



# THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

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## PRESIDENT CONFERS PM RASHTRIYA BAL PURASKAR ON 20 CHILDREN

Cricketing sensation Vaibhav Suryavanshi (pic), singer Esther Lalduhawmi Hanamate, and judoka Yogita Mandavi among 20 awarded on Friday

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPUR • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDUM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

## VISA HASSLE

India presses US to resolve H-1B delay

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

INDIA on Friday said it has taken up with the US the issue of delays, cancellations and difficulties in scheduling H-1B visa appointments amid mounting concerns that recent regulatory changes have affected thousands of Indian nationals. "The Government of India has received several representations from Indian nationals who are facing delays or problems with the rescheduling of their visa appointments," said Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

"While we do understand that visa-related issues pertain to the sovereign domain of any country, we have flagged these issues and concerns of our nationals to the US side, both in Delhi and in Washington."

The latest disruptions follow a series of policy changes announced by Washington, including a steep fee of \$100,000 for first-time H-1B visa applicants and a move away from the random lottery system towards prioritising applicants with higher skills.

From December 15, the MEA also expanded social media vetting to all H-1B and H-4 visa applicants, a step that has led to widespread appointment cancellations and rescheduling months later.

Jaiswal said India is actively engaging with US to address the issues faced by Indians.

The changes apply to H-1B visas, which allow US firms to employ foreign professionals in specialised fields such as technology, engineering and medicine, as well as H-4 visas issued to dependents.

Reports say thousands of Indians have been affected with several people who travelled to India specifically to renew their visas being stranded.



A hotel owner in West Bengal's Siliguri pastes a notice banning Bangladeshis | PTI

## MEA: Relentless attack on B'desh Hindus worrying

Expresses deep concern over unremitting hostilities against minorities in the country

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

Unremitting hostilities against the minorities in Bangladesh is a matter of grave concern

— MEA

**2,900 cases of violence**

The MEA said that over 2,900 incidents of violence against minorities, including cases of killings, arsons, land grab have been reported during the tenure of the interim government

INDIA on Friday expressed deep concern about the "unremitting hostilities" against Hindus in Bangladesh and condemned attempts to dismiss the continuing violence against religious minorities as media exaggeration or political violence.

New Delhi also reacted cautiously to the return of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader Tariqul Rahman to Dhaka after 17 years of exile, stressing that the development should be viewed in the context of ensuring inclusive polls.

"The unremitting hostilities against the minorities in Bangladesh including Hindus, Christians and Buddhists are a matter of grave concern. We condemn the recent killing of a Hindu youth in Bangladesh and expect that the perpetrators of the crime will be brought to justice," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

The comments came in the wake of a string of incidents targeting religious minorities in Bangladesh amid a rapidly evolving political landscape following the ouster of former PM Sheikh Hasina.

Two Hindu men were lynched in two separate incidents in a span of a week. Jaiswal said India is closely monitoring the developments across the border and underlined that protection of minorities is integral to democratic credibility.

Referring to the lynching of Dipu Chandra Das on December 18, Jaiswal said New Delhi has unequivocally condemned the incident and sought swift accountability. On the killing of another Hindu man, Amrit Mondal, on December 24, Jaiswal appealed to link it to hostilities towards minorities.

When asked about BNP's acting chairman Rahman's return, Jaiswal struck a measured note, saying it should be seen in the context of ensuring inclusive elections. He reiterated India's stand that the upcoming elections must be free, fair, and inclusive but refrained from commenting on Bangladesh's internal political rivalries.

On the court's earlier suggestion for a virtual GST Council meeting given Delhi's air pollution crisis, the Centre said it was "not possible" as regulations require physical presence of all members.

"This is not a PIL at all. GST is only a ruse...We are scared from the constitutional perspective. It is doctrine of separation of powers," the ASG said, adding the Centre couldn't commit to a Council meeting.

The court had noted that

## CHAMPIONS ACROSS SIX FIELDS AWARDED

The award is in recognition of exceptional achievements in the fields of bravery, social service, environment, sports, art & culture and science & technology. President Murmu said it is owing to talented children such as Vaka Lakshmi Pragnika that India is considered a chess powerhouse. Ajay Raj and Mohammed Sidan P, who saved lives of others, were feted too

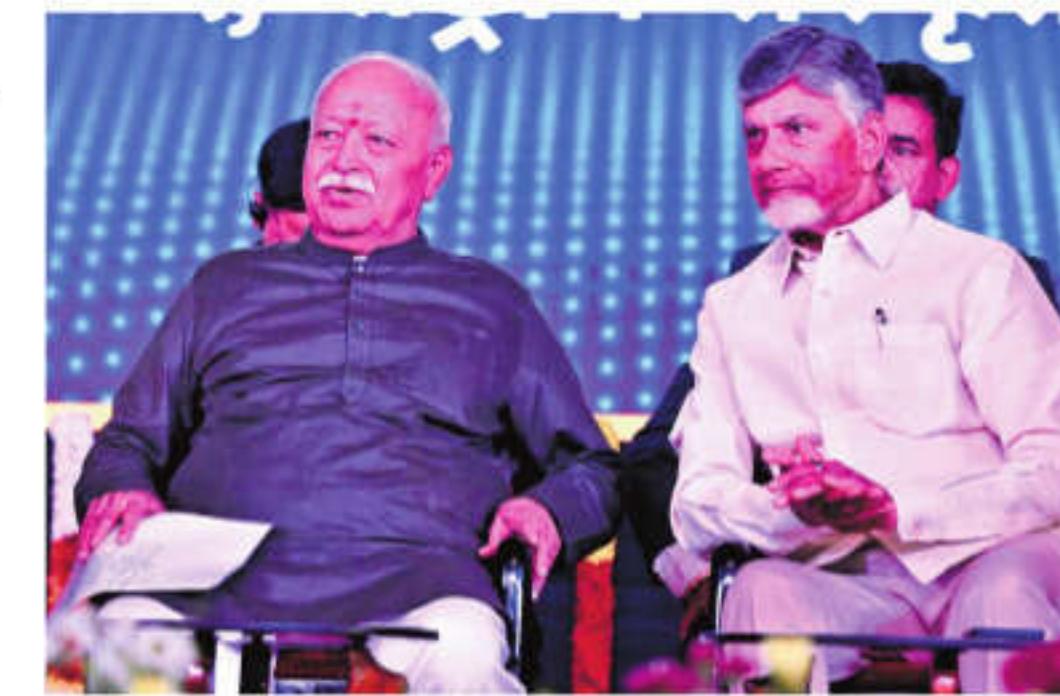
President Droupadi Murmu confers the award on ten-year-old Shravan Singh, who delivered water and milk to soldiers during Op Sindoora

## OF X FACTOR, AND THE SUPREME SACRIFICE

- Cricketer Vaibhav Suryavanshi was feted for making "a name for himself in a highly competitive sport", the President said
- Nine-year-old Coimbatore resident Vyoma Priya, awarded posthumously, had lost her life while trying to save a six-year-old during an electrical accident in their gated community park | P7

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AWARDDEES AMONG THE 20 ARE SPORTSPERSONS



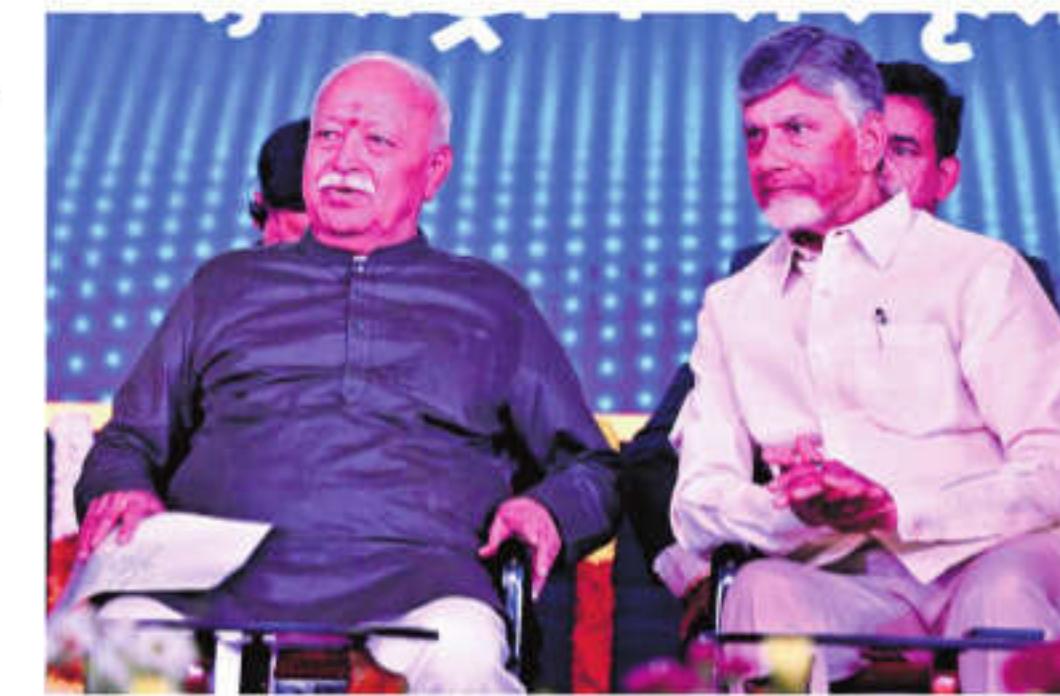
Naidu said understanding the epics helps the youth differentiate between good and evil, instills moral values and fosters pride in India's timeless contributions to philosophy, ethics and governance.

He underscored the importance of preserving India's knowledge systems while advancing science and technology for the future.

Reflecting on ancient achievements, he referred to Indus Valley civilisation's urban planning, the global spread of yoga, the foundations of Ayurveda, and renowned centres of learning such as Takshashila and Nalanda.

He recalled the contributions of great Indian thinkers, including Aryabhata, Bhaskaracharya, Charaka, Dhanvantari and Kautilya, describing them as enduring sources of inspiration. He noted that platforms like the Bharatiya Vigyan Sammelan provide an important space to reflect on Indian identity, culture, and intellectual heritage. "The Sammelan is playing a vital role in presenting Indian knowledge traditions to the world, and expanding their global understanding," Naidu said. P4

## Promote our epic heroes for values: CM



CHIEF Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has emphasised the need for connecting the younger generation with India's rich heritage.

Speaking at the inaugural session of the 7th Bharatiya Vigyan Sammelan at National Sanskrit University in Tirupati on Friday, he urged parents and teachers to teach the stories of our epic heroes Rama, Krishna, Arjuna and Hanuman to children, highlighting their virtues, courage and wisdom to inspire and motivate them. India's mythological heroes embody far greater values, strength and ideals than fictional characters like Spiderman, Batman or Superman, he observed.

## PIL IN DELHI HC TO CUT GST FOR AIR PURIFIERS

## STAY OFF LEGISLATIVE TURF: GOVT ON GST NUDGE

UDAYAN KISHORE  
@ New Delhi

THE Centre on Friday opposed a PIL seeking reduced air purifier rates, telling the Delhi High Court that judicial intervention would violate the principle of 'separation of powers.'

"This will open up a Pandora's box," the Centre told a vacation bench of justices Vikas Mahajan and Vinod Kumar after the court questioned why the rates couldn't be brought "within reach of the common man".

Additional Solicitor General N Venkataraman, for the Centre, said there was already a legislative process involving parliamentary standing committee reports and GST Council deliberations.

"How can this process be scuttled through a court process?" he asked.

On the court's earlier suggestion for a virtual GST Council meeting given Delhi's air pollution crisis, the Centre said it was "not possible" as regulations require physical presence of all members.

"This is not a PIL at all. GST is only a ruse...We are scared from the constitutional perspective. It is doctrine of separation of powers," the ASG said, adding the Centre couldn't commit to a Council meeting.

The court had noted that



## Key demands of the PIL

The petitioner submitted that on medical devices, GST was five per cent whereas it was 18 per cent for air purifiers. He sought a direction to authorities to charge five per cent on air purifiers as well considering the capital's pollution crisis

air purifiers are pricey, ranging from ₹10,000-12,000 ₹60,000. "It is beyond the reach of a common man. Why not bring it down to a reasonable level...What is the difficulty in the GST Council meeting?" it asked.

The ASG said, "It is a loaded petition, we want to know who is behind this... Somebody wants a monopoly in air purifiers... Health ministry is not even a party." The court permitted the Centre to file a counter-affidavit within 10 days.

## EXPRESS READ

### Amaravati riot dies at meet on road alignment

Vijayawada: A farmer, D Rama Rao (70), from Mandadaram village in the capital region of Amaravati, collapsed and died due to cardiac arrest during a meeting conducted by Municipal Administration and Urban Development Minister P Narayana and officials regarding the alignment of a road | P4

### 4 officials suspended over illegal construction

Rajahmundry: West Godavari District Collector Ch Nagaram has ordered the suspension of four officials for failing to prevent the unauthorised construction of a Shivalayam on government and ZP road land at Prathipadu | P4



## TSUNAMI REMEMBRANCE

Women perform Ganga Puja at Pedajalaripeta in Vizag on Friday to mark the 21st Tsunami anniversary | 6 SATYANARAYANA

## Medically unfit RTC staff to get alternative jobs

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
@ Vijayawada

In a major relief, the State government has provided alternative employment to APSRTC employees, who have been declared medically unfit. Special Chief Secretary MT Krishna Babu issued a GO in this regard on Friday.

As per the GO, the benefit has been extended to beyond RTC

drivers. Alternative jobs will be provided to RTC employees, who became medically unfit on or after January 1, 2020, following the merger of the corporation with the State government.

Earlier, the policy of providing alternative employment was limited only to drivers, who were declared medically unfit.

"The new decision expands

the scope to include drivers, conductors and all other categories of RTC employees. The government has decided to offer alternative employment to employees, who are medically unfit in 21 identified categories, while working in the RTC.

The same policy will continue even after the merger, ensuring that employees declared medically unfit in these 21 categories are accommodated with suitable alternative jobs," reads the GO.

Medically unfit employees may be given posts such as record tracer and assistant mechanic, depending on eligibility.

If an employee is not eligible for any post in the RTC, the government has directed that suitable jobs be provided in other departments based on their qualifications. P4



Cybercrime SP Adhiraj Singh Rana explains the modus operandi of international cybercrime network at a media conference in Vijayawada on Friday | EXPRESS



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AWARDDEES AMONG THE 20 ARE SPORTSPERSONS

## CEO among three held for gang-rape in moving car

RAJESH ASNANI @ Jaipur

THREE persons, including the CEO of a private IT company, have been arrested in connection with the alleged gang-rape of the firm's female manager in a moving car after a birthday party in Udaipur.

Police said a local court on Thursday sent the accused to four-day police custody. They identified the accused as GKM IT Pvt Ltd's owner and CEO, Jitesh Sisodia, a senior female executive of the firm and her husband Gaurav Sirohi.

The horrific incident allegedly took place on December 20, while the complaint was lodged on December 23.

As per the FIR, the alleged assault followed a birthday and New Year's party organised by the CEO at a hotel in Udaipur. The victim said she reached the hotel around 9 pm. The CEO, the senior female executive and her husband were also present. The party reportedly continued till 1.30 am.

The victim said when she began feeling unwell late at night, the senior female executive offered to drop her home. Around 1.45 am, they left the hotel in the victim's car. The executive's husband and the CEO were present in the vehicle as well.

Midway during the journey, the accused allegedly purchased an intoxicant and forced the victim to consume it, following which she passed out. When she partially regained consciousness, she saw the CEO sexually assaulting her in the moving car; the victim said in her statement.

She alleged that despite her repeated pleas, the accused dropped her home only around 5 am. The victim told the police that her car's dashcam recorded audio and video of the entire incident. The footage allegedly shows the presence and involvement of all three accused. Police officials are examining the footage.

# Strive for all-round growth in Vizag, Collector tells officials

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

@Visakhapatnam

VISHAKHAPATNAM District Collector MN Harendhira Prasad directed officials to work in coordination across all departments with the goal of achieving comprehensive economic development in the district. The Collector held a meeting with concerned officials at the Collectorate conference hall in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

He briefed officials on the key points and guidelines discussed during the Collectors' Conference held on December 17 and 18. The discussions covered economic growth, agriculture, industries, e-governance, online services, and progress across various sectors. Collector Harendhira Prasad emphasised the importance of improving the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) and noted significant growth in Gross Value Added (GVA). Action plans are being implemented based on over 300 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)



to enhance departmental performance, he added.

Later, he instructed that an action plan should be developed to achieve 15 per cent growth across all sectors in Visakhapatnam district, aligning with the goals of Viksit Bharat and Swarnandhra. He noted that over 50 per cent of the targets in the agriculture sector have already been achieved, and the industrial sector has shown approximately 44.9 per cent growth. The services sector achieved Rs 1.48 lakh crore in

2024-25, and the target for 2025-26 has been set at Rs 1.60 lakh crore. Additionally, he emphasised the need to focus on MSME registration, industrial promotion, improving the business environment, reducing production costs, promoting renewable energy such as rooftop solar, reducing electricity expenses, and implementing Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs).

In the animal husbandry sector, he directed that milk collection centres be operated more efficiently and productivity in the fisheries sector be enhanced. He also advised coordination with banks to increase employment opportunities under the PMEGP scheme.

Collector Harendhira Prasad stressed the preparation of risk-based action plans and directed Agricultural Extension Officers (AAOs) to be proactive in the field. He called for widespread implementation of the fruit cover programme for mango crops and the adoption of models.

## Collector gifts mountain trail bike to cyclist

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

@Visakhapatnam

IN a move to encourage better performance in cycling and promote cycling tourism, Alluri Sitalarama Raju District Collector AS Dinesh Kumar on Friday advised district cycling brand ambassador Petteli Vijay to aim for higher achievements in the sport.

As a mark of recognition for securing second place in the 36-kilometre cycling race held during this year's Araku Winter Festival, the Collector presented Vijay with a mountain trail bike in the ASR district. The gesture was aimed at supporting the young cyclist's future progress and motivating him to perform better in upcoming events.

## CPI takes out huge rally to celebrate 100th anniv

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

@Visakhapatnam



MARKING the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of India (CPI), the party organised a large public rally in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

The procession, with 100 red flags, began at Saraswathi Park and passed through Daba Gardens, LIC Building, RTC Complex and Asilmetta, before concluding at the GVMC Gandhi statue. A public meeting was later held at the same venue under the party's leadership.

Addressing the gathering, CPI National Executive Member JV Satyanarayana Murthy said the CPI was the only political party in the country with a century-long history of struggle. He also said the CPI was the first party to demand complete independence.

## 'Gobala Sambaram' held in Manyam

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

@Parvathipuram-Manyam

IN a bid to improve health, productivity and living conditions for farm animals, Parvathipuram-Manyam officials have organised 'Gobala Sambaram' to create awareness among dairy farmers on animal protection and conservation, besides sensitising the public to avoid cruelty to animals.

Animal husbandry officials organised the 'Gobala Sambaram' at the veterinary hospital

premises in MR Nagar on Friday for the first time in Andhra Pradesh, as per the directions of District Collector N Prabhakar Reddy, to promote sustainable practices, improve animal care and expand employment opportunities for dairy farmers.

'Gobala Sambaram' is a livestock fair in which animal husbandry officials conduct health check-ups for livestock, provide medicines and treatment, and perform necessary surgeries free of cost, besides organising a large rally with calves.

Parvathipuram-Manyam is one of the agriculture - and dairy-based districts in the State. A majority of the people depend on dairy after agriculture in the district.

Therefore, the Animal Husbandry Department conducts calf rallies every year to create awareness among dairy farmers on the health, productivity and living conditions of farm animals.

However, dairy farmers have been incurring losses due to a lack of awareness on the health and conservation of livestock.

## Horoscopes By Holiday

### HOLIDAY MATHIS

27th December: Advice for a Saturday Moon Change Puffer fish puff, peacock fan and people at parties posture and sparkle, because making oneself bigger seems like the impressive, attractive thing to do. And with the lunar move from Pisces to competitive Aries, this tactic can even discourage the opposition. Still, approach with humor; the most attractive thing of all is not taking oneself too seriously.

### ARIES

(Mar 21-Apr. 20)  
There's a time to show your skills, a time to downplay them and wisdom in knowing which way to take things. Downplaying is easy. But are you ready to "show and tell"? Because your moment is coming.

### TAURUS

(Apr. 20-May 20)  
Your heart's ambition has been hard to make progress with inside a chaotic stretch of life. But do keep the flame alive. This is an aim for the long haul. Forget about short-term heroics and just keep coming back.

### GEMINI

(May 21-June 21)  
Good relationships, whether with people, places, projects or roles, are going to take effort. But they shouldn't feel like constant work. Give yourself some grace. You're dealing with a complicated situation.

### CANCER

(June 22-July 22)  
Instead of pining for distant good fortune, you'll pay closer attention to what's happening around you. The invitations, ideas, people and opportunities crossing your path are just the collaboration you need. It's not "out there"; it's in your realm.

### LEO

(July 23-Aug. 22)  
It comes up today how might have been nice to have certain opportunities others take for granted. But don't let that diminish the rare, defining experiences that are yours. You're someone extraordinary despite, or maybe because of, them.

### VIRGO

(Aug. 23-Sept. 22)  
You can't change the number of hours there are in a day, but you can use them well. And today, with a mix of instinct and planning, you can use them even better than you have been. Efficiency is your middle name.

### LIBRA

(Sept. 23-Oct. 22)  
Big moments of intuition are often intuition comes in microcosms, tiny pangs and pings alerting you to a moment or detail before you consciously understand why it will be important. Today brings three such signals.

### SCORPIO

(Oct. 24-Nov. 21)  
You'll say yes to simplicity when you say no to superfluosity. Your closet becomes functional when you eliminate what you don't wear. Your schedule eases when you decline social clutter. Your emotions stabilize when you stop engaging with takers. Less is more.

### SAGITTARIUS

(Nov. 22-Dec. 21)  
You are with yourself 24/7. Any relationship on earth with that kind of schedule is bound to have its tense moments. Expect fluctuations of self-esteem, and roll with them, knowing that you deserve loads of kindness. You're doing great.

### CAPRICORN

(Dec. 22-Jan. 19)  
You have a bit of competition. Your opponent may be worthy, but the game itself is not. You could walk away, come to a deal or give in. Stay flexible and humble, and you just may end up with everything.

### AQUARIUS

(Jan. 20-Feb. 18)  
When you smile, you feel happier. Whether you make up reasons or have no reason at all, either way it just works. It's not about faking it; it's about letting go of the petty ideas keeping you from joy.

### PISCES

(Feb. 19-Mar. 20)  
You'll pick up undercurrents of a situation -- the real feeling beneath the surface. Because of this, you'll understand someone without them having to say much. You'll also have the right response at the right moment.

# TSUNAMI ANNIV: HUGE TURNOUT OF WOMEN FOR GANGAMMA PUJA

Fishing community offers prayers recalling divine protection during the 2004 disaster

NEELIMA EATY @Visakhapatnam

RESIDENTS of Pedajalaripeta, a fishing village in Visakhapatnam, marked the 21st anniversary of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami by offering special prayers to Goddess Gangamma at the seashore on Friday.

The prayers were organised under the aegis of the Pedajalaripeta Grama Seva Sangham. Thousands of women gathered along the shore, chanting "Challaga choodamma, Gangamma Thalli", and offered milk, turmeric and vermilion at the seashore. The ritual was performed as an expression of gratitude for what the community believes was divine protection during the tsunami and as a prayer that such a disaster should never occur again.

The devastating tsunami struck coastal regions on December 26, 2004, following a massive undersea earthquake



Women performing Ganga Puja to mark the 21st tsunami anniversary at Pedajalaripeta in Visakhapatnam on Friday | SATYANARAYANA

near Sumatra in Indonesia. The disaster claimed over 2.3 lakh lives across several countries, including India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. While large parts of the Indian coastline were severely affected, Pedajalaripeta escaped major loss of life and property.

Since 2005, the fishing community of Pedajalaripeta has been observing Gangamma

On this day, no one goes fishing. We gather here to thank Gangamma for protecting our village

Parvathy, a resident

Puja every year on December 26. Locals believe that the presence of the Goddess Gangamma temple near the shore protected the village from the fury of the waves. Over the years, the annual observance has evolved into a major community event.

This year's programme witnessed the participation of traditional fishermen, elders from neighbouring fishing villages, representatives of various associations and thousands of women from the locality. As part of the tradition, no fishermen ventured into the sea on the day, with all fishing activities suspended as a mark of respect.

## 55-year-old man booked for sexually assaulting 14-yr-old girl in Port City

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

@Visakhapatnam

sues, while the victim's relatives alleged that he lured the minor and sexually assaulted her.

According to the III Town Inspector P Pydiyya, the Rayudu had an extramarital affair with the woman, a native of Rajahmundry. The woman claimed she had faced financial and family problems and had taken ₹2.4 crore from Rayudu.

The dispute between Rayudu and the woman began when Rayudu asked her to return the money, but she declined. Rayudu lodged a complaint against

### EXPRESS READ

#### SITAM students shine at inter-polytechnic meet

#### AU scholar for Viksit Bharat dialogue

Visakhapatnam: Polytechnic students of SITAM College, Gajularega, Vizianagram, won several medals at the Inter-Polytechnic Sports and Games Regional Meet 2025-26 held on December 22 and 23. Around 800 sportsmen from 20 colleges took part. K Deeksha won gold in the girls' 800 metres and bronze in the 200 metres, while G Pawan Kumar secured bronze in triple jump. The boys' badminton team finished third

#### Stolen goods worth ₹1.01 crore recovered

Visakhapatnam: The city police recovered stolen property worth over ₹1.01 crore in Nov 2025. CP Shanka Brata Bagchi said at a crime property recovery mela on Friday that 70 property offences were reported, of which 53 cases were detected and 65 offenders arrested. The recovered items included over 355 g of gold ornaments, more than 2 kg of silver, ₹2.2 lakh in cash, five bikes, 27 cows and 509 stolen or missing phones. Police handed over recovered property to owners

## Medical kits given to filaria patients

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

@Parvathipuram-Manyam

HINDUSTAN Shipyard Limited (HSL), in collaboration with the LEPRA Society, on Friday distributed medical footwear and self-care medical kits to 360 filaria patients in the district as part of its corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. The distribution programme was held at the District Early Intervention Centre (DEIC).

District Medical and Health Officer (DM&HO) Dr S Bhaskara Rao distributed the kits to the beneficiaries. He appreciated HSL and the LEPRA Society for extending support to underprivileged sections.

District Medical and Health Officer (DM&HO) Dr S Bhaskara Rao distributed the kits to the beneficiaries. He appreciated HSL and the LEPRA Society for extending support to underprivileged sections.

LEONARD RAY / THE HINDU

**CROSS WORD**

**ACROSS**

- Inspection by officers ends the game on board (10)
- Clothes changed frequently in the car (4)
- A doctor and a mother in an exciting story (5)
- Thought me old fashioned about it (9)
- Extreme scepticism (8)
- A blow that's designed to humiliate (5)
- Nautical way to the top (7)
- Strange charm that is pure fantasy (7)
- Plunder piled so haphazardly (7)
- Stays to enclose a number in some armour (7)
- Regretting having to destroy a note (5)
- Ten girls making money (8)
- All agreed to distribution of a unit sum (9)
- Pitched one in an outhouse (5)
- Still having the same points (4)
- Of use to writers still we hear (10)

**DOWN**

- Laws the experts may break (4)
- Wastes time, a case for improvement (5)
- A uniform colour perhaps (5)
- Cupboard that will give more air (7)
- Directions to medics worried about disease type (7)
- Reserve shown by one with nothing to say (5)
- Coarse taste enjoyed by those who are fit (4,6)
- Main thoroughfare used by merchants (5,5)
- Firm hold for a golf club I'm pro about (4,4)
- An inelegant sort of plant (9)
- Oaf does some wood for making attack (4,3)
- Salad greenery and French dressing in a basket (7)
- I am on time for the picture (5)
- Rope in a girl with a ring (5)
- Extremely irritable? (4)

**YESTERDAY'S SOLUTIONS****CROSS:**

1 Support; 5 Mufti; 8 Universals;

10 Late; 12 Left over; 14 Chance; 15 Debris; 17 Discount;

18 Reel; 21 Coo; 22 Anchor man; 24 Lathe; 25 Lute;

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## Techie among 8 held for ganja smuggling

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
@Visakhapatnam

THE Nathavaram police in Anakapalle district on Friday arrested eight people, including a woman software engineer, for allegedly supplying high-quality Sheelavathi strain ganja from Narsipatnam to Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.

Police said it was the first time ganja from the Andhra-Odisha border had been smuggled to Sri Lanka. The arrested woman, identified as Gade Renuka, 28, a Bengaluru-based software professional and native of Santhakaviti in Vizianagaram district, was described as the "lady don" of the operation.

Renuka, along with her associate Surya Kalidas, rented a house in Narsipatnam to procure ganja from Odisha and distribute it to Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.

Acting on credible information, police teams from Narsi-

patnam rural and Nathavaram stations intercepted the gang near Srugavaram village and seized 74 kg of dry ganja, a car, two motorcycles and mobile phones. Investigators said Renuka and Kalidas worked with middleman Adduri Prasad, who sourced ganja from tribes A Ravu Kumar, O Lalitha Kumari and P Mani Kumari.

The tribals purchased the contraband from Balimalla and Chintrakonda areas of Odisha at about ₹5,000 per kg. The supply chain was completed by Madhan Kumar and driver Naga Muttu,

who transported the ganja to Rajanagaram on the highway before it was moved to Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.

Police said Renuka had earlier been involved in ganja smuggling under Payakaraopeta, Narsipatnam, Saluru and Bengaluru limits. Authorities warned that strict action would continue against cross-border narcotics networks.



## 'Probe sought into FAAP certificates'

The certificates in question were not tampered with in any manner, asserts SAAP secy

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
@Vijayawada

RESPONDING to the news article published in *TNIE* on Friday, VC and MD of Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh (SAAP) S Bharani clarified that SAAP had taken necessary action against the players who obtained medical seats under sports quota. She informed that SAAP has filed a written complaint to the Machavaram police against the Fencing Association of Andhra Pradesh (FAAP) seeking a thorough enquiry into the issuance of certificates and other aspects pertaining to the non-compliance of renewing their recognition from 2023.

Taking it on serious notes, the SAAP has issued circulars to the concerned Sports Associations requesting them to submit their proposals for issuing of affiliation renewal, in order to avoid inconvenience to fencing players seeking admission to professional courses. "SAAP has addressed a letter to



SAAP has addressed a letter to the FFI and the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) regarding the allegations pertaining to the functioning of the Fencing Association of AP

S Bharani, SAAP VC &amp; MD

municated to the university for withdrawal of medical seat.

Secondly, the FAAP has categorically denied allegations of certificate tampering and irregularities in the conduct of championships and selection trials, terming them 'baseless and far from facts.'

Secretary GSV Krishna Mohan said that FAAP did not issue fake certificates to the players and has nothing to do with the player who obtained a medical seat using the certificates. He clarified that the certificates in question were not tampered with in any manner.

The FAAP said that qualified technical officials from Odisha and Tamil Nadu officiated as referees during the competitions. "As per norms, players

securing the top four positions were selected to represent the State at the national-level competitions. Since the entire process of entries and conduct of events was done online, issuing certificates with backdated entries was 'not possible under any circumstances,' the FAAP asserted.

After the General Body Meeting, minutes of the first meeting were approved in the subsequent meeting and submitted in duplicate to the Registrar's Office. The process of renewal with the concerned authorities is underway the FAAP said.

As per the SAAP website, the FAAP continues to be recognised, though the renewal is pending. The association pointed out that if competitions are not conducted during this period, state players would lose the opportunity to showcase their talent at national platforms. The association further expressed their integrity to prove the allegations made by the SAAP and other individuals wrong.



## Four die as car rams into bus in Nandyal

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
@Kurnool

FOUR people died and two others sustained injuries in a road accident on NH-40 near Nallagatla village in Nandyal district on Friday.

Police said a Toyota Qualis travelling from Tirupati to Hyderabad lost control, struck a road divider and collided with an oncoming CGR private bus, killing all four occupants of the car on the spot.

Police identified the deceased as Shravan, 21; Gundarao Kulkarni, 46; Itikadi Narasimhulu, 30; and Siddappa, 50. All were residents of Nizampet in Hyderabad and originally hailed from Bidar district in Karnataka.

Police said the injured, Siddharth Kulkarni and Shiva Sai Kulkarni, were admitted to Nandyal Government Hospital, where they are undergoing treatment. Allagadda Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) K Pramod, Circle Inspector (CI) BV Ramana and SI Varaprasad said the victims were returning to Hyderabad after providing catering services at a function in Tirupati. Investigation is underway.

## Country-made pistols, ammunition seized, three arrested

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
@Anantapur

ANANTAPUR District SP P Jagadeesh announced the arrest of three members of an illegal arms supply gang, with police seizing five country-made pis-

tols, seven magazines, 30 live bullets, three empty shells and swords.

The accused are Rohit Parmar (24) and Shivam Singh Parihar (25) from Morena, Madhya Pradesh, and Nalli Rajashekhar Reddy (32), a gym operator

from Anantapur. A case was registered on December 12 under Crime No. 262/2025, invoking Sections 25(1)(a) and 25(1)(b) of the Arms Act.

Investigations revealed Parmar and Parihar had been procuring firearms cheaply in the

Gwalior-Morena region and supplying them illegally to other states. Rajashekhar Reddy, who met them in Punjab three years ago, purchased a weapon to intimidate troublemakers at his gym and later assisted in sales using local contacts.

Acting on credible information, police arrested the trio near Prasannayapalli Railway Station.

The SP warned that illegal weapons pose a grave threat to public safety and vowed strict action against offenders.



SP P Jagadeesh addressing a media conference in Anantapur | EXPRESS

**अखिल भारतीय आर्युविज्ञान संस्थान (एस्एस), भुवनेश्वर**  
**ALL INDIA INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENCES (AIIMS), BHUBANESWAR**  
(A Statutory body under aegis of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India)  
Sijua, Post-Dumuda, Bhubaneswar (Odisha) - 751019

DEANAC-25015/1/2023-DEAN ACADEMIC/4356 Date:26<sup>th</sup> December, 2025**ADMISSION TO FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME FOR JANUARY 2026 SESSION AT AIIMS, BHUBANESWAR**

Online Applications (Online Recruitment Portal) are invited from eligible candidates for appointment as fellowship programme at AIIMS, Bhubaneswar.

**NUMBER OF VACANCIES: 14**

Eligibility criteria (age, qualification, etc.), requisite fee and other details, are available on [www.aiimsbhubaneswar.nic.in](http://www.aiimsbhubaneswar.nic.in) vide Advertisement No:DEANAC-25015/1/2023-DEAN ACADEMIC/4344, Date: 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2025.

Any query please contact Academic Section, AIIMS, Bhubaneswar. (Email-ID: [acad\\_recrt@aiimsbhubaneswar.edu.in](mailto:acad_recrt@aiimsbhubaneswar.edu.in))

Candidates are advised to visit our website [www.aiimsbhubaneswar.nic.in](http://www.aiimsbhubaneswar.nic.in) regularly for latest update.

Sd/-  
REGISTRAR  
AIIMS, Bhubaneswar

**CHANGE OF NAME**  
I. YIGALA SRIDEVI W/o. Srinivasa Rao, aged 49 years residing at Garvidi Village, Garvidi Mandal, Vizianagaram District, Andhra Pradesh-53101, do hereby solemnly affirm that my name was wrongly entered as M. SRIDEVI W/o. Srinivasa Rao instead of my correct name is YIGALA SRIDEVI W/o. Srinivasa Rao. The above contents are true and correct as per Aadhar Card. If it found false in future , I am personally liable for action.

**CHANGE OF NAME**  
I. M SITARAMALAKSHMI (Old Name), W/o Balaji Varaha Girirama, Presently residing at D.No. 1/23/9, Plot No.M-G-234, Vuda Layout, Chinamushiduvada, Sujatha nagar Post, Pendurthi, Visakhapatnam-530051, have Changed My Name From M SITARAMALAKSHMI (Old Name) To SITA RAMA LAKSHMI MARADA (New Name) Henceforth I am being called as SITA RAMA LAKSHMI MARADA (New Name) for all purposes.

**CHANGE OF NAME**  
I. GOSANGI KRISHNA VENI, W/o. Thanavarapu Veera Swamy, worked in INDIAN ARMY, Ex-Serviceman, Ex-No.JC035757 Rank HONORARY SUBEDAR MAJOR Record Office MEG & CENTRE BENGALURU. Residing at D. No. 32-12-856, MIG-63, Bethel Enclaves 401, Sheela Nagar Near Registrar Office, Revenue Ward-65, Road No.2 Pendluti, Visakhapatnam, AP-530012. Herby declare that in my HPO No. 222200500976 and e-PPO No. 154200400809 my name was wrongly entered as KRISHNAVENI instead of correct name is GOSANGI KRISHNA VENI. (As per Aadhar & PAN Card) Vide affidavit dated 24/12/2025 sworn before notary at Visakhapatnam.

**CHANGE OF NAME**  
I. M SITARAMALAKSHMI (Old Name), W/o Balaji Varaha Girirama, Presently residing at D.No. 1/23/9, Plot No.M-G-234, Vuda Layout, Chinamushiduvada, Sujatha nagar Post, Pendurthi, Visakhapatnam-530051, have Changed My Name From M SITARAMALAKSHMI (Old Name) To SITA RAMA LAKSHMI MARADA (New Name) Henceforth I am being called as SITA RAMA LAKSHMI MARADA (New Name) for all purposes.

**GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH ROADS AND BUILDINGS DEPARTMENT**  
e-Procurement Tender Notice  
e' NIT No.22/MDR/ENC1/MDR/DEC/R/TEC/DEE/AEE/AEF/2025-26, Dt.24.12.2025  
Online tender is invited under e-procurement platform for one work in Krishna District in Andhra Pradesh for Rs.22.00 Crores under MDR Plan. Tenderers can download the tender schedules and have further details from e-market place [www.apeprocurement.gov.in](http://www.apeprocurement.gov.in) from 3:00 PM on 29.12.2025 onwards. The last date of receipt of tenders is upto 3:30 PM on 12.01.2026.  
Sd/- Engineer-in-Chief (R&B), Major District Roads  
DIPR No.18539/CL/ADVT/1/1/2021-22, Dt: 26/12/2025

**RAJIV GANDHI UNIVERSITY OF KNOWLEDGE TECHNOLOGIES**  
RK Valley Campus  
Idupulapaya, Y.S.R. Kadapa District, Andhra Pradesh-516330  
Tender Notice Dt: 27.12.2025  
Online tenders are hereby invited through e-procurement portal towards:  
1. Providing of Housekeeping Services on Outsourcing Basis through Agency.  
2. Selection of Service Provider for providing Outsourcing Manpower.  
3. Providing of Services on Out Sourcing Basis through Agency.  
4. Providing 2Gbps Internet leased line and Access Points on rental basis and other works  
For further details please visit website <http://www.rguktriv.ac.in/rku-tenders.html>  
https://www.apeprocurement.gov.in  
Sd/- Administrative Officer

**Karnataka Food & Civil Supplies Corporation Ltd.**  
(Government of Karnataka Undertaking)  
No.16/1, MILLERS TANK BED AREA, BANGALORE-560 052  
Ph: 080-2226 0932 E-mail: [admnkfcsc123@yahoo.com](mailto:admnkfcsc123@yahoo.com)  
No:KFCSC/MKT/INDIRA KIT/02/2025-26/ Date: 26.12.2025

**NOTIFICATION**  
Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Corporation Ltd., Bangalore Invites "Request for Proposal for Selection of Transaction Advisor Consultants for Selection of Vendor for Supply and Distribution of Indira Kit Scheme" The RFP and other information can be obtained from the <https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in> e-procurement portal.  
Sd/- Managing Director

**MAHATRANSO**  
Maharashtra State Electricity Transmission Co. Ltd  
Tenders are invited through e-Tendering in SRM Two Bid system from the registered vendors for Supply of following:

Tender No. & Description of Material	Estimated Amount (in Rs. Lakhs)	Due Date & Time (Hrs.) Submission & Opening of Tender
SP/T-0641/1225 RFx 7000038449 (1 <sup>st</sup> Call) for Supply, Installation, Testing & Commissioning of Nagpur islanding scheme under EHV O&M Zone, Nagpur and ALDC Ambazari in MSETCL on Portal.	Rs. 2459.33 Lakhs Tender Fee (in Rs.) 25,000.00	15.01.2026 18:00 Hrs 15.01.2026 18:15 Hrs

Contact Person: Office of the Executive Engineer (Gr-VI)  
Tel. No. 022-69852712/022-69852720.  
CPA, C.O. MSETCL, 1st Floor, Prakashgad Building, Bandra (E), Mumbai  
Email: 1) C.E. (CPA) 2) S.E. (CPA) 3) E.E. (P&C) 4) E.E. (Group-VI)  
Email id: [cecpa@mahatransco.in](mailto:cecpa@mahatransco.in), [secpa@gmail.com](mailto:secpa@gmail.com), [eepc@mahatransco.in](mailto:eepc@mahatransco.in), [eegrp6@mahatransco.in](mailto:eegrp6@mahatransco.in)  
For further details visit our website <http://www.srmetsender.mahatransco.in>

Any further amendments will be published on the MSETCL website [www.mahatransco.in](http://www.mahatransco.in). So bidders are requested to check the website.

Sd/- Executive Engineer (P&C)

**GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU KARUR CORPORATION KARUR DISTRICT E-Tendering Tender Notice**  
RoC No: 6052/ 2025/ E5  
Karur Corporation invites Bids from eligible Bidders through e-procurement portal for "Providing Under Ground Sewerage Scheme to the leefout areas and added areas of Karur Corporation with operation and maintenance for the period of 5 years for collection system and construction of STP including operation and maintenance for the period of 10 years". Bidders shall submit their Bids through online e-procurement portal <https://tenders.gov.in> up to 03.00 PM (as per the time in the server clock of the tender portal) on 13/02/2026. The Bids will be opened through online at 03.30 PM on the same day (13.02.2026)

Sl. No	Name of Work	Bid Value (Rs. In lakh)	Bid Security (Rs. In lakh)	Period of availability of bid document	Date and time of Bid opening	Period of Completion
1	Providing Under Ground Sewerage Scheme to the leefout areas and added areas of Karur Corporation with operation and maintenance for the period of 5 years - package 1	11015.26	113.84	30.12.2025 to 13.02.2026 up to 3:00 PM	13.02.2026 at 3:30 PM	36 Months
2	Providing Under Ground Sewerage Scheme to the leefout areas and added areas of Karur Corporation with operation and maintenance for the period of 5 years - package 2	21426.56	220.74	30.12.2025 to 13.02.2026 up to 3:00 PM	13.02.2026 at 3:30 PM	36 Months
3	Construction of 35.25 MLD capacity sewage treatment plant at Arasu colony with operation and maintenance for the period of 10 years at Karur Corporation package 3	7791.39	94.89	30.12.2025 to 13.02.2026 up to 3:00 PM	13.02.2026 at 3:30 PM	18 Months
	Estimated cost for Construction of STP	1698.02				
	Estimated cost for Operation and maintenance for the period of 10 Years (Excluding electricity charges)					

1. The Bid documents shall be made available from 30.12.2025.  
2. The Bid documents may be downloaded from the website (<https://tenders.gov.in>) at free of cost up to 3:00 PM on 13.02.2026.  
3. Bids through e-submission shall only be accepted.  
4. Pre-bid meeting will be held on 12.01.2026 at 11.00 AM in the Office of the Karur Corporation, Main Road, Karur – 639 001.

Commissioner  
Karur Corporation  
DIPR/6851/TENDER/2025

**CATCH BENGALURU POLICE COMMISSIONER  
SEEMANT KUMAR SINGH, IPS**  
AS HE TALKS ABOUT  
CONTROLLING CRIME IN THE CITY AND THE HUMAN SIDE OF POLICING  
IN A CONVERSATION WITH Neha

Available on: YouTube and Spotify

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**Neha**

# Naidu vows tough action against rowdyism

Inaugurates Tirupati Dist Police Office, calls for visible & invisible policing in Tirumala ahead of Vaikunta Ekadasi

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Tirupati

CHIEF Minister N Chandrababu Naidu inaugurated the district police office, along with Home Minister Vangalapudi Anitha here today.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said top priority will be given to protect the sanctity of Tirumala and safety of devotees. He advised police to use technology and surveillance through drones to prevent crime. He directed the police to be more alert in view of Vaikunta Ekadasi rush at Tirumala and steps should be taken for the safety of devotees.

The Chief Minister directed the police to act tough on rowdyism and warned of severe action against rowdy elements in the guise of politicians and added that rowdies will be expelled from the state. He warned that no one will be spared and severe action will be taken on those who resort to anti-social activities irrespective of party affiliations. He said that some people are resorting to mud-slinging activities on the gov-

ernment for political mileage. The government will act tough on those who resort to false campaigns against the government using social media platforms.

Naidu further addressed the issue of rowdyism and anti-social activities, asserting that the state government would not tolerate such behavior under any circumstances. He warned that anyone indulging in such activities, even if they were politically affiliated, would face strict action, including exclusion from the state.

The Chief Minister also mentioned that anyone involved in illegal activities would be prosecuted, irrespective of their political ties, referring to the past instances where individuals from his own party had been sent to jail for criminal actions.

Chandrababu Naidu appreciated Tirupati police for their efforts in controlling ganja, drugs, and other illegal activities. He said strict action has been taken against criminals by opening suspect sheets, in-



Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu signs in the register after inaugurating the Tirupati District Police office on Friday | EXPRESS

voking the PD Act, and effectively preventing red sandalwood smuggling.

Referring to the previous government (2019-24), Chandrababu Naidu alleged that law and order had deteriorated and that the sentiments of devotees in Tirumala and Tirupati were hurt.

He said his government never encouraged violence or political killings and maintained that peace and security are es-

sential for attracting investments.

The Chief Minister warned that attempts to create fear through violence, road blockades, threats, or social media abuse would be dealt with strictly.

He said attacks on temples and thefts have now reduced significantly and asked the police to remain highly alert, especially in view of the upcoming Vaikunta Ekadasi

festival.

Calling for both visible and invisible policing, the Chief Minister said anyone indulging in rowdyism under the guise of politics would face strict legal action. He urged the police to protect the sanctity of Tirumala, the sacred abode of Lord Venkateswara.

AP Home Minister Vangalapudi Anitha, Revenue and Tirupati District Incharge Minister Aanagani Sathy Prasad, DGP Harish Gupta, Tirupati District Collector S Venkateswar, SP L Subba Rayudu, TUDA Chairman Dollar Diwakar Reddy and other leaders participated in the DPO inauguration.

Later, Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu visited the residence of Tirupati District Telugu Desam Party Media Coordinator Sridhar Varma and consoled the family following the sudden demise of his father, NTR Raju.

The Chief Minister also paid floral tributes to the portrait of the late party leader Raju and expressed his heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family.



aspects. It may be recalled that the Parakamani theft case was compromised in a Lok Adalat on September 9, 2023, without obtaining approval from either the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Board or the Executive Officer.

A petition challenging the settlement of the case in the Lok Adalat was heard earlier by the High Court, following which directions were issued to the ACB to conduct a detailed investigation into the assets of the accused in the Parakamani theft case.

## Govt sanctions ₹90.50 crore for BC scholarships

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
@Vijayawada

BC Welfare Minister S Savitha has said that the government has sanctioned ₹90.50 crore towards scholarships for OBC, EBC and DNT (Denotified and Nomadic Tribes) students pursuing education in government, private and aided educational institutions during the 2025-26 academic year under the PM YASASVI scheme.

In a release issued on Friday, Savitha stated that ₹69.40 crore was sanctioned towards the second phase of post-metric scholarships for the 2025-26 academic year. Another ₹21.10 crore was sanctioned towards the second phase of pre-metric scholarships for the same academic year.

Emphasising that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu is giving high priority to the education of BC students, the Minister said financial constraints should not become a barrier to students pursuing their education. The government, she added, is committed to ensuring that eligible students receive timely scholarship support.

While respecting the customs and traditions of BC communities, Madhav said BJP would also engage with leaders of the coalition government to address the challenges faced by BCs and work towards resolving their long-pending issues. This would help BCs overcome hurdles and move steadily towards development, he noted.

He also reiterated that the party is fully prepared to take all necessary steps for BC welfare. He expressed concern that many BC communities continue to face discrimination and asserted that the OBC Morcha would play a key role in uniting and strengthening the BC society. OBC State President Gopi Srinivas and others attended.

Addressing a meeting of OBC State office-bearers held at the BJP State Office in Vijayawada on Friday, Madhav alleged that previous ruling parties treated BCs merely as vote banks and confined them only to the ballot box. In contrast, the BJP has taken concrete steps to promote BC leadership at the national level and provide them with meaningful representation, he said.

He assured that BJP would stand firmly by every BC community living across the state's 175 Assembly constituencies, particularly those sustaining

themselves through traditional caste-based occupations while preserving culture and traditions. The party would reach out to BCs who believe in their caste deities and depend on traditional professions for livelihood, he added.

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## Four officials suspended over illegal temple construction on public land

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
@Rajahmundry

WEST Godavari District Collector and District Magistrate Chadalawada Nagarani has ordered the suspension of four officials for failing to prevent the unauthorised installation of a statue and construction of a Shivalayam temple on government and Zilla Parishad road land at Prathipadu village in Pentapadu mandal, in violation of High Court directions.

In communication to West Godavari Superintendent of Police, District Collector Chadalawada Nagarani said illegal construction continued on public land in RS No. 7-13B, measuring 0.13 cents, despite clear and binding orders of the

Andhra Pradesh High Court and repeated instructions from the district administration, leading to contempt proceedings.

Referring to a report submitted by the Revenue Divisional Officer, Tadepalligudem, the Collector said unauthorised activities continued even after officials issued stop-work instructions and directed field staff to prevent encroachment. She said the land stood recorded as Zilla Parishad property and authorities had granted no permission for installing any statue or constructing a religious structure.

Based on the findings, the District Collector ordered the

suspension of Panchayat Secretary J Nageswara Rao of Prathipadu Gram Panchayat, Deputy MPDO YVR Vara Prasad of Prathipadu, Village Revenue Officer Grade-II Vasamsetti Umadevi of Prathipadu and Tahsildar T Raju

Rajeswari of Pentapadu for failing to take timely and effective action to prevent encroachment and unauthorised construction on public land.

The Collector observed that failure by police, Panchayat Raj and revenue machinery at the field level, despite repeated requisitions from the revenue and Panchayat Raj departments seeking bandobust and protection, directly contributed

to the violation of High Court orders and exposed the district administration to contempt proceedings.

Citing supervisory lapses, Nagarani issued show-cause notices to the Revenue Divisional Officer and the District Local Planning Officer, Tadepalligudem, seeking explanations for failure to ensure strict compliance with court directions.

Stating that the lapses amounted to dereliction of duty and conduct unbecoming of government servants, the collector directed initiation of disciplinary proceedings against the suspended officials and warned of strict action to protect public land and enforce judicial orders.

## Tragedy: Amaravati farmer collapses, dies at meeting over road alignment

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
@Vijayawada

A farmer, D Rama Rao (70), from Mandadam village in the capital region of Amaravati, collapsed and died due to cardiac arrest during a meeting conducted by Municipal Administration and Urban Development (MA&UD) Minister Ponguru Narayana and other public representatives and officials at Mandadam on Friday.

The meeting was held with farmers regarding the alignment of a road in the Amaravati capital city.

Rama Rao, who attended the meeting, spoke to the Minister and said that he had no objection to giving his residence for laying the road, but sought houses for all

those losing their houses to the road at a good location near Thallayapalem village, along with all necessary facilities.

Later, Rama Rao sat on a chair at the meeting venue and collapsed after some time.

People nearby performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and he was later rushed to a hospital in a vehicle from Minister Narayana's convoy. However, doctors declared him dead.

According to Thullur DSP Murali Krishna, the deceased, Rama Rao (70), had faced cardiac-related issues in the past and had been administered cardiac stents earlier.

## ALTERNATIVE JOBS

Konakalla hails CM for solving RTC staff issue

*Continued from page 1*

To complete the process, district collectors have been instructed to facilitate such appointments in government departments. For employees who opt for voluntary retirement due to medical unfitness.

Welcoming the decision, AP-SRTC Chairman Konakalla Narayana Rao said, "The TDP-led coalition government has taken a positive and humane approach in resolving long-standing issues faced by AP-SRTC employees. The government is committed to ensuring that not a single employee suffers."

The APSRTC Chairman thanked Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu for resolving the issue that had remained pending for a long time, thereby bringing relief and hope to the families of affected employees. "This decision reflects the government's commitment to employees' welfare, and marks a significant step in protecting the rights, and the future of APSRTC staff," he added.



**The accused clandestinely imported SIM boxes made in China in the guise of power amplifiers using fake names, and installed them in houses where they were operating the network**

Adhiraj Singh Rana,  
Cybercrime SP

and temporary addresses, and installed them in the houses where they were operating the network. The accused were also collecting SIM cards using fake fingerprints, e-KYC, ID cards, and other documents, and using them for committing various cyber crimes," the SP elaborated.

"In order to prevent illegal imports, we have alerted the Customs Department to conduct a thorough inspection of electronic gadgets, and communication devices. The Vietnamese national came to India to train members of the gang in the operation of SIM boxes. It is a huge network with multiple layers of organised crime patterns" the SP said.

DoT Deputy Director General Hemanth Rathwae urged people to cooperate with the Telecom Department.

## YSRCP warns against politics over Tirumala

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
@Vijayawada

YSRCP has warned the coalition government and TTD Board not to use Tirumala for political gains.

Speaking to the media at the party Central Office in Tadepalligudem on Friday, former Minister Velampalli Srinivas said people are scared to visit Tirumala for its shoddy administration. While last year's stampede was still fresh in the minds of people, the policy of issuing tickets for darshan at Alipiri has caused another commotion. There was no need to shift the counter knowing very well that there would be a huge rush in the wake of the extended holiday.

TTD Board is unable to handle even the smallest issue and the coalition is not bothered about devotees, he said. Devotees are scared to visit Tirumala due to such faulty policy decisions.

## Naidu emphasises values and ethics, cites role of RSS in nation-building

*Continued from page 1*

Naidu emphasised the importance of values and ethics in nation-building, acknowledging the role played by leaders such as RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat in strengthening society at the grassroots level. He described India's family system as a unique strength that provides security, stability, and social cohesion.

Expressing confidence that India would emerge as the world's number one nation by 2047, he stressed the need to ensure inclusive growth by reducing disparities between the rich and the poor.

Highlighting the future, he said India would re-emerge as a global champion in science and technology. He announced that Andhra Pradesh would soon operate a quantum computer, and spoke about improved connectivity through telecom reforms. He further highlighted the establishment of specialised hubs, including Space City.

Drone City, Aerospace City, Electronics City, and MedTech Parks across the State.

Union Minister of State for Science and Technology Jitendra Singh provided a comprehensive overview of India's technological and economic rise over the past decade. He revealed that India has made a remarkable leap in the Global Innovation Index, moving from 81st to 38th rank.

The Union Minister specifically noted that India's space economy has climbed to the 8th position globally, with projections suggesting it could reach \$44 billion by 2033.

He also underscored India's growing self-reliance in the defence and healthcare sectors. He highlighted the significant global demand for the BrahMos missile, and India's role as a leading exporter of Covid-19 vaccines.

Mohan Bhagwat highlighted India's dual journey towards

spiritual depth and scientific excellence. He described dharma not merely as a religion, but as the "science governing the functioning of creation," asserting that both fields ultimately seek the same truth through different methodologies.

Mohan Bhagwat emphasised the need for developing a scientific outlook in Indian society while remaining rooted in religious and cultural values.

He stressed that India is destined to become great, the demand of the time is that a rising India should not be

only a great power focused on self-defence, but should become a Vishwaguru (teacher of the world) and free the world from its problems.

The national event is being jointly organised by the Union Ministry of Education, Vijnana Bharati, Indian Knowledge Systems, APCOST, National Innovation Foundation, and National Sanskrit University.

*Continued from page 1*

The investigation into fraudulent international network started with a complaint lodged through the Chakshu module of the Sanchar Sathi portal of the DoT regarding the suspicious calls. After a departmental inquiry, the DoT confirmed the illegal SIM box operations. Later, the CID registered a case. Acting on the directions of CID chief Ravi Shankar Ayyanar, several teams conducted raids in Goa, West Bengal, Telangana, Odisha, Visakhapatnam and Bihar, and arrested 14 persons, including a Vietnamese national, for their involvement in the racket.

"The accused clandestinely imported SIM boxes manufactured in China in the guise of power amplifiers through courier services using fake names, e-KYC, ID cards, and other documents, and using them for committing various cyber crimes," the SP elaborated.

"In order to prevent illegal imports, we have alerted the Customs Department to conduct a thorough inspection of electronic gadgets, and communication devices. The Vietnamese national came to India to train members of the gang in the operation of SIM boxes. It is a huge network with multiple layers of organised crime patterns" the SP said.

DoT Deputy Director General Hemanth Rathwae urged people to cooperate with the Telecom Department.



## ₹250-crore facelift readies for Sammakka-Saralamma Jatara

Biennial Jatara is scheduled to take place on January 28 amid dense forest

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Hyderabad

WITH preparations gathering pace ahead of the biennial Sammakka-Saralamma Jatara, Asia's largest tribal congregation, extensive development works are nearing completion at Medaram in Mulugu district. The Jatara, which traces its origins to the medieval period, is scheduled to take place on January 28 amid dense forest.

The state government has taken up works with an outlay of over ₹250 crore to give the historic Adivasi place of worship a facelift that blends history, tribal faith and modern infrastructure, while respecting Adivasi customs and offering a completely new experience to devotees. Officials said the development works are almost complete, at least in the core area.

Utmost care has been taken in the design and development of the Sammakka-Saralamma, Govinda Raju and Pagididda Raju Gaddelu. Symbols of bamboo, the Sonodi bird, the white horse representing tribal aristocracy, peacock, holy dots symbolising gotras and Adivasi dances have been inscribed on towering pillars carved out of single gigantic stone structures at all eight gates.

The stone installations narrate the legend through symbolic representations, with around 7,000 such symbols engraved across 31 stone installations in and around the sacred platforms.

The government sought the assistance of Dr Mypathi Arun Kumar, a research scholar from the Koya community who has extensively studied the history of Sammakka-Saralamma, in designing the artefacts.

The premises of the Sammakka-Saralamma sacred platforms are being developed into stone-based structures infused with devotion. The symbols carved on the stones are drawn from Padangal, a sacred flag, and palm-leaf manuscripts, while the inscriptions depict lineage, genealogy, gotras and elements of nature.

Speaking to TNIE, Mypathi said,

"There are around 256 omens through which the Mulavasis (aboriginals) predict nature, such as whether it will rain in a particular year. All these signs are engraved on the inscriptions in the sanctum and surrounding areas of the Sammakka-Saralamma Gaddelu."

He thanked the local MLA and Minister for Panchayat Raj and Rural Development, Danasari Anasuya (Seethakka), and the administration for taking the initiative.

Mulugu Collector Dikavara TS said the works were nearing completion, with 90% of the Gaddelu works and 85% of the flooring finished.

He said special attention was paid to translocating native and sacred trees as per gotras and that the government was planning to bring out a book. Minister Seethakka said arrangements were being made.

### MEDARAM RESEMBLES VANAVASAM

With about a month to go for the Jatara, devotees have already begun thronging the Adivasi place of worship. The long weekend may help devotees offer prayers, with roads leading to Medaram resembling Vanavasam—a local tradition symbolising a day-long forest dwelling. An elder said they visit the temple every year, to offer jaggery, locally referred as gold. "This year it is different as the development works are taken up earlier. The premises are also widened."

## Kudankulam power likely for TNPCL at ₹5.95 a unit

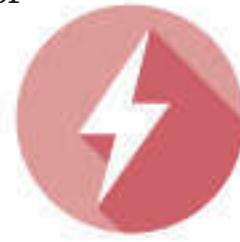
S GURUVANMIKANATHAN@Chennai

THE Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP) in Tirunelveli has conveyed its decision to supply electricity to the Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation Limited (TNPCL) at a tentative cost of ₹5.95 per unit from its upcoming third and fourth units.

At present, Tamil Nadu has an agreement to buy 1,152 MW of the 2,000 MW generated by units 1 and 2 of KKNPP at a cost of ₹4.10 per unit. While the proposed cost from units three and four is nearly 50% higher than the rate at which power is currently being supplied from the older units, the official order approving the tariff has not been issued yet.

A top official of the state-run power utility said the tariff decision has been conveyed to Tamil Nadu, but formal clearance from the union government is still awaited.

According to the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL), which operates the Ku-



dankulam plant, unit 3 is expected to be commissioned in December 2026, while unit 4 is scheduled to begin operations in August 2027. Each unit has a capacity of 1,000 MW.

Speaking to TNIE, a senior official of TNPCL said construction work on units 3 and 4 began during the 2016–17 financial year and around 70% of the work has been completed.

"For the past few years, TNPCL has been repeatedly requesting NPCIL to share the tentative tariff. The matter was also discussed several times at meetings of the Southern Regional Power Committee. We have now received a tariff indication, which can be taken up with the union government for negotiations, if required," the official said.

He added that Tamil Nadu has sought allocation of 100% of the power generated from units 3 and 4. "However, the centre has indicated that only 50% power can be allocated to the state, with 15% of unallocated power.

## KIMS denies new medical college plan in Andhra Pradesh

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
@ Hyderabad

IN A statement issued on Friday, KIMS Hospital denied that the group has made a bid to own and operate a medical college-cum-hospital at Adoni under the Andhra Pradesh government's Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model.

The hospital said that it has not participated in any tender process related to the proposed medical college and hospital at Adoni, nor is there any such development under consideration.

"As a listed enterprise, KIMS Hospitals is governed by strict disclosure norms and is mandated to promptly inform the stock exchanges of any material developments. No such disclosure has been made, as no such event has occurred", the statement said.

### LOST OF DOCUMENT

I, BULUSU PADMA, W/o Bulusu Durga Rao, Residing at D.No. 39-33-69, Sri Sri Shashi Apartments, Flat No. S2, VUDA Colony, Madhavacharya, Visakhapatnam - 530018. have lost my Original Reg. Sale Deed Link Document Bearing No. 7498/1983, while travelling by Bus from Punjab Hotel Jn. to Madhavacharya VUDA Colony If anybody finds it please contact - 817906 9212

**INDEL MONEY**

Corporate office: Indel Money Limited

3rd Floor Indel House, Changampuzha Nagar,

South Kalamassery, Ernakulam - 682033

PH: 0484-2933999 ECustomerCare@indelmoney.com

### GOLD AUCTION NOTICE

The pledges In specific and the public in general are hereby notified that public auction of the gold ornaments pledged in the below accounts is proposed to be conducted at the following branches on 27-01-2026 at 11:00 am We are auctioning the gold ornaments of the defaulted customers who have failed to make the payment of his/her loan amount despite being notified through various communication. Unclaimed items shall be auctioned on any other days without further notice of changes in venue or date and the same shall be displayed at concerned branches without any further notice.

By Authorized Officer, Indel Money Limited

**SBI STATE BANK OF INDIA**  
Stressed Assets Recovery Branch, Administrative Office Campus, Balaji Nagar, Siripuram, Visakhapatnam

Authorised Officer's Details: Name : Mr. Y. Srikant (Chief Manager), Mobile No.80994 44378, e-Mail ID : sri.1007@sbi.co.in For Property Inspection : 96669 09050

### E - AUCTION SALE NOTICE

SECURITY INTEREST (ENFORCEMENT) RULES, 2002 READ WITH PROVISO RULE 8(6) & 9(1)(F) (SALE OF IMMOVABLE ASSETS CHARGED TO THE BANK UNDER THE SECURITISATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT, 2002).

The undersigned as Authorized Officer of State Bank of India has taken over symbolic possession of the following property w/s 13(4) of the SARFAESI Act 2002. Public at large is informed that e-Auction (under SARFAESI Act, 2002) of the charged property mentioned below for realisation of Bank's dues will be held on "AS IS WHERE IS" and "AS IS WHAT IS" and "WHATEVER THERE IS" BASIS and on the terms and conditions specified hereunder.

Borrower(s): Mrs. Sri Sampath Traders, Prop : Sri Tanneeru Hari Prasad Rao, Door No.1-8-23, Plot No.34, Sector 5, M.P. Colony, Visakhapatnam-530017. Also At : Sri Tanneeru Hari Prasad Rao, Dr. No.4-9-518, Vinayaka Nagar Colony, Near Community Hall, Hayat Nagar, KVRanga Reddy District, Hyderabad, Telangana-501505. Sri Gunji Hanumantha Rao, S/o Late Venkata Subbaya, Door No.1-8-23, Plot No.34, Sector-5, M.P. Colony, Visakhapatnam-530017. Smt. Gunji Sivamma, W/o Hanumantha Rao, Dr. No.1-8-23, Plot No.34, Sector-5, M.P. Colony, Visakhapatnam-530017.

Demand Notice Date: 13-02-2026

Outstanding Amount as per Demand Notice: Rs.4,96,86,740.80 P's

Present Outstanding Amount: Rs.8,22,66,157/- as on 22-12-2025 + Interest and other expenses thereon from 23.12.2025.

### SCHEMULE OF PROPERTIES

Property No.1: Immovable property mortgaged by Smt. Gunji Sivamma: All that piece and parcel of Residential site of an extent of 317.19 sq yards or 265.171 sq mtrs. Patta No.37, Plot No.09, covered in Survey No.171/3P, Madhurawada Village and Rural Mandal within the limits of GMVC and standing in the name of Smt. Gunji Sivamma, W/o Hanumantha Rao vide Regd. Sale Deed No.7229/2014, Dt. 03.12.2014 SRO Madhurawada, Visakhapatnam District. Site Boundaries: As per Sale Deed: East : Vacant Site in Plot No.10 of M. Naga Ratnam, South: 6 feet Road, West : Vacant Site in Plot No.8 of I. Radha Devi, North : Land Belongs to G. Appa Rao. As per Actual: East: House of others, South: 6 feet Way, West: Vacant Site Plot No.8, North : Building of others.

Reserve Price:Rs.1,49,00,00/- Bid Multiplier Amount: Rs.50,00/-

Property No.2: Immovable property mortgaged by Sri Gunji Hanumantha Rao : All that piece and parcel of Residential site of an extent of 257.33 sq.yds or 215.127 Sq.Mtrs. Patta No.37, Plot No.08, Covered in Survey No.171/3P Madhurawada Village and Rural Mandal within the limits of GMVC and standing in the name of Sri Gunji Hanumantha Rao, S/o Late Venkata Subbaya vide Regd. Sale Deed No.7230/2014, Dt. 03-12-2014 SRO Madhurawada, Visakhapatnam District. Site Boundaries: As per Sale Deed: East : Vacant Site in Plot No.9 of R. Geetha Devi, South : 6 Feet Road, West : 13 Feet Road, North : Land Belongs to G. Appa Rao. As per Actuals: East : Vacant Plot No.9 of G. Sivamma, South : 6 Feet Way, West : 13 Feet Road, North : Vacant Land of Others.

Reserve Price:Rs.1,21,00,00/- Bid Multiplier Amount: Rs.50,00/-

Date of E-auction: 28-01-2026 Time: 11.00 AM to 4.00 PM

Date & Time of Inspection of property: 29-12-2025 to 27-01-2026 From 10.00 A.M to 04.00 P.M.

### TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF THE E-AUCTION ARE AS UNDER:

1) For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided in State Bank of India, the Secured Creditor's website [www.sbi.co.in/web/sbi-in-the-news/auction-notices](http://www.sbi.co.in/web/sbi-in-the-news/auction-notices). For Registration, EMD, Auction Details etc, visit <https://baanknet.com/euction-psb-x-login> of the service provider : M/s PSB Alliance and M/s. Baanknet, e-Auction Portal: <https://baanknet.com/> & Toll free Number : +91- 6291220220, Mail ID : support.baanknet@psbaliance.com.

2) The purchaser shall bear the applicable stamp duties/ additional stamp duty/ transfer charges, fee etc. and also all the statutory / non-statutory dues, taxes, rates, assessment charges, fees etc.

Note: Interested bidder may deposit Pre-Bid EMD with PSB Alliance before the close of auction. Credit of Pre-bid EMD shall be given to the bidder only after receipt of payment in PSB Alliance's Bank account and update of such information in the e-auction website. This may take some time as per banking process and hence bidders, in their own interest, are advised to submit the pre-bid EMD amount well in advance to avoid any last minute problem.

Note - 2: As per Section 194-IA of the Income Tax Act 1961, TDS @ 1% will be applicable on the sale proceeds where the sale consideration is Rs.50,00,00/- (Rupees fifty lakhs) and above. The successful bidder/purchaser shall deduct the TDS from the sale price / Government guideline value, whichever is higher and deposit the same with the Income Tax Department in Form No. 16-B and submit the original receipt of the TDS Certificate to the Bank. (Applicable for immovable property, other than Agricultural land).

Date: 23-12-2025, Place: VISHAKHAPATNAM Sd/-Authorized Officer, STATE BANK OF INDIA

**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER,  
RAYAGADA (R&B) CIRCLE, RAYAGADA**  
e-mail ID - sepwd\_rgda@yahoo.com, Phone/Fax No - 06856 - 22304  
e-Procurement Notice Bid Identification No. C.C.E (R AND B).  
RGDA- 11/2025-26 (Online) Dt. 20.12.2025

No.2181 Date.20.12.2025

B-883 INVITATION FOR BIDS

1. The Chief Construction Engineer, Rayagada (R&B) Circle, Rayagada on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate bids in double cover mode to be received in online mode only for the construction of works as detailed in the table below:
2. Nature of work : BuildingWork
3. No. of Work : 01 (One) No of work
4. Estimated Cost. (Approximately) : Rs.133.56
5. Bid Cost (Online) : Rs. 10,000/-
6. EMD/ Bid Security Amount (Online) : One Percentage of the Estimated Cost.
7. Class of Contractor : B, A & Special Class only as per Financial Eligibility.
8. Availability of Bid Documents in : 11.00 Hours of Dt.29.12.2025 to 17.00 Hours of Dt. 31.01.2026.
9. Date of opening of Bid : 11.00 hrs of Dt. 31.01.2026.

10. The Bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website: <https://tendersissa.gov.in>. Any Addendum/Corrigendum/cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website. The authority reserves the right to reject any or all bids without assigning any reason thereof.

OIPR-34154/11/0027/256

Sd/- Chief Construction Engineer, Rayagada (R&B) Circle, Rayagada

अदिल भारतीय आयुर्विज्ञन संस्थान (एम्स), भुवनेश्वर  
**ALL INDIA INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENCES (AIIMS), BHUBANESWAR**

(A Statutory body under aegis of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt. of India)

Sijua, Post-Dumuduma, Bhubaneswar (Odisha) - 751019

DEANAC-25012/1/2023-DEAN ACADEMIC/4357 Dated: 26/12/2025

### NOTICE

#### REOPENING OF SENIOR RESIDENT (NON-ACADEMIC) ADVERTISEMENT

Reference: Advertisement No. DEANAC-25012/1/2023-DEAN ACADEMIC-(Part 2)/404 dated 07.11.2025, and Addendum/Corrigendum vide Advertisement No. DEANAC-25012/1/2023-DEAN ACADEMIC/4199 dated 27.11.2025.

1. It is hereby informed that, due to administrative reasons, the above-mentioned advertisement is reopened (23.12.2025) for submission of online applications only through the official website [aiimsbhubaneswar.nic.in](http://aiimsbhubaneswar.nic.in) (Recruitment → Recruitment Notice → Online Recruitment) for a period of 10 (ten) days, i.e. up to 01.01.2026 (11:59 P.M.).

Candidates are advised to visit our website [aiimsbhubaneswar.nic.in](http://aiimsbhubaneswar.nic.in) regularly for latest update.

Any query please contact Academic Section, AIIMS, Bhubaneswar. (Email-ID: acad\_rectt@aiimsbhubaneswar.edu.in)

Sd/-  
REGISTRAR  
AIIMS, Bhubaneswar

**BENGALURU NORTH CITY CORPORATION**

Office of the Executive Engineer, Byatarayanapura Division, Zone-1, No. 2152/20, Defence colony, 9th Main, D Block, Sahakamagara, BNCC Office, Bengal



# EDITORIAL

VISAKHAPATNAM, SATURDAY 27.12.2025

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS



The men the American people  
admire most extravagantly are  
the most daring liars

HL Menken

INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN  
INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

— Ramnath Goenka

## JOB REMAIN BIGGEST CHALLENGE AS ECONOMY CLOSES A MIXED YEAR

IT'S been an unusual year for the Indian economy. If growth surpassed market expectations to settle at 8 percent in the first half of the fiscal, other macro indicators saw a mixed performance. Merchandise exports struggled amid steep US tariffs, while rupee plunged to new lows. The saving grace was that inflation softened and interest rates eased, making credit more affordable to both households and businesses. Even as growth holds up and private demand turns around, the industry remains reluctant to kick-start the much-awaited private investment cycle, thanks to trade uncertainties, a fragmenting global economy reshaped by wars and shifting supply-chain dynamics. Notwithstanding the government's capital expenditure, if private investments and manufacturing activities do not pick up, job creation and wage rise will remain elusive.

The good news amid the prevailing uncertainties is that India's growth forecasts hold promise both for this fiscal and the next. The IMF pegged it above 6.5 percent for each year, citing personal income tax reductions, an accommodative monetary policy, the ongoing GST reforms, and a likely trade deal with the US. But merchandise exports are coursing through a rough patch—not just to the US, but even to ASEAN economies, even though services exports, particularly IT and business-process management, are remaining robust. As if the export shock isn't enough, currency volatility is brewing fresh trouble. The rupee is in a free fall, and the decline isn't just limited against the US dollar but is ending up as a widespread depreciation. For instance, the RBI's index marking changes against 40 odd currencies fell nearly 9.9 percent this year, which means rupee's depreciation is not just a nominal adjustment but an erosion of purchasing power.

Finally, job creation remains one of the toughest challenges for policymakers. Even though India has seen strong economic growth following liberalisation since the 1990s, the employment rate is yet to keep pace with growth. While the unemployment rate fell from 6 percent in 2017-18 to 3.2 percent in 2023-24, according to official data, India needs to create jobs at a much faster clip to accommodate its growing workforce. As the Economic Survey 2024 noted, India must create 7.85 million non-farm jobs annually till 2030; private estimates suggest the need is for about 10 million jobs in the formal sector every year. Undeniably, that will remain the biggest challenge in the new year, too.

## PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF ALL COMMUNITIES

A spate of attacks and disruptions targeting Christmas celebrations and Christian gatherings in some parts of the country has raised serious concerns, coming as it does at a time when the NDA is seeking to engage with the community. Church bodies including the Catholic Bishops Conference of India have spoken out, urging authorities to act decisively to protect believers. They point to more than 1,500 incidents of anti-Christian violence in 2024-25, marking a steep rise over a decade. Many recent cases have been reported from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Chhattisgarh. There is little evidence to suggest these incidents reflect the views of the wider population; they appear to be driven by fringe elements. Rights organisations warn, however, that repeated inaction risks allowing intimidation to harden into a pattern.

The issue has acquired political salience. In Kerala, where assembly polls are due in a few months, the BJP appears uncertain in its approach towards the Christian community, which accounts for about 18 per cent of the population. The Congress, meanwhile, has moved quickly to foreground incidents from BJP-ruled states. Electoral calculations aside, the larger concern is whether governments are responding with the seriousness that threats to public order and religious freedom demand.

At the national level, the BJP leadership has in recent years made visible efforts to reach out to Christian leaders and institutions. Those gestures, however, ring hollow if violence, harassment and disruption of worship are not met with swift and unambiguous action on the ground. Whatever disagreements may exist over religious practice, there can be no justification for preventing a community from observing festivals or creating an atmosphere of fear around places of worship. Law and order is not a matter of interpretation; it is a core responsibility of the state.

Christians constitute a small minority in India despite a presence extending back nearly two millennia. That historical rootedness and their demographic vulnerability place a particular obligation on the State to act without hesitation or bias. Protecting citizens and their right to practise their faith peacefully is not a concession, but a constitutional duty. The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and equal protection of the law. Upholding these guarantees, especially when tested, is essential to preserving the credibility of democratic governance. A clear, firm response is necessary—not to privilege one community, but to reaffirm that intimidation and violence have no place in a constitutional republic.

### QUICK TAKE

#### NOT RISING TO THE OCCASION

A food review is more useful when it advises one to steer clear, because it saves a would-be consumer time, money and probably a pungent belch. But when a celebrated British baker who has opened shop in Mexico City pooh-poohs the proud wheat tradition of the hosts, it's a culture war. After Richard Hart slighted the *tortas* of Mexico, chef Tania Medina retorted, "He wants to be the Christopher Columbus of bread." Maybe Hart didn't stomach the difference between low-starch maize, which has a rich history in the region, and high-fibre wheat. It sounds like a half-baked attempt at attracting heat to make daily bread. Not all that leavens brings in dough.

**R**EIGIME-change operations often stray from the script, particularly when orchestrated violence becomes a policy tool. Bangladesh is fast becoming a classic case. Both the US and Pakistan were aggrieved at Sheikh Hasina's cold-shouldering, independent foreign policy stance and her friendship with India. The current bonhomie between these two countries is, inter alia, an expression of the US's gratitude to Pakistan.

One of the most crucial steps of the regime-change operation in Bangladesh was to install Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus as the head of an unelected interim government. In its 17 months in power, his dysfunctional regime has presided over mob violence, economic decline and growing extortion from business houses. There has been a flight of capital, a steep fall in investment, and a fall in GDP growth from a recent peak of 7.5 percent to below 3 percent.

Undeniably, Hasina's own policy miscalculations contributed to her ouster. Apart from corruption, cronyism and manipulating elections, one crucial error was her coddling of selected hardline Islamic groups and a crackdown on others. Madrasas mushroomed, creating a new generation of indoctrinated youngsters. Many of them are fronting violent mobs today.

In this mix, the arrival of Tarique Rahman, the acting chairman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the eldest son of former PM Khaleda Zia, after 17 years in exile in the UK changes the political matrix before the February 2026 election. It is likely to improve the BNP's chances of winning a majority.

Tarique's return, after acquittal in all cases in which he was convicted, points to a compact with the interim government and Yunus. This compact may have the backing of the regime-change planners, but doubts remain about Tarique's considerable political baggage. Still, India can expect another BNP-Jamaat e Islami (Jei) government emerging from the 2026 elections. Whether it will have a 're-formed' policy agenda with India is the million-taka question.

Tarique will have to navigate pressure from Pakistan and the US. He may find it useful to balance such pressures by improving ties with India. With the Hasina's Awami League banned, it could extend support to the BNP to ensure that the bigger 'devil', the Jei, does not become the bigger partner in a future government.

Meanwhile, the Jei, Bangladesh's largest Islamist organisation, is projecting a moderate image and desperately trying to

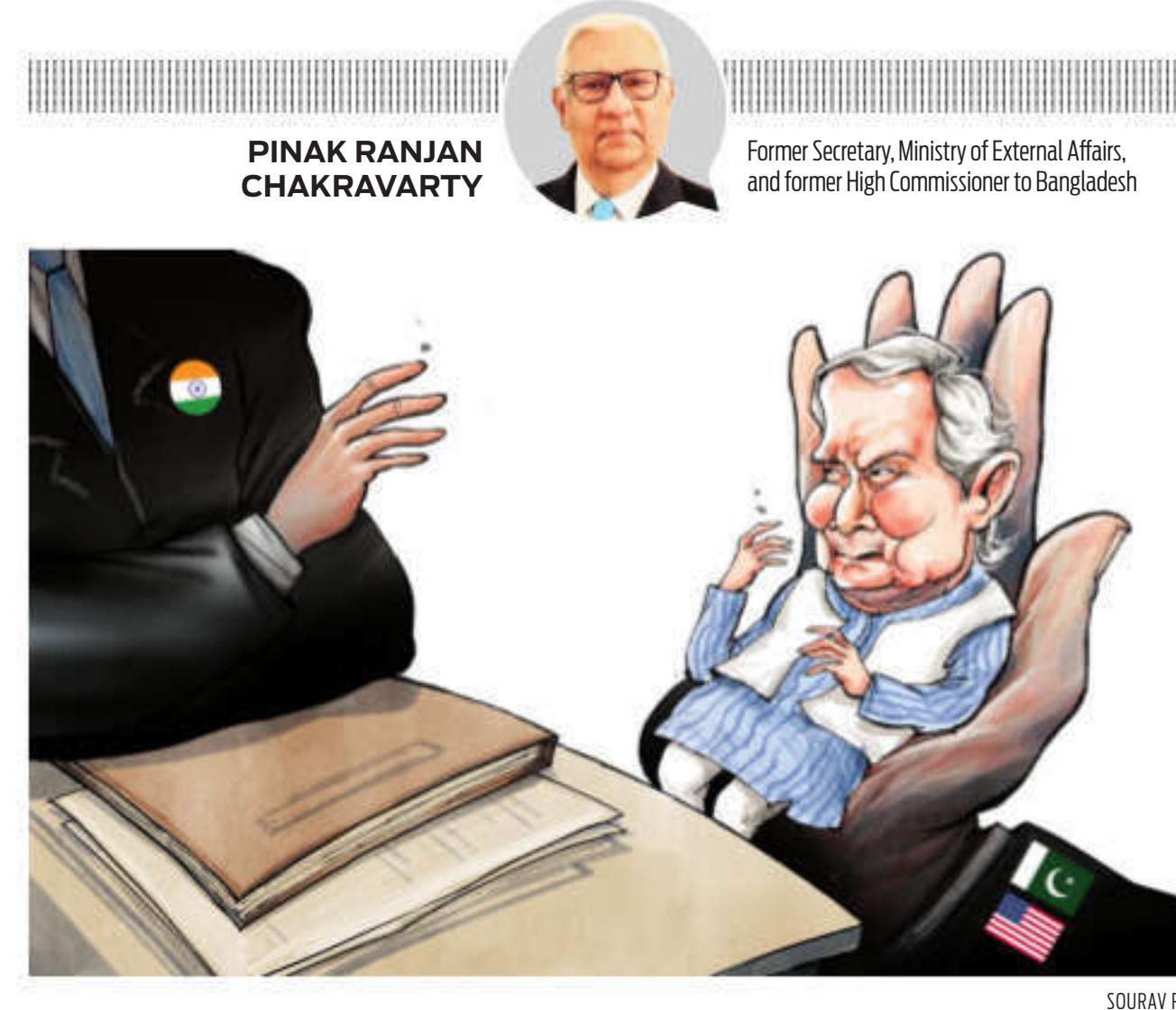
The return of Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman after 17 years in exile points to BNP's compact with the Yunus regime.

Two deaths reveal the alignment of foreign powers

## RETURN OF PRODIGAL SON IN BANGLADESH CHANGES PROSPECTS

PINAK RANJAN CHAKRAVARTY

Former Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs,  
and former High Commissioner to Bangladesh



SOURAV ROY

discard its reputation as the Pakistan army's collaborators during the 1971 war. It remains closely aligned with Pakistan and the US and sees the current situation as its best-ever opportunity to grab power. The National Citizen Party formed by student leaders is also in the fray, though without much prospect.

Anti-Indian rhetoric has risen to new levels. Recently, a student leader threatened to isolate India's northeastern states and provide sanctuary to insurgents from India. It reflects a well-planned effort to fan the flames of a hardened nationalist rhetoric. As a direct conflict with India will be self-destructive, surrogates are being used by these new political players.

The death of young anti-Hasina activist Sharif Osman Hadi, who had founded the cultural platform Inqilab Manch—known for spewing hatred against the Awami

League and India—ignited public opinion. This rabble-rouser was shot in Dhaka and died in Singapore. Dhaka was overrun with people mourning his death. His burial site is significant—next to national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam in the Dhaka University campus, an unprecedented honour.

Social media was flooded with allegations that the alleged killer had fled to India, though police investigation failed to produce any evidence. Such deliberate provocations have led to another round of testy diplomatic exchanges between Delhi and Dhaka. Mobs burned down and looted two leading Bangladeshi newspapers—*Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star*.

Chhayanaut, a leading cultural organisation, suffered the same fate. Islamists appear to have declared war not only on India, but also on their own country's premier institutions and history.

Another mob attacked Dipu Chandra Das, a Hindu garment worker, on the false allegation of blasphemy, snatched him from police custody, beat him to death, hung his lifeless body from a tree and set it on fire. Police investigation confirmed that the deceased had not said anything blasphemous. India called the incident "horrendous" and "barbaric"; Dhaka reacted by saying the killing should not be "conflated with the security of minorities" and that several culprits had been arrested.

Mobs also attacked India's high commission in Dhaka and consulates in Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi and Sylhet, compelling India to temporarily stop issuing visas. India has officially reminded the Yunus government about its international obligation to provide security to India's diplomatic missions. Indian public opinion is inflamed. Meanwhile, Bangladesh has stopped issuing visas to Indians, and India has restarted issuing visas on "humanitarian grounds".

The UN country office, embassies of the US, Germany, France and the EU, and advocacy organisations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International were quick to condole the death of the Inqilab Manch leader. The German embassy went further and flew its flag at half-mast. But the brutal killing of the Hindu garment worker elicited a stunning silence. Meanwhile, faced with backlash, the interim government expressed regret and offered funding to the garment worker's family.

India's neighbourhood challenge is being redefined by events in Bangladesh, hitherto a close political and economic partner. India has adopted strategic restraint so far, taking the long view and hoping that the forthcoming election will lead to political stability and a more productive engagement. There are, however, compelling geopolitical factors may force India to reassess its policy.

A Bangladesh-Pakistan military pact seems to be on the anvil. Unverified reports have surfaced of Pakistan and Turkey's intelligence agencies collaborating to create a "special force" comprising members of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, with the target of using it against India and Myanmar. Indian intelligence agencies view the effort as a low-cost, deplorable tool that can be used for logistics support and narrative warfare.

All these developments have heightened India's security concerns. Bangladesh must realise that rhetoric and geopolitical reality rarely converge on the same page.

(Views are personal)

Full article on [newindianexpress.com](http://newindianexpress.com)

## MAIL BAG

WRITE TO: [letters@newindianexpress.com](mailto:letters@newindianexpress.com)

### Generation gap

Ref: *Tyranny of RWAs* (Dec 26). RWA office bearers, most of them belonging to older generations, fail to align themselves with the changing norms of society and get involved in moral policing. Residents, too, must behave responsibly, maintain decorum and not disturb neighbours. RWAs must learn to sail along with Gen Z. R V Baskaran, Pune

### Missing half

Ref: *The other half of future* (Dec 26). Predictive systems often replicate biases embedded in historical data. As AI is still in its infancy, humans must ensure that their own shortcomings in matters of gender are not coded into it. It's essential to shape gender-neutral institutions, laws and technologies for an inclusive India that fully harnesses the participation of its 'missing half'. Anwesha Mishra, Bhadrak

### United subcontinent

Ref: *United by blood, split by politics* (Dec 26). We can't turn a blind eye to the happenings in Bangladesh. But it's nonsensical to think of direct warlike action against a sovereign neighbour to protect Hindus there. All parties keep society polarised to reap political gains. In the subcontinent, one can espouse that all inhabitants are united by blood. Jitendranath Guru, Padampur

### Highway tragedy

Ref: *Six dead in bus-truck collision* (Dec 25). The tragic road accident has deeply saddened the local community. In recent days, traffic along this route has increased significantly, and concerns are being raised that long-distance driving fatigue, lack of rest and overspeeding may be contributing to the growing risk of such accidents. It's a stark reminder for the authorities to strengthen safety measures and spread awareness. Darshan Yadav, Sirsa

### Protect wildlife

Ref: *Poachers kill three blackbucks near Chikmagaluru* (Dec 25). The killings are deeply disturbing. Allegations of negligence by forest officials and a hurried investigation demand a transparent, high-level inquiry. Blackbucks are a protected species, and such incidents pose a grave threat to biodiversity. The government must strictly enforce wildlife laws, and hold offenders and errant officials accountable. Umme Haani, Bengaluru

## RESIZING AMERICA'S SENSE OF SELF

KAJAL BASU

Veteran journalist

then by the DoJ releasing the records—only to begin massively redacting them from its website within hours of release, especially for documentation to do with Trump.

In the interstices of this stormy diminution of ratings and the public outcry against the harm done by presidential duplicity to juvenile-focused familyism—one of the foundations of American society—other self-critiques began doing the rounds. Trump has always trumpeted his height as 6'3".

This steadily declining graph is a reliable mirror to America's glissading sense of self under the Trump presidency. Trump has been promising big and delivering small. The Epstein files fiasco is a case in point. One of Trump's presidential election planks was the unconditional release of the entire, unredacted Epstein files. In January, Trump reiterated his promise. In February, his attorney general Pam Bondi told an interviewer that an Epstein "client list" was on her desk. The department of justice (DoJ) ostentatiously sent "declassified" dossiers to far-right influencers—but it was material already done since November 3.

On February 21, Trump's ratings fell to 45 percent. A month later, they were down to 43 percent. On April 25, Virginia Giuffre, one of the early Epstein accusers, died by suicide—and between then and May 18, his ratings plateaued. Giuffre's death forced his ratings further down to 40 percent on June 19, two weeks before the DoJ denied that Epstein maintained a "client list" at all, and that it wouldn't release any more files. On July 21, Trump's ratings plummeted to 37 percent.

On October 1, Trump hit a relative high of 40 percent, until Giuffre's posthumous memoir, published on October 19, clubbed the ratings down to 37 percent. They slid further to 36 percent on November 3, where they remained until last declared on December 1.

Meanwhile, the Trump dispensation doubled down on halting the skid, first by releasing emails sent between Epstein and others, then by the Congress passing and Trump signing into law the Epstein Files Transparency Act, and

then by the DoJ releasing the records—only to begin massively redacting them from its website within hours of release, especially for documentation to do with Trump.

On December 13, following a trip to Japan, Trump spoke positively about "really cute" kei cars, asking, "How would that do in this country?" It sent the bellwether US automobile industry, predicated on design and factory largeness, into a lather. On December 22, he went big, announcing the commissioning of a new series of ginormous "Trump class" battleships.

Things are changing in America, but, as a March 2020 report by the University of Georgia pointed out, "Americans who do change tend to report a lower sense of well-being." I wonder if this is going to end well.

(Views are personal)  
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THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

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Shashi Tharoor @ShashiTharoor  
Remembering #DrManmohanSingh on the first anniversary of his passing. I dedicated my most recent book, #OurLivingConstitution, to him in tribute.



Akhilesh Yadav @yadavakhilesh  
When the gathering of loved ones is adorned, sir, you become gracious, and to others, you issue the decree of a warning.

Devendra Fadnavis @Dev\_Fadnavis  
Sacrifice of the 10th Guru of Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, and his family is an unparalleled example of humanity, faith, and courage in the history of our nation and world.

# Zero tolerance on terror: Shah

At NIA meet, home minister bats for national platform where different agencies share ideas

MUKESH RANJAN @ New Delhi

UNION Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday inaugurated a two-day Counter-Terrorism Conference organised by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), as he said that terrorism is the biggest threat to humanity and everyone must work together to defeat it. He went on to add that such a conference acts as a national platform where different agencies share ideas and strategies to prepare effective plans to eliminate terrorism.

The minister, during the inaugural session, also unveiled the NIA's updated crime manual - Organised Crime Network Database and Lost/Looted and Recovered Weapon Database.

In his address, the Home Minister said, "Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'zero tolerance' against terrorism, this annual conference has become a platform to deal with emerging threats."

The minister noted that in the last three years, "we have moved forward in the direction of making this conference an annual tradition, and it is not merely a forum for discussion, but actionable points emerge from here, and the NIA, along with all related agencies of the states, continuously work throughout the year towards their implementation."



## Landscape of terrorism in world has been changing

Noting that the landscape of terrorism in the world has been changing due to the use of technology in terrorist incidents alongside technological advancements, Union home minister Amit Shah said, "We too must prepare to prevent this by anticipating invisible future challenges and counter them."

"As a result, we are succeeding in building a strong anti-terrorism grid across the country. The objective of this conference is also to analyse all terrorist incidents that occurred in the country and the world in the past year, along with the intelligence received about them, and to enhance our counter-terrorism capabilities accordingly," Shah said.

Noting that the landscape of terrorism in the world has been changing due to the use of technology in terrorist incidents

alongside technological advancements, the minister said, "We too must prepare to prevent this by anticipating invisible future challenges and counter them."

Speaking about the three new initiatives being launched at the event, Shah said, "The updated crime manual prepared by the NIA was released today. I request all the Director Generals of Police from the states to form a team in their respective states and ensure that they study this manual for

investigation and prosecution purposes."

During the conference last year, there was a consensus among various central and state agencies and police forces on the need for stronger collaborative efforts backed by a standardised strategy to combat the menace of terrorism, particularly with respect to cybercrime and financial terrorism.

The Home Minister said that a database on organised crime networks has also been released and noted that they initially operate for the purpose of ransom and extortion, but when their leaders flee abroad and settle there, they automatically come into contact with terrorist organisations and then use the proceeds from ransom and extortion to spread terrorism within the country.

The conference was attended by Union Ministers of State for Home Affairs Nitin Gadkari, Nirmala Sitharaman, and Bandaru Dattatreya, the Union Home Secretary, the Secretary of counterinsurgency R&AW, the Director General of NIA and many other dignitaries.

The conference is being attended by senior police officers from states/UTs, officers from central agencies/departments dealing with issues related to counterterrorism and experts from related fields such as law, forensics and technology.

MAYANK SINGH @ New Delhi

THE Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) on Friday extended the Emergency Procurement (EP) mechanism, aimed at strengthening operational preparedness.

Sources confirmed that "The scheduled DAC meeting on Friday took up the sole case of Emergency Procurement (EP) and was postponed to be held soon, and will be taking up important procurement projects."

The EP provision was introduced following the May 2020 standoff with the Chinese PLA. It empowers authorities in cases of urgent or operationally immediate military necessity linked to preparedness for contingencies such as war or war-like situations, natural calamities and similar emergencies.

The core objective of delegating these powers is to fast-track the procurement or repair of equipment, items, materials, and stores, as well as the provisioning of urgently required services for the successful conduct of operations.

The Competent Financial Authority (CFA) for Emergency Procurement (Capital) up to ₹300 crore rests with the Vice Chiefs of Staff of the three services — the Army, Navy and Air Force.

The defence budget allocated

## FAST-TRACKING PROCESS

### WHAT IS EMERGENCY PROCUREMENT (EP)?

Fast-track procurement for urgent operational needs

Triggered during war, war-like situations, or emergencies

Introduced after 2020 India-China standoff



completed

Capital outlay is intended for the acquisition of new systems and equipment, as well as the creation of military infrastructure. Allocations to the armed forces under revenue expenditure (excluding salaries) are intended to meet sustainment needs and operational commitments.

The Defence Acquisition Council which is usually chaired by the Defence Minister, is the highest decision-making body for defence policy and capital procurement, and its approval of an Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) marks the first step in the acquisition process.

# Plan to double originating train capacity in 48 cities

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi



IN a first-of-its-kind initiative amid sustained growth in passenger travel demand, the Ministry of Railways has decided to expand coaching terminals and enhance sectional and operational capacities in a planned manner over the next five years.

The objective is to meet emerging and projected travel demand by 2030 across 48 major cities in the country. After extensive deliberations covering all aspects, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has accorded priority to this long-pending requirement, setting a deadline for completion by 2030. The initiative aims to significantly ease congestion at busy stations that witness heavy footfalls of originating and terminating passengers.

"We are expanding coaching terminals, enhancing sectional and operational capacities in various cities to meet rising passenger demand and reduce congestions", Railway minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Friday. Under this mega plan, the railways intend to double train-handling capacity in 48 major cities over the next five years. Short- and medium-term meas-

ures proposed by railway zones will contribute to the required capacity addition, particularly at high-density stations.

The plan includes major infrastructure upgrades such as construction of additional platforms and terminals in and around urban areas, along with multi-functional facilities to handle new originating trains. Cities identified for these developments include Mumbai, Hyderabad, Jodhpur, Bangalore, Kolkata, Delhi, Pune, Chennai, Gaya, Patna, Puri, Jammu and several others.

Existing infrastructure will be augmented to meet future requirements through the creation of additional platforms, stabling lines, pit lines and adequate shunting facilities.

As part of the effort to double

the number of originating trains, the railways will identify and develop new terminals in and around urban centres, supported by maintenance facilities. A critical component of the plan involves increasing sectional capacity through traffic facility works, signalling upgrades and multi-tracking, which will be essential to manage higher train volumes at key locations.

For instance, in Pune, Hadapsar, Khadki and Alandi have been identified for capacity enhancement, alongside additional platforms and stabling lines at Pune station. Following the Railway Minister's directive, a comprehensive, city-wise plan for all 48 major cities is under consideration, covering works that are planned, proposed or already sanctioned to achieve the target of doubling train-handling capacity within a defined timeframe.

The cities included in the plan are Delhi, Mumbai (CR, WR), Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Patna, Lucknow, Pune, Nagpur, Varanasi among others. Notably, a majority of these stations experience consistently high footfalls due to pilgrimage traffic throughout the year.

Smaller airlines face the challenges of finances, aircraft leasing, pilot availability, sus-

tainability, and competitive fares, he said. "The government needs to bring fuel under GST and give subsidies to encourage big corporate houses to enter aviation with a big bang to break the existing duopoly," he added.

Randhawa is of the opinion that regional airlines only increase regional connectivity and the government needs to change its outlook for the sector to change. "There is an urgent need for the government to relook at the aviation policies of the country," he said.

An Airline Pilots Association of India representative told this newspaper that the new airlines cannot have big aircraft to disturb the existing market share pattern. "IndiGo presently has 434 aircraft, and it took them two decades to

reach this position. The new airlines need to lease A320 aircraft only from it. Orders placed at Boeing by Air India for the 737s are getting delayed. It will take the new airlines at least two decades to reach the position of these airlines," the source said. SpiceJet and Aksa Air have been around for some time, but they have between 20 and 30 aircraft and cannot match up to IndiGo and Air India, he added.

However, Captain G R Gopinath, who pioneered the low-cost airline concept in the country through Air Deccan, seemed positive about the move. He said, "Permitting new airlines to operate is good for the country, as the industry will become more vibrant. The public stand to benefit, as the prices will be kept under check. Airlines will

become more effective and service-minded. It is good that the government is doing it and it will benefit all."

Aviation expert Captain Mohan Ranganathan gave zero chances of the new airlines offering any competition. "Where are the captains? The title of a 1971 Robert Stirling novel 'She'll Never Get off the Ground' is apt to describe their situation," he said.

Earlier, Alhind CEO Reena Abdul Rahim told this newspaper that the Thiruvananthapuram-Kochi-Kozhikode sector was its priority and to facilitate this, the company had started a base in Kochi airport as early as August 2024. Alhind Air will begin its operations with two ATR 72-600 aircraft, with plans to scale up to seven within the first year.

# Bravery awards for 9-yr-old, 11-yr-old posthumously

KAVITA BAJELI-DUTT @ New Delhi



NINE-YEAR-OLD Vyoma Priya lost her life while trying to save a six-year-old during an electrical accident in their gated community park in Tamil Nadu's Coimbatore. Kamlesh Kumar, an 11-year-old, died while bravely attempting to save another child in the Durgawati river near Jaipur village in Bihar's Kaimur district.

The two were among the 20 young boys and girls who were conferred with the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar 2025 by President Droupadi Murmu on Friday.

Lauding the award-winning children for bringing "pride to their families, communities, and the entire country," the President said, "The greatness of a country is certain when its children are filled with patriotism and high ideals."

Remembering the brave deeds of the two children who were awarded posthumously, she said, "Nine-year-old daughter Vyoma Priya and 11-year-old brave son Kamlesh Kumar lost their lives while saving the lives of others with their courage."

The President also conferred the awards in six categories—bravery, art and culture, environment, social service, science and technology and sports.

and motivating his family and community to support the Army, despite constant threats from hostile drones.

"Shravan Singh, amidst the risks associated with war during Operation Sindoora, regularly delivered water, milk, and lassi to the Indian soldiers stationed at the border near his home. Whereas, the differently-abled daughter Shivani Hosuru Uppara has achieved extraordi-

nary accomplishments in the world of sports, overcoming economic and physical limitations," she said.

"It is because of talented children such as the seven-year-old Vaka Lakshmi Pragnika that India is considered a chess powerhouse on the world stage. Ajay Raj and Mohammed Sidan P, who saved the lives of others with their bravery and intelligence, deserve the praise they receive," she said.

"Vaibhav Suryavanshi has made a name for himself in the highly competitive and talent-filled world of cricket and has set many records," she added.

Among those the President mentioned was Muhammed Sidan P, an 11-year-old Class 6 student from Palakkad, Kerala. He saved his two friends from electrocution while they waited for their school bus.

Talking about the Veer Bal Diwas, the president said that about 320 years ago, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Sikh Guru, and his four sons had made the "supreme sacrifices" while fighting for truth and justice.

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY  
@ New Delhi

CHIEF Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant said on Friday that he envisions a transition towards a multi-door courthouse where the court is a comprehensive centre for dispute resolution and not merely a place for trial.

Addressing a conference on 'Mediation: How significant in the present-day context', organised by the India International University of Legal Education and Research (IIULER) in South Goa, Justice Kant said mediation is increasingly being accepted as a successful, cost-effective and win-win settlement for both litigating parties. "Mediation is not a sign of the law's weakness, but rather its highest evolution. It is a true transition from a culture of adjudication to a culture of participation where we cultivate harmony," he said.

The CJI, however, said that though he is an advocate of me-

diation, it does not mean that cases coming up before courts will be mechanically referred to mediation. "There is an internal exercise carried out by a team of experts who identify whether a case is suitable for settlement through mediation. Only such matters are referred to mediation," he said.

The CJI also clarified that courts are prepared to adjudicate disputes on merit when mediation does not succeed. "We have to be mentally prepared that where mediation does not succeed, the matter

has to come back to court. We do not shy away from our responsibilities," the CJI said.

He said that the success of mediation lies in the mediator's ability to speak not only the local or regional language, but also the dialect, expressions, and cultural idiom of the person for whom the mediation is being conducted.

Asserting the need for mediation training, he said there are 39,000 trained mediators, but there is a gap in demand and supply. Justice Kant emphasised the need for a larger number of mediators from district courts to the apex court. For effective implementation of mediation at all levels, the country needs more than 25,000 trained mediators, said the CJI.

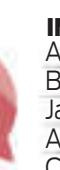
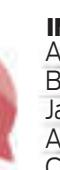
The campaign 'Mediation for Nation' was launched in July this year to cut judicial pendency by resolving several kinds of disputes, including matrimonial, commercial and motor accidents, he said.



CM Hemant Soren said protection of tribal self-governance, dignity and cultural heritage is his government's priority, on Friday. The PESA law, which strengthens their rights, pride, and self-governance will prove to be a milestone, he added.

16  
DETAINED

FROM DRUG HOTSPOTS  
IN J&K DISTRICT



INDIA	Max	Min	Max	Min
Ahmedabad	41	25	Mumbai	34
Bhopal	37	22	Panaji	34
Jaipur	38	24	Patna	38
Amritsar	33	18	Lucknow	38
Chennai	32	28	Port Blair	28
Kolkata	36	28	Imphal	29
Srinagar	21	07	Chandigarh	34

● Second case within days of another murder ● Youths seek govt's help for rescue ● Accused drew ₹16 lakh salary from state for 10 years

## Indian student shot dead near Toronto varsity

HARPREET BAJWA @Chandigarh

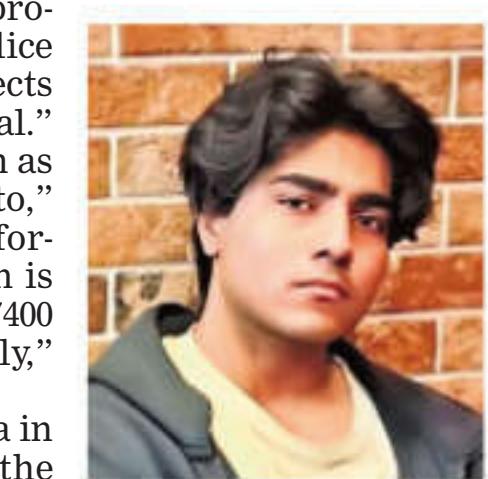
A 20-year-old Indian student was shot dead near the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus, prompting Canadian police to seek public help in finding the suspect. The victim has been identified as Shivank Avasthi, a doctoral student, who was found with a gunshot wound on Tuesday. Police said the incident marked Toronto's 41st homicide of the year.

In a statement, the Toronto Police Service said, "On Tuesday, December 23, 2025, at approximately 3:34 p.m., police responded to a call for an Unknown Trouble in the Highland Creek Trail and Old Kingston Road area. Officers located a male victim with a gunshot wound, and he was pronounced deceased on scene." Police added that "the suspect or suspects fled the area prior to police arrival." Authorities confirmed the victim as "Shivank Avasthi, 20, of Toronto," and urged witnesses to come forward. "Anyone with information is asked to contact police at 416-808-7400 or Crime Stoppers anonymously," the statement said.

The Consulate General of India in Toronto expressed grief over the death and said it is supporting the family. In a post on X, it said, "We express anguish over the tragic death of a young Indian doctoral student, Mr. Shivank Avasthi, in a fatal shooting incident near the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus." It added that officials are "extending all necessary assistance in coordination with the local authorities."

Avasthi was also a member of the University of Toronto Scarborough cheerleading team. Paying tribute on Instagram, the team wrote, "We are saddened and in shock by the sudden loss of a beloved Maroon." Remembering his energy, the post said, "He brought a smile to anyone's face, and he will always be part of our UTSC Cheer family."

The killing comes days after another Indian national, 30-year-old Himanshi Khurana, was found murdered in Toronto, raising renewed concerns within the community there.



25 Lalu MLAs in touch with BJP: Minister

RAMASHANKAR @Patna

A fresh political slugfest erupted in Bihar after a senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and state agriculture minister, Ram Kripal Yadav, on Friday claimed that all 25 MLAs of the opposition Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) were in contact with his party.

Yadav, once a trusted aide of RJD chief Laloo Prasad, claimed that RJD MLAs could join his party at any given time. "RJD leader Tejashwi Prasad Yadav's party is finished. He will be out for a duck," he claimed.

Mocking Tejashwi's foreign trip, Yadav alleged that Tejashwi was ashamed of facing people after his party's humiliating defeat in the recently concluded assembly election.

"I am saying with all seriousness, all 25 of his MLAs are in touch with our party. They can join BJP at any time. Take care of your party, there is nothing left," he remarked while addressing Tejashwi, who was the chief ministerial face of the INDIA bloc in the recently concluded Bihar assembly election.

The state BJP leadership, according to him, was forced to compromise on the issue. "Earlier, Shinde's Shiv Sena de-

BJP says ready to contest 140 seats, leaves 78 for Shinde Sena in BMC polls

SUDHIR SURYAWANSI @Mumbai

IN view of the alliance of Thackeray brothers, the BJP has decided to compromise with deputy chief minister Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena faction by offering it 78 seats for the 227-member Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) election, keeping 140 seats for itself. The election is scheduled for January 15 next year.

Sources in the BJP claimed that the BJP had planned to contest all the 227 seats on its own but the party's national leadership felt that it could alienate the Marathi vote base. "Our top leadership in Delhi did not want to take any chance, because the decision to go solo might have sent a wrong message to the Marathi voters.

"We are confident of the consolidation of the BJP's core vote base of Gujaratis, Marwaris, and north Indians. The upper caste Marathi, like Brahmins, does vote for us, but we need lower caste Marathis as well. Here Shinde's Sena plays a role," he said.

Sources added that deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar has been asked to contest separately and concentrate in area where minority voters can influence the outcome, "so that they do not shift to the Congress and Uddhav Thackeray".

The BJP has also decided to accommodate Union minister Ramdas Athwale's Republican Party of India (Athwale) from its quota of 140 seats.



Pilot joins Aravalli protests, Raj Cong plans to step up offensive with march

RAJESH ASNANI @ Jaipur

DESPITE the Centre's claim that no fresh mining leases will be issued in the Aravallis, the political fight over the fragile range is growing sharper in Rajasthan. On Friday, NSUI took out a large march in Jaipur, drawing thousands of students and activists.

Congress general secretary Sachin Pilot joined the protest, saying the Aravallis are "not just hills, but Rajasthan's natural shield". His son, Arhaan Pilot, made his first appearance at a political protest, adding symbolic weight.

The Congress plans to carry the agitation to Alwar on Saturday through a public awareness march led by Bhanwar Jitendra Singh, Govind Singh Dotsara, Tikaram Jolly, and Pawan Khera. Former chief minister Ashok Gehlot has also kept the issue alive online, warning that



"silence today will cost generations tomorrow."

The controversy deepened after a petition to the President objected to defining the Aravallis only as hills above 100 metres. Congress leader Charmesh Sharma argued the yardstick "ignores ecology and rewards destruction", while a complaint was also sent to the NHRC.

Congress leaders admit that earlier protests on MNREGA

## Cyber fraudsters in Myanmar trap 100 from Gujarat

DILIP SINGH KSHATRIYA @Ahmedabad

A dream of foreign jobs has turned into a nightmare for more than 100 youths from Gujarat who are trapped in a cyber-scam in Myanmar. Lured by fake data-entry offers, they say they are hiding in fear, broke and desperate, and pleading with the Indian government to bring them home.

Most of the youths are from Vadodara district, including Savli and Desar talukas. Agents promised easy work, good pay, and a better future abroad. The promise collapsed the moment they landed. Instead of offices, they allege they were locked in compounds and pushed into illegal cybercrime. Those who refused were threatened and forced to work for 14 to 18 hours a day.

Their plight became public after a video appeal went viral. In the clip, tired young men ask the Government of India and the Ministry of External Affairs for urgent rescue. They claim they have spent nearly 20 days in "hell-like conditions," hiding in a small safe house in Myanmar's Maya Wadi area, with little money, weak phone batteries, and fading hope.

Kunjan Shah from Sandhasal village shared the reality in an audio message. "We were called here in the name of a job," he said. "We were forced to work illegally for 14 to 18 hours. We escaped when we got a chance. Now we have no money, no balance, and no support."

Fear grew after Ahmedabad Crime Branch busted a similar Myanmar racket. Realising the danger, the youths fled captivity. They say Myanmar authorities cleared their immigration, but no Indian help has reached them. Back home, Kunjan's parents broke down. "We don't want money," they said. "We just want our son back." On Friday, Savli MLA Ketan Inamdar wrote to the Prime Minister, Home Minister, and External Affairs Minister, urging immediate action. Families across Gujarat now wait, asking one question: when will their sons return?



## UK-based UP preacher booked over Pak links

NAMITA BAJPAI @ Lucknow

THE Enforcement Directorate has opened a money laundering case against Maulana Shamsul Huda Khan, a UK-based Islamic preacher from UP, after an FIR by the Anti-Terrorist Squad flagged alleged radical links and suspicious foreign funding. Khan, a native of Azamgarh, was appointed an assistant teacher in a government-aided madrasa in 1984 but left India in 2007, later settling in the UK and acquiring British citizenship by 2013. Despite living abroad, he allegedly continued to draw a salary for nearly a decade, earning around ₹16 lakh, and later secured voluntary retirement with full benefits in 2017.

Investigators say he "fraudulently availed medical leave, updated service records, and remained on paper a serving employee" while overseas.

ED sources claim Khan amassed properties worth ₹33 crore in Sant Kabir Nagar and deposited about ₹5 crore in cash from "suspicious entities". Multiple FIRs have been registered under cheating, forgery, FEMA provisions, and charges including concealment of foreign citizenship and waging war against India.

An ATS report dated March 25, 2025, alleges he travelled frequently to Pakistan for "dawah-related activities" and maintained links with clerics and organisations in Lahore, Karachi, and Rawalpindi. The probe also flags interactions with separatist-leaning individuals in Jammu and Kashmir and attempts to build ideological influence in eastern Uttar Pradesh after 2017.

Post-return, Khan established a girls' madrasa in Khalilabad and floated two NGOs, which allegedly received foreign donations. Authorities sealed his madrasa campuses this year over financial irregularities, suspecting them to be "operational nodes for foreign fund inflows". The government suspended four officials from the Minority Welfare Department, calling the case "one of the most extraordinary instances of administrative collusion and systemic breakdown".



### Rise of another son in SAD politics likely

Anantveer Singh Badal, son of Shiromani Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal, was seen campaigning in Lambi seat for zila parishad and block samiti polls. A graduate in economics, he moved in a cavalcade, meeting youngsters, touching elders' feet and posing for photographs. Party's old timers accompanying him claimed that the young Badal might be launched into politics from traditional family seat. This came days after Sukhbir declared that he would contest 2027 assembly polls from Giddarbaha. He had also hinted at his son joining politics soon. Lambi was represented by Parkash Singh Badal for five straight terms before losing in 2022.

### Haryana set to get new DGP on January 1

Haryana is set to get a new DGP on January 1, as the officiating incumbent OP Singh retires on December 31. The UPSC prepares a panel of three IPS officers and sends it to the state government for selecting the DGP. On December 16, the state sent the records of five officers -- Shatrjeet Kapur (1990 batch), SK Jain (1991 batch), Ajay Singh (1992 batch), Alok Mittal and Arshinder Chawla (both of 1993 batch). The UPSC has sought the status of the FIR in which former DGP Kapur is named. Kapur was divested of the DGP post on December 14 after his name figured in former IGP Y Puran Kumar's suicide note.



## SIR done in UP, 19% voters may be deleted from rolls

NAMITA BAJPAI @ Lucknow

AS the deadline for Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the voter list in Uttar Pradesh ended on Friday, the details of 2.89 crore voters couldn't be collected. The SIR deadline had been extended twice earlier but was not extended a third time.

Now the work of filling and submitting enumeration forms has been completed. Currently, there are 15.44 crore names in the voter list, and out of these, 2.89 crore (approx. 19%) names are likely to be deleted.

According to sources, among the 2.89 crore voters whose names will be deleted, 1.26 crore have migrated, 46 lakh are deceased, 23.70 lakh are duplicates, 83.73 lakh are absent, and 9.57 lakh are from other categories. UP's Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa said that the draft voter list would be released on December 31, 2025.

Claims and objections on the draft voter list would be accepted from December 31 to January 30, 2026.

Meanwhile, from December 31 till February 21, 2026, decisions on enumeration forms and disposal of claims and ob-



### Mapping of 2003 voters' list also completed

The work of mapping the voters list of 2003 with the current voter list has also been completed. About 91 per cent of people included in the current voter list from the 2003 voter list have been matched. Now notices will be sent by the Election Commission to only nine per cent of people, which forms about 1.11 crore people.

jections would be done during the notice phase. Then the final voter list will be released on February 28, 2026.

It may be recalled that the Election Commission of India had extended the SIR deadline on December 11 for the second time by two weeks to December 26, 2025.

Not only this, but the work of mapping the voters list of 2003 with the current voter list has also been completed. About 91 per cent of people included in the current voter list from the 2003 voter list have been matched. Such voters have been matched by their own names, parents, grandparents or ma-

ternal grandparents' names.

Now notices will be sent by the Election Commission to only nine per cent of people, which forms about 1.11 crore people.

They will have to provide documents to the Commission as proof of being voters.

Currently, all necessary measures are being taken for publication of the clean voter list. All district DMs have been ordered to release the draft voter list with full caution. Full transparency should also be maintained in the disposal of claims and objections going forward.

According to sources, among the 2.89 crore voters whose names will be deleted, 1.26 crore have migrated, 46 lakh are deceased, 23.70 lakh are duplicates, 83.73 lakh are absent, and 9.57 lakh are from other categories. UP's Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa said that the draft voter list would be released on December 31, 2025.

Claims and objections on the draft voter list would be accepted from December 31 to January 30, 2026.

Meanwhile, from December 31 till February 21, 2026, decisions on enumeration forms and disposal of claims and ob-

jections would be done during the notice phase. Then the final voter list will be released on February 28, 2026.

It may be recalled that the Election Commission of India had extended the SIR deadline on December 11 for the second time by two weeks to December 26, 2025.

Not only this, but the work of mapping the voters list of 2003 with the current voter list has also been completed. About 91 per cent of people included in the current voter list from the 2003 voter list have been matched. Such voters have been matched by their own names, parents, grandparents or ma-

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Now notices will be sent by the Election Commission to only nine per cent of people, which forms about 1.11 crore people.

They will have to provide documents to the Commission as proof of being voters.

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6 dead

and 21 wounded in mosque bombing in Syria

LR: Light Rain • HR: Heavy Rain • LS: Light Snow • SNY: Sunny

TDS: Thundershower • LC: Light Cloud • SNY: Sunny



Beijing	29	19	SNY	Los Angeles	20	12	SNY
Colombo	29	23	TDS	Melbourne	17	5	LC
Dhaka	27	16	TDS	Moscow	4	2	SNY
Dubai	26	22	SNY	New York	2	-3	SNY
Houston	30	23	TDS	Singapore	27	25	TDS
Istanbul	33	21	SNY	Toronto	-6	-8	SNY
London	12	8	SNY	Washington	3	-2	SNY

# US launches missiles at Islamic State targets in northern Nigeria

Strikes come after Nigerian government provided intelligence on terrorist whereabouts

## LAGOS

NIGERIA on Friday signalled that more strikes against jihadist groups were expected after a Christmas Day bombardment by US forces against militants in the north of the country, which it said was a joint operation with its military.

The west African country faces multiple interlinked security crises, with jihadists waging an insurgency in the northeast since 2009 and armed "bandit" gangs raiding villages and staging kidnappings in the northwest.

The strikes came after Abuja and Washington were locked in a diplomatic dispute over what US President Donald Trump has characterised as the mass killing of Christians amid Nigeria's myriad armed

conflicts. A Pentagon official told AFP that "the Department of War worked with the government of Nigeria to carry out these strikes" and that they "were approved by the government of Nigeria", without saying whether Nigeria's military had been involved.

US defence officials later posted a video of what appeared to be a nighttime missile launch from the deck of a battleship flying the US flag.

Meanwhile, Nigeria's military said in a statement that its forces, "in conjunction with the United States", had conducted "precision strike operations".

Both countries said the strikes targeted militants linked to the Islamic State group, without providing details. Washington's framing of the violence in Nigeria as



A missile being launched from a US warship on Thursday

saying he was on the phone with US State Secretary Marco Rubio ahead of the bombardment.

Asked if there would be more strikes, Tuggar said: "It is an ongoing thing, and we are working with the US. We are working with other countries as well." The Department of Defense's US Africa Command said "multiple ISIS terrorists" were killed in an attack in the northwestern state of Sokoto.

Residents in the far-flung villages of that state told AFP they were shocked by the blasts. The strikes hit multiple locations, including a town that residents said was not a militant stronghold.

Which of Nigeria's myriad, and well-documented, armed groups were targeted remains unclear.

AFP

## Indian origin man dies in Canada after 8-hour wait for treatment in hospital

### TORONTO

A 44-year-old Indian-origin man has died of suspected cardiac arrest after waiting for more than eight hours for treatment in a Canadian hospital's emergency room area, a media report has said.

Prashant Sreekumar began experiencing severe chest pains while at work on December 22, *Global News* reported on Wednesday.

A client drove him to the Grey Nuns Hospital in southeast Edmonton, where Prashant

was checked in at triage and then took a seat in the waiting room.

His father, Kumar Sreekumar, soon arrived. He told me, "Papa, I cannot bear the pain," Kumar said. Kumar said his son told him and hospital staff the pain was a 15 out of 10. They did an electrocardiogram (ECG) on him to check his heart's function, but the family said Prashant was told there was nothing of significance and to keep waiting.

Staff also offered Prashant some Tylenol for his pain. He waited, and waited some more. Kumar said as time passed, nurses would check Prashant's BP.

"It went up, up, and up. To me, it was through the roof." Eight hours went by before Prashant was called to treatment area.

"After sitting maybe 10 seconds, he looked at me, he got up and put his hand on his chest and just crashed," Kumar said.

PTI

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman on Friday visited the grave of his father and Bangladesh's former president Ziaur Rahman in Dhaka, a day after he returned home from self-exile in the UK.

Rahman reached Zia Udayan in a red-and-green bulletproof bus and paid floral tributes at the grave, offering 'dua' and 'munajat' for the eternal peace of his father's soul, news portal *bangla.dailysun.com* reported.

The 60-year-old Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader returned to the country on Thursday after over 17 years. He has been living in London since 2008. This is the first time in almost 19 years that Rahman has paid tribute at his father's grave, *tbsnews.net* reported.

The last time he did so was on September 1, 2006, when he was serving as BNP's Senior Joint Secretary General, marking the party's founding anniversary, it said.

BNP founder Ziaur Rahman was a Bangladeshi military officer who served as the sixth president of Bangladesh from 1977 until his assassination in 1981. He retired from the army in 1978 with the rank of lieutenant general. Rahman stood before the grave with visible emotion and offered fataha. He was seen wiping tears with a handkerchief, *The Daily Star* newspaper reported.

Though the distance between Rahman's Gulshan residence and Zia Udayan is only 8 km, it took him one hour and 51 minutes to reach the grave due to the massive presence of party leaders and workers, who lined both sides of the road, making the route narrow.

### THAILAND

#### RARE WILD CAT SPOTTED AFTER 30 YEARS

An elusive wild cat long feared extinct in Thailand has been rediscovered three decades after the last recorded sighting, conservation authorities and an NGO said Friday. Flat-headed cats are among the world's rarest and most threatened wild felines. Their range is limited to Southeast Asia and they are endangered because of dwindling habitat. The domestic cat-sized feline with its distinctive round and close-set eyes was last spotted in 1995. But an ecological survey that began last year in Princess Sirindhorn Wildlife Sanctuary, recorded 29 detections.



#### OVER 20 HOUSES HIT BY FLASH FLOOD

More than 20 houses were flooded in Lorong Pulai Raya 4, Simpang Pulai, after two and a half hours of relentless heavy rain on Thursday night, *The Malaysia Star* reported.

"The road was submerged and impassable. The cause of the flooding was a blocked drainage system due to a new housing project," a statement said.

### SINGAPORE

#### 6 LINKED TO 45 SCAM CASES ARRESTED

Six people, aged between 19 and 34, have been arrested over their suspected involvement in scams as money mules, *The Straits Times* reported on Friday. A further 13 individuals, aged 17 to 60, are being investigated for similar activities, the police added. The suspects were apprehended following a 14-day operation from 10 to 24 December and are believed to be linked to more than 45 scam cases. According to the police, the scams involve impersonation, job scams, investment schemes, and other methods, with victims reportedly losing over \$4,06,800.

## Another 4 years needed to fully restore Chernobyl

### KYIV

INSIDE an abandoned control room at Ukraine's Chernobyl nuclear power plant, a worker in an orange hardhat gazed at a grey wall of seemingly endless dials, screens and gauges that were supposed to prevent disaster. In February, a Russian drone hit and left a large hole in the New Safe Confinement (NSC), the outer of two radiation shells covering the remnants of the nuclear power plant.

It functions as a modern high-tech replacement for an inner steel-and-concrete structure—known as the Sarcophagus, a defensive layer built hastily after the 1986 incident.

Ten months later, repair work is still ongoing, and it could take another three to four years before the outer dome regains its primary safety functions, plant director Sergiy Tarakanov told AFP in an interview from Kyiv.

AFP

## Palestinian rams car into Israeli man, stabs woman

### JERUSALEM

A Palestinian killed two people in a stabbing and car-ramming attack in northern Israel on Friday, triggering the defence minister to threaten a crackdown on the assailant's village in the occupied West Bank.

The attack came a day after an Israeli military reservist dressed in civilian clothes rammed his vehicle into a Palestinian man in the West Bank, where violence has surged since the war in Gaza began.

The Gaza war, sparked by Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, also set off several attacks by Palestinians inside Israel that have left dozens dead.

"Preliminary investigation indicates this was a rolling terror attack that began in the city of Beit Shean, where a pedestrian was run over," Israeli police said in a statement about Friday's attack, adding that the victim was a 68-year-old man.

"Later, a young woman was stabbed near Road 71, and the suspect was ultimately engaged with gunfire near Maonot Junction in Afula following intervention by a civilian bystander," it



said, adding the attacker was taken to hospital.

Both victims succumbed to the injuries, Israel's Magen David Adom emergency services said in a statement.

In a later statement on Friday, the Israeli police said the attacker, a 34-year-old man, was a resi-

dent of Qabatiya and had taken his employer's vehicle to carry out the attack. After ramming the vehicle into two individuals, the attacker continued and struck a vehicle. Following attack, Defence Minister Israel Katz ordered military to launch an operation in Qabatiya, after it

emerged that the attacker came from there. Katz instructed the army "to act forcefully and immediately against the village of Qabatiya, from which terrorist emerged, to locate and thwart every terrorist and strike the village's terror infrastructure," his office said.

AFP



TOLL SO FAR

70,155

## V.O.CHIDAMBARAN PORT AUTHORITY CIVIL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT TUTICORIN - 628 004

### GLOBAL NOTICE INVITING TENDER

No.CIV-FCPD-PRJ-DEVEL-V1-21(5029)/D-4101 Date:26.12.2025  
V.O.Chidambaran Port invites Application from interested parties (Applicants) in accordance with the Request For Proposal (RFP) for the project "Construction of Breakwater, Rock Bund, Wharf and capital dredging and reclamation for backup yard and allied onshore facilities including maintenance thereof on Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) under Development of Outer Harbour at V.O. Chidambaran Port".

Name of Work	Construction of Breakwater, Rock Bund, Wharf and capital dredging and reclamation for backup yard and allied onshore facilities including maintenance thereof on Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) under Development of Outer Harbour at V.O. Chidambaran Port.
Indicative Project Cost	Rs.9,859.45 Crs.
Sale of bid Documents	26.12.2025 to 09.02.2026
Bid document fee	Rs.11,63,416/- (inclusive of GST @ 18%)
Bid Security	Rs 116,34,15,100/- (as per cl. 1.2.4 of RFP)
Last date of receiving queries	07.01.2026
Pre-Application Conference	08.01.2026 at 12:00 noon (Hybrid mode)
Last date and time for submission of Tender through online	09.02.2026 up to 15:00 hours (IST)
Online RFP Bid opening date and time	10.02.2026 at 15:30 hours (IST)
Validity of offer	180 days from the last date fixed for submission of Tender
For downloading of RFP & further details, visit port Website: www.vocport.gov.in & https://etenders.gov.in/eprocure/app. Ph. No: 0461-2372306 Email: ce@vocport.gov.in	

Sd/-  
CHIEF ENGINEER

dent of Qabatiya and had taken his employer's vehicle to carry out the attack. After ramming the vehicle into two individuals, the attacker continued and struck a vehicle. Following attack, Defence Minister Israel Katz ordered military to launch an operation in Qabatiya, after it



# Coforge to acquire US co Encora for ₹17k cr

Acquisition to scale hitech and healthcare verticals, expand nearshore delivery capacity and increase client base in US

SANAL SUDEVAN @Chennai

INDIA'S IT services company Coforge, formerly NIIT Technologies, will acquire US-based engineering services company Encora for ₹17,032 crore through a swap of 93.8 million equity shares at ₹1,815.91 each, which is 14.5% premium to Friday's close. Coforge is also planning to pay off Encora's debt by raising a term loan of ₹550 million funds through a bridge loan or QIP issue.

The company will acquire 100% of shares of Encora US Holdco, Inc. and Encora Holdings Ltd (Cayman) from Advent International, Warburg Pincus and other minority shareholders, whereas Encora will have 21.25% in the combined firm, Coforge said in regulatory filings. The enterprise value of the transaction is \$2.35 billion.

The company said the acquisition is a defining moment for



**Acquisition will position the company as capability leader in AI-led engineering services underpinned in data and cloud. Encora, with its Silicon Valley roots, brings strong AI-native DNA**

IT services company Coforge

the firm. "This acquisition will position the company as the capability leader in AI-led engineering services underpinned in data and cloud. Encora, with its Silicon Valley roots, brings

strong AI-native DNA and a composable agentic platform (AIVA) that enables it to build intelligent workflows."

As per a company statement, the combined entity is project-

ed to become a \$2.5 billion tech services powerhouse. "In FY27, \$2 billion revenue is expected to accrue from the enterprise core of AI-led engineering, cloud and data services alone. The acquisition will immediately scale Coforge's hitech and healthcare verticals, expand its nearshore delivery capabilities in LATAM, and increase its client footprint in the US West and Midwest," said the company.

Encora is backed by Advent International and Warburg Pincus and offers AI solutions for product, cloud and data engineering, estimating that it would help generate revenue of \$2 billion in next financial year. Encora has a large and widespread nearshore delivery capability with over 3,100 delivery team strength in its LATAM Delivery centers.

The value of the transaction is \$2.35 billion, of which \$1.89

billion will be financed through equity and balance through bridge loan or qualified institutional placement (QIP) of debt securities. The pricing of QIP will be determined by SEBI regulations at the time of transactions. The acquisition is subject to shareholder's approval which will be secured within 30 days, and regulatory approvals which are expected to take another four to six months.

The consolidated turnover of Encora Group in FY25 was \$516 million and \$481 million in FY24. In FY26, it is expected to hit \$600 million with adjusted EBITDA margin of 19%. As per the statement, Coforge's North America unit generated only 25% revenue from US West and Mid-west, whereas post-acquisition the North America business is expected to witness a jump of 50% to \$1.4 billion.



## LOAN

### PNB declares 2 Srei accounts of ₹2.4k cr as fraud

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @Mumbai

STATE-run Punjab National Bank (PNB) has reported a ₹2,434 crore of loan it had extended to crippled infra lender Srei as fraud to the RBI.

The reported fraudulent borrowing is linked to the former promoters of Srei Equipment Finance and Srei Infrastructure Finance, both in the NCLT since 2021.

Other lenders such as Punjab & Sind Bank, Bank of Baroda, and Union Bank of India had also earlier declared their respective loans to Srei companies as fraud.

In an exchange filing on Friday, PNB said of the total fraudulent borrowings, ₹1,240.94 crore are related to Srei Equipment Finance and the remaining ₹1,193.06 crore are related to Srei Infrastructure Finance.

The third-largest public sector lender also said it has 100% provisions for these loans.

According to the bank, the declaring these two accounts as frauds are based on a forensic audit by KPMG, which pointed to irregularities such as loans to connected parties and potential evergreening of loans.

However, Srei founder Hemant Kanoria has challenged the KPMG report as the basis for the fraud classification, noting the matter is sub-judice.

The Srei group has been undergoing insolvency resolution process since 2021, and the National Company Law Tribunal has approved a resolution plan submitted by the National Asset Reconstruction Company in 2023. Like DHFL and Reliance Capital, the Srei group was sent to the NCLT by the Reserve Bank in October 2021 after it had found governance issues and defaults and the regulator superseded the boards of Srei Infrastructure Finance and Srei Equipment Finance. In February 2023, NARCL emerged as the successful bidder for SIFL and SEFL which together owed ₹32,750 crore to lenders.

### Tata Steel faces €1.4 bn lawsuit in Netherlands

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ New Delhi

STITCHING Frisse Wind.nu (SFW), a Dutch nonprofit organisation, has sent legal notice to Tata Steel's unit seeking €1.4 billion (about ₹14,800 crore) compensation for alleged environmental harm and health damages caused to people in the Netherlands due to hazardous emissions.

Tata Steel in a regulatory filing to the exchanges said on December 19, 2025, SFW served a writ of summons on two subsidiaries of Tata Steel Limited - Tata Steel Nederland B.V. and Tata Steel IJmuiden B.V. (collectively referred to as TSN).

The proceedings initiated by SFW concern a collective action under the Dutch Act on Collective Settlement of Mass Claims (WAMCA). In this action, SFW states that it is acting on behalf of residents living in the vicinity of TSN.

The litigation has been filed in the District Court North Holland (Haarlem).

#### SFW has not provided supporting evidence: Tata Steel

SFW seeks euro 1.4 billion in compensation on account of increased susceptibility to various health issues and the loss of enjoyment of homes. As per TSN, SFW has provided no supporting evidence for the claim, making it unsubstantiated and speculative.

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The proceedings pertain to

allegations by SFW, holding TSN liable for alleged damages caused by TSN's operations in Velsen-Noord (including, most importantly, emissions of hazardous and/or harmful substances). Tata Steel's subsidiary TSN said that it is fully prepared to defend against the claim. "In our assessment, SFW faces considerable challenges

regarding both admissibility and the merits of its case. Although, TSN is yet to receive the exhibits on which SFW intends to rely, TSN has already identified substantial grounds for defence," said Tata Steel.

As per Tata Steel's filing, SFW seeks € 1.4 billion in compensation on account of increased susceptibility to various health issues and the loss of enjoyment of homes, as the average home value in the region lags behind that of comparable regions. As per TSN, SFW has provided no supporting evidence for the claim, making it unsubstantiated and speculative.

### Cos raise ₹2 lakh crore in 2025, Dalal Street sees average 1 IPO a day

BENN KOCHUVEEDAN @Mumbai

DALAL STREET is closing 2025 just shy of ₹2 lakh crore (₹2 trillion) fundraising through the primary markets, mopping up as much as ₹1.88 lakh crore from 365 initial share sales—104 mainboard issues and the rest SME issues—eclipsing the 2024 record of mopping up ₹1.68 lakh crore.

The year saw average one IPO a day. Investment bankers are expecting the new year to set fresh record. The biggest IPOs lined up for 2026 are of Re-

liance Jio, Phonepe and Flipkart.

While the 104 mainboard issues have raised a record ₹1,76,151 crore and 44% of this have come from just eight issues, 267 SME issues have raised ₹11,800 crore, totalling ₹1,87,951 crore, according to the data from Chittorgarh.com, an IPO-focused online publication.

In comparison, in a decade from 2015, companies have raised over ₹7.5 lakh crore from IPOs, as per historical data from Prime Database. In 2015, 21 IPOs raised ₹13,614 crore,

which rose to ₹26,494 crore in 2016 from 26 issues, 2017 saw 36 issuers collecting ₹67,147 crore, but it declined in 2018 to ₹30,959 crore from 24 issues, and 2019 saw a sharper decline to ₹12,362 crore from 16 issues. Come 2020, 15 issues raised ₹26,613 crore, which rose manifold to ₹1,18,723 crore in 2021 from 63 issuers, but more than halved in 2022 to just about ₹59,302 crore in 2022 from 63 issues, and going down further to ₹54,125 crore in 2023

from 57 issues, but rose sharply in 2024 to ₹1,68,545 crore from 91 mainboard issues raising ₹1,59,784 crore and 240 small issues raising ₹8,761 crore.

But listing gains are the lowest this year with average IPO gains being at just 9%—lowest in a decade. This was 11% in 2022, 29% in 2023 and 30% in 2024. Only a small number of the 91 listings delivered returns above 50%, while many traded lower within three to six months of debut.

As per Chittorgarh.com, of the 103 mainboard IPOs, only 53 issues made listing day gains, 49 made listing day losses, 67 are trading in gains and 35 are

### MSMEs SEEK COLLATERAL-FREE CREDIT

PUSHPITA DEY @ New Delhi

WITH the Budget around the corner, the MSME industry has asked the finance ministry for relief in terms of taxes and better access to credit. In a letter written to finance ministry by the Association of Indian Entrepreneur (AIE), the major demand of the association is the access to statutory collateral-free lending up to ₹10 crore for micro enterprises with interest capped at 6-7%.

The association highlighted that the micro enterprises have been hit by the recent geo-political turmoil and tariff situations and despite several measures being announced by the government, there has been little on-ground visible impact for the micro enterprises.

The AIE requested for an Export Risk Equalisation Fund to compensate micro exporters

impacted by sudden tariff hikes and temporary duty drawback enhancement and interest relief during tariff shocks.

The MSME industries expect the government to ease credit constraints for micro enterprises in next year's Budget. Among their other demands include automatic renewal of working capital limits for GST-compliant units, dedicated micro-lending targets for

SIDBI and public sector banks, built-in interest subvention during stress phases, and interest-free loans to support import-substitution projects.

Budget 2025-26 had unveiled a raft of measures to improve credit flow to MSMEs including a credit guarantee cover for micro and small enterprises that was raised to ₹10 crore from ₹5 crore and a guaranteed cover of ₹20 crore for start-ups, with a reduced fee of 1% for loans in 27 priority sectors.

## ASIANOMICS

### JAPAN

#### CABINET APPROVES RECORD ₹785 BILLION BUDGET

Japan's cabinet under Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi on Friday approved a record budget of ₹785 billion for next fiscal year, seeking to balance expansionary spending plans with concerns over rising debt by keeping new bond issuance in check. Amid higher government bond yields and a weak yen, the Takaichi administration has moved to reassure markets that it will avoid excessive borrowing or unfunded tax cuts. The budget for the fiscal beginning in April, to be submitted to parliament early next year, stands at a record 122.3 trillion yen, up from 115.2 trillion yen in the current year. Despite the rise in spending, new government bond issuance will rise only marginally.

### CHINA

#### REVISES 2024 GDP FIGURES DOWNWARDS

China on Friday said it had revised gross domestic product (GDP) figures for last year downwards, state media reported. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of the world's second-largest economy, GDP was revised to 134,8066 trillion yuan (about \$19.16 trillion), down 101.8 billion yuan from the preliminary figure. But the final verified GDP growth rate for 2024 remained at 5%, unchanged from the preliminary calculation, said the NBS. China's GDP target for this year remains at "around 5%", said a bureau report. "China's annual GDP goes through two stages of accounting: preliminary calculation and final verification.

The final verification is conducted based on the annual statistical data, final fiscal accounts, and departmental administrative records," the report said.

### THAILAND

#### LEVERAGES NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY TO BOOST TOURISM

As thousands of fireworks illuminated the sky over the Chao Phraya River, marking the finale of the annual light festival, Thailand has signaled a step forward in its strategy to revitalise the tourism sector through "night economy." The Vtij Chao Phraya 2025 festival transformed Bangkok's main riverbank into an open-air cultural stage, with 15 curated locations ranging from historic sites and temples to bridges and contemporary landmarks adorned with multimedia light installations, laser effects, projection mapping, and drone shows. As per the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), the 45-day extravaganza attracted over 1.7 million visitors and generated an estimated revenue of 5.5 billion baht (\$177 mn). Beyond the visual spectacle, the event served as a pilot for the government's broader "night economy" policy, designed to extend visitors' spending hours and encourage overnight stays.

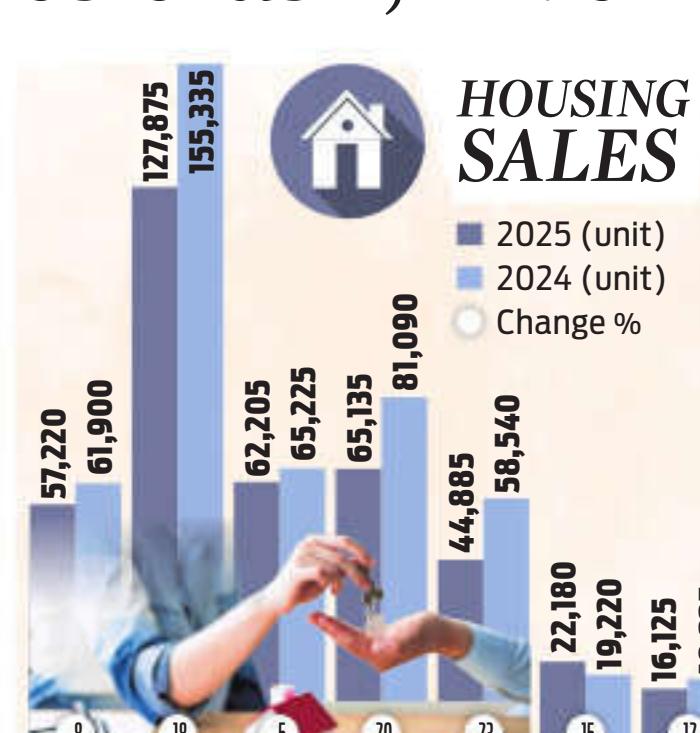
### Housing sales crash, inventory soars as prices rise in 2025

ARSHAD KHAN @ New Delhi

REALTY sector in 2025 disappointed consumers and most developers with sales struggles plaguing all but top players. Hit by increasing property prices, layoffs in the IT sector, geopolitical tensions, and other uncertainties, the sector reported a sharp dip in housing sales.

Realty consultant firm ANAROCK Research data indicates that housing sales in India's top 7 cities witnessed a 14% decline in 2025, with nearly 3,95,625 units sold in the year against 4,59,645 units in 2024.

Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) witnessed the highest sales of nearly 1,27,875 units, registering an 18% yearly decline. Pune followed with approx. 65,135 units sold, declining by 20% YoY. The two



western markets together led residential sales in India's top 7 cities, comprising a 49% overall share. Besides Chennai (up 15%), sales

declined YoY in all the other six major markets. Hyderabad (down 23%), Pune (down 20%) and MMR (down 18%) registered a sharp decline in sales. Annually, unsold inventory in the top 7 cities rose 4% by 2025-end, largely because of tapered demand and increased new supply in the year. Approximately 5.77 lakh units are currently on the primary sales market in these cities. Bengaluru recording a significant 23% increase in unsold inventory. "2025 has been a year of broad-spectrum upheaval including geopolitical turmoil, layoffs in the IT sector, tariff tensions and other uncertainties," said Anuj Puri, Chairman – ANAROCK Group.

"The year's trend was of sale

volumes stabilising at near 4 lakh units across the top 7 cities, but growth in overall sales value. Our data shows over 21% of the new supply was launched in the above ₹2.5 crore price bracket. Interestingly, the average residential price growth rate has tapered down from double digits in previous years to single digits in 2025," added Puri.

Prices in the top 7 cities collectively rose 8% annually, and only NCR saw double-digit growth at 23%, largely due to a higher new supply of pricier homes. The other major cities recorded single-digit price appreciation, ranging between 4-9% in 2025 as against last year's 13-27% in 2024. Out of NCR's total new supply of 61,775 units during the year, over 5

2025 will be one to remember for teams that finally broke decade-long hoodoos. A look at a few...

# YEAR OF FIRSTS

**ROYAL ECSTASY**

"Ee Sala Cup Namde" (in Kannada: this year the cup will be ours) finally became "Ee Sala Cup Namdu" (this year, the cup is ours) as the Royal Challengers Bengaluru finally got their hands on an IPL trophy 17 years after its inception. For Virat Kohli — who went to his knees and broke down in tears — the elusive title has been captured in what has been a decorated career.

**PROTEAS TITLE PRAYERS ANSWERED AT MECCA OF CRICKET**

After waiting for years and despite boasting of some of the finest cricketers in the recent years, the South African team failed to lay their hands on an ICC trophy. They had come close but it still remained a dream. South Africa made history at Lord's in England when they rallied to defeat Australia in the World Test Championship final in June this year. At the core of it was skipper Temba Bavuma, whose position as captain since 2022 was constantly debated. Not a bad way to silence critics by securing South Africa their first ICC title.


**Elsewhere...**
**PSG EUROPEAN CHAMPS**

After pouring truckloads of money into new recruits, Paris Saint Germain finally broke their European duck, blazing through Inter Milan in June's UEFA Champions League final in Munich. They were ridiculed for their continental failures, for they had the household names in Lionel Messi, Neymar and Kylian Mbappe at their disposal once and still failed to win the title.

**SPURS DELIGHT**

For Tottenham Hotspur, their 17-year-wait of winning a trophy ended, by winning the Europa League title against Manchester United. Considering the fact that Tottenham finished one place above relegation in the 24/25 English Premier League, this European glory was of increased significance.

**HISTORIC NIGHT IN MUMBAI**

After the heartbreak in 2017 ODI World Cup final and failure to win in 2022, the senior women's team finally broke the jinx and won the title in November this year. With the popularity of women's cricket slowly rising, this win could spark another revolution in the country. Harmanpreet Kaur and Co, despite a brief hiccup in the league stages, beat defending champions Australia in the semifinals before seeing off South Africa in the final in front of a jubilant crowd at DY Patil Stadium.

**MINNOWS MAKE IT TO BIG STAGE**


Curacao — the smallest ever nation with a population of 156,000 — historically qualified to the 2026 FIFA World Cup. Their spot was confirmed after avoiding defeat to Jamaica away from home. Cape Verde — another island nation off the West African coast — also made history as they finished on top of their qualifying group which featured big teams like Cameroon. When teams representing these nations walk out to the pitch for their first game, expect a lot of fanfare, passion and emotion.

Madhya Pradesh's Suraj Sharma delivered a golden double, sweeping both the senior and junior men's titles in the 25m rapid fire pistol at the national shooting championship. Suraj topped the senior final with 31 hits, finishing three clear of reigning champion Vijayveer Sidhu of Punjab (28 hits). Rajasthan's Bhavesh Shekhawat claimed bronze.

[newindianexpress.com](http://newindianexpress.com)



## Not a very healthy sight

Amidst few highs, sports in India also saw painful lows. A look...

**NO FOOTBALL LEAGUE YET**

The country is still yet to witness the start of its premier football league — the 2025/26 Indian Super League — and players, coaches, staff and many depending on the league are left high and dry. The agreement between All India Football Federation (AIFF) and its commercial arm Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL) in organising the league expired early December and ever since, no new organisers have been found.

**INDIA'S DOPING SHAME PERSISTS**

The country has yet again topped doping charts, with 26 Adverse Analytical Findings (AAF) being confirmed by World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) recently. To make things more embarrassing, no other country has crossed 100 cases, exposing the large scale of India's doping issue despite several measures and strict guidelines in place.

**MODEST RETURNS FOR BADMINTON**

Despite good track-record in recent memory, India's premier doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty could not collect another doubles gold this year. In the singles event, it was largely a struggle for big names like PV Sindhu, HS Prannoy, Kidambi Srikanth, Lakshya Sen salvaged his year by winning the Australian Open in November. Ayush Shetty showed promise after his US Open success in June this year.

**TOUGH TIMES CONTINUE FOR TENNIS**

Little to nothing has changed after a tumultuous 2024 for Indian tennis on the administrative front. After last year's elections of the sport's national governing body — The All India Tennis Association (AITA) remained unannounced, two factions within the federation reportedly announced their own team managers for the Davis cup matches. On the court, no player is yet to breach the top 100s, as India's best, are still ranked somewhere in the 250s.

## Captain's innnings: Pant comes to the fore for Delhi

CHANDRA PRABHU @Chennai

WHILE all the focus has been on Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli's performances in the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy, another player that may also garner sizeable amount of attention is Rishabh Pant. The wicketkeeper-batter's high-risk, high-reward approach has made heads turn in Test cricket, but he has not had a similar impact in white-ball cricket. That lack of influence has put him in the background for some time now. When the national squad for the upcoming men's T20 World Cup was announced, Pant was clearly not part of the equation and it was far from a surprise to see his name missing. Such has been his predicament in the shorter formats in recent times.

The last time he featured in an ODI match was August last year. He was part of the Champions Trophy that India won at the start of the year but he didn't feature in a single game. Likewise, it was the same story during the recent ODI series against South Africa. His below-par shows in recent outings in the Test format has also not helped his case. And his last T20I match came in the same year in July. He's clearly down the pecking order in the short formats of the game. For that reason, his 79-ball 70 for Delhi on Friday in the ongoing domestic competition is a welcome balm for the 28-year-old. Thanks to his contribution, Delhi registered a seven-run over Gujarat in their Group D meeting at the BCCI Centre of Excellence on the outskirts of Bengaluru. Just a couple of days back, he had been dismissed for 5 against Andhra in the first outing. While Pant might have a lot of catching up to do, this knock could give him the confidence going forward.

Before Pant walked onto the pitch, it was Virat Kohli who orchestrated Delhi's quick start. He rallied to a 29-ball half-centu-



Rishabh Pant (L) in action against Gujarat on Friday | SHASHIDHAR BYRAPPAN

**SELECT BRIEF SCORES**

Group A: Tamil Nadu 280 in 49.3 ovs (Mohamed Ali 57, Narayan Jagadeesan 55, Sai Sudharshan 51; Kumar Kartikeya 3/62) lost to Madhya Pradesh 283/8 in 49.2 ovs (Yash Dubey 92, Himanshu Mantri 90; Govith Ganesh 4/54) by 2 wickets; Kerala 284/7 in 50 overs (Mohammed Azharuddin 84, Babu Aparajith 71; Abhilash Shetty 3/59) lost to Karnataka 285/2 in 48.2 ovs (Karan Nair 130 not out, Devdutt Padikkal 124) by 8 wickets; Group B: Uttar Pradesh 367/4 in 50 ovs (Aryan Juyal 134, Rinku Singh 106 not out; Tarunpreet Singh 2/74) bt Chandigarh 140 all out in 29.3 ovs (Manan Vohra 32; Zeeshan Ansar 4/29) by 227 runs; Group C: Mumbai: 331/7 in 50 ovs (Hardik Tamore 93, Sarfaraz Khan 55; Devendra Bora 3/74) bt Uttrakhand: 280/9 in 50 ovs (Yuvraj Choudhary 96); Group D: Railways: 266/9 in 50 ovs (Ravi Singh 76, Ansh Yadav 59, Satyanarayan Raju 3/41; Narasimha Raju 3/68) lost to Andhra 271/4 in 44.4 ovs (Ricky Bhui 76, Nitish Kumar Reddy 55 not out; Karn Sharma 3/46).

ry — his 84th in List A format. He scored 77 of Delhi's 108 runs before getting stumped by Urvi Patel off a beautiful delivery from left-arm spinner Vishal Jayswal.

Walking in at 98/3 in the 20th over, Pant took a conservative approach. According to partnership statistics, he was at 5 off 10 balls (4th wicket with Kohli), 26 off 26 balls (5th wicket with Ba-

doni), before taking 62 balls to reach 50. He was stuck to his crease, and avoided any extravagant shots. But that eventually changed, post his fifty. It began when Ravi Bishnoi — who was brought back to the attack — saw his deliveries slammed to long on. From thereon, it seemed like Pant was in his natural habitat — shots-off-the-crease, sweep shots deep towards backwards square leg as he rushed to 20 in his next 16 balls after reaching his fifty. But the pick of the lot would be the shots deep from the crease, where he swivelled his bat to a ball moving outside off and the result being the ball on the covers' boundary. With more innings like this, he could give selectors something to think about ahead of future series.

**Rohit goes for duck**

Days after he slammed a 94-ball 155 against Sikkim, former India captain Rohit Sharma suffered a golden duck in Mumbai's win against Uttarakhand in Jaipur in a Group C tie. Put to bat first, the lanky medium fast bowler Devendra Bora (3/74) scalped the most memorable victim of his career when he dug one short and Rohit instinctively went for a pull shot.

J Nagarkoti, stationed at deep fine leg, juggled before taking it on the second attempt.

**Full story:** [newindianexpress.com](http://newindianexpress.com)

## Salah spot on as Egypt beat South Africa

AGENCIES @ Agadir (Morocco)

MOHAMED Salah scored as 10-man Egypt beat South Africa 1-0 in Agadir on Friday to become the first qualifiers for the knockout stage of the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations.

Salah converted a penalty on 45 minutes, and South Africa were denied a spot-kick late in the second half when Yasser Ibrahim appeared to handle the ball inside the box. Salah came to Morocco after not starting in five Liverpool matches — his omission leading to an outburst against manager Arne Slot. Egypt were reduced to 10 men in first-half added time when right-back Mohamed Hany was shown a second yellow card for a stamp, followed by a red.

**Friday's results:** Egypt 1-0 South Africa; Angola 1-1 Zimbabwe.

al governing body after every season. And the period of this arrangement would be for 20 seasons that would be calculated from June 1 to May 31 of next year and after every season, it is to be redistributed/re-tendered. The proposal also speaks of relegation.

"Each participating Club would pay the AIFF a 'standard participation fee' of Rs 1 Crore a year at the beginning of the season directly to the AIFF," said the proposal. "This would be independent

of any calculations of the 'Central Operating Expenditure', however, this amount would be fully reimbursable from the central revenue prior to distribution of 'Net Revenue'. As for the initial budget the proposed "total outlay for the purpose of the Indian Super League would be Rs 70 crore for the first season which would be invested into the competition as a 'Central Operations Budget.' Apparently, the total participation fee for all clubs

would be at 20 per cent of the central operational budget of the league. "In case the board decides to raise the 'central operational budget' by 10 per cent in the future, the 'standard participation fee' would proportionately increase," said the proposal.

**CFG exit Mumbai**

City Football Group (CFG), the holding company which runs EPL club Manchester City, has divested its shares back to the parent company of Mumbai City FC, it confirmed on Friday.

## Deepti in record books as Ind seal series

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
@ Chennai

INDIA all-round Deepti Sharma etched her name into global cricket folklore, becoming the first-ever cricketer across the men's and women's game to register 1000 runs and 150 wickets in T20 Internationals.

The historic milestone came during the third T20I against Sri Lanka in Thiruvananthapuram on Friday, underlining Deepti's status as one of the most complete white-ball cricketers the sport has seen.

With a decisive three-wicket spell, Deepti also rose to joint-highest wicket-taker in women's T20I history, drawing level with Australia's Megan Schutt on 151 wickets.

Sri Lanka's Kavisha Dilhari became her landmark 150th scalp, falling in the 14th over.

Deepti, the player of the Tournament at the 2025 ICC Women's World Cup, was re-

cently bought for ₹3.2 crore by UP Warriorz.

On the day, the right-arm off-spinner's figures of 3 for 18 helped the team restrict Sri Lanka to 112/7 in 20 overs. While it was a significant day for Deepti, it was also a memorable outing for pacer Renuka Singh, who was the top wicket-taker for the home side. Bar-



Deepti Sharma (C) celebrates with her teammates on Friday | BP DEEPU

ring Chamari Athapaththu, who was Deepti's first wicket, Renuka dismissed all the other top-order batters, returning with figures of 4/21 in four overs.

The visiting batters, after a slow start, could never find their footing and ended up with a sub-par total of 112/7. In their chase, opener Shafali Verma sparked with an unbeaten fifty (79 runs off 42 balls).

She single-handedly dismantled the opposition bowlers, guiding India home with 40 balls to spare. After facing three dot balls, Shafali danced down the track to clobber a towering 83-metre six over long-off. She continued punishing the Sri Lankan bowlers, smashing 11 boundaries and three sixes. With this victory, India have an unassailable 3-0 lead over Sri Lanka in the five-match T20I series.

**Brief scores:** SL 112/7 in 20 ovs (Dulan Perera 25; Renuka 4/21; Deepti 3/18) lost to India 115/2 in 13.2 ovs (S Verma 79 n.o.)

**THE ASHES**

## Aus lead Eng by 46 runs after crazy day at MCG

AGENCIES @ Melbourne

AN astounding 20 wickets fell on a frantic day one of the fourth Ashes Test on Friday with Australia all out for 152 before storming back to dismiss England for 110 and leave the clash on a knife-edge. England skipper Ben Stokes won a key toss on a green track and his quicks feasted after sending in the hosts under overcast skies in front of 94,199 fans at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

It was the biggest cricket crowd ever at the cavernous arena, exceeding the 93,013 who watched the 2015 World Cup final, and they witnessed the home side collapse with Josh Tongue grabbing 5-45. But England fared even worse, slumping

to 16-4 and never recovering, leaving Australia to face one over before stumps, which nightwatchman Scott Boland safely negotiated with Travis Head at the other end.

Australia were 4-0 at the close with Boland on four, 46 ahead, with Head yet to face a ball.

"We saw how tough it was when we batted. The ball was nipping around and we needed to bowl in the right areas," Nesser said. "I feel like anyone could have taken a 'five-fer' today," said Tongue, who became the first



Michael Neser celebrates a wicket on the opening day on Friday | AFP

Englishman to take five wickets in an innings in a Test at the MCG since Dean Headley and Darren Gough in 1998.

"When I'm at my best I'm bowling at that fuller length. Stokes has spoken to us quite a bit about it, going a touch fuller but hitting the pitch hard."

"If we get the ball in the same areas tomorrow we can get them three of four wickets down in the first hour."

Australia bowler Michael Nesser, who took 4-45, was not making any predictions for the second innings after a day when the ball dominated the bat.

"We saw how tough it was when we batted. The ball was nipping around and we needed to bowl in the right areas," Nesser said.

**Muddappa back for drag nationals finale**

CHENNAI: After a measured first half of the season, ace Bengaluru biker Hemant Muddappa will be returning this weekend with the final two rounds of the MMSC FMSCI Indian National Motorcycle Drag Racing Championship 2025 gets underway here on Saturday. The 15-time National champion will chase yet another milestone, taking part in four categories.

**EXPRESS READ**
**Court restores Jaiveer's post as EFI secy general**

NEW DELHI: A Delhi court on Friday has restored the position of Colonel (retired) Jaiveer Singh as the secretary general of Equestrian Federation of India (EFI), holding his suspension by the federation's Executive Committee illegal and restored his authority Principal District and Sessions Judge Anju Bajaj Chanda on December 22 restrained EFI from extending Singh's suspension.

**Sr nat'l: Surya, Shruti enter semifinals**

VIJAYAWADA: Producing major upsets, local favourite Surya Charisma Tamiri and seasoned campaigner Shruti Mundada ousted the top two seeds — Unnati Hooda and Anupama Upadhyaya — to advance to the women's singles semifinals of the senior national badminton meet on Friday. Surya sealed a 21-12, 21-15 quarterfinal win against Unnati. Shruti beat Anupama 22-20, 21-12.





Anil Jauhri, Former CEO, National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies



Dr. Y Raghuramulu, former Director of Central Coffee Research Institute



Keerthi D Souza is a Sustainability Expert

## REWRITTEN INDIA'S COFFEE STORY – FROM SHADE TO STANDARDS

As the Central Coffee Research Institute (CCRI) marks its centenary, India introduces new certification standards INDICOFS that will shape the global sustainability landscape for Indian coffee

In celebration of its 100th anniversary, the Central Coffee Research Institute (CCRI) has launched the Indian Coffee Sustainability Standards (INDICOFS) through the Coffee Board of India. This initiative is more than just a certification scheme; it represents a significant shift in how agricultural sustainability is defined, measured, and valued in international trade.

For the first time, a major coffee producer from the Global South has created comprehensive sustainability standards that are rooted in its own ecological and social contexts while also incorporating insights from various global frameworks. The new standards present a fresh opportunity for Indian coffee on the world stage – a new identity for everyone's daily cup.

Indian coffee is predominantly produced by smallholder farmers, with over 95 per cent of coffee holdings belonging to small and marginal growers. This coffee-centric farming system plays a vital socio-economic role by providing consistent employment for rural communities and significantly reducing migration from rural to urban areas. As an export-oriented crop, most of India's coffee is sent to international markets, with Europe being a key destination.

Unlike conventional plantations, Indian coffee is cultivated under dense shade in regions such as the Western Ghats, Eastern Ghats, and the north-eastern part of India, which is home to unique biodiversity hotspots. Our coffee farms resemble managed forests; birds nest among the shade trees, elephants traverse traditional corridors and multiple crops grow in harmony. This is more than agriculture; it is agroforestry refined over generations.

The INDICOFS framework is primarily designed to capture the ecological value of Indian coffee systems. Farmers who have practiced sustainability for generations will find that INDICOFS reflects their established practices. INDICOFS enriches the sustainability conversation by ensuring compliance with regulations like the EU Deforestation Regulation and by recognizing essential ecosystem services. The carbon sequestered by shade trees, protected watersheds, and the biodiversity present in these landscapes are all acknowledged within INDICOFS.

The three-tier structure of INDICOFS promotes continuous improvement, with each level building toward world-class sustainability performance.

**DEMOCRATIZING SUSTAINABILITY:** One of INDICOFS's most significant innova-



tions is making sustainability certification accessible to small and marginal farmers. The current global certification landscape can be challenging for smallholders due to high costs and requirements that do not always reflect the realities of small-scale farming. By enabling Coffee Board assessments for small farmers at Level 1, INDICOFS expands access to sustainability premiums.

This recognizes that sustainable agriculture often occurs at small scales, managed by farmers with extensive ecological knowledge but limited financial resources.

**INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION:** The development of INDICOFS showcases the enhanced institutional capacity of Indian coffee research. As CCRI enters its second century, the Core Technical Committee brings together diverse expertise—scientists, sustainability professionals, and certification experts—and incorporates feedback from farmers, exporters, and trade associations through consultation.

The resulting framework balances rigor with practicality, ambition with achievability.

**TECHNOLOGY AS AN EN-ABLER:** INDICOFS harnesses India's digital infrastructure to enable new possibilities not available when international standards were established.

Satellite monitoring, blockchain traceability, and mobile connectivity facilitate cost-effective verification and direct engagement with farmers. This integration with evolving digital systems creates an ecosystem where sustainability verification becomes part of everyday business rather than an additional burden.

This systematic approach could represent India's contribution to global sustainability practices.

**MARKET REALITIES:** The ultimate success of INDICOFS hinges on market recognition. The framework is designed to complement existing certification systems while addressing the specific needs of Indian coffee cultivation. As consumers increasingly seek transparency in sustainability claims, a government-backed framework grounded in scientific principles offers additional credibility and assurance.

**BROADER IMPLICATIONS:** The significance of INDICOFS extends beyond coffee. It demonstrates that sustainability standards can originate from producing countries, enriching the global dialogue on sustainable agriculture. The shade-grown coffee gardens of Coorg offer valuable lessons in sustainable farming for the world. INDICOFS embodies this contribution.

The launch of INDICOFS marks a pivotal moment when India began to define what sustainability means for its unique coffee systems. In the second century of organized coffee development, this shift toward sustainability could transform the future of Indian coffee.

# Environment

SINCE 2011  
Critically Endangered in the  
Red List of Threatened  
Species by IUCN

Extinct  
EX

EW

CR

EN

VU

NT

LC

Threatened

Least concern

newindianexpress.com

JITENDRA CHOUBEY @ New Delhi

AFTER six years, the Supreme Court issued its final order on the conservation of the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB) or (*Ardeotis nigriceps*)

by revising the priority conservation area while promoting renewable energy in Rajasthan and Gujarat. The Supreme Court's order strikes a fine balance between green energy promotion and conservation efforts.

In 2019, environmental expert MK Ranjitsinh filed a public interest litigation (PIL) to protect the birds from the impacts of human activities in their habitats. The PIL requested interim directions to the governments of Rajasthan and Gujarat to ensure predator-proof fencing, controlled grazing and to halt any further permits for installing overhead power lines, wind turbines and solar infrastructure in GIB's potential habitats identified by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

The PIL also sought installation of bird diverters on power lines and proposed to shift power transmission cables underground.

This case is unique as it involves a conflict between the goals of addressing climate change through generation of green energy via solar fields and the need to preserve the GIB. The solar and wind mill installation have encroached upon the habitat of critically endangered species like the GIB and Lesser Florican (LF) in the Desert National Park of Rajasthan. Earlier, the court had pronounced two interim orders on it. Both the GIB and LF have been listed as Critically Endangered in the Red List of Threatened Species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) since 2011. The latest count says there are only 144 GIBs in India - 140 in Rajasthan and 4 in Kutch (Gujarat). In a 2018 survey, the estimated population was 150, including 25 birds in government captivity.

In its final order, the Supreme Court directed renewable energy companies to relocate some overhead power lines underground within two years in areas prioritised for the conservation of the GIB and LF in the Desert National Park of Rajasthan. The court established a revised conservation area of 14,753 sq km for the GIB and strictly instructed power companies not to violate this zone under any circumstances.

### First interim order on GIB

The first interim order on April 19, 2021, restricted the establishment of overhead transmission lines over a vast area of approximately 99,000 sq km. The order also mandated the formation of a three-member committee to assess the situation and find a balance between the conservation of endangered species and the necessity of combating climate change. The court stated that the decline in GIB and LF populations had various causes, including low fecundity, habitat fragmentation, loss of habitat, predation and loss of prey. It emphasised that converting overhead lines to underground transmission lines might not significantly contribute to species conservation.

### Dwindling GIB populations

The GIB, locally known as Godawan, is one of the heaviest flying birds in the world and a flagship species for the arid and semi-arid grasslands of the Indian subcontinent. This majestic bird symbolises the health of fragile grassland ecosystems. Historically found across much of North and West India, the GIB's critically endangered population is now confined to a small region of Rajasthan.

Moreover, the government also contended in court that the designated area was larger than the actual habitat of the GIB and constituted a significant portion of the country's solar and wind energy potential. It also argued that underground

high-voltage power lines was not technically or financially feasible.

### Modification of the interim order

On March 21, 2024, the apex court modified its prior blanket ban on the installation of renewable energy power lines and formed an expert committee to assess the situation and find a balance between the conservation of endangered species and the necessity of combating climate change. The court stated that the decline in GIB and LF populations had various causes, including low fecundity, habitat fragmentation, loss of habitat, predation and loss of prey. It emphasised that converting overhead lines to underground transmission lines might not significantly contribute to species conservation.

### High-voltage power lines pose a significant risk to GIBs

As one of the largest birds in the world, they have inadequate frontal vision, making it difficult for them to detect power lines during flight. This often results in collisions with the lines, leading to electrocution. "The main threats to these birds are habitat loss due to agricultural activities and collisions with transmission lines of solar and wind power grids," an expert stated.

**SC's final order on GIB**

In the recent ruling, the apex court established a revised priority area (RPA) of 14,753 sq km, which is 857 sq km smaller than the previous priority area. The RPA for Rajasthan is set at 14,013 sq km, while Gujarat's RPA is 740 sq km. The court strictly prohibits any future renewable energy projects within the RPA of Rajasthan.

Additionally, the court ordered the immediate underground installation of 80 km of 33 KV power lines and emphasized the need for further mitigation efforts in Rajasthan. It also instructed that existing 66 KV and above power lines within the revised priority area of Rajasthan should be rerouted in a timely manner.

Furthermore, the court stated that there is no need for existing or future power lines of 11 KV or below within a 100-meter buffer zone around GIB nesting areas. The Wildlife Institute of India identified 250 km of critical power lines in Rajasthan and the court directed that the competent authority ensure their implementation within a maximum of two years.

In addition to these measures, the court called for in-situ and ex-situ conservation management of GIBs and recommended long-term studies on the effects of climate change on the species. Installations of bird flight diverters should be based on scientific analysis.

the ground and primarily feed on pests, termites, rats and snakes, helping maintain ecological balance in the desert. However, the expansion of the Indira Gandhi irrigation canal led to increased agricultural activities in the arid regions of Jaisalmer and Barmer which damaged their habitats. Additionally, use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides in agriculture disrupted the GIB's food chain and hindered its population growth. The introduction of renewable energy grids aimed at combatting global warming further reduced the GIB's available habitats.

High-voltage power lines posed a significant risk to GIBs. As one of the largest birds in the world, they have inadequate frontal vision, making it difficult for them to detect power lines during flight. This often results in collisions with the lines, leading to electrocution.

"The main threats to these birds are habitat loss due to agricultural activities and collisions with transmission lines of solar and wind power grids," an expert stated.

**What SC ruling ensures**

Revised priority area (RPA) of 14,753 sq km

857 sq km smaller than the previous priority area

RPA for Rajasthan is 14,013 sq km

RPA for Gujarat 740 sq km

Prohibits any future renewable energy projects within RPA of Rajasthan

Calls for ex-situ conservation management

raise this to 1 pc by 2030 by offering incentives for industry-academia collaboration, matching grants for deep tech and global partnerships for technology transfer. Innovation in components such as solar wafers, battery chemistries, and electrolyzers can give India a proprietary edge in international markets.

Some funds from the Research and Development Initiatives, with a budgetary allocation of 1 lakh crore, can be targeted towards cleantech R&D and innovation.

Third, India must secure the raw materials and machinery that power cleantech supply chains. This includes upstream investments in refining lithium, nickel, cobalt, and rare earths, areas where China currently dominates.

The recent G20 summit has explicitly elevated critical minerals, Indigenous processing, and Global South partnerships as core priorities, reaffirming the strategic importance of India's "India Plus Many" approach.

India must accelerate its "India Plus Many" strategy: locking in bilateral deals with countries like Australia, Brazil, and South Africa, while investing in domestic reserves, recycling infrastructure, and machinery manufacturing.

To operationalize this strategy, India needs a three-part upstream approach. First, scale up domestic refining capacity for battery minerals, with targeted fiscal incentives under the National Critical Minerals Mission.

Second, strategic overseas acquisitions must be expanded through public-private vehicles like KABIL to secure long-term access to lithium, cobalt, and rare earth sources abroad.

Third, the government should invest in a national circularity infrastructure, building over 150 battery waste collection centers and material

recovery hubs across states by 2030, to reclaim critical inputs like lithium, nickel, and rare earths. This combination of refining, sourcing and recycling is essential to de-risk India's cleantech transition from future geopolitical shocks and global price volatility.

Fourth, the country must address the green workforce gap. The cleantech transformation demands not just labor, but highly trained talent—across R&D, engineering, and manufacturing operations. This will require curriculum overhauls at ITIs and engineering colleges, global faculty exchanges and targeted skilling programs. By 2030, India will need over one million trained professionals in cleantech manufacturing alone. Some funds from the current allocations of 60,000 crores to PMKVY and ITI upgradation schemes can be earmarked to build a skilled workforce for cleantech manufacturing.

Fifth, policy must create and protect domestic demand. Tools like Domestic Content Requirements, the ALMM framework for solar and wind, and indigenous procurement mandates must be strengthened. These measures give domestic manufacturers the scale and predictability they need to invest in capacity and innovation.

COP30's launch of the Global Sustainable Public Procurement Declaration highlights how governments worldwide are using procurement as a lever to accelerate green manufacturing, a signal India should incorporate into the Mission.

The National Manufacturing Mission is a powerful commitment. But its success will depend on where we place our bets. Cleantech is not just aligned with India's climate goals; it is central to its industrial renewal, job creation, and global positioning.

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