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WATER CONTAMINATION  
Congress questions  
govt. over  
Indore toll

NEWS » PAGE 9

FATE OF ARAVALLIS

An ancient range stands battered by machinery

And the people of the foothills bear the brunt

GROUND ZERO » PAGE 7



JAISHANKAR ON PAKISTAN  
India has the right to guard  
itself against terrorism

NEWS » PAGE 8

## U.S. 'locked and loaded' as Iran protests turn deadly

Trump's threat to intervene against protest crackdown drew sharp reactions from Iranian officials who warned that U.S. interference would 'destabilise' the region and 'destroy' American interests

Stanly Johny  
CHENNAI

U.S. President Donald Trump on Friday threatened to intervene if Iran used lethal force against protesters, drawing swift and angry responses from Iranian officials who warned that American troops and bases in West Asia would become legitimate targets if Washington interfered.

"If Iran shoots and violently kills peaceful protesters, which is their custom, the United States of America will come to their rescue. We are locked and loaded and ready to go," Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post.

Mr. Trump's threat came at a time when protests over poor economic conditions in Iran turned



If Iran [shoots] and violently kills peaceful protesters, which is their custom, the United States of America will come to their rescue

DONALD TRUMP, U.S. President

X Trump must realize that U.S. intervention in this internal matter will lead to destabilizing the entire region and destroying American interests

ALI LARIJANI, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council

deadly on Thursday with multiple casualties. Iran's Fars news agency said at least seven people were killed in clashes, including one security official.

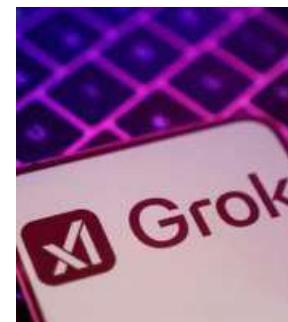
"With the statements by Israeli officials and Donald Trump, what has been going on behind the scenes is now clear," Ali Larijani, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, wrote on social media in response to Mr. Trump's post. "We distinguish between the stance of the protesting shopkeepers and the actions of disruptive actors, and Trump should know that U.S. interference in this internal

matter would mean destabilizing the entire region and destroying America's interests," he added.

The protests began last Sunday in Tehran when shopkeepers downed shutters over a sharp fall in the value of the rial. Iranian officials initially acknowledged the economic pressure and promised to address their grievances. But protests spread across the country in the following days leading to deadly clashes between the security personnel and protesters, whom state media and officials dubbed "rioters".

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi raised an alarm over the issue in a letter to Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnav earlier in the day.

X did not have an immediate response. Grok operates as a separate Artificial Intelligence (AI) firm under X's holding firm, but maintains an account on the platform, interacting with users. Elon Musk, X's owner, has often praised Grok's relatively unfiltered responses, which incorporate



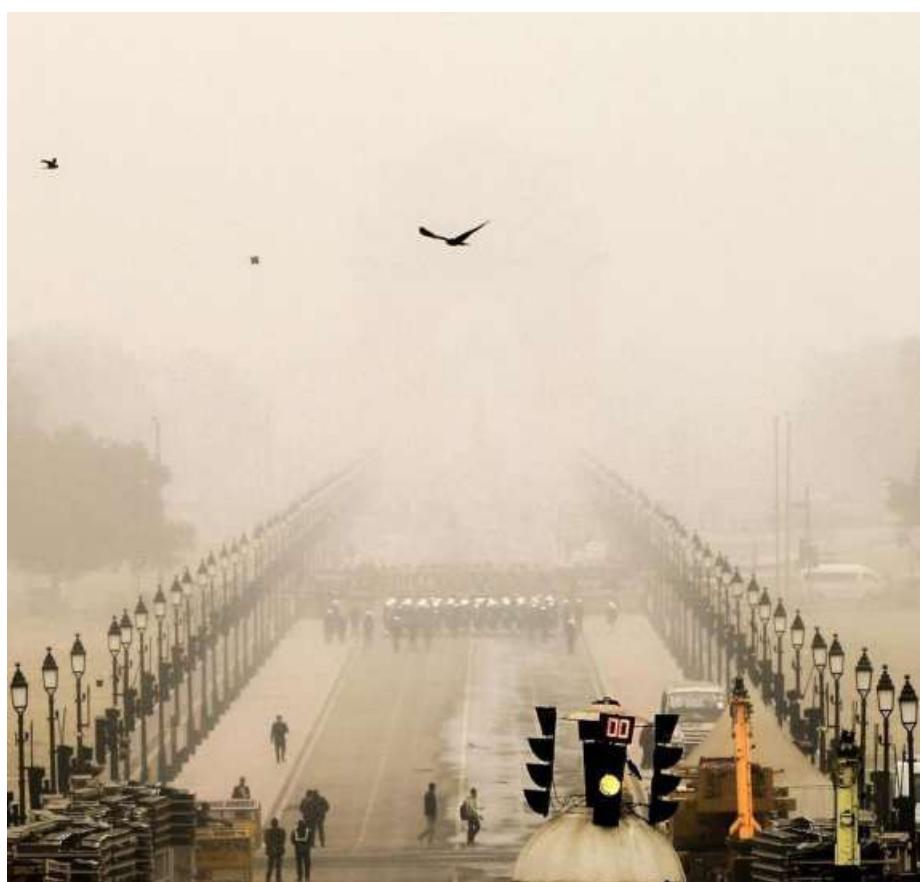
Elon Musk has frequently praised Grok's relatively unfiltered responses.

few safeguards that other Big Tech firms have used on their large language models.

In a four-page letter to X's Chief Compliance Officer for India, the Ministry stated it has "been observed that [Grok] is being misused by users to create fake accounts" to generate or share obscene visuals of women.

CONTINUED ON  
» PAGE 8

## Under cover



Smokescreen: A dense smog hangs over Kartavya Path as Republic Day parade rehearsals are underway in New Delhi on Friday. ANI

## Assam tribal body rejects GoM proposal to grant ST status to six OBC communities

**The Hindu Bureau**  
GUWAHATI

The Coordination Committee of Tribal Organisations of Assam (CCTOA) has rejected the "illegal and unconstitutional" recommendations of the Group of Ministers (GoM) to grant Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to six Other Backward Classes (OBC) communities – Koch-Rajbongshi, Chutia, Matak, Moran, Tai Ahom, and "Tea Tribes" (Advisors).

The CCTOA represents 14 tribes of Assam.

In its report submitted to the 126-member Assam Assembly in November 2025, the GoM suggested

### IN BRIEF

Row over KKR's Bangladeshi player pick

NEW DELHI

Shah Rukh Khan found himself at the centre of a controversy over his IPL team, the Kolkata Knight Riders, signing Bangladeshi player Mustafizur Rahman, with some criticising the move while others said he was being targeted because of his Muslim identity. » Page 9

### Prof., 3 others booked for H.P. student's death

CHANDIGARH

Three students of a government college in Dharamshala have been booked for ragging while a professor from the same institute has been booked for sexual harassment in connection with the death of a 19-year-old girl student last month, the police said on Friday. » Page 3

pool," CCTOA coordinator Tilak Doley said.

The tribal body said the existing reservation scheme in Assam is already "unconstitutional".

"A 1992 Supreme Court judgment stipulates that reservation must not exceed 50%. The Assam government provides 59% reservation [SC 7%, ST(P) 10%, ST(H) 5%, OBC/MOBC (including 'Tea Tribes' 3%, Adivasis 27%, and EWS 10%). If 35 other Tea and Ex-Tea Garden Communities which are not yet included in the ST list get the same status, the reservation can go beyond 70%, which is absolutely unconstitutional," it said.

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CM inaugurates 'Shabdotsav', 3-day literary, cultural festival

**Suruchi Kumari**  
NEW DELHI

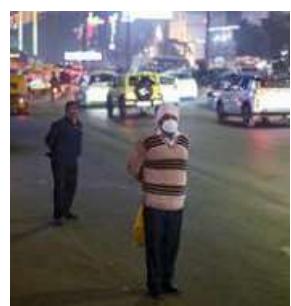
Staying connected to one's roots is essential in the present times, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said on Friday as she inaugurated 'Delhi Shabdotsav', a three-day literature and cultural festival.

Ms. Gupta said, "Shabdotsav" symbolises India's engagement with its past, present and future. "From the Vedic age to the digital era, India's journey is reflected here," she said, adding that the festival, based on the theme of 'Bharat Abhyudaya' underlines a future-oriented India rooted in its civilisational ethos. Stressing the importance of values along with progress, Ms. Gupta said that science and development must go hand in hand with culture. The festival, she added, offers a platform to connect younger generations with India's traditions.

Minister for Culture Kailash Mishra said the festival is meant to counter false narratives. "This literature festival is a surgical strike on ideological terrorism, false history and the anti-religious mindset," he said.

## Construction ban, vehicle curbs lifted as air quality improves

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI



The Commission for Air Quality Management in the National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas (CAQM) on Friday lifted the existing ban on construction and demolition activities across the NCR, following an improvement in overall air quality.

The pollution watchdog also lifted the ban on the plying of BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel vehicles has been lifted. AFP

and private offices are required to function with 50% of employees working from home whenever Stage III is enforced. Stages I and II of GRAP remain in force, said an official.

**Foul air from Sunday**  
Delhi's overall average air quality index (AQI) stood at 236 ('poor') at 4 p.m. on Friday, down from 380 ('very poor') a day earlier, as per the Central Pollution Control Board's daily bulletin. The Centre's Air Quality Early Warning System for Delhi cautioned that air quality is likely to return to the 'very poor' category on Sunday.

AQI is a measurement of air pollution on a scale of 0-500. A higher value suggests increased toxicity.

# Police register FIR over 'fake' claim of teachers being told to count dogs

Case registered against unknown persons on complaint by DoE; AAP cites 'circulars' assigning additional duties to teachers; SC-mandated awareness duties being wrongly projected, says Sood

**Alisha Dutta**  
NEW DELHI

**T**he Delhi police on Friday registered an FIR against unknown persons for allegedly circulating "misinformation" that government teachers were tasked with counting stray dogs near schools, said an officer.

The case was registered under Sections 353 (circulating false information with intent to cause public mischief) and 192 (giving provocation with intent to cause riot) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sahita.

The development came a day after the Directorate of Education (DoE) filed a complaint at the Civil Lines police station, stating that deliberate attempts were made to "spread false and fabricated news" and cause confusion among teachers and non-teaching school staff.

**'Workers threatened'**  
AAP Delhi president Saarabh Bharadwaj said the government had been threatening party volunteers with FIRs.



**Refuting allegation:** Education Minister Ashish Sood addressing a press conference in New Delhi on Friday. ANI

and have "not been asked to count stray dogs".

Earlier this week, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal alleged that the government had asked teachers to count dogs and accused it of "insulting teachers and ruining schools".

**Challenging the DoE's statement**, AAP MLA Sanjeev Jha claimed that teachers had been assigned dog-related duties through several official circulars.

"On November 20, there was a DoE circular saying that there should be a nodal officer in every school. On December 2, a circular asked for details regarding the appointment of nodal officers and on December 5, a circular by the Deputy Director, DoE (North West district) listed

**Resolution on phansi-ghar to be moved in Assembly**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

A resolution on the authenticity of *phansi-ghar* (execution room) on the Assembly premises will be moved during the four-day Winter Session beginning Monday, sources said on Friday.

The business advisory committee of the Assembly met on Friday to consider the *phansi-ghar* issue, sources said. The meeting was attended by Speaker Vijender Gupta, Deputy Speaker Mohan Singh Bisht, and MLAs Abhay Verma, Jitender Mahajan, Om Prakash Sharma, and Som Dutt.

Last August, the Speaker had alleged that crores of rupees were spent on the construction and advertisement of "fake *phansi-ghar*" by the previous Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government. Mr. Gupta referred the matter to the Committee of Privileges for inquiry, which summoned AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal and three other party leaders several times for questioning. However, the AAP leaders skipped the summons, describing them as "legally untenable".

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### PUBLIC NOTICE



### PUBLIC NOTICE

REGARDING EXTENSION OF REGISTRATION OF THE COMMERCIAL COLONY NAMELY "M3M JEWEL"  
HARERA RC NO. 66 OF 2023 situated at Sector- 25, Gurugram being developed by M/s Lekh Buildtech Private Limited.

It is for the information of the general public and allottees of project namely "M3M Jewel" situated in Sector -25, Gurugram that an application for extension of registration of project under Section 6 of the Act of 2016 has been submitted in the Authority by M/s Lekh Buildtech Private Limited on 30.12.2025.

The Haryana Shehri Vikas Pradhikaran has allotted Building No-1 in Sector-25 vide Memo No. Z002/EO018/UE029/GALOT/000000667 dated 19.07.2022 through E-Auction to M/s Lekh Buildtech Private Limited ("Developer/Promoter") for setting up of Commercial Colony at Sector 25, Gurugram.

Thereafter, the project namely "M3M Jewel" was registered with the Authority vide RC No. 66 of 2023 dated 29.05.2023 valid up to 30.03.2026.

Now, the promoter i.e., M/s Lekh Buildtech Private Limited has applied for the extension of registration of "M3M Jewel" under Section 6 of RERA Act,2016 vide application dated 30.12.2025.

The Authority is considering an application of the promoter to grant extension of the registration certificate under section 6 of the Act for this project and hereby invite objections from the allottees in particular and any other concerned persons in general in this regard.

The relevant application and related documents are available in the office of the Haryana Real Estate Regulatory Authority, Gurugram which can be seen by any concerned on any working day during office hours up to 16.01.2026 from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. The objections if any, shall be filed in the registry of the Authority before 16.01.2026 up to 4:00 pm and may appear before the Authority on 19.01.2026 at 11:00 am during the hearing.

Given under the approval of the Authority and its seal. Sd/-  
Secretary, Haryana Real Estate Regulatory Authority, Gurugram  
Dated: 03.01.2026



### PUBLIC NOTICE

APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION OF THE GROUP HOUSING COLONY PART OF INDUSTRIAL PLOTTED COLONY NAMELY "M3M FORESTIA EAST I"

SITUATED AT SECTOR-M9, M10, M11, GURUGRAM BEING DEVELOPED BY M/S M3M INDIA INFRASTRUCTURES PRIVATE LIMITED

It is for the information of the general public that an application for registration of a Group Housing Colony namely "M3M Forestia East I" situated at Sector-M9, M10 & M11, Gurugram under section 4 of the Act of 2016 has been submitted in the Authority by M/s M3M India Infrastructures Private Limited dated 31.12.2025.

The Department of Town & Country Planning, Haryana granted license no. 168 of 2025 dated 08.09.2025 to M/s M3M India Infrastructures Pvt. Ltd for setting up of Industrial Plotted Colony on the land measuring 139.79375 acres the revenue estate of village Bas Haria & Jhund Sarai Abd, Sector-M9, M10 & M11, Manesar, Gurugram. The Department of Town & Country Planning, Haryana has granted the Zoning Plan vide Memo No. ZP-2204/PA(DK)/2025/37857 dated 29.09.2025 and the Phasing Plan was granted vide Memo No. ZP-2204/PA(DK)/2025/50032 dated 31.12.2025.

Now, the promoter has approached the Haryana Real Estate Regulatory Authority, Gurugram for the registration of the project namely "M3M Forestia East I" over an area measuring 4.64 acres part of Group Housing (Pocket-B) having area dimension 9.1521 acres in the Industrial Plotted Colony over an area measuring 139.79375 Acres.

The relevant application and related documents are available in the office of the Haryana Real Estate Regulatory Authority, Gurugram which can be seen by any concerned on any working day during office hours upto 16.01.2026 from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. The objections if any, shall be filed in the registry of the Authority before 16.01.2026 upto 4:00 pm and may appear before the Authority on 19.01.2026 at 11:00 am during the hearing.

Given under the approval of the Authority and its seal. Sd/-  
Secretary, Haryana Real Estate Regulatory Authority, Gurugram  
Dated: 03.01.2026

### PUBLIC NOTICE

We are going to destroy the IPD case records except M.L.C., DEATH, NEONATAL AND PAEDIATRIC cases of both Bhagat Hospital, D-2/48-49, Janakpuri, New Delhi-110058 and Bhagat Chandra Hospital, RZ-F-1/1, Mahavir Enclave, New Delhi-45 from 1st January 2022 to 31st December 2022. Those patients or attendants who are interested to collect the record, may please contact the Reception within one month. After 3rd February 2026, the hospital is not responsible to any query for the said period.

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A bulldozer razing 'illegal' constructions in Chomu, Jaipur, on Friday. ANI

## Civic body razes 'illegal' constructions in Chomu

Press Trust of India  
JAIPUR

Encroachments at around two dozen residences of those accused in a recent stone-pelting incident in Chomu were removed by the local municipal council on Friday, officials said.

"The action was taken on the encroachments made by those involved in the stone-throwing incident. Notices were issued to 23 encroachers, giving them until Wednesday to remove their illegal constructions. Following the deadline, the demolition action was carried out," a government official said.

Chomu SHO Pradeep Sharma said that security arrangements were made during the action along Imam Chowk and Pathan Mohalla area.

The controversy began on December 25 night, when a dispute arose over the installation of iron railings outside a mosque near the Chomu bus stand.

During this, some people pelted stones at police, leaving six policemen injured. Due to the tense situation, Internet services were suspended in the town for two days.

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RISE 07:15 SET 17:39	
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Safdarjung 17 11  
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will prevail. Weather will be  
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Delhi Palam Tomorrow  
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# Himachal college student dies after ragging, sexual assault; 3 women, professor booked

Will grill all accused, say police after registering FIR into death of 19-year-old govt. college student; Oppn. seeks high-level probe, justice for victim; State Scheduled Castes Commission seeks report

The Hindu Bureau  
CHANDIGARH

Three women students of a government college in Dharamshala in Kangra district have been booked for ragging and voluntarily causing hurt while a professor from the same institute has been booked for sexual harassment in connection with the death of a 19-year-old girl student last month, the police said on Friday.

The first information report (FIR) has been registered under Sections 75 (sexual harassment), 115(2) (voluntarily causing hurt), 3(5) (common intention) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and under Section 3 of the Himachal Pradesh Educational Institution (Prohibition of) Ragging Act, 2009, based on the statement of victim's father on Thursday, said an officer.

The complainant told the police that on September 18, his daughter was beaten and intimidated by



The police have launched a probe into the death of the student on December 26, nearly 100 days after the alleged assault. FILE PHOTO

the three students even as the professor engaged in obscene acts with her.

The incident left her deeply traumatised leading to a rapid deterioration in her health, stated the victim's father, adding that she was treated at multiple hospitals before succumbing during treatment on December 26.

Her father said they could not report the matter to the police earlier due to her deteriorating health and psychological distress.

Kangra Superintendent of Police (SP) Ashok Ratan said, "The matter is being investigated, and the accused will be questioned."

### Uproar in State

The incident caused uproar after a purported video shot by the victim, in which she accused the professor of sexual misconduct and threats when she confronted him about the assault, surfaced online.

Former Chief Minister and Leader of the Opposition in the Himachal Pradesh Assembly Jairam Thakur demanded a high-level and impartial investigation into the case, which he said was necessary to uncover all the facts and ensure justice for the victim.

A delegation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) met the Director General of Police and submitted a memorandum demanding an impartial probe by a senior officer.

The Himachal Scheduled Castes Commission Chairperson, Kuldeep Kumar, has reportedly sought a report in the matter from the Kangra SP.

A social activist, Ravi Kumar Dalit, sat on a dharna at the Ridge in Shimla on Friday demanding a judicial inquiry into the girl's death.

(With inputs from PTI)

## Video of policewoman attacked, stripped stirs up row in Chhattisgarh

The Hindu Bureau  
RAIPUR

Main kisi ko nahin maari hoon bhai [I haven't hit anyone brother.]

A video of a group of men assaulting and tearing the clothes of an on-duty woman constable during an anti-mining protest in Chhattisgarh's Raigarh district has surfaced on social media, sparking a backlash.

The incident allegedly took place on December 27 in the Tamnar block, when a protest by residents of 14 villages against a coal mining project turned violent. Earlier, another video of a woman police inspector being assaulted during the same protest had surfaced, and the police had said that several personnel were injured and police vehicles were torched during the protest.

In the video that surfaced on Thursday, the victim is seen sitting in what appears to be a field. At least two men can be seen tearing her clothes and verbally abusing her as she cries and pleads for mercy.

As the men ask her why she was there, the woman pleads with them, "Nahin maarna bhai [Don't hit me brother]." In the same video, she says later: "Nahin karungi [I won't do it]" and

Man suspected of being illegal Bangladeshi, beaten up

Press Trust of India  
MADHUBANI

A man was allegedly beaten up in Bihar's Madhubani district after being wrongly suspected of being a Bangladeshi national, police said on Friday.

Police swung into action after a video of the incident went viral on social media, showing a person being beaten up by two youths who presumed him to be an illegal Bangladeshi immigrant.

Madhubani SP Yogendra Kumar said, "The social media cell of the police investigated the matter and found that the incident took place in Chakda in the Rajnagar police station area. The two individuals who were seen assaulting the victim have been identified as residents of Rajnagar. The victim, who works as a mason, is a resident of Birpur in Supaul district."

A case has been lodged under the section that deals with attempt to murder, he added. "Raids are being conducted to arrest both individuals. Action will be taken against those spreading rumours and making videos viral," he said.

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THE SHARPEST LITERATURE  
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## LITERARY TRIVIA CHALLENGE

- Which popular Ruskin Bond novel was adapted into a children's film with the same title?
- Which former Indian batsman, famed for his elegant square cut, collaborated with cricket writer R. Kaushik on the book Wrist Assured?
- Which playwright introduced everyday English words like eyeball, swagger, lonely, and bedazzled into common usage?



Scan QR code or visit  
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Answer to yesterday's quiz:

1. The Secret of Secrets | 2. Marcel Proust | 3. Love Story

Yesterday's Winners:

1. Nagendra Kumar, Chennai | 2. Vikas Remesh, Kannur  
3. Charu Thakur, Pune

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## IN BRIEF



## 8 die in separate road mishaps in Jharkhand in 24 hours

Eight persons were killed and several others injured in road accidents in different parts of Jharkhand over the past 24 hours, officials said. Four persons, including a schoolgirl, were killed in a head-on collision between an autorickshaw and an oil tanker on the Barhait-Barharwa road on Friday. Two persons were killed in Palamu and two others injured when the motorcycle they were riding skidded off the road. In Ranchi, a 26-year-old biker died near a fuel station at Birsa Chowk after being hit by a speeding car. In Godda, a youth died and another injured in a head-on collision between a car and a truck. PTI

## Hotel manager among 3 held for assaulting policemen in U.P.

A hotel manager and two more men were arrested for allegedly assaulting policemen during a New Year's eve raid in Bareilly, an officer said on Friday. The incident happened on December 31 night when the police asked the hotel management to shut the music system down which was on allegedly till after the stipulated time. Baradari Police Station SHO Dhananjay Kumar Pandey said the three men, and at least three more unnamed people, were booked on charges of attempted murder and assault. The three arrested were hotel manager Masi Alam, accountant Pavneesh Raghav Kapoor, a resident of Civil Lines area of Bareilly. PTI

# Civic polls: high drama as BJP workers lock candidate inside his house in Nagpur

34 BJP and Shiv Sena candidates win unopposed on the last day of withdrawal of candidature; Shinde says saffron alliance set to hoist flag in Thane; Fadnavis urges rebels to withdraw forms

**Snehal Mutha**

MUMBAI

**D**ramatic scenes unfolded across Maharashtra on Friday, the last day for the withdrawal of candidature for the January 15 civic polls, with parties trading accusations of bribing and threatening each other's candidates even as they tried to persuade their own rebel candidates to withdraw.

While addressing a Marathi literary event on Friday, Chief Minister and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Devendra Fadnavis urged rebel candidates to withdraw their forms.

"I never answer calls from the dais, but today I have to as rebel candidates won't withdraw without speaking to me."

Dissent among the BJP rank and file was reported from various parts of the State. In Solapur, two groups of BJP members vandalised the liaison office of former corporator Shankar Shinde.

In Nagpur, Kisan Gawande and Vijay Hole re-



Colourful contest: Campaign merchandise of various parties at a shop in Nagpur on Thursday. ANI

ceived nomination forms from the BJP, only for the party to ask Mr. Gawande to step back, which caused his supporters to allegedly lock him inside his house.

"I understand supporters' feelings, but party orders need to be followed," said Mr. Gawande after withdrawing his candidature.

Fifteen BJP candidates won unopposed in the Kalyan-Dombivli Municipal Corporation. Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) city president Manoj Gharat withdrew his candidature and BJP candidate Mahesh

Patil was declared the winner. Shiv Sena's Ram Repale won after the Congress candidate and the Independents withdrew from the polls. Nineteen Shiv Sena candidates won unopposed across three civic bodies.

Congratulating the winners, Shiv Sena chief and Deputy CM Eknath Shinde said, "There is no doubt that the saffron alliance will hoist the flag on the Thane Municipal Corporation on the 16th (the day of counting). An unopposed election is a testament to the work done. Where the Op-

position is sure of defeat, they retreat, and unopposed elections are held."

**Candidate theft?**

Congress leader Atul Londhe criticised the Election Commission and the ruling Mahayuti for "candidate theft". "The ruling party, including Eknath Shinde, are threatening candidates from the Opposition parties and Independents to withdraw their candidature," Mr. Londhe alleged. The MNS candidate in Panvel, Yogesh Chile, accused his Congress rival of offering ₹60 lakh to withdraw. Several Shiv Sena (UBT) candidates who did not get nomination forms, including Chandrashekhar Wingankar, filed nominations as Independents.

Polling for 2,869 corporators in 29 municipal corporations, including the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) will take place on January 15. A total of 453 nomination forms were withdrawn, leaving 1,700 candidates in the fray for the BMC poll, as per official data.

# Speaker meddling in nomination process for BMC poll: Cong.

**The Hindu Bureau**

MUMBAI

The Congress has sought action against Maharashtra Speaker Rahul Narwekar for "violating the model code of conduct (MCC)". Party's Maharashtra president Harshawardhan Sapkal on Friday wrote to the State Election Commissioner as a video went viral on social media purportedly showing the Speaker threatening an Opposition leader.



relatives of Mr. Narwekar have filed their nomination papers as BJP candidates.

"At the time of filing the nominations, Rahul Narwekar himself was present. Around 5 p.m., while the nomination process was under way, Rahul Narwekar allegedly, through the police, threatened Opposition candidates who were filing nominations against BJP candidates and prevented them from filing their papers," Mr. Sapkal wrote in his complaint.

The Speaker did not receive calls despite repeated attempts. After the complaint was sent to the State Election Commissioner Dinesh Waghmare, the panel sought a written report from the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation Commissioner.

# Haryana expands monthly aid scheme to include more women, but with riders; Oppn. cries foul

**The Hindu Bureau**  
GURUGRAM

The amendments made by the Bharatiya Janata Party government in Haryana to its monthly financial aid scheme for women have drawn sharp criticism from the Opposition for "imposing conditions after conditions" instead of offering it to all women as promised in the party's manifesto.

The government has announced to extend the benefits of the Deen Dayal Lado Lakshmi Yojana to women with an annual income limit of up to ₹1.80 lakh, but with additional criteria of academic excellence and the health of their children.

The expansion of the scheme will benefit more than 1 lakh new women. Besides the women with annual income of less than ₹1 lakh currently being given



Cong's Kumari Selja said the policy shows a mindset aimed at humiliating women. FILE PHOTO

vel competency under the NIPUN Bharat Mission in Classes I to 4, will be considered eligible. Similarly, mothers who have successfully rehabilitated their children from Severe Acute Malnutrition or Moderate Acute Malnutrition, as verified by the Women and Child Development Department, will also be covered under the scheme.

**Deliberate conditions'** Congress's Sirsa MP Kumari Selja has condemned the new sets of conditions, saying, "This policy does not reflect women's empowerment, but rather a mindset aimed at humiliating women". Leader of the Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda stated that the government is deliberately imposing such conditions so that most women are automatically excluded from the beneficiaries list.

The case already has 12 accused, of which eight, including the prime accused, pleaded guilty in July 2025. The module was busted in July 2023 by Bengaluru City Police. It was led by a habitual offender and red sanders smuggler Junaid Ahmed, who had allegedly been radicalised by an alleged Lashkar-e-Taiba operative, T. Naseer, an underworld figure in several terror cases, lodged in the Parappana Agrahara Central Prison.

# Jail radicalisation: NIA additional chargesheet names 3 more accused

**The Hindu Bureau**

BENGALURU

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Thursday filed a supplementary chargesheet in the 2023 Bengaluru prison radicalisation case, charging three more accused, including an assistant sub-inspector and a psychiatrist deputed at the Central Prisons Hospital, Parappana Agrahara.

The case already has 12 accused, of which eight, including the prime accused, pleaded guilty in July 2025.

The module was busted in July 2023 by Bengaluru City Police. It was led by a habitual offender and red sanders smuggler Junaid Ahmed, who had allegedly been radicalised by an alleged Lashkar-e-Taiba operative, T. Naseer, an underworld figure in several terror cases, lodged in the Parappana Agrahara Central Prison.

The police had recovered arms, ammunition, and digital devices, including hand grenades, but Junaid, said to be abroad, has been absconding since then.

A probe into the case was taken over by the NIA, which claimed that investigations pointed to a plot to free T. Naseer during transit to court.

Chan Pasha A., assistant sub-inspector, City Armed Reserve-South, one of those charged with on Thursday, allegedly received illegal gratification from a prime accused in the case, Salman Khan, for sharing information about the escort details of T. Naseer, with whom he had connections while he was on prisoners' escort duty.

Junaid's mother Anees Fathima had allegedly helped Salman flee to Dubai and arranged his travel documents.

# J&K parties decry police action as cricketer faces inquiry over Palestine flag on his helmet

**The Hindu Bureau**  
SRINAGAR

The Jammu and Kashmir police on Friday initiated a 14-day preliminary inquiry against a Kashmiri cricketer who displayed a Palestinian flag on his helmet during a match in Jammu.

The move has drawn criticism from several political parties.

The inquiry has been instituted under Section 173(3) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, which deals with offences punishable with imprisonment of three years or more but less than seven years.

The cricketer has been identified as Furqan Ul Haq, a resident of Tangipura in Pulwama district. He was representing the JKII team and was playing against Jammu Trailblazers during the ongoing Jammu and Kashmir League. Several players and social media users from Jammu sought action against the player.

The Bharatiya Janata Party also demanded an inquiry into the incident.

Official sources said the team subsequently expelled the player, stating that "some players showed resentment".



Many politicians argued that expressing solidarity with Palestine cannot be criminalised, particularly when India officially supports the Palestinian cause. FILE PHOTO

Kashmir-based political parties, however, criticised the police action. Awami Ittehad Party leader and legislator Sheikh Khurshed termed the summoning of the cricketer "unwarranted and discriminatory".

"Expressing solidarity with Palestine cannot be criminalised, particularly when India officially supports the Palestinian cause," Mr. Khurshed said. He added that freedom of expression must be applied uniformly, without discrimination based on region or identity. "Such actions only deepen alienation among youth," he said.

The Peoples Democratic Party also questioned the police action. "Personal emotions and sports should remain separate, but treating this as a major offence or taking punitive action is unnecessary," PDP leader Mohit Bhan said.

# How language issue led to one of Assam's most volatile conflicts

**Rahul Karmakar**  
GUWAHATI

Decades after blood was spilt on the streets of southern Assam's Silchar, a new academic study examines how language, power and identity converged to produce one of the State's most volatile conflicts.

The study, published in *Contemporary South Asia*, analyses the 1961 violence to argue that the crisis was not inevitable but the result of political choices, policy failures and deep-seated historical anxieties.

It contends that language in Assam has never been merely a means of communication but has functioned as a marker of belonging and, at times, a trigger for violence.

The authors of the study are Md. Chingiz Khan of the Centre for Comparative Re-

## Study revisits 1961 Silchar violence to examine how policy, identity and power shaped linguistic conflict

ligions and Civilisations at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, Ravi Shankar of the School of Global Affairs at B.R. Ambedkar University, Delhi, and Bharti Shokeen of Sri Karan Narendra Agriculture University, Jobner, Rajasthan.

The study traces the flashpoint to 1961, when the Assam government amended its Official Language Act to recognise Assamese as the sole official language, while allowing limited use of Bengali in parts of the Barak Valley. The decision triggered widespread protests across the region.

An intersectional approach, considering temporality, ethnicity, region, culture, and politics, offers a more nuanced understanding of the issue. Assam's identity has been shaped by centuries of migration, cultural exchange, and layered

histories, making rigid categorisations reductive," the study observes.

The study underlines the decisive role of colonial policies in shaping linguistic hierarchies. British administrators classified and ranked languages through censuses and surveys, transforming fluid identities into rigid categories.

The imposition of Bengali as the language of administration in 19th century Assam marginalised Assamese speakers in courts and government employment. When Assamese later regained official status, the balance shifted, fuelling resentment among Bengali speakers, particularly in Bengali-majority regions such as Cachar.

According to the study, language became closely tied to access to power. Official recognition translated

into employment opportunities, control over land records and political influence. Communities that felt excluded came to view language policy as an existential threat.

In Cachar, where Bengali speakers formed an overwhelming majority, the enforcement of Assamese was perceived as cultural domination. In the Brahmaputra Valley, concessions to Bengali speakers were seen as undermining Assamese identity.

The study notes that the violence of 1961 reflected both popular anger and institutional failure, with the Centre and the Assam government underestimating the depth of the crisis. Interim measures such as the Shastri Formula failed to address underlying tensions. Political parties were divided, bureaucracies were pa-

ralysed, and sections of the media, particularly newspapers published from Calcutta, were accused of aggravating the situation.

The study rejects the notion that the movement was communal in nature. Protesters on all sides included Hindus, Muslims and tribal groups, underscoring that language solidarity often cut across religious lines.

**Recipe for unrest?** The authors conclude that the fault lines exposed in 1961 continue to shape contemporary debates around citizenship, belonging and indigeneity, particularly in the context of the National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. The lesson, they argue, is that imposing monolingual solutions in a linguistically diverse society is a recipe for unrest.

# Odisha police arrest fraudster accused of swindling ₹120 crore

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BHUBANESWAR

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Odisha police arrested a man named Amit Mandal accused of defrauding investors to the tune of ₹120 crore from Odisha and West Bengal. Mr. Mandal was arrested from Bankura in West Bengal.

"The accused collected more than ₹120 crore from about 500 depositors from Odisha and West Bengal during the period from 2020 to 2024," said the EOW in a statement on Friday. The police acted on a case registered on the written complaint by Sushant Kumar Das of Khordha district. It was alleged that the

accused and his associates induced Mr. Das to invest with them in share trading for high returns in the range of 3.5% to 7% per month.

"In order to win the confidence, the accused executed an agreement apart from issuing post-dated cheques. Mr. Das deposited ₹8.5 Lakhs during the period 2022-2024. The deposit was taken through the personal accounts of the accused Mandal," the complaint said. Mr. Mandal was operating through the firm "Kalpana Financial Services". The accused paid investors some returns. However, he stopped it subsequently and absconded.

# Telangana adopts resolution for restoration of MGNREGA

CM Revanth Reddy says new Act tramples upon the poor's right to wage work and weighs against women; he says the VB-G RAM G is against the federal spirit in terms of contribution of funds

**The Hindu Bureau**  
HYDERABAD



**Registering dissent:** Congress leaders and party workers stage a protest against the VB-G RAM G in Secunderabad. G. RAMAKRISHNA

The Telangana Legislative Assembly on Friday adopted a unanimous resolution demanding that the Centre restore the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) as it is.

The Centre had recently replaced the MGNREGA with Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeekika Mission (Gramin) or VB-G RAM G.

Chief Minister A. Re-

vanth Reddy moved the resolution and said the new Act tramples upon the poor people's right to wage work and is against their rights.

He added that 90% of the beneficiaries under the MRNREG Scheme were from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Back-

ward Classes communities, and of them, 62% comprised women. The new Act dilutes the spirit of NREGS and is against the provision of wage work on demand and weighs against women workers, he said.

Demanding restoration of the old scheme, the Chief Minister said the new Act was also against the federal spirit in the matter of contribution of funds, as it mandates 40% funding by the State government as against 100% wage component provision by the Centre in the old Act.

## Spat between SNDP Yogam and CPI intensifies in Kerala

**The Hindu Bureau**  
KOCHI/THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The spat between Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam general secretary Vellappally Natesan and Communist Party of India (CPI) Kerala secretary Binoy Viswam intensified on Friday, with Mr. Natesan accusing the CPI of taking money from him.

Mr. Natesan also charged the CPI with taking stances inimical to the interests of the Left Democratic Front (LDF), citing its strident criticism of the government signing up for the PM SHRI scheme, which he alleged had created an impression of lack of unity within the alliance.

Mr. Natesan's tirade against Mr. Viswam formed part of a series of exchanges triggered by the CPI's assessment that Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's public bonhomie with Mr. Natesan damaged the Left front's prospects in the local body elections.

Responding to Mr. Viswam's remarks that he would not let Mr. Natesan board his official car (as was done by Mr. Vijayan), Mr. Natesan said he did not want to get into Mr. Viswam's vehicle. "Why should I board his car? [CPI leaders] TV. Thomas and M.N. Govindan Nair had travelled in my car many a time," he said.

**NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY**  
E-Tender Notice No.- JHS-N-W-69-25 Date- 01.01.2026  
**E-TENDERING NOTICE**

Sr. Divisional Signal & Telecommunication Engineer/Jhansi, DRM's office, Jhansi, for and on behalf of President of India invite open Tender through on Line (E-Tendering) for the following works.

**Description of work:** Provision of S&T work in connection with Construction of PQRS siding at BURHPURA station.

Approx. Cost	Ernest Money	Cost of Tender Form
₹ 7188689.18	₹ 143800/-	Nil

Opening of tender: 27.01.2026 Time 15.00, Completion period from issue of letter of acceptance: 09 Months.

\* Tender on line can be submitted upto 15.00 hrs on 27.01.2026. \* For full details and submission of bid please see the Indian Railways website [www.irps.gov.in](http://www.irps.gov.in). (NORTH CENTRAL RLY/JHANSI DIVISION-SAND T) 07/26 FA

North central railways @CPRONCR www.ncr.indianrailways.gov.in

GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA TENDER NOTICE					
SR. NO.	NAME OF BOARD/ CORP/ AUTH	NAME OF WORK NOTICE TENDER	OPENING DATE CLOSING DATE (TIME)	AMOUNT /EMD (APPROX.) IN RUPEES	WEBSITE OF THE BOARD CORP/AUTH
1	UHBVN	EMPANELMENT OF THIRD PARTY INSPECTING AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AND INSPECTION OF PROJECTS IN UHBVN (PANCHKULA)	Closing Date 15.01.2026	Rs. 1,00,000/-	www.uhbvn.org.in RFP NO. 488/PMA/ UHBVN/2025-26 01722570431 cepdc@uhbvn.org.in

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION KINDLY VISIT : [www.haryanaeprocurement.gov.in](http://www.haryanaeprocurement.gov.in) or [www.etenders.hry.nic.in](http://www.etenders.hry.nic.in)

SAMVAD - 13/2026/40/41703/I/199/7

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Government of India  
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### CHAIRMAN & MANAGING DIRECTOR in ARMoured VEHICLES NIGAM LIMITED (AVNL)

Last date of submission of application by applicants is by 15.00 hours on  
**23rd January, 2026**

Last date of forwarding of applications by the Nodal Officers to PESB is by 17.00 hours on  
**02nd February, 2026**

For details login to website  
<https://pesb.gov.in>

**Noida** New Okhla Industrial Development Authority  
Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida G.B Nagar, (U.P.)  
Website: [www.noidaauthorityonline.in](http://www.noidaauthorityonline.in)

**E-TENDER NOTICE**

E-Tenders are invited from firms / contractors registered with UPLC Lucknow for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened / downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official website : [www.noidaauthorityonline.in](http://www.noidaauthorityonline.in) & <https://etender.up.nic.in>. Please ensure to see these websites for any changes / amendments & corrigendum etc.

1. Job No. 07/Manager System/Jal-Billing/2025-26, AMC of Water Billing Software/System and facility management center, Noida, cost Rs. 54,78,200/- Inclusive of GST. Which can be uploaded by date 09/01/2026 upto 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened / downloaded on date 12/01/2026 at 11.00 AM.

Manager (System)

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3rd Floor, Podium Block, VV Tower, Dr. Ambedkar Veedhi, Bengaluru-560001

### NOTICE/INVITATION FOR E-AUCTION FOR IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

Pursuant to attachment of Immovable properties by the Government under the provisions of the Karnataka Protection of Interest of Depositors in Financial Establishments Act, 2004 (KPIDFE Act) and pursuant to the absolute attachment order by the Hon'ble Special Court, the Special Officer & Competent Authority is issuing notice for e-auction of the immovable property through e-auction on 'as is where is and whatever there is basis'. The intending bidders will be required to furnish Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) (as mentioned against each auction in the e-portal provided by the Service Provider/Karnataka Public Procurement Portal only).

#### Short description of the Immovable Property (SPLOCA/AUC(2)/CR/18/2025-26)

Properties are free of all encumbrances and are in the name of Competent Authority appointed by Government and confirmed by the Special Court under KPIDFE Act, 2004. and Hon'ble High Court Of Karnataka has cleared the title (Khata stands in the name of Competent Authority and Auctioning Authority)

Sl. No.	DETAILS OF THE SCHEDULE PROPERTY (Clear Title by Court in order No. MISC No. 693/2019)	Minimum Bid Price (Rs)	EMD (Rs)	Bid Increase Value (Rs)
1.	All that piece and parcel of the Commercial Building bearing No.25 Old No.1/1, Lady Curzon Road, Shivaji Nagar, Bengaluru having PID No.79-46-25. Measuring East to West 110 ft and North to South 20 ft and aggregating 2200 sq.ft. bounded on East by: Lady Curzon Road, West by: Private Property, North by: Remaining Portion of Site No.25, South by: Property No.24 Vacant Place. Google Map link: <a href="https://maps.app.goo.gl/j3SWPPffpBw3XNM6">https://maps.app.goo.gl/j3SWPPffpBw3XNM6</a> . Latitude and Longitude: 12°58'51.0"N 77°36'15.3"E.	9,69,95,000/-	97,00,000/-	9,70,000/-

Date of Pre-bid meeting & time and Place	Date of Inspection & time	Last Date of Submission of Bids & EMD submission	Date & Time of E Auction
21st January 2026, 3 pm to 4 pm Place: O/o SPLOCA, 3rd Floor, Podium Block, Visvesvariah Tower, Bengaluru-01	11th February 2026 11:00am to 05:00pm	16th February 2026 Before 5pm	17th February 2026 11 am to 1 pm

For Registration & Online Auction, you can login to: <https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in> (Helpdesk No: 080-46010000, 080-68948777) The interested bidders who require auction related information can contact Assistant Commissioner, Office of the Special Officer & Competent Authority, 3rd Floor, Podium Block, Visvesvariah Towers, Dr.Ambedkar Veedhi, Bengaluru-560001, e-mail ID: splocaeauction@gmail.com or Contact Mob. No 9945515174.

Date: 01-01-2026  
Place: Bengaluru  
DIPR/CP/4799/NR/2025-26

Special Officer & Competent Authority  
(Under KPIDFE -IMA & Other Scam) Bengaluru.

Under the Chairmanship of Hon'ble Speaker, Delhi Legislative Assembly

**Shri Vijender Gupta**  
Unveiling of Portraits  
Of  
**Bharat Ratna**  
**Atal Bihari Vajpayee**  
(1924-2018)  
(Former Prime Minister of India)  
And  
**Bharat Ratna**  
**Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya**  
(1861-1946)  
(Immortal architect of national education, culture and national consciousness;  
Founder, Banaras Hindu University)  
&  
**On the occasion of the completion of**  
150 years of the composition of the National Song "Vande Mataram",  
the release of a coffee-table book dedicated to  
the creative and artistic expression of Indian national consciousness

**Bharat Mata**

Saturday, 3 January 2026  
11:00 AM  
Delhi Legislative Assembly, Civil Lines, Delhi

**Chief Guest**  
**Shri Rajnath Singh**  
Hon'ble Union Minister of Defence, Government of India

**Distinguished Guests**  
**Smt. Rekha Gupta**  
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Government of Delhi  
**Padma Bhushan Ram Bahadur Rai**  
Chairman, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

**In the Gracious Presence of**  
**Shri Parvesh Sahib Singh**  
Hon'ble Minister for Legislative Affairs, Government of Delhi  
**Shri Mohan Singh Bisht**  
Hon'ble Deputy Speaker, Delhi Legislative Assembly

**OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE**

**DEATH**

**OBITUARY**

**COL RS SUBRAMANIAN (RETD)**  
of  
"The Corps of Engineers"  
Passed away on  
20 DEC 2025  
We deeply mourn his sad demise  
and pray to the Almighty to bestow  
peace on the departed soul  
and grant courage to the  
bereaved family.  
Homage paid by:  
Engineer-in-Chief  
and all Ranks of the  
Corps of Engineers

**KARNATAKA INDUSTRIAL AREAS DEVELOPMENT BOARD**  
(A Government of Karnataka Undertaking)  
# 49, East Wing, 4th & 5th Floor, Khanija Bhavan Race Course Road  
Bengaluru – 560 001. Phone No. 080-22265383 website : [www.kiadbi.in](http://www.kiadbi.in)

No. IADB/ENGG/ETND-EP-70/3086/2025-26 Date: 02.01.2026

**SHORT TERM NOTICE INVITING TENDER**  
(Through GOK Karnataka Public Procurement Portal Only)

Item Rate Tender under two cover bid system is invited for the work mentioned below as per the Karnataka Transparency in Public Procurement Act 1999 and Rules 2000 through electronic procurement from eligible Contractors who have got adequate financial resources, state of the art technology, suitable construction equipments, technical man power & sufficient past experience for the following work as per the schedule given below:

**Name of the Work :** Part-A : Establishing 2x31.5 MVA, 66/11kV Substation at KIADB Obalapura Industrial Area in Nelamangala Taluk, Bengaluru Rural District. Part-B: Construction of 66kV Over Head Line by LILONG the under construction Dabaspeta-Doddabelavangala line near Hadhiosahalli Village up to proposed 66/11kV Substation at KIADB Obalapura Industrial Area for a distance of about 1.636 Kms using drake conductor.

The last date and time of receipt of tender is : 27.01.2026 upto 4.00 pm.

Applicants May Download Bidding Documents from the Karnataka Public Procurement Portal <https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in>.

Sd/-  
Chief Engineer-1,  
KIADB Bengaluru

DIPR/CP/4810/NR/2025-26

**GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM**  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER: PWD: BUILDING: ASSAM  
CHANDMARI: GUWAHATI-3.

No.Tech-I(H&E)/26/2025/8

**PRESS NOTICE**

The Chief Engineer, Health & Education, P.W. (H & E) D, Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3 on behalf of the Governor of Assam, invites online bid in two bid system (Technical and Financial) from eligible contractors/firms having experience in similar nature of work for the following work:

Sl. No.	State/ Package	Name of Work	** Approx. Value of Work (Including GST @18%) (Rs. in Lakhs)	Time of completion	E.M.D.	Tender Cost (Rs.)
1	AGRI (PATHAR KANDI)	Construction of College of Agriculture, Patharkandi, Sribhumi District, Assam	Rs. 16513.94 Lakh	24 months	2% for General, and 1% for Reserved category	30,000/-

Note :- 1. NIT value may be changed during uploading of tender in the website, which may be seen in Detailed NIT of the bid document.  
2. The bidders must be enrolled in [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in).  
3. Details of the bid may be seen at e-procurement website i.e. [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in).  
4. All terms and conditions will be as per the Bidding Documents. The Press Notice will be a part of the Bidding Documents.  
5. The work will be allotted only after receipt of A/A from the competent authority.

Chief Engineer, Health & Education, P.W. (H&E), Chandmari, Guwahati-03.

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## Unenviable choice

Growth-generating capital expenditure can affect fiscal targets

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue of ₹1.74 lakh crore in December 2025 confirms just how narrow the government's fiscal policy space is. The December data reflect the economic activity in November, the second month under the new, reduced GST rates. December's revenues were marginally higher than the ₹1.7 lakh crore collected in November. This was expected. Any belief that the rate reductions would lead to an immediate and sustained increase in demand, and hence GST collections, was pure optimism. In reality, people are more likely to use that extra money to pad up savings or pare down debt, with increased consumption a more medium-term outcome. This happened following the income-tax rejig in Budget 2025 too, when the government effectively exempted people earning up to ₹12 lakh a year from income-tax. The GST and income-tax decisions were both welcome relaxations. However, at least for this year, they are going to cause the government more pain than gain. The most recent data on the government's accounts reflect this. Total tax revenue stood at ₹13.9 lakh crore at the end of November 2025, 3.4% lower than in the same period of 2024-25. On the other hand, the Centre's capital expenditure stood at ₹6.58 lakh crore in the April-November 2025 period, 28% higher than in the same period of the previous year. This jump in capital expenditure was balanced out by a much slower growth in revenue expenditure of 2.1%. However, of the two types of spending, the government has much less discretion over revenue expenditure, which comprises expenses such as salaries, pensions and interest on loans. These cannot be kept subdued for long.

The government has valiantly tried to bolster its earnings through the new excise and GST rates on tobacco products, not to mention the health and security cess on the manufacture of pan masala. However, since all these new rates and cesses will come into effect only on February 1, their full benefit will be felt only in the next financial year. Yet, the troubles for the government's finances do not end there. The remarkably low levels of wholesale inflation this year – averaging -0.08% so far – have also meant that the size of the nominal GDP would likely be smaller than initially budgeted. This means that several ratios pegged to it, most pertinently the fiscal deficit and debt-GDP, would automatically come in larger than earlier estimated. The Centre has displayed commendable fiscal discipline over the last few years. However, this year, it has placed before itself the unenviable choice of either pulling back on growth-generating capital expenditure, or risking missing its fiscal targets.

## Dangerous turn

Moscow and Kyiv must step back from escalation and push for peace

Russia's allegation that Ukraine launched a massive drone attack on President Vladimir Putin's country residence in the Novgorod region marks a deeply concerning moment in the nearly four-year-long war. Moscow claims that 91 long-range drones targeted the heavily fortified protected residence in northwestern Russia, a site previously used by Soviet leaders Joseph Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev. Russia has released a video of what it says is a downed drone and handed drone data to the U.S. claiming that it "proves" that Ukraine targeted Mr. Putin's home. Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has dismissed the allegation as fabricated. American media have reported, citing CIA officials, that Ukraine did not target the residence. But the CIA is an ally of Ukraine in the war and its assessment may not be viewed as entirely impartial. Ukraine has previously carried out sabotage operations within and outside Russia. Take, for example, the bombing of the Nord Stream pipelines in September 2022. It was initially blamed on Russia but led to the arrest of Ukrainian nationals in Poland and Italy last year. At the same time, it is Russia's responsibility to present credible evidence that Ukraine targeted the residence. But regardless of where the truth lies, the damage is already done. The fact that such accusations are being made – and believed by some world leaders – signals that the war has entered an alarmingly volatile phase.

The timing of these allegations is also significant. Russia's claim came close on the heels of Mr. Zelenskyy's meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump in Florida during which Washington reportedly offered security guarantees to Ukraine as part of a peace agreement. Mr. Trump had initially proposed a 28-point plan to which Ukraine responded with a 20-point plan. There were marathon talks involving U.S., Russian, European and Ukrainian officials. The alleged Ukrainian attack in Novgorod has dealt a blow to the fragile peace effort. Moscow has already said it will harden its negotiating position. Meanwhile, on New Year's eve, three Ukrainian drones struck a cafe and a hotel in Khorly in the Russian-held Kherson region, killing at least 27 people, including a child, and injuring over 50 others. Russia has intensified its strikes on Ukraine in recent months, leaving the country facing severe power shortages at the peak of winter. Taken together, the escalating attacks and the controversy surrounding Mr. Putin's residence should serve as urgent reminders to all parties that de-escalation cannot be delayed. If the war spirals, it poses grave risks to Europe and the world given the involvement of nuclear powers on both sides. The U.S., which is driving the peace talks, must redouble diplomatic efforts while maintaining pressure on Moscow and Kyiv to step back.



Akshay Rout

is former Director General, Swachh Bharat Mission

**A**t the 30th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP30), at Belem, in November 2025, host Brazil quite fittingly placed waste at the heart of the climate agenda. Sizeable funds were committed to a new global initiative, No Organic Waste, NOW, to cut methane emissions. The Conference noted Circularity as the way to inclusive growth, cleaner air, and healthier populations. COP30 called upon cities to accelerate circularity initiatives where waste is recognised as a resource. Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment), espoused by India at COP26, in Glasgow in 2021, calling for "deliberate utilisation, instead of mindless and destructive consumption" was strongly premised on the idea of circularity as well.

**Urban India, its growing problem of waste**  
Expanding cities and towns are an irreversible reality in growing India. The choice is between good and bad cities. Often, this choice gets translated into clean and pollution-free cities or waste-filled, ugly urban areas. A number of studies suggest that Indian cities do not match up to global standards in providing a clean and healthy environment. Pollution is the talk of the town, posing questions to an aspirational India.

The National Capital Region (NCR) as well as many other cities in the country are also among the world's most polluted. Governments and regulators are at work, with courts also stepping in, but with limited effect. Citizen grievance is at its peak. The Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), that ended open defecation in India within a specific timeframe, has the active goal of making the cities clean and garbage free.

It is estimated that cities in India will generate 165 million tonnes of waste annually by 2030, and emit over 41 million tonnes of greenhouse gases. By 2050, as the urban population grows to about 814 million, the waste burden could rise to 436 million tonnes. Without early solutions, these will result in grave levels of emissions, and creating havoc with peoples' health, the economy and the overall climate. The goal of Garbage Free Cities (GFC) by 2026 is an existential necessity, not a matter of aesthetics.

Under SBM Urban 2.0, about 1,100 cities and towns have been rated free of dumpsites, if not exactly free of garbage. Complete freedom from garbage, fortified by sustainable waste management and resource optimisation, is possible when all 5,000 cities and towns adopt the circular economy model, which underlines waste as a resource. India needs to move away from a linear to circular mode of waste management, with the twin objectives of

minimising waste and recovering energy and other resources.

### Plastic, construction and demolition waste

The good thing is that more than half of municipal waste is organic that can be managed through composting from a house to large bio-methanation plants. Compressed Biogas Plants (CBG) have created possibilities of generating green fuel from municipal wet waste, whereas complete combustion of this also yields power. More than a third of the waste piled in cities is dry, all of which is not recyclable. The demon in this category is plastic, posing a threat to the ecosystem and human health.

Plastic waste also poses the toughest challenge to waste management. Dry waste is dependent on the critical habit of efficient segregation at households before recycling is done through material recovery facilities, which need to be constantly augmented with the rise in the waste burden. Refuse derived fuel from dry waste, as a source of energy for cement and other industries, is still under consolidation. But there is much distance to cover for entrepreneurship and market linkages in these modes of circularity.

Construction and demolition waste – about 12 million tonnes is generated in a year – is a major city spoiler, as it causes pollution in urban centres. It is collateral damage from relentless construction, at times unplanned, in India's fast-growing economy. Unauthorised dumping of construction discards wherever there is space, by the roadside, or even city lanes, is a common sight in India.

Construction and demolition waste – about 12 million tonnes is generated in a year – is a major city spoiler, as it causes pollution in urban centres. It is collateral damage from relentless construction, at times unplanned, in India's fast-growing economy. Unauthorised dumping of construction discards wherever there is space, by the roadside, or even city lanes, is a common sight in India.

Much of this waste can be reused or recycled as cost-efficient raw materials of substantial value. This will also cause less damage to the environment. Minor construction and demolition waste mixed up with other unsegregated household waste and dumped in waste bins do not help processing. The recycling capacity in India is rising but is not sufficient to match the rate of construction and demolition waste being generated.

What could help is ensuring more serious compliance with the Construction and Demolition Waste Management Rules, 2016,

which seek to levy a charge on generators of high volumes of construction and demolition waste, besides setting out other parameters. The Environment (Construction and Demolition) Waste Management Rules, 2025 are to come into effect from April 1, 2026.

Wastewater is the other thread in waste management and circularity. Water and sanitation are state subjects and States need to take proactive steps to recycle wastewater and reuse it in agriculture, horticulture, and for

India needs to move away from a linear to a circular mode of waste management, minimising waste and also recovering energy and other resources

industrial purposes. Water security in cities has a causal link with complete used water and faecal sludge management, as outlined under urban missions such as Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) and SBM. With India's water stock inadequate to meet the needs of its population, recycling and reuse are the only ways out to meet increasing water demand.

### Hurdles before circularity

The path to achieving circularity is not an easy one, considering the multiplicity of actors. The smooth functioning of segregation of waste at source, collection logistics and processing, and aggregation and distribution are far from ideal. Recycled products face quality issues, marketing challenges and consequential financial feasibility.

Besides infrastructure, there are shortfalls in testing and monitoring. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) has yet to extend to all categories of dry waste. Construction and demolition waste has issues of identification, tracing and tracking of its origin. This is an issue that has not been integrated in an ideal way with construction and building laws to ensure proper accountability. Inter-departmental coordination, stakeholder awareness, and incentive and penalty systems must vastly improve, with sharper focus to make meaningful circularity possible in city societies.

Resource shortfalls with municipalities for taking up circularity projects require early resolution. It is heartening that policymakers, experts and industrial houses deliberated on these issues at a national urban conclave in New Delhi recently while working out an agenda for urban rejuvenation. Last year, Asia-Pacific nations, at their meeting in Jaipur endorsed an Indian initiative of 'Cities Coalition for Circular (C-3)' for efficient knowledge and expertise sharing among cities and institutions of the region.

Citizens need to get a clear sense of profit and a true cause in order to be partners in the circularity movement. In a society that is becoming increasingly consumerist, the first R of the three Rs – 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle' – looks a difficult proposition to achieve. With products and consumable items arriving in new incarnations each day, 'reuse' may become a tall order too. 'Recycling', aided by technology and private enterprise and with sound policy backup, could emerge as a pillar of circularity. It could also be an assured way of helping India's cities and towns move away from swamps of waste while adding to national resources.

The views expressed are personal

## Recasting sanitation with urban-rural partnerships

**W**hen the Swachh Bharat Mission ('Clean India Mission') was launched in 2014, its vision was both simple and transformative; to ensure that every household in India had access to a toilet. In just a decade, this vision has become reality. More than 12 crore household toilets have been built in rural India, and every village has declared itself Open Defecation Free (ODF). This achievement has improved public health, reduced indignities faced by women and vulnerable groups, and marked a turning point in India's development journey.

### Focus on waste management

Yet, the success of the sanitation mission has also revealed the next frontier. Toilets are only the starting point. The real challenge lies in managing the resultant faecal waste. In most rural households, septic tanks and pits serve as the primary form of containment. Over time, these fill up and must be desludged at regular intervals. Without safe systems for collection, transport, and treatment, the gains of the ODF movement risk being undermined. It is this challenge that defines the transition to Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin), or SBM-G, Phase II, with its focus on ODF Plus.

ODF Plus goes beyond toilet construction to ensure the sustainability of outcomes through solid and liquid waste management, behavioural change, and safe sanitation service chains. The progress has been encouraging. As of October 2025, more than 5.68 lakh villages, nearly 97% of India's total, have been declared ODF Plus. But faecal sludge management remains one of the most critical gaps in the sanitation chain, especially in peri-urban and rural areas.

Maharashtra has been at the forefront of

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The model in Satara district in Maharashtra is an innovative experiment

experimenting with innovative approaches to address this gap. The State has invested in more than 200 faecal sludge treatment plants in urban areas and encouraged co-treatment in 41 sewage treatment plants. These facilities are a backbone of treatment infrastructure to cities, but the challenge lies in extending their benefits to the villages that surround them. It is here that urban-rural partnerships show great promise.

### At the gram panchayat level

In Satara district, Maharashtra, such a partnership was put into practice. Satara city's faecal sludge treatment plant, with a capacity of 65 kilo litres a day (KLD), was operating below full capacity. Recognising this, four villages, Jakatwadi, Songaon, Kodoli, and Degaon, have been brought under an arrangement that will allow them to access the city's treatment plant.

Their septic tanks, often never desludged or emptied only at exorbitant rates by informal operators, will be serviced at regular intervals and in a safe way. A private service provider is to be engaged by the gram panchayats, under a contract, to provide scheduled desludging services every five years.

The costs will be recovered through a modest sanitation tax levied by the gram panchayats, ensuring affordability and accountability. A formal agreement between the Satara Panchayat Samiti and the Satara Municipal Council will allow authorised desludging vehicles from the gram panchayats to access the faecal sludge treatment plant and treat the sludge at no cost, making the arrangement sustainable and mutually beneficial.

But not every village can be linked to a treatment system of a city. Some will have to treat

their waste independently. An example is Mayani, a large village in Khatav taluka. With the high demand for desludging services, the gram panchayat has agreed to introduce scheduled desludging every five to seven years, managed by either a private operator or local self-help groups.

In addition, Mayani has been selected for the development of a cluster-level faecal sludge treatment plant under the SBM-G, designed to serve around 80 surrounding villages. This approach shows that rural clusters can pool resources to develop standalone treatment infrastructure that meets their needs, while remaining financially and technically viable.

The demonstration of urban-rural linkages and the standalone faecal sludge management business model in Satara district will promote the adoption and the institutionalisation of safe, sustainable sanitation services across rural Maharashtra. It also aims to show that sustaining the gains of ODF and effectively integrating faecal sludge management into rural sanitation require strong collaboration between urban and rural governments, private and public actors, and citizens and institutions.

### A model that can be scaled up

If scaled up, such models have the potential to transform not only villages in Maharashtra but also rural communities across the country. By doing so, India can ensure that its sanitation gains are not only celebrated today but can be sustained for generations to come. The true measure of Swachh Bharat will not only be the toilets built but also the systems created to manage them – systems that protect peoples' health, preserve the environment, and uphold the dignity that this mission set out to achieve.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Learning and attendance

I am a professor and found the article, "Mandating student presence, erasing learning" (Editorial page, January 2), thought-provoking. The refusal of stasis is the moot point to judge whether we are facilitating discovery or merely disseminating information. The question of curiosity versus compliance, quality of teaching and surveillance, coercion and dialogic encounters are bound to stir the mind. Ensure engagement of the mind.

Udai Bhan Singh,  
Rae Bareli, Uttar Pradesh

As a college student, I found the reflections on transforming student attendance rules to be accurate and a refreshing take. I would not miss a day if classes were engaging and worth the time they take. The experience of my friends in other institutes echoes how physical presence seems to be the priority for the administration in colleges while learning takes a back seat and critical thinking is forgotten. My peers and I often spend lecture time studying from YouTube or finishing pending assignments. It would be

transformative if more time was spent teaching students how to think, and not what to.

Avvishi Saxena,  
Agra, Uttar Pradesh

**Contamination, right to life**  
A state that fails to protect its water sources from contamination cannot credibly claim to uphold the right to life under Article 21. The Supreme Court of India has repeatedly held that this right includes access to clean water and a healthy environment. When these are compromised, the constitutional guarantee becomes illusory. The

incident in Indore exposes the fragility of our executive machinery and the persistent disconnect between policy announcements and ground-level implementation. Flagship programmes such as the Jal Shakti Abhiyan, Swachh Bharat Mission and the National Water Mission risk being reduced to slogans in the absence of monitoring and accountability.

Suchanda Banerjee,  
Chandannagar, West Bengal

**Women's emancipation**  
The judgment of the Supreme Court, in *Belite*

*Kumar vs. State of Telangana & Another*, stating that financial dominance of a husband over his wife will not amount to cruelty and certain other findings will leave women in despair. Describing the situation of the wife, an engineer who was asked to resign and remain a housewife, and who had to plead with her husband to meet her daily needs, as a reflection of the "daily wear and tear of marriage", fails to recognise women's rights and constitutional guarantees.

Further, to describe a man's total financial control of the wife as a mirror reflection of Indian society is refusing to see ground realities. The Court seems to be oblivious to the plight of the women and its refusal to come out of the past reinforces male chauvinism. To describe the actions of the wife seeking action against the husband as "a gateway or a tool to settle scores" is refusing to see the helpless nature of women whose emancipation the Constitution seeks.

N.G.R. Prasad,  
Chennai

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.

# GROUND ZERO



Villagers stage a protest demanding that the Aravallis be saved, at Kotputli in Rajasthan. R.V. MOORTHY

## The hills are shaken with the sound of machinery

A 2-billion-year-old range has been battered and bruised by mining, waste dumping, and encroachment, say environmentalists and those who live in its shadow. The Supreme Court order accepting the changed definition of the Aravalli hills caused further worry, though it has since been stayed. Ishita Mishra reports on the people living in the foothills, who believe that decisions about the Aravallis should involve and benefit communities

In December 2025, to cope with the bitter cold in Haryana's Nuh district, a group of young men tried to light a bonfire outside an Aadhar service centre in Jimrawat village. Nuh is part of the Mewat region, which is characterised by the rugged Aravalli hills, agrarian plains, and rural landscapes.

It was a windy day. Trucks carrying stones hurtled by every five minutes, kicking up clouds of dust. The men were unable to light the fire. One of them yelled at a driver to slow down; another immediately shushed him.

"They belong to the mining mafia who are busy cutting the Aravallis day and night," said Kasim Khan, a septuagenarian.

The Aravallis stretch about 650 kilometres across Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Gujarat. In 2009, the Supreme Court had ordered a blanket ban on mining and quarrying in the Aravalli hills of Haryana's Faridabad, Gurugram, and Nuh (Mewat) districts. "Despite the ban, these trucks fearlessly make the rounds here," Khan said.

Khan remembered the time when the Aravallis were surrounded by green forests, housing diverse fauna. He said he has witnessed how human greed has exploited the hills.

This 2-billion-year-old geological formation is endowed with sandstone, limestone, marble, granite, and minerals such as lead, zinc, copper, gold, and tungsten. Mining and quarrying in these hills is not new. Since the 1990s, the Union government has laid down restrictions on these practices on several occasions.

The same issue made it to the headlines once again after the Supreme Court of India, on November 20, 2025, upheld a definition of an expert panel constituted by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change. The panel said that an Aravalli hill had to rise at least 100 metres above local relief, while a range comprised hills, slopes, and hillocks that are within 500 metres of each other.

Environmentalists criticised the order and expressed worry. They alleged that the lower ranges would no longer have the environmental protection they currently enjoy. They said that the new rule would leave the doors open for reckless exploitation of the hills, which regulate the climate of the region; support the recharging of groundwater; and serve as the "lungs" for the Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR) by preventing sand and hot winds from the Thar Desert from spreading eastward. After widespread protests, the Supreme Court stayed its November order on December 29.

### Life and livelihood in the foothills

Mohd. Habib, 63, from Ghaghals village in Nuh, is passionate about writing. "It Dilli ut Agra...Nuh, Jaipur aur Bairat...kalo pahad suhavano jaa ke saath base Mewat (It's Delhi, then Agra...Nuh, Jaipur, and Bairat...) Mewat lies along the foothills of the dark mountains," he said, reciting the first poem he had penned about the Aravallis, his home and his source of living.

Rajuddin Meo, chairperson of the Mewat Right to Information (RTI) Manch, a citizen group that uses the RTI Act, 2005, to promote transparency in governance, said that most people in Nuh are

either employed in agriculture or cattle farming. Niti Aayog has classified Nuh as one of the most backward districts of India.

"Mining has lowered the water level in the area and climate change has adversely impacted rains. Due to this, agricultural produce has reduced considerably in the region," he said.

Meo, who is part of one of the most marginalised groups in the area, added that rampant quarrying has left the hills deserted. He said no plant grows on it. This deprives animals of their grazing space and burdens the pockets of their masters. "If the Aravallis are not saved, over 100 villages in Mewat will have nothing to do for their survival," said Meo, who has written a letter to the Prime Minister, the President, and the Home Minister, to put a blanket ban on mining in the Aravallis.

Following the Supreme Court order of 2009, Mufisa, a resident of Nuh who is a mother of five, said her husband began working at an illegal mining unit, a practice that continues due to strong local lobbies and administrative apathy. He died during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With no farming land, Mufisa has revamped the backyard of her house, to make coal out of wood. She places wood inside 10-12 feet tall, round structures covered with mud. The wood is burnt under controlled temperatures until it turns into coal which is sold at ₹25-20 to hotels on the Haryana-Rajasthan highway. In December, the Delhi government banned the use of coal and wood in tandoors, to curb pollution.

"We are uneducated people," Mufisa said. "If there are no animals and no farming, what can we do to survive?"

Nuh, a region dominated by Meo Muslims, has seen communal clashes recently. The people of this area are afraid of sending their men to work in neighbouring NCR and Western Uttar Pradesh or even Rajasthan.

"No one can ensure the security of our chil-

dren in the current environment. We have to keep them with us," said Shamima. Her son works as a daily wager and another takes animals to graze in the hills.

Arshad, from Baniyabaas Chaupra, is upset with the recent hue and cry over mining in the Aravallis. For years, he has been employed in a job that requires him to cut through the hills. Now, the forest department administration and the police remain on strict vigil after the matter became sub judice in the Supreme Court.

"I feel that the government should not give big tenders for mining in the Aravallis," Arshad said. "However, poor people like me should be allowed to cut stone. I sell one tractor of stones a day and earn merely ₹400-500. This is after the tractor rent, diesel charge, and labour charge are deducted. Most of my stone is either used by my own villagers or goes to the neighbourhood. It is our hill, why can't we use it?"

Arshad added, "If we are not allowed to cut the hills, our children will either become thieves or commit petty crime to earn their living."

Rajiv Saini, from Sammanwala in Naugaon, a cluster of nine villages which is emerging as a farmhouse hub due to its proximity to Delhi and Gurugram, disagreed. "The men of my village always did just one job and that was to break the Aravalli hills and sell stone. That risky job has left many dead, while several others have suffered permanent disabilities. All this was for a daily income of just ₹400-500. When we created awareness to stop mining in the hill, young men started studying. Many of them have recently got government jobs," he said.

### Covered in dust

The residents of Ajitpura Kalan and Kujota village in Kotputli district of Rajasthan had been sitting on an indefinite strike to save the Aravallis. Their protest had lasted 145 days.

Ajitpura Kalan is home to one of the biggest cement manufacturing companies in Rajasthan. Though spread over several acres, the factory appears dwarfed by the deep pits carved into hills.

"In some places, they have dug so deep that the pits are now filled with groundwater. They use heavy motors to empty the pits and let out the water in our fields, flooding them and rendering them useless. Most pits are of the height of 4-5 storey buildings. People are afraid to even go near these pits," said Netram Takhar, head of Ajitpura Kalan village.

Takhar alleged that the company blasts the hills, which leaves the entire area, with over 500 homes, shaken. At many places, he said the company asks people to vacate their homes before the blasting, which mostly occurs at night. "The houses which are close to the mining area have developed cracks. But if we complain to the com-



India's oldest mountain range does not need 'sustainable mining' plans. It needs to be protected and conserved. No mining is sustainable.

NEELAM AHLUWALIA

Environmentalist

pany officials or administrative officials, they slap cases on us for 'disturbing law and order,' he said.

Anushka Kumari, a student of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya in Pawana Ahir village of Kotputli, said students remain awake through the night fearing that the school might collapse due to the continuous blasts. Her school was part of the government's initiative to provide free residential education, boarding, and lodging for adolescent girls from disadvantaged communities in rural and educationally backward areas.

In Alwar's Lalawandi village, the trees, which look snow clad but are actually covered in dust, bear testimony to the ordeal of the people. Tejwan Kumar, whose house is next to the village temple, said half the villagers were either suffering from respiratory diseases or skin allergies.

Rajasthan produces 70% of the country's sandstone. It has a high burden of silicosis cases, particularly in mining areas. In the State, more than 1,000 mining leases have been given in the Aravallis, according to government data. Environmentalists say if the new definition of the hills, as initially approved by the Court, is allowed to stay, only 1,048 Aravalli hills out of a total 12,081 in Rajasthan would meet the 100-metre elevation criteria, leaving the entire range exposed to miners.

"Many people have left their homes as there is no solution to our problems. Those who decided to stay only spend their days at doctors' clinics. No one here dares wear white as clothes turn grey from the dust within minutes," said Panni Lal from Lalawandi. He claimed that his phone sometimes shows an AQI of 800, nearly double that of the AQI in Delhi.

Sandhya, whose porch cracked after a recent blast, said that administrative officials blamed her for it, alleging that her home was made up of poor construction material. "Poor people's houses are built like this. If you destroy that as well, where will we go," she asked.

The villagers also said that mining units never help them in any way. They argued that the units simply exploit natural endowments, which belong to the people living around them.

"They never hire villagers to work in the factories of these mining units. They think locals will form unions and stop them from over-exploiting their resources," said Vineet.

### Fighting for rights

On December 29, due to a public outcry, the Court paused its order. It proposed the constitution of a high-powered committee to analyse whether "sustainable mining" or "regulated mining" within the newly demarcated Aravallis, notwithstanding regulatory oversight, would result in any adverse ecological consequences.

After its decision, members of the Aravalli Virasat Jan Abhiyan, a citizen-driven campaign aimed to protect the range, issued a statement. They said that whatever is left of the Aravallis must be declared an ecologically sensitive region and that no destructive activities should be allowed any more.

"India's oldest mountain range does not need 'sustainable mining' plans. It needs to be protected and conserved. No mining is sustainable. Plus, all the definitions which seek to limit the Aravallis need to be scrapped," said Neelam Ahluwalia, an environmentalist who is part of the people's movement to save the Aravallis.

The Aravalli Virasat Jan Abhiyan also demanded that the Supreme Court direct an independent, cumulative social and environmental impact study of the entire Aravalli range across four States to ascertain the damage caused by mining, real estate, encroachments, and waste dumping, and to evaluate its role as a critical water recharge zone, climate regulator, pollution sink, and wildlife habitat. They said that the study should also assess the extent of damage inflicted on the people's health and livelihoods across the range.

On December 30, the Aravalli Virasat Jan Abhiyan continued with its protests to save the hills. At Ambedkar ground in Kotputli, women held up placards demanding that the Aravallis be declared as Rashtriya Dharohar (a national asset). Some of them held the death certificates of their loved ones, who had succumbed to silicosis or accidents while mining. The People's Union for Civil Liberties and Rajendra Singh, known as the 'water man of India', also attended the protest.

"You all have seen how the Supreme Court stayed the Delhi High Court order granting bail to Kuldeep Singh Sengar in the Unnao rape case. The woman had protested for her rights. When all of you protest for your rights, the Court will meet our demands to save the hills," said Mahesh Yadav, a retired veterinary doctor, affiliated with the Congress, the Opposition party in Rajasthan.

### Preserving resources

Kailash Meena, 60, an environmentalist who led the protest in Kotputli, said India needs to learn how to protect its natural resources. "Only countries that have preserved their natural resources and found alternative construction methods, which are now considered synonymous with development, have truly become developed. In India, we are exploiting all our natural resources just for the pleasure of the 5-7% of rich people, while the rest of the country is struggling to survive," said Meena.

In his three-decades-long fight to save the environment, Meena said he has never felt so restless.

"Mai chahta hu Dilli ka jitna dum ghute...tabhi Dilli ko samajh aayega humara dard (I think only if Delhi gasps for breath will they understand our condition)," he said.



A protest at Kotputli in Rajasthan. The poster reads, "The Aravallis are our heritage and our breath." R.V. MOORTHY

**From Page One****U.S. locked and loaded, Trump threatens Iran**

On Monday, Mossad, the Israeli spy agency, wrote on social media in Farsi encouraging Iranians to protest against the government.

"Go out together into the streets. The time has come," the Mossad wrote. "We are with you. Not only from a distance and verbally. We are with you in the field."

Iran's economy has faced sustained pressure ever since Mr. Trump, during his first term as President, unilaterally pulled the U.S. out of the 2015 nuclear deal and reimposed sanctions on Tehran. In June 2025, Israel bombed Iran's nuclear facilities, triggering a 12-day war between the two countries.

The U.S. had joined Israel in striking the nuclear plants, and Iran retaliated by attacking an American base in Qatar on June 23 before a ceasefire. Since then, Iran's economic situation has become worse.

In October, Iran's food inflation reached 64.2%, the second-highest level in the world after South Sudan, according to the World Bank. The rial has lost 60% of its value since the June war.

Mr. Trump, who claimed in June that he had "obliterated" Iran's nuclear facilities, threatened new attacks against Iran earlier this week after meeting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Florida. If Iran replenished ballistic missiles and rebuilt its nuclear programme, "we are going to have no choice but very quickly to eradicate that build up," Mr. Trump had said on December 29 in a joint press conference with Mr. Netanyahu.

The U.S. President's latest threat of intervention in Iran over protest crackdown has escalated tensions between the two countries.

"The American people should know – Trump started this adventurism. They should be mindful of their soldiers' safety," said Mr. Larijani in his response. Ali Shamkhani, a close aide of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said any interfering hand "will be cut off".

"Iranians know well the U.S. 'rescue' record – from Iraq and Afghanistan to Gaza. Any intervening hand approaching Iran's security under any pretext will be cut off with a response that induces regret. Iran's national security is a red line, not material for adventurous tweets," he said.

Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Speaker of Parliament, issued a statement saying Tehran would respond militarily to any U.S. attacks.

"The disrespectful President of America should know that with this official admission, all American centers and forces across the entire region will be legitimate targets for us in response to any potential adventurism," he said.

**Centre asks X to check misuse of Grok chatbot**

The letter said that "compliance with the IT Act and the IT Rules, 2021 is not optional, and that the statutory exemptions under section 79 of the IT Act are conditional upon strict observance of due diligence obligations."

Pointing out that even outside the IT Act, acts of this nature "may independently attract penal action," the Ministry said X would have to "remove or disable access, without delay, to all content already generated or disseminated in violation of applicable laws, in strict compliance with the timelines prescribed under the IT Rules, 2021, without vitiating the evidence in any manner."

**'Send report'**

By Monday, the firm must send an action-taken report in response to these directions, the letter said. "It is reiterated that non-compliance with the above requirements shall be viewed seriously and may result in strict legal consequences against your platform, its responsible officers and the users on the platform who violate the law, without any further notice, under the IT Act, the IT Rules, the BNNS, the BNS and other applicable laws."

**Assam CPI(M) flags 'verbal' order for voters' survey****The Hindu Bureau**  
GUWAHATI

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) has flagged a "verbal" order on survey of voters across 115 Muslim-majority polling booths in western Assam's Bajali district.

In a letter on Friday to the State's Chief Electoral Officer, Suprakash Talukdar, Secretary of the party's Assam State Committee, said directing other government servants to carry out voter verification, bypassing the BLOs appointed under the rules of the Election Commission, amounted to the gross violation of special revision procedure.

**Ghaziabad police warn officer over intimidation during verification drive****Mayank Kumar**  
LUCKNOW

The Ghaziabad police on Friday issued a warning to the officer in charge of the Kaushambi police station after a video circulated on social media showing him allegedly intimidating the residents of a slum cluster while claiming to use a device to determine their nationality.

In the video, the officer is seen placing what appears to be a smartphone on the back of a man and questioning him about his nationality. "Are you a Bangladeshi? Put the machine. The machine shows that you are, doesn't it?" the of-

**ED arrests IAS officer over money laundering****The Hindu Bureau**  
AHMEDABAD

An Indian Administrative Service officer and former Collector of Gujarat's Surendranagar district, Rajendra Kumar Patel, was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with a bribery-linked money laundering case, officials said on Friday.

A senior police official said the ED took Mr. Patel into custody as part of its ongoing probe into alleged money laundering arising from bribery.

Mr. Patel, a 2015-batch IAS officer, was serving as the Surendranagar Collector until he was transferred without a new posting last week. The transfer came days after the ED arrested a deputy mamladar from Mr. Patel's office in the same case.

The Central agency is probing alleged money laundering involving the deputy mamladar, Chandrasingh Mori, and others, following the registration of an Enforcement Case Information Report under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The Gujarat Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) has also registered an FIR against Mr. Patel and three others based on a complaint filed by the ED.

(With inputs from PTD)

**India has the right to defend itself against terrorism: Jaishankar**

India cannot be a good neighbour to a country that supports terrorism; signing of Indus Waters Treaty was a gesture of goodwill, says Minister

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

Launching a scathing attack on Pakistan on Friday, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said that India cannot be a good neighbour to a country that supports terrorism.

"You can also have bad neighbours... unfortunately we do. When you have bad neighbours... if you look to the one to the West – if a country decides that they will deliberately, persistently, unrepentantly continue with terrorism, we have a right to defend our people against terrorism," he said, while answering queries from the student fraternity at the Indian Institute of Technology-Madras after launching the IITM Global Research Foundation.

"We will exercise that right. How we exercise that right is up to us. Nobody can tell us what we should do or not," he added.

Mr. Jaishankar also spoke about the Indus Waters Treaty. "Many years ago, we agreed to a water-sharing arrangement. The



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar interacts with students in IIT-Madras on Friday. R. RAGU

belief was that it was a gesture of goodwill... but if you have decades of terrorism, there is no good neighbourliness and [in return] you don't get the benefit of good neighbourliness," he said. "You can't say... please share water with me but I will continue terrorism."

He also told the students that India was blessed with a lot of good neighbours. He pointed out that during the pandemic, most neighbours got the first shipment of vaccine from India.

He then highlighted another example pertaining to the Ukraine conflict.

"Because of the Ukraine conflict, there were food shortages, fuel shortages and financial crises – we helped our neighbours with fuel, food and fertilizers. And in a sense, we were sharing what we had," Mr. Jaishankar said.

The Minister also said some neighbours went through exceptional stress, the notable example being Sri Lanka.

"They had an acute financial crisis and we stepped up with a package of \$4 billion," he said.

**Unplanned SIR led to multiple deaths, says Trinamool leader****Shrabana Chatterjee**  
KOLKATA

Trinamool Congress national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Friday said the party will win at least one more seat in the 2026 Assembly election than its tally in 2021 in West Bengal. He also claimed the Bharatiya Janata Party was responsible for the "unplanned" special intensive revision (SIR) exercise that led to many deaths in the State.

"I have promised to increase the vote percentage and seats of Trinamool compared to 2021. In 2021, we won 214 seats. We will have to win at least one more seat this time. You need to promise me that one seat will come from South 24 Parganas," he said while addressing a rally in Baruipur, South 24 Parganas district.

The Lok Sabha MP and second-in-command in the Trinamool also threw a challenge to the Opposition leaders in BJP-ruled States. He said that if anyone can manage to start a scheme like the flagship Lakshmir Bhandar in any other State, he will quit politics. Lakshmir Bhandar is a direct cash transfer scheme under which women from across West Bengal receive ₹1,000 a month from the government. Ov-



Abhishek Banerjee

er 2.21 crore women benefit from this scheme. "CM Mamata Banerjee gives Lakshmir Bhandar without any criteria of eligibility to the women of Bengal," Mr. Banerjee added.

"Who will take the responsibility for the deaths due to unplanned SIR?" he asked, raising questions about the "hurried and unplanned" SIR process that, he claimed, led to multiple deaths across the State.

He also said they met Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar and asked for the list of alleged "Bangladeshi nationals" who were found in the SIR process. This came after BJP had claimed that there were over one crore illegal immigrants in West Bengal who will be deleted in the SIR process.

On December 16, the Election Commission published the draft voter list, which saw around 58 lakh deletions including deceased, shifted, doubtful, and other voters.

**T.N. police ask 'X' to take down video of attack on Odisha man****S. Vijay Kumar**  
CHENNAI

pions, causing severe cut injuries. The victim was later identified as Suraj, 34, a native of Odisha.

The accused, all hailing from Nemelli in Tiruvallur district, reportedly recorded the assault on their mobile phones and uploaded the video on social media. The footage soon went viral, drawing sharp condemnation from civil society, including politicians, journalists and social media influencers. The juveniles were detained by the local police.

Suraj was rushed to the Government Hospital, where he was treated and later discharged, the sources said.

"We act strictly in accordance with the law, not emotions. Steps have been taken to block the URLs as the content involves graphic violence and exposes the identities of juveniles," a police officer said.

**Chhattisgarh HC gives bail to Chaitanya Baghel in two cases linked to liquor 'scam'****The Hindu Bureau**  
RAIPUR

Chaitanya Baghel, son of former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister and senior Congress leader Bhupesh Baghel, was granted bail by the Chhattisgarh High Court on Friday in two cases related to the alleged liquor scam. The liquor scam surfaced during Mr. Bhupesh Baghel's tenure as Chief Minister.

While the State Anti-Corruption Bureau/Economic Offences Wing (ACB/EOW) has been probing the liquor scam, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is investigating the alleged money laundering linked to the case.

ED counsel Saurabh Kumar Pandey said that Mr. Chaitanya was granted bail in both the cases. According to the ED, he was at the helm of the syndicate in-



Chaitanya Baghel

volved in the alleged liquor scam and personally handled nearly ₹1,000 crore in proceeds of crime generated from it. The ACB/EOW has claimed that, in addition to managing the proceeds of crime, he received around ₹200-250 crore as his share.

In the ED case, the court noted that the allegations, as they stand, are premised primarily on broad assertions regarding influence and proximity, rather than concrete acts

of commission. As per the order, the prosecution narrative proceeds on the premise that the alleged syndicate was managed operationally by public servants and private intermediaries, with day-to-day execution allegedly handled by certain named officials and associates.

"The applicant is not shown to have held any statutory position in the Excise Department, CSMCL, CSBCL, or any licensing authority. Nor is he alleged to have issued any administrative direction, policy decision, or official order forming part of the scheduled offences," it added. In the EOW bail order, the court mentioned that Mr. Chaitanya was not named in the FIR and that he was never arraigned as an accused in the original or five supplementary chargesheets.

**Anantnag's key trekking spots shut for tourists****The Hindu Bureau**  
SRINAGAR

Popular trekking spots in Anantnag in Jammu and Kashmir were declared out of bounds for tourists on Friday, following inputs from security agencies.

On the banned list are Margan Top, Chauhar Nag, and Sinthan Top. The areas are at an altitude of around 3,696 metres and have traditionally attracted adventure lovers to the high-altitude meadows and glacier lakes they are known for.

According to an order issued by the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM), Koker-nag, inputs from the police and security agencies indicated security vulnerabilities in certain high-altitude and forested areas falling under the sub-division.

"The order will remain valid for two months unless withdrawn or extended," it said.

**SC slams denial of bail to give accused a 'taste of imprisonment as a lesson'****The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has said the presumption of innocence of an undertrial does not dissolve merely because a law enforcement agency says his alleged offence is "serious" or if he happens to be booked under a stringent law.

Bench headed by Justice J.K. Maheshwari marked the court's disapproval of agencies resorting to ways to prolong the incarceration of undertrials without bail for the "purpose of giving him a taste of imprisonment as a lesson".

The police said the drive was not aimed at verifying nationality but was part of a routine exercise to identify suspected individuals in temporary settlements.

The Opposition Congress demanded judicial intervention in the matter.



the top court was presumed innocent.

**'Bail is the rule'**

"Pre-trial incarceration cannot be allowed to degenerate into punishment without adjudication, and courts are constitutionally obliged to intervene where long custody becomes disproportionate, arbitrary or excessive," it said.

The court said the norm

"bail is the rule and jail is an exception" was etched in the ethos of criminal jurisprudence.

"Generally an undertrial prisoner ought not be placed behind bars indefinitely unless there is clear threat to society, [possibility of] influencing witnesses/inquiry or he is a flight risk etc. This rule also ensures that the process is also not made a punishment by which a person is jailed for very many years pending trial. Bail is a qualified right of an accused before conviction, wherein the accused is not guaranteed bail, rather it puts onus on the prosecution to establish as to why the undertrial prisoner should not be enlarged on bail. Any deviation in the above pro-

position is constitutionally circumspect," the apex court observed. The order referred to precedents that had laid down that "once it is obvious that a timely trial would not be possible and the accused has suffered incarceration for a significant period of time, the courts would ordinarily be obliged to enlarge them on bail".

The observations were part of a recent order granting bail to Kapil Wadhawan, Managing Director of Dewan Housing Finance Limited (DHFL), and his brother Dheeraj Wadhawan in connection with the ₹34,000-crore bank fraud case registered by the Central Bureau of Investigation on a complaint by the Union Bank of India.

# Congress alleges 15 deaths in Indore as official toll stands at 5

Team of senior doctors will analyse media reports of deaths related to drinking water contamination and update official figures, says Collector; two senior municipal corporation officials suspended as Congress seeks accountability and action

## Mehul Malpani

BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh Congress has alleged that at least 15 people have died so far after drinking contaminated water supplied by the Indore Municipal Corporation (IMC), even as the BJP-led State government maintained the official death toll at five, including a woman who died on Friday.

Late on Friday night, following a State-wide review meeting, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav suspended two senior IMC officials and transferred the IMC Commissioner, as the Congress called for accountability and action to be taken against all those responsible.

"The State government will not tolerate negligence in the incident that occurred in Bhagirathpura due to contaminated



**Citizens' plight:** Family members grieve in Bhagirathpura, Indore, on Friday. Nearly 210 people hospitalised so far, says Collector. PTI

drinking water. Strict decisions are being taken in this regard. The corporation's Additional Commissioner Rohit Sisoniya and the in-charge Superintendent Engineer of PHE Sanjeev Shrivastava have been suspended. Instructions have also been given to remove Indore Municipal Corporation Commission-

er Dilip Kumar Yadav," the Chief Minister said on X.

In a status report submitted to the M.P. High Court, the district administration and the State Health Department said that four people, all above 60 years of age, have died so far in Bhagirathpura due to water-related problems. Indore District Collector

Shivam Verma later updated the death toll to five. "The administration issues the figures on the basis of medical confirmation and so far, five deaths have occurred in the incident," Mr. Verma said.

"We have also constituted a team of senior doctors which will analyse the death figures which were received from other sources such as public representatives or media and then we will update our official death figure report. Till yesterday, 201 people were admitted; today, nine more people have been admitted, and the number has risen to 210."

### Delayed response

After a morning review meeting, the Chief Minister had directed Mr. Sisoniya's transfer to the agriculture department, relieved Mr. Shrivastava of the charge of the water distribution department, and issued a

show-cause notice against Mr. Yadav.

"Complaints of dirty water had been coming from the area for more than a year now. This is why the project for a new supply line was added in a note-sheet in November 2024, and the tender was issued in August 2025. But work remained stalled," an official at the IMC said.

### Mere cover-up

After the morning transfer order against Mr. Sisoniya, the Madhya Pradesh Mahila Congress's chief Reena Bourasi termed the State's actions "a mere cover-up". "The government is trying to protect the accused responsible for the 15 deaths. This government did not take any action even on the demands of its own departmental Minister and the city's mayor," she said, adding that the transfer of one official is not enough to fix accountability.

# Kharge questions Modi's silence, says Centre failed to ensure clean water, clean air

## The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI



Mallikarjun Kharge

Mr. Kharge alleged that all the government's schemes were mired in corruption, and said that 10% of the Jal Jeevan Mission fund was allocated for purifying contaminated water. "The Modi government and the BJP have failed to provide either clean water or clean air to the country," the Congress chief said.

His party colleague and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi accused the government of providing "poison instead of water".

"Not water, but poison was distributed in Indore, and the administration remained in deep slumber," Mr. Gandhi said in a post on X.

"Every home is filled with mourning, the poor are helpless – and on top of that, BJP leaders are making arrogant statements. Those who lost their lives and livelihoods needed solace; the government offered arrogance," the Opposition leader said.

# BJP alleges 'maha jungle raj' in Bengal, says Mamata 'threatened' Amit Shah

## The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Friday alleged that there was "maha jungle raj" in the Trinamool Congress-ruled West Bengal, and that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had threatened Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

Addressing a press conference, BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said: "In West Bengal, we see how

jungle raj is flourishing throughout under the patronage of Mamata Banerjee."

**Constitutional violation**  
"A Chief Minister, who takes an oath to uphold the Constitution, threatens the Home Minister of India. She says 'if I do not want it, the Home Minister of India cannot enter West Bengal,'" he claimed, adding that it was a "violation" of Article 19 of the Constitu-

tion. "And she says 'if I want, he cannot even come out of his hotel room. This means if a citizen, exercising his constitutional rights, wants to go and communicate and interact with people, if the Home Minister of the country wants to go, you are threatening him,'" he said.

"What is 'jungle raj', 'maha jungle raj', 'goonda raj' like? It is exactly like Mamata Banerjee...where she feels that the Rohingya, who are infiltrators, are her vote bank," alleged Mr. Bhatia.

"And since we are talking about West Bengal, and I mentioned the baseless allegations of vote theft that Rahul Gandhi repeatedly makes after losing elections. Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury is a respected leader of the Congress... He says that in West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee does not steal votes, she commits vote dacoity," he said.

## The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Accusing the Centre of weakening the Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS) through budget cuts and administrative curbs, the Congress on Friday announced a nationwide "Save ECHS" campaign to highlight pending medical bills of ex-servicemen and disruptions in medical treatment they face.

Colonel Rohit Chaudhry (retd), chairman of the AICC Ex-Servicemen Department, said ex-servicemen would start an agitation in the national capital unless the government released ₹14,000 crore for the ECHS by January 30.

The scheme covers around 72 lakh beneficiaries, but medical bills of more than 20 lakh ex-servicemen were pending, with outstanding dues exceeding ₹9,000 crore, he said.

As part of the month-long campaign, the Congress would reach out to over 400 ECHS polyclinics across the country to gather data on unpaid bills and assess operational challenges, Mr. Chaudhry said at a press conference.

### Mounting backlog

He said the scheme needed ₹13,500 crore in 2023-24 but got an allocation of ₹9,831 crore, despite an existing backlog of ₹3,500

crore. The backlog rose to ₹5,400 crore in 2024-25 and has touched nearly ₹6,000 crore in the current financial year, forcing several empanelled hospitals to stop providing treatment to beneficiaries, the Congress said.

The Congress demanded clearance of all pending bills immediately, restoration of the ECHS's administrative powers, and bringing the scheme under the Chief of Defence Staff.

# Remarks by Minister's husband trigger row

## The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

A controversy has erupted over a recent statement by the husband of an Uttarakhand Cabinet Minister that "girls are sold for ₹20,000 to ₹25,000 in Bihar".

The remark was made by Girdhari Lal Sahu, BJP leader and husband of State Women and Child Development Minister Rekha Arya, at a public event in Uttarakhand's Almora earlier this week.

### Seeks apology

While the Minister and the Uttarakhand BJP are silent on the issue, the party's Bihar unit has demanded an apology from Mr. Sahu for disrespecting women of their State.

The Congress has also condemned the remarks.

A video of the BJP leader's comments at the event has gone viral on social media. In the conversation, he was trying to persuade some young BJP members, present in the audience, to get married at the "right time". "You are young now, when are you getting married? In old age? If you're unable to get married....we will bring a girl for you from Bihar. There, you get girls for ₹20,000-₹25,000".

Bihar State Women Commission chairperson Apsara condemned his statement and said the board had taken *suo motu* cognisance and issued a notice seeking an apology.

# BJP, Shiv Sena leaders target Shah Rukh Khan after KKR induces Bangladeshi player

## The Hindu Bureau

MUMBAI



Shah Rukh Khan

The inclusion of Bangladeshi cricketer Mustafizur Rahman in the IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR), co-owned by actor Shah Rukh Khan, has sparked a controversy in Maharashtra.

Politicians and spiritual leaders slammed the actor for selecting a Bangladeshi player, given the attacks on Hindu minorities in Bangladesh.

Calling Bangladeshis "enemies", the Shiv Sena (UBT) said that if the actor retained the player in his team, it would mean that he did not understand the nation's sentiments.

"They [Bangladeshis] are terrorising the country, and Shah Rukh Khan should use this time to show gratitude towards the country. Boycott these players; choose Indian

last few months, the atrocities have hurt the sentiments of India. The Indian government needs to intervene in this. If Shah Rukh Khan doesn't want to get targeted, then he should remove the player."

Hindu spiritual leader Jagadguru Swami Rambhadracharya called Mr. Khan a "traitor".

There were voices in support of the *Chak De! India* star.

"Shah Rukh Khan is being targeted because he is Muslim; we still play cricket with Pakistani cricketers after Operation Sindo. This is BJP-RSS' double-faced policy," Congress leader Bhai Jagtap said.

According to Trinamool Congress spokesperson Kunal Ghosh, not every issue needs to be politicised. "What will they achieve by targeting Shah Rukh Khan?" he asked.

(With inputs from PTI)

<b>GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA</b>					
<b>OFFICE OF THE ENGINEER-IN-CHIEF, RURAL WORKS, ODISHA, BHUBANESWAR</b>					
Letter No.42335, Dated : 22.12.2025 Email i.d. : crew_bbsr@yahoo.com					
Notice inviting Request for Proposal under EPC Contract (RFP-On-line - CE (Buildings & Bridges)-01/ 2025-26 dt. 22.12.2025)					
1. Name of the work : As mentioned in NIT 2. Total No. of Works : 02 (Two) no 3. Period of Completion: 30 Calendar Months 4. Other details : www.tendersodisha.gov.in					
Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	No. of bridge works	Availability of Tender on-line for bidding		
			From	To	
Chief Engineer, Buildings & Bridges, Rural Works, Odisha, Bhubaneswar	RFP-Online-CE-Buildings & Bridges-01/ 2025-26	(02) Nos.	06.01.2026 at 10.00 A.M	28.01.2026 Upto 5.00 P.M	
Other details can be seen in the bidding documents, which will be available in website : www.tendersodisha.gov.in.					
Chief Engineer (Buildings & Bridges), Rural Works, Odisha, Bhubaneswar					
O-1885: DIPR/25201/1/0001/2526					

<b>TAMILNADU MINERALS LIMITED</b>					
(An Undertaking of Government and Private Sector Companies in Tamil Nadu)					
No. 54/54/CE/TD/2025-26 & NIT No.913 & 914 /SE-II/TD/ 2025-26 dt:29-12-2025					
NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER WITH FORWARD BIDDING					
1 Description	Sale of Certain Grades of Natural Graphite Flakes and D.E. Fines produced at Graphite Beneficiation Plant, Sivaganga, Tamil Nadu.				
2 Tender No. & Date	001/AP-2/2026, Dated:02.01.2026 2026, TNMIN_638466_1				
3 Bid submission end date	31.01.2026 upto 1600 hrs.				
4 Technical bid opening date	02.02.2026 at 1600 hrs.				
5 Tender Fee	Rs.2,000/- (Rupees Two Thousand only) (Non-refundable)				
EMD amount	As per annexure-3 of tender document				
Note: For further details please visit <a href="http://tenders.tnlmin.org">http://tenders.tnlmin.org</a> e-tendering portal					
DIPR/006/TENDER/2026					
GENERAL MANAGER (FINANCE)					

<b>TIRUMALA TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS-TIRUPATTI</b>					
Office of the Chief Engineer TENDER NOTICE					
ADV No.54/D3/CE/TD/2025-26 & NIT No.913 & 914 /SE-II/TD/ 2025-26 dt:29-12-2025					
Name of work:(1) Providing Permanent Queue line from Batagangamanna circle to GG Dam Circle with steel Foot-over bridges and Toilets along the outer ring road at Tirumala. Amount 1200.00 Lakhs, Time for Completion:6 months.(2) Improvements & Providing Granite flooring to Corridors and PUW Windows in VSRH-I at Tirumala. Amount 650.00 Lakhs, Time for Completion:12 months. NOTE: For full details log on to the Website <a href="http://www.tirumala.org">http://www.tirumala.org</a>					
TTD-40021/10/2025-PRO SEC (Adv.No.342) Date:02-01-2026					
EXECUTIVE OFFICER					

<b>PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LIMITED</b>					
(Regd Office: PSEB Head Office, The Mall, Patiala, Website: <a href="http://www.pspcl.in">www.pspcl.in</a> )					
Corporate Identification Number (CIN): U40109PB2010SGC033813 Contact Number: 9646123323					
Tender Inquiry No. PPR-01/2026 Dated: 02.01.2026					
Chief Engineer/PP&R Organization, Shed No. D-3, Shakti Vihar, PSPCL, Patiala invites E-Tender under three-part bid system for PSPCL for Appointment of Consultant for Load Forecasting Automation Solution. For detailed NIT & tender specifications please refer to <a href="http://eproc.punjab.gov.in">http://eproc.punjab.gov.in</a> from 02.01.2026 onwards.					
Note: Corrigendum and addendum, if any will be published online at <a href="http://eproc.punjab.gov.in">http://eproc.punjab.gov.in</a>					
C 10/26 1079/12/2025-26/6732					

<b>PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT</b>					
Office of the Executive Engineer, PWD Bengaluru Division, 2nd Floor, PWD Annexure Building, K.R. Circle, Bengaluru-01, Phone: 080-22133370 Date: 01.01.2026					
No. 47/2025-26					
Date: 01.01.2026					
<b>SHORT-TERM TENDER NOTIFICATION</b>					
Item-rate tenders, for the work in The limits of Bengaluru Division, No.2, North & Devanahalli Sub-Divisions under this office noted below, are invited by the undersigned on behalf of the Governor of Karnataka in accordance with Karnataka Transparency in Public Procurement Rules 2000 and as per Standard Tender Documents for procurement of works from the contractors registered in K.P.W.D. as per KPPP. Tender Notification is Published for 05 works (Rs.10.00 to 950.00 Lakhs) Details of the tender works can be obtained from the above Office during office hours on working days. EMD & Tender processing fees are mentioned in KPP Portal <a href="http://kpp.karnataka.gov.in">http://kpp.karnataka.gov.in</a>					
(1) Tenders must be submitted online through KPP Portal on or before 4.00 P.M. on: 08.01.2026 (2) The opening of tenders through KPP Portal on: 09.01.2026 at 4.30 P.M. or further date and time will be intimated. For more details contact this office.					
Sd/- Executive Engineer DIPR/DD-C/P/4798/KSMCA/2025-26					

<b>KMML</b>					
(A Govt. of Kerala Undertaking) Sankaramangalam, Kollam-691583 Phone: +91 474 2131111 Email: <a href="mailto:kml@kmml.com">kml@kmml.com</a> URL: <a href="http://www.kmml.com">www.kmml.com</a>					
TENDER NOTICE					
For more details, please visit E-Tendering Portal <a href="https://etendering.kerala.gov.in">https://etendering.kerala.gov.in</a> or <a href="http://www.kmml.com">www.kmml.com</a>					
No.	Tender ID	Items			
1.	2026_KMML_825037_1	Manufacturing and Supply of Paper Valve Product Bags for KEMOX RC-800PG+, RC-813 and RC-822			
Chavara.					

## IN BRIEF



## BJP accuses New York Mayor of interfering in India's affairs

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Friday accused New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani of "interfering" in India's internal affairs after he wrote a note to jailed activist Umar Khalid. Addressing a press conference, BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said India would not tolerate such actions and questioned Mr. Mamdani's *locus standi* to comment on the country's internal matters. Mr. Bhatia said the people of India had complete faith in the country's judiciary and asserted that if India's sovereignty were challenged, the nation would stand united under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

## Gold theft case: BJP leader calls for Central agency probe

Indicating his lack of confidence in the probe by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) in the gold theft case linked to the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple, former Kerala BJP president K. Surendran has demanded an investigation by a Central agency "to nab the real culprits." Speaking at a press conference here on Friday, Mr. Surendran alleged that leaders of both the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the United Democratic Front (UDF) are involved in the theft. Mr. Surendran also alleged that changes were made to the SIT to include "two CPI(M) cadres" as part of the team.

## First mountain tunnel breakthrough achieved in bullet train project: Minister



The 1.5-km tunnel is the longest among the seven planned in Maharashtra for the bullet train corridor. PTI

## Snehal Mutha

Mumbai

The first mountain tunnel breakthrough of the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail (MAHSR) project was achieved in Maharashtra's Palghar district, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced on Friday. The 1.5-km tunnel is the longest among the seven planned in Maharashtra for the bullet train corridor.

"On completion, the project will reduce travel time between Mumbai and Ahmedabad to just one hour and 58 minutes. It has facilitated the generation of employment and will integrate the economies of major commercial centres," Mr. Vaishnaw said. He added that India is likely to get its first bullet train on August 15, 2027.

Calling it a "milestone,"

Mr. Vaishnaw said, "This is the first mountain tunnel of the project in the State. The breakthrough has been achieved in an approximately 1.5 km long mountain tunnel (MT-5), located between Virar and Boisar bullet train stations."

According to the official statement, "The MT-5 tunnel was excavated from both ends, and the excavation was completed within

18 months using a cutting-edge drill and blast method." The 508-km MAHSR project has an overall tunnel length of 27.4 km. Among this, 21 km is underground tunnels, while 6.4 km is surface tunnels. Overall, the MAHSR has eight mountain tunnels, with seven tunnels alone in Maharashtra having a combined length of about 6.05 km, and one tunnel of 350 metres located in Gujarat.

Mr. Rathore said that the two girls did not speak

- Solve this puzzle online and access more puzzles at <https://crossword.thehindu.com>
- CROSSWORD** 14682 (set by Gussalufz)
- SCAN TO PLAY
- 1 November observance organised in December and May, mistakenly (11,3)  
12 Woman set out after pocketing diamonds (4)  
13 Minor U.S. assets restricting one's source of tax breaks (9)  
17 Drug havens minus dope? Bizarre! (5,4)  
19 Pasta, pizza win British, Irish hearts (4)  
22 Reject gnu clone after trial in synthetic habitat (8,6)  
25 Leaving body writhing, in goes killing squad's leader (7)  
26 Popular team, now called "WI", backed regularly (7)  
27 Startles Slytherin insiders with honesty (9)  
28 Pulls rank, replacing premier with unknown assistant, essentially (5)

- Across**
- Munch quietly on cold meat (5)
  - Glands prone to release second dash of rheum before end of sneezes (9)
  - Painter's angrier production (7)
  - Tandoori chicken cooked without onion had flopped, that's fair (7)
  - Munch quietly on cold meat (5)
  - Glands prone to release second dash of rheum before end of sneezes (9)
  - Painter's angrier production (7)
  - Tandoori chicken cooked without onion had flopped, that's fair (7)
  - Hot garlic oil that can be smoky? (9)
  - Frightened gangster with weapon (7)
  - Some cameraman apparently capsized in canal (6)
  - Bird's role on hill (9)
  - Old review in old language (5)
  - Time to join race-fit running group (small one) (8)
  - Line up crosshairs and attack veganism occasionally (4,3)
  - Provide reference over the phone, for position (4)
  - Was beverage wrongly emptied jamming a sink? (5,4)
  - Mean behaviour is rising (partially lessened in September) (9)
  - Is this setter guy friendly? (8)
  - Smooth transformation that turns female into male? (4,3)
  - In Germany, radicals at extreme left have matured towards centre? (7)
  - English writer, upper-class, by and large boring attention-grabber (6)
  - Numbers filmed by Steven Spielberg (5)
  - Pointless wager over origin of artifact in tourist destination (4)

- Down**
- Hot garlic oil that can be smoky? (9)
  - Frightened gangster with weapon (7)
  - Some cameraman apparently capsized in canal (6)
  - Bird's role on hill (9)
  - Old review in old language (5)
  - Time to join race-fit running group (small one) (8)
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- Solution to previous puzzle**
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## IN BRIEF



## Maruti produces more than 22.55 lakh vehicles in CY2025

Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. said it had produced more than 22.55 lakh units in calendar year (CY) 2025, its highest-ever production in a calendar year. "This is the second consecutive year that the company exceeded 20 lakh units in annual production," it said. The production includes vehicles for domestic sales, exports and OEM supplies. The top five models by production volume during the year were Fronx, Baleno, Swift, Dzire and Ertiga.

## LIC rolls out revival campaign for individual lapsed policies

The Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) has launched a special revival campaign for individual lapsed policies. Under the campaign, from January 1 to March 2, up to 30% concession will be extended on late fee for all non-linked insurance plans up to a maximum of ₹5,000 if they are eligible for revival. Policies in a lapsed condition during the premium paying term and not completed policy term are eligible to be revived.

## Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal can directly buy coal from CIL

State-owned CIL on Friday said buyers from neighbouring nations Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal can now join online coal auctions directly, skipping the Indian middlemen. The move will help in utilising the surplus coal resources better and promote transparency. Earlier, access to Coal India Ltd.'s (CIL) dry fuel by consumers across the borders was only through domestic coal traders who were allowed to buy and sell without any end-use restrictions. PTI

## Export Promotion Mission: Govt. unveils 2 more credit-linked plans

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Government introduced two new components in the Export Promotion Mission (EPM) aimed at easing and reducing the cost of the credit-access process for exporters.

This comes days after the Ministry of Commerce and Industry notified guidelines for a market access scheme under the EPM. With Friday's announcement, three of the 11 schemes under the EPM have been operationalised.

The two schemes would entail an outlay of ₹5,181 crore over six years until 2030-31. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK



**Export boost:** The two schemes would entail an outlay of ₹5,181 cr. over six years until 2030-31. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

Interest Subvention for Pre- and Post-Shipment Export Credit scheme will reduce the cost of export finance and "strengthens MSME liquidity, improve competitiveness and supports India's integration into global value chains, while ensuring fiscal pru-

dence and compliance," the Ministry of Commerce said in its announcement.

**Interest subvention** "Eligible MSME exporters can avail interest subvention on rupee export credit (pre- and post-shipment) extended by scheduled

banks, in accordance with RBI Master Directions," it added. The second sub-scheme – Collateral Support for Export Credit – is aimed at giving MSME exporters the ability to access bank credit even with limited collateral or third-party guarantees.

The scheme would be implemented through the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) on a pilot basis and be applicable to export-linked working capital loans.

MSME exporters exporting notified tariff lines will be eligible for the collateral support.

Micro & small exporters would be eligible for up to 85% guarantee, while medium exporters would be capped at a 65% guarantee.

## Anticipating risks before they surface'

Lalatendu Mishra  
MUMBAI

The next phase of market development would be defined not just by scale, but by quality and sophistication, Securities & Exchange Board of India (SEBI) Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey said on Friday.

"Our priorities include continued strengthening of corporate governance standards, promoting sustainable finance and long-term value creation, encouraging innovation while keeping investor protection at the centre and responsible use of technology and data in market operations and supervision," he



he said. "As markets evolve emerging technologies – particularly artificial intelligence – along with deeper global linkages, bring new efficiencies but also fresh complexities. The next frontier therefore lies in anticipating risks before they surface," he emphasised.

## 'Gig economy reflects systemic inequality'

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Days after the New Year's Eve protest by gig and delivery workers across the country, Zomato founder Deepinder Goyal on Friday said that the gig economy is a "reminder of systemic inequality", crediting it for purportedly "shattering" the "invisibility" of the poor's labour in India.

In what Mr. Goyal referred to as his "last one on the topic" in his series of statements on social media over December 31 protests, he argued this was the "first time in history at this scale" the working class and consuming class are

interacting face-to-face. He went on to argue before gig work, "the rich could enjoy luxury without moral discomfort", adding that this "discomfort with our own selves is why we are uncomfortable about the gig economy". "Visibility is the price of progress", he posited.

He went on to argue before gig work, "the rich could enjoy luxury without moral discomfort", adding that this "discomfort with our own selves is why we are uncomfortable about the gig economy". "Visibility is the price of progress", he posited.

Deepinder Goyal

Deputy Inspector General of Forest (C) & Head of Office

CBC13134/11/0006/2526

(S. M. P. R. S. / S. Y. VARAJI)  
उप वन मन्त्रालयका कार्यालयापात्र

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(S. M. P. R. S. / S. Y.

**SEOUL**

**Kim Jong-un's daughter makes public visit to state mausoleum**



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's daughter, Ju Ae, who is likely being prepared as his successor, accompanied her parents on her first public visit to the Kumsusan mausoleum to pay respects to former leaders. Ms. Ju Ae has been making increasingly prominent appearances in state media over the past three years. REUTERS

**COLOMBO**

**Sri Lanka launches probe over English syllabus' gay website link**



Sri Lanka launched a criminal investigation on Friday after a government syllabus for 11 and 12-year-olds directed pupils to a gay chat website to improve their language skills. The Grade Six English syllabus suggested pupils could find a pen-pal to improve their language skills via *buddy.net* — an online chat website. AFP

**KARACHI**

**Pakistan permits Biman Airways to start direct flights to Karachi**



Pakistan's aviation authorities have issued permission to the Bangladesh national airline, Biman Airways, to start direct operations on the route of Dhaka-Karachi. According to a report on Friday in the *Jang* newspaper, permission has been given on a test basis for a period that will last until March 30. PTI

**KYIV**

**Ukraine's Zelenskyy names spy chief Budanov as new top aide**



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday named military intelligence chief Kyrylo Budanov as the new head of his office, after his previous top aide resigned in November over a corruption scandal. Mr. Budanov, 39, said he had accepted the nomination and would "continue to serve Ukraine". AFP

# Pak. court awards life sentences for journalists, YouTubers over protests

The anti-terrorism court sentences seven persons to life for inciting violence and spreading hatred against state institutions during the 2023 riots; they were tried and convicted in absentia; rights groups and media organisations condemn verdict

**Associated Press**

ISLAMABAD

A court in Pakistan's capital sentenced seven persons, including three journalists, two YouTubers and two retired army officers, to life imprisonment on Friday, after convicting them of inciting violence during riots in 2023 and spreading hatred against state institutions.

An anti-terrorism court judge, Tahir Abbas Sipra, announced the verdict in Islamabad after completing trials held in absentia.

None of the accused were present in court. They have been living abroad after leaving the



Journalists protest against 'curbs on press freedom' and 'excessive control of the digital landscape' in Karachi, in January 2025. REUTERS

country in recent years to avoid arrest.

Those convicted include former editor Shaheen Sehbai; two other journalists, Sabir Shakir and Moed Pirzada; YouTubers

Wajahat Saeed Khan and Haider Raza Mehd; and retired army officers Adil Raaja and Akbar Hussain.

According to the court order, the charges against the men stemmed from the

violent unrest that erupted in May 2023 following the arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan in a graft case.

At the time, thousands of Mr. Khan's supporters attacked military installations, torched government property, ransacked the residence of a senior army officer and damaged the state-run *Radio Pakistan* building.

Mr. Khan was also indicted in 2024 on charges of inciting violence against military and government targets. He has denied the allegations. He was ousted from power by his political opponents through a no-confidence vote in Parliament in April 2022.

Human rights defenders and representatives of journalists' unions say freedom of speech is shrinking in Pakistan.

According to the prosecution, the seven men, who are known for publicly supporting Mr. Khan, had incited people to violence during the riots on May 9, 2023, when demonstrators targeted military installations, because Mr. Khan repeatedly blamed his removal on the United States and Pakistan's military.

The U.S. government, the Pakistani military and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who replaced Mr. Khan after his ouster, have denied the allegations.

Human rights defenders and representatives of journalists' unions say freedom of speech is shrinking in Pakistan.

# Yemen separatists declare independence transition

**Agence France-Presse**

MUKALLA

Yemen's UAE-backed separatists announced a two-year transition to an independent state on Friday after seizing swathes of territory in a lightning offensive that triggered deadly air strikes by a Saudi-led coalition.

The surprise announcement means Yemen, which was divided into North and South from 1967 to 1990, could again be split by January 2028. The separatists plan to call the new country "South Arabia".

Southern Transitional Council (STC) president Aidaros Alzubidi said the transitional phase would include dialogue with Yemen's north – controlled by Iran-backed Houthi rebels – and a referendum on independence.



Supporters of the UAE-backed separatist Southern Transitional Council during a rally in Aden, Yemen, on Thursday. REUTERS

"Between the parties concerned in the South and the North," Mr. Alzubidi said in a revised address.

"This constitutional declaration shall be considered immediately and directly effective before that date if the call is not heeded or if southern Yemen again came under attack."

"We announce the commencement of a transitional phase lasting two years, and the Council calls on the international community to sponsor dialogue between the parties concerned in the South and the North," Mr. Alzubidi said in a revised address.

# Russian strike injures 19 in Kharkiv housing area, says Ukraine

**Agence France-Presse**

KHARKIV/KYIV

A Russian strike Friday on residential buildings in the major Ukrainian city of Kharkiv wounded at least 19 people, Ukrainian officials said.

The attack came a day after Russia accused Kyiv of a strike on a hotel and a cafe in Khorly in Ukraine's occupied south, killing 28 people, and warned of "consequences" – but Ukraine said the attack targeted a military gathering that

was closed to civilians.

Kharkiv regional governor Oleg Synegubov said on Telegram after Russia's attack on Friday that "a total of 19 people suffered blast injuries, glass wounds, and abrasions", adding that a six-month-old baby was among them.

Investigators are combing through the blackened ruins of the venue, examining videos on social media and interviewing survivors for clues on how the fire began in the early hours of New Year's Day in the bar and spread so fast.

# Fountain candle' sparklers likely started Swiss bar fire which killed 40: prosecutor

**Reuters**

CRANS-MONTANA



Mourners gather near the site of a fire that ripped through a bar in Crans-Montana, during a New Year's celebration, on Friday. AFP

Witnesses have recounted seeing bar staff carrying sparkling fountain candles attached to bottles of champagne. The Valais

canton's chief prosecutor, Beatrice Pilloud, said the sparklers were a leading line of enquiry that looked to be firming up.

"Everything suggests that the fire started from the burning sparklers ... that had been attached to champagne bottles and were moved too close to the ceiling," Ms. Pilloud told a news conference. "From there, a rapid, very rapid and widespread blaze ensued."

The probe will also focus on previous renovations at the Constellation bar and the materials used, the availability of adequate fire extinguishing systems and escape routes, and the number of people who were in the bar.

# Maduro holds out olive branch to U.S., suggests serious talks

**Reuters**

MADRID

Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro has extended an olive branch to U.S. President Donald Trump, proposing serious talks on combating drug trafficking and offering U.S. companies ready access to Venezuelan oil.

Mr. Trump has accused the "illegitimate" Maduro of running a narco-state and threatened to remove him from power. Mr. Maduro has vehemently denied links to crime.

# Women's cricket is evolving fast, says former Lanka pacer Ratnayake

**P.K. Ajith Kumar**

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

He bowled Sri Lanka to its first-ever Test victory. That was in 1985, but four decades later, Rumesh Ratnayake still remembers how he got the better of a world-class Indian batting line-up that boasted the likes of Sunil Gavaskar, Dilip Vengsarkar and Mohinder Amarnath at Colombo.

The quick, who used to wear a white headband, took four for 76 and five for 49 to lead Sri Lanka to a historic 149-run win in the second Test at Colombo. The islanders went on to win the three-match series 1-0.

"For that series, we had wickets that were con-



Ratnayake. NIRMAL HARINDRAN

cive to pace," said Ratnayake in an exclusive interview with *The Hindu*. "That was our strategy, but we probably would not have made pitches like that if we were playing Pakistan, though."

Gavaskar had chosen to bat in the middle-order in

that series, in which K. Srikanth, debutant Lallachand Rajput and Ravi Shastri were the openers. "India had a great batting line-up those days, with Gavaskar, Amarnath and Vengsarkar, who had such a lazy elegance to his batting," said Ratnayake during Sri Lanka's women's T20I series against India. Incidentally, the final match in the series here was his last as the coach.

He had taken over when the team was going through a rough patch, some three years ago. Under him, the Lankan women beat South Africa in T20I series in South Africa and England and stunned India in the Asia Cup final.

"I was absolutely new to

women's cricket and I accepted the job only after the then coach Hashan Tilakaratne, my friend, joined the Bangladesh team," said the man who took 149 wickets from 23 Tests and 70 ODIs.

"I saw potential in the team and I gave them confidence. I wasn't harsh on them when they made mistakes, like dropping a catch. In the very first match we played, against South Africa at the 2023 T20I World Cup, we won."

He believes women's cricket is evolving fast. "Some of the sixes you see in women's cricket today are almost as big as the ones that were scored by the men 30 years ago," he said.

## Easy starts for Divyanshi and Ritvik

### TABLE TENNIS

**Press Trust of India**

VADODARA

Defending champion Divyanshi Bhowmik, who had won the U-15 and U-17 girls' singles titles last year, opened her under-17 campaign by beating compatriot Neeta Kamat 11-2, 11-2 in the Group 1 opener at the WTT Youth Contender on Friday.

In the boys' U-17 category, top seed Ritvik Gupta defeated Dhruba Malikarjunan 11-9, 11-5, 11-5 and then got the better of Shreyas Mankeshwar 13-11, 11-6, 11-7.

In the U-13 boys' category, Shaurya Goyal and Divya Paul posted wins.

# Man City charge stalls at Sunderland, Liverpool held goalless by Leeds

### PREMIER LEAGUE

**Agence France-Presse**

LONDON

Manchester City trails Arsenal by four points at the top of the Premier League after failing to end Sunderland's unbeaten home record in a 0-0 draw on Thursday, while Liverpool was also held similarly by Leeds.

In a goal-shy start to 2026, three of the four New Year's Day fixtures ended without a goal as Tottenham also played out a 0-0 draw on Thomas Frank's return to Brentford.

City had won eight consecutive games to end 2025 and cut the gap on the Gunners to just two points. A draw extended Leeds'



Stupendous show: Roofs was in inspired form to deny Gvardiol. REUTERS

unbeaten run to six games and takes it seven points clear of relegation zone.

Fourth-placed Liverpool edged three points ahead of Chelsea and Manchester United in the battle for a place in next season's Champions League.

Crystal Palace boss Olivier Glasner said his depleted side is in "survival mode" after a 1-1 draw against Fulham extended its winless run to six games.

**The results:** Brentford 0 drew with Tottenham 0; Crystal Palace 1 (Mateja 39) drew with Fulham 1 (Cairney 80); Liverpool 0 drew with Leeds 0; Sunderland 0 drew with Manchester City 0.

GETTY IMAGES

# Xabi Alonso's pivotal week in the Madrid hot seat

Managerial life in the Spanish capital can be challenging when the results dry up, as Alonso is discovering. Despite a promising beginning, a form slump has led to the 44-year-old dealing with boardroom drama, superstar egos and fickle fan sentiment. Given club president Florentino Perez's impatience with managers, Alonso's future hinges on how his side starts the new year

**Reuters**  
**Agence France-Presse**

**W**hen Xabi Alonso was unveiled as the manager of Real Madrid in May last year, there was palpable excitement not just in the Spanish capital but also across the football world at large.

This, after all, was a former Bernabeu midfield general, loved by Madridistas for his trophy-laden playing years. As emotional arcs go, there are few more popular than a club legend's return.

#### Building a reputation

Moreover, after retiring, Alonso – coached by Pep Guardiola, Jose Mourinho and Vicente del Bosque among others – had quickly earned the reputation of being an elite manager.

He guided Bayer Leverkusen to a historic German league and cup double in 2023-24 in his first full season after taking over. His team became the first to complete a Bundesliga campaign unbeaten, disrupting powerhouse Bayern Munich's monopoly.

Alonso also demonstrated his prowess as an adroit tactician. Having to combat a Bayern side with more accomplished players and richer resources, he fashioned inventive solutions. His ideas were modern and progressive, bolstered by a rigorous structure.

In short, Alonso's move to Madrid appealed to the partisan, the neutral and the 'tactico'. But charged with reviving a Real side that ended last season without a major trophy, how would he fare? Amid the excitement, there were also reservations. Coaching Real Madrid involves navigating high-stakes boardroom politics, superstar egos and fickle fan sentiment. Carlo Ancelotti managed it with great success, winning 15 trophies in two spells, but even he faced criticism in 2024-25. His methods were thought to have outlived their utility.

Alonso's stint began promisingly. Although his side was knocked out of the semifinals of the Club World Cup in the summer, he showed tactical flexibility, utilising both a four-man and three-man defence, whereas his predecessor Ancelotti was criticised for not being adaptive enough. By contrast Alonso was keen to adjust things during matches, including where his players were positioned and how they pressed.

He spoke of playing an "ambitious" game with "emotion and energy", and when the season began, the results were encouraging. Madrid won

My mood doesn't change from one day to the next. We need to improve in several areas. We need to give the game a different intention and rhythm, and combine control with verticality  
**XABI ALONSO**



13 of the first 14 games, including a Clasico conquest of bitter rival Barcelona. After four consecutive defeats to Barcelona across competitions last season, Madrid entered the match desperately in need of a statement win to validate Alonso's project and it duly snapped its losing streak.

But things took a turn in November and December. After a win over Valencia, which established Madrid firmly on top of LaLiga, Alonso's side failed to win four of the next seven games, allowing Barcelona to displace it. It also lost Champions League games against Liverpool and Manchester City, as the Basque coach began to feel the heat. Speculation was rife that Alonso would be shown the door, with reports questioning whether he would survive till Christmas.

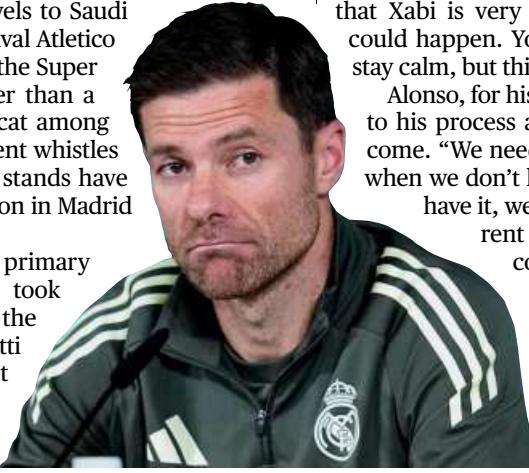
Two successive wins in the league ensured Alonso will stay in the hot seat when Madrid faces Real Betis on Sunday, its first match of the new year. But his situation remains perilous, with ESPN reporting recently that Madrid was considering its options. The club, under president Florentino Perez, is known to be impatient when the results dry up: the number of coaches

who have lasted between three months and just under a year is in double digits.

#### Growing frustration

If reports from the Spanish capital are to be believed, the upcoming week could prove pivotal for Alonso's future. After the Betis fixture, Madrid travels to Saudi Arabia to face city rival Atletico in the semifinals of the Super Cup. Anything other than a win could put the cat among the pigeons. As recent whistles from the Bernabeu stands have shown, the frustration in Madrid is growing.

One of Alonso's primary tasks when he took charge was to find the balance that Ancelotti failed to achieve last season following Kylian Mbappe's arrival from PSG.



He needed to put together a formula for Mbappe and Vinicius Jr. to work together without sacrificing too much out of possession, given their disinclination to repeatedly press and track back in defence.

Indeed, it was always going to be interesting to see whether Alonso could get his superstars to buy into his system. Madrid managers have tended to allow the individual to supersede the collective. The sheer quality of talent at the club has made this work. But in the modern game, where the spaces are more intensely contested, this isn't a consistently reliable method, as Madrid found out last season. Ancelotti was at times exasperated with his forward line's unwillingness to work hard enough for the sake of the team as a whole.

"What I am certain of is that we need and want everyone to defend – the 11 players on the pitch have to be involved defensively,"

Alonso said before the season started, but it's fair to say he hasn't cracked it just yet. If anything, this requirement has contributed to some bad blood in the dressing room. While Mbappe's scintillating form – 29 goals in all competitions – has carried the side, the Alonso-Vinicius relationship has not been straightforward.

Alonso has left Vinicius out of the starting lineup on occasion and subbed him off on others, most notably in the Clasico. The Brazilian's outburst has contributed to gossip that the manager has lost the dressing room.



Here even if you win matches, no one is really happy, there are few teams like that. I am positive that Xabi is very good. You have to give him time and stay calm, but this is difficult at Madrid

**TONI KROOS**

Francesco Mauri, former assistant coach to Ancelotti, refuted this idea. "Xabi's situation isn't ideal, but I don't think it has anything to do with his relationship with the players," Mauri told *Diario AS*. "It isn't easy to coach Madrid and change concepts. It's intelligent not to be stubborn with an idea if it isn't working. It's about finding the system that makes you win, because if you win everything else becomes easier. It's nonsense to say players try to get a coach sacked. It's an exaggeration. Madrid is like that. Xabi is right now the best possible coach for Madrid."

It must also be mentioned that Alonso has had to contend with an injury crisis, at times missing up to 11 first-team players – Mbappe's knee injury couldn't have come at a worse time.

#### Madrid's unique pressure

Madrid legend Toni Kroos threw his weight behind Alonso, speaking on Brazilian great Romario's YouTube channel. "Here even if you win matches, no one is really happy, there are few teams like that," he said. "The coach has little time. You can't think about how you want to play in a year or two, you need results. I am positive that Xabi is very good. He already knew this could happen. You have to give him time and stay calm, but this is difficult at Madrid."

Alonso, for his part, knows he needs to stick to his process and trust that the results will come. "We need to improve in several areas: when we don't have the ball and when we do have it, we need to give the game a different intention and rhythm, and combine control with verticality," he said. "My mood doesn't change from one day to the next. I'm also critical in a constructive way, but I put it in context with where we've come from and what's coming in January."

## STACKING UP



ATP Men's Top 15					
#	Player	Age	Points	Events	
1	Carlos Alcaraz	22	12,050	19	
2	Jannik Sinner	24	11,500	18	
3	Alexander Zverev	28	5,110	24	
4	Novak Djokovic	38	4,820	20	
5	Felix Auger-Aliassime	25	4,190	28	
6	Taylor Fritz	28	4,085	23	
7	Alex de Minaur	26	4,080	23	
8	Lorenzo Musetti	23	3,990	23	
9	Ben Shelton	23	3,960	23	
10	Jack Draper	24	2,990	17	
11	Alexander Bublik	28	2,845	29	
12	Casper Ruud	27	2,825	21	
13	Daniil Medvedev	29	2,710	29	
14	A. Davidovich Fokina	26	2,585	26	
15	Holger Rune	22	2,580	21	



**Top Indians ▶**  
Sumit Nagal  
Rank 277 ▲ No change

Aryan Shah  
Rank 402 ▲ 1 spot

WTA Women's Top 15					
#	Player	Age	Points	Events	
1	Aryna Sabalenka	27	10,870	21	
2	Iga Swiatek	24	8,395	21	
3	Coco Gauff	21	6,763	21	
4	Amanda Anisimova	24	6,287	23	
5	Elena Rybakina	26	5,850	23	
6	Jessica Pegula	31	5,583	23	
7	Madison Keys	30	4,335	21	
8	Jasmine Paolini	29	4,325	19	
9	Mirra Andreeva	18	4,319	19	
10	Ekatерина Александрова	31	3,375	26	
11	Belinda Bencic	28	3,119	21	
12	Clara Tauson	23	2,770	23	
13	Linda Noskova	21	2,641	25	
14	Elina Svitolina	31	2,606	16	
15	Emma Navarro	24	2,515	25	

Sahaja Yamalapalli  
Rank 330 ▲ 1 spot



English Premier League Standings					
#	Team	GP	W	D	L
1	Arsenal	19	14	3	2
2	Man. City	19	13	2	4
3	Aston Villa	19	12	3	4
4	Liverpool	19	10	3	6
5	Chelsea	19	8	6	5
6	Man. United	19	8	6	5
7	Sunderland	19	7	8	4
8	Everton	19	8	4	7
9	Brentford	19	8	3	8
10	Crystal Palace	19	7	6	6
11	Fulham	19	8	3	8
12	Tottenham	19	7	5	7
13	Newcastle	19	7	5	7
14	Brighton	19	6	7	6
15	Bournemouth	19	5	8	6
16	Leeds United	19	5	6	8
17	N. Forest	19	5	3	11
18	West Ham	19	5	11	11
19	Burnley	19	3	3	13
20	Wolves	19	0	3	16

Spanish LaLiga Standings					
#	Team	GP	W	D	L
1	Barcelona	18	15	1	2
2	Real Madrid	18	13	3	2
3	Atletico Madrid	18	11	4	3
4	Villarreal	16	11	2	3
5	Espanyol	17	10	3	4
6	Real Betis	17	7	7	2
7	Celta Vigo	17	5	8	4
8	Athletic Club	18	7	2	9
9	Elche	17	5	7	5
10	Sevilla	17	6	2	9
11	Getafe	17	6	2	9
12	Osasuna	17			



FIDE

I normally do not regret what I did. So I enjoy who I am right now. But at the same time, I have to admit, yes, if I spent those years on chess, I believe I should have been stronger.

# The world is huge, right? It's not just a chessboard and pieces

As a child prodigy, a dominant World champion and a university professor, Hou Yifan has lived many lives — and she is just 31. Still the top-ranked woman, she intends to study neuroscience to understand the connection between the brain and chess patterns. She continues to awe the sport's fans from time to time, like she did at the Global Chess League recently. She opens up in this conversation about her unique relationship with the game

## INTERVIEW

### Hou Yifan

P.K. Ajith Kumar

**H**ou Yifan became the women's World chess champion at 16 and abdicated her crown seven years later. In all her title matches, she never lost a game. She is the second-strongest female player of all time, behind Judit Polgar. Chess may no longer be her only interest in life: she is a professor at Peking University and is planning to pursue a PhD in neuroscience.

But Hou still remains the women's No. 1. She occasionally reminds the world of that fact. Like she did recently in Mumbai, where she played a stellar role in Alpine SG Pipers' triumph in the Global Chess League. She won her last four games in the league phase to help her team make the final. Excerpts from an exclusive interview Hou gave *The Hindu*:

You have been a regular at the Global Chess League.

This league is very important for the chess

QQ

Chess for me represents not just the results. For instance, there is the beauty and philosophy of chess. That I find is more attractive than winning a game

world, no matter the format, which is innovative. It is not just the world's top male players, there are women and juniors. In an elite event, girls and juniors usually don't get the chance. There is the entertainment aspect of chess too, while keeping intact the professionalism of the sport. This was my second time with SG Pipers, and it was nice being a teammate of players like Fabiano Caruana, Anish Giri and R. Praggnanandhaa.

And how did you find working with coach Pravin Thipsay?

He is an experienced Grandmaster and has really good theoretical knowledge. We were surprised by some of his understanding of the position, especially the endgame. We later found out that Mumbai is his hometown. This is my first visit and I have liked the city, the hotel, the location and the food.

You don't play as often as you used to.

Chess is not my entire life now. I have the passion for it, but it is mainly like a hobby instead of a profession. I am trying to participate in the events in the way I can. Sometimes you miss the game and also you miss the people.

## Do you miss that winning feeling as well?

Not really. Personality-wise, if you're not talking about chess, I think I am not that competitive. Of course, when I play, I fight for that win, but outside the chess world, I am not like that. Chess for me represents not just the results. For instance, there is the beauty and philosophy of chess. That I find is more attractive than winning a game. Imagine if you luckily win a couple of games, when the position was not winning. So you win by chance, or luck. Let us imagine you are a professional player and you play chess for decades. You won maybe half of them. You didn't win half of them. That is suffering. Yes, I have relatively attained a certain level in my career. I have won most of the games.

You never lost a game in a World title match. After winning your first championship, in the knockout format, you won three title matches without dropping a single game.

Yes, actually I was surprised. All my three matches, yes. And I finished the match even before all the games had to be played.

You have not just been the World champion but one of the best of all time. So stepping away from that, when you were still in your prime and very young and beginning a new career... How did you find that transition?

It is not difficult. I am just following my heart to make the decision at the moment I want. Let us say I know that chess is part of my life, but I also

understand that my life could not be lived only with chess. That is why I felt like, you should remember first you are a human, then you are a chess player. The world is huge, right? It is not just a chessboard and the pieces. I do not want, you know, when you visit a place, when you think about something, when there are some stories, you connect only with chess. I know some of the others may not be like that, and I fully respect them, but I enjoy this kind of lifestyle more.

**Do you remember when you made that decision? Was lack of motivation after winning successive World titles a factor?**

A bit, but I think I didn't really reach my maximum potential. My rating could have been higher. I just thought that I should get a certain education and explore. Maybe that had also something to do with my family background. But I didn't think making such decisions were hard because I always kept in mind that if I wanted, I could come back to the chess world at any time. I normally do not regret what I did. So I enjoy who I am right now, pretty much. But at the same time, I have to admit, yes, if I spent those years on chess, I believe I should have been stronger; my peak should have been at least a bit higher.

## Why international relations?

I am interested in diplomacy. So I thought that international relations, when it connected with geopolitics and negotiations, maybe there was something in common. But later I did my Masters in public policy. Now I am working for the physical education department. And I am actually applying for my PhD in neuroscience. I know it is a little cross-field. The subject I want to research is the connection between the brain and chess patterns. If you wanted to find something scientifically connected with chess, this is one of the obvious parts. As a chess player, I felt such research could be beneficial to the players, too.

## How do you look back at your first World title?

The first title is always more meaningful and exciting. It was something special for me. More so because I broke the [32-year-old] record of Maia Chiburdanidze as the youngest champion. And she was a legend who inspired a lot of girls. But I didn't really aim for the record, but the coach and my team kept telling me about it. I thought, OK, if I can try, that is good, but that is not easy, to be honest, because most of the players, if you want to achieve it at 16 or 17, it means you study chess for about 10 years. So that is why I thought D. Gukesh was amazing, because to win in the open section at a very young age is even much more difficult. Before my World Championship, I had played a rapid match with Anatoly Karpov in China, and he said I could win the World title. Coming as it did from a legend, it was very inspiring.

## In 2011, you beat Koneru Humpy in the match to defend your World title.

That match was the toughest. Not just rating-wise, Humpy was at her peak. She had a very good home preparation, because I remember most of the games, after the opening, I was really in trouble. But I think I was lucky, I tried my best to fight back in the middle game.

## Are you surprised that Humpy hasn't won the classical World Championship yet?

Yes, she is one of the strongest players not to have won the World title. But she still has chances. She is playing the next Candidates [in March/April], isn't she?

## GAME THEORY

### The year that was: best in Tests

Mitchell Starc and Shubman Gill led the way with ball and bat respectively during the year in Test cricket. A look at the top performers in the game's classical format in 2025:

### MOST WICKETS IN 2025

Player	Team	Tests	Wkts	Ave	SR	5-fors
Mitchell Starc	Australia	11	55	17.32	28.4	3
Mohammed Siraj	India	10	43	27.20	43.5	2
Blessing Muzarabani	Zimbabwe	10	42	26.80	42.8	3
Ben Stokes	England	9	33	23.12	40.9	2
Taijul Islam	Bangladesh	6	33	26.57	52.8	2
Josh Tongue	England	6	33	27.15	37.9	2
Scott Boland	Australia	6	32	15.00	30.2	1
Jasprit Bumrah	India	8	31	22.16	47.1	3
Simon Harmer	South Africa	4	30	14.30	34.3	2
Noman Ali	Pakistan	4	30	17.50	30.8	3

### MOST RUNS IN 2025

Player	Team	Tests	Runs	Ave	SR	100s
Shubman Gill	India	9	983	70.21	63.7	5
Travis Head	Australia	11	817	40.85	79.4	2
K.L. Rahul	India	10	813	45.16	48.5	3
Joe Root	England	10	805	50.31	57.7	4
Harry Brook	England	10	771	45.35	82.5	2
Alex Carey	Australia	11	767	47.93	75.9	2
Ravindra Jadeja	India	10	764	63.66	53.5	2
Yashasvi Jaiswal	India	10	745	39.21	66.2	3
Ben Duckett	England	10	735	40.83	88.2	2
Devon Conway	NZ	5	697	87.12	61.3	3



Mitchell Starc



Mohammed Siraj



Shubman Gill

SOURCE: ESPNCRICINFO.COM

## PICTURE THIS



### Cycling steeplechase

In cyclo-cross, riders race over several laps of a 2.5-3.5km course which can have sections of pavement, grass, inclines, wooden trails, ditches, very deep mud, and even obstacles.

Described as 'the steeple-

chase of cycling', it severely tests a rider's aerobic endurance, physical strength and bike-handling skills.

Given the harshness of the conditions, riders are allowed to change bicycles and receive mechanical assistance from a pit crew during the race. They are also permitted to dismount, carry their cycles over

or around a hurdle, remount and continue racing.

Cyclo-cross bicycles are light, with fairly narrow tyres and drop handlebars. The tyres are tubular and use knobby tread for traction. The braking mechanism involves disc brakes.

Although not a traditional snow or ice sport, a large part

of the competitive season unfolds during winter, which means races can be held on icy or snowy ground.

Many of the best riders cross-train — and often compete — in other cycling disciplines.

But cyclo-cross has grown to such a level that many specialise in it.

**THE MIX**

**Markram to lead SA in T20 WC; De Kock and Nortje included**



FILE PHOTO: R.V. MOORTHY

South Africa announced its 15-member contingent for the ICC T20 World Cup. **The squad:** Aiden Markram (Capt.), Quinton de Kock, Tony de Zorzi, Dewald Brevis, David Miller, Donovan Ferreira, Marco Jansen, Keshav Maharaj, Kagiso Rabada, Kwena Maphaka, Lungi Ngidi, Jason Smith, George Linde, Corbin Bosch, and Anrich Nortje.

**BETTER NEWS**

**'Positive signs' on hospitalised Martyn, reveals Gilchrist**



FILE PHOTO: S. SUBRAMANIAM

Former Australia Test batter Damien Martyn is showing "positive signs" after being hospitalised in an induced coma with meningitis, ex-teammate Adam Gilchrist said. "He's still in hospital. There'll be more details coming out as they come to hand but certainly in the last 24 hours there are some positive signs," Gilchrist said.

**COLLECTIVE APPEAL**

**Indian footballers urge FIFA to intervene in ISL impasse**



FILE PHOTO

India's leading footballers, including Sunil Chhetri, along with several foreign players featuring in the ISL, made a collective appeal to FIFA, urging the world governing body to intervene as the country's top-tier league remains suspended indefinitely. The players voiced concern over the prolonged uncertainty.

**WILDCARD ENTRY**

**Venus, 45, set to become oldest woman to play at Australian Open**



The 45-year-old Venus Williams was handed a wildcard to the Australian Open, becoming the oldest woman ever to play at the season-opening Grand Slam. The American will compete in the main draw for the first time since 2021. "I'm excited to be back in Australia and looking forward to competing," said Venus.

# Royals hand Soorma third straight loss

**Rutuja draws first blood for the Ranchi outfit while Sakshi's strike, six minutes from time, seals the deal; Madhuri saves a penalty stroke**



Opening salvo: Rutuja showcased superb skill to put Royals ahead. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

**WOMEN'S HIL****Sports Bureau**

**R**anchi Royals defeated JSW Soorma Hockey Club 2-0 in their Women's Hero Hockey India League encounter in Ranchi on Friday. Rutuja Pital (30) and Sakshi Rana (54) found the mark as Royals notched up their second win while

Soorma slumped to its third loss in a row. Soorma showed great attacking intent in the opening quarter.

It won the first penalty corner of the evening, but Penny Squibb's shot was stopped by the first rusher.

In the 25th minute, Royals' Ishika committed a foul inside the circle, giving away a penalty stroke. However, Squibb was denied the mark as Royals notched up their second win while

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## IN BRIEF



## New Chelsea boss McFarlane braces for Man City clash

Chelsea interim boss Calum McFarlane was officially introduced to the squad on Friday after a "crazy 24 hours" following Enzo Maresca's exit, with Manchester City looming. "It's been a crazy 24 hours, a whirlwind, as you can imagine but also really enjoyable, really exciting, so I can only feel positive about this," under-21s boss McFarlane told reporters on Friday.

## LIVE TELECAST

**Vijay Hazare Trophy:** JioHotstar, 9 a.m.  
**Serie A:** DAZN, 5, 7.30, 10.30 p.m. & 1.15 a.m. (Sunday)  
**Premier League:** SS Select 1 & JioHotstar, 6, 8.30 & 11 p.m.  
**LaLiga:** FanCode, 6.30, 8.45, 11 p.m. & 1.30 a.m. (Sunday)  
**HIL:** (Women), Sony Sports Ten 1 & LiV, 5 p.m. & Men: 7.30 p.m.  
**The Ashes:** 5th Test, day 1, Star Sports 1 & JioHotstar 5 a.m. (Sunday)

## Gill to appear for Punjab in a closed-door affair

**Shayan Acharya**  
JAIPUR

India's Test and ODI captain Shubman Gill will turn up for Punjab in a Vijay Hazare Trophy fixture against Sikkim on Saturday, but the match will be played behind closed doors.

Last week, more than 20,000 spectators had turned up at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium to watch Rohit Sharma in action for Mumbai. However, Punjab will play at the Jaipuria Vidyalaya

Ground, where there are no facilities for the spectators.

Situated inside the school premises, the ground has no proper seating arrangements for the spectators.

"The fixtures were decided much in advance, and back then, there was no clarity about the availability of the international players," D.D. Kumawat, the convenor of the ad-hoc committee for the Rajasthan Cricket Association, told *The Hindu*.

## East Bengal routs Nita FA, goes top



**All smiles:** Gokulam Kerala players celebrate their goal against Garhwal United. DEBASISH BHADURI

## IWL

**Sports Bureau**  
KOLKATA

Defending champion East Bengal FC drubbed Nita Football Academy 5-0 in a fifth-round match of the Indian Women's League (IWL) at the Kalyani Stadium to reach the top of the standings, here on Friday.

The top-of-the-table clash turned out to be a lopsided affair. Sulanjana Raul put East Bengal in the lead in the sixth minute before Soumya Guguloth, Ugandans Resty Nanziri and Fazila Ikwaput, and substitute Priyangka Devi Naorem scored to complete the tally. East Bengal took its tally to 12 points from four straight wins.

In a match played at the AIFF National Centre of Excellence, former champion Sethu FC routed debutant Sesa Football Academy 5-0. Marti-

na Thokchom, Kaviya Pakkirisamy, Lisham Babina Devi, Lynda Kom Serto and Ruchi found the target to give Sethu its second successive win. Sethu has 10 points from five matches and is placed second on the table.

Kickstart FC of Bengaluru rallied to beat Sribhumi FC 2-1 and ended its losing streak. Gokulam Kerala FC and Garhwal United FC played out a 1-1 draw.

**The results:** At Kalyani: East Bengal FC 5 (Sulanjana Raul 6, Soumya Guguloth 42, Resty Nanziri 50, Fazila Ikwaput 63, Priyangka Devi Naorem 88) bt Nita Football Academy 0; Kickstart FC 2 (Loveeth Njideka Edeh 81, Babysana Devi 85-pen) bt Sribhumi FC 1 (Yunnam Kamala Devi 12-pen).

At NCE, Kolkata: Sethu FC 5 (Martina Thokchom 24, Kaviya Pakkirisamy 27, Lisham Babina Devi 35, Lynda Kom Serto 65, Ruchi 72) bt Sesa Football Academy 0; Gokulam Kerala FC 1 (Shilji Shaji 21) drew with Garhwal United FC 1 (Deepika Pal 52).

## SMAT title biggest moment in my career, says Anukul

The quintessential team man, who played a key role in Jharkhand's maiden triumph in the T20 championship, has been in fine form both with the bat and ball in the Hazare Trophy as well

## CRICKET

**M.R. Praveen Chandran**  
AHMEDABAD

For Anukul Roy, personal milestones are always secondary to his team's success.

Whether with the bat or ball, the 27-year-old believes in delivering his best for the team. A quintessential team man, Anukul was one of the heroes for Jharkhand in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (SMAT) triumph, with 303 runs, 18 wickets and nine catches.

**Game-changing knock**  
In the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy, Anukul has already played a game-changing knock with the bat – an unbeaten 98 against Pondicherry – and has tied down the batters



**On the ball:** Anukul says that he tweaks his game according to match situations. FILE PHOTO: VIJAY SONEJI

in the middle overs with his disciplined bowling.

"You can't court success without hard work. For me it began in the pre-season camp we had before the Buchi Babu Trophy.

"I know my role in the team and I tweak my game

according to match situations. I stick to the basics and bowl to the field.

"While batting I ensure that I don't get bogged down and don't mind taking the odd risk. "We were in a spot against Pondicherry. But

credit to (captain Kumar Kushagra for making it easier for me. I knew I had the shots to finish the innings on a high," said Anukul.

"It has been a great season for Jharkhand. The icing on the cake was definitely the SMAT title win. It was easily the biggest moment in my career.

## The bonus

"The Player-of-the-Series award was a bonus. But we still have some unfinished business to do this season. For me I would like to play regularly in (the) IPL.

"Right now I am the second- or third-choice spinner in my IPL team (Kolkata Knight Riders), but I want to be the premier spinner and will work hard to reach that level," said the former India under-19 player.

## Sai Sudharsan out for a few weeks

**Sports Bureau**  
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu batter B. Sai Sudharsan will be out of action for at least a few weeks after suffering a rib injury during the Vijay Hazare Trophy game against Madhya Pradesh last week.

The southpaw is now at the BCCI's Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru, where he is undergoing rehab. Sai Sudharsan injured himself when he dived to complete a run during his knock of 51. He retired hurt, came back to bat again towards the end, and was the last TN batter dismissed in that

## VIJAY HAZARE TROPHY — SATURDAY'S FIXTURES

## Elite: Group A (Ahmedabad):

Rajasthan vs. Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand vs. Kerala, Madhya Pradesh vs. Pondicherry, Karnataka vs. Tripura.

## Group B (Rajkot):

Jammu & Kashmir vs. Uttar Pradesh, Baroda vs. Vidarbha, Chandigarh vs. Hyderabad, Assam vs. Bengal.

## Group C (Jaipur):

Punjab vs. Sikkim, Manipur vs. Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh vs. Nagaland.

game, which his side lost by two wickets. Earlier last year, Sai Sudharsan made his Test debut and has featured in six games for India.

Meanwhile, TN, which has lost three of its four matches, will be strengthened for the next two games, with Washington Sundar and Varun Chakravarthy set to feature against Rajasthan (Saturday) and Tripura (Tuesday). The BCCI has asked the duo to play these games ahead of the white-ball series against New Zealand, which starts on January 11.

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