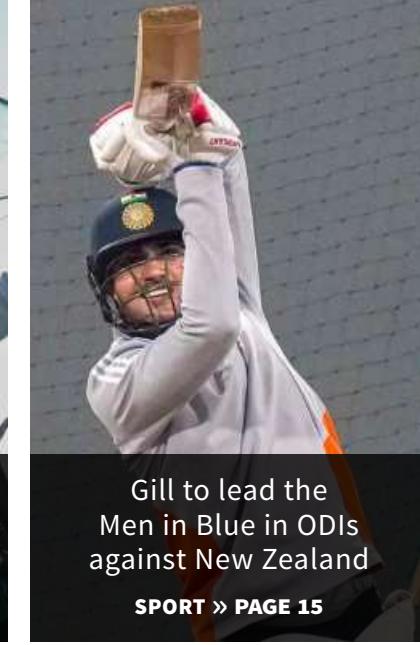
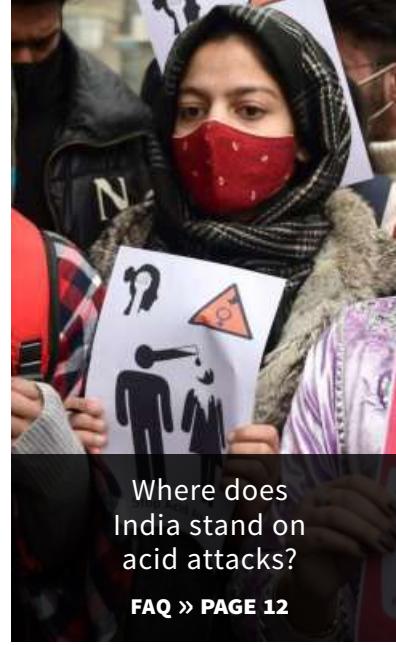
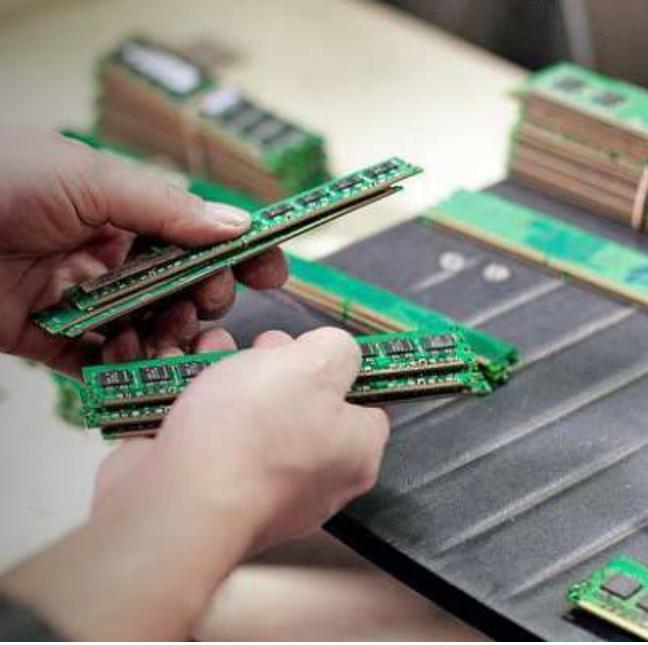


LOOMING CRISIS

## Global chip crunch signs start to show in India

Prices of RAM sticks, SSDs surge with little precedent as AI hyper scalers crowd out supply chain globally

BUSINESS » PAGE 10



Gill to lead the Men in Blue in ODIs against New Zealand

SPORT » PAGE 15

IN BRIEF



### 14 Maoists killed in encounters in Bastar: police

RAIPUR

At least 14 Maoists, including six women, were killed in two separate encounters in Sukma and Bijapur districts of Chhattisgarh on Saturday, the police said. » Page 7

### SEC orders probe into 'unopposed wins' in civic polls

MUMBAI

The Maharashtra State Election Commission (SEC) has ordered a probe into reports of a large number of candidates in the municipal corporation polls winning unopposed. » Page 4

CLASSIFIEDS » PAGE 6  
MAGAZINE » 8 PAGES

## U.S. forces capture Maduro after strikes on Venezuela

President of the South American nation, his wife aboard a U.S. warship headed to New York to be prosecuted, says President Trump; U.S. to run the country, tap into its vast oil reserves, he says

Associated Press  
CARACAS



Taken from home: An image posted by U.S. President Donald Trump on Truth Social on Saturday shows Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro blindfolded aboard the USS *Iwo Jima*. AFP

reserves to sell "large amounts" to other countries. "We are going to run the country until such time as we can do a safe, proper,

and judicious transition," Mr. Trump said at a news conference.

Mr. Trump said Mr. Maduro and his wife, Cilia

Flores, were aboard the U.S. warship *Iwo Jima* and headed to New York, where they will face prosecution. U.S. Attorney-General Pam Bondi said the couple would "soon face the full wrath of American justice on American soil".

While the legal authority for the attack was not immediately clear, Mr. Maduro's government accused the U.S. of attacking civilian and military installations, called it an "imperialist attack" and urged citizens to take to the streets.

CONTINUED ON  
» PAGE 7  
MORE REPORTS ON  
» PAGES 13 & 14

## Bangladeshi pacer dropped from KKR on BCCI instructions

Kallol Bhattacharjee  
NEW DELHI



Mustafizur Rahman  
structures of BCCI," said the KKR in a press note.

The move triggered strong reactions from several quarters. The sports adviser to the interim government of Bangladesh has instructed authorities to stop IPL telecast in Bangladesh.

CONTINUED ON  
» PAGE 7

Hindu man dies 3 days after attack in Bangladesh

Press Trust of India  
DHAKA/NEW DELHI

A Hindu businessman, who was hacked and set on fire three days ago, died on Saturday in Bangladesh, a minority faith group leader said.

Khokon Chandra Das, 50, was assaulted near Keurbanga Bazar in Shariatpur district, about 100 km south of Dhaka, on Wednesday night while returning home after closing his shop. This is the fifth death of a person from the Hindu community since December 2025, and radical groups in Bangladesh are visibly trying to intimidate the minority faiths, Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council spokesman Kajol Deb-

nath said.

## Kerala MLA sentenced to 3 years in prison for 'evidence tampering'

The Hindu Bureau  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM



In a setback to former Kerala Transport Minister and ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) legislator Antony Raju, a court in Thiruvananthapuram on Saturday sentenced him to three years' imprisonment for tampering with evidence related to a drug seizure case.

The Judicial First Class Magistrate Court, Nedumangad, on Saturday found him guilty of forging and planting material evidence following the drug seizure case booked in 1990.

Although Mr. Raju, a leader of the Janadhipathy Kerala Congress, an LDF ally, was granted bail and one month's time to appeal against the verdict, he will be disqualified as an MLA on account of his conviction.

Under the Representation of the People Act, membership of the Legislative Assembly will be terminated if a court sentences a member to two years' imprisonment or more.

The verdict comes 19 years after the chargesheet was filed against him. Mr. Raju was a junior lawyer appearing in the 1990 drug case involving an Australian national, Andrew Salvatore. It was alleged that Mr. Raju tampered with the Australian national's undergarment, which was seized as material evidence. An FIR was filed in the evidence tampering case in 1994.

The court sentenced the

## T.N. announces assured pension scheme for State govt. staff

N. Sai Charan  
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Saturday announced the new Tamil Nadu Assured Pension Scheme (TAPS) for State government employees. Under the new arrangement, State government employees will be provided with an assured pension equal to 50% of their last-drawn basic pay.

The State government made the announcement after taking into consideration a report submitted recently to the Chief Minister by a three-member Pension Committee headed by Additional Chief Secretary (Rural Development and Panchayat Raj) Gagandeep Singh Bedi, which studied various pension schemes and arrived at a suitable model for Tamil Nadu.

Under TAPS, employees



Tamil Nadu CM M.K. Stalin. ANI

pension fund, while the additional fund required to provide the assured pension will be borne by the State government.

Two DA hikes a year  
Pensioners will be given dearness allowance (DA) hikes twice a year on a par with serving government employees. In the event of death of a pensioner, 60%

of the pension being received by the pensioner

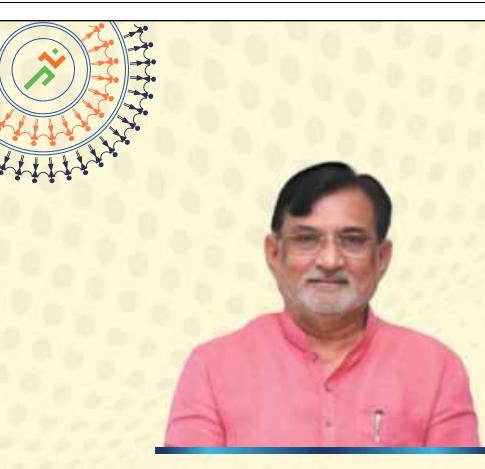
will be paid as family pension to the nominated beneficiary. At the time of retirement or in the event of death during service, government employees will be provided with a gratuity not exceeding ₹25 lakh, based on the tenure of their service.

After the implementation of TAPS, employees who retire without completing the qualifying service period required to re-

ceive pension will be provided with a minimum pension.

Employees who retired after joining service under the Contributory Pension Scheme without drawing a pension in the intervening period before the implementation of TAPS will be granted a "special compassionate pension".

CONTINUED ON  
» PAGE 7



SHRI PRAFUL PATEL  
Administrator, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu and Lakshadweep



KHELO INDIA BEACH GAMES 2026, DIU  
Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu  
5th to 10th January 2026

KHEL KE SITARE, DIU KE KINARE

1300 ATHLETES | 31 STATES / UTs

8 DISCIPLINES | 6 DAYS

VENUE: GHOGHLA BEACH, DIU

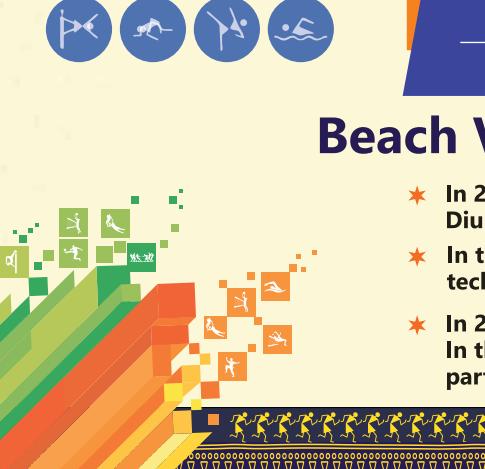
#khelindiabeachgames2026



"Khelo India Beach Games reflect transformative power of sports."

SHRI NARENDRA MODI

Prime Minister



1300+ Athletes

31 States/UTs

8 Sports

6 Days

Opening Ceremony of Khelo India Beach Games 2026

5th January, 2026, from 04:00 PM onwards | Ghoghla Beach, Diu

Beach Vahee, Jazba Naya, Khel Vahee, Andaaz Naya

- In 2024, the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu initiated the Multi-Sports Beach Games in India.
- In the Inaugural Games, more than 1700 athletes, coaches, managers and technical officials from 28 States/Union Territories participated in 8 Beach Sports Disciplines.
- In 2025, Beach Games were successfully organized under the banner of the Khelo India. In the first version of KIBG, 1200 athletes from 31 States/Union Territories participated in 8 Beach Sports.



LIVE ON:  
SPORTS  
COULDISHAN SPORTS







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(Under Deen Dayal Jan Awas Yojna 2016, Govt. of Haryana)

Registration No.: HRERA-PKL-SNP-548-2024 Dated: 23.02.2024  
[https://haryanarerera.gov.in/view\\_project/searchprojectDetail/2738](https://haryanarerera.gov.in/view_project/searchprojectDetail/2738)  
Project: Elite Homes+02 Home | Developer: Y.P. Infratech Pvt. Ltd.



## फ्री होल्ड आवासीय प्लॉट

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आवेदन करने के लिए भुगतान  
(100% रिफंडेबल)

₹ 21,000  
मात्र

Area in (Sq.Yd.)	Area in (Sq.Mtr.)	Registration Amount	10% Within 5 Days	40% Within 30 Days (Bank Loan Available)	50% On Offer of Possession (Bank Loan Available)	Total Cost*
143.42	119.90	₹ 21,000	₹ 9,11,230	₹ 37,28,920	₹ 46,61,150	₹ 93,22,300
167.44	139.98	₹ 21,000	₹ 10,67,360	₹ 43,53,440	₹ 54,41,800	₹ 1,08,83,600

\*PLC & Govt. Charges Applicable

Registration of builder buyer agreement is mandatory after making a total payment of 10%

1 Sq. Mtr. = 1.196 Sq. Yd.



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## IN BRIEF



## Drunk man held for climbing atop temple in Tirupati

Under the influence of alcohol, a man climbed the main Gopuram of Sri Govindaraja Swamy temple in Tirupati on Friday night. He reportedly tried to remove the Kalasam and demanded a quarter bottle of liquor to come down. After three hours of drama, he was brought down with the efforts of police and fire department personnel. According to sources, K. Tirupati, a native of Nizamabad district in Telangana, entered the temple like other devotees. In an inebriated condition, he climbed up the main Gopuram using the poles. The TTD vigilance staff immediately informed the police. The police arrested him and registered a case.

## 4 accused in Zubeen Garg's death case file bail petitions

Four accused in singer Zubeen Garg's death case filed bail petitions before the court on Saturday. The Kamrup (Metro) District and Sessions Court, which is hearing the case, fixed January 17 as the next date of hearing when the bail objection by the public prosecutor will be filed. The bail pleas were moved by Garg's band member Amritprava Mahanta, his cousin Sandipan Garg, a police officer, and his two personal security officers, Nandeshwar Bora and Prabin Baishya. The singer-composer-actor had died on September 19 while swimming in the sea in Singapore, where he had gone to attend the Northeast Festival. PTI

## Gandhinagar typhoid surge: 100 hospitalised

Press Trust of India  
GANDHINAGAR

Gujarat Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghavi on Saturday reviewed the situation at the Gandhinagar Civil Hospital after 104 patients, including children, were admitted with suspected typhoid.

Mr. Sanghavi said senior officials, including the Deputy Collector, were asked to assess the situation. Arrangements for food and other facilities have also been made for the families of admitted patients. A

team of 22 doctors has been constituted to treat the patients, he added.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has discussed the situation with the District Collector thrice and will review the developments again in the evening, Mr. Sanghavi added.

Civil Hospital Medical Superintendent Mita Parikh said water samples have been collected from the affected areas, and reports show the water is unsafe. Officials have started a door-to-door survey in the affected sectors.

## In India's 'cleanest city' Indore, trust in municipal tap water runs dry

Press Trust of India  
INDORE

The water contamination tragedy in Madhya Pradesh's commercial capital Indore, also the country's 'cleanest city' for almost a decade, has left people shunning municipal tap supply and scurrying for bottled water, putting a financial strain on those with limited means.

According to officials, six persons have died and more than 200 were hospitalised in an outbreak of vomiting and diarrhoea caused by contaminated drinking water in Bhagirathpura, which has a large population from low and middle-income groups. The death figures, however, vary. While Indore Mayor Pushyamitra Bhargava had said on Friday that he had information about 10 patient deaths linked to the outbreak, residents put the figure at 16, including that of a six-month-old child.

"We are now scared of drinking water from municipal taps. We need proof that the water is clean, only then we will drink it. My family is currently buying drinking water jars from the market, paying between ₹20 and ₹30 per jar,"



A man drinks water from a tanker amid a contaminated water crisis at the Bhagirathpura area in Indore on Saturday. PTI

Sunita, a resident of Marathi Mohalla, said on Saturday.

She claimed the area was getting "dirty water" from

taps for the past two to three years, but no one listened to the complaints of residents.

"For a long time now, we

have been adding alum (sulphate salt used for water purification) and also boiling water before drinking," Ms. Sunita added.

Such is the level of distrust in a city that has often been lauded for its cleanliness that stall owners are using bottled water to make tea to reassure customers of safety.

Indore has been recognised as India's "cleanest city" for multiple consecutive years, most recently for the eighth time in the Swachh Survekshan 2024-25 survey.

Meanwhile, around 45

functionaries were detained on Saturday as a "precautionary measure" after a clash with ruling Bharatiya Janata Party workers when a fact-finding committee of the Opposition party was at the Bhagirathpura area.

## 'Dirty politics'

Congress leaders alleged the police acted at the behest of the ruling BJP and prevented the fact-finding team from meeting the affected families. This was rejected by BJP leaders who said the Congress was indulging in "dirty politics" over the water tragedy.

## Parivar, party, and the quest for power

The Thackeray cousins, whose acrimonious split two decades ago had led to a change in the dynamics of regional politics in Maharashtra, have reunited. Their combining forces on the 60-year-old Marathi *manoos* plank is significant against the backdrop of the upcoming civic polls



MNS chief Raj Thackeray and Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray at an event in 2025. EMMANUEL YOGINI

built the Shiv Sena in 1966, on a 'sons of the soil' plank, had Bombay renamed to Mumbai, after the goddess Mumbadevi.

**Sharing, compromise** On December 24, the duo invoked the Samyukta Maharashtra movement, setting the stage for their joint political agenda of regional linguistic identity and the alleged threat to

this identity by 'outsiders'. They talked of how these powers wanted to break Mumbai away from Maharashtra. The script was similar to Balasaheb's appeal during the formation of Shiv Sena amid what he pushed as the growing threat of livelihood and cultural identity loss for Maharashtraans.

The Marathi *manoos* plank unites people on linguistics rather

than religion. Rough estimates by political parties have put Mumbai's Marathi-speaking population at over 30%, in tandem with the 2011 Census.

The cousins did not field many questions about the alliance for the January 15 local body elections. "Who will fight on how many seats, we will not tell you," Raj said, to a packed hall of

journalists at a hotel on the Worli promenade. The crowd cracked up.

Of particular importance to the Shiv Sena (UBT) is the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) election. Traditionally, the Thackerays have controlled the BMC, the country's richest civic body. Things changed in 2017, when the BJP got just two seats less than the Shiv Sena. The polls to BMC have been pending since 2022.

Sources say that in the BMC election, Uddhav's party would contest 163 seats, Raj's 53, of the 227 seats. Sharad Pawar's NCP, that has been with Uddhav, is also in the seat-sharing, with 11. "They had wanted a respectable seat share. Our position is also challenging as we have sitting corporators at several of these places. But Uddhav has decided that he will adjust," says a leader from the Shiv Sena (UBT).

"Raj saheb has told the party cadres, they should not stretch things. We are willing to compromise," an MNS leader says. A total of 2,869 corporators will be elected in these polls, the results of which will be declared on January 16.

**The break-up years** Raj was seen to have inherited the aura and the oratory appeal of Balasaheb, his uncle. Uddhav, Balasaheb's son, was known as

the quiet organisation man who built discipline in the party. In 2003, Raj had supported Uddhav's name as the party's working president in Mahabaleshwar, despite growing tension between the cousins. This was a year after Balasaheb had named Uddhav as the executive president.

In 2005, Raj left the Shiv Sena after an acrimonious public fallout, when he called a press conference to announce his resignation, saying in an emotionally wrought voice, "All I asked for was respect.... All I got was insult and humiliation."

Most of the old leaders had stayed with Balasaheb and Uddhav, and a handful went with Raj. The following year, Raj founded the MNS. In 2014, after a fallout between the Shiv Sena and the BJP, there were murmurs again, but Raj had then blamed Uddhav for failing to respond. In 2022, Eknath Shinde split from Uddhav, taking 40 MLAs to form the government with the BJP.

Uddhav and Raj have often traded barbs over the Mahayuti alliance – the BJP, Shiv Sena (Shinde faction), NCP (Ajit Pawar faction) – are unopposed. This has united the Opposition, including the cousins. Now, both Shiv Sena factions and the MNS are fighting for the same pie.

With a BJP coalition now in power in Maharashtra, the statement came amid dwindling political fortunes for both.

In the first two phases of city local body elections last month, the Shiv Sena (UBT) got presidents elected on nine of the 288 municipal councils and nagar panchayats. "We don't give importance to the elections fought with such money power. We had left these polls to our local cadres," says Raut.

On the last day for the withdrawal of candidature for the civic polls, January 2, Shiv Sena (UBT) MLA Aaditya Thackeray, Uddhav's son, and the MNS' Amit Thackeray, Raj's son, held a joint workshop for potential corporators. Their main campaign pitch is to be ₹1,500 monthly assistance for registered women domestic workers. They also announced support for the women of the Koli fishing community and relief on property tax.

The following day, 68 candidates in the Maharashtra civic polls from the Mahayuti alliance – the BJP, Shiv Sena (Shinde faction), NCP (Ajit Pawar faction) – are unopposed. This has united the Opposition, including the cousins. Now, both Shiv Sena factions and the MNS are fighting for the same pie.

vinaya.deshpande@the-hindu.co.in

## SEC orders probe into 'unopposed victories' in Maharashtra civic polls

Will check if other candidates withdrew under duress, says poll official; Oppn. claims candidatures were withdrawn due to threats; such large-scale withdrawals unheard of in 50 years: Londhe Patil

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit  
Ashokamithran T.  
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra State Election Commission (SEC) has ordered a probe into reports of a large number of candidates winning unopposed in the municipal corporation elections.

Polling for 2,869 corporators in 29 municipal corporations, including the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), will take place on January 15 and votes will be counted the following day.

"We have asked all the local authorities to submit a report to us. This is part of the routine process whenever other candidates withdraw nominations and only one candidate remains in the fray," an official of the SEC told *The Hindu*. He said the SEC will check whether nominations were withdrawn under duress or as a result of any allurement.

Hinting that results in such wards might be de-



Campaign mode: Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis at an election rally in Sangli, Maharashtra, on Saturday. PTI

layed, the official added that there was no deadline for the submission of these reports. "There is no deadline. The report can be submitted after January 16 as well. We will not declare the official results till these reports are submitted to us," he said.

Earlier in the day, Opposition parties, including the Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Congress, alleged that bribery and threats using Central agencies led to candidates in as many as 68 seats withdrawing their

candidatures, clearing the way for Mahayuti candidates to win unopposed.

Though official data on such victories are not yet available, media reports have pegged the figure at over 60.

"We do not yet have the official figure as the Returning Officers or Commissioners have not yet submitted their final report. We will come to know how many such cases have occurred, only once we get the reports," the official said.

"He (Ajit Pawar) should come back to Sharad Pawar. Now that he has allied in the Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad, he should leave the BJP-led government and merge with the NCP (with the original NCP)," Mr. Raut remarked.

## Hopeful of DMK sealing seat-sharing deal soon: T.N. Cong.

The Hindu Bureau  
CHENNAI

Girish Chodankar, All India Congress Committee in charge of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, on Saturday said the Congress was hopeful that the DMK would conclude the seat-sharing negotiations at the earliest.

Addressing a press conference at Sathyamurthy Bhavan here, Mr. Chodankar, said that Congress has been proactive in pursuing an alliance with the DMK and rejected the notion that the party was exploring other alternatives.

"We have been proactive in forming a committee and met Chief Minister M.K. Stalin at his office a month ago. We are waiting and hopeful that DMK will take a decision. We are confident that they will close the issue at the earliest. We have a long-standing relationship with the DMK. Our tradition is that we conclude alliance negotiations for Tamil Nadu and Puducherry together," he said.

"Earlier in the day, Opposition parties, including the Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Congress, alleged that bribery and threats using Central agencies led to candidates in as many as 68 seats withdrawing their



Congress leader Girish Chodankar

ing a part of government?"

He said the party has received close to 5,000 applications from aspiring candidates and the conclusion of the seat-sharing negotiations at the earliest.

"We have been proactive in forming a committee and met Chief Minister M.K. Stalin at his office a month ago. We are waiting and hopeful that DMK will take a decision. We are confident that they will close the issue at the earliest. We have a long-standing relationship with the DMK. Our tradition is that we conclude alliance negotiations for Tamil Nadu and Puducherry together," he said.

"Earlier in the day, Opposition parties, including the Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Congress, alleged that bribery and threats using Central agencies led to candidates in as many as 68 seats withdrawing their

functionaries were detained on Saturday as a "precautionary measure" after a clash with ruling Bharatiya Janata Party workers when a fact-finding committee of the Opposition party was at the Bhagirathpura area.

## 'Dirty politics'

Congress leaders alleged the police acted at the behest of the ruling BJP and prevented the fact-finding team from meeting the affected families. This was rejected by BJP leaders who said the Congress was indulging in "dirty politics" over the water tragedy.



# Classifieds

LIFE MADE SIMPLE

## Matrimonial

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

## INDEX OF MATRIMONIAL

## BRIDE/ GROOMS WANTED

## BRIDES WANTED

## BRIDES &amp; GROOMS WANTED

*Classification Common for Brides, Bridegrooms, Brides & Grooms*

## ASSAMESE

## AWADHI

## BENGALI

## BHOJPURI

## BIHARI

## CHHATTISGARHI

## ENGLISH

## GUJARATI

## HARYANI

## HINDI

## KANNADA

## KASHMIRI

## KONKANI

## MALAYALAM

## MANIPURI

## MARATHI

## MARWARI

## NEPALI

## ORIYA

## PARSI

## PUNJABI

## SAURASHTRA

## SINDHI

## TAMIL

## TELUGU

## TULU

## URDU

## ADVOCATE

## BUSINESS

## DEFENCE

## DOCTOR

## ENGINEER

## FINANCE/ BANKING

## GOVERNMENT/ QUASI-GOVERNMENT

## IAS/ ALLIED SERVICES

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

## MBA/ CA/ ICWA

## NRI

## COSMOPOLITAN

## DIVORCEE

## PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED

## MARRIAGE BUREAUS

## WEDDING ARRANGEMENTS

## BRIDE/ GROOMS WANTED

## COMPUTER / INFO.TECH

**WE ARE** looking for an alliance for our daughter Miss. Shamangapriya, aged 28 years (DOB: 01-11-1997) residing in Chennai, height 170cm, B.E., working with Deloitte, ERP, SD, 16+ Lakhs/annum, Hindu, Tirunelveli, Saiva, Pillai, Visakam star, Thulam Rasi, Maharam Lakshmi. The groom should have from same caste, well groomed, family oriented, career focused, aged between 28 & 30 years. Contact with details +91 98403 15397, cransqd@yahoo.co.in**NEED UNMARRIED**, any language Brahmin Boy--employed in India/ Abroad. Ph: 9791111321 for BRAHMIN GIRL 1984/BTech/Employed

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**ATTRACTIVE, TALENTED** 35, well-educated professional (LSR, UK Masters). Seeks compatible groom. Religion/caste no bar. Call/WA 9345 634 365

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## DOCTOR

**HINDU NADAR**, 25, MBBS MD, 165, v fair, Hospital owner, seeks PG Doctor Multi millionaire family. Contact: 9940119844**M.S. SURGEON** 28 Tall Fair Good Looking Seeks Suitable Doctors from Well Educated Broadminded Background. Caste no bar. Contact: 7200365364**MD General Medicine Doctor** girl working in Chennai 32/156seeks suitable alliance 9447493034 /9497168001 or 9443985816**IAS / ALLIED SERVICES** Interstate Parents seek suitable Alliance for their Daughter D/B 25-3-95, 165 cm, IPS Officer Odisha Cadre from Parents of Civil Service Officers, Doctors, Judicial Officers or any other Group A Officers. Contact: 9447186098 & 9747823111.**MALAYALAM** NAIR GIRL 92BORN, MBBS ATMAN, CHENNAI settled, kindly whatapp profile 904256302**HINDU-VISWAKARMA PARENTS** seeks suitable alliance for daughter, 27 yrs, MBBS, pursuing MD, height 157 cms, well-educated and family-oriented, seeking PG Doctors/ Engineers/ Other Professionals Hindu grooms of age group 27-32. Caste No Bar. Never married. Alliance from respectable families preferred. Contact: ptskumar@gmail.com.**HINDU NAIR** girl (1/3/2002, 5:15 am, Uthram), Trivandrum, Kerala, studying MBA at Melbourne, Australia and also working in logistics company. Preferring NFL's Also without horoscope. Ph: 9526344646.**EZHAVA GIRL** 31, MS, Gyne (Govt. College) 28.10.1994, fair, upper middle class, proposals from Doctors / Professionals. Ph: 8281254224.**TAMIL** BANGALORE BASED CSI Christian Nadar girl from upper middle class family - fair skin, 5ft 5inches, divorced, 41, no kids, BE, MBA, Working with MNC, earning over 40 LPA. Seeking professionally qualified, god fearing Christian groom, below 45, no kids, from established family. Caste, language no bar. Contact mother on +918296019442 / mozartsacademy@gmail.com**CHRISTIAN, PILLAI, 36,M.Sc, M.Phil,** Asst.Prof.Pondy,Seeks Groom FC/BC, below 39 yrs. Ct: 9894677892.**CSI NADAR** 29/178cm USA MS Seeks CSI Nadar Groom from USA CS19448885050.**CANADIAN CITIZEN** Christian Bride 29 yrs, 158cm, is looking for God Fearing. Family Oriented, Canadian or American Citizen. Age 30-35. Professional have Biblical values and Faith. Email Profile and Photo to vtopplanning@gmail.com 9677181606**36/154CMS CHRISTIAN** girl Born Again SC AD/ M.Ed Working in Chennai 25Kpm/ Own house. Caste no bar. Below 40 yrs. Ct: 7339432540**40/163CMS CHRISTIAN** girl Born Again Christian SC AD/ M.B.A/ Not working/ Own house. Seeks suitable groom below 45 yrs. Ct: 7339432540**CHRISTIAN NADAR** 165cm 28yr Fair Advocate in Chennai, Doing CA, Prefer Doctor. Mail: itpleaseyou@gmail.com**CHRISTIAN, 29, 50 lakhs, VIP,** 8137003549**CHRISTIAN CSI** 42, Divorce seeks working professional, God fearing Christian-educated family. WhatsApp: 8939896578**CHRISTIAN, 36, MBA, rich & affluent.** 8137003550**CHRISTIAN, 24, BSc, rich & affluent.** 8138900470**CHRISTIAN, 32/153, Chithrai, M.E.,** Spiritual, Vegetarian, wants to be a home maker seeks Groom. Ct:94422 49597 0712**RC NADAR**, 32/153, Chithrai, M.E., Spiritual, Vegetarian, wants to be a home maker seeks Groom. Ct:94422 49597 0712**BORN AGAIN** Christian, 44yrs/152, MBBS, MD doctor, seeks Christian groom, Chennai. CT - 9500188067**WELL EDUCATED**, 36 , Seeks Compatible Groom. Caste No Bar. Call / WA 94896 95984.**MUDALIAR 31 162cm BTech** Abudhabi working in MNC seeking High Abroad Profiles CNB Geetham 9884858014**SENGUTHAR 31/162 BE, MABA** working in MNC, Chennai seeks suitable match. Subcaste no bar. Ct: 7200988849**SEEKING NEVER** Married Tamil/Telugu Groom age (43-44)working in Chennai/US for Naidu Bride-SWE. Yamihi.hari@gmail.com 9445270312/ 9962805093**RICH MUDALIYAR**, 31yrs B.Tech/MBA, Industrial background in Chennai, Seeks Suitable Groom Cont: 9385293227**VANIYA CHETTIAR**, 46/157, Rohini, M.Sc., TNGFS Department, Officer. Seeks equally Qualified Employed Groom. Contact: 94452 07116**HINDU, 33, castenobar, NRI, BE, 10** crores, 735648311**SEEKING NEVER** Married Tamil/Telugu Groom age (43-44)working in Chennai/US for Naidu Bride-SWE. Yamihi.hari@gmail.com 9445270312/ 9962805093**PILLAI GIRL 29 YEARS / 160 / N. VEG / B. TECH - MEM - IVY LEAGUE USA, LIVES IN NEW YORK / H1B, WORKING WITH TOP 5****Seek well educated well placed boy in USA. Caste no bar.****Call +91 9791664050****WhatsApp +91 8925527453****LIFE MADE SIMPLE****Matrimonial****BRIDEGROOMS WANTED****COMPUTER / INFO.TECH****WE ARE** looking for an alliance for our daughter Miss. Shamangapriya, aged 28 years (DOB: 01-11-1997) residing in Chennai, height 170cm, B.E., working with Deloitte, ERP, SD, 16+ Lakhs/annum, Hindu, Tirunelveli, Saiva, Pillai, Visakam star, Thulam Rasi, Maharam Lakshmi. The groom should have from same caste, well groomed, family oriented, career focused, aged between 28 & 30 years. Contact with details +91 98403 15397, cransqd@yahoo.co.in**NEED UNMARRIED**, any language Brahmin Boy--employed in India/ Abroad. Ph: 9791111321 for BRAHMIN GIRL 1984/BTech/Employed**ATTRACTIVE, TALENTED** 35, well-educated professional (LSR, UK Masters). Seeks compatible groom. Religion/caste no bar. Call/WA 9345 634 365**HINDU NADAR**, 41 years, 158cm, wheatish, Divorcee, B. Tech. M.S. in Life Sciences (USA), Freelancer, only daughter of a retired ISRO Scientist, well settled in Chennai, seeks well qualified professional groom, divorce without kids, employed/business, same caste, good family. Contact WA 9444895863.**DIVORCE THONDAMANDALA** Mudaliar Girl no issue 39. B.Tech, M.B.A working as Executive in M.N.C at Thiruvallur seeks well qualified and well employed in Chennai only. Vegetarian Mudaliar or Vegetarian family Boy. Ct:9381004883**LIFE MADE SIMPLE****Matrimonial****BRIDEGROOMS WANTED****COMPUTER / INFO.TECH****WE ARE** looking for an alliance for our daughter Miss. Shamangapriya, aged 28 years (DOB: 01-11-1997) residing in Chennai, height 170cm, B.E., working with Deloitte, ERP, SD, 16+ Lakhs/annum, Hindu, Tirunelveli, Saiva, Pillai, Visakam star, Thulam Rasi, Maharam Lakshmi. The groom should have from same caste, well groomed, family oriented, career focused, aged between 28 & 30 years. Contact with details +91 98403 15397, cransqd@yahoo.co.in**NEED UNMARRIED**, any language Brahmin Boy--employed in India/ Abroad. Ph: 9791111321 for BRAHMIN GIRL 1984/BTech/Employed**ATTRACTIVE, TALENTED** 35, well-educated professional (LSR, UK Masters). Seeks compatible groom. Religion/caste no bar. Call/WA 9345 634 365**HINDU NADAR**, 41 years, 158cm, wheatish, Divorcee, B. Tech. M.S. in Life Sciences (USA), Freelancer, only daughter of a retired ISRO Scientist, well settled in Chennai, seeks well qualified professional groom, divorce without kids, employed/business, same caste, good family. Contact WA 9444895863.**DIVORCE THONDAMANDALA** Mudaliar Girl no issue 39. B.Tech, M.B.A working as Executive in M.N.C at Thiruvallur seeks well qualified and well employed in Chennai only. Vegetarian Mudaliar or Vegetarian family Boy. Ct:9381004883**LIFE MADE SIMPLE****Matrimonial****BRIDEGROOMS WANTED****COMPUTER / INFO.TECH****WE ARE** looking for an alliance for our daughter Miss. Shamangapriya, aged 28 years (DOB: 01-11-1997) residing in Chennai, height 170cm, B.E., working with Deloitte, ERP, SD, 16+ Lakhs/annum, Hindu, Tirunelveli, Saiva, Pillai, Visakam star, Thulam Rasi, Maharam Lakshmi. The groom should have from same caste, well groomed, family oriented, career focused, aged between 28 & 30 years. Contact with details +91 98403 15397, cransqd@yahoo.co.in**NEED UNMARRIED**, any language Brahmin Boy--employed in India/ Abroad. Ph: 9791111321 for BRAHMIN GIRL 1984/BTech/Employed**ATTRACTIVE, TALENTED** 35, well-educated professional (LSR, UK Masters). Seeks compatible groom. Religion/caste no bar. Call/WA 9345 634 365**HINDU NADAR**, 41 years, 158cm, wheatish, Divorcee, B. Tech. M.S. in Life Sciences (USA), Freelancer, only daughter of a retired ISRO Scientist, well settled in Chennai, seeks well qualified professional groom, divorce without kids, employed/business, same caste, good family. Contact WA 9444895863.**DIVORCE THONDAMANDALA** Mudaliar Girl no issue 39. B.Tech, M.B.A working as Executive in M.N.C at Thiruvallur seeks well qualified and well employed in Chennai only. Vegetarian Mudaliar or Vegetarian family Boy. Ct:9381004883**LIFE MADE SIMPLE****Matrimonial****BRIDEGROOMS WANTED**

**From Page One****U.S. forces capture Venezuelan President**

The U.S. military action, which plucked a nation's sitting leader from office, echoed the U.S. invasion of Panama that led to the surrender and seizure of its leader, Manuel Antonio Noriega, in 1990.

Mr. Maduro and other Venezuelan officials were indicted in 2020 on "narco-terrorism" conspiracy charges. The U.S. Justice Department released a new indictment on Saturday of Mr. Maduro and his wife for alleged role in narco-terrorism conspiracy. Venezuelan ruling party leader Nahum Fernández said Mr. Maduro and Ms. Flores were at their home within the Ft. Tiuna military installation when they were captured. "That is where they bombed," he said. "And, there, they carried out what we could call a kidnapping of the President and the First Lady of the country."

Early on Saturday, multiple explosions rang out and low-flying aircraft swept through the Venezuelan capital. The attack itself lasted less than 30 minutes and the explosions – at least seven blasts.

Some Venezuelan civilians and members of the military were killed, Venezuela's Vice President Delcy Rodriguez said without giving a number. However, Mr. Trump said some U.S. forces were injured in the strikes but that he believed "we had nobody killed".

Venezuela's government responded to the attack with a call to action: "People to the streets!" while Armed people and uniformed members of a civilian militia headed into the streets of a Caracas neighborhood long considered a stronghold of the ruling party.

**Bangladeshi cricketer dropped from KKR**

"BCCI will allow KKR a replacement player in line with IPL regulations, and further details will be communicated in due course," the franchise said further. The IPL season will start on March 26 and continue till May 31. The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had permitted Mustafizur to play for KKR during this duration.

Mustafizur's exclusion from KKR after he was picked for Rs. 9.20 crore at the IPL 2026 auction has sent a shockwave in Bangladesh media. Bangladeshi newspaper *Amar Desh*, edited by Mahamudur Rahman, has announced that it would boycott all news related to the upcoming IPL season.

Dr. Asif Nazrul, Adviser of Sports and Youth Affairs, Bangladesh, expressed his "strong condemnation and protest" and said he will not "tolerate insult of Bangladeshi's cricket, cricketers and of Bangladesh".

However, BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia told ANI that BCCI's instruction to KKR was prompted by "recent developments that are going on all across" indicating that the decision was taken in view of the political crisis in Bangladesh.

**T.N. CM announces new pension scheme**

With the introduction of TAPS, the Tamil Nadu government will have to incur an additional expenditure of ₹3,000 crore towards pension funds. In addition, the State will have to contribute approximately ₹1,000 crore every year as its annual contribution, an amount that is likely to increase based on the salary of employees.

Before making the announcement, Mr. Stalin held discussions with Minister for Public Works E.V. Velu, Minister for Finance Thangam Thennarasu, Minister for School Education Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi, Chief Secretary N. Muruganandam, and Additional Chief Secretary (Finance) T. Sudhayachandran at the Secretariat.

**14 Maoists killed in encounters in Bastar****Shubhomoy Sikdar**  
RAIPUR

At least 14 Maoists, including six women, were killed in two separate encounters in Sukma and Bijapur districts of Chhattisgarh on Saturday, the police said.

Two commanders, each carrying a reward of ₹5 lakh, are among the dead.

A senior police officer said that based on credible information about the presence of armed Maoists in the southern areas of the two districts, security forces launched simultaneous operations during which 12 Maoists were neutralised in Sukma and two in Bijapur. Both districts fall in the Bastar region.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai called the twin operations a "decisive success". Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan said the operation in the dis-

trict was launched by the Sukma District Reserve Guards (DRG), and intermittent encounters between the security forces and Naxalites began around 8 a.m.

"Bodies of 12 Maoists, including five female Maoists, were recovered along with weapons such as AK 47, INSAS, SLR Rifles, from the encounter sites," he said. Among the slain Maoists were Konta Area Committee in-charge Vetti Mangadu, and Konta Area Committee secretary Madvi Hitesh, said Mr. Chavan.

Bijapur Superintendent of Police Jitendra Yadav said there was intermittent firing between the DRG Bijapur and the Maoists from 5 a.m. After the operation, the bodies of two Maoist commanders - Hunga Madkam and Aayiti Muchaki, - were recovered. Each was carrying a reward of ₹5 lakh, he added.

**Himachal govt. starts probe into college student's death**

State sets up a committee to examine charges of sexual assault and caste-based abuse; it will submit a report in three days; assistant professor accused of sexual assault has been suspended

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHANDIGARH

The Himachal Pradesh government on Saturday suspended an assistant professor of a government college in Dharmsala following charges of sexual harassment and ragging linked to a 19-year-old Dalit student's death in December.

The police, on January 1, registered cases against the professor and three girl students of Government College, Dharmsala, on allegations of ragging and voluntarily causing hurt to the victim.

The State government has formed a four-member committee, led by Additional Director of Higher Education Harish Kumar, for fact-finding and conducting a preliminary inquiry into the death.

The inquiry will examine all aspects regarding the incident, including alleged sexual harassment by the professor and caste-based abuse, according to Director of Education Amarjeet Sharma's order.

**Case file**  
A 19-year-old Dalit student from Government Degree College, Dharmsala, died on December 26, after alleged harassment and ragging incidents**INQUIRY:** A four-member committee, led by Additional Director of Higher Education, formed for fact-finding.

**POLICE ACTION:** FIR registered under sections of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (sexual harassment, voluntarily causing hurt, common intention) and Himachal Pradesh Educational Institutions (Prohibition of Ragging) Act, 2009

**ACCUSED**  
Ashok Kumar,  
Assistant Professor of  
Geography  
  
Three students accused of  
ragging and assault**VICTIM'S FATHER'S CHARGE:** On September 18, the victim was beaten and intimidated by the three students and was being sexually harassed by the professor. The victim fell ill, and died during treatment in Ludhiana

The accused, Ashok Kumar, assistant professor of geography, has been put under immediate suspension, pending the outcome of the inquiry, said the order.

The order further stated, "During the period of suspension, the headquarters of the accused Ashok Kumar shall be at the Directorate of Higher Education in Shimla and he shall not leave the headquarters without obtaining prior

permission of the higher authorities."

**Report in three days**

The committee will submit a comprehensive report within three days after examining all aspects of alleged harassment, sexual assault, ragging, and caste-based comments by college teachers and students.

The victim died at a hospital in Punjab's Ludhiana on December 26, 2025. Her father alleged that on

September 18, 2025, she was beaten up and intimidated by three students, and that Ashok Kumar, the professor, engaged in obscene acts with her.

Following these incidents, the girl was severely traumatised and fell seriously ill.

She was treated at multiple hospitals before she died during treatment.

The police have registered a first information report (FIR) under Sections 75 (sexual harassment), 115 (2) (voluntarily causing hurt), 3 (5) (common intention) of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and Section 3 of Himachal Pradesh Educational Institutions (Prohibition of Ragging) Act 2009, against the accused.

An investigation is under way.

**CM promises action**

Speaking with media persons in Kandaghat in Solan, Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhinder Singh Sukhu said strict action would be taken against all those involved.

**UGC sets up panel to look into assault, ragging allegations****The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The University Grants Commission (UGC) on Saturday said it had taken cognisance of the death of a college student in Dharmsala after it emerged that the police had registered a case over allegations that the 19-year-old victim was sexually assaulted by a professor and subjected to ragging by other students at the government college.

The UGC said, "Its anti-ragging helpline had registered a *suo motu* complaint over the matter, and that a fact-finding committee had also been constituted to investigate the incident. The 5-member fact-finding committee is chaired by UGC Member Professor Raj Kumar Mittal... It has been asked that a report be submitted within seven days."

This comes a day after the Himachal Pradesh police booked three women students of the college for ragging and voluntarily causing hurt and one professor for sexual assault.

The UGC's statement, noted that it had taken cog-

**The UGC says that it has taken cognisance of the incident as one of 'alleged suicide'**

niscience of the incident as one of "alleged suicide" due to ragging, also noting that the college was denying this charge.

**NCW takes cognisance**

On Saturday, the National Commission for Women (NCW) in Delhi said that it had also taken *suo motu* cognisance of the case, condemning the "heinous, inhuman, and reprehensible act, which is a gross violation of the student's life, dignity, and rights.

It has sought an action-taken report from authorities in Himachal Pradesh within five days.

Further, NCW Chairperson Vijaya K. Rahatkar has written to the Director-General of Police in Himachal Pradesh, calling for the arrests of those responsible.

*(For those in distress, counselling is available at TeleMANAS-14416)*

**Odisha Police begin probe into 'violation' of powers by Naveen Patnaik aide V.K. Pandian****Satyasundar Barik**  
BHUBANESWAR

The Crime Branch of the Odisha Police has begun an investigation into the alleged "excessive power" exercised by V.K. Pandian, the then close aide of former Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Santosh Kumar Gauda, who has been entrusted with the task of investigating the allegations, has sought evidence in support of allegations made by Surendra Panigrahi, the petitioner in the case.

**'No such department'**  
In 2023, Mr. Panigrahi, president of the Bharatiya Bi-kash Parishad, a non-go-



**Close aide:** File photo of former Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik with V.K. Pandian. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

vernment forum, had alleged that under the Odisha Government Rules of Business, 1956, which outlines the framework for the functioning of the Odisha government, there was no such department called '5T' in the State.

V.K. Pandian, the 2000 batch IAS officer who had taken voluntary retirement to join Biju Janata Dal, was private secretary to then Odisha CM. However, he was appointed as 5T Secretary by a notification issued in 2019. This is clearly

violation of rules," said the petitioner.

Mr. Panigrahi had first sent his petitions to the Governor, Chief Minister and Chief Secretary in 2023, but his petition was never taken up for investigation. He subsequently sent his allegations to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and the office of the President in 2024 and 2025.

**Helicopter use**

"Mr. Pandian moved alone by helicopter throughout Odisha without permission of then CM. As per RTI information, an expenditure of ₹9,03,60,346 was made towards hiring of helicopter. Subsequently, ₹8,18 crore was spent for helicopter use, taking the total expenditure to ₹17.21 crore.

It was illegal to travel by air alone," he said. "The former IAS officer used to address public meetings, declare new projects without budgetary provisions and invite all the students from primary schools to university to attend his meeting declaring compulsory holiday. He had then hijacked the administration," Mr. Panigrahi said.

"In the event that constitutional heads are unwell, powers are generally not passed onto subordinates including private secretaries. How was it possible that private secretary to Odisha CM was discharging constitutional duties by the strength of oral orders from CM?" Mr. Panigrahi had further pointed out in his 2023 petition.

**Don't look at RSS through BJP's prism, says Bhagwat****The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Sangh cannot be understood by looking at the BJP, said Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat on Friday.

Mr. Bhagwat said that different narratives about the Sangh were being circulated and it was important to present the truth.

"The Sangh is a unique organisation in the world. Therefore, the Sangh cannot be understood by comparing it to anyone," he said. Mr. Bhagwat said that since the beginning, the Sangh was to become an organisation whose sole aim is to organise the entire Hindu society.

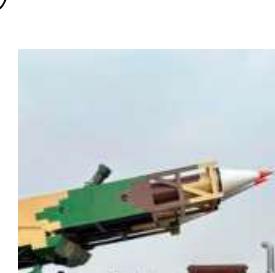
**Army signs deal to procure long-range rocket launchers backed by Israeli technology****Saurabh Trivedi**  
NEW DELHI

Under emergency procurement powers, the Indian Army has signed a ₹293-crore contract with the private defence manufacturer NIBE Ltd., in collaboration with Israel, for the supply of an advanced long-range rocket launcher system with strike capabilities of 150 km and 300 km.

The acquisition will significantly enhance the Army's deep-strike artillery firepower and operational reach.

The development was confirmed by the Pune-based NIBE Ltd. in a letter to the Bombay Stock Exchange and National Stock Exchange on Friday.

The company has entered into a supply contract with Indian Army, Ministry of Defence, Government of India for manufacturing and supply of ground equipment, accessories, ESP and ammunition for universal rocket launcher system capable of



The Suryastra multi-calibre rocket launcher system.  
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

integrating multiple rocket types including rockets striking at long ranges of 150 km and 300 km for a total consideration of ₹292.69 crore (inclusive of all taxes and duties)," the letter mentioned.

The system, Suryastra, is India's first Made in India universal multi-calibre rocket launcher, capable of executing precision surface-to-surface strikes at ranges up to 300 km.

Designed to engage multiple targets simultaneously at varying ranges, the system achieves a high de-

gree of accuracy with a circular error probable (CEP) of less than five metres during trials.

In July 2025, the defence manufacturer has signed a Technology Collaboration Agreement (TCA) with Israeli defence major Elbit Systems to manufacture the advanced universal rocket launcher system (SURYA) in India.

This marks the first time a high-precision rocket launcher system with strike capability up to 300 km is being produced domestically.

**EP provisions**

On December 26, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) of the Defence Ministry cleared a proposal to allow defence forces to sign contracts under emergency procurement (EP) powers till January 15. Under the EP provisions, the armed services can procure weapons systems worth up to ₹300 crore on an urgent basis without any further clearances.

Designed to engage multiple targets simultaneously at varying ranges, the system achieves a high de-

**SC to give verdict on bail for Umar Khalid and others tomorrow****Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is on Monday scheduled to pronounce judgment on the bail pleas of former Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) student leader, Umar Khalid, and other accused persons in an Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act case related to the alleged "larger conspiracy" behind the February 2020 riots in the national capital.

A Bench headed by Justice Aravind Kumar had reserved its verdict in December 2025 on separate special leave petitions filed by the accused persons against a September 2 decision of the Delhi High Court denying them bail.

The High Court had reasoned that "unfettered right to protest would damage the Constitutional framework and impinge upon the law-and-order situation in the country".

Besides Mr. Khalid, the other appellants are Gulfish Fatima, Sharjeel



A Bench headed by Justice Aravind Kumar had reserved its verdict in December 2025.

Imam, Meera Haider, Shifa Ur Rehman, Mohammad Saleem Khan, and Shadab Ahmed. Mr. Khalid, Mr. Imam and others were accused of being the "masterminds" behind the riots, which left 53 people dead.

**Grounds for bail**  
They have sought bail chiefly on the ground of prolonged incarceration without trial for the past five years. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the petitioners, likened the prolonged custody to pre-trial conviction.

Trinamool MP Mausam Noor returns to Congress

**The Hindu Bureau**  
KOLKATA

In a major boost to the Congress ahead of the Assembly election in West Bengal, Mausam Noor, Rajya Sabha member of the Trinamool Congress, joined the party.

"West Bengal wants change," she said after joining the Congress. She had complete faith in the Congress leadership and was willing to shoulder any responsibility the party offered her, Ms. Noor said.

She hails from the family of Congress leader and the late former Union Minister A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury, whose name remains synonymous with the Congress in Malda district decades after his death. Ms. Noor was a two-time Lok Sabha member from Malda from the Congress, before she defected to the Trinamool seven years ago.

She rejoined the Congress in the presence of senior leaders Jairam Ramesh, Ghulam Ahmed Mir, and Bengal Congress president Shubhankar Sarkar.

Maoist leader, 19 cadres surrender in Telangana

**The Hindu Bureau**  
HYDERABAD

A senior commander of the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) and a State Committee member of the CPI (Maoist) surrendered before the Telangana Police on Saturday, along with 18 other cadres.

Among those who surrendered are the commander of the PLGA battalion, Badse Sukka, alias Deva (49), and member of the Telangana State Committee Kankalan Raji Reddy, alias Venkatesh (50). They also handed over 48 firearms and more than 2,200 rounds of ammunition, officials said.

The party said it stood with the gig workers and had been an ardent champion of the rights of those in the unorganised sector.

"Amid a larger movement by gig workers to secure dignified working conditions, the [Narendra] Modi government has be-

# Cong. to begin agitation against new rural jobs law on Jan. 10

Campaign to save the MGNREGA will kick off with district-level press conferences and culminate with four major rallies; Jairam Ramesh says VB-G RAM G Act represents 'dangerous centralisation'; party says it will challenge the new law in court

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Congress will hold a nationwide agitation, the MGNREGA Bachao Sangram, from January 10 to February 25 to demand the withdrawal of the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (VB-G RAM G) Act, the party announced on Saturday.

The Congress is pressing for restoration of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in its original, rights-based form.

"MGNREGA is not charity. It is a legal guarantee. Crores of poorest people got work in their own villages; MGNREGA reduced hunger and distress migration, raised rural wages, and strengthened women's economic dignity. VB-G RAM G is designed to dismantle this right," Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said in a post on X.



Congress leader Jairam Ramesh and K.C. Venugopal at a press conference in New Delhi on Saturday. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Addressing a joint press conference with fellow Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh, K.C. Venugopal alleged that the new law fundamentally altered the nature of rural employment by removing the legal guarantee to work and centralising powers that were earlier vested with States and panchayats. He declared that the party would

challenge the Act in court. "The new legislation strikes at the federal structure of the country. No consultations were held with State governments, even though their finances and administrative authority will be directly affected," Mr. Venugopal said.

He added that under the new Act, employment would no longer be a legal

right, unlike under MGNREGA, and the authority of Panchayati Raj institutions would be weakened.

**Common strategies**

Asked whether Opposition-ruled States would refuse to implement the law, Mr. Venugopal said the Congress would consult its INDIA bloc partners to evolve a common strategy. "We will reach a consensus among Opposition-ruled Chief Ministers and explore all possible options going forward," he said.

Mr. Ramesh contended that the VB-G RAM G Act represented "dangerous centralisation" and undermined the constitutional balance between the Centre and the States.

"Despite its grand name, the only guarantee in this law is centralisation. There is no assured employment and no financial security for State governments," Mr. Ramesh said, adding that under the new

framework, the allocation of funds would be decided entirely by the Centre.

"Our demand is not modification but complete withdrawal of this Act and the restoration of MGNREGA as a rights-based programme," he asserted.

The Congress said the agitation would focus on defending the right to work, protecting Panchayati Raj institutions, and standing with women workers, Dalits, Adivasis, and the rural poor.

The campaign will begin with district-level press conferences on January 10, followed by day-long fasts and symbolic protests at district headquarters on January 11. Panchayat-level meets and mass contact programmes are scheduled from January 12 to 29, with ward-level sit-ins planned for January 30.

Gheras of Vidhan Sabhas will be held between February 7 and 15, followed by four major rallies from February 16 to 25.

# Logical discrepancies' in SIR forms down to 94.49 lakh in Bengal

**Moyurie Som**  
KOLKATA

The total number of "logical discrepancies" detected in electors' enumeration forms in the ongoing special intensive revision in West Bengal has decreased by around 41.51 lakh since the draft roll was published in December.



People checking their documents during an SIR hearing in West Bengal. PTI

being less than 15 years, 8.41 lakh cases of age difference with parents being over 50 years and nearly 3 lakh cases of age difference with grandparents being less than 40 years.

Trinamool Congress leaders, including the party's national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, had raised questions on why the Election Commission is not publishing the list of electors with logical discrepancies in the public domain.

**Other issues**

The cases of logical discrepancies are in addition to 30 lakh 'unmapped' voters who could not establish a familial link with the voters' list of 2002 and the 58 lakh names that were deleted from the draft electoral roll on account of being absent, shifted, dead or duplicate.

Before the SIR exercise began in the State, there were roughly 7.66 electors listed on the voter list as of October 27.

## Cong. terms Centre's plan for gig workers 'too little, too late'

**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI

Recently woken up to the need to do so. But its vision is too little, too late and falls far short of the provisions made out by the Congress governments in Telangana, Rajasthan, and Karnataka to support gig workers," Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said.

Listing out provisions made by Congress governments, he said these include establishment of a welfare fund, setting up a tripartite welfare Board to ensure registration of workers by platforms, welfare fee collection, transparency and workers access to their own information, and implementation of social security schemes.

## Kerala parties ask EC to curb voter summons for SIR hearings

**The Hindu Bureau**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Political parties have asked the Election Commission (EC) of India to ensure that electors are summoned for hearings only in unavoidable cases under the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls in Kerala.

The demand came at a weekly political party meeting convened by Chief Electoral Officer (Kerala) Rathan U. Kelkar on Saturday.

The parties raised the issue amid concerns that notices would be issued on a large scale to electors on the 'no mapping' list and in cases where 'logical discrepancies' or inconsistencies

have been detected in the entries.

AERO)," M.K. Rahman of the Congress said.

The parties wanted the EC to issue directions to the EROs/AEROS so that hearings are restricted to unavoidable cases. They also repeated the demand that authorised representatives be allowed to appear for bedridden, aged, and overseas electors.

**Avoidable cases**

"There should be an arrangement where hearings are avoided in cases where the elector submits sufficient documents and they are examined and found satisfactory at the level of the booth-level officer (BLO) or the electoral registration officer/assistant electoral registration officer (ERO/

While notices are to be generated in the cases of all electors on the 'no mapping' list, the decision whether they should be called for hearings rests with the ERO/AERO, Mr. Kelkar said. "We have issued a guidance to them that the hearings should be held without causing inconvenience to the public," Mr. Kelkar said.

## Cong. to screen poll aspirants; Priyanka to head Assam panel

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Congress leader and Lok Sabha member from Wayanad Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has been appointed as the chairperson of the screening committee that will shortlist potential candidates for the upcoming Assembly election in Assam.

The party on Saturday also announced screening committees for Kerala, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

Ms. Vadra will head the Assam panel with Lok Sabha MP Saptagiri Ulaka and

Rajya Sabha MP Imran Masood as members of the committee. The move shows the party's intent to make a comeback in the State where the party had a 15-year uninterrupted rule from 2001 before losing to the BJP in 2016.

The Kerala panel would be headed by Madhusudan Mistry, with Rajya Sabha MPs Naseer Hussain, Neeraj Dangi and Abhishek Dutt being members of the panel. The committee for Tamil Nadu and Puducherry would be headed by T.S. Singh Deo while B.K. Hariprasad will lead the West Bengal panel.

**KARNATAKA STATE NATURAL DISASTER MONITORING CENTRE**  
(A Regd. Society of Govt. of Karnataka)  
Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan Road, Near Attur Layout,  
Yelahanka, Bengaluru - 560 064. Ph.: 080-67355000  
No.: KSNDMC/ADM/MISC/50/2025-WFTG/ Date: 03.01.2026

**Amended Notification regarding appointment of Technical Director for KSNDMC**

**Subject:** Advertisement for appointment of Technical Director for KSNDMC under the Karnataka Water Security and Resilience Programme (KWSRP) for implementation of the World Bank funded Project

The amended detailed Terms of Reference (ToR), eligibility criteria and other conditions for engaging as Technical Director at KSNDMC is available at KSNDMC Web portal [www.ksndmc.org](http://www.ksndmc.org). The Applicants may note the following:

- Last date for submission of applications along with relevant supporting documents through Registered Post / Courier or in Person, is extended until 5.00 pm of 20.01.2026
- Applications to be sent through proper channel to "The Office of Director, Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre (KSNDMC), Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan Road, Near Attur Layout, Yelahanka, Bengaluru - 560 064"
- Incomplete applications will not be considered and KSNDMC reserves the right to reject any application, without assigning any reason, whatsoever
- The qualified candidates will be shortlisted and called for Personal Interview for final selection to the post
- For further Queries, you may contact the Administrative Officer at 9611990357

Sd/- Director, KSNDMC

**THE SPECIAL OFFICER AND COMPETENT AUTHORITY, (UNDER KPIDFE - IMA & OTHER SCAM)**  
3rd Floor, Podium Block, V.V 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/03/2025-26)**

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. 688/2019)	Minimum Bid Price (Rs)	EMD (Rs)	Bid Increase Value (Rs)
1.	# 48, PID No. 64-86-48, 30th Cross, Bannerghatta Road, ward No: 46, Thilakanagar, Bengaluru- 560041. Measuring North to South 40 ft, East to West 90+92/2 ft Total 3500 Sq.ft Location: <a href="https://maps.app.goo.gl/WT1yZf135vgjKv7">https://maps.app.goo.gl/WT1yZf135vgjKv7</a>	1,44,49,500/-	14,45,000/-	1,45,000/-
(a)	Ground Floor-1, Flat No.GF-01, UDS-417.53, SBA-1593.75 Sq.ft	1,44,49,500/-	14,45,000/-	1,45,000/-
(b)	Ground Floor-2, Flat No.GF-02, UDS-417.53, SBA-1593.75 Sq.ft	1,46,01,500/-	14,61,000/-	1,47,000/-
(c)	1st Floor-1, Flat No.FF-01, UDS-417.53, SBA-1593.75 Sq.ft	1,46,01,500/-	14,61,000/-	1,47,000/-
(d)	1st Floor-2, Flat No.FF-02, UDS-417.53, SBA-1593.75 Sq.ft	1,47,44,000/-	14,75,000/-	1,48,000/-
(e)	2nd Floor-1, Flat No.SF-01, UDS-417.53, SBA-1593.75 Sq.ft	1,47,44,000/-	14,75,000/-	1,48,000/-
(f)	2nd Floor-2, Flat No.SF-02, UDS-417.53, SBA-1593.75 Sq.ft	1,47,44,000/-	14,75,000/-	1,48,000/-
(g)	3rd Floor Merged Flat, Flat No.TF-01, UDS-835.06, SBA-3187.50 sq.ft	2,89,76,900/-	28,98,000/-	2,90,000/-
(h)	4th Floor, Office Space, UDS 359.77, SBA-1500 Sq.ft	1,36,80,000/-	13,68,000/-	1,37,000/-

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 22nd January 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](mailto:splocaeauction@gmail.com) or Contact Mob. No 9945515174.

Date: 01-01-2026 Place: Bengaluru DIPR/CP/4826/NR/2025-26

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

## Bihar launches medical services for elderly at doorsteps

Bihar CM Nitish Kumar on Saturday said he has directed the health department to provide healthcare facilities to the elderly at their doorsteps. "Our effort is to ensure that they can avail health services at their homes," he said.

**MP POORV KSHETRA VIDYUT VITARAN CO. LTD.**  
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER (O&M), M.PPKV.V.Ltd, MANDLA  
Tel No: 07624-250209, 250902, e-mail: se9449500@yahoo.co.in  
Mandla dttd: 02.01.2026

**NOTICE INVITING TENDER**

Online Tenders are invited for following works under (O&M) Circle MPPKVCL, Mandla.

Sr. No.	Tender Specification No.	Name of the Work/Services	APPROX. VALUE (Rs in Crores)	TENDER FEE (In Rs)	EMD (In Rs)	Due date of opening from 14:00 Hrs (*)
1	SEM/08M/PUR/TS/4398 Date 02.01.2026 (e-tender No. 2026_PKVC_472 6301)	Outsourcing of Manpower Required for Miscellaneous Works under the jurisdiction of O&M Circle MPPKVCL, Mandla.	24.64	1800.00 (1000.00+ 1800.00 18%GST=1800)	1.00 Lakh	29.01.2026

\*For updated/extended due dates for opening of tender (EMD in Cover-1 & Techno-commercial bid in Cover-2) please refer to the online key dates. Other details can be seen in the complete tender documents available on e-portal <https://nptenders.gov.in>.

\*\* SAVE ENERGY FOR BETTER TOMORROW \*\*

"विद्युत विनियोगिता संरचना विकास के लिए वी मित्र ऐप डाउनलोड करें और पारं पक्ष 50,000 रुपये का इनाम!"

## IN BRIEF



## Shah-led panel meet focuses on issues of national security

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday chaired a Parliamentary Consultative Committee meeting of the Union Home Ministry in Sri Vijaya Puram. The panel meeting, which started at 11 a.m. and ended at around 2.40 p.m., focused on issues of national security, disaster management, cybersecurity and regional infrastructure, sources said. The meeting also emphasised the establishment of more modern centres such as the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL) and the National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU) at the regional level, the sources said. PTI

## Man arrested for playing 'anti-national' songs at salon

A 25-year-old man has been arrested by the Mira Bhayander Vasai Virar police in Palghar district of Maharashtra for allegedly playing "anti-national" songs related to Kashmir at his salon, officials said on Saturday. The accused, identified as Abdul Rehman Shah, originally from Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh, has been operating his salon in Naigaon for several years. According to local people who complained to the police, he allegedly played provocative content regularly, ignoring previous warnings, an official said. He was produced before a local court, which remanded him in police custody, a police officer said. PTI

## 'NEP will bring Indian youth out of Macaulay mentality'

The National Education Policy will be the medium to implement Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call to bring the country's new generation out of the Macaulay mentality, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said on Saturday. Mr. Pradhan said that the NEP, which is in its sixth year now, will herald a paradigm shift. "Prime Minister Modi has said the country needs to come out of the Macaulay mentality," he said. The Union Minister further pitched for holistic assessment of studies, entrepreneurship and innovation in education, adding that youth should not be just job seekers but also job creators. PTI

## Centre pushes States to speed up farm scheme fund release

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Saturday urged States to adopt a strategic approach to budget utilisation, warning that delays in spending allocated funds result in losses for States and hamper the timely release of subsequent central instalments. "If States are unable to spend their budgets on time, it only results in losses for them," the Minister said, adding that budget allocations are often held up due to minor administrative issues. Mr. Chouhan stressed the need for prompt verification of eligible farmers under the PM-KISAN scheme, and ensuring timely settlement of claims. PTI

## SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

**Solution to yesterday's Sudoku**

9	3	1	2	4	5	6	8	7
2	6	4	7	8	1	3	5	9
7	5	8	3	6	9	2	4	1
4	9	7	5	2	8	1	3	6
6	2	3	4	1	7	8	9	5
8	1	5	9	3	6	4	7	2
1	7	6	8	5	3	9	2	4
3	4	9	1	7	2	5	6	8
5	8	2	6	9	4	7	1	3

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Information and Broadcasting Ministry has established a Live Events Development Cell (LEDC) to facilitate the expansion of the "concert economy", boosting employment and tourism in the country.

India's live events industry is witnessing rapid expansion and is emerging as a key contributor to the media and entertainment ecosystem, an official said. The organised live events market was valued at ₹20,861 crore in 2024, registering a growth rate of

15%, outpacing several traditional media segments.

With an expected CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) of 18%, the sector is poised to position India among the leading global live entertainment destinations by 2030, as per government estimates.

In his address at the WAVES Summit in May 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the vast untapped potential of India's live entertainment sector, underlining its role as a key driver of employment, investment, tourism, and India's cultural and global influence.



According to a report, Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities are increasingly emerging as cultural and entertainment hubs. PTI

Constituted in July 2025 under the direction of Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting Ashwini Vaishnaw, the LEDC serves as a single-window facilitation mechanism for the sector. It brings together representatives of the Central and State govern-

ments, industry associations, music rights societies and major event companies.

A single large-format live event generates more than 15,000 direct and indirect employment opportunities.

## Entertainment hubs

According to a BookMyShow report covering the period January-November 2025, Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities are increasingly emerging as cultural and entertainment hubs. Cities in the northeastern region recorded significant growth in live entertainment foot-

'Correct use of technology can reduce court delays'

**The Hindu Bureau**  
PATNA

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Saturday laid the foundation stones for seven buildings on the Patna High Court premises and attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the new campus of the Bihar Judicial Academy (BJA).

Asserting that the institution's strength is closely connected to technological capacity, Chief Justice Kant said, "Appropriate use of technology can reduce delay, improve transparency and make courts more approachable for the elderly, persons with special disabilities, and those who reside in remote areas. This is what we call access to justice."

He also dedicated an e-ACR platform for judicial officers designed to modernise the process of filing and processing Annual Confidential Reports online. He also e-inaugurated the Judges' guest house at Gaya Ji.

The seven new buildings in the High Court included an auditorium, administrative block, multi-level car park, residential complex and hospital.

# Peace and dialogue essential where there are 'only disputes', says Modi

PM speaks at exposition on Piprahwa relics related to the Buddha, he says Buddha's philosophy is India's guide to a global approach; some relics repatriated to India after the family of a colonial archaeologist sought to auction them

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Strength is necessary against the "enemies of humanity", but where there are "only disputes", dialogue and peace are essential, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday, speaking at the inauguration of an international exposition of the sacred Piprahwa relics related to Lord Buddha in New Delhi.

Buddha's philosophy of "walking together instead of conflict and dominance" has been India's "core philosophy" and approach to the world in the 21st century, the Prime Minister said. "India is committed to 'Sarvajan Hitaya, Sarvajan Sukhaya (the welfare and happiness of all people)". This is what Lord Buddha taught us."

Mr. Modi said that the departure of the relics from India and their eventual return both held "significant lessons". Noting that slavery was not just political and economic, "but it also destroys our heritage", he added: "The



Reviving heritage: Prime Minister Narendra Modi attends the Grand International Exposition of Sacred Piprahwa Relics related to Lord Buddha, at Rai Pithora Cultural Complex in New Delhi on Saturday. ANI

same happened with the sacred relics of Lord Buddha."

**Rescued from auction**  
For those who took the relics away and their descendants, these were just "lifeless antique pieces" and this was why they had tried to auction them off, he said. "But for India, these relics are a part of our revered deity, an inseparable part of our civilisation. Therefore, India decided that their public auction

would not be allowed," the Prime Minister said.

The exposition, being hosted at the Rai Pithora Complex in New Delhi, consists of relics from the 1898 excavation in Kapilavastu, other relics unearthed from excavations in the 1970s, reliquaries and jewelled treasures from the Indian Museum in Kolkata, a monolithic stone coffin which had originally contained the gem relics, and the most recently repatriated relics from

the family collection of William Claxton Peppé, who had led the 1898 excavation.

The Peppé family collection of relics was repatriated to India in July 2025 after a joint effort by the Ministry of Culture and private partners, just as they were about to be auctioned by Sotheby's in Hong Kong. Acknowledging the support of private partners in bringing back parts of the relics, the Prime Minister thanked

## Challenges aplenty for rural, tribal, migrant groups in fighting TB: report

**Bindu Shajan Perappadan**  
NEW DELHI

India continues to bear a major portion of the global tuberculosis (TB) burden, accounting for about 27% of the cases worldwide, and faces challenges—including socio-economic disparities, malnutrition, comorbidities, and disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic—that impede elimination efforts.

A TB report titled 'India's Progress in Addressing the Challenges of Tuberculosis', published by stakeholders, including the Women's Collective Forum, has also identified India's rural, tribal, and migrant communities as those faced with multiple challenges when fighting tuberculosis.

"Migrant populations in India encounter critical obstacles to TB care due to high mobility, informal employment, and limited health access, often resulting in delayed diagnosis and disrupted treatment," said the report, adding that targeted intervention should include nationwide mapping of non-notified settlements to identify



The study says, migrant populations in India encounter critical obstacles to TB care due to limited health access. ISTOCKPHOTO

### The report calls for a nationwide mapping of non-notified settlements to locate high-burden clusters

high-burden migrant clusters, as well as outreach programmes in educational institutions for early awareness and screening.

It also noted that addressing these challenges requires an integrated migrant health framework, combining various sectors such as HIV, non-communicable disease (NCD) and vector-borne disease services at common delivery points. Also, strengthening

data systems for frontline workers and establishing an online inter-state referral platform can improve tracking and continuity care, stated the report.

Highlighting the challenges faced by frontline workers, the report called for prioritisation of developing a robust employee welfare policy that encompasses incentives, travel reimbursement, health insurance, and salary standardisation for frontline workers.

"Operational research on work patterns, documentation processes and barriers to patient-centred service delivery among frontline workers may pro-

duce evidence-based strategies," said the report.

It notes that strengthening health infrastructure, embedding digital technology and equity, ensuring uninterrupted care in crises, and empowering communities through partnership models will be critical to overcome the existing barriers and achieve TB elimination targets," it said.

## Call for framework

Additionally, research also indicates that a significant proportion of TB survivors exhibit chronic respiratory symptoms or structural lung damage such as fibrosis, bronchiectasis and airflow obstruction.

"Post-TB lung disease significantly impacts morbidity, disability and mortality rates. Establishing a national framework for post-TB care is crucial," said the report.

It added that nearly 60% of individuals with TB symptoms in India initially seek care from private providers, underscoring the critical need for robust and sustained public-private partnerships to meet national TB elimination goals.

## NCC cadets assisted authorities during Operation Sindoor'

**Saurabh Trivedi**  
NEW DELHI



Lt. Gen. Virendra Vats speaks at the pooja for the Republic Day Camp recently. ANI

social commitment. India launched the operation against Pakistan on May 7, 2025, in response to the Pahalgam terror attack. The conflict ended four days later.

The NCC Republic Day Camp (RDC) 2026 commenced at the DG NCC Camp, Delhi Cantonment. A total of 2,406 cadets, including 127 from Jammu & Kashmir and 131 from the north-eastern region, are participating in the camp. Cadets and officers from 25 friendly foreign countries are also taking part under the Youth Exchange Programme.

## Live Events Development Cell to support expansion of 'concert economy', boosting tourism and employment

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Information and Broadcasting Ministry has established a Live Events Development Cell (LEDC) to facilitate the expansion of the "concert economy", boosting employment and tourism in the country.

India's live events industry is witnessing rapid expansion and is emerging as a key contributor to the media and entertainment ecosystem, an official said. The organised live events market was valued at ₹20,861 crore in 2024, registering a growth rate of

15%, outpacing several traditional media segments.

With an expected CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) of 18%, the sector is poised to position India among the leading global live entertainment destinations by 2030, as per government estimates.

In his address at the WAVES Summit in May 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the vast untapped potential of India's live entertainment sector, underlining its role as a key driver of employment, investment, tourism, and India's cultural and global influence.



According to a report, Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities are increasingly emerging as cultural and entertainment hubs. PTI

serves as a single-window facilitation mechanism for the sector. It brings together representatives of the Central and State govern-

ments, industry associations, music rights societies and major event companies.

## Entertainment hubs

According to a BookMyShow report covering the period January-November 2025, Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities are increasingly emerging as cultural and entertainment hubs. Cities in the northeastern region recorded significant growth in live entertainment foot-

fall, with increases of 213% in Shillong, 188% in Guwahati and 143% in Kokrajhar. Visakhapatnam recorded the highest growth at 490%, followed by Vadodara at 230%, the records show.

A 17% rise in consumption of live entertainment across musical concerts, sports and theatre has also been noted. Over five lakh people travelled to other cities to attend live events, representing an 18% increase over the previous year. Attendance at theatre events rose by 45%, reflecting renewed public engagement.



# SCIENCE

## Green paradox: planting trees will cool a megacity unless it's dry

**Vasudevan Mukunth**

Cities around the world are getting hotter for two reasons: the climate is warming and urban areas often trap heat more than the countryside. Planting more vegetation, especially trees, has become a popular 'nature-based' way to cool cities. But how much does this really help?

To answer this, researchers from Australia, China, Saudi Arabia, and Switzerland recently com-

pared the temperature over different kinds of urban land cover, including trees, grasslands, croplands, and built-up surfaces like concrete and asphalt, in 761 megacities in 105 countries worldwide, including India. They defined a measure called temperature regulation capability: the temperature of a vegetated area minus the temperature of a built-up area. If the number was negative, vegetation was cooler, and vice versa.

When they analysed the data, the researchers found a paradox. In many cities, vegetation cooled, but in dry places, it could warm. Across all cities, grasslands cooled built-up areas in 78% of cases and trees cooled in 98%. But in almost a fourth of cities, especially in places with under 1,000 mm of rain a year, urban grasslands and croplands were hotter than built-up areas, creating net warming. Even trees showed warming in 2% of

arid cities. The researchers published their findings in *Science Advances* on January 2. They used a combination of physical effects to explain the paradox. Vegetation can cool a surface by evapotranspiration, i.e., water evaporating from soil and transpiring from leaves, carrying heat away. But vegetation can also absorb more sunlight if it reflects less light than some built surfaces. In arid cities, the cooling weakens

because water is scarce, so evapotranspiration is limited. Then the warming could 'win', i.e. reflection-driven warming plus changes in stored heat could outweigh the weaker cooling.

The authors also examined what happened during extremely hot summers. In about 75% of cities, trees reduced how much the temperature rose compared to built-up areas. Grasslands and croplands often did the oppo-

site, worsening the heat increase in about 71% and 82% of cities. One reason was that extreme heat often came with a large deficit in the vapour pressure, which caused many grasses and crops to shut down water loss more strongly, reducing cooling from evapotranspiration.

As the authors concluded, planting trees is not a simple solution and "misguided greening risks are worsening urban warming".

## SNAPSHOTS



**Oldest-yet deliberate human cremation found in Malawi**

Archaeologists have found an ash and charcoal feature dating to about 9,500 years ago in Malawi, with burnt bone fragments from a small adult within, making it the earliest evidence of an *in situ* adult pyre yet. The ash formed in layers, showing that people repeatedly relit and fed the fire with substantial amounts of deadwood, with uneven heating. People later returned to light more fires at the spot, making the shelter a memorial for later generations.



**Microlensing used to weigh distant rogue planet**

A study has used microlensing to weigh a rogue planet, i.e. not orbiting a star. A foreground object passes in front of a distant star and its gravity briefly magnifies the star's light. This brightening tells scientists about the object. The technique is difficult for rogues yet the study succeeded by combining observations from ground- and space-based telescopes. The team reported the planet, around 9,800 ly from the Milky Way's centre, weighed as much as Saturn.



**Starvation forces leafcutter bees to start adulting**

Larvae of many insects begin metamorphosis after reaching a critical weight. But a new study found the trigger in leafcutter bees is starvation, usually 24 hours after not getting food. Food removal reduced gene transcripts linked to making juvenile hormones and increased those linked to producing the molting hormone and to nutrient-sensing insulin. The findings suggest the hormonal machinery responds to food running out, also matching the fact that the adults provision food and larvae can't forage.

## Earthlife is made of space stuff, studies of asteroid Bennu hint

OSIRIS-REx samples from Bennu show the asteroid carries ribose, glucose, amino acids, nucleobases; discovery includes nitrogen-rich polymers, presolar grains of supernova origin, raising questions about how earth acquired life's ingredients

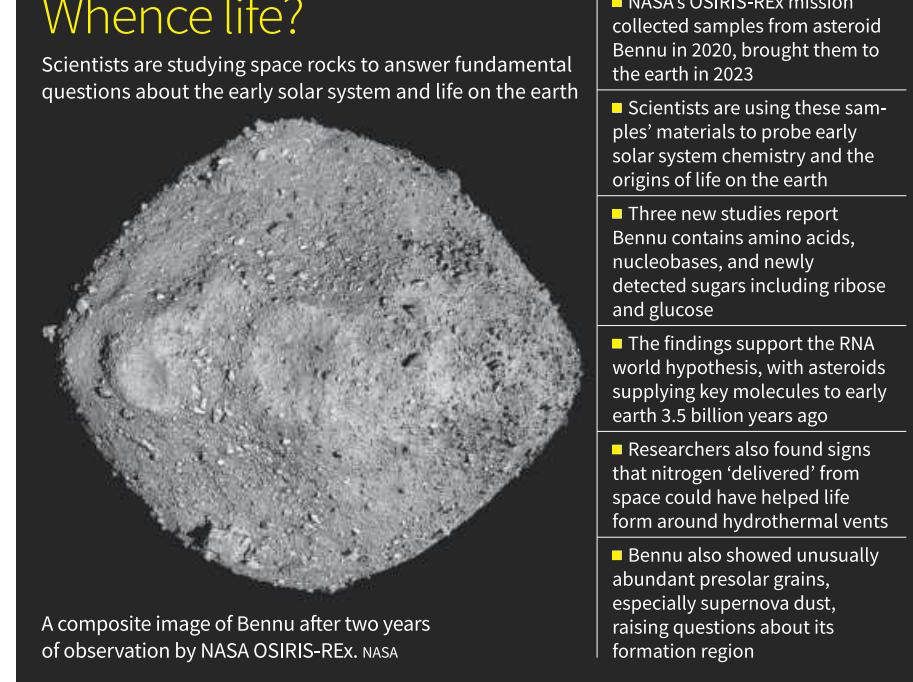
**Sandhya Ramesh**

In 2020, a spacecraft more than 3 lakh km away on a small asteroid called Bennu collected samples of its surface. The craft, part of NASA's OSIRIS-REx mission, then launched itself towards the earth, dropping off the canister of samples in September 2023. Since then, scientists in the US and Japan have been studying pieces of Bennu to answer fundamental questions about the formation of the early solar system and life on the earth.

On December 2, three teams published papers reporting Bennu contains sugar and other important molecules required to form RNA, and is also surprisingly abundant in supernova dust from a time before the sun formed.

When the solar system was forming from the cloud of dust and gas swirling around the sun, several smaller rocks were pushed around as well, and often clumped together. Bennu's larger parent asteroid formed in this way around the same time as the sun, 4.6 billion years ago, somewhere beyond Saturn. When Jupiter migrated to its present orbit, the parent was kicked into the asteroid belt, where it collided with other rocks. Over millennia, fragments from the parent gave rise to Bennu, which today orbits the sun between the earth and Mars.

In a *Nature Geoscience* paper, scientists led by Tohoku University in Japan



A composite image of Bennu after two years of observation by NASA OSIRIS-REx. NASA

reported finding ribose, the sugar molecule present in RNA, and glucose, the sugar molecule required for metabolism, on Bennu. Together with previous findings of amino acids and all the five nucleobases found in DNA and RNA, the entire inventory of molecules scientists believe are needed for life have now been confirmed on Bennu.

"For 5-C to convert to 6-C sugar, the optimal mix of environmental conditions such as very little but liquid brine, the right pH, and extremely low temperatures are required, which the asteroid possessed at formation," Kuljeet Kaur Marhas, professor and head of the Planetary Labs Analysis Section at the Physical Research Laboratory, Ahmedabad, who works with samples of the

asteroid Itokawa, said. The findings strengthen the 'RNA world' hypothesis: that early life used RNA as a source of genetic information and for catalytic functions, before DNA and proteins evolved. According to the study, the abundance of asteroids like Bennu in the inner solar system would have provided sugars and amino acids, leading to the formation of life on the earth more than 3.5 billion years ago.

**Chemical reactions**  
Scientists have also reported evidence of chemical reactions between ices forming polymer molecules before the ices melted. In a *Nature Astronomy* paper, a second team from NASA thus explained the discovery of polymers of nitrogen- and oxygen-rich

materials on Bennu. This material, called carbamate, would have been soft and gummy when it formed, hardening since. Scientists haven't found this material in extraterrestrial samples before.

At the time Bennu's parent formed, volatile compound ices like frozen ammonia, known to accumulate on asteroids' primordial surfaces, could have been heated by random radioactive decay. This would have liquefied the ices, which seeped into rocky pores and deposited the salts and minerals dissolved in them there. Bennu could have 'inherited' a piece of this.

Dust and gas in the early presolar system were formed from other exploding stars. By analysing the dust, astronomers hope to

find clues about the elements that made up its counterpart in the early solar system, which could help understand how planets formed.

In a third paper also published in *Nature Astronomy*, a different NASA team showed the presolar grains on Bennu had indeed been disturbed and moved around by moving liquids on the asteroid's surface. The concentration of presolar grains was at least 6x higher than in other similar asteroid and meteorite samples.

The team also reported signs the grains had been singed by heat released when the great mass of dust collapsed to form our sun.

Studies of the grains revealed they originated from various types of stars and supernovae. Of these, the concentrations of grains of supernovae-origin were the highest, indicating it was present in abundant quantities in the part of space where Bennu's parent formed.

"Why exactly there is an abundance of supernova-origin presolar grains is the biggest question, as Bennu is just like plenty of other asteroids in its neighbourhood," Dr. Marhas, who also reviewed the presolar grains paper, said.

"Will we find similar concentrations if we sample previously studied asteroids in different locations or is there something specific that makes the ordinary-seeming Bennu extremely special?"

*Sandhya Ramesh is a freelance science journalist*

## Here's how you're paying to use 'free' social media

**DECODED****John Xavier**

A flurry of developments around artificial intelligence tools and applications in the past year might suggest a lull in social media patterns and usage. But a closer look at how people engaged on some of the top social media platforms tell a different story.

Current estimates show that over 5.6 billion people maintain at least one active social media account. The average user now juggles accounts across nearly seven platforms, from messaging apps to video feeds and professional networks. Each handle represents a carefully curated digital persona, maintained not just for self-expression, but to remain socially and professionally visible. What

began as a tool for connection has quietly evolved into a continuous obligation.

A persistent myth underpins this system: that social media is free. After all, there is no upfront payment, no monthly invoice, and no credit card required at sign-up. But the absence of a price tag does not mean the absence of a cost. Instead of money, we pay with something far scarcer: Time and attention.

Only a few years ago, average daily social media use hovered around two hours. This trend seems to be going up to two and a half hours per day, driven largely by short-form video and algorithmic feeds designed for frictionless consumption. That adds up to more than 75 hours per month, which is nearly two full workweeks devoted solely to scrolling.

The cost becomes clearer with a simple calcula-



AI makes it possible to publish thousands of posts a day, optimised for engagement signals rather than substance. GETTY IMAGES

tion. Take your monthly income and divide it by the number of hours you work to estimate your true hourly value. Now multiply that rate by the time you spend each day on social platforms. The result is the implicit "fee" you pay for scrolling through digital feeds. For many people, this hidden cost rivals discretionary expenses like dining out, watching a movie, or even a portion of

rent. The difference is that, unlike money, these hours are permanently gone.

Platform-level data makes the scale even starker. On TikTok, Android users globally average more than 30 hours per month, largely consumed in rapid-fire bursts of short videos. Similar dynamics exist across Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, where recommendation algorithms are optimised for

user retention. The longer you stay, the more data you generate, and the more valuable you become to advertisers on those platforms.

This environment is now being fundamentally reshaped by generative AI content. The rise of what some call "AI slop" has dramatically increased the volume of content flooding social feeds. (AI slop is low-effort, mass-produced text, images, and videos generated at near-zero cost.)

AI makes it possible to publish hundreds or thousands of posts a day, often optimised for engagement signals rather than substance.

As a result, platforms are becoming frothier, noisier, and harder to navigate.

This explosion of content cuts both ways for engagement. On one hand, more content gives algorithms more material to

test, remix, and personalise, which can temporarily boost metrics like watch time and impressions. On the other hand, over-saturation risks diminishing returns. When feeds are dominated by repetitive, shallow, or misleading AI-generated posts, users can experience fatigue, mistrust, and disengagement.

Early signals already suggest a bifurcation: passive scrolling time may rise, while meaningful interaction declines.

In an ecosystem flooded with infinite, instantly generated media, focus itself becomes the most valuable commodity. What we choose to ignore may matter more than what we consume.

Social platforms can still be powerful tools for learning, collaboration, and creativity. But only if we remember that "free" has always been the most expensive price of all.

**Q**

## Question Corner

### For up, go this way

**How does my smartphone know which way is up?**

Your smartphone knows which way is up due to its accelerometer. It's a chip whose parts shift slightly when the phone accelerates or when

gravity acts along a particular direction. The phone's software reads the accelerometer's measurements along the x, y, and z directions and figures out which side is pointing towards the earth.

Social platforms can still be powerful tools for learning, collaboration, and creativity. But only if we remember that "free" has always been the most expensive price of all.

Phones also have a gyroscope. This is a microelectromechanical sensor with a small vibrating mass on a chip. The phone drives this

Readers may send their questions / answers to science@thehindu.co.in

# FAQ

## What went wrong with a rabies vaccine batch?

Has the problem been rectified? Should patients repeat the doses?

**Bindu Shajan Perappadan**

**The story so far:**

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S., issued a health warning late last year about counterfeit human anti-rabies vaccine Abhayrab available in India and in circulation since November 1, 2023. The warning came after rabies cases were seen in travellers from India.

**What did the CDC flag?**

In its November 25, 2025, travel notice, the CDC said that a counterfeit Abhayrab vaccine for humans has reportedly been circulating in major cities in the country (India) and that this could be both harmful and fail to prevent rabies. Australia maintained that its travellers who had been administered Abhayrab in India after November 1, 2023, should consider the vaccination invalid and initiate a new course of vaccination.

**What did the manufacturer say?**

On December 27, 2025, Indian Immunologicals Limited (IIL), one of India's leading vaccine manufacturers, which produces Abhayrab, said a counterfeit batch of its human anti-rabies vaccine, Abhayrab, was no longer available on the shelves.

Sunil Tiwari, vice-president and head of quality management at IIL, added that every batch of the vaccine manufactured in India is tested and released by the National Control Laboratory (Central Drugs Laboratory), which is a WHO-Geneva pre-qualified laboratory under the National Regulatory Authority.

**What is the protocol to be followed?**

If patients suspect that they have received a counterfeit vaccine, the primary protocol is to consult a healthcare provider to determine if replacement doses of a verified, authentic vaccine are needed.

According to Tushar Tayal, associate director, Internal Medicine, CK Birla Hospital, Gurugram, "Repeat rabies vaccination is allowed and safe. The rabies vaccine is an inactivated vaccine, and as such, it does not contain a live virus. It, therefore, becomes safe to be given repeatedly if required. Revaccination is allowed by the health institutions in situations of suspected vaccine effectiveness or exposure."

He explained that following exposure from a bite or exposure as suspected, a complete series of post-exposure prophylaxis is administered. "Revaccination is recommended whenever there is a question of

vaccine quality, authenticity, or schedule compliance. In cases where there are doubts about vaccine authenticity, inappropriate dosages, lack of cold chain maintenance, or lack of records, revaccination is recommended," he said.

Doctors add that if a previously vaccinated individual faces fresh exposure with doubts about his/her immunity status, then repeating the dose is advisable. In cases where an immunocompromised person faces a situation where his/her immunity is inadequate, that person might need to be revaccinated. As a life-threatening disease, any question regarding ensuring immunity makes revaccination necessary.

**What is the rabies revaccination regimen?**

Without a valid vaccination, a person is considered to be previously unvaccinated and needs a full regimen – usually administered on days 0, 3, 7, 14, and 28. Rabies immunoglobulin should be administered in cases of severe exposure. But if a person has been vaccinated previously and there is proper documentation of the same, then only booster doses are needed.

**How is India positioned in terms of rabies incidence and control?**

The World Health Organization notes that India is endemic for rabies, and accounts for 36% of the world's rabies deaths. The true burden of rabies in India is not fully known; however, as per available information, it causes 18,000-20,000 deaths every year. About 30-60% of reported rabies cases and deaths in India occur in children under the age of 15 years, as bites that occur in children often go unrecognised and unreported.

Rabies deaths in humans are 100% preventable through prompt and appropriate medical care. Vaccinating dogs is the most cost-effective strategy for preventing rabies in people.

India has implemented the National Rabies Control Programme and the joint National Action Plan for Rabies Elimination to achieve the goal of eliminating dog-mediated rabies by 2030.

The WHO and its global partners aim at ending human deaths from dog-mediated rabies through a comprehensive One Health approach promoting mass dog vaccination, ensuring access to PEP, health worker training, improved surveillance, and bite prevention through community awareness.

## Which are the airports being privatised?

How were the places selected? When is the tender process likely to begin? What are the privatisation goals a part of? When was the revenue-sharing model replaced by per passenger fee? How does it impact airfares? What are some of the issues being raised by airports?

**Jagriti Chandra**

**The story so far:**

The third round of airport privatisation, covering 11 airports to be opened for bids in five bundled groups, has moved a step forward with the Ministry of Civil Aviation sending a proposal to the Public Private Partnership Appraisal Committee (PPPAC) for its in-principle clearance and detailed scrutiny. According to government officials, the five bundles, each comprising metro and non-metro airports, include airports at Amritsar and Kangra; Varanasi, Kushinagar and Gaya; Bhubaneswar and Hubli; Raipur and Aurangabad; Tiruchi and Tirupati.

**What is the process?**

Once the PPPAC completes its appraisal and the Union Cabinet signs off on the plan, bids will be invited from private operators, with the government planning to launch the tender process by March 2026.

The 11 airports were selected from among all AAI (Airports Authority of India) facilities handling 0.1-1 million passengers annually. Projections of future traffic growth and investment requirements then narrowed the list to these top performers for the third privatisation round.

The development comes six years after the plan for privatising 25 airports was first shared by AAI on the conclusion of the privatisation of six airports, bagged by the Adani Group. Sources say the remaining 14 airports would be taken up for privatisation in subsequent rounds.

The privatisation goals are also part of the National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) that aims at monetising operating public infrastructure to unlock idle capital and reinvest that in other assets. Launched in August 2021, the NMP set an aggregate indicative target of ₹6 lakh crore to be raised by leasing brownfield infrastructure

The aim should be to ensure the cost of air travel for smaller cities remains affordable

assets over the four-year period from FY 2022 to FY 2025.

The target for the airport sector through the privatisation of 25 airports was pegged at ₹20,782 crore, or nearly 4% of the overall NMP value. In all, 88.3% of the total NMP target has been achieved by various infrastructure ministries, of which roads and railways remain the top contributors, but the aviation sector remains a laggard. The Union Budget 2025-26 announced the launch of the Asset Monetisation Plan 2025-30 to plough back ₹10 lakh crore.

**When did the privatisation of airports start?**

Privatisation of airports started in 2003 under the NDA government. It approved the privatisation of two brownfield airports, i.e., Delhi and Mumbai airports, with 26% AAI stake and 74% stake owned by private JV partners. Delhi went to a GMR-led consortium in 2006, Mumbai to a GVK-led consortium in the same year via competitive bidding based on a revenue-share model. Two greenfield PPP airports followed, which included Bengaluru and Hyderabad in 2004.

In 2019, six more airports (Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Jaipur, Mangaluru, Guwahati, Thiruvananthapuram) were privatised, which were all won by the Adani Group. The revenue-share model was replaced by per passenger fee.

For the third round of privatisation, the PPPAC will evaluate key aspects, including revenue-sharing models versus per-passenger fees, cross-subsidisation between metro and non-metro airports in a bundle, and the need for a cap on the number of airports a single entity bags. It will also assess optimal land parcels for non-aeronautical revenue streams that are used to offset airline and passenger fees, and whether the User Development Fee collected from passengers as a component in the airfare will be determined for each airport independently or as a joint asset.

**What are the concerns?**

Recently, when IndiGo was forced to cancel nearly 5,000 flights in the first two weeks of December, widespread concern was raised about the risks of a duopoly in India's aviation sector. Similar dangers are now emerging in the airport sector, where a monopoly has steadily taken shape over the past five years, with the Adani Group bagging 8 airports – six through privatisation, followed by Mumbai and Navi Mumbai airports, where it acquired GVK's stake.

Consider the recent dispute involving telecom operators, who approached the Department of Telecommunications over what they describe as "extortionary" charges levied at the newly inaugurated Navi Mumbai Airport to allow the use of its in-building solutions and refusal of

right of way to set up infrastructure to provide cellular services.

**Why are costs rising for both airlines and passengers?**

Privatisation often raises concerns about rising costs for airlines and passengers, even as infrastructure investment increases. These concerns are magnified when a large monopoly emerges, leaving airline operators with limited bargaining power and passengers with virtually none.

Take the example of Thiruvananthapuram Airport, where, following its first tariff revision after privatisation to Adani, which was approved by the Airport Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA), the user development fee charged to passengers as part of the airfare increased from ₹506 to ₹770 for domestic travellers for one year, followed by further hikes in subsequent years. Aircraft landing charges were also sharply increased.

Additionally, the regulator pulled up the airport for under-reporting its projection of non-aeronautical revenues, which are meant to cross-subsidise charges levied on airlines and passengers. AERA noted that the projections submitted were based on pre-privatisation and pre-COVID figures from the AAI.

The common man's grievances include high taxi charges at airports, congestion within terminal buildings, limited access to wheelchairs, and being compelled to pay for porter services to overcome challenges of accessibility. A beginning has been made with the airport tariff regulatory body moving towards evaluating airports on service delivery benchmarks and proposing a penalty if these are not met. The service benchmarks include wait time at security gates, check-in time, availability of help desks, and time taken to travel between terminals, among others. It plans a third-party evaluation of these parameters and a penalty in the form of 5% reduction on airport tariff, so that it results in reduced user development fee for passengers.

**What lies ahead?**

Only about 6% of Indians currently travel by air, highlighting the enormous scope for growth in what is already the world's third-largest aviation market. While affordability remains a key factor, the low penetration rate makes it clear that air travel in India is far from saturated. To meet rising demand, the government has set a goal of building 50 new airports over the next five years and expanding the existing network of 163 airports. By FY2026, India's airports are expected to have a combined passenger-handling capacity of around 550 million passengers per annum (mppa), factoring in new facilities such as Navi Mumbai Airport and the upcoming Noida International Airport. Industry estimates suggest that airport capacity will need to grow to about 850 mppa within five years. Supporting this growth will require more than just new airports and will also depend on the presence of financially robust airlines.



**On track:** The airports were selected from among all Airports Authority of India facilities handling 0.1-1 million passengers annually. R. V. MOORTHY

## Where does India stand on acid attacks?

What is survivor and social activist Shaheen Malik fighting for? What happened to her case in court? How many cases were reported in 2023, the latest National Crime Records Bureau data available? Why is the crime severely under-reported? Why is the conviction rate low despite laws?

**Priscilla Jebaraj**

**The story so far:**

When a Delhi court acquitted the three main accused in a vicious 2009 acid attack case on December 24, 2025, it was not just a devastating end to a 16-year battle for justice fought by survivor and social activist Shaheen Malik, but also shone a harsh light on the situation of acid attack survivors. Ms. Malik was a 26-year-old MBA student and counsellor in Panipat when she was attacked outside her workplace, resulting in the loss of vision in one eye and 25 reconstructive surgeries. She plans to appeal the verdict in the Delhi High Court but says it will discourage other survivors from seeking justice. Hers is not an isolated story; of 703 acid attack cases in Indian courts in 2023, the last year for which data is available, there were 16 convictions and 27 acquittals.

**What are acid attacks?**

An acid attack is an assault where a corrosive substance is thrown on or administered to a person with the intention of harming them. Sulphuric, hydrochloric, and nitric acids are the most commonly used substances. They can melt

In 2023, 57 reported acid attacks took place in West Bengal, 31 in Uttar Pradesh, and 15 in Gujarat, the three worst affected States

the skin and flesh, dissolve bones, causing severe burns, scarring, blindness, maiming, or even a permanent vegetative state, apart from psychological trauma and socio-economic harm.

The majority of victims are women and young girls, while perpetrators are almost always men. A 2024 analysis of 55 cases in India by the Acid Survivors Trust International (ASTI) found that motives were related to personal relationship issues in three-fourths of attacks against women, including revenge for spurning romantic or sexual advances, dowry-related disputes, suspicions of infidelity, and domestic abuse.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, there were 207 reported cases of acid attacks in 2023, the last year for which data is available, an increase from 202 in 2022 and 176 in 2021. There were also 65 cases of acid attack attempts. The crime is severely underreported due to societal stigma, family pressure, and fear of retaliation. ASTI estimates that there are likely 1,000 attacks per year in India.

In 2023, 57 reported acid attacks took place in West Bengal, 31 in Uttar Pradesh, and 15 in Gujarat, the three worst affected States.

**What are the laws against acid attacks in India?**

Section 124 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sahita mandates a minimum punishment of 10 years in prison up to life imprisonment, and a "just and reasonable" fine to meet the victim's medical expenses. An acid attack attempt is to be punished by five to seven years' imprisonment. The law also requires all public and private hospitals to provide free treatment to victims.

In 2013, the Supreme Court mandated the regulation of acid sales, with a photo ID for buyers, and sellers required to keep a register of purchases, but this is poorly implemented.

In 2023, the NCRB reported that the police were investigating 113 acid attack cases, along with 53 cases pending from the previous year, and 86 cases were charged and sent for trial. There were 649 cases pending trial from the previous year. The accused were convicted

in only 16 cases, including pending cases, while 27 cases saw acquittal in the course of the year.

Ms. Malik's experience puts a human face on those statistics. "Just the fact that I did not get a verdict for 16 years when the case should have been completed in six months is a denial of justice. The police investigation was shoddy, there was evidence that was ignored, there was extreme judicial insensitivity... The judge even falsely accused me of having an emotional relationship with the accused," she told *The Hindu*. "The investigating officer pushed me to settle the case instead of taking it to court and the accused offered me crores of rupees. I did not take one paisa because I wanted my rights, not money... Who will be willing to go to court after this?" she asks, noting that not one of the 300 survivors supported by her Brave Souls Foundation has yet secured a conviction in their trials, though most have been offered out-of-court settlements. Ms. Malik also had to go to court to get the ₹3 lakh she is entitled to from the State as compensation, receiving the money nine years after the crime.

**What steps are needed to end this crime and support survivors?**

Survivors have called for a more comprehensive ban on the sale of acid and stricter implementation of the existing rules. "The sub-divisional magistrate is responsible for monitoring acid sale; has even one SDM been punished for illegal sales? In Bangladesh, a shop is sealed within 30 days if they are openly selling acid," says Ms. Malik. The neighbouring country passed stringent laws against acid sales and attacks in 2002, accompanied by large-scale public awareness campaigns, after which the number of reported attacks has fallen 15% to 20% each year, according to the Acid Survivors Foundation of Bangladesh; from 494 attacks in 2002, there were only 13 attacks in 2024.

Sensitisation of judges, public prosecutors and judges, fast track courts, legal support and counselling for victims, and penalisation of judicial delays are essential to improve conviction rates and create a stronger deterrent. The Justice J.S. Verma Committee's recommendations for a national fund to cover lifelong medical, psychological, educational, and skilling needs of survivors must be implemented for comprehensive rehabilitation.



**Safety first:** Survivors call for a more comprehensive ban on the sale of acid and stricter implementation of existing rules. FILE PHOTO

# PROFILES

## Monroe Doctrine reloaded

### Strike on Venezuela

By bombing Venezuela, the U.S. is seeking to reestablish its primacy in the Western Hemisphere, check the influence of its rivals in the region and install a friendly regime in the country which has one of the world's largest proven oil reserves

#### Stanly Johny

**D**onald Trump had set his sights on Venezuela during his first term. Then, his administration formally charged President Nicolás Maduro and his top aides with alleged involvement in drug trafficking. Juan Guaidó, an opposition politician, was recognised by the U.S. and its Western allies as the acting President of Venezuela. After Mr. Trump returned to power in early 2025, his immediate foreign policy priority was Venezuela. The administration declared a 'war on drugs' and accused Mr. Maduro of being 'one of the largest narco-traffickers in the world'. It began bombing civilian boats off Venezuela claiming they were carrying drugs, and deployed jets, warships and thousands of troops to the Caribbean. Mr. Trump said he had authorised the CIA to carry out a clandestine operation inside Venezuela, and imposed a naval quarantine on oil tankers to and from the country.

#### Regime change

On January 3, a day after Mr. Maduro offered "serious talks" with Washington, the U.S. carried out large scale air strikes in the Latin American country. The Venezuelan government "denounced" the military aggression and declared a state of emergency. Mr. Trump acknowledged the strikes in a social media post and claimed that Mr. Maduro and his wife "were captured" and taken out of the country. While it is not immediately clear whether the abduction of Venezuela's sitting President would mark an end to the socialist regime, Mr. Trump seems to be moving fast with his plan of aggression. What he wants is clear: regime change. María Corina Machado, Venezuela's right-wing opposition leader who won this year's Nobel Peace Prize, "absolutely supports" Mr. Trump's policies.

Why does Mr. Trump want regime change in Venezuela, a country that doesn't pose any serious security challenges to America? Venezuela is



**Skeletal remains:** A destroyed anti-aircraft unit at La Carlota military air base in Caracas, Venezuela, after the U.S. attack on Saturday. REUTERS

not even a major source of drug production, and Washington hasn't provided any evidence to substantiate its claim that the Maduro regime was running cartels.

Three broad reasons can be identified for the U.S. aggression.

One, Mr. Trump wants to reimpose American primacy in the Western Hemisphere. President James Monroe declared in 1823 that the Americas were off-limits to future European interference and colonisation. What later came to be known as the Monroe Doctrine, the policy established U.S. hegemony in its backyard, carving out a sphere of influence.

The recently released *National Security Doctrine* of the Trump administration identifies Latin America and the Caribbean as a strategic priority – a Trump corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, which American media and experts dubbed the 'Monroe Doctrine', after Donald Trump. The document asserts that the U.S. must deny influence or control by outside powers [read China] in Latin America and ensure that the Western Hemisphere remains under American

political, economic and military influence.

Two, while reinforcing American primacy, the U.S. would also want to keep the Chinese and Russian influence in the region under check. China has already made huge investments in Latin America through its Belt and Road Initiative, which Beijing claims have 24 signatories in the region. China is also the largest or the second largest trading partner of most countries in the region.

In his second term, Mr. Trump has supported far-right figures in the continent, from Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil to Javier Milei in Argentina. In Honduras, Nasry Asturía, a Trump-endorsed right-wing candidate, won the presidency last month. With the return of the right-wing, the U.S. and its allies are rolling back South America's pink tide. While there are still a few left-wing governments in Latin America, two of them publicly defy American dominance and seek stronger strategic and economic ties with China and Russia – Venezuela and Cuba. Of the two, Venezuela holds a prime spot because of its vast

reserves of liquid gold.

China accounts for nearly 80% of Venezuela's oil purchases. China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) is also the largest foreign company with investments and operations in Venezuela's oil sector. Even though China has scaled back its investments in Venezuela due to American sanctions, in 2024, China Concord Resources Corporation, a private company, signed a \$1-billion agreement with PDVSA, Venezuela's state oil company, to develop two oilfields in Lake Maracaibo. Earlier in 2025, the Trump administration forced Panama to pull back from the China-led BRI. If the Maduro regime is forcibly brought down, the U.S. could send a strong message to other weaker powers in the region against economic and security cooperation with China and Russia.

#### It's about oil

The third reason could be oil. Venezuela has about 17% of the world's known oil reserves, or more than 300 billion barrels, nearly four times the reserves of the U.S. American

companies such as ExxonMobil and Gulf Oil were active players in Venezuela's oil sector until the 1976 nationalisation. When left-wing leader Hugo Chávez came to power in 1999, he tightened the state control over oil resources through another wave of nationalisation and used oil profits to launch poverty eradication projects. In 2002, there was a coup against Chávez, which was backed by the U.S. But Chávez was brought back to power within 48 hours in the face of mass protests against the coup plotters.

Last month, Mr. Trump demanded Venezuela return all the "stolen American oil, land and assets", in a direct reference to Venezuela's nationalisation of its oil resources. He also made it clear that he wanted Venezuelan oil for American companies – which would help the U.S. reduce its dependence on Persian Gulf oil and force China out of Venezuela.

Mr. Trump had said this earlier as well. In 2019, after the first Trump administration recognised Juan Guaidó as the acting President of Venezuela, Mr. Trump had ordered his aides to demand Mr. Guaidó to commit to giving the U.S. access to his country's oil and ousting China and Russia if he wrested power, John Bolton, Mr. Trump's former National Security Adviser, wrote in his memoir. In 2023, Mr. Trump said: "When I left [in 2021], Venezuela was ready to collapse. We would have taken it over. We would have gotten all that oil".

Now, with the strike on Venezuela and the claimed capture of Mr. Maduro, Mr. Trump appears close to achieving his objective. Ms. Machado, the West's favourite Venezuelan politician who could succeed Mr. Maduro should the regime collapse, has already promised to open up Venezuela's oil sector. "We will open all, upstream, midstream, downstream, to all companies," she said on a podcast hosted by Donald Trump Jr., the President's eldest son. She added that the minerals and power sectors would also be opened up for foreign [read American] companies.

#### THE GIST

▼ The recently released National Security Doctrine of the Trump administration identifies Latin America and the Caribbean as a strategic priority – a Trump corollary to the Monroe Doctrine

▼ Venezuela has about 17% of the world's known oil reserves, or more than 300 billion barrels, nearly four times the reserves of the U.S.

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## Enigmatic mayor

### Balendra Shah

The rapper-engineer architects his leap into national politics, eyeing the prime ministerial chair as Nepal heads to elections

#### Sanjeev Satganya

**A** known figure. But an unknown character.

That is how many describe Balendra Shah, the current Mayor of Kathmandu, Nepal's capital city.

Popularly known as "Balen", the rapper-turned-mayor has now officially made his foray into national politics. Last week, he joined the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), which has projected him as its prime ministerial candidate for the general election slated for March 5.

Until the run-up to the 2022 local elections, when Balen decided to throw his hat into the ring for the highly coveted post of Kathmandu Mayor, he was known largely within a limited circle, mostly among the youth, as a rap singer.

Much of his mayoral campaign played out on social media, particularly Facebook. Running as an independent candidate, Balen was assigned a walking stick as his election symbol. Against expectations, he trounced candidates from established political parties – a feat many summed up with the refrain: Balen beat the parties with the stick.

He rarely gives speeches, avoids interviews, and maintains almost no direct engagement with the public. Instead, he communicates almost exclusively through social media.

In one such instance in



September 2023, after a vehicle from his office was stopped during a routine check, Balen wrote on Facebook that he would "burn Singha Durbar," a remark referring to Nepal's central seat of power. He later deleted the post but offered no clarification on the context or intent behind the statement.

Two years later, during the second day of the Gen Z-led protests against corruption, nepotism and misgovernance, several government buildings, including parts of Singha Durbar, were vandalised and set ablaze by demonstrators.

In a Facebook post ahead of the protests, he wrote that he fully supported the cause but would not take to the streets himself, noting that he was not part of Gen Z. It was the 35-year-old Mayor who later urged protest leaders to enter into dialogue with the Nepal Army, which had emerged as the chief negotiator between Gen Z representatives and President Ram Chandra Poudel.

After 19 – later revised

to 22 – people died on the first day of the protests on September 8, then Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli resigned the next day. Later that day, in a provocative social media post, Balen wrote, "...the resignation of your murderer has come," as he urged protest groups to "exercise restraint".

**Under scrutiny**  
As protest groups conducted an online vote to select a consensus candidate to lead a civilian government, Balen endorsed Sushila Karki, a former Chief Justice. President Poudel subsequently appointed her as Prime Minister on September 12. Ms. Karki dissolved Parliament immediately after taking the oath.

In the past three years, his performance as Kathmandu Mayor has increasingly come under scrutiny. Critics point to his high-handed approach toward street vendors and landless squatters. Meanwhile, basic civic challenges, such as drinking water and waste management, remain unresolved.

His agreement last week with Rabi Lamichhane, the RSP chief, following days of negotiations, surprised many. The two are sharply contrasting figures: Balen is reclusive, while Mr. Lamichhane is gregarious. Only days after the Gen Z protests, Balen had lashed out on Facebook using expletives against all political parties, including the RSP.

How an off-standish Balen would fare in national politics – which demands public engagement, negotiation, and compromise – has yet to be tested. His strength largely rests on personal mystique, which he may not be able to maintain once he starts going to the hustings.

As someone who won independently, Balen did not have a party, and forming a new political outfit with elections just two months away would have been an uphill task. Mr. Lamichhane's offer to join his party, the RSP – which already has an organisational base – and become the prime ministerial face was too good to resist, analysts say.

Since the deal last week, Balen – mostly seen donning a black blazer over a T-shirt, with black shades a permanent fixture – has not made a single public appearance, even as speculation about his resignation as mayor circulates.

For now, Balen remains what he has long been: a familiar face, but a sphinx-like enigma.

## The junta in civilian clothing

### USDP

The party in Myanmar functions as a strategic instrument of the junta within a multi-party system where the military retains ultimate power through constitutional guarantees

#### Srinivasan Ramani

**F**ive years after staging a military coup that overthrew the 2020 election results and imprisoned elected leaders, including National League for Democracy (NLD) leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and President U Win Myint, Myanmar's junta is now attempting to legitimise its rule through elections. The poll has been denounced as a sham by the international community, with the regime's allies – Russia, Belarus and neighbouring China – sending observers to lend it credibility.

The first phase of the poll was held on December 28, 2025, with the remaining two scheduled for early and late January. However, these polls cover only about half of Myanmar's territory, with the rest beyond the junta's reach due to the ongoing civil war involving the NLD-led National Unity Government's Bamar-dominated People's Defence Forces and ethnic armed organisations across the country.

In results that were a foregone conclusion, the military's proxy Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) claimed victory in nearly 80% of contested seats. The USDP fielded over 1,000 candidates, far exceeding its closest rivals' tallies. Meanwhile, the NLD, which won landslide victories in 2015 and 2020, was deregis-



tered along with 40 other parties. Collectively, they had won 90% of legislative seats in 2020.

Aiding the USDP's dominance was the junta's introduction of a proportional representation system, replacing the first-past-the-post method that had delivered the NLD's sweeping victories.

This allows the USDP to secure seats even with minimal popular support, over and above the 25% of parliamentary seats reserved for military appointees under the 2008 Constitution.

The USDP's origins lie in the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), established by Senior General Than Shwe in September 1993, just months after the regime convened a National Convention to draft Myanmar's future constitution. Than Shwe, who ruled Myanmar from 1992 to 2011, had come to power after the junta negated the NLD's triumph in multi-party elections in 1990. Officially a social organisation aimed at "national development" and "ethnic amity", the

The military seized power again through a coup, and ruled until 2011 with Than Shwe as leader.

The USDP, in contrast to the BSPP, functions as a strategic instrument within a multi-party system while the military retains ultimate power through constitutional guarantees. If the USDP loses, the military doesn't collapse; it simply uses other mechanisms to maintain control, as demonstrated by the 2021 coup. Also, unlike the BSPP's "secular" and "socialist" pretensions, the USDP seeks legitimacy in an ideological blend of Bamar and Buddhist nationalism, by aligning with radical monastic groups like MaBaTha against perceived foreign and minority threats.

The USDP's current leader is U Khin Yi, a former senior military officer and police chief who also served as immigration minister in Thein Sein's government. Khin Yi conducted a series of pro-military rallies before the February 2021 coup, following the junta's false claim that the NLD's victory was due to fraud.

The party's candidate list for the current election is packed with generals and former ministers. The USDP now appears to be a vehicle to transition junta leader Min Aung Hlaing into a civilian presidency, providing a legal veneer to end the state of emergency declared after the coup.

#### Strategic instrument

In a way, the USDP is a successor to the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) that ruled Myanmar under a one-party dictatorship led by Ne Win following a military coup in 1962. The BSPP was inseparable from the state and collapsed in 1988 following the popular 8888 uprising.

**BANGKOK**

**Military-backed party leads in early election results in Myanmar**



Myanmar's military-appointed election body has begun announcing the winners of the first phase of its three-part general election, saying that the military-backed party has won the majority of seats, as widely expected. The Union Election Commission said on Saturday that USDP won 38 seats in the 330-seat lower house. AFP

**PHNOM PENH**

**Cambodia demands Thailand withdraw troops, a week into truce**



Cambodia called on neighbouring Thailand on Saturday to pull out its forces from areas Phnom Penh claims as its own, one week since a truce halted deadly clashes. The Thai army has rejected claims it had used force to seize Cambodia territory, insisting its forces were present in areas that had always belonged to Thailand. AFP

**ISLAMABAD**

**Pakistan backs China's mediation claim during Operation Sindoor**



Pakistan has backed China's claim that Beijing played a role in defusing tension with India during Operation Sindoor, calling it "diplomacy for peace" that was part of international efforts. India consistently maintained that there is no place for any third-party intervention in matters relating to India and Pakistan. PTI

**DHAKA**

**Thirteen NCP leaders resign over alliance with Jamaat in Bangladesh**



Thirteen central leaders of the student-led National Citizen Party (NCP) have resigned in the last eight days over its alliance with the Jamaat-e-Islami ahead of the elections in Bangladesh in February, a report said. Despite the objections, Jamaat chief Shafiqur Rahman officially announced the alliance with the NCP last week. PTI

# Trump says U.S. to 'run' Venezuela, oil firms to head into the country

President states that a designated group, including Cabinet officials, would oversee management of South American nation; he indicates potential deployment of U.S. troops; he also dismisses Nobel Prize winner Machado as potential interim leader

**Agence France-Presse**

PALM BEACH

**U.S.** President Donald Trump said on Saturday that the United States will "run" Venezuela and tap its huge oil reserves after snatching leftist leader Nicolas Maduro out of the country during a bombing raid on Caracas.

Mr. Trump's announcement came hours after a lightning attack in which special forces grabbed Mr. Maduro and his wife, while air strikes pounded multiple sites, stunning the capital city.

Mr. Trump did not go into detail what he meant but told a press meet in



**Taking control:** Donald Trump, alongside Marco Rubio, left, and Pete Hegseth, speaks to the press in Florida on Saturday. AFP

Florida: "We're going to be running it with a group."

"We're designating people," he said, mentioning that Cabinet officials standing with him would be in charge.

In another surprise, Mr. Trump indicated that U.S. troops could be deployed in Venezuela.

The U.S. is "not afraid of boots on the ground", he said.

Although the operation is being framed as a law-enforcement action, Mr. Trump made clear that regime change and Venezuela's oil riches are the major goals.

"We're going to have our very large United States oil companies, the biggest anywhere in the world, go in, spend billions of dollars, fix the badly broken infrastructure," he said. "We'll be selling large amounts of oil," he said.

Mr. Trump said the assault began with a partial blackout caused by U.S. "expertise".

U.S.-backed Opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, who won the Nobel Peace Prize last year, post-

ed on social media: "the hour of freedom has arrived."

But Mr. Trump scotched any expectation that Ms. Machado should emerge as Venezuela's new leader. She doesn't have "support or respect" there, he said.

The top U.S. military officer, General Dan Caine, said 150 aircraft took part in the operation, supporting troops helicoptering in to seize Mr. Maduro with the help of months of intelligence into the leader's daily habits – down to "what he ate" and what pets he kept.

Mr. Maduro, 63, and his wife "gave up" without a struggle and there was "no loss of U.S. life," he said.

# Troops deployed to border with Venezuela: Colombia

**Agence France-Presse**

BOGOTÁ

Colombian President Gustavo Petro said on Saturday he ordered the deployment of military forces to the Venezuelan border, following U.S. strikes that, according to Donald Trump, ended with the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Mr. Petro described Washington's actions as an "assault on the sovereignty" of Latin America and said they would result in a humanitarian crisis.

While proposing that the situation could be resolved through "dialogue," the leftist President said on X that he had also ordered the "deployment of the security forces" to the Venezuelan border.

Mr. Petro made no mention of Mr. Maduro's cap-



Colombian military personnel deployed in Cucuta, stands guard at the border crossing with Venezuela, on Saturday. AFP

ture, despite the Venezuelan leader being one of his government's closest allies in the region.

Earlier, the Colombian leader had requested an "immediate" meeting of the Organisation of American States (OAS) and the UN to "establish the international legality of the aggression" by the United States.

Colombia holds a non-

# 'Saudi-backed forces make advances in Yemen's Hadramout'

**Agence France-Presse**

MUKALLA

Saudi-backed troops on Saturday made advances in Yemen's resource-rich Hadramout province, military officials said, as confrontations between forces backed by Riyadh and Abu Dhabi deepened a rift between the two Gulf allies.

The Saudis and Emiratis have for years supported rival factions in Yemen's fractious government. But a recent offensive by the UAE-backed secessionist

Southern Transitional Council (STC) to capture Hadramout angered Riyadh and left the oil-rich regional powers on a collision course.

In a statement, the military of the Saudi-aligned government announced that "all military and civilian facilities" in Mukalla, the capital of Hadramout province, had "been secured" by Riyadh-backed forces. Earlier, two military officials said they had taken control of Mukalla's principal military base.

**Associated Press**

DUBAI

Iran's Supreme Leader insisted on Saturday that "rioters must be put in their place" after a week of protests that have shaken the Islamic Republic, likely giving security forces a green light to aggressively put down the demonstrations.

The first comments by 86-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei come as violence surrounding the demonstrations sparked by Iran's ailing economy has killed at least 10 people.

**Escalating protests**  
The protests have become the biggest in Iran since 2022, when the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in police custody triggered nationwide demonstrations.

State television aired the remarks by Mr. Khamenei to an audience in Tehran

"But there is no benefit to talking to rioters. Rioters must be put in their place."

He also reiterated a claim constantly made by officials in Iran that foreign powers like Israel or the U.S. were pushing the protests, without offering any evidence. He also blamed the "enemy" for Iran's collapsing rial.

Hard-line officials within the country are believed to have been pushing for a more-aggressive response to the demonstrations as President Masoud Pezeshkian has sought talks to address protesters' demands.



Ayatollah Ali Khamenei  
that sought to separate the concerns of protesting Iranians upset about the rial's collapse from "rioters".

"We talk to protesters, the officials must talk to them," Mr. Khamenei said.

# MSF says it may have to cease operations in Gaza Strip in March

**Agence France-Presse**

PARIS

Banned from the Gaza Strip with 36 aid bodies, medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said on Saturday it will have to end its operations there in March if Israel does not reverse its decision.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on Friday for Israel to end a ban on humanitarian agencies that provided aid in Gaza, saying he was "deep-

ly concerned" at the development.

Israel confirmed on Thursday it is barring 37 major international humanitarian organisations from entering the Gaza Strip, accusing them of failing to provide the list of their employees' names, which is now officially required for "security" reasons. MSF called this demand a "scandalous intrusion" but Israel says is needed to stop jihadists from infiltrating into humanitarian structures.

# Nagal faces Prajwal in round one; Aryan starts against Zhukayev

## Sport

### Gritty Wawrinka leads Switzerland to win over France

**UNITED CUP****Agence France-Presse**

PERTH



**Big hopes:** Nagal will look to begin the new season on a strong note. KMURALI KUMAR

**BENGALURU OPEN****Sports Bureau**

BENGALURU

Sumit Nagal will open his Bengaluru Open ATP Challenger 125 campaign against wild card and local lad S.D. Prajwal Dev.

At the draw ceremony that was conducted on Saturday, it also emerged that the 28-year-old World No. 277 can potentially meet second seed Harold Mayot of France (No. 163) in the round of 16.

Aryan Shah will start against Kazakhstan's Beibut Zhukayev while Karan Singh - the third Indian to gain a direct entry - will take on Croat Borna Gojo, a Davis Cup winner in 2021.

Even as top seed and World No. 92 Pedro Martinez of Spain drew a qualifier, Dam Evans, a former top-25 player, pulled out. Lloyd Harris, US Open quarterfinalist in 2021, will meet Czechia's Jonas Forejtak. Indian wildcards in 25-

year-old Dhakshineswar Suresh (No. 523) and 17-year-old Manas Dhamne (588) will face Croats Duje Ajdukovic (319) and Matej Dodig (232) respectively.

The qualifying rounds will begin on Sunday with the main draw matches scheduled from Monday.

bles to make it 3-0. Wawrinka is competing in Perth for the first time in his long career. "After 20 years on the tour it's amazing to finally play here," he said.

Also on Saturday, in Sydney, Zhang Zhizhen led China to a 2-1 win over Belgium.

**The results:** Group B: China bt Belgium 2-1 (Lin Zhu lost to Elise Mertens 2-6, 2-6; Zhang Zhizhen bt Zou Bergs 6-7(2), 7-6(3), 7-5; Zhu & Zhang bt Mertens & Bergs 5-7, 7-6(5), 10-6).

**Group C:** Switzerland bt France 3-0 (Belinda Bencic bt Leontine Jeanjean 6-2, 6-2; Stan Wawrinka bt Arthur Rinderknech 5-7, 7-6(5), 7-6(5); Bencic & Wawrinka bt Tiantsoa Rakotomanga Rajao & Eduardo Roger-Vasselin 6-2, 5-7, 10-2).

### AFI announces the qualifying standards for Asian Games

**Uthra Ganeshan**

NEW DELHI

The Athletics Federation of India on Saturday announced the qualifying standards for 2026 Asian Games, going beyond the Sports Ministry's selection criteria and making it tougher for athletes to book a spot in the event.

AFI spokesman and former president Adille Sumariwalla said the athletes have ample opportunities to peak at the right time and book tickets for the quadrennial event in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan.

"The AFI will select at least two eligible athletes in each of the events but the selection committee will take a final call on the total strength of the continent for the Asian Games."

While the ministry guidelines allow for athletes matching the 6th place finish in their event at the previous edition of the games to qualify, the AFI has made stricter norms in certain events including the 200m, 400m, 800m and hurdles. Selection in certain events including 21km race walk and 4x100 mixed relay will be under the purview of the selection committee at a later date.

"We have gone to make things slightly more competitive in certain events. There have been over three months of discussions with coaches both foreign and Indian, athletes and our research team, keeping two things in mind. One, We should not miss a medal and two, we don't want to take any pass-

sengers. People might qualify with a mark matching the 6th place finish but if they will have no chance of a medal, they won't be taken. These people often become a liability to the rest of the prospects," Sumariwalla was categorical.

Interestingly, barring the men's 100m, most other marks have been achieved by Indians, although it will now be a matter of doing so in the qualifying period. He added that the qualifying marks had been shared with the ministry. He also revealed that a team from World Athletics would be visiting later this month to evaluate the facilities and possibilities of India hosting the 2028 World U20 Championships and the World Championships in 2031.

**ALL SET**

**Shreyas to play in Mumbai's next couple of Hazare Trophy games**



Having received a conditional clearance from the BCCI's Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru, Shreyas Iyer will be available for Mumbai's Vijay Hazare Trophy fixtures against Himachal and Punjab. "Shreyas will link up with the team on Sunday and will be playing in the next couple of games," said Mumbai's chief selector Sanjay Patil.

**KEEP THE FAITH**

**Stokes urges England to stick with McCullum despite Ashes defeat**



Ben Stokes has urged the England chiefs to keep faith with Brendon McCullum despite a stinging Ashes defeat. "There is no doubt in my mind that me and Brendon are the right people. I can't see there being someone else who could take this team to even bigger heights. We're both keen on continuing," Stokes said.

**Sport****DRAWING FIRST BLOOD**

**Harvansh, Ambrish star as India colts win opening Youth ODI**



Harvansh Pangalia (93), in pic, and R.S. Ambrish (65) shone as India u-19 beat South Africa u-19 by 25 runs, via DLS Method, in a rain-affected opening ODI in Benoni. **The scores:** India 301 in 50 overs (Harvansh 93, Ambrish 65, Basson 4/54) bt South Africa 148/4 in 27.4 overs (Van Schalkwyk 60 n.o., Manack 46), via DLS method.

**NEW DIMENSION**

**'Would love to see one bowler getting a fifth over in T20s'**



Former umpire Simon Taufel has called for a better balance between bat and ball in T20 cricket, suggesting that one bowler should be allowed to bowl five overs instead of the existing four-over quota. Taufel also said he does not endorse all recent rule changes, including the Impact Player rule and strategic timeouts.

## Dragons scrape past Toofans in opener

Prince Deep produces a crucial save in the shootout for the home side; the Hyderabad outfit comes back thrice from behind to force penalties

**HIL - MEN**

**K. Keerthivasan**  
CHENNAI

**M**idfielder Mohammed Raheel kept his composure, waited for goalkeeper Jean-Paul Danneburg to commit, and calmly rolled the ball past him to help Tamil Nadu Dragons edge Hyderabad Toofans 4-2 in the shootout after the teams were locked 3-3 at the end of regulation time in the inaugural match of the Men's Hockey India League at the SDAT-Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium here on Saturday.

Michel Struthoff and Talwar Singh missed their attempts for Toofans in the shootout. Dragons' goalkeeper Prince Deep Singh, who replaced an impressive David Harte for the tiebreaker, produced a crucial save to deny Talwinder.

Dragons had raced to a 2-0 lead in the first quarter with two quick goals. Utam Singh opened the scoring by deflecting in a penalty-corner variation, before Thomas Sorsby produced a brilliant 25-yard run and finished emphatically past the goalkeeper.

Toofans responded



**Keeping his cool:** Raheel outwits Danneburg to clinch the tie for Dragons. R. RAGU

through Amandeep Lakra, who struck twice with two clean and precise drag-flicks.

Striker Selvam Karthi put the host back in the lead with an opportunistic finish, but defender Arthur De Sloover restored parity with a superb goal from a tight angle that caught Harte by surprise.

In the absence of injured drag-flick ace Gonzalo Peillat, the responsibility fell on Amandeep, and the 23-year-old rose to the occasion.

However, Toofans were unable to get going in the

shootout. For the Dragons, the foreign contingent played a decisive role across the midfield, defence and attack, delivering key interventions at crucial moments.

The contest was billed as the one between Dragons' fluency in open play against the Toofans' strength in penalty corners, and it lived up to expectation.

**The result:** Tamil Nadu Dragons 3 (Utam 4-pc, Sorsby 9, Selvam 32) drew with Hyderabad Toofans 3 (Amandeep 12-pc & 18-pc, De Sloover 37). Dragons won the shootout 4-2.

## Gill returns as captain for ODI series against NZ

**Amol Karhadkar**  
MUMBAI

Shubman Gill returns as the ODI captain for India's three-match series against New Zealand while his deputy Shreyas Iyer has also been included – subject to fitness clearance – in the 15-member squad. Mohammed Siraj was recalled after being rested for the two home ODI series earlier in the season.

The squad was announced on Saturday afternoon after the selection committee, in consultation with captain Gill, held a virtual meeting in the morning.

Gill had missed the previous ODI series against South Africa due to a neck spasm.

According to a BCCI statement, Shreyas' availability is subject to fitness clearance from the BCCI Centre of Excellence. The middle-order batter is on the road to recovery after sustaining a serious abdominal injury during the Australia tour in October last year.

Gill and Shreyas have replaced Ruturaj Gaikwad and Dhruv Jurel from the squad that won the series against South Africa. Tilak Varma has made way for

Siraj, with the selectors opting to bolster the pace attack by adding a specialist fast bowler.

Ruturaj was unfortunate to miss out despite scoring a century while batting at No. 4 against the Proteas.

The BCCI release also clarified that Hardik Pandya was not considered for selection as the medical team at the Centre of Excellence has advised against him bowling 10 overs in a match, keeping in mind next month's T20 World Cup.

Siraj, who had been rested following a heavy workload in the Test format, is expected to spearhead the bowling attack as the selectors look to try out combinations ahead of the 2027 ODI World Cup in South Africa.

Rishabh Pant retains his place, with the selection committee opting to persist with him instead of bringing in Ishan Kishan.

**The squad:** Shubman Gill (Capt.), Shreyas Iyer\* (Vice-capt.), Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, K.L. Rahul (wk), Washington Sundar, Ravindra Jadeja, Mohammed Siraj, Harshit Rana, Prasidh Krishna, Kuldeep Yadav, Rishabh Pant (wk), Nitish Kumar, Arshdeep Singh, and Yashasvi Jaiswal. (\*subject to fitness clearance).

## Under Jemimah, Capitals aim to cross the final hurdle

**WPL COUNTDOWN**

**Vivek Krishnan**

For three seasons of the Women's Premier League, Delhi Capitals has stayed in the champion's shadow. To reach the final of the showpiece T20 league every year is a testament to the franchise's capability and consistency, but to not be rewarded for it with silverware even once must be difficult to digest.

When the tournament's fourth season commences in Navi Mumbai on January 9, the three-time runner-up will aim to chart a slightly different course that entails finding a way past the final hurdle.

The responsibility of steering DC through this challenge has been entrusted to a new skipper in Jemimah Rodrigues.

With franchises being allowed to retain a maximum of five players prior to November's mega auction, Capitals opted to let go of Australia's Meg Lanning. It has opened the door for Jemimah, who was one of the stars of India's triumphant ODI World Cup campaign in November, to take on the task of leadership for the first time in the WPL.

Having displayed the capacity to perform under pressure during the recent World Cup – her unbeaten 127 in the semifinal against Australia was the cornerstone of India's record chase of 339 – Jemimah seems to be ready to withstand the additional scrutiny that comes with captaincy.

With Lanning's move to UP Warriorz creating a void at the top of the order, it is imperative for South African opener Laura Wolvaardt to settle into her



**Big responsibility:** Jemimah will look to swing it Capitals' way this time. FILE PHOTO: R.V. MOORTHY



**Kapp...** Capitals' heavyweight. FILE PHOTO: K. MURALI KUMAR

The fourth edition of the WPL will be held from January 9 to February 5

South Africa's Marizanne Kapp. Particularly with Australian all-rounder Annabel Sutherland pulling out of the tournament for personal reasons earlier this week, Kapp's ability with bat and ball lends much-needed balance.

Adding robustness to the spin department is Shree Charani. The 21-year-old left-arm spinner will be complemented by off-spinners Sneha Rana and Minnu Mani and leggie Alana King.

**The squad:** Jemimah Rodrigues (Capt.), Laura Wolvaardt, Tanya Bhatia (wk), Deeya Yadav, Chinelle Henry, Lizelle Lee, Madivali Mamatha (wk), Niki Prasad, Shafali Verma, Marizanne Kapp, Lucy Hamilton, Alana King, Sneha Rana, Minnu Mani, Shree Charani, and Nandani Sharma.

**Capitals' schedule:** Jan. 10: vs Mumbai Indians; Jan. 11: Gujarat Giants; Jan. 17: Royal Challengers Bangalore (all matches at Navi Mumbai); Jan. 20: MI; Jan. 24: RCB; Jan. 27: GG; Feb. 1: UPW (all matches at Vadodara).

Matches start at 7.30 p.m.

## Pipers rally to put Soorma on the brink of elimination

**HIL - WOMEN**

**Santdeep Dev**  
RANCHI

On Saturday, the denizens here came together to commemorate the 123rd birth anniversary of Jaipal Singh Munda. A distinguished politician, accomplished sportsman, and visionary leader, Jaipal's legacy endures through the iconic 5,000-seater AstroTurf Stadium in Morabadi that bears his name.

So, probably there could have been no better fitting stage for a night of top-class hockey when JSW Soorma Hockey Club, last year's Women's Hockey India League (HIL) runner-up, was effectively shown the door by the current edition's table-topper SG Pipers. Coach Jude Menezes would have heaved a sigh of relief when Soorma finally dispelled the hex after three games and 24 unsuccessful penalty corners, but his happiness turned out to be shortlived.

Penny Squibb's fiery swipe from the second battery beat Pipers' defender Lola Riera and sounded



**Take a bow!** Sunelita is the toast of her teammates after scoring Pipers' third goal. R.V. MOORTHY

the boards. But the latter was quick to make amends.

A drag-flick from the three-time Olympian in the very next minute clattered into the backboard to take her season tally to three goals – the joint-most alongside Shrachi Bengal Tigers' star Agustina Gorzelany.

Jyoti Singh brought more joy to the high-flying Pipers dugout in the second quarter, dispossessing Shihori Oikawa in front of the goal before burying the ball deep into the net.

The result: JSW Soorma Hockey Club 1 (Squibb 12) lost to SG Pipers 3 (Riera 13, Jyoti 18, Sunelita 58).

## Smith bats away talk of retirement

**THE ASHES**

**Agence France-Presse**  
SYDNEY

Australia skipper Steve Smith said on Saturday he had no end date to call time on his career, while keeping England guessing on how his team will line up for the fifth and final Ashes Test.

With the retirement of Usman Khawaja after the Sydney Test beginning on Sunday and Nathan Lyon out injured, Smith will be the oldest player in the Australian line-up alongside Scott Boland.

Asked if he would still be playing at the next Ashes in England in 2027, the 36-year-old was non-committal, but said he was enjoying his cricket.

"I've said it for a while, I'm taking it day-by-day, series-by-series, and we'll see



**WTC points at stake:** Smith insists that there will be plenty of motivation for the final Test. AFP

where things land," said Smith, who has played 122 Tests and scored more than 10,000 runs.

"I feel like I'm doing alright at the moment, I'm enjoying it. So there's no real end date for me."

In terms of Australia's team for Sydney, Smith said everything was on the table with another look at the wicket required.

"Could play a couple of

all-rounders, could play a spinner, could play no spinner," he said.

Australia leads the five-Test series 3-1 after eight-wicket wins in Perth and Brisbane, before an 82-run victory in Adelaide ensured they retained the urn. Smith said there was still plenty of motivation with WTC points at stake.

(Match starts at 5 a.m. IST).

## Japan's Susaki is the most expensive buy

**PWL AUCTION**

**Sports Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

In the player auction for the 2026 edition of the Pro Wrestling League here on Saturday, Japan's Yui Susaki emerged as the most expensive buy as she attracted a bid of ₹60 lakh from Haryana Thunders. In the men's section, Poland's Robert Baran was roped in by Maharashtra Kesari for ₹55 lakh.

Wrestlers in the auction pool were classified into four categories: A+, A, B and C.

Among women in category A+, which mandated a base price of ₹18 lakh, Susaki was the most sought-after wrestler. Antim Panghal was

snapped up by UP Dominators for ₹52 lakh in the women's 53 kg category, while Puerto Rico's Ana Godinez fetched ₹46 lakh from Punjab Royals in the 62 kg division.

Delhi Dangal Warriors secured the services of Azerbaijan's Anastasiya Alayeva for ₹27 lakh in the women's 76 kg category.

Among the men, Sujeet Kalkal, who was in category A, was picked by Delhi Dangal Warriors for ₹52 lakh. Aman Sehrat, who won bronze in the 2024 Paris Olympics, was acquired by Tigers of Mumbai Dangal for ₹51 lakh.

The fifth season of the league will be held from January 15 to February 1 at the Noida Indoor Stadium. The event, which features six teams, is resuming after a six-year hiatus.





**Show-starter:** Escaping the harsh winter in Central Asia and Siberia, a little citrine wagtail, the first visitor this season, arrives in biodiversity-rich Assam. RITU RAJ KONWAR



**Pasture hunting:** In the iconic V-formation, a flock of bar-headed geese flies over a wetland in Assam. The birds will stay in the State till April.



**Hungry guest:** A black-necked stork searches for food in a wetland in the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary in Morigaon district.



**Roosting haven:** Northern pintails at the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, which is a popular winter destination for migratory birds from Siberia, Central Asia, and the Himalayas.

# A winter getaway in Assam's wetlands

To escape the freezing cold winters of the Siberian, Tibetan and European landscapes, every year several migratory birds flock to wetlands and Ramsar sites in Assam; this year too, these winged guests have made their way to birding spots in the northeastern State, boosting its biodiversity and ecotourism initiatives



Ritu Raj Konwar  
rituraj.k@thehindu.co.in

**W**ith winter, tiny moving specks appearing on the sky over Assam mark the arrival of avian guests that flock to riverbeds, wetlands, and natural and artificial reservoirs. To escape the biting cold of Siberian, Tibetan, and European regions, these water birds spread their wings each year in search of warmer winter homes across the globe. Assam's wetlands and Ramsar sites welcome these migratory birds, which not only enhance the northeastern State's biodiversity but also support its ecotourism initiatives.

This year too, vibrant migratory species such as white-fronted geese, pied avocets, greylag geese, ruddy shelducks, falcated ducks, ferruginous pochards, northern pintails, great crested grebes, common pochards, and bar-headed geese – known for their high-altitude migratory flight – have arrived to roost in the State's wetlands.

Despite threats posed by unsustainable development activities to waterbodies and wildlife reserves, Assam remains an important seasonal hub for migratory birds.

Some of the popular birding destinations in the State include Deepor Beel in Kamrup Metropolitan district; Maguri Motapung Beel in Tinsukia; Pani Dihing Beel in Sivasagar; the lakes within the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve; and the largest of all, Son Beel in Karimganj district.

Apart from these regular stopovers, the winter visitors also explore new and picturesque locations each year. Assam has long hosted these long-distance travellers with sustained conservation efforts, which continue to be strengthened to protect their habitats.



**Friends of a feather:** A flock of glossy ibis takes a dip in Lake Deepor Beel, a Ramsar site, near Guwahati.



**A regular:** Arriving from their breeding grounds in Europe and Central Asia, greylag geese are a familiar sight at this time of year in Assam.



**The day's catch:** A purple heron, with a fish in its beak, flies back to its nest.



**Fragile coexistence:** Fishermen repair fishing nets on the bank of Lake Deepor Beel. Migratory birds and fishermen are often at odds over wetland use.



**Cameo appearance:** Eurasian wigeons make a stopover in Assam's wetlands in the Kaziranga National Park or Pobitora, on the Central Asian flyway.



**Fascinating fowls:** Northern pintail ducks, with their breeding range extending as far as the equator, visit the northeastern State every winter.