oman and Ireland.

"My contract ends in June but I will go before that, I will be talking to Sri Lanka Cricket to decide my stepping down,"



Jayasuriya told reporters after Sri Lanka lost to Pakistan on Saturday.

"We should have done better, I am sorry and I apologize to fans," Jayasuriya, the player-of-the-tournament when Sri

Lanka won the 1996 ODI World Cup, said.

He said Sri Lanka was badly hampered by the injuries to Wanindu Hasaranga, Matheesha Pathirana and Kusal Mendis.

"Their replacements could not perform to the levels required. Hasaranga was my best player you can't easily find a replacement for him," Jayasuriya said blaming both bowler and batter inconsistency for the poor show.

Over the one-and-a-half years of his services Sri Lanka improved their rankings across formats, Jayasuriya said.

We did not take right decisions under pressure: Salman Ali Agha

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Pallekele (Sri Lanka)

Pakistan captain Salman Ali Agha says they did not take right decisions under pressure in the T20 World Cup where they failed to perform to their full potential.

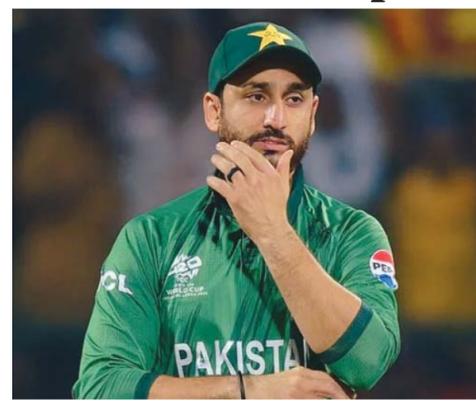
Pakistan defeated co-hosts and already-ousted Sri Lanka by a narrow five-run margin in their last Super Eight stage match but that was not enough to book a place in the semifinals.

"If you see the entire tournament, we have underperformed. In the 20 over game, we played 18 overs very well, and the other team is allowed to lay two overs well. But, yes our last three overs execution was not good.

"We have done better bowling than this in the past. We are a better bowling unit. We were missing our execution," Agha said at the post-match press conference on Saturday night.

The skipper took full responsibility for the below-par performance. "...We will take full responsibility. Why not? Because we were involved in selecting the team and we were responsible for the players. I will take responsibility and I'm sure the coach will also take," Agha said.

He said decision making under pressure situations was a big issue with Pakistan, which needs to be sorted out for better results in ICC events.



them, we have to take better decisions when we are under pressure. Because basically, you make mistakes under

pressure. And in ICC events, the pressure is high because you're playing against the best teams in the world.

"Every game is very important because if you lose a game, it feels like you are out of the tournament. So, I think when you are under pressure, you have to make good decisions," Agha said.

Agha feels the need of the hour for Pakistan is to improve their game when put under pressure situations.

"...You are absolutely right that we didn't reach the semi-finals in the last four ICC tournaments. The reason is that we have to increase (better) our game playing under pressure. And when the pressure increases, how to improve our decision making. I think that matters more right now.

"Because whenever there is pressure, I think our deci-

sion making is not as good as it should be. When you come to the World Cup or ICC events, there is always pressure. If your decision making is not good under that pressure, then the result will be like this."

Agha refrained from saying if he will leave T20 captaincy after the dismal campaign.

"I came in at number 3 and played well in in Sri Lanka and Australia series. I couldn't give the performance I should have given.

"We haven't played as well as we should have in the World Cup. Any decision taken right now will be emotional. We will go back and take some time and then make the required decision," he concluded.

We're safe but there is a little bit of worry, says Sindhu's coach Irwansyah

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Indonesian coach Irwansyah Adi Pratama, who trains two-time Olympic medallist P V Sindhu, had a narrow escape after an explosion occurred close to where they were stationed at Dubai Airport while travelling to Birmingham for the All England Championships.

Sindhu and Irwansyah were left stranded at Dubai International Airport after

flight operations were suspended following escalating tensions in the Middle East. The tournament is scheduled to begin on Tuesday.

Explosions were reported across parts of the Gulf after Iran responded with a salvo of missiles, including in the United Arab Emirates' capital Abu Dhabi and in Dubai, prompting the suspension of all flights at Dubai airport.

"In Dubai at the moment, flights getting cancelled. There was an explosion in airport, so

are stuck here at the moment," Irwansyah told PTI.

"They have put us in the hotel, we are okay but again there is a little bit of worry at the same time. We want to go to All England. I hope we can fly out today because Sindhu's match is on Wednesday."

Meanwhile, the Badminton World Federation (BWF) said it was closely monitoring the travel challenges arising from the ongoing geopolitical situation in the Middle East



along with Badminton England. "We remain in regular contact with teams and players whose journeys to Birmingham for the YONEX All England Open 2026 may be affected.

The safety and wellbeing of all athletes, officials and support personnel remain our highest priority," BWF said in a statement.

"BWF is working with the tournament organisers and national associations to assess travel conditions,

while our operations teams maintain real-time oversight of the situation and stand ready to assist delegations experiencing delays or route changes.

"This includes reviewing and preparing potential contingencies within the competition schedule should any players experience delayed arrival. We will continue to share updates as the situation evolves and more information becomes available."

Sindhu on Sunday morning

detailed the tense moments on social media.

"The ordeal continues to unfold, and the situation is becoming more frightening by the hour. A few hours ago, there was an explosion close to where we were holed up at the airport," she wrote on social media.

"My coach had to quickly run out of the area as he was closest to the smoke and debris. It was an extremely tense and scary moment for all of us."