



CITY: Pg 3

TMC: lakhs of voter hearings impossible before deadline



NATION: Pg 5

PM hails commissioning of 'Samudra Pratap'



FILM: Pg 14

Kristen Stewart would love to readapt 'Twilight' franchise

'POLITICS FOR US IS ABOUT STANDING BY PEOPLE...'

# 2026 polls: Abhishek pitches 15-0 & 6-0 sweep for TMC in Dinajpur districts



Abhishek Banerjee at the roadshow, in Itahar, on Wednesday



Abhishek Banerjee met migrant labourers Asit Sarkar & Gautam Barman, who were detained in Maharashtra for nearly seven months, in Balurghat, on Wednesday

## THE NARRATIVE

- » Abhishek Banerjee challenged the Balurghat BJP MP to make public any letters written to the Centre or projects secured for the district
- » 'The roads and infrastructure you see today—were these built by the BJP or by the Trinamool Congress?'
- » 'The region's development over the last 15 years was driven by the visionary and people-centric schemes'
- » 'You all know how they were harassed. Without verification, they were labelled as Bangladeshis and put behind bars'
- » 'Why didn't you take steps to ensure their release from jail. If they are Bangladeshis for speaking in Bengali, then you are Bangladeshi for appealing for votes in Bengali'

### PINAK PANI CHOWDHURY

**BALURGHAT:** From a roadshow in Itahar on Wednesday, Trinamool Congress (TMC) national general secretary and Diamond Harbour MP Abhishek Banerjee called on

voters to ensure a clean sweep for the ruling party in all 15 Assembly seats in North Dinajpur in the 2026 West Bengal Assembly elections. Earlier, he had made a similar appeal for a 6-0 sweep in South Dinajpur. During the roadshow, Baner-

jee launched a sharp attack on the BJP and its state president and Union minister Sukanta Majumdar, alleging that they had done nothing for South Dinajpur and were instead focused on appeasing their "masters in Delhi".

Interacting with local residents shortly after arriving at Balurghat aerodrome around 1.30 pm, Banerjee questioned the BJP's contribution to the development of North and South Dinajpur. "The roads and infrastruc-

ture you see today—were these built by the BJP or by the Trinamool Congress?" he asked, asserting that the region's development over the last 15 years was driven by the "visionary and people-centric schemes," of **Continued on P6**

AMARTYA SEN NOTICE OVER 'LOGICAL DISCREPANCY'

## Day after Abhishek's nudge, CEO says SIR process completed at residence

### OUR CORRESPONDENT

**KOLKATA:** A day after Trinamool Congress (TMC) national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee alleged that a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) hearing notice was being served to Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), West Bengal, clarified that all required formalities in the matter had already been completed at Sen's residence.

In a post on its official X handle, the CEO's office said that the enumeration form of Sen—listed as an overseas elector—was received through a family member and that a "logical discrepancy" was flagged by the ERO Net Portal as the recorded age difference between the economist and his mother was less than 15 years.

"A notice was generated for Dr Amartya Sen in parity with other discrepancy cases. Since the elector is aged 85 years plus, the ERO/AERO along with the Booth Level Officer (BLO) have

### TAKEAWAYS

- » 'A notice was generated for Dr Amartya Sen in parity with other discrepancy cases. Since the elector is aged 85 years plus, the ERO/AERO along with the Booth Level Officer have visited his residence and completed the formalities'
- » Earlier, the ECI had issued a hearing notice scheduling a January 16 hearing, citing discrepancies in the enumeration form submitted by the 92-year-old economist



» 'A Nobel laureate should be above any suspicion, right? But what if he's a Bengali? Then he'll be slapped with hearing notices as if he were some common criminal'

» Abhishek Banerjee had described the notice as "unfortunate" and alleged misuse of the SIR process

visited his residence and completed the formalities," the CEO office said.

Earlier in the day, the Election Commission of India had issued a hearing notice scheduling a January 16 hearing, citing discrepancies in the enumeration form submitted by the 92-year-old economist.

Under ECI norms, electors above the age of 85 are entitled to hearings at their residence, conducted by the concerned BLO.

The development triggered a political row, with the ruling Trinamool Congress condemning the move. Addressing a rally in Birbhum, Abhishek Banerjee had **Continued on P6**

## India set to grow 7.4% in FY26

Economy holds firm despite 50% US tariffs, global uncertainty

### MPOST BUREAU

**NEW DELHI:** India's economy is projected to expand by 7.4 per cent in the current financial year, retaining its position as the world's fastest-growing major economy even as global trade tensions and higher US tariffs weigh on activity.

The First Advance Estimates released on Wednesday by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation placed growth for 2025-26 at 7.4 per cent, ahead of the 7.3 per cent projection of the Reserve Bank of India and above the government's earlier range of 6.3 to 6.8 per cent. The economy had expanded by 6.5 per cent in

### KEY POINTS

- » Growth exceeds Reserve Bank of India projection of 7.3%
- » Government's earlier growth range was 6.3-6.8%
- » GDP growth stood at 6.5% in FY25
- » Economy grew 9.2% in FY24

- » Real GDP estimated at Rs 201.90 lakh crore
- » Nominal GDP projected at Rs 357.14 lakh crore
- » Manufacturing growth seen at 7%, services at 9.1%
- » Agriculture growth moderates to 3.1%

the previous fiscal year.

The estimates show that the stronger outcome comes despite the United States imposing punitive tariffs of up to 50 per cent on Indian goods, a move that heightened trade frictions and raised con-

cerns about exports. Policymakers have responded with measures including a revamp of the goods and services tax that lowered rates on hundreds of items, long-pending labour reforms, income tax relief and **Continued on P6**

RUSSIA WARNS AGAINST DANGEROUS PRECEDENT

## Moscow claims maritime law violation after US seizes Russian-flagged tanker

### MPOST BUREAU

**WASHINGTON/ MOSCOW:** The United States has seized two sanctioned oil tankers linked to Venezuela in back-to-back operations in the North Atlantic and the Caribbean, officials said on Wednesday.

US European Command announced the seizure of the merchant vessel Bella 1 for "violations of US sanctions" in a social media post. The tanker had been under US pursuit since last month after allegedly attempting to evade a US blockade target-

### CLOSER LOOK

- » US European Command captures tanker Bella 1 for violating US sanctions
- » Bella 1 had evaded US blockade on sanctioned Venezuelan oil shipments
- » Homeland Security confirms seizure of tanker Sophia in the Caribbean

» US says both tankers last docked in or were bound for Venezuela

» Russia accuses Washington of breaching international maritime law

» Moscow reportedly deployed navy to escort sanctioned vessel

docked in Venezuela or were en route to it."

Russia condemned the actions, accusing Washington of breaching maritime law after US forces seized a Russian-flagged, Venezuela-linked tanker in the Atlantic Ocean. The operation followed days of heightened tensions after US forces abducted Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

Before the seizure, Russia's Foreign Ministry said it was "following with concern the anomalous situation" surrounding the oil tanker Mari-nera. In a statement carried by the state-run **Continued on P6**

ing sanctioned oil shipments connected to Venezuela.

Soon after, Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem disclosed that US

forces had also taken control of the tanker Sophia in the Caribbean. In a separate social media post, Noem said both vessels had "either last

### SIR PHASE 2

## Nearly 6.5 cr electors removed from draft rolls of 9 states, 3 UTs

### AAISHA SABIR

**NEW DELHI:** The Election Commission of India has removed the names of about 6.5 crore electors from draft electoral rolls published across nine states and three Union territories as part of the ongoing Special Intensive Revision exercise, officials said this week.

Before the second phase of the revision began, the 12 states and Union territories together had 50.90 crore registered voters. After the publication of separate draft rolls in



recent days, the figure declined to 44.40 crore, reflecting the scale of deletions carried out during the process.

**Phase II of the SIR began on November 4 and covers Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Puducherry, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Separately, Assam is undergoing a distinct special revision of its electoral rolls**

According to officials of the Election Commission of India, voters whose names were removed **Continued on P6**

## Centre seeks more details from X on misuse of Grok AI for obscene content

### OUR CORRESPONDENT

**NEW DELHI:** The Centre has sought additional information from social media platform X over the alleged misuse of its artificial intelligence chatbot Grok to generate obscene and sexualised images of women, with officials saying the company's initial response fell short of expectations.

Sources said on Wednesday that the IT Ministry asked X to spell out the specific actions taken against content linked to Grok AI and the safeguards planned to prevent similar incidents in the future. The

**Officials said crucial information was missing, particularly on enforcement steps and future controls**

request followed submissions made earlier by the Elon Musk-led platform in response to a government directive aimed at curbing the misuse of AI tools for creating indecent material.

According to sources quoted by PTI, the reply sent by X was "detailed, but not adequate," as it did not clearly address what concrete measures had been **Continued on P6**

## EPFO WAGE CEILING UNCHANGED AT RS 15,000 PER MONTH FOR 11 YEARS — SC asks Centre to consider revising wage ceiling for EPFO Scheme

### MPOST BUREAU

**NEW DELHI:** The Supreme Court has asked the Centre to consider taking a decision within four months on revising the wage ceiling under the Employees Provident Fund Scheme, which has remained unchanged for the past 11 years.

A bench comprising Justices J K Maheshwari and A S Chandurkar passed the order while hearing a petition filed by activist Naveen Prakash Nautiyal. The plea raised concerns that the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation currently excludes employees earning more than Rs 15,000 per month from mandatory coverage, despite the scheme being intended as a key social security measure for organised

WHY IS THE NEEDED?

REVISION

The EPFO wage ceiling remains at Rs 15,000 per month, unchanged for 11 years, while minimum wages and salaries have risen nationwide. This gap excludes many organised-sector employees from mandatory social security coverage. The ceiling no longer reflects inflation, income growth or current wage structures, weakening the objective of the Employees' Provident Fund Scheme

HOW WILL THE REVISION BENEFIT THE PUBLIC?

Revising the wage ceiling would bring more employees under EPFO coverage, extending provident fund, pension and insurance benefits to workers currently excluded. Wider inclusion would strengthen retirement savings, enhance financial security for families and restore the scheme's role as a broad social security mechanism for the organised workforce

sector workers.

Appearing for the petitioner, advocates Pranav Sachdeva and Neha Rathai told

the court that the wage ceiling has not been revised for over a decade, even though minimum wages **Continued on P6**

## US Embassy warns Indian students of deportation risks over visa violations

### MPOST BUREAU

**NEW DELHI:** The United States Embassy in India on Wednesday issued a strong advisory for Indian students pursuing education in the US, warning that any violation of American laws could lead to visa revocation and deportation. The embassy underlined that a US visa is a privilege rather than a guaranteed right and urged students to strictly follow local laws during their stay.

In a post on social media, the mission said, "Breaking US laws can have serious consequences for your student visa. If you are arrested or violate any laws, your visa may be revoked, you may be deported, and you could be ineligible for future US visas. Follow the rules and don't jeopardise your travel. A US



**FOLLOW THE RULES AND DON'T JEOPARDISE YOUR TRAVEL. A US VISA IS A PRIVILEGE, NOT A RIGHT**

visa is a privilege, not a right."

The warning comes months after the Trump administration announced major changes to the student visa framework, measures that are expected to have a direct bearing on Indian applicants. These updates include higher application costs, mandatory social media screening, and a proposed limit on the duration of student stays. **Continued on P6**

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'WOULD PUSH FARMERS INTO CRISIS'

# TMC MP snubs Centre over move to replace jute with plastic bags

## OUR CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA: Trinamool Congress (TMC) Rajya Sabha MP Ritabrata Banerjee has written to Union Textiles minister Giriraj Singh protesting the Centre's decision to allow large-scale use of high-density polyethylene (HDPE) and polypropylene (PP) plastic bags for foodgrain procurement in the RMS 2026–27 season, describing it as a state-sanctioned dilution of jute.

Banerjee said the move to replace jute bags with plastic on a large scale would push farmers into crisis. He pointed out that by allocating 9.22 lakh bales of plastic bags (one bale comprising 500 bags) across states and the Food Corporation of India (FCI), the Centre has effectively withdrawn assured demand from the jute sector at a time when it is already under severe stress. He termed the decision the

## Highlights

- » TMC MP pointed out that by allocating 9.22 lakh bales of plastic bags (one bale comprising 500 bags) across states and the Food Corporation of India (FCI), the Centre has effectively withdrawn assured demand from the jute sector at a time when it is already under severe stress
- » He termed the decision the culmination of two years of policy failure by the Ministry of Textiles



REPRESENTATIVE PIC

- » Rejecting the Centre's justification of "scarcity", Banerjee argued that the shortage was not natural but the direct outcome of policy paralysis
- » No buffer was created when prices were low, he wrote, and jute was sidelined when prices rose

- » The impact, he said, is already evident, with farmers—who had earlier faced distress sales due to weak enforcement of the minimum support price (MSP)—now staring at an uncertain future as plastic is formally introduced as a substitute

culmination of two years of policy failure by the Ministry of Textiles.

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No buffer was created when prices were low, he wrote, and jute was sidelined when prices rose. The impact, he said, is already evident, with farmers—who had earlier faced distress sales due to weak enforcement of the minimum support

price (MSP)—now staring at an uncertain future as plastic is formally introduced as a substitute. He further stated that lakhs of workers are losing employment days as jute mills curtail shifts and suspend operations owing to the shrink-

ing of assured demand. Flagging a serious environmental contradiction, the Trinamool Congress MP said that while the Central government publicly advocates sustainability and reduction of single-use plastics, the Ministry of Textiles has endorsed the replacement of a renewable, biodegradable and labour-intensive Indian fibre with petroleum-based plastic packaging.

A few days earlier, Banerjee had also written to Singh warning that the jute sector was slipping into a "serious economic and social crisis" and seeking urgent Central intervention for the Bengal raw jute industry.

In that letter, he said the prevailing situation—marked by acute scarcity of raw jute, sharp price volatility, curtailment of mill operations and loss of employment—was not sudden but the cumulative result of policy shortcomings over the past few years.

# For sea rescue: Water drone deployed at Gangasagar Mela

## OUR CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA: For the first time, the South 24-Parganas district administration has deployed a remote-controlled lifebuoy water drone at the Gangasagar Mela as part of its sea rescue operations.

The annual pilgrimage will be held from January 8 to 17. A water drone is a self-propelled flotation device designed to identify and reach persons in distress in water using GPS-based navigation. With a range of up to 1 km, the drone can attain a maximum speed of 7 metres per second, allowing it to reach victims much faster than a human swimmer.

The device is equipped with an auto-righting capability—an exclusive feature that enables it to recover from capsizing within two seconds, ensuring uninterrupted operation even in rough sea conditions. It has a high towing capacity of up to 1000 kg (one tonne), allowing it to assist multiple survivors or life rafts simultaneously.

"We expect a record turnout of pilgrims at this year's Gangasagar Mela, especially since there is no Kumbh Mela

## Safety Measures

- » The device is equipped with an auto-righting capability—an exclusive feature that enables it to recover from capsizing within two seconds, ensuring uninterrupted operation even in rough sea conditions
- » It uses GPS for navigation and is programmed to automatically return to its launch point if the signal is lost or if the battery level drops below 15 per cent



A high-speed remote-controlled lifebuoy water drone, deployed for search and rescue operations during the Gangasagar Mela, in Sagar Island, on Wednesday PIC/PTI

- » 'The water drone is expected to be extremely useful in rescuing pilgrims in the event of any mishap in seawater'

this year. The water drone is expected to be extremely useful in rescuing pilgrims in the event of any mishap in seawater. We have already conducted multiple mock drills using the water drone," a district administration official said.

The drone is operated through an advanced remote controller fitted with a screen that displays a 1080p HD live video feed from an onboard camera, enabling rescuers to navigate accurately and

monitor rescue situations in real time. It uses GPS for navigation and is programmed to automatically return to its launch point if the signal is lost or if the battery level drops below 15 per cent.

Made from high-density, impact-resistant LLDPE polymer, the drone features enclosed propellers, making it safe for distressed individuals to hold on to and reducing the risk of secondary injuries during rescue operations.

## ASHA workers stage stir, seek pay hike

KOLKATA: A chaotic situation cropped up around Sasthya Bhavan in Salt Lake, Sector V, after Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers' deputation program demanding a minimum fixed salary and other benefits.

On Wednesday morning, a large number of ASHA workers gathered near the Sasthya Bhavan. To prevent them from moving forward, police had set up barricades.

However, the ASHA workers broke the barricades. Before police could react, the ASHA workers reached the main gate of the Sasthya Bhavan.

However, to prevent any untoward situation, the gate was locked well ahead. Failing to enter the Sasthya Bhavan premises, the ASHA workers started an agitation there. When police tried to clear the place, a scuffle broke out between the cops and the ASHA workers.

According to ASHA workers, the current salary they are getting is insufficient, and it needs to be increased to Rs 15000. Also, they demanded a one-time compensation of Rs five lakh in case any ASHA worker dies. They also claimed that payments on several heads, which they are entitled to get, are still unpaid which need to be cleared immediately. After a few hours of the agitation, 15 ASHA workers were allowed to enter the Sasthya Bhavan to submit their deputation. After the submission, the ASHA workers dispersed.

MPOST

## Anandapur: Fire breaks out at slum; none hurt

### OUR CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA: Tension gripped the Nonadanga area in Anandapur after a fire broke out at a slum around 6 pm on Wednesday.

According to sources, the fire broke out at a shanty, which quickly spread to other shanties. Immediately police and the fire brigade were informed.

After a while, two fire tenders were pressed into action. Later, seven more fire tenders were sent in phases. Around 8:30 pm, the fire was controlled.

However, the bowlers are still working to douse the flames and ensure that there is no pocket fire which can erupt again.

Till the last reports came in, no one was injured in the incident. The cause of fire and extent of damage are yet to be ascertained. Commissioner of



Nine fire tenders were pressed into action to douse the flames PIC/MPOST

## Commissioner of Police (CP), Kolkata, Manoj Kumar Verma, visited the gutted slum and took stock of the situation

Police (CP), Kolkata, Manoj Kumar Verma, visited the gutted slum and took stock of the situation.

## Custody orders must prioritise child welfare: Calcutta High Court

### SOUMYADIP MULLICK

KOLKATA: Holding that custody arrangements must be shaped by the welfare and specific needs of the child, the Calcutta High Court modified a trial court order granting weekend custody of a six-year-old child to his father and limited it to structured weekly visitation.

The Division Bench of Justice Sabyasachi Bhattacharyya and Justice Supratim Bhattacharyya was hearing an appeal filed by the child's mother against an order of an Additional District Judge at Barasat directing her to hand over custody of the child from Friday evening to Sunday evening every week.

The mother submitted that the child is suffering from Autism Spectrum Disorder and requires constant care, including assistance with feeding, and argued that extended weekend custody could be detrimental to the child's welfare.



The father accepted that weekend custody may not be appropriate and sought visitation rights, submitting that in view of criminal complaints lodged by the mother and the acrimony between the parties, visitation should be fixed at a neutral place.

After hearing both sides, the High Court observed that for the healthy upbringing of a child, the company of both parents is necessary, but emphasised that custody or visitation arrangements must be determined by the welfare of the child. Accordingly, the court directed that instead of weekend custody, the father would

## The father accepted that weekend custody may not be appropriate and sought visitation rights

be entitled to visit the child for two hours every Saturday from 4 pm to 6 pm at Eco Park in New Town.

The mother was directed to bring the child to a designated gate of the park at the scheduled time, starting January 10, 2026, and the child is to be returned to her at the same location by 6 pm.

The court further directed that the mother would not remain present during visitation or interfere in any manner. If the park remains closed on any Saturday, the parties were asked to mutually decide an alternative day, preferably the following Sunday.

# Admit cards for Madhyamik 2026 to be distributed on Jan 20

### DIPALI SEN

KOLKATA: Admit cards for candidates appearing in the Madhyamik Examination, 2026, scheduled from February 2 to 12, will be distributed through designated camp offices on January 20, the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE) said in a notification.

Heads of recognised secondary schools, or their autho-

rised representatives, have been asked to collect the admit cards from the respective camp offices between 11 am and 5 pm on that day. Schools have been instructed to verify all details on the admit cards and follow the guidelines issued along with them in case of any error or discrepancy.

Separately, the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education (WBCHSE) has directed schools to complete

## Schools have been instructed to verify all details on the admit cards and follow the guidelines issued along with them in case of any error or discrepancy

Class XI Semester II examinations, Semester I supplementary examinations, and all practical and project assessments for the 2025–26 academic year within March, according to institutional con-

venience and council norms. Marks for written, practical and project components must be uploaded on the council's online portal between March 16 and April 13.

The council has also made

institutions responsible for setting question papers, supplying blank answer scripts and conducting evaluations.

Schools have been specifically advised not to source question papers from outside agencies and to prepare them internally with the help of subject teachers.

Earlier, the All Post Graduate Teachers' Welfare Association had written to the council seeking a separate and detailed

notification laying down clear guidelines for the conduct of Class XI Semester II written and practical examinations.

The association said that although the annual working plan permits schools to hold the examinations in February or March, a clear notification specifying examination schedules and marks upload timelines was necessary to ensure uniform implementation across institutions.

## Couple held over 'trafficking of minor girls, women'

### GOURAB NETO

KOLKATA: The Anti Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) of the Kolkata Police Detective Department has arrested a couple from Kalyani in Nadia district in connection with a case of Immoral Trafficking.

According to police, earlier during the month of September, last year, six persons were arrested from a brothel in Burtolla area and had rescued nine minor girls along with two women. During the raid at 4/A, Gulu Ostagar Lane in Burtolla police had found nine trafficked minor girls.

Two more women, also victims of trafficking, were rescued during the operation. Among the six arrested, a couple, identified as Saraswati Banerjee and Amit Banerjee, were found to be running a prostitution racket, with traffickers supplying the victims.

Police had also arrested four traffickers from there as well. After this raid, the duo identified as Sathi Biswas alias Tina of Kalyani and Tanmoy Das of Muchipara, had gone underground.

Despite cops knowing about them, they failed to trace the couple. Recently, police from its sources and technical assistance spotted them in Kalyani.

On Monday, they were picked up from a cafeteria in Kalyani. While interrogating them, police reportedly came to know about two brothel owners as well, for whom they used to traffic minor girls and women.

# Can't impose election duty on co-op bank staff: Cal HC

## OUR CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA: The Calcutta High Court has held that employees of an autonomous cooperative bank cannot be requisitioned for election-related duties or included in an election personnel database, as they do not fall within the categories of staff permitted to be deployed under election law.

Justice Krishna Rao passed the order while allowing a writ petition filed by employees of Balagera Central Cooperative Bank Ltd, who had challenged a communication issued by the District Magistrate-cum-District Election Officer of East Midnapore. The communication had directed the bank to upload employee details on a government election management portal for the preparation of personnel data ahead of the 2026 West Bengal Assembly elections.

The court observed that the cooperative bank is a registered body governed by its own bye-laws and managed by an elected board. It noted

## The Order

- » The communication had directed the bank to upload employee details on a government election management portal for the preparation of personnel data ahead of the 2026 West Bengal Assembly elections
- » It noted that the bank is neither owned nor controlled by the State and that the salaries and

service benefits of its employees are paid exclusively from the bank's own funds

- » Finding that the cooperative bank does not fall within any such category, the court set aside and quashed the communication directing the upload of employee details on the portal emms.wb.gov.in and allowed the writ petition

that the bank is neither owned nor controlled by the State and that the salaries and service benefits of its employees are paid exclusively from the bank's own funds.

Examining Article 324 of the Constitution alongside provisions of the Representation of the People Act, the court held that the powers of the Election Commission to requisition staff are circumscribed by statute. It ruled that Article 324 does not override

Section 159 of the Act, which limits election duty requisition to government employees, local authorities, or institutions established, controlled or substantially funded by the government.

Finding that the cooperative bank does not fall within any such category, the court set aside and quashed the communication directing the upload of employee details on the portal emms.wb.gov.in and allowed the writ petition.

## OUR CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA: Come January 11 and St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata is all set to organise Xavathon 2026, the first-ever city-level mini-marathon. Not merely a sporting event, Xavathon is a collective step towards healthier lives and a more sustainable future. The marathon will be flagged off by the Commissioner of Police, Kolkata, Manoj Kumar Verma, IPS, in presence of the senior Jesuit priests.

On January 16, the 19th convocation and valedictory ceremony of the institute will be held at the college grounds. Prof Asutosh Ghosh, Vice Chancellor, University of Calcutta, will be the chief guest and Prof Sanghamitra Bandyopadhyay, former Director, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata, will be the Nihil Ultra Awardee for this year. A record number of 20 scholars will receive their PhD among 2,450

## Key Points

- » On January 16, the 19th convocation and valedictory ceremony of the institute will be held at the college grounds
- » A record number of 20 scholars will receive their PhD among 2,450 undergraduate, postgraduate, BEd degrees recipients at this convocation ceremony
- » More than 12 institutes will participate in 50 diverse competitions



undergraduate, postgraduate, BEd degrees recipients at this convocation ceremony. Rev Fr Dominic Savio, SJ, Principal, St Xavier's College (Autonomous) Kolkata, said that work is in progress in full swing at the new campus at Ajaynagar to house the communication and media department.

"Research-based science departments and some PG departments will also be shifted to another wing at this campus. An incubation centre for innovation linked entrepre-

neurship and a community radio station will also be set up there," he said. The college will also host the 10th international conference on Data Management, Analytics & Innovation, ICDMAI 2026, jointly with the Society of Data Science (S4DS).

Then comes Xavostav, the much-awaited annual inter-college fest of the college on January 17 and 18. More than 12 institutes will participate in 50 diverse competitions. The other events include Beyond Barriers, one of the oldest

musical concerts of eastern India, organised annually by the college. This year, the institute will pay tribute to legendary singer Zubeen Garg, who passed away last year.

The college will also organise a mega health camp on January 18 in collaboration with the Department of Health & Family Welfare, Government of West Bengal. To be held at the Raghobpur campus of St. Xavier's College, the camp will provide free medical services, including consultations.



'BJP SHOULD CLEAR STATE DUES BEFORE SEEKING VOTES'

# About Rs 680 cr per Assembly seat dues withheld by Centre: Abhishek

RADHAMADHAB SAHA

**RAIGANJ:** Trinamool Congress (TMC) national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Wednesday accused the BJP of withholding around Rs 680 crore in state funds per Assembly constituency, affecting projects like road construction, NREGA, drinking water, and Awas Yojana. Speaking at a massive roadshow in Itahar, North Dinajpur, he asserted that TMC would secure a massive mandate in the 2026 Assembly elections.

"When BJP comes seeking votes in the next Assembly elections, ask them first to clear the state's dues. Around Rs 680 crore per Assembly Constituency dues have been withheld. Funds for road construction, NREGA, drinking water projects and Awas Yojana have all been stopped," he alleged.

Banerjee said: "Under



Abhishek Banerjee at the massive roadshow in Itahar, on Wednesday

the Pathasree and Rastasree schemes, roads are being built from state funds. In the last four years, the state government has constructed more than 14 lakh houses on its own, and another 16 lakh houses will be built soon."

Abhishek led a nearly one-kilometre roadshow



central agencies such as the ED, CBI, Income Tax, GST, along with a section of the judiciary and the Election Commission, were being used to target the state government. "Despite all this, people have given BJP a fitting reply in Assembly, Parliamentary and Panchayat elections since

"TODAY, WE HAVE PERFORMED THE 'KHUNTI PUJA' OF THE 2026 ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS IN ITAHAR..."

2011. We are confident they will get the same answer in 2026," Banerjee said.

Recalling his road show at the same location ahead of the 2023 Panchayat elections, Banerjee said an FIR had been lodged against him when the national highway was blocked by crowds.

"That day marked the 'Khunti Puja' of the Panchayat elections, and BJP was decisively defeated. Today, we have performed the 'Khunti Puja' of the 2026 Assembly elections in Itahar. We expect TMC to win more than 250 seats," he said.

## TMC: lakhs of voter hearings impossible before deadline

SIR row: Several AEROs warn 'process is unworkable...'

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**KOLKATA:** A Trinamool Congress (TMC) delegation on Wednesday evening met West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Manoj Agarwal and objected to the large-scale issuance of hearing notices under the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process on grounds of "logical discrepancy".

The delegation claimed that around 94.5 lakh electors across the state had been identified for hearings, making it impossible to complete the exercise within the February 1 deadline. "The Commission is summoning lakhs of electors in the name of logical discrepancy. Even if hearings are conducted for 100 voters per day, the process cannot be completed within the stipulated time," said TMC leader Partha Bhowmik, who was accompanied by Shashi Panja, Birbaha Hansda, Pulak Roy and Seuli Saha, who submitted a deputation seeking safeguards to protect voters' rights. The delegation alleged that multiple deaths linked to SIR-related



TMC delegation at CEO office, in Kolkata, on Wednesday PIC/GAUTAM BOSE

stress had occurred, including that of Samprita Chowdhury Sanyal, a Booth Level Officer from Englishbazar in Malda. They also claimed that a sick woman died after attending a hearing recently.

The leaders said they had sought home hearings for elderly, sick and specially abled voters, alleging poor implementation at the ground level. According to them, the CEO assured that instructions would be reinforced and publicised.

The delegation also demanded virtual hearings for electors outside West Bengal and sought alternate arrangements for long-term residents lacking full documentation, saying voting rights should not be denied on that ground.

On logical discrepancies, the

TMC said 40,000–50,000 voters per constituency could be summoned for hearings, despite assurances that minor spelling errors would not attract notices.

Separately, Assistant Programme Officers, many of whom function as AEROs, have written to the CEO warning that the process is unworkable. In a letter issued under the banner of the Assistant Programme Officers' Welfare Association, West Bengal, they said each AERO had been assigned 3,000–4,000 logical discrepancy cases, in addition to "no mapping" cases. With January largely consumed by "no mapping" hearings, the officers said it would be impossible to complete verification of logical discrepancy cases by the February 7, 2025 deadline without compromising due process.

MIGRANT WORKERS

## Bengal CEO seeks ECI nod for proxy, virtual hearings

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**KOLKATA:** The office of the West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) has proposed to the Election Commission of India (ECI) that family members be allowed to appear for hearings on behalf of electors who are residing in other states or abroad for education, employment or medical reasons and have been served hearing notices.

The state CEO's office has conveyed that migrant workers and persons living outside their place of enrolment are facing considerable difficulty in appearing for physical hearings. According to sources, the CEO has also suggested that virtual hearings be conducted, wherever possible, for such electors, citing the practical difficulty of appearing on the specified dates.

The CEO's office informed the ECI that several complaints highlighting these difficulties have been received and that political parties have also raised the issue. It has proposed that parents or other close relatives of such electors be permitted to appear for hearings with the requisite documents.

The Election Commission of India has not yet responded to the proposal. Meanwhile, state Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Agarwal has written to the state Chief Secretary requesting that officials or

### Takeaways

- » The state CEO's office has conveyed that migrant workers and persons living outside their place of enrolment are facing considerable difficulty in appearing for physical hearings
- » According to sources, the CEO has also suggested that virtual hearings be conducted, wherever possible, for such electors, citing the practical difficulty of appearing on the specified dates
- » The Election Commission of India has not yet responded to the proposal

employees who have received hearing notices in connection with the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls not be deputed for Gangasagar Mela duty. He stated that the deployment of such personnel could affect the hearing process.

The Gangasagar Mela is scheduled to be held from January 8 to January 17. The CEO has further suggested that, if necessary, the state government may deploy officials and employees from other districts for Mela duty.

## Sports Min draws TMC flak after mispronouncing East Bengal, Mohun Bagan

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**KOLKATA:** The Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Wednesday launched a sharp attack on Union Sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya after he mispronounced the names of Bengal's iconic football clubs, East Bengal and Mohun Bagan, triggering widespread criticism and political backlash in the state.

A short video clip of Mandaviya referring to the clubs as "Mohan Baigan" and "East Baigan" went viral on social media, drawing strong reactions from football fans and political leaders alike.

In a strongly worded post, the party said it was unfortunate that a Union Sports minister could not even pro-

nounce the names of clubs that have played a pivotal role in shaping Indian football. Clarifying the correct pronunciations, the TMC said such mistakes reflected a lack of awareness and sensitivity towards Bengal's traditions and passions.

Stressing that football is an emotion in Bengal, the party accused the BJP of repeatedly failing to understand the state's culture. "Football runs in Bengal's blood," the TMC said

TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said the mispronunciation amounted to an insult to Bengal's sporting luminaries, asserting that those who disrespect such institutions "cannot be Bengal's own."

## Gangasagar Mela: Kolkata Police set up kiosks, speed limiters made mandatory on all busses

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**KOLKATA:** Kolkata Police (KP) have taken several measures to assist pilgrims travelling to Gangasagar and to ensure their safety during the journey.

Elaborate security arrangements have also been made at the Gangasagar transit camp in the Outram Ghat area, which is scheduled to be visited by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday. The route to Gangasagar is via Behala and Diamond Harbour Road through Thakurpukur.

To facilitate smooth navigation, police have installed signage along the route for the convenience of drivers. A special kiosk has also been set up by Kolkata Police in the Thakurpukur area, where dry food, drinking water and tea have been arranged for pil-



A 'sadhu' performs skill at a transit camp ahead of the annual Gangasagar Mela, in Kolkata, on Wednesday PIC/PTI

grims. Medical kits have also been kept at the kiosk to deal with emergencies.

The kiosk will be manned round the clock in view of the expected rush of pilgrims.

In addition, a few buses have been kept on standby near the kiosk. In the event of a breakdown of any bus or vehicle carrying pilgrims, these buses will be used to transport them to Gangasagar.

Kolkata Police are also maintaining close coordination with the Diamond Harbour Police District to ensure a safe and hassle-free journey for pilgrims.

At the Gangasagar transit camp in the Outram Ghat area, a large number of CCTV cameras have been installed for security. Police personnel are also monitoring social media platforms to prevent the spread of rumours or false information.

Meanwhile, the state government has made the installation of speed governors or speed limiters mandatory on all government and private buses ferrying pilgrims to and from the Ganga Sagar Mela 2026, citing repeated road accidents linked to over-speeding in previous years.

In an order issued by the Transport Directorate, all state

transport undertakings (STUs) and Regional Transport Officers (RTOs) of five districts have been directed to ensure strict compliance with the provisions of the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989, governing the use of speed governors.

The directive also instructs the RTO of South 24 Parganas to maintain close coordination with the Kolkata Police Traffic Control Room for round-the-clock monitoring of pilgrim buses and immediate enforcement action in cases of violations involving stage or contract carriage vehicles.

Around 220 private buses is set to operate between Kachuberia and Sagar this year. Buses have already started reaching Kachuberia by vessel and are scheduled to begin operations from January 11, with the return of buses scheduled to begin from January 16.

## Youth arrested for rape of college student in Anandapur

### The Incident

» After she fell unconscious, Mondal allegedly raped her

» Later, he allegedly threatened the woman with dire consequences if she told anybody about the incident

» Out of fear, the student did not say anything to her family members

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**KOLKATA:** A youth was arrested for the alleged rape of a college student in Anandapur. According to sources, the victim woman, a student of a college in South Kolkata, had been to a friend's house in Anandapur to attend a party a few months ago.

The accused youth, identified as Koushik Mondal, was a student of the same college at the time. It is alleged that during the night-long party, the accused allegedly took her to another room where she was compelled to consume liquor. After she fell unconscious, Mondal allegedly raped her. Later, he allegedly threatened the woman with dire consequences if she told anybody about the incident.

Out of fear, the student did not say anything to her family members. Recently, the woman narrated the incident to her parents and lodged a complaint in Barasat, as she lives there. However, due to jurisdictional issues, the FIR was sent to the Anandapur Police Station for further action. A few days ago, police arrested Mondal.

Cops are likely to take him to the house where the woman had faced sexual torture.

## Dilip Ghosh, Sukanta, Suwendu left out of BJP state committee

PRADIP CHATTERJEE

**KOLKATA:** A day before BJP's national president JP Nadda is to hold a meeting on Thursday to outline party's strategy for the 2026 Assembly elections in Bengal, the saffron camp on Wednesday announced a new state committee with 34 members.

Around six months after BJP's Rajya Sabha MP Samik Bhattacharya became the state president, the BJP finally announced the new state committee. The 34 new

names included 12 vice-presidents, five general secretaries, 12 secretaries, one treasurer, two joint treasurers, one office secretary, and one joint office secretary.

Interestingly, the name of former BJP state president Dilip Ghosh, who came to the spotlight again after his recent meeting with Amit Shah, was not in the list of the newly formed state committee. The names of another former state president, Sukanta Majumdar, and Opposition leader Suwendu Adhikari were not

### BJP announced a 34-member new state committee a day ahead of JP Nadda's strategy meeting

on the list. Ahead of the 2026 elections, the BJP aimed to balance veteran leaders and newer faces in its newly formed state committee, a party leader said. BJP had also announced

the heads of three affiliated Morchas (mass organisations) of the party. Among the notable appointments are former Union Minister Nishith Pramanik, BJP MLA Agnimitra Paul, and Lok Sabha member Manoj Tigga. They have been named vice presidents. The new general secretaries include Lok Sabha members Saumitra Khan and Jyotirmoy Singh Mahato, along with actress-turned-politician Locket Chatterjee.

Shankar Ghosh, the Chief Whip of BJP's legisla-

tive party in Bengal, has been named as one of the secretaries. Additionally, Khagen Murmu will lead the Scheduled Tribe Morcha, while Dr Indranil Khan will head the Party Yuva Morcha. Falguni Patra and Ali Hossain will lead the Mahila and Minority Morchas, respectively.

After Samik Bhattacharya said Dilip Ghosh was willing to take on any responsibility, speculation grew that Ghosh could play a key role in the state committee and the 2026 Assembly elections.

BOTH SIDES CHALLENGED THE REGULATOR'S ORDER

## PS Group builders must refund for carpet area shortfall: RERA Tribunal

SOUMYADIP MULLICK

**KOLKATA:** The West Bengal Real Estate Appellate Tribunal has upheld an order directing a builder to refund money with interest for a shortfall in the carpet area of a commercial office unit, holding that statutory real estate law prevails over contrary terms in a private agreement.

The dispute relates to an office space in the commercial project "ABACUS" in New Town, developed by PS Group Realty Pvt. Ltd.. The allottee, Ayush Tradelinks Private Limited, approached the West Bengal Real Estate Regulatory Authority (WBREERA) alleging that the actual carpet area of the office was smaller than stated in the agreement, despite full payment.

On WBREERA's directions, the New Town Kolkata Development Authority (NKDA) carried out a physical measurement of the unit. The NKDA report found the carpet area to be 380 sq ft, compared to 390 sq ft mentioned in the agree-



### Closer Look

» Tribunal ruled Carpet area means the net usable floor area & excludes external walls, plaster, finishes and structural components

» NKDA report found the carpet area to be 380 sq ft, compared to 390 sq ft mentioned in the agreement.

» Builders cannot rely on "tolerance limits" to justify reduced carpet area

ment. Accepting the report, the regulator ordered a refund with interest for the carpet area shortfall, while declining to grant interest for the alleged delay in handing over possession. Both sides challenged the regulator's order before the Appellate Tribunal. The builder argued that the variation fell

within a 3% tolerance allowed under the agreement and contended that carpet area should be calculated by including plaster, finishes and additional wall thickness. The allottee sought interest for delay in taking possession.

Dismissing the builder's appeal, the Tribunal held that

the statutory definition of "carpet area" under the West Bengal Housing Industry Regulation Act and the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act is binding. It ruled that carpet area means the net usable floor area and excludes external walls, plaster, finishes and structural components. Contractual clauses permitting tolerance were held to be inconsistent with the mandatory form of agreement prescribed under the rules.

On the issue of possession, the Tribunal dismissed the allottee's appeal, noting that a valid possession notice had been served after the occupancy certificate was obtained. Since the agreement did not permit possession to be withheld on the ground of a dispute over carpet area, the claim for interest on delayed possession was rejected. The Appellate Tribunal affirmed the WBREERA order in full and directed that the amount deposited by the builder be released to the allottee along with any accrued interest.



TMC BLAMES ELECTION COMMISSION; BJP COUNTERS

# Malda: BLO death triggers debate over work conditions

AVIJIT ROY

**MALDA:** Malda witnessed renewed tension on Wednesday following the death of a Booth Level Officer (BLO) amid the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. The deceased, Samprita Choudhury Sanyal (48), was an ICDS worker by profession and a resident of the Phulbari Pakurtala area under English Bazar Municipality. She was entrusted with BLO duties at Booth No. 163 under Ward No. 15 of the municipal area.

According to her family, Samprita had been under tremendous work pressure over the past several days due to SIR-related responsibilities. The situation, they alleged, was aggravated by severe winter conditions.

Her husband, Ardhendu Choudhury, claimed that she had fallen seriously ill due to continuous work and stress. "My wife was under

## Takeaways

» According to her family, Samprita had been under tremendous work pressure over the past several days due to SIR-related responsibilities

» The situation, they alleged, was aggravated by severe winter conditions. Her husband, Ardhendu Choudhury, claimed that she had fallen seriously ill due to



SAMPRITA CHOUDHURY SANYAL

continuous work and stress

» 'BLOs are being forced to work under tremendous pressure for long hours. Many of them are falling ill. This tragic

death is the result of the additional and relentless pressure imposed during SIR'

» Issue soon snowballed into a political controversy, with the BJP countering the TMC's allegations. Prez of the BJP's South Malda Organisational District said that while the death was tragic, blaming the EC alone was inappropriate

extreme pressure because of the SIR work. She became unwell and we took her to a doctor, who clearly advised medicines. But the workload was so heavy and she worked without a break in this severe cold. Her health deteriorated further, and she died early this morning," Ardhendu Choudhury said.

Following the incident, local Trinamool Congress

councillor Gayatri Ghosh visited the bereaved family to express condolences. She strongly criticised the Election Commission, alleging that excessive workload during the SIR process was pushing BLOs beyond their physical limits.

"BLOs are being forced to work under tremendous pressure for long hours. Many of them are falling ill. This tragic

death is the result of the additional and relentless pressure imposed during SIR," Gayatri Ghosh alleged, demanding a review of the working conditions of BLOs. "The whole matter would be reported to Abhishek Banerjee, national general secretary of TMC, on a visit to North Bengal districts," added Ghosh. The issue soon snowballed into a political con-

trovery, with the BJP countering the Trinamool's allegations. Ajoy Gangopadhyay, president of the BJP's South Malda Organisational District, said that while the death was tragic, blaming the Election Commission alone was inappropriate. "Any death is extremely unfortunate and painful. However, it is not right to put the entire responsibility on the Election Commission. Trinamool leaders and local elected representatives also put pressure on BLOs to meet targets. That combined pressure is what leads to such situations," Gangopadhyay said.

Meanwhile the Chief Electoral Officer, West Bengal, taking to 'X' handle, claimed that the death of another BLO Jayanti Sarkar of Kushmandi, Dakshin Dinajpur on December 27, 2025 was due to cardiac arrest linked to pre-existing illness. He urged people not to connect the death with SIR activities, which are being conducted as per ECI guidelines.

## Written assurance brings an end to wage standoff at 6 tea gardens

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**ALIPURDUAR:** The prolonged wage deadlock involving six tea gardens operated by Marico Agro Industries Private Limited in Alipurduar district has finally been resolved following a written assurance from the management to clear all pending dues by January 31.

Earlier, on December 23, the Marico management had informed the district administration about its plan to disburse pending wages. However, as payments were not made within the stipulated time, labour unrest escalated across the gardens. The affected estates include Birpara, Huntapara, Tulsipara, Garganda, and Dhumchipara tea gardens.

Workers had been awaiting payment of wages, Puja bonus, provident fund, and gratuity for a considerable period of time. A tripartite meeting convened at the office of the Alipurduar District Labour Commissioner failed after the management did not attend, further aggravating the situation.

Subsequently, over a hundred workers from the six tea gardens launched an indefinite sit-in protest in front of

## Highlights

» Workers had been awaiting payment of wages, Puja bonus, provident fund, and gratuity for a considerable period of time

» Late Tuesday night, Marico issued a formal notice stating that one fortnight's pending wages would be paid immediately, while all outstanding wages and salary dues of workers, staff, and sub-staff would be cleared by January 31, 2026. The notice also stated that one week's wages would be paid on January 9

the district administrative building, Duars Kanya, from Monday, demanding immediate clearance of all dues. The District Labour Commissioner intervened, leading to fresh negotiations.

Late Tuesday night, Marico issued a formal notice stating that one fortnight's pending wages would be paid immediately, while all outstanding wages and salary dues of workers, staff, and sub-staff would be cleared by January 31, 2026. The notice also stated that one week's wages would be paid on January 9 at Dhumchipara, Garganda, and Tulsipara tea gardens. The management further expressed willingness to discuss other genuine demands in February and urged work-

ers to resume duties for winter cultivation ahead of the 2026 season. Rajya Sabha MP Prakash Chik Baraik met the agitating workers on Tuesday night and conveyed the contents of the notice. "I myself am a tea worker. The management has given a written assurance, and the administration and state government stand firmly with the workers.

If any issue arises again, we will stand by them and launch a movement," he said.

Following the assurance, the workers withdrew their protest. However, tea garden worker Parimal Oraon warned: "If the dues are not cleared by January 31, as announced earlier, we will be forced to resume our agitation."

## Tader & son attacked after objecting to unruly act

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**SILIGURI:** A man and his son were allegedly assaulted after protesting an antisocial act at Batasi Railway Station in Kharibari area. The incident occurred on Tuesday night when local businessman Gopal Sarkar objected to the unruly behaviour of a youth at the station. Enraged, the youth allegedly attacked him.

**Accused were produced in the Siliguri Sub-Divisional Court**

Later, a group of youths, including women, arrived in a four-wheeler and allegedly assaulted Sarkar's son at their hardware shop.

The shop was reportedly vandalised and looted. Hearing the commotion, other traders intervened and caught five accused, later handing them over to Kharibari police.

Based on a written complaint, police arrested Mohammad Hasim Uddin Sheikh, Hasibul Sheikh, Hasina Bibi, Rina Khatun and Menuka Khatun, all residents of Buraganj Chorna Jote.

The accused were produced in the Siliguri Sub-Divisional Court on Wednesday. Police have started an investigation.

## Neglected road in Cooch Behar leads to brief highway blockade

SHASHIKESH ROY

**COOCH BEHAR:** Residents of the Bhabherhat area staged a road blockade on the Mathabhanga-Siliguri state highway on Wednesday, demanding immediate paving of a long-neglected stretch of road. Protesters alleged that the road has remained in a severely dilapidated condition for years, despite repeated assurances from the local administration.

Locals claimed that while promises are routinely made ahead of elections, no concrete steps are taken once the polls are over. They further alleged that roads in several other areas have been upgraded, but the authorities have consistently ignored the poor condition of the road in the Dankoba area under the Pachagarh Gram Panchayat.

**They further alleged that roads in several other areas have been upgraded, but the authorities have consistently ignored the poor condition of the road in the Dankoba area**

The blockade led to heavy traffic congestion on the busy state highway, causing inconvenience to commuters. On receiving information, police from Mathabhanga Police Station rushed to the spot and held discussions with the protesters. After two hours of agitation, the protesters withdrew at 2 pm after police assured

them that the matter would be taken up with the concerned authorities. A section of local Trinamool Congress workers also voiced their resentment during the protest.

Anwar Hossain, a local resident who participated in the blockade, said: "There are three Gram Panchayats in Mathabhanga-I Block, but Pachagarh Gram Panchayat continues to suffer from a lack of proper roads. Despite repeated appeals to higher authorities, no action has been taken, forcing locals to protest."

Responding to the allegations, Pachagarh Gram Panchayat Pradhan Kunti Barman said that the construction of the road does not fall under the Gram Panchayat's jurisdiction and that the issue has already been brought to the notice of higher authorities.

PINAK PANI CHOWDHURY

**BALURGHAT:** For nearly five decades, the rhythmic beats created by his hands mesmerised thousands of audiences across eastern India and beyond. Today, those very fingers have fallen silent. Renowned folk drummer Sudhir Mali (60), a resident of Dashed Dakshin Para near Patiram under Balurghat Block of South Dinajpur district, is battling paralysis and struggling for survival due to acute financial hardship.

Sudhir Mali suffered a paralytic attack in 2017, after which his right hand became almost completely paralysed, forcing him to give up the dhol—his lifelong companion. He was not merely an ordinary percussionist but a celebrated folk artist, known



Sudhir Mali MPOST

for his extraordinary style of playing the dhol using not just his hands but also his head and chin, a rare skill that left music lovers spellbound.

As the chief dhol player of the troupe led by Baul Samrat Taranisen Mahanta, Mali performed extensively across West Bengal, Tripura, Jharkhand, Bihar and even Bangladesh.

He was once considered a shining star in the folk cul-

**As the chief dhol player of the troupe led by Baul Samrat Taranisen Mahanta, Mali performed extensively across West Bengal, Tripura, Jharkhand, Bihar**

tural landscape of North Bengal. However, that glory has now faded into darkness.

Mali lost his wife nearly 30 years ago. At present, his only son works as a daily wage labourer, but his meagre income is insufficient to meet the medical expenses of his ailing father.

Due to lack of funds, Sudhir Mali's treatment has come to a halt, and he now survives

on occasional help and charity. Expressing his anguish, Sudhir Mali said: "There was a time when thousands applauded my music. Today, I have to look towards others even for a handful of food. If I could get proper treatment and some support, maybe I could live with dignity again."

Responding to the issue, Balurghat Block Development Officer (BDO) Soham Chowdhury stated: "If the person submits an application to our office, we will examine it and try to arrange assistance.

Although there is no specific provision for such help, efforts can be made to ensure his treatment through the Swasthya Sathi health card. Additionally, upon application, arrangements for rice and pulses for his sustenance can be made from the block."

## Firing on migrant workers, armed robbery spark tension in North Dinajpur

RADHAMADHAB SAHA

**RAIGANJ:** Two migrant workers were seriously injured after being fired upon by miscreants at Niyamatpur under Goalpokhar Police Station in North Dinajpur district on Tuesday evening, triggering tension in the area. In a separate incident the same evening, armed miscreants robbed a woman jewellery shop owner at gunpoint in Ramganj under Islampur Police Station, further heightening fear among residents.

## Closer Look

- » The injured migrant workers were identified as Manjur Alam (28) and Mohammad Irfan (25), residents of Sarvita in Goalpokhar
- » The duo were travelling on a motorcycle when they were chased by miscreants near Niyamatpur
- » The attackers suddenly opened fire with



shotguns, leaving both youths grievously injured. Hearing their cries, locals rushed to the spot, rescued them and admitted them to Islampur Sub Divisional Hospital

The injured migrant workers were identified as Manjur Alam (28) and Mohammad Irfan (25), residents of Sat-

vida in Goalpokhar. According to local sources, the duo were travelling on a motorcycle when they were chased

by miscreants near Niyamatpur. The attackers suddenly opened fire with shotguns, leaving both youths grievously

injured. Hearing their cries, locals rushed to the spot, rescued them and admitted them to Islampur Sub Divisional Hospital, where their condition is stated to be critical.

Mahammad Irfan, speaking from his hospital bed, said that he had recently returned home after working in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh. "In the evening, I was returning with my friend, who is also a migrant worker, when two unknown persons chased us on a bike and suddenly fired at us. We do not know who they were or why

they attacked us," he alleged. NT Bhutia, Inspector-in-Charge of Goalpokhar Police Station said: "Police have started an investigation. We are probing all possible angles and are confident that the miscreants will be arrested soon."

Meanwhile, in another incident, armed miscreants robbed Arati Das, a jewellery shop owner, at gunpoint at Deshbandhu Para in Ramganj on Tuesday evening. According to police, the incident occurred when Das was returning home after closing her shop, carry-

ing a substantial quantity of silver ornaments along with a staff member. Three miscreants allegedly followed them in the dark and attacked her at the gate of her house, snatching the bag of ornaments. The criminals fired two rounds in the air to create panic and fled. When a staff member tried to resist, he was also assaulted.

Arati Das said that the incident has left her traumatised. "They suddenly attacked me and escaped after firing shots," she added. Police have launched an investigation.

PARK IS THE ONLY FACILITY IN STATE TO HOUSE MANDRILLS

## Bengal Safari Park: Rare mandrill birth boosts conservation efforts

SANCHITA AICH BAG

**SILIGURI:** Bengal Safari Park begins the New Year on a positive note with a significant conservation achievement. After successfully breeding tigers, lions and Himalayan black bears, the park has now achieved the success of breeding a Mandrill, an animal listed as Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. The achievement has come after a gap of two years, making it even more special for the park authorities.

The Mandrill was born last week, coinciding with the New Year celebrations, bringing immense joy to the Park. Bengal Safari Park is the only facility in North Bengal—and in the entire state—to house Mandrills. Park officials have confirmed that both the mother and the infant are in good health. "There are no Mandrills in any other zoo in the state, so we were particularly concerned about their well



PIC/MPOST

being. The successful breeding has made us extremely happy. Both the mother and the baby are doing well, and all necessary care is being provided," said E Vijay Kumar, director of Bengal Safari Park.

In December 2023, three mandrills were brought to Bengal Safari Park from the Tata Steel Jamshedpur Zoological Park under an animal exchange programme. A separate enclo-

sure was constructed for them at a cost of Rs 23.54 lakh. Special arrangements were also made to ensure the animals remained comfortable during the harsh winter conditions.

After two continuous years of careful monitoring and nurturing, the Mandrill pair named Vishnu and Niyati have successfully given birth to a healthy baby. To protect the newborn from the cold, the

park has provided jute sacks and straw, and is maintaining strict surveillance. Special changes have also been made to Niyati's diet to help her maintain body warmth after giving birth. The Mandrill (Mandrillus sphinx) is a large monkey, native to west central Africa. It is one of the most colorful mammals in the world, with red and blue skin on its face and posterior.

## Key Points

- » The Mandrill was born last week, coinciding with the New Year celebrations, bringing immense joy to the Park
- » Bengal Safari Park is the only facility in North Bengal—and in the entire state—to house Mandrills. Park officials have confirmed that both the mother and the infant are in good health
- » After two continuous years of careful monitoring and nurturing, the Mandrill pair named Vishnu and Niyati have successfully given birth to a healthy baby



SAYS POLLUTION CONTROL SHIP STRENGTHENS SELF-RELIANCE

PM hails commissioning of ‘Samudra Pratap’

OUR CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said the commissioning of home-built pollution control ship Samudra Pratap has strengthened the vision of self-reliance and reflected the commitment to sustainability. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh commissioned the Indian Coast Guard Ship Samudra Pratap on Monday, India's first indigenously built pollution control vessel and the largest ship in the Coast Guard's fleet so far. "The commissioning of Indian Coast Guard Ship (ICGS) Samudra Pratap is noteworthy for numerous reasons, including the fact that it adds strength to our vision of self-reliance, boosts our security apparatus and reflects a



Rajnath Singh during the commissioning of the ICG's Samudra Pratap on Monday

PTI

commitment to sustainability, among others," the prime minister said in a post on X. The vessel will serve as a critical platform for enforcing marine pollution control regulations, maritime law enforcement, search and res-

cue operations, and safeguarding India's Exclusive Economic Zone. The vessel's primary role is pollution response at sea, supported by state-of-the-art systems including side-sweeping arms, floating booms, high-

Highlights

- » The vessel will serve as a critical platform for enforcing marine pollution control regulations, maritime law enforcement, search and rescue operations
- » The vessel's primary role is pollution response at sea, supported by state-of-the-art systems including side-sweeping arms, floating booms

system, integrated platform management system, and automated power management system to enhance automation and mission efficiency. Measuring 114.5 meters in length and 16.5 meters in beam, the ship can achieve speeds exceeding 22 knots and is equipped with advanced automation and computerised control systems, underscoring India's growing capability in complex shipbuilding. During its commissioning, Rajnath described ICGS Samudra Pratap as an embodiment of India's mature defence industrial ecosystem. Praising the ecosystem for its capability to handle complex manufacturing challenges effectively, Rajnath said the addition of ICGS Samudra Pratap will significantly enhance the ICG's operational capability in pollution control, fire-fighting, maritime safety, and environmental protection. "ICGS Samudra Pratap has been specially designed for pollution control, but its role is not limited to this alone. With multiple capabilities integrated into a single platform, the ship will be effective for coastal patrol and enhance maritime safety. It is a product of the modern approach adopted by the Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL) to enhance flexibility and readiness to deal with present-day maritime challenges," said Rajnath. The Defence Minister commended the ICG for its multidimensional role, spanning marine pollution and coastal cleanliness, search and rescue, and maritime law enforcement.

LoP issue remains unresolved, Oppn in Maha may not have whips too

MUMBAI: Even as the Maharashtra legislative assembly has not had a leader of opposition for the last three sessions, opposition parties may be unable to appoint a chief whip under a new government resolution as the strength of each of them is below the 10 per cent threshold. A consolidated government resolution (GR) issued on Wednesday standardised the status, facilities and honorarium of chief whips and whips of political parties in the state legislature. The GR made it clear that parties must have at least 10 per cent of the total House strength to be eligible to appoint a chief whip and a whip who are entitled to state-funded facilities. The Speaker, meanwhile,

has not yet accepted opposition parties' demand to appoint a leader of opposition. The strength of the Maharashtra assembly is 288. Of the ruling combine, the BJP has 132 MLAs, Shiv Sena 57 and the NCP 41. Of the opposition parties, Shiv Sena (UBT) has 20 members, the Congress 16 and NCP (SP) 10. Smaller parties and independents together account for the remaining seats, including Samajwadi Party (2), JSS (2) and several parties with one MLA each. Under the new norms, every party which is part of the government is entitled to appoint a chief whip and a whip, irrespective of its numerical strength. Opposition and other parties, however, must cross the 10

per cent mark -- 29 MLAs -- to qualify for the same, a condition no single opposition party currently fulfils. The GR issued by the Parliamentary Affairs Department consolidates earlier orders of 2018 and 2021. While chief whips and whips are accorded the protocol rank of cabinet minister and minister of state, respectively, they are entitled only to a token monthly honorarium and limited facilities during Assembly sessions. Officials said the facilities would be withdrawn immediately if a party ceases to meet the eligibility criteria. "This is typical BJP government behaviour, denying basic decency to opposition parties," said Congress spokesperson Sachin Sawant. MPOST

‘Amendments to Forest Conservation Act led to privatisation of forest mgmt’

NEW DELHI: The Congress on Wednesday alleged that the amendments made to the Forest (Conservation) Act in 2023 have opened the door for the privatisation of forest management. Congress general secretary and former environment minister Jairam Ramesh shared on X a screenshot of a circular issued by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change on January 2 related to amendment of the guidelines specifying the terms and conditions for the assignment of forest land on lease. "In August 2023, the Modi Government had bulldozed amendments to the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 through Parliament. Apart from renaming this law as the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Sam-

vardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980, these amendments had introduced far-reaching changes in the legal regime for the governance of forests in the country," Ramesh said in his post on X. "It had been pointed out at that time itself that the amendments opened the door for privatisation of forest management. This is exactly what has happened as evidenced from the circular issued by the Union Ministry of Environment, For-

ests, and Climate Change on January 2, 2026," hesaid. The circular shared by Ramesh stated that "based on recommendation of Advisory Committee and approval of the said recommendations by competent authority, the Central Government with a view to align with the evolving framework for restoration of forest land and utilization of silvicultural available sustainable harvest from forests and in accordance with provision of section 2(1)(i), and section 3C of the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980, hereby amend the sub para 14 of para 7.2 of the guidelines notified on 29.11.2023 and incorporated at para 7.2 of the Consolidated Guidelines, by inserting the following provision." AGENCIES

BMC polls: Four former mayors, 3 ex-deputy mayors in poll ring

MUMBAI: Four former mayors of Mumbai, who held the city's top position at different points of time from 1996 to 2022, and three ex-deputy mayors are contesting the next week's keenly-watched elections to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the country's richest civic body. Close relatives of some former first citizens of the metropol- is are also in the fray this time. Elections to the BMC and 28 other civic bodies in the state will be held on January 15, and the results will be declared the next day. Amid a heated political debate over whether Mumbai's next mayor should be Marathi or non-Marathi and Hindu or Muslim, the Shiv Sena (UBT) has fielded four former mayors and two former deputy mayors while the BJP has given a ticket to a former deputy mayor. Former mayors Kishori Pednekar (Ward 199), Shraddha Jadhav (Ward 202), Vishakha Raut (Ward 191), and Milind Vaidya (Ward 182), along with former deputy mayors Suhas Wadekar (Ward 41) and Hemangi Waralikar (Ward 193), are contesting on the Shiv Sena (UBT) ticket. The BJP has fielded former deputy mayor Alka Kerkar. Shiv Sena (UBT) has also given tickets to close relatives of some former mayors who are not contesting elections themselves. Sena (UBT) MLA and former mayor Sunil Prabhu's son, Ankit Prabhu, is contesting from Ward 54 in Goregaon East. Sunil Prabhu had served as Mumbai mayor from 2012 to 2014. Meanwhile, Puja Mahadeshwar, wife of former mayor Vishwanath Mahadeshwar (2017-2019), is contesting from Ward 87 in Santacruz East. Congress leader and former mayor Chandrakant Handore's daughter, Prajyoti Handore, is contesting from Ward 140 in the Chembur-Govandi belt as a Congress candidate. Handore had served as Mumbai mayor in 1992-93. AGENCIES

Assam polls: Himanta meets Shah; NDA seat-sharing to be finalised by Feb 15

DHEMAJI/DHAKUAKHANA: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said he met Union Home Minister Amit Shah to discuss the seat-sharing agreement with NDA partners for the upcoming assembly elections in the state. Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an official function, Sarma said the BJP is likely to formalise its seat-sharing arrangement with the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and other smaller NDA allies by February 15. Last month, Sarma had said the finalisation of the alliance with existing NDA partners was expected to be over by January 15. "Our seat sharing and other details related to the alliance will be finalised by February 15. Last night, I went to meet the Union home minister and discussed it. Hagrama Mohil-



Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma points on a wall

PTI

ary (BPF chief) was also with me during the meeting," the CM said. Prior to this meeting, UPPL president Pramod Boro had also met Shah, he added. The CM went to Delhi on Tuesday in a special flight and returned on Wednesday morning. "Yesterday, I had a long discussion with AGP president Atul Bora. Our discussions are going on. We will amicably decide on a seat-sharing agreement and there will be no issue at all," Sarma said. He, however, did not share

any reason for the delay of a month in finalising the seat-sharing agreement and other details for the elections. Sarma also said new faces always get an advantage in every election and this time will not be different. The BJP currently has an alliance with AGP, United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) and Bodoland People's Front (BPF). Besides, Rabha Hasong Joutha Sangram Samiti (RHJSS) and Janashakti Party (JP) are also NDA constituents in Assam. On December 5, Sarma said, "I feel we will complete our discussion with AGP regarding poll alliance and seat-sharing before Magh Bihu." In the same manner, BJP's talks with the RHJSS and JP would also be over by Magh Bihu, which is celebrated usually on January 13-15, he had said. MPOST

On a high: NCB seized 1.33L kg narcotics worth Rs 2K crore in 2025

Several operations marked major milestone in India's fight against drugs

NARESH BISWANI

NEW DELHI: The year 2025 has been a turning point for India's war on drugs, with the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) aggressively operating on multiple fronts: massive seizure operations, tough prosecution, international cooperation, and public outreach. In a year-ending press briefing, the NCB said it seized 133,965 kgs of narcotics, worth approximately Rs 1,980 crore, as well as 77,773 kilograms of contraband estimated to be worth almost Rs 3,889 crore to prevent it from reaching the markets. The global drug syndicates were pressed hard with concerted efforts. The Operation Crystal Fortress yielded 328 kg of premium methamphetamine in Delhi, while Operation Ketamelon busted one of the largest dark-net drug syndicates in India for distributing LSD and ketamine via cryptocurrencies. Internationally, the NCB published 37 notices for the interpol (Red, Blue, and Silver notices) and assisted in

Key Points

- » The global drug syndicates were pressed hard with concerted efforts. Operation Crystal Fortress yielded 328 kg of premium methamphetamine in Delhi, while Operation Ketamelon busted one of the largest dark-net drug syndicates in India for distributing LSD and ketamine via cryptocurrencies
- » Internationally, the NCB published 37 notices for the interpol (Red, Blue, and Silver notices) and assisted in

operation extending over four continents with Indian traffickers utilizing encrypted communications and drop shipping. Clandestine labs were also brought under intense scrutiny, where six labs in the states of Rajasthan, Maharashtra, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh were seized, resulting in the recovery of 110 kg of synthetic drugs like mephedrone, alprazolam, and ketamine. To disrupt the financing of trafficking, assets amounting to Rs 96.69 crore were frozen in

70 cases, and 16 orders of preventive detention were passed under the PIT-NDPS Act. Internationally, the NCB published 37 notices for the interpol (Red, Blue, and Silver notices) and assisted in the deportation of five fugitives who were based in the UAE, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia. Public participation turned out to be a great strength multiplier in the year 2025. The national anti-narcotic helpline number MANAS (1933) received over 1.19 lakh



the deportation of five fugitives who were based in the UAE, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia

public interactions, resulting in 110 NDPS cases. AWARENESS campaigns like Nasha Mukh Bharat Pakhwada, Country-wide Anti-Drug Awareness Campaign, Missions Drug Free Campus, and Spiritual Outreach Programs touched practically crores of people. With its enhanced international relations, tech-assisted investigation, and strong engagement with its communities, according to the NCB, 2025 was an important step towards making India drug-free by 2047.

‘Lies’: Cong slams BJP’s criticism of Nehru over Somnath temple row

‘Nehru hated Lord Somnath the most’

OUR CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: The Congress on Wednesday slammed the BJP for accusing first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru of indulging in appeasement politics over the Somnath temple issue, saying the ruling party was resorting to "lies and half-truths" by selectively quoting from Nehru's letters. Congress leader Piyush Babele said when the BJP is raising the issue of then President Rajendra Prasad's participation in the rebuilt Somnath temple inauguration, it must answer why President Droupadi Murmu was not invited to attend the inauguration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. "They (BJP) are serving lies and presenting it as truth, they are serving half truths. They selectively pull out Nehru's letters with the context taken away as the letters written before and after are not talked about," Babele said in a video that was reposted by Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jai Ram Ramesh on X. Meanwhile, the BJP launched a fresh attack, alleging that while the Somnath temple was plundered by Mahmud of Ghazni and Alauddin Khilji in the past in independent India, Nehru hated Lord Somnath the most.

BJP leader Sudhanshu Trivedi alleged that Nehru did not want the Somnath temple rebuilt after Independence

India's "civilisational memory", Nehru chose to "appease" Pakistan by downplaying historic Hindu symbols and prioritised "external appeasement over internal self-confidence", the BJP Rajya Sabha MP charged, citing letters of the first prime minister. "Somnath was plundered by Mahmud Ghazni and Khilji in the past, but in independent India, Pandit Nehru harboured the greatest hatred towards Lord Somnath," Trivedi said. He said the most "striking example" of this is a letter by Nehru to then prime minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan, on April 21, 1951. Nehru addressed Khan as "Dear Nawabzada" and described the story of the Somnath temple gates as "completely false", the BJP leader alleged. "Pandit Nehru, in a way, surrendered to Liaquat Ali Khan, writing that nothing like the reconstruction of the Somnath temple was taking place," he said. "What exactly was Pandit Nehru's fear from Liaquat Ali Khan that he felt the need to write him a letter about the Somnath temple? What else was this if not blind appeasement politics and the glorification of Mughal invaders?" he asked.

FOR D.EI.ED 2020–2022 BATCH

WBBPE releases merit list following SC order

OUR CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA: The West Bengal Board of Primary Education (WBBPE) on Wednesday published the long-pending merit list of 1,982 eligible candidates from the D.El.Ed 2020–2022 batch for appointment as primary teachers, in compliance with a Supreme Court judgment, bringing partial closure to a recruitment process initiated in 2022. Of the total, the Bengali medium accounts for 1,966 candidates, while the Hindi medium has 13, the Nepali medium one and the Santhali medium two. The merit list includes registration numbers, TET roll numbers, category-

Takeaways

- » Of the total, the Bengali medium accounts for 1,966 candidates, while the Hindi medium has 13, the Nepali medium one and the Santhali medium two
- » The merit list includes registration numbers, TET roll numbers, category-

wise details and marks awarded under training, TET performance, viva-voce, aptitude or teaching experience, among others » WBBPE president said the Board had implemented the court's order while ensuring that no appointments already made were affected

The list has been published pursuant to the Supreme Court's judgment dated April 4, 2025, which granted relief to candidates who were pursuing the Diploma in Elementary Education (D.El.Ed) course when the 2022 recruitment notification was issued. Invoking its powers under Article 142 of the Constitution, the apex court set aside a division

bench order of the Calcutta High Court that had declared the pursuing batch ineligible and directed the Board to complete the recruitment process without further delay. The 2022 notification had invited applications for 11,765 primary teacher vacancies from TET-qualified candidates, including those who were then pursuing the D.El.

Ed course, in line with an earlier single bench order of the High Court. Subsequent litigation, however, led to the exclusion of the pursuing batch, who moved the Supreme Court. After the Supreme Court lifted its interim stay on the recruitment process in January 2024, the WBBPE proceeded with the recruitment of other eligible candidates and appointed 9,934 teachers that year on a conditional basis. However, the status of the 2020–2022 batch remained unresolved until the final verdict last year. WBBPE president Goutam Pal said the Board had implemented the court's order while ensuring that no appointments already made were affected. "The Supreme Court allowed the Board to accommodate eligible candidates from the remaining vacancies without terminating anyone who had been appointed," Pal said.

Nation Briefs

BIHAR PANEL SAYS MINORITIES LABELLED AS BANGLADESHIS, BEATEN

PATNA: The Minority Commission of Bihar has flagged rising incidents in which a section of the Muslim people are beaten up by mobs after labelling them as "Bangladeshis", and asked the police to stop such happenings. The letter from the Minority Commission Chairman Gulam Rasool Balyawi came less than two months after the NDA returned to power in the state. In a letter to the state police chief, Balyawi contended that such incidents have left minorities "terrorised" and demanded "a complete check" through implementation of measures "suggested by the Supreme Court". Balyawi is also a leader of the JD(U), the party headed by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

CONG'S LEGAL CELL TO SET UP TASK FORCE OF LAWYERS AT DISTRICT, STATE LEVELS

NEW DELHI: The Congress' legal cell would soon start setting up its task force of lawyers at district and state levels for them to take up important cases on behalf of the party. Congress leader and chairman of the party's legal, RTI and human rights department Abhishek Singhvi said on Wednesday that they are also working on appointing chairpersons of the legal departments in every state and would form a directory of its members across the country. Addressing the media after a meeting of the department at Indira Bhawan here, he said a rapid response force would be set up at the state level, with a minimum of five senior people who can take up cudgels on behalf of the Congress.



EAM ALSO MENTIONS MACRON'S UPCOMING INDIA VISIT

# India, France must work together to stabilise global politics: Jaishankar

MPOST BUREAU

**NEW DELHI:** With the world witnessing a fractious geopolitical environment, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday said India and France working together has become important to stabilise global politics.

The external affairs minister made the remarks during a meeting with his French counterpart Jean-Noel Barrot in Paris.

The two ministers largely focused on preparing ground for French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to India next month to participate in the AI Summit.

Jaishankar's visit to France comes against the backdrop of growing global concerns over the US' capture of Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro and his wife in a military



Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar meets French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot during bilateral discussions

PTI

## Highlights

» The two ministers largely focused on preparing ground for French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to India next month to participate in the AI Summit

» Jaishankar's visit to France comes against the backdrop of growing global concerns over the US' capture of Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro and his wife in a military operation

sides being part of the G20 grouping.

"We are also otherwise active in a number of international organisations. So as two nations committed to multi-polarity, I believe that working together is important for ourselves, also for stabilising the global politics at this stage," he said.

The external affairs minister also mentioned Macron's upcoming visit to India.

"We are expecting President Macron in India very soon," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had co-chaired the AI Summit along with Macron in Paris last February.

"France is amongst our oldest strategic partners, the first in Europe and I believe that our continuous conversation is an important part of nurturing that relationship," he said.

WITH AGENCY INPUTS



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

**The same pachyderm claimed the lives of seven people, including three members of a family in the Kolhan region on the previous day, Narayan said**

engaged to drive away the elephant back to the forest, the official said.

Meanwhile, six pairs of trains in the Chakradharpur division of South Eastern

Railway have been cancelled in the area due to the movement of elephants, a railway official said.

Officials said that the rogue elephant has triggered panic in the region.

Meanwhile, BJP leader and former chief minister Madhu Koda criticised the forest department for allegedly failing to initiate concrete measures to find out a lasting solution to the menace.

Koda, who visited the families of the victims in a village in Nomaundi during the day, claimed that the department used to distribute articles such as torches and firecrackers to members of the Gram Samity to drive away herds of elephants entering villages, but the practice has been stopped now.

He also demanded that the government rehabilitate the minor children, who became orphans due to elephant attacks, and bear the expenses of their education.

## Moscow claims maritime law violation...

Continued from Page 1

Tass news agency, the ministry said a US Coast Guard vessel had been shadowing the tanker for several days, even though it was "approximately 4,000 kilometres from the American coast."

Russia reportedly dispatched naval assets to escort the tanker, which Washington says violated US sanctions. US officials have also said they seized a second "stateless" tanker accused of operating as part of Venezuela's so-called "dark fleet".

That vessel was sanctioned in 2024 for allegedly smuggling cargo on behalf of a company linked to the Iran-backed Lebanese militant group Hezbollah. The US Coast Guard attempted to board it in the Caribbean in December as it headed toward Venezuela, but the crew refused access and diverted across the Atlantic.

Shipping databases show that during this period, Bella 1 was renamed Marinera and reflogged to Russia. A US official confirmed that the crew had painted a Russian flag on the hull.

On Wednesday, open-source maritime tracking data placed the vessel between Scotland and Iceland, moving northward, a location later confirmed by US officials. US military aircraft have conducted overflights of the tanker, and flight-tracking data on Tuesday showed a Royal Air Force surveillance aircraft operating in the same area.

US European Command said the seizure supported President Donald Trump's proclamation targeting sanctioned vessels that "threaten the security and stability of the Western Hemisphere." Officials in the Trump administration have said they plan to continue seizing sanctioned vessels linked to Venezuela.

Russia's Transport Ministry later confirmed that the tanker Marinera had been captured by US forces. The ministry said the vessel was boarded "on the high seas outside the territorial waters of any state," after which "contact with the vessel was lost." It said Marinera had received a temporary permit on December 24, 2025, to fly the Russian flag in accordance with Russian and international law, adding that the seizure violated the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which guarantees freedom of navigation in international waters.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said it was "closely monitoring" the situation and noted that Russian nationals were believed to be among the crew. It urged the US to ensure "humane and dignified treatment" of the sailors and to allow them to return home "as quickly as possible."

The tanker was first targeted late last year after reportedly attempting to approach Venezuela. During that pursuit, the crew refused a US Coast Guard boarding attempt, reversed course into the Atlantic, and changed both the vessel's name and flag.

## Sponsoring terrorism is an expensive affair: HC denies bail to two

**CHANDIGARH:** The Punjab and Haryana High Court has denied bail to two men in a case related to the smuggling of narcotics, arms and explosives from Pakistan via drones to fund terror activities in India.

The court denied bail to Gurmukh Singh, the son of former Akal Takht Jathedar Jasbir Singh Rode, and Gurmej Singh. The division bench of Justices Gurvinder Singh Gill and Ramesh Kumari passed the order on December 5 last year.

The bench observed that sponsoring terrorism is an "expensive affair" and the charge is that heroin is smuggled into the country from across the border to fund terrorist activities.

"The facts brought on record by the respondent NIA prima facie prove the involvement of the appellants in the terrorist activities. The trial is in progress. Since they have links with persons across the border, who fund their activities, there are also chances of their absconding from trial," the HC said, dismissing the appeals filed by Gurmukh

Singh and Gurmej Singh. Gurmukh and Gurmej had approached the high court after their bail applications were rejected by an NIA court in Punjab.

Dismissing their appeals, the high court bench observed that both the appellants are part of anti-national elements who indulge in narco-terrorism, reflecting another dimension of anti-national activities wherein there is a nexus between narcotics and terrorism.

The bench said the facts of the case reveal that money received from the sale of narcotic substances smuggled from across the border is used for terror funding, and the accused-appellants are actively involved in India for terror funding at the behest of their masters, who are working from across the border in Pakistan.

Gurmukh Singh's counsel had contended that during the investigation of the case, police recorded the statement of one of the co-accused and dragged him into this case "due to political reasons."

AGENCIES

## From Page 1

### Abhishek

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

Calling upon party workers and the public to support the TMC in all six Assembly constituencies—Balurghat, Gangarampur, Kushmandi, Tapan, Harirampur and Kumarganj—Banerjee said TMC representatives were reaching out to people with a clear report card of development. "Winning or losing is not our priority. Politics for us is about standing by people and working for them," he said, adding that the final verdict rested with the electorate.

Mounting a direct attack on Sukanta Majumdar, Banerjee challenged the Balurghat MP to make public any letters written to the Centre or projects secured for the district. "If he has done anything for Balurghat or South Dinajpur, let him show it in writing," he said, accusing the BJP of spreading "division and deprivation".

A major focus of Banerjee's visit was the case of two Bengali-speaking migrant labourers from South Dinajpur—Asit Sarkar and Gautam Barman—who were detained in Maharashtra for nearly seven months after allegedly being branded as Bangladeshis. Banerjee visited their homes in Balurghat, keeping a promise he had made earlier, and spent around 20 minutes listening to their accounts of incarceration, which he described as "inhuman and deeply disturbing".

"You all know how they were harassed. Without verification, they were labelled as Bangladeshis and put behind bars," Banerjee said, alleging that the BJP had failed to help them despite repeated appeals by their families. Gautam Barman's wife had reportedly approached Sukanta Majumdar, as Barman had earlier served as a BJP booth vice-president, but no assistance was forthcoming.

Speaking at the event, Sarkar credited Banerjee and the TMC for securing his release, while Barman alleged that BJP leaders did nothing. "It was Abhishek Banerjee and the Trinamool Congress who stood by me," he said.

"Forget party, politics. These two are from your Constituency. As a public representative, why didn't you help them? The Government in Maharashtra is led by the BJP. Why didn't you take steps to ensure their release from jail. If they are Bangladeshis for speaking in Bengali, then you are Bangladeshi for appealing for votes in Bengali," remarked Banerjee.

Earlier in the day, Banerjee visited the family of Osman Molla, an elderly resident of Kumarganj who reportedly died amid fear linked to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process. He assured the family of assistance and announced that a memorial would be set up in Molla's name.

Accusing the BJP of spreading fear through SIR, Banerjee claimed that 65 people had died due to panic and challenged the media to verify whether BJP leaders had supported any affected families.

Banerjee concluded by saying that "abuse and attacks from the BJP only strengthen the TMC's bond with the people." He later left Balurghat by helicopter around 3.55 pm for Itahar after participating in

a roadshow. From the roadshow, he departed for Malda, where he will be addressing the masses on Thursday.

### CEO says SIR

described the notice as "unfortunate" and alleged misuse of the SIR process.

"A Nobel laureate should be above any suspicion, right? But what if he's a Bengali? Then he'll be slapped with hearing notices as if he were some common criminal," the party said in a statement, accusing the ECI and the BJP of targeting Sen.

Meanwhile, officials in the CEO's office clarified that only one notice had been issued and that such discrepancies are routinely resolved at the local level. Another official said the Nobel laureate was not required to physically appear and that minor errors in voter records could be corrected administratively.

As Sen is currently abroad, the notice had earlier been served on a family member at Santiniketan in Bolpur. His cousin has confirmed receipt of the notice.

### MHA

The notification by the Ministry of Home Affairs also provides for self-enumeration. This option will be available for 15 days immediately before the start of the house-to-house houselisting operations. Registrar General of India and Census Commissioner Mrityunjay Kumar Narayan said, "The Central government hereby declares that the houselisting operations of the Census of India 2027 shall take place between 1st April, 2026 and 30th September, 2026."

The decadal census was originally due in 2021 but was postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The overall census will be conducted in two phases, with houselisting and housing census from April to September 2026, followed by population enumeration in February 2027.

Officials said the upcoming census will, for the first time, collect caste data electronically during the population enumeration phase. The decision was cleared by the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, chaired by Narendra Modi, on April 30 last year. India's last caste-based count was carried out during British rule between 1881 and 1931.

The digital census will involve around 30 lakh enumerators using mobile applications on Android and iOS platforms. As per Census 2011, India's population stood at 1,210.19 million, including 623.72 million males and 586.46 million females.

### India set

reductions in interest rates. These steps, alongside low inflation and firm rural demand, have helped sustain activity.

According to the National Statistics Office, real GDP at constant prices is expected to rise to Rs 201.90 lakh crore in 2025-26 from a provisional Rs 187.97 lakh crore a year earlier. Nominal GDP is projected at Rs 357.14 lakh crore, up from Rs 330.68 lakh crore, implying an 8 per cent increase. This is lower than the 10.1 per cent nominal

able global uncertainty", and said it is natural for strategic partners to consult "very closely" in such a situation.

"We must and we are making full use of the vari-

ous mechanisms we have in different domains," he said.

Jaishankar also noted India chairing the BRICS and France helming the G7 this year and even referred to both

### Nearly 6.5 cr

have been placed under the "ASD" category, which includes those marked as absent, shifted, dead or listed more than once. The commission has said the exercise is based on verification of current residence and eligibility.

Officials also pointed to uneven participation during the revision. They said trends so far indicate that the collection of enumeration forms has been significantly lower in urban areas than in rural regions across the states and Union territories covered by the exercise.

Uttar Pradesh provides a stark example of the impact of the revision. The draft electoral roll published on Tuesday after the completion of the exercise excluded 2.89 crore voters, while retaining 12.55 crore names. An election official told a press conference that the excluded voters accounted for 18.70 per cent of the 15.44 crore electors listed earlier. He attributed the deletions to factors such as deaths, permanent migration and multiple registrations.

Phase II of the Special Intensive Revision began on November 4 and covers Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Puducherry, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Separately, Assam is undergoing a distinct special revision of its electoral rolls.

The commission has said the last Special Intensive Revision carried out in each state will serve as a reference cut off, similar to the use of the 2003 voter list in Bihar during an earlier intensive revision. In most states, the previous such exercise was conducted between 2002 and 2004.

Officials said the primary objective of the current revision is to identify and remove foreign illegal migrants by verifying place of birth. The exercise comes amid intensified enforcement actions in several states against illegal migrants, including those from Bangladesh and Myanmar.

### EPFO Scheme

notified by the central government and several states are now higher than the existing EPFO limit of Rs 15,000 per month. Sachdeva submitted that this gap has deprived a large section of workers of provident fund benefits and statutory protection under the scheme.

The petition argued that employees earning above the prescribed ceiling are automatically excluded from EPFO coverage, undermining the objective of the Employees' Provident Fund Scheme, 1952, which was framed under the Employees' Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952. Nautiyal said the plea sought enforcement of fundamental rights under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution, alleging arbitrary and irregular revision of the wage ceiling.

According to the petition, revisions to the wage ceiling over the decades have been inconsistent, with gaps of 13 to 14 years at times, and without any fixed periodicity or linkage to economic indicators such as inflation, mini-



AFTER TRUMP'S 'RESCUE' COMMENTS

Army chief threatens preemptive attack over ‘rhetoric’ targeting Iran

DUBAI: Iran's army chief threatened preemptive military action Wednesday over the "rhetoric" targeting the Islamic Republic, likely referring to US President Donald Trump's warning that if Tehran "violently kills peaceful protesters," America "will come to their rescue".

The comments by Maj Gen Amir Hatami come as Iran tries to respond to what it sees as a dual threat posed by Israel and the United States, as well as the protests sparked by its economic woes that have grown into a direct challenge to its theocracy.

Seeking to halt the anger, Iran's government began Wednesday paying the equivalent of \$7 a month to subsidize rising costs for dinner-table essentials like rice, meat and pastas.

Shopkeepers warn prices for items as basic as cooking oil likely will triple under pressure from the collapse of Iran's rial currency and the end of a preferential subsidised dollar-rial exchange rate for importers and manufacturers, likely fuelling further popular anger.

"More than a week of protests in Iran reflects not only worsening economic conditions, but longstanding anger at government repression and regime policies that have led to Iran's global isolation," the New York-based Soufan Center think tank said.

Hatami spoke to military academy students. He took over as commander-in-chief of the Iran's army, known by the Farsi word "Artesh", after



Iranian Army commander-in-chief Amir Hatami

Highlights

- » Seeking to halt the anger, Iran's government began paying the equivalent of \$7 a month to subsidize rising costs for dinner-table essentials like rice, meat & pastas
- » Protests began soon after on December 28. They reached their 11th day on Wednesday and did not appear to be stopping

Israel killed a slew of the country's top military commanders in June's 12-day war. He is the first regular military officer in decades to hold a position long controlled by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

"The Islamic Republic considers the intensification of such rhetoric against the Iranian nation as a threat and will not leave its continuation without a response," Hatami said, according to the state-run IRNA news agency.

He added, "I can say with confidence that today the readiness of Iran's armed forces is far greater than before the war. If the enemy commits an error, it will face a more decisive response, and we will cut off the hand of any aggressor."

Iranian officials including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have been responding to Trump's comments, which took on more significance after the US military raid that seized Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, a longtime ally of Tehran, over the weekend.

But there's been no immediate public sign of Iran preparing for an attack in the region. Iranian state television reported on the start of a new subsidy of the equivalent of \$7, put into the bank accounts of heads of households across the country.

More than 71 million people will receive the benefit, which is 10 million Iranian rials, it reported.

The rial now trades at over 1.4 million to \$1 and continues to depreciate.

The subsidy is more than double than the 4.5 million rial people previously received. But already, Iranian media report sharp rises in the cost of basic goods, including cooking oil, poultry and cheese, placing additional strain on households already burdened by international sanctions targeting the country and inflation.

Iran's vice president in charge of executive affairs, Mohammad Jafar Ghaempanah, told reporters Wednesday that the country was in a "full-fledged economic war".

He called for "economic surgery" to eliminate rentier policies and corruption within the country.

Iran has faced rounds of nationwide protests in recent years. As sanctions tightened and Iran struggled after the June war with Israel, its rial currency sharply fell in December.

Protests began soon after on Dec 28. They reached their 11th day on Wednesday and did not appear to be stopping.

The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency offered the latest death toll of 36 for the demonstrations. It said 30 protesters, four children and two members of Iran's security forces have been killed. Demonstrations have reached over 280 locations in 27 of Iran's 31 provinces.

The group, which relies on an activist network inside of Iran for its reporting, has been accurate in past unrest. AGENCIES

AS CLASHES ERUPT IN ALEPPO

Hundreds flee through corridors opened by Syria's government

ALEPPO: Clashes broke out Wednesday in Syria's northern city of Aleppo after hundreds of people left two predominantly ethnic Kurdish neighbourhoods when the military opened two corridors for civilians to leave the area that witnessed deadly violence a day earlier.

Syria's military gave people until 3 pm (1200 GMT) to leave the neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqoud and Achrafieh, after which they would be considered a "closed military area." Once the deadline ended, sounds of explosions were heard in the two neighbourhoods.

The Syrian Civil Defence said that by noon (0900 GMT), around 850 people had left the two neighbourhoods, after a day of clashes and shelling that left seven people dead in areas controlled by the Kurdish-led and US-backed Syrian Demo-

The two predominantly Kurdish neighbourhoods have witnessed intermittent clashes in recent months. Previous rounds of fighting ended with truce agreements

cratic Forces and four others in the government-controlled areas.

Dozens of people were wounded in the violence.

Syria's Information Ministry said that the army will launch "a limited military operation" in Aleppo, saying it comes in response to SDF attacks on govern-

ment-held parts of the largest city in the country and once its commercial centre. The ministry said that such attacks by the SDF over the months have killed more than 20 civilians and wounded more than 150 others, and resulted in the deaths of more than 25 soldiers.

The SDF said in a statement Wednesday afternoon that government forces are launching an attack with heavy weapons on the Sheikh Maqoud and Achrafieh neighbourhoods.

It added that Kurdish forces are engaging in "fierce resistance to repel" the assault and protect the neighbourhoods and their residents.

The latest round of clashes is the deadliest so far between the two sides, and came as efforts to merge the SDF with the national army have shown little progress. AGENCIES

Sealed tenders are invited from Bonafide suppliers vide **NIT No. MSMET/DO(H/COB)/NIT01(e)/25-26 Tender ID. 2026\_DOTH\_985027\_1** Last date of submission is **28.01.2026 up to 2.00 pm.** Details may be seen at the office on any working day or visit. **www.wbtenders.gov.in**

Sd/-  
Development Officer (Handloom) Coochbehar

**CHANGE OF NAME**  
I, Amrita Moitra W/O Ravi Kumar Gundappa R/O vill-Daragaon, P.S - Jaigaon, Dist.- Alipurduar do hereby declare that my husband's name has been wrongly recorded in my son Ranvijay Kumar's Birth Certificate ( vide No- 8/2023/1217362 dt. 30/10/2023 ) as Ravi Kumar. Shall henceforth be known as Ravi Kumar Gundappa and Ravi Kumar both are same and identical person vide affidavit no- 186 dt. 06/01/2026 sworn before the 1st class judicial magistrate at Alipurduar Court.

**NOTICE**  
**West Bengal Pollution Control Board**  
In compliance with Notification No. S.O.1533(E) dated 14.09.2006 of Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change, Govt. of India, it is hereby notified that the Public Hearings for the proposed sand mining projects in the district of Birbhum, West Bengal will be held on **11.02.2026**. The date, time and venue of the hearings are hereby scheduled as follows:

Name of Sand Mine	Date & Time of Hearing	Venue of Public Hearing
<b>Barajor (MIN_BIR_26) Sand Mine</b> over an area of 20.01 Ha (49.45 Acres) on the Ajay River bed at Mouza: Barajor, Plot Nos. 3400(P), 3401(P), 3399(P), 3398(P), J.L. No. 113, Block: Khoyrasol, District: Birbhum, West Bengal by <b>M/s. West Bengal Mineral Development &amp; Trading Corporation Ltd.</b>	11.02.2026 at 12:00 hr.	At the Khoyrasole Panchayat Samity Meeting Hall, Khoyrasole, Birbhum Birbhum
<b>Dakshin Ekdala (MIN_BIR_37) Sand Mine</b> over an area of 20.02 Ha (49.47 Acres) on the Ajay River bed at Mouza-Dakshin Ekdala, Plot Nos. 693(P), 698(P), 699(P), 710(P), 696(P), J.L. No- 60, P.S.- Illambazar, District- Birbhum, West Bengal by <b>M/s. West Bengal Mineral Development &amp; Trading Corporation Ltd.</b>	11.02.2026 at 14:00 hr.	At the Illambazar Panchayat Samity Meeting Hall, Illambazar,

Any person or association of persons who feel that he/it might be affected or the local authority involved, may consult the copies of Executive Summary of the project (English and Bengali) and draft EIA/EMP report which would be available at the (1) Office of the District Magistrate, Birbhum (2) Office of the Additional District Magistrate and DL & LRO, Birbhum, (3) Office of the Sub-Divisional Officer, Suri-Sadar Subdivision, Birbhum (4) Office of the Sub-Divisional Officer, Bolpur Subdivision, Birbhum (5) Office of the Block Development Officer, Khoyrasole Development Block (6) Office of the Block Development Officer, Illambazar Development Block (7) Office of the General Manager, D.I.C., Birbhum (8) Office of the Sabhadhipati, Birbhum Zilla Parishad (9) Office of the Khoyrasole Panchayat Samity, Birbhum (10) Office of the Illambazar Panchayat Samity, Birbhum (11) Office of the Kendogore Gram Panchayat, Birbhum (12) Office of the Sirsha Gram Panchayat, Birbhum (13) Office of the Environmental Engineer, Durgapur Regional Office, WBPCB, Sahid Khudiram Sarani, City Centre, Durgapur, PIN - 713216, Dist - Paschim Bardhaman (14) Department of Environment, Govt. of West Bengal, Pranisampad Bhavan, 5th Floor, LB-2, Sector - III, Bidhannagar, Kolkata 700 106 (15) Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change, Integrated Regional Office, Kolkata, IB-98, Sector - III, Salt Lake City, Kolkata - 700 106 (16) Head office of West Bengal Pollution Control Board, Paribesh Bhawan, 10A, Block - LA, Sector - III, Bidhannagar, Kolkata - 700 106. Executive Summary, Draft EIA Report and the application form of the project would also be available in the website of the Board: **www.wbpcb.gov.in**

Any person or groups who might be locally affected from the proposed projects or activities may participate in the public hearings to be held on the above mentioned date, time and venue. They may make verbal or written suggestions / objections in the matter in the public hearing meetings. Any other concerned persons having a plausible stake in the environmental aspects of the projects or activities may make suggestions/objections in writing to the Chief Engineer (EIM Cell), Paribesh Bhawan, 10A, Block - LA, Sector - III, Bidhannagar, Kolkata - 700 106 before the date of public hearings.

Member Secretary  
West Bengal Pollution Control Board

Iran executes man convicted of spying

TEHRAN: Iran executed a man convicted of spying for Israel's Mossad, state media reported Wednesday.

The official IRNA news agency identified the man as Ali Ardestani, saying he relayed sensitive information to Mossad officers in return for financial rewards in the form of cryptocurrencies.

The report said the man confessed to the spying charges and that he had hoped to receive a million-dollar reward as well as a British visa.

It called Ardestani a "special operative force of Israel" and said he gave images and footage of "special places" to Mossad agents.

IRNA did not elaborate about the time and place of his detention.

The report said Israel recruited Ardestani online, adding that his case went through legal procedures, both in primary courts and the country's Supreme Court. AGENCIES

**Durgapur Municipal Corporation**  
City Centre, Durgapur - 713216, Dist- Paschim Bardhaman

**Notice Inviting e-Tender**

1) **Name of the Work:** Repairing Road & Drain at Naim Nagar B Block Ward No.- 14, under DMC.  
e-Tender No. : WBDMC/W/152(APAS) of 25-26 (2nd Call)  
Tender ID : 2026\_MAD\_5006505\_1 • Estimated Amount : 5,81,404.00/-

2) **Name of the Work:** Construction of Shed at Surya Sen Nagar Gobinda Mandir Street No. 01 under Ward No.- 20, under DMC.  
e-Tender No. : WBDMC/W/307(APAS) of 25-26 (2nd Call)  
Tender ID : 2026\_MAD\_5006579\_2 • Estimated Amount : 7,64,396.00/-

3) **Name of the Work:** Construction of C.G.I. Shed at Hari Mandir within Ward No.- 18 under DMC.  
e-Tender No. : WBDMC/W/290(APAS) of 25-26 (2nd Call)  
Tender ID : 2026\_MAD\_5006766\_1 • Estimated Amount : 9,19,457.00/-

4) **Name of the Work:** Construction of Boundary Wall at Milan Pally, B-Block (West Side) Park under Ward No.- 11, Booth No.- 08, DMC area.  
e-Tender No. : WBDMC/W/435(APAS) of 25-26 (2nd Call)  
Tender ID : 2026\_MAD\_5006800\_1 • Estimated Amount : 9,79,311/-

Last Date : 19th January 2026, up to 10:55 am Sd/- Executive Engineer  
For details : tenders.wb.gov.in Durgapur Municipal Corporation

**EASTERN RAILWAY**

**BID Number: GEM/2026/B/7063052, Dated: 02.01.2026.** Bids are invited by Assistant Environment & House Keeping Manager, Eastern Railway, New DRM Building, near Rail Museum, Howrah-711101 for the following works. **Item Category:** Custom Bid for Services - Mechanized Cleaning of Howrah Station Old Complex Platforms 1 to 15 and Associated Areas including Rag Picking on outcome basis for a Period of 2 years or 730 days and lifting of garbage to the nominated vat. **Similar Category :** Cleaning, Sanitation and Disinfection Service - Outcome Based. **Estimated Bid Value:** ₹ 7,32,42,563.17. **EMD Details: Advisory Bank:** State Bank of India. **EMD Amount:** ₹ 5,16,220/- **Contract Period:** 02 years. **Bid Offer Validity (From End Date):** 90 Days. **Bid End Date/Time:** 23.01.2026 at 14.00 hrs. **Bid Opening Date/Time:** 23.01.2026 at 14.30 hrs. **Minimum Average Annual Turn over of the Bidder (for 3 years):** ₹ 367 Lakh(s). **Years of Past Experience Required for same/similar service:** 3 years. **Past Experience of similar services required:** Yes. **MSE Relaxation for Years of Experience and Turnover:** No. **Startup Relaxation for Years of Experience and Turnover:** No. **Documents required from seller:** Experience Criteria, Bidder Turnover, Certificate (Requested in ATC). "In case any bidder is seeking exemption from Experience / Turnover Criteria, the supporting documents to prove his eligibility for exemption must be uploaded for evaluation by the buyer. **Do you want to show documents uploaded by bidders to all bidders participated in bid :** Yes (Documents submitted as part of a clarification or representation during the tender / bid process will also be displayed to other participated bidders after log in). **Bid to RA enabled :** No. **Type of Bid:** Two Packet Bid. **Time allowed for Technical Clarifications during Technical Evaluation:** 2 days. **Evaluation Method:** Total value wise evaluation. **ePBG Details: Advisory Bank:** State Bank of India. **ePBG Percentage (%) :** 5.00. HWH-517/2025-26

Tender Notice is also available at websites : [www.er.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.er.indianrailways.gov.in) / [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)

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**PSPCL Punjab State Power Corporation Limited**

GVK Power (Goindwal Sahib) Limited  
Regd. Office: Plot No. 10, Padga Colony, Sardar Patel Road, Secunderabad-500003, Telangana, India CIN U40109TG1997PLC028483  
(A wholly owned subsidiary of Guru Amar Das Thermal Power Limited, GATPL)  
(A step down wholly owned subsidiary of Punjab State Power Corporation Limited, PSPCL)

**HOD-Electrical, GATP, Goindwal Sahib, invites E-Tender For Procurement of Transformer Oil.**

1. Tender Enquiry No: 108/GATP/EMD/20018031 dated 07/01/2026  
"Procurement of Transformer Oil (for GT/ST/JAT top-up), Transol-EHV Grade, Transformer Oil as per IS: 335/1993, Make M/S Savita Oil Technology at GATP" at 2X270 MVA Gurus Amaradas Thermal Plant (GATP), Goindwal Sahib, Distt: Tarn Taran, Punjab as per details given in the tender specifications.

For detailed NIT & tender specifications, please refer to <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from 07/01/2026 from 17:00 Hrs. onwards.  
Note: Corrigendum and addendum, if any, will be published online at <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>  
GATP-02/26 PR-Advt. No :- 1079/12/2025-26/6870

**OFFICE OF THE KHARGPUR MUNICIPALITY**  
**P.O.-KHARGPUR, DISTRICT: PASCHIM MEDINIPUR**  
Chairperson, Khargpur Municipality invites e-Tender for eligible bidders for the work given below.

NIT No-	Name of Work
WBMAAD/ULB /KHARGPUR/NIT-01e(W&L) dt-07.01.26	The Laying of Distribution Line with HDPE(PN-6) pipes at Ward No-06,09,11&18 for drinking water supply within Khargpur Municipal area in the district of Paschim Medinipur

Details quotation notice along with complete tender document can be down loaded from Website: <https://wbtenders.gov.in>

Sd/- Chairperson, Khargpur Municipality

**GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL**  
**WEST BENGAL HOUSING INFRASTRUCTURE e-Tender Notice No. 109 of 2025-2026**

e-tender is invited for the work in the manner as described in the detailed e-tender notice available on websites- **wbtenders.gov.in** and **wbhidcoltd.com** & in e-tender portal. Last date of Bid submission on 24.01.2026 upto 02.00 P.M. Details may also be available in the website **www.wbhidcoltd.com**.

Sd/-  
General Manager (Engg)-IV  
WBHIDCO

**Metro Railway, Kolkata**

Chief Signal and Telecom Engineer/Project, Metro Railway, Kolkata for & on behalf of the President of India invites e-Tenders against Open Tender due to open on **28.01.2026 at 15:00 hrs.** for the following works. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender and any such manual offer received shall be ignored. **Name of work:** Rehabilitation and re-installation of various signaling gears like signals, point machines, cables, location boxes and allied works in Metro Railway, Kolkata along with Rehabilitation of VRLA type batteries of various UPS from Salt Lake Sector V to Phoolbagan including OCC and DCC in Green Line (Phase-I) of Metro Railway, Kolkata. **Tender Value:** ₹ 2,14,66,725.97; **Earnest Money:** ₹ 2,57,300/- **Cost of Tender Document:** ₹ 0.00; **Completion Period:** 24 months. The tender can be viewed at website <https://www.ireps.gov.in>. The tenderer/bidders must have Class-III Digital Signature Certificate & must be registered on IREPS Portal. Only registered tenderer/bidders can participate on e-Tendering. All relevant paper must be uploaded at the time of participating in e-Tender: **Open Tender Notice No.:** S&T/Work/35-2025 **Date:** 07.01.2026

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**GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL**  
**Office of the District Magistrate & Collector District ICDS Cell**  
Barasat, North 24 Parganas  
(i) **NiET No : 25DPO/ICDS**  
**e-Tender ID: 2026\_DMNP\_984763\_1**

e-Tenders are invited vide the Tender ID as mentioned above under the NiET vide NiET No. 25DPO/ICDS for Lifting and transporting of Rice for 18(Eighteen) ICDS Projects in Barrackpore Sub Division as mentioned in the NiET. Prescribed Tender Forms along with detail Terms and Conditions for the Tenders can be downloaded from the State Government e-tender portal: <https://wbtenders.gov.in>. Closing date and time of e-Tender is: 06.02.2026, 06:00 PM.

Sd/-  
Additional District Magistrate (Treasury)  
North 24 Parganas  
43(3)/DICO/N24Pgs, dt.07.01.2026

**EASTERN RAILWAY**  
**NOTICE INVITING E-AUCTION**

**No. : COM/E-AUCTION/HWH/2025 Dated 05.01.2026**

E-Auction is invited by Senior Divisional Commercial Manager, Eastern Railway, Howrah, New DRM Building, near Rail Museum, Howrah, PIN-711101 for awarding contract for operation of parking lot at various stations over Howrah Division for a period of 03 years. For more details and participation in E-Auction kindly visit the website **www.ireps.gov.in** through **E-Auction Leasing Module. Catalogue No. PARK-HWH-JAN-10. Auction Start Date & Time :** 20.01.2026 at 14.00 hrs. **Srl. No.;** **Lot No. and Name of the station** are as follows : (1) PARKING-HWH-KWAE-TW-106-25-1 (Parking - Two Wheeler) and Katwa-IV. (2) PARKING-HWH-AMBG-TW-180-25-1 (Parking - Two Wheeler) and Arambagh. (3) PARKING-HWH-HWH-TW-279-25-1 (Parking - Two Wheeler) and Howrah. (4) PARKING-HWH-BRPA-TW-282-25-1 (Parking - Two Wheeler) and Baruipara. (5) PARKING-HWH-KOG-TW-262-24-1 (Parking - Two Wheeler) and Konnagar. (6) PARKING-HWH-JOX-MX-296-26-1 (Parking - Mixed) and Janai Road. (7) PARKING-HWH-MYM-MX-228-26-1 (Parking - Mixed) and Memari. (8) PARKING-HWH-MUG-RW-295-26-1 (Parking - Three Wheeler) and Magra. (9) PARKING-HWH-RSLR-RW-207-26-1 (Parking - Three Wheeler) and Rasulpur. (10) PARKING-HWH-MYM-RW-198-26-1 (Parking - Three Wheeler) and Memari. HWH-516/2025-26

Tender Notice is also available at websites : [www.er.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.er.indianrailways.gov.in) / [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)

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**E-Quotation Notice**  
**Notice No. 24/AZRMCM, Dated: 07.01.2026**

e-NIQ is being invited by the Secretary, Alipurduar Zilla RMC. For details please Visit <http://wbtenders.gov.in> or District Portal.  
Tender Ref. e-NIQ No: AZRMC/SEC/08/2025- 26, Dated: 07.01.2026  
Vide Tender ID No. 2026\_WBSMB\_985000\_1

Sd/-  
Secretary, AZRMC

**millenniumpost CLASSIFIEDS**

**CHANGE OF NAME**

**I, Prakash Dhar S/O Bijay Kumar Dhar, R/o Talbanda (CT), Jugberia, North Twenty Four Parganas, West Bengal-700110, I have changed the name of my minor Son Prottoy Dhar aged about 10 Years and He shall hereafter be known as Piyal Dhar.**

**I, Pradip Pal S/O Nirlatan Pal, R/o South Thanamakua Haora Corporation Danesh Sk Lane Haora West Bengal-711109, have changed my name and shall hereafter be Known as Pradip Kr Paul.**

**I, Piyush Harlalka S/O Subhas Chandra Harlalka, R/o Anand Kanan Flat-202, 10A Alipore Park Place, VTC: Alipore, PO: Alipore Dist:Kolkata, West Bengal-700027, I have changed the name of my minor Son Viraa harlalka aged about 17 Years and He shall hereafter be known as Lakshya Harlalka.**

**I, Alauddin Mandal alias Md Alauddin Mandal S/O Tami Uddin Mandal, R/o Kamar Para-Kurmali Kamarpura Balurghat South Dinajpur West Bengal-733153, have changed my name and shall hereafter be Known as Alauddin Mondal.**

**I, Mukta Harlalka W/O Ayush Harlalka, R/o Anand Kanan 202 10A, Alipore Park Place Near South City Bellaire Alipore Kolkata West Bengal-700027, have changed my name and shall hereafter be Known as Kaavya Harlalka.**

**I, Ayush harlalka S/O Subhas chandra harlalka, R/o 10A Anand Kanan Flat-202 Alipore Park Place Near South City Bellaire Alipore Kolkata West Bengal-700027, have changed my name and shall hereafter be Known as Ayushh Harlalka.**

**I, Naazneen Sofeo D/O Sk Naguib Hossain, R/o Denan, Amalghana, Kolaghat, Amalghara, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal-721134. Declare that Name of My Father and My Mother has been wrongly written as S N Hussain and Sitara Hussain in my All Educational Documents. The actual name of My Father and My Mother are Sk Naguib Hossain and Satara Begum, which may be amended accordingly.**

**I, Sk Shahrukh Saba S/O Sk Naguib Hossain, R/o Vill Denan, Dakshin Para Amalghara, Kolaghat, East Midnapore, West Bengal-721134. Declare that Name of My Father and My Mother has been wrongly written as S N Hossain and Sitara Hossain in my All Educational Documents. The actual name of My Father and My Mother are Sk Naguib Hossain and Satara Begum, which may be amended accordingly.**

**I, SRITY AGARWAL, daughter of KISHAN KUMAR AGARWAL, aged 35 years, residing at 46/C, Mondal Street, Kolkata-700006, presently residing at The 64 Earthpoint, Block 4, Flat 4D, 4 Kundan Bye Lane, Near Jindal Tower Hanuman Mandir, Liluah-711204, have declared before the 1st class judicial magistrate Bankshall Court, Kolkata vide affidavit no-565 dated 07.01.2026 that KISHAN AGARWAL, KISHAN KUMAR AGARWAL and KISHAN KUMAR JHUNJHUNWALA refer to one and the same person.**

**I, DEEPAK J H U N J H U N W A L A , son of KISHAN KUMAR JHUNJHUNWALA, aged 33 years, residing at 46/C, Mondal Street, Kolkata-700006, presently residing at The 64 Earthpoint, Block 4, Flat 4D, 4 Kundan Bye Lane, Near Jindal Tower Hanuman Mandir, Liluah-711204, have declared before the 1st class judicial magistrate Bankshall Court, Kolkata vide affidavit no-554 dated 07.01.2026 that KISHAN KUMAR AGARWAL and KISHAN KUMAR JHUNJHUNWALA refer to one and the same person.**

**I, Jaswant Doshi S/O Keshowjee Pranjivan, R/o 20 Ballygunge Circular Road Ballygunge Circus Avenue Kolkata West Bengal-700019, have changed my name and shall hereafter be Known as Jashwant Kumar Pranjivan.**

**I, Vineeta Nemani W/O Rajiv Killa, R/o CG-98, Salt Lake City, Sector-2, Sech Bhawan S.O , Kolkata, West Bengal-700091. have changed my name and shall hereafter be Known as Vineeta Killa.**

**I, Droupadi Deviagarwala W/O Kash Pasad, R/o BE-417, Salt Lake, Kwality, Salt, Bidhannagr CC Block S.O, Dist-Kolkata, West Bengal-700064. have changed my name and shall hereafter be Known as Droupadi Devi Agarwal.**





## EDITORIAL

### ARCTIC POWER CONTEST

Greenland has long existed at the edge of maps and imaginations, a vast white space that most of the world could afford to ignore. That luxury is gone. Climate change, accelerating geopolitical competition and the global hunger for critical minerals have forced the world's largest island to the centre of strategic conversations. What was once a remote, sparsely populated stretch of ice and rock has become a contested arena in the emerging politics of the Arctic. As ice melts and waters open, Greenland is no longer just an environmental symbol; it is a geopolitical fulcrum, sitting above vital North Atlantic routes and guarding what may soon become one of the world's busiest polar corridors. This shift has brought renewed attention from Washington, Moscow, Beijing and European capitals alike, but it has also raised difficult questions: who truly benefits from Greenland's rising importance, and whose priorities will shape its future?

For the United States, Greenland has never been an abstract concern. Since World War II, when American forces stepped in to prevent Nazi Germany from establishing a foothold, the island has been an essential node in North Atlantic defence. During the Cold War, it supported early warning radar systems and strategic monitoring networks. Today, that legacy continues through the Pituffik Space Base, a critical hub for missile warning and space surveillance. Greenland also flanks the GIUK Gap, the narrow maritime bottleneck where NATO keeps a close watch on Russian submarines moving from the Arctic into the Atlantic. The war in Ukraine has only sharpened NATO's anxieties, rekindling fears of great power confrontation in what was once considered a zone of cooperation. Meanwhile, Russia has expanded its Arctic bases, refurbished Soviet-era infrastructure, and modernised nuclear-capable icebreakers, signalling clearly that it does not intend to yield the High North to Western dominance. This reality forces NATO to take Greenland more seriously, not as a frozen outpost, but as a strategic shield.

Yet military competition is only one layer of the story. Melting ice sheets, once discussed primarily in tragic environmental terms, have made new shipping routes imaginable. The prospect of a viable Northwest Passage and shorter maritime links between Asia, Europe and North America has transformed Arctic geography into economic opportunity. Added to this are Greenland's rare earth deposits, essential to batteries, electronics and renewable energy technologies. As the world tries to reduce dependence on China's dominant position in rare earth supply chains, Western governments are looking northward with renewed urgency. China, for its part, has labelled itself a near-Arctic state and invested in scientific research, infrastructure proposals and economic partnerships in the region, raising unease in Washington and European capitals. Environmental regulations, indigenous rights, and infrastructure challenges make mining in Greenland complicated, but the sheer scale of global demand means these debates will intensify rather than fade. What was once a forgotten expanse is now being seen as a vault of strategic resources, and with that comes pressure, persuasion and power plays.

Caught in the middle is Greenland itself, home to just 56,000 people, most of whom are Inuit. For decades, they lived in relative international obscurity, their political and cultural concerns overshadowed by decisions made in Copenhagen or Washington. But Greenland today is not passive. It has increasing autonomy under the Kingdom of Denmark and a strong sense of political identity. It has made it clear that although global powers view the island as strategic territory, it is first and foremost a homeland. Greenland's leaders weigh sovereignty debates, economic opportunity, environmental protection and cultural preservation with a realism born from lived experience. They know that external attention often arrives wrapped in promises of development but leaves behind extraction scars and geopolitical tension. Denmark, meanwhile, is recalibrating its defence posture, investing billions in Arctic surveillance, new naval assets, and enhanced sovereignty operations. For Denmark, controlling Greenland is not only about alliance politics with NATO and the United States; it is also about retaining relevance in a rapidly changing polar order.

The stakes stretch beyond military calculations, commercial interests and national pride. The Arctic is warming four times faster than the rest of the planet, reshaping ecosystems, livelihoods and coastlines. Increased traffic and mining ambitions threaten fragile environments already under stress. Indigenous communities carry the weight of this transition more heavily than anyone else, confronting economic temptations alongside fears of cultural erosion and ecological damage. The world cannot afford to treat Greenland simply as a strategic asset or resource depot. The real measure of leadership in the Arctic will be whether the great powers can act with restraint, long-term responsibility and respect for those who actually live there. If the Arctic becomes another theatre of zero-sum rivalry, the costs will be severe and irreversible. Greenland's rising prominence offers a chance to reimagine security in broader terms, where stability, environmental stewardship and indigenous dignity matter as much as military presence and mineral wealth. Whether that opportunity is seized or squandered will shape not only Greenland's future, but the story of the Arctic in the twenty-first century.

## NEXUS OF GOOD



ANIL SWARUP

THE WRITER IS AN AUTHOR AND A FORMER CIVIL SERVANT

### The Gondwana Marine Fossil Park reminds us that development can coexist with preservation — if vision, science and community walk together

# Chhattisgarh's Timeless Treasure

*Gondwana Marine Fossil Park isn't just a tourist marvel — it's a model of conservation, education, community livelihood and responsible development*

In today's fast-paced world, as cities expand and technology permeates every aspect of life, places that remain untouched by time have become increasingly rare. Yet, nestled in the heart of Manendragarh Forest in Chhattisgarh lies a remarkable site that tells the story of life from nearly 290 million years ago. This marvel is now officially recognised with the opening of the Gondwana Marine Fossil Park on April 26, 2025—the largest marine fossil site in Asia. Chhattisgarh is taking a leadership role in promoting conservation-focused tourism, creating opportunities for geological education, and supporting local communities through ecological initiatives.

The inauguration of the Gondwana Marine Fossil Park is a significant milestone for the Surguja division of Chhattisgarh, exemplifying a story of transformation. More than a grand ceremony, the conversion of this once-overlooked geological site into a vibrant tourist destination underscores the region's progress. Much of the project's success can be attributed to the vision of Divisional Forest Officer Manish Kashyap, a 2015 Indian Forest Service officer.

#### Preserving our Planet's Prehistoric Legacy

In 1954, geologist SK Ghosh made an extraordinary discovery during coal mining operations along the Hasdeo River. Beneath the earth's surface, he uncovered fossil beds stretching over a kilometre and filled with the remarkable remains of ancient marine life. These fossils include various creatures such as clams, brachiopods (a type of shellfish), snails, crinoids (starlike sea creatures), and bryozoans (tiny colonial animals). Many date back to the Permian period—a pivotal era in Earth's history—making them among the oldest marine fossils ever discovered in India.

For many years, this significant site remained overlooked. However, in 2015, it finally gained recognition when the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences designated it as a National Geological Monument. This recognition underscores the importance of these fossils in deepening our understanding of life's history on Earth.



In a world rushing toward glass towers and concrete ambition, Chhattisgarh has chosen a quieter triumph — preserving a 290-million-year-old chapter of Earth's history

Earth.

Manish Kashyap envisioned creating a protected area that would serve as a living museum, showcasing the planet's incredible history. The park is designed to educate and inspire, especially for those in northwestern Chhattisgarh, fostering a connection to Earth's ancient story. Drawing inspiration from dinosaur parks in Gujarat and Jharkhand, Manish aimed to develop a unique site focused on nature conservation, storytelling, and meaningful public engagement.

#### Bringing the Jurassic Era to Life

Chhattisgarh is home to an amazing new attraction called the Jurassic Rock Garden, which is a groundbreaking way to showcase our planet's prehistoric past. This garden features 35 enormous sculptures of ancient creatures, all expertly carved from the region's granite. These impressive sculptures, varying in height from 3 to 12 feet, represent a variety of life forms, including marine animals, amphibians, and land creatures, highlighting the incredible diversity of life that has existed on Earth.

Creating these sculptures was no easy task. The granite is very hard, which often damages the tools used for carving.

The area where the sculptures were made is also steep and rocky, making it hard to work in. Additionally, there weren't many skilled artisans available to take on such a unique project. Despite these challenges, the team behind the Jurassic Rock Garden showed great determination and creativity, working closely with the local community to bring this project to life. Today, the garden stands out as a one-of-a-kind space in India, offering a fascinating glimpse into the world of dinosaurs and other ancient life forms.

#### From Fossil to Future

The Gondwana Marine Fossil Park stands out as a great example of sustainable eco-tourism because of its thoughtful design, which balances scientific, educational, ecological, and community goals. At the park, visitors can explore an Interpretation Centre that takes them on an exciting journey through the Earth's 4.5-billion-year story, complete with fascinating fossil displays, artwork, and engaging visual content.

This has sparked growing interest in education, attracting geology students from distant places, such as Manipur, demonstrating how the park is becoming a hub for learning.

In addition to education, protecting the unique fossils is also very important. To protect the park from damage or vandalism, the park has implemented various security measures. These include fencing, video surveillance, and trained security personnel, working closely with the Geological Survey of India to preserve this valuable natural heritage.

Local communities have played an important role in the park's operations. Residents have been hired as guides, security workers, and maintenance staff. Around the edges of the park, visitors can enjoy activities like bamboo rafting on the Hasdeo River, along with local food stalls and craft kiosks. These initiatives create sustainable jobs for locals and enhance the visitor experience. Looking ahead, there are plans to add more attractions, such as a cactus garden, bamboo structures, and nature trails, to enhance the park's natural offerings.

#### Redefining Geo-tourism in Sarguja

Until recently, the Sarguja region was mostly known for Mainpat, often called the "Shimla of Chhattisgarh." However, the opening of the Gondwana Marine Fossil Park has changed that view. As stated during the inauguration, "This

park is not just a tourist spot; it's a remarkable site that highlights the geological history of the area and will help put Chhattisgarh on the world map for fossil tourism." With its blend of scientific knowledge, impressive displays, and commitment to nature, the park is poised to become a major attraction in Chhattisgarh's tourism efforts.

#### Legacy of Conservation Endures

The Gondwana Marine Fossil Park represents not only a significant infrastructural achievement but also a profound philosophical shift in how we approach ecological preservation and heritage tourism. This initiative serves as a testament to the idea that developmental progress does not require the obliteration of historical landscapes; rather, it highlights the potential to preserve, appreciate, and integrate ancient ecosystems into contemporary society in ways that promote both environmental stewardship and economic growth.

The park has quickly become an exemplary model of integrated heritage tourism, showcasing how effective administrative strategies and innovative vision can transform an underutilised natural resource into a globally recognised destination. Since its opening, the park has attracted over eleven thousand visitors, indicating strong public interest in its ecological value and potential for community development.

In light of the pressing challenges posed by biodiversity decline and climate change, the Gondwana project exemplifies a collaborative framework where policy, scientific inquiry, and community engagement converge. The narrative of Gondwana reinforces our collective responsibility to remember, respect, and remediate our natural heritage.

Manish Kashyap, a dedicated forester, was conferred with the Nexus of Good Annual Award, 2025, for this initiative. The model that he has put in place is replicable and scalable through public-private partnerships. This approach could serve as a blueprint for similar ecological conservation projects worldwide.

*Views expressed are personal*

## GREEN THOUGHTS



SUDHEER KUMAR SHUKLA

THE WRITER IS AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTIST AND LEADS THE THINK TANK AT THE MOBIUS FOUNDATION

### Until India admits that clean air requires structural reform, not seasonal firefighting, air pollution will remain its longest-running public health emergency

# Emergency That Never Ends

*India's air pollution crisis persists not because it is inevitable, but because governance treats it as a temporary inconvenience rather than a systemic public health failure*

Every winter, India rehearses the same script. As smog engulfs Delhi and much of north India, emergency measures are announced, courts intervene, schools shut and political attention briefly sharpens. When winds change or the monsoon arrives, pollution fades from view — and accountability fades with it. This cycle persists not because air pollution is seasonal, but because India has chosen to govern it as an episodic inconvenience rather than a structural failure.

The science is unequivocal. Fine particulate matter (PM2.5) is the most harmful air pollutant, penetrating deep into the lungs and bloodstream and increasing the risk of cardiovascular disease, stroke, lung cancer and premature death. The World Health Organisation's safe annual average limit is 5 micrograms per cubic metre. India's national average remains close to 50 micrograms — a level that constitutes a continuous public health emergency. Yet this exposure has been politically normalised.

The extent of chronic exposure is stark. Delhi records barely 20–25 days a year that meet WHO health standards; for more than 330 days, residents breathe unsafe air. Mumbai and Kolkata manage only about 50–70 healthy days annually. Even Bengaluru and Chennai, often cited as cleaner cities, experience unhealthy air on nearly three out of four days each year. These figures underline a critical reality: unsafe air is not confined to winter or to the Indo-Gangetic Plain — it is a nationwide condition.

A key reason this crisis fails to trigger sustained action lies in how air quality is officially communicated. India's Air Quality Index is fundamentally misaligned with health science. Air can be labelled "satisfactory" or "moderate" even when PM2.5 levels exceed WHO guidelines several times. This is not a semantic flaw but a policy choice. By understating health risk, the AQI dulls public urgency, reassures administrators and enables political complacency. Visibility improves; exposure does not.



Every winter, India briefly wakes up to its air pollution crisis — only to forget it as soon as the smog lifts

sures administrators and enables political complacency. Visibility improves; exposure does not.

Institutional weaknesses extend further. The National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), India's flagship response, exemplifies diluted ambition. Its original targets — a 20–30 per cent reduction in particulate pollution — were modest, non-binding and detached from health-based benchmarks. Even these limited goals have been pursued unevenly, with weak enforcement, uncertain funding and little consequence for failure. Cities are assessed on action plans and reporting compliance rather than on actual reductions in population exposure.

Equally damaging is the absence of effective inter-state and airshed-level governance. Air pollution does not respect administrative boundaries, yet regulatory responses remain fragmented along municipal and state lines. Crop-residue burning, thermal power generation, freight transport and industrial clusters operate across regions, while coordina-

tion mechanisms remain advisory and weak. Responsibility is routinely deflected — from cities to states, from states to the Centre, and ultimately to meteorology.

The costs of this governance failure are severe. Air pollution reduces average life expectancy in India by over three years, and by more than eight years in Delhi-NCR. Healthcare systems absorb the burden, productivity declines, and the poorest and youngest bear disproportionate harm. Still, policy remains reactive, litigation-driven and winter-centric.

Until India confronts air pollution as a systemic failure of standards, institutions and coordination, emergency measures will continue to substitute for reform. Clean air cannot be delivered through seasonal firefighting. It demands binding, health-aligned targets, credible enforcement and governance that matches the scale of the problem. Without this shift, unsafe air will remain India's most enduring — and most tolerated — public health emergency.

*Views expressed are personal*



## DEAR EDITOR

### ENSURE YOUR INCLUSION

The Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision in Uttar Pradesh has sparked understandable anxiety, with 2.89 crore names missing from the draft roll. However, the month-long window for claims and objections until February 6 offers a crucial opportunity that citizens must actively use instead of merely expressing outrage. Many deletions appear to stem from routine reasons such as deaths, permanent migration, duplication and lack of verification forms, but for genuine voters mistakenly excluded, this period is essential to restore their democratic right. People must check their names through BLOs, the CEO's website, the ECINet app or the Election Commission portal. Those left out should promptly submit Form 6, while corrections and objections can also be made through prescribed forms. Democracy functions best when citizens participate responsibly, and ensuring one's name on the electoral roll is the first civic duty. The final responsibility to safeguard our vote rests with us.

MANJU SHARMA,  
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Zafar Marg, New Delhi 110 002



BHARAT KI SOCH

# Forgotten Half of Citizenship

While modern democracy rightly empowers citizens, our ancient traditions underline an equally vital truth — responsibility sustains a nation; writes P Sharma

From ‘dharma’ and ‘rajdharmā’ to Fundamental Duties and Viksit Bharat 2047, the path to national success lies in citizens consciously upholding their obligations with sincerity and purpose

‘Rajpath’, the iconic landmark of India Gate, was rechristened *Kartavya Path* to shun the colonial-era connotation and reinforce the glow of India’s democratic values. The adoption of the nomenclature *Kartavya Path*, meaning the ‘path of duty’, portrays a shift from emphasis on the colonial pomp of the ruling power to one on public ownership, service and responsibility, as well as the duty of the government and citizens towards the nation.

Indian citizens play a part in governance through the democratic process and civic engagements. Time and again, leaders have reminded the citizenry to take up its duties diligently. The idea that people’s contribution is crucial in ensuring the success of the endeavours of the government is pertinent. J. F. Kennedy had remarked, “Do not ask what the country can do for you, ask what you can do for the country.”

The Indian family structure is hailed as one of the most stable social institutions in the world. What sets our culture apart from the rest of the world is that this institution is anchored in the essence of duty. Each family member is assigned specific responsibilities, producing a framework of mutual obligations.

The king’s duties are discussed at length in the texts on *rajdharmā* such as the *Arthashastra*, the epics, especially the *Mahabharata*, and the early Buddhist texts. What about the duties of the *praja* or the populace? How can the common people be located in these traditions? We know that the populace had a prominent role in the ancient political milieu, as they vehemently supported the rule of some monarchs while they denounced and rejected the power of inefficient kings. Yudhishthira ruled with the help of associates and, in that, the voice of the subjects also mattered. The ancient texts tell us that an idea of *dharma* with regard to the discipline, responsibility and duties of the subjects did exist in the texts.

*Dharma* refers to the proper, ideal conduct of a person living in society.

The literature on *rajdharmā* emphasises the happiness of people being of utmost importance to the kings. The etymology of *rāja* is “one



The rediscovery of civic duty is essential to a truly developed nation

who pleases his subjects” (*rāja* *rañ-jayati prajā*). Bhishma, in his discourse on kingship in the *Shanti Parva*, asserts that the king should be guided by his *dharma*, not self-interest. The king, being the maintainer of *dharma*, must guard *varna-dharma*, *desha dharma* (the duties of different countries) and *kula dharma* (the duties of the clans), thereby preventing the onset of chaos (*matsyanyaya*).

Although the literary sources place more value on the *dharma* concerning the duties of one’s *varna* and *ashrama*, texts such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Dharmasutras* also underscore the existence of another *dharma*, namely, the *sadharana dharma*. This *dharma* applied to everybody and included virtues like righteousness (*arjava*), non-violence (*ahimsa*), compassion, not getting angry, truthfulness, sharing, not taking what belongs to someone else (*aparigraha*), forbearance, supporting one’s dependents, and honouring guests. A concept akin to *sadharana dharma* also exists in the *Arthashastra*. Kautilya specifies *ahimsa*, *satyam* (truthfulness), cleanliness, freedom from malice, compassion and tolerance to be embraced by all people.

In an extremely relevant section, Kautilya strictly warns the people against vices (*vyasana*) arising due to anger and unbridled desire. Three kinds of vices emanating from anger are: inflicting verbal injury, harming another’s property and causing physical injury. Harming another person’s property includes not giving what is due, taking away unjustly, destroying it and neglecting entrusted property.

Following one’s *sadharana dharma* can prove to be instrumental in making today’s masses conscious of their fundamental duties. The ethic of righteousness would motivate people to act with fairness and morality when dealing with fellow countrymen, thus promoting harmony and the spirit of brotherhood.

Taking a cue from Kautilya’s advice on the vices of men would instil discipline in people. They would refrain from taking law into their hands and, at all times, protect public property. Hate crimes, acts of discrimination and systemic prejudices would also diminish if citizens of the country would imbibe *sadharana dharma* principles such as compassion and tolerance. Non-violence, practised at the community and individual level, would certainly help decrease instances of assault, domes-

tic abuse and cases of road rage, creating more secure neighbourhoods. The adherence to the idea of non-stealing/ *aparigraha*, which besides being a part of *sadharana dharma*, is central in Buddhist and Jaina thought, would discourage robberies and thefts.

The concept of *Ramarajya*, as given at the end of the *Yuddhakanda*, has had an enduring appeal. The *Ramayana*’s notion of the ideal kingdom is captured in the description of Rama’s rule. The people looked up to righteous Rama as a model. It is said that during Rama’s reign, his subjects followed their own proper occupations and were content with performing their own duties. Devoted to *dharma*, they always followed the truth.

The story of *Ramayana* itself can be seen as a vehicle of moral values for people, as we encounter in it many models of excellent behaviour. While Rama is the ideal son and king, Bharata and Lakshmana epitomise the obedient brother, and Sita is the ideal devoted wife. The *Ramlila*, involving broad-based people participation, propagates models of ideal behaviour. Its purpose transcends mere entertainment, since it also imbues in the audience a sense of duty as embodied by the *Ramayana* characters.

The idea of following one’s *dharma* also assumes supremacy as it was connected to one’s afterlife—an extremely significant thought in the ancient Indian worldview. The rewards of *dharma* included acquiring spiritual merit (*punya*), and its impact would be experienced in future lives as well. Thus, a dutiful subject who performed his duties with sincerity was, in a way, securing a good next life.

Deriving inspiration from our ancient textual tradition, we must follow our fundamental duties such as defending the country and performing national services if and when the country requires; encouraging the spirit of harmony and brotherhood amongst all the people of India; preserving all public property; conserving the rich national heritage of our composite culture; and striving to improve the natural environment including lakes, wildlife, rivers and forests. If we citizens do not leave any stone unturned in doing our duties, we can help our nation achieve the pinnacles of success and make it truly a power to reckon with.

Our ancient social ethos was defined by individuals following their respective *dharma*s. This can be viewed as a precursor to the contemporary idea that, as Indian citizens, we are entitled not just to rights but also to carry a commitment to the fundamental duties. The obligations of *dharma* were compulsory and universally applicable in ancient times. While modern fundamental duties are not enforceable by the government, they should be understood as the core responsibility of the citizens. At this critical juncture, it is necessary to acknowledge that nation-building cannot be achieved through rights alone. It requires serious dedication to duties. Fundamental Duties are indispensable to the realisation of a developed India and must function as the fulcrum of the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision. The victory of this national aspiration ultimately rests on the conscious, unflinching, and sincere participation of citizens, whose collective effort alone can transform this vision into reality.

The writer is a Senior Research Fellow, Bharat Ki Soch. Views expressed are personal

STRATEGIC COMPASS

## Confidence Without Alignment

Coming after Putin and ahead of the India–EU Summit, Friedrich Merz’s visit reinforces a reality the world is slowly accepting—India no longer chooses sides; it shapes outcomes



PRIYA GUPTA

THE WRITER IS AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AT ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP, JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

Friedrich Merz’s visit to New Delhi is not a standalone bilateral engagement; it is a chapter in a far larger geopolitical text India is writing

When German Chancellor Friedrich Merz arrives in New Delhi in the third week of January 2026, the visit will be read not as an isolated bilateral engagement, but as part of a carefully sequenced diplomatic narrative. Unlike his predecessor Olaf Scholz’s coalition complexities, Merz’s conservative leadership post-May 2025 election promises a more decisive push on security and trade, contrasting Berlin’s earlier hesitations. Coming weeks after Russian President Vladimir Putin’s visit and just ahead of the India–EU Summit, the timing highlights how India is consciously positioning itself as a power that engages across geopolitical divides without being constrained by them. In an increasingly divided world, the order in which leaders arrive in New Delhi often matters as much as the meetings themselves.

India’s strategic autonomy, often mistaken for hesitation, is in fact a deliberate and confident diplomatic choice. Rather than aligning with rigid blocs, New Delhi is expanding its room for manoeuvre by engaging multiple partners in a fractured global order. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly underlined, India’s foreign policy is guided not by blocs but by national interest, a principle that increasingly defines New Delhi’s global posture.

**Diplomacy in the Age of Public Signalling**

The digital conversation around Merz’s visit offers a revealing layer to this strategy. Social media discussions over the past weeks have not revolved around protocol or symbolism alone; instead, they have framed India as a country confident enough to host major leaders from rival geopolitical camps in close suc-



In a polarising world, New Delhi is signalling that strategic autonomy is not indecision, rather it is influence

cession. Analysts, former diplomats, and strategic commentators online have repeatedly interpreted the sequencing from Moscow to Berlin as evidence that India no longer reacts to global power shifts but manages them.

What is notable is the absence of domestic polarisation on this issue in online discourse. Unlike earlier phases of the Ukraine war, recent conversations reflect a broad acceptance that India’s engagement with Russia is transactional and historical, while its engagement with Europe is strategic and forward-looking. This convergence of elite and popular narratives strengthens India’s diplomatic credibility abroad.

**Germany, Europe, and India’s Economic Calculus**

Germany’s importance to India extends well beyond symbolism. It is India’s largest trading partner in the European Union. Bilateral trade crossed USD 26 billion in 2024, and German foreign direct investment stock in India has exceeded USD 14

billion, spanning automobiles, engineering, chemicals, and clean technology. Over 1,800 German companies currently operate in India, employing several hundred thousand people directly and indirectly.

The Merz visit is therefore widely viewed as a preparatory step toward building momentum for the long-stalled India–EU Free Trade Agreement. Timed just before the January 27 India–EU summit, Merz’s trip is expected to inject momentum into the long-stalled India–EU FTA discussions, particularly on tariffs and market access. Policy discussions increasingly suggest that Berlin could play a bridging role within the EU at a time of supply-chain recalibration. European diplomats have increasingly described India as a “partner of choice, not convenience” in a shifting global economy.

From India’s perspective, deeper economic alignment with Germany offers access to advanced manufacturing, green

hydrogen technologies, and Industry 4.0 expertise areas central to India’s own industrial transformation agenda.

**Strategic Autonomy and the Russia–Ukraine Question**

India’s position on the Russia–Ukraine conflict continues to attract scrutiny, but the tone of global commentary has subtly shifted. European political discourse, as reflected both in official messaging and online analysis and now appears more pragmatic. Rather than pressing India for alignment, the focus has moved toward keeping New Delhi engaged as a stabilising actor with influence across camps. Former foreign secretary Shivshankar Menon once observed that India’s diplomacy is about “keeping options open, not sitting on the fence.”

India’s trade with Russia, particularly discounted energy imports, helped cushion domestic inflation during a period of global volatility. At the same time, India’s expanding strategic

cooperation with Europe underscores that its Russia relationship does not preclude deeper Western engagement. This duality is increasingly accepted as a feature, not a flaw, of India’s foreign policy.

**Security, Indo-Pacific, and Quiet Convergence**

Beyond trade, security cooperation is emerging as a quieter but significant pillar of India–Germany relations. Discussions around defence manufacturing, maritime security, and cyber resilience are expected to gain traction. Key among these is the anticipated push for co-production of Type 214 submarines under a USD 8 billion deal between ThyssenKrupp and Mazagon Dock, underscoring Germany’s growing interest in defence cooperation with India’s maritime sector. Germany’s growing interest in the Indo-Pacific aligns with India’s own regional priorities, even as both countries maintain different threat perceptions.

Digital commentary around the visit suggests a recognition that Europe, led by Germany, is recalibrating its strategic outlook and moving from normative diplomacy toward interest-based engagement. India fits naturally into this recalibration as a democratic power with scale, market depth, and geopolitical weight.

A senior German official recently described the Indo-Pacific as “no longer a distant theatre, but a shared responsibility.”

**A Message to the World**

The broader message of the Merz visit lies in what it signals to multiple audiences simultaneously. To Europe, it conveys that India is a dependable long-term partner. To Russia, it signals continuity without dependency. To China, it reflects India’s expanding global options. And to the wider Global South, it reinforces the idea that strategic autonomy remains viable even in an era of hardened blocs.

India’s diplomatic journey from Moscow to Berlin is therefore less about movement between capitals and more about movement in posture. Strategic autonomy today is no longer passive non-alignment; it is the capacity to host, negotiate, and cooperate with competing powers from a position of confidence.

The visit also advances G4 UNSC reform efforts, with Germany’s backing amplifying India’s multilateral voice. This comes at a time when global governance reforms remain stalled. This quiet geopolitical alignment positions India as Europe’s anchor in reforming institutions for a multipolar world. In a world growing more binary by the day, India is quietly making a different case that influence lies not in choosing sides, but in retaining the confidence to engage all.

Views expressed are personal



COUNTRY FACES NEW ROUND OF PROTESTS

# Protest-hit Iran warily watches US after its raid on Venezuela

**DUBAI:** Iran faces a new round of protests challenging the country's theocracy, but it seems like the only thing people there want to talk about is half a world away: Venezuela.

Since the US military seized Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, a longtime ally of Tehran, over the weekend, Iranian state media headlines and officials have condemned the operation. In the streets and even in some official conversations, however, there's a growing question over whether a similar mission could target the Islamic Republic's top officials including the supreme leader, 86-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The paranoia feeds into wider worries among Iranians. Many fear that close US ally Israel will target Iran again as it did during the 12-day war it launched against Tehran in



Representational Image

June. Israel killed a slew of top military officials and nuclear scientists, and the US bombed Iranian nuclear enrichment sites.

Khamenei is believed to have gone into hiding for his protection. "God bless our leader, we should be careful too," said Saeed Seyyedi, a 57-year-old teacher in Tehran, worried the US could act as it

did in Venezuela. "The US has always been after plots against Iran, especially when issues like oil, Israel are part of the case. In addition, it can be complicated when it is mixed with the Russia-Ukraine war, the Lebanese (group) Hezbollah and drug accusations"

The US long has accused the Iranian-backed Hezbollah of running drug-smuggling

operations to fund its operations, including in Latin America, which the group denies.

Immediately after Maduro's seizure, an analyst on Iranian state television claimed, without offering evidence, that the US and Israel had plans during the war last year to kidnap Iranian officials with a team of dual-national Iranians. Even for conspiracy-minded Iranian

television, airing such a claim is unusual.

Then on Sunday night, the prominent Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Javedan warned an audience at prayers in Tehran University that Khamenei's life was in danger. "Someone said he had a bad dream that the leader's life is in danger," Javedan said, without elaborating. "Please pray." However, Iran is roughly twice the size of Venezuela and has what analysts consider to be a much stronger military and robust security forces. The memory of Operation Eagle Claw, a failed US special forces mission to rescue hostages held after the 1979 US Embassy takeover in Tehran, also haunts Washington.

Then there's the political situation in Iran, with its theocracy protected by hard-liners within the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

Highlights

» Many Iranian fear that close US ally Israel will target Iran again as it did during the 12-day war it launched against Tehran in June

» The US long has accused the Iranian-backed Hezbollah of running drug-smuggling operations to fund its operations, including in Latin America, which the group denies

## B'desh expresses potential interest in procuring JF-17 fighter jets: Pak

**LAHORE:** Bangladesh has expressed a "potential interest" in procuring JF-17 Thunder fighter aircraft from Pakistan, the military said on Wednesday.

The JF-17 Thunder is a multi-role combat aircraft jointly developed by China and Pakistan.

Pakistan claims that the fighter jet has proved its combat capabilities during the four-day military conflict with India in May 2025.

The development came during a meeting between Bangladesh Air Force Air Chief Marshal Hasan Mahmood Khan and Pakistan Air Force (PAF) Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Babar Sidhu in Islamabad on Tuesday.

"The meeting focused on strengthening operational cooperation and institutional synergy, with emphasis on training, capacity building, and collaboration in aerospace advancements," Pakistan military's media wing Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement.



“THE JF-17 THUNDER IS A MULTI-ROLE COMBAT AIRCRAFT JOINTLY DEVELOPED BY CHINA AND PAKISTAN”

"Detailed discussions were also held on the potential procurement of JF-17 Thunder aircraft," it said.

The fighter jet has proven its combat capabilities during the recent conflict with India, the statement claimed.

Khan was leading a high-level defence delegation. During the meeting, Sidhu briefed

his Bangladeshi counterpart on PAF's recent advancements and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to supporting the Bangladesh Air Force through a comprehensive training framework from basic to advanced flying and specialised courses across PAF institutions, it said.

The Bangladeshi delegation also visited key PAF facilities.

Sidhu also assured fast-tracked delivery of Super Mushshak trainer aircraft, along with a complete training and long-term support ecosystem, the statement said.

The move follows warming relations between Islamabad and Dhaka after changes in Bangladesh's political leadership in August 2024.

According to the ISPR, the Bangladeshi air chief praised the PAF's combat record and expressed interest in benefiting from its operational expertise, seeking assistance in maintenance support for Bangladesh Air Force's aging fleet and integration of air defence radar systems to enhance air surveillance.

## Japan's nuclear plant review halted over fraudulent earthquake data

**TOKYO:** Japan's nuclear watchdog said Wednesday it is scrapping the safety screening for two reactors at the Hamaoka nuclear power plant in central Japan after the plant's operator was found to have fabricated data about earthquake risks, in a setback to Japan's attempts to accelerate reactor restarts to boost nuclear energy use.

Chubu Electric Power Co had applied for safety screening to resume operations at the No 3 and 4 reactors at the Hamaoka nuclear power plant in 2014 and 2015. Two other reactors at the plant are being decommissioned, and a fifth is idle. The

Key Points

» The plant, about 200 kilometres west of Tokyo, is located on a coastal area known for potential risks from so-called Nankai Trough megaquakes

» Two other reactors at the plant are being decommissioned, and a fifth is idle

plant, about 200 kilometres west of Tokyo, is located on a coastal area known for potential risks from so-called Nankai Trough megaquakes.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) said it started an internal investigation in February after receiving a tip from a whistleblower that the utility

had for years provided fabricated data that underestimated potential seismic risks.

The regulator suspended the screening for the reactors after it confirmed the falsification and the utility acknowledged the fabrication in mid-December, said Shinsuke Yamanaka, the watchdog's chair.

## Israel clears final hurdle to start settlement construction that would cut West Bank in two

**JERUSALEM:** Israel has cleared the final hurdle before starting construction on a contentious settlement project near Jerusalem that would effectively cut the West Bank in two, according to a government tender. The tender, which seeks bids from developers, would clear the way to begin construction of the E1 project.

The anti-settlement monitoring group Peace Now first reported the tender. Yoni Mizrahi, who runs the group's settlement watch division, said initial work could begin within the month.

Settlement development in



Representational Image

E1, an open tract of land east of Jerusalem, has been under consideration for more than two decades, but was frozen due to US pressure during previous administrations. The international community overwhelmingly considers Israeli settlement construction in the

West Bank to be illegal and an obstacle to peace.

The E1 project is especially contentious because it runs from the outskirts of Jerusalem deep into the occupied West Bank. Critics say it would prevent the establishment of a contiguous Palestinian state in the territory.

Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a far-right politician who oversees settlement policy, has long pushed for the plan to become a reality.

"The Palestinian state is being erased from the table not with slogans but with actions," he said in August, when Israel

gave final approval to the plan.

"Every settlement, every neighborhood, every housing unit is another nail in the coffin of this dangerous idea."

The tender, publicly accessible on the website for Israel's Land Authority, calls for proposals to develop 3,401 housing units. Peace Now says the publication of the tender "reflects an accelerated effort to advance construction in E1."

Syrian and Israeli officials met Tuesday in Paris for US-mediated talks intended to broker a security agreement to defuse tensions between the two countries.

Trump says his voters loved Venezuela attack

WASHINGTON: It's only been days since an audacious US raid snatched Nicolás Maduro from a Venezuelan military base and sped him to a Brooklyn prison, yet Detroit-area Trump supporter Aaron Tobin can already see it all playing out on the big screen. It'll be the subject of movies for years to come, he predicts.

"I am thrilled." Plenty of others who voted for Trump are applauding, too -- at least for now.

## B'desh to resume direct flights with Pak from Jan 29

**DHAKA:** Bangladesh's flag carrier will resume direct flights between Dhaka and Pakistan's largest city Karachi from January 29, restoring non-stop air connectivity between the two countries after over a decade, officials said Wednesday.

Initially, state-run Biman Bangladesh Airlines will operate twice a week, on Thursdays and Saturdays, on the Dhaka-Karachi route, the airline said in a statement.

The flight will depart Dhaka at 8:00 pm local time and arrive in Karachi at 11:00 pm.

The return flight will depart Karachi at 12:00 midnight and arrive in Dhaka at 4:20 am, it said.

## Israeli bus runs over and kills ultra-Orthodox boy

*Netanyahu tries to calm tensions*

**JERUSALEM:** Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged calm after a bus driver ran over and killed a teenage boy Tuesday night during a protest in Jerusalem against a law seeking to draft the ultra-Orthodox community into Israel's military.

"I call for restraint to prevent the mood from becoming further inflamed so that, heaven forbid, we do not have additional tragedies," Netanyahu said in a statement early Wednesday, adding that the death would be thoroughly investigated.

The incident killed yeshiva student Yosef Eisenthal. Video from the protest obtained by The Associated Press showed a public bus dragging him



Israel's PM Benjamin Netanyahu

for meters before running him over as onlookers jostled and screamed. Police officers arrested and questioned the bus driver, who told investigators he was attacked by protesters before hitting the boy, Israel's police spokesperson said.

Protesters had been blocking the road and acting violently toward police officers, throwing eggs and other objects at them.

## South Korean leader says he asked Xi to act as mediator on North's issues

**SEOUL:** South Korean President Lee Jae Myung said Wednesday he asked Chinese President Xi Jinping to serve as a mediator to help resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis and ease animosities between the two Koreas.

He said he made the request when the two leaders met for a summit earlier this week.

Speaking with reporters travelling with him on the Shanghai leg of his China trip, Lee cited Xi as replying that patience was needed on North Korean issues during their Monday summit in Beijing.

"We're making efforts but all our channels (with North Korea) are completely blocked so we can't communicate at all. I told him it would be good for China to play the role of a mediator for peace," Lee said

attempts to toughen sanctions on North Korea despite its weapons tests banned under UN resolutions.

North Korea has refused to engage in dialogue with South Korea and the US and has taken steps to expand its nuclear arsenal since its leader Kim Jong Un's high-stakes nuclear diplomacy with President Donald Trump collapsed in 2019.

Since taking office last June, Lee's liberal government has been pushing hard to reopen talks with North Korea, but Pyongyang has largely ignored Lee's overture. In July, Kim's sister and senior official, Kim Yo Jong, said the Lee government's "blind trust" in South Korea's alliance with the US and hostility toward North Korea made it no different from its conservative predecessor.

## Uganda's security forces accused of using violence against Oppn

**WAKISO:** The Ugandan presidential candidate known as Bobi Wine wears a flak jacket and helmet while campaigning to protect himself from gunfire. But the safety gear offers no protection from the stinging clouds of tear gas that often follow him on the campaign trail.

Wine is challenging President Yoweri Museveni, who has ruled Uganda since 1986 by repeatedly rewriting the rules to stay in power.

Term and age limits have been scrapped, rivals jailed or sidelined, and state security forces are a constant presence at opposition rallies as Museveni seeks a seventh term in elections on Jan. 15.

Wine, a musician-turned-politician whose real name is

Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, faced similar setbacks in 2021, when he first ran for president. He was often roughed up by the police, clothes ripped from his body, and dozens of his supporters were jailed.

In a recent interview with The Associated Press, he charged that this time "the military has largely taken over the election" and that at least three of his supporters have been killed in violent campaign events.

"It has been very violent. There's been a lot of impunity to the extent that we are denied the right to use the public roads," he said. "We are hounded by security and followed by over 40 police and military cars."

## Gen Z revolters angry at govt they installed

**KATHMANDU:** Mukesh Awasti was all set leave for Australia to pursue a degree in civil engineering on a sunny day in September, but instead he joined a youth revolt against corruption in Nepal and lost his leg after being shot by security forces.

Lying on a hospital bed at the National Trauma Center in the capital Kathmandu where his leg was amputated, 22-year-old Awasti said he regrets giving up so much for the little that has been achieved after the sacrifices of so many people.

Violent protests in Kathmandu that began Sept. 8 left 76 people dead and more than 2,300 injured before the demonstrations fueled by "Gen Z" activists forced the appointment on Sept. 12 of Nepal's first female prime minister, Sushila Karki, a retired Supreme Court judge who has promised fresh elections in March.

Since then, the interim government and its leader have come under criticism from many of the people who took part in the protests and

“I AM REGRETTING MY DECISION TO TAKE PART IN THE PROTEST BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN ZERO ACHIEVEMENTFROM THE NEW GOVT”

expected major changes in the Himalayan nation.

"I am regretting my decision to take part in the protest because they have been zero achievement from the new government we brought which has failed us," Awasti said.

"There should be end to corruption which has not happened and the people who opened fire on the demonstrations should have been arrested but that has also not happened either."

So far the government's anti-graft agency has filed one significant corruption case that does not include key political figures.

## European allies working on plan should US move on Greenland

*The next North Atlantic Council meeting is scheduled for Thursday*

**PARIS/BERLIN:** Allies including France and Germany are working closely on a plan on how to respond should the United States act on its threat to take over Greenland, as Europe seeks to address U.S. President Donald Trump's ambitions in the region.

A US military seizure of Greenland from a longtime ally, Denmark, would send shock waves through the NATO alliance and deepen the divide between Trump and European leaders. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said the subject would be raised at a meeting with the foreign ministers of Germany and Poland later in the day. "We want to take action, but we want to do so together with our European partners," he said on France Inter radio.

A German government source said separately that Germany was "closely working together with other European countries and Denmark on the next steps regarding Greenland". A senior European



Representational Image

official said Denmark must lead the effort to coordinate a response, but "the Danes have yet to communicate to their European allies what kind of concrete support they wish to receive," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Leaders from major European powers and Canada have rallied behind Greenland this week, saying the Arctic island

belongs to its people, following a renewed threat by Trump to take over the territory.

Johannes Koskinen, chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of Finland's parliament, called for the issue to be raised at NATO.

NATO allies should "address whether something needs to be done and whether the United States should be

Highlights

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brought into line in the sense that it cannot disregard jointly agreed plans in order to pursue its own power ambitions," he said. The next North Atlantic Council meeting is scheduled for Thursday.

Trump has in recent days repeated that he wants to gain control of Greenland, an idea first voiced in 2019 during his first presidency.

World Briefs

AT LEAST 10 KILLED IN FOG-RELATED ACCIDENTS IN PAKISTAN'S PUNJAB

LAHORE: At least 10 people were killed on Wednesday in two fog-related accidents in Pakistan's Punjab province, an official said. In the first incident, five people died while 27 others injured when a passenger bus carrying them fell into a ravine near Talagang, Chakwal, some 300kms from Lahore. According to a spokesperson of the Punjab Emergency Department's Rescue 1122, the bus was going to Multan from Rawalpindi. "As the motorway was closed due to fog, the driver opted for an alternative route -- the GT Road. In the thick fog at around 2 am, the driver lost control of the vehicle while negotiating a turn, and the bus plunged into a 100-foot-deep ravine," he said.

PHILIPPINES EVACUATES 3,000 VILLAGERS AFTER VOLCANO ACTIVITY RAISES ALERT

MANILA: A series of mild eruptions at the most active volcano in the Philippines has prompted the evacuation of nearly 3,000 villagers in a permanent danger zone on its foothills, officials said Wednesday. Authorities raised the 5-step alert around Mayon Volcano in the northeastern province of Albay to level 3 on Tuesday after detecting intermittent rockfalls, some as big as cars, from its peak crater in recent days along with deadly pyroclastic flows — a fast-moving avalanche of super-hot rock fragments, ash and gas. Alert level 5 would indicate a major explosive eruption, often with violent ejections of ash and debris and widespread ashfall, is underway.



INT'L PRICES ALSO REMAINED UNDER PRESSURE

# Indian gas prices fall 18% in Dec as global markets remain weak: IGX

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**NEW DELHI:** Greater supply, a mild winter in Europe and muted demand throughout Asian markets all contributed to the decline in Indian gas prices in December 2025, which was consistent with worldwide patterns, according to data supplied by the Indian Gas Exchange (IGX).

The IGX benchmark price index, GIXI, averaged Rs 994 or \$11 per MMBtu in December 2025, registering an 18 per cent decline on a year-on-year basis.

International gas prices also remained under pressure during the month. Europe's TTF benchmark fell to \$9.9 per MMBtu, down 17 per cent month-on-month and 35 per cent year-on-year, while the WIM-Ex Dahej price declined to \$10.6 per MMBtu, lower by 11 per cent month-on-month and 32 per cent year-on-year. In the US, Henry Hub prices stood



REPRESENTATIVE PIC

at \$4.5 per MMBtu, unchanged from the previous month but 30 per cent higher compared to a year earlier.

Despite the softer pricing environment, trading volumes on IGX recorded strong growth during the current financial year. The exchange traded a cumulative volume of 58.2 million MMBtu during the first nine months of FY26, marking a 46 per cent increase over the corresponding period last year.

During the third quarter of

FY26, IGX recorded traded volumes of 17.5 million MMBtu, equivalent to 441 million standard cubic metres, reflecting an 8 per cent year-on-year increase. Of the total volume traded during the quarter, around 69 per cent comprised free-market gas, while 31 per cent was domestic high-pressure high-temperature (HPHT) gas traded at the administered ceiling price.

A total of 569 trades were executed in Q3FY26, with monthly contracts emerging

## Highlights

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» Despite the softer pricing environment, trading volumes on IGX recorded strong growth during the current financial year

as the most liquid product, accounting for 48 per cent of total volumes. Dahej was the most active delivery point during the quarter, followed by Mhaskal.

Every month, IGX traded 5.6 million MMBtu, or 142 million standard cubic metres, in December 2025, reflecting a marginal decline of 2 per cent year-on-year. The decline was attributed mainly to a reduction in domestic HPHT gas volumes. Free-market gas accounted for

around 71 per cent of the traded volume during the month, while the remaining 29 per cent comprised domestic HPHT gas traded at the ceiling price of Rs 875 or \$9.72 per MMBtu. Nearly 10 million standard cubic metres of domestic gas with pricing freedom were traded by producers at delivery points, including Bokaro (CBM), KG Basin and Hazira-ONGC.

Regional price differences were observed across the country. GIXI-West averaged Rs 996 or \$11.1 per MMBtu, broadly in line with the all-India benchmark, while GIXI-East and GIXI-South were lower by about 5 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively, due to transmission and tax differentials. The GIXI-Dahej index stood at Rs 975 or \$10.8 per MMBtu in December, about 3 per cent lower than the previous month, and remained comparable to the WIM-Ex Dahej settled price.

# IndiGo flight disruptions: CCI seeks info from airline

Commission also seeks information from DGCA

MPOST BUREAU



REPRESENTATIVE PIC

**NEW DELHI:** Competition Commission has sought information from IndiGo as well as aviation regulator DGCA in order to assess whether the country's largest airline indulged in unfair business practices against the backdrop of massive flight cancellations last month, according to sources.

In early December, IndiGo, the country's largest airline with a domestic market share of over 63 per cent, faced operational disruptions that resulted in thousands of flights getting cancelled before the situation normalised.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) curtailed the airline's winter schedule by 10 per cent, and its probe into the disruptions has been completed, while the Competition Commission of India (CCI) had also taken cognisance of the situation.

The sources on Wednesday

said the regulator has sent certain queries to IndiGo to gather more information as it looks into the business practices of the airline. Besides, information has been sought from DGCA, including on airfares, to have a better understanding of the sector before deciding on the next course of action, they added.

CCI keeps a tab on unfair competition in the marketplace, and as a first step, makes a prima facie assessment of a case. If there is a prima facie conclusion that the entity concerned has violated competition norms, then the regulator orders a detailed probe by its Director General (DG).

At present, in the case of

IndiGo, the anti-trust watchdog is assessing whether there is prima facie evidence of anti-competitive practices.

CCI will be mainly looking at whether the airline abused its dominant position, violating the competition norms.

On December 18, CCI, in a release, said it has taken cognisance of the information filed against IndiGo in the context of the recent flight disruptions witnessed in the aviation sector across various routes.

"Based on the initial assessment, the Commission has decided to proceed further in the matter in accordance with the provisions of the Competition Act, 2002," it had said.

# AAIB recommends inspection of airlines' safety mgmt systems

**NEW DELHI:** Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), in a probe report into an airprox incident involving two IndiGo planes, has recommended that aviation regulator DGCA carry out an inspection to assess the effectiveness of airlines' safety management systems.

In its 35-page final investigation report into the incident that happened in the Delhi airspace on November 17, 2023, the probe agency said that non-adherence to the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) by the crew of one of the flights was one of the probable reasons for the incident, while the airline's failure to take timely action despite repeated SID-related occurrences prior to the particular incident was a contributing factor.

Generally, airprox refers to two aircraft coming closer than the permitted distance between them, and Standard Instrument Departure Route (SID) per-

**The recommendation came in AAIB's probe report into an 2023 airprox incident involving two IndiGo planes**

tains to the route that an aircraft takes from the take-off to the enroute phase.

IndiGo's A321 aircraft operating flight IGO2113 from Delhi to Hyderabad and A320 plane operating the flight IGO2206 from Delhi to Raipur were involved in the serious airprox incident.

Apart from non-adherence to SOP by the crew of IGO2113 during cockpit preparation and failure to update the SID when it was provided, AAIB cited inadequate measures taken to minimise disturbances during cockpit preparation, failure to cross-verify the SID informa-

tion during the TPC (Threats-Plan-Considerations) briefing, and the lack of monitoring during the climb as probable causes.

Making various recommendations in the final report, AAIB has said the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) may carry out a one-time inspection to assess the effectiveness of the safety management system of all the scheduled operators and air navigation service provider as well as reiterate the rules to ensure compliance with prompt reporting of mandatory occurrences without fail.

The recommendations also come in the context of AAIB's detailed examination of the occurrence data provided by the Airports Authority of India (AAI), which indicated six previous SID-deviation events involving IndiGo aircraft that had happened within a four-month period from August 2023 to November 2023. AGENCIES

# Kotak expects IPOs to jump by 32% in 2026

**MUMBAI:** Kotak Investment Banking (KIB) on Wednesday estimated 32 per cent growth in initial public offers at Rs 2.50 lakh crore this year on the back of jump in large issuances of over USD 1 billion.

It said 2025 was a good year for new listings, with the Indian markets experiencing 13 per cent growth in issuances to Rs 1.89 lakh crore.

However, overall equity capital markets (ECM) activity, which includes follow-on offers, bulk deals and qualified institutional placements, declined by 18 per cent to Rs 5.1 lakh crore in the year.

A third of the IPOs in the new year will be issuances of over USD 1 billion, and the new age companies and consumer sector companies are likely to continue to dominate. AGENCIES

# National Textiles Ministers' Conference to discuss policy, investment & development

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**NEW DELHI:** The National Textiles Ministers' Conference 2026, under the theme "India's Textiles: Weaving Growth, Heritage & Innovation", is being held in Guwahati from Thursday.

The two-day conference, organised by the Ministry of Textiles, in collaboration with the Assam Government, will bring together Textile Ministers and senior officials from states and Union Territories across the nation.

The conference aims to provide a platform for deliberations on policy, investment, sustainability, exports, infrastructure development, and technological advancement in the textile sector. It aligns with the government's vision of positioning India as a global textile manufacturing hub by 2030, with a focus on boosting exports, employment generation, and inclusive growth, in line with the ethos of "Vikas Bhi, Virasat Bhi".

The inaugural session will

**The conference, under the theme 'India's Textiles: Weaving Growth, Heritage & Innovation', is being held in Guwahati from Thursday**

be attended by the Union Minister of Textiles, Giriraj Singh, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Minister of State for Textiles, Pabitra Margherita along with other dignitaries. The inaugural session will also feature the opening of an exhibition and pavilion, showcasing India's textile strength, innovation, and rich heritage.

The conference will feature sessions covering key areas such as Infrastructure and Investment, Expanding India's Textile Exports, Raw Materials and Fibres, Technical Textiles and New-Age Fibres, and Preserv-

ing and Promoting Handlooms and Handicrafts. Special focus will be placed on flagship initiatives such as the PM Mega Integrated Textile Regions and Apparel (PM MITRA) Parks, sustainability and environmental compliance, technical textiles, innovation, and integrated value-chain development.

Participants are expected to share best practices, challenges and policy suggestions aimed at strengthening the textile value chain across regions and districts.

A conclave on "Strengthening and Empowering the Textiles Sector of the North-Eastern Region of India" will also be held in which Textile Ministers from North-Eastern States, MPs, and senior officials from the Centre and States will participate. The Conclave will focus on unlocking the potential of the North-East's silk, handloom, handicrafts, and bamboo-based textiles, with special emphasis on Eri, Muga and Mulberry silk, women-led enterprises, branding, and market access.

# Anil Agarwal's eldest son passes away at 49 in US



**NEW DELHI:** Agnivesh Agarwal, the eldest son of mining billionaire Anil Agarwal, passed away in the US. He was 49. Agnivesh, who was on the board of Vedanta group firm Talwandi Sabo Power Limited (TSPL), was recovering from an undisclosed illness at the time of his death.

"Today is the darkest day of my life. My beloved son, Agnivesh, left us far too soon. He was just 49 years old, healthy, full of life, and dreams. Following a skiing accident in the US, he was recovering well in Mount Sinai Hospital, New York. We believed the worst was behind us. But fate had other plans, and a sudden cardiac arrest snatched our son away from us," Agarwal said in a post on X.

"No words can describe the pain of a parent who must bid goodbye to his child. A son is not meant to leave before his father. This loss has shattered us in ways we are still trying to comprehend..." he added.

Anil Agarwal has two children: his late son, Agnivesh, and a daughter, Priya, who is on the board of Vedanta and chairperson of Hindustan Zinc Limited. MPOST

# Leather players flag tariffs issues at meeting with Parl panel

**NEW DELHI:** Leather sector players on Wednesday met the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce in Chennai and flagged issues arising from high US tariffs, industry officials said.

The delegation comprised PR Aqeel Ahmed, Former Chairman, Council for Leather Exports (CLE); Abdul Wahab, Regional Chairman, CLE; and R Selvam, Executive Director of the council.

The officials said that the 50 per cent tariffs imposed by the US is hurting the exports.

Higher US tariffs have adversely impacted the competitiveness of Indian leather exports in the US market, which is one of India's key export destinations for them.

The industry representatives emphasized that the Indian leather sector supports a large workforce, including women and marginalized sections, and that prolonged trade disruptions could have serious socio-economic consequences.

The need for addressing tariff and non-tariff barriers through appropriate bilateral engagements was underscored, one of the officials said.

The delegation also requested the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce to consider taking up the issues related to US tariffs at appropriate policy and diplomatic levels, extending necessary support measures to exporters, and facilitating diversification of export markets to reduce vulnerability arising from trade uncertainties. AGENCIES

# India should boost silver processing, diversify imports: GTRI

**NEW DELHI:** Silver is not just a precious metal but a key industrial and energy transition input, and India should focus on processing it by securing long-term overseas mining supplies, boosting domestic refining and recycling, reducing reliance on imported finished silver, and diversifying import sources, GTRI said.

It said China is the world's dominant processor of silver.

Beijing is importing around USD 5.6 billion of silver ores and concentrates out of a global total of USD 6.3 billion. It

refines this metal domestically and exports higher-value silver embedded in electronics, medical devices, and solar panels.

India, by contrast, imported about USD 6.4 billion of refined silver in 2024, 21.4 per cent of global trade, making it the world's largest consumer of finished silver rather than a processor.

"India must learn to process silver from the ore stage for domestic value addition,"

Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

**'In FY25, India exported just USD 478.4 mn of silver products while importing USD 4.83 bn'**

In FY25, India exported just USD 478.4 million of silver products while importing USD 4.83 billion, underscoring its deep import dependence.

That dependence surged in 2025. Imports jumped to USD 2.7 billion in October alone,

up 529 per cent year-on-year, followed by USD 1.1 billion in November, a 126 per cent increase.

Cumulatively, imports reached USD 8.5 billion during January-November 2025 and are estimated at USD 9.2 billion for the full year, about 44 per cent higher than in 2024. During April-October 2025, India imported USD 5.94 billion worth of silver.

"India should recognise silver as a critical industrial and energy-transition metal, not merely a precious commodity,

and integrate it into its minerals and clean-energy strategy," he said.

He added that this will require securing long-term supply through overseas mining partnerships and encouraging domestic refining and recycling capacity to reduce dependence on imported finished silver, and diversifying import sources beyond a few trading hubs.

"In a fragmenting global order, securing silver is becoming as important as securing energy. India's policy framework must reflect that shift,"

Srivastava said.

He also said unlike gold, silver supply chains remain far less transparent -- a vulnerability that is becoming strategic as competition intensifies.

Import diversification is important as China has tightened export controls, shifting silver exports to a licence-based system from January 1, 2026.

Under the new rules, only approved firms can export silver, and each shipment requires government authorisation, replacing the older quota regime. AGENCIES

# PNGRB launches study on vehicular fuels amid India's energy transition

Assessment being undertaken by TERI under the aegis of PNGRB

AAISHA SABIR

## KEY POINTS

» The study, titled Comparative Assessment of Vehicular Fuels in India's Energy Transition: A Multi-Dimensional Approach, is being undertaken by TERI under the aegis of PNGRB, with participation from city gas distribution entities

» India faces persistently poor air quality, with six of the world's ten most polluted cities in 2022

» In cities such as Delhi and Bengaluru, transport contributes up to 49% of particulate matter



REPRESENTATIVE PIC

emissions, while diesel-heavy fleets remain a major source of nitrogen oxides (NOx) and PM<sub>2.5</sub>

» Current PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels in many urban centres exceed World Health Organisation annual guidelines by more than ten times

» India's broader energy context complicates a single-technology solution

polluted cities in 2022. In cities such as Delhi and Bengaluru, transport contributes up to 49% of particulate matter emissions, while diesel-heavy fleets remain a major source

of nitrogen oxides (NOx) and PM<sub>2.5</sub>. Current PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels in many urban centres exceed World Health Organisation annual guidelines by more than ten times.

The presentation also showed that older heavy-duty diesel vehicles emit NOx at levels up to 14 times higher than those of BS-VI-compliant vehicles, reinforcing the urgency of cleaner fuel transitions. Switching half of diesel buses to CNG and electric alternatives, the study noted, could significantly reduce daily particulate emissions in urban areas.

At the same time, India's broader energy context complicates a single-technology solution. Coal continues to dominate the primary energy mix at 58%, while crude oil accounts for 29% and natural gas just 7%. Although non-fossil generation capacity has reached nearly 50%, its share of electricity generation remains around 25%, even as electricity demand rises due to air-conditioning, data centres, and industrial electrification.

"Knowledge-backed products will always be welcomed

and supported by stakeholders. The government should focus on knowledge-driven decisions," said Anil Kumar Jain, Chairperson of PNGRB, underscoring the need for evidence-led policy making in the transport sector.

Against this backdrop, the PNGRB-led study will compare electric vehicles, natural gas-based vehicles, and petrol and diesel options across technical, environmental, economic, social and geopolitical parameters. It will also develop emission-based weightage frameworks to guide incentives and identify conditions under which natural gas can act as a credible transition fuel between now and 2047.

TERI Director-General Vibha Dhawan said the assessment would factor in affordability, infrastructure readiness, and energy security, alongside emission-reduction goals, to support balanced transport policy choices in a rapidly growing economy.

**LAS VEGAS:** The presence of Indian companies and start-ups continues to grow at the global technology platform CES and "we welcome broad participation" in the years to come, a top executive at the world's largest technology showcase has said.

These remarks were made by Vice President and Show Director, CES John Kelley.

"The Indian presence continues to grow at CES. I think you're starting to see more and more Indian startups show up and participate at CES. And of course, we welcome broad Indian participation in the years to come," Kelley said in response to a question during a press conference here.

Kelley said he anticipates participation from about 150 countries at this year's edition of CES, noting that about 40 per cent of the attendees and exhibitors at the trade show come from outside the United States.

CES 2026, the world's most powerful technology event produced by the Consumer Technology Association (CTA), kicked off here on Tuesday and will run through January 9, bringing together global com-

**CES 2026, the world's most powerful technology event produced by the CTA, kicked off in Las Vegas on Tuesday**

panies, startups, industry executives and government leaders to "experience the next-generation of tech that will solve global challenges."

More than 4,100 exhibitors are showcasing innovation across accessibility, AI, digital health, energy, enterprise solutions, immersive entertainment, mobility, quantum, robotics and more.

Owned and produced by the Consumer Technology Association, CES features every aspect of the tech sector. As North America's largest technology trade association, CTA's members are the world's leading innovators – from startups to global brands – helping support more than 18 million American jobs, CTA said in a statement. AGENCIES



INDIA'S ELECTRIFICATION JOURNEY

EV retail sales surge 16.37% to over 22.70 lakh units in 2025, says FADA

OUR CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI: Electric vehicle (EV) retail sales surged 16.37 per cent year-on-year to 22,70,107 units in 2025, driven by a 77 per cent jump in electric passenger car sales, according to data released by dealers' body FADA on Wednesday.

The EV makers had recorded a total sales of 19,50,727 units in 2024, the Federation of Automobile Dealers' Association (FADA) said.

Electric car sales rose 77.04 per cent to 1,76,817 units in 2025 from 99,975 units a year earlier, it said, adding that e-commercial vehicle sales during the reporting period increased 54.2 per cent to 15,606 units from 10,123 eCVs retailed a year ago.

The electric two-wheeler sales for the year under review stood at 12,79,951 units com-



pared to 11,49,416 units in the year-ago period, registering a growth of 11.36 per cent.

Similarly, the e-three-wheeler retail sales rose 15.39 per cent to 7,97,733 units in 2025 against 6,91,313 units sold in 2024, FADA said.

"CY25 clearly reinforces that India's electrification journey is no longer a pilot; it is scaling, segment by segment. On the strength of robust ground-level adoption, electric

two-wheelers retailed around 12.80 lakh units (+11.36 per cent YoY) with an EV share of 6.3 per cent, while electric passenger vehicles grew sharply to 1,76,817 units (+77.04 per cent YoY), taking EV share to around 4 per cent from 2.4 per cent last year," said CS Vigneshwar, president, Federation of Indian Automobile Dealers' Association (FADA).

The most decisive transformation continues to be in

HIGHLIGHTS

- » Electric car sales rose 77.04% to 1,76,817 units in 2025 from 99,975 units a year earlier
- » E-commercial vehicle sales during the reporting period increased 54.2% to 15,606 units
- » Electric two-wheeler sales for the year under review stood at 12,79,951 units, registering growth of 11.36%
- » Similarly, the e-three-wheeler retail sales rose 15.39 per cent to 7,97,733 units in 2025 against 6,91,313 units sold in 2024, FADA said

three-wheelers, where EVs now command 60.9 per cent share, with EV 3W retails at 7,97,733 units (15.39 per cent higher year-on-year), a strong endorsement of EV economics in the last-mile mobility, the FADA president added.

Even in commercial vehicles, while the base is still evolving, momentum is visible with EV CV retails at 15,606 units (54.2 per cent jump year-on-year) and EV share rising to

1.55 per cent, FADA president Vishneshwar said.

This transition is being powered by improving product choices and total cost of ownership benefits, he added.

It underlines the need for a coordinated push on charging infrastructure, policy continuity, and faster, more inclusive retail financing so that EV adoption becomes even more mainstream and pan-India, Vishneshwar stated.

Sensex, Nifty extend losses into third straight session

OUR CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI: Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty drifted lower for the third day in a row on Wednesday as geopolitical tensions and renewed concerns about potential US tariff hikes weighed on investor sentiment.

Sustained foreign fund outflows also dragged the markets lower, traders said.

However, buying on select blue-chip counters and lower crude prices in the international market supported equities, they added.

In a volatile trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 102.20 points or 0.12 per cent to settle at 84,961.14. During the day, it dropped 445.85 points or 0.52 per cent to 84,617.49.

The 50-share NSE Nifty went down by 37.95 points, or 0.14 per cent, to 26,140.75.

"Market sentiment continued to be shaped by mixed global cues and lingering geopolitical concerns, which kept risk appetite in check. In addition,



Geopolitical tensions and renewed concerns about potential US tariff hikes weighed on investor sentiment

tion, rotational selling in select index heavyweights, such as ITC, HDFC Bank and Reliance, capped the upside and restrained the broader uptrend.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Maruti, Power Grid, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles, HDFC Bank, Asian Paints and Tata Steel were among the biggest laggards.

However, Titan, HCL Tech, Tech Mahindra, Infosys and

Tata Consultancy Services were among the gainers.

The BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.47 per cent, and the smallcap index went up by 0.12 per cent. Among sectoral indices, BSE utilities declined by 0.80 per cent, oil & gas (0.76 per cent), auto (0.68 per cent), telecommunication (0.61 per cent) and realty (0.39 per cent).

However, BSE Focused IT jumped 2.52 per cent, IT climbed 1.97 per cent, consumer durables (1.25 per cent), healthcare (0.42 per cent) and capital goods (0.41 per cent).

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.81 per cent to USD 60.21 per barrel.

FIIs offloaded equities worth Rs 107.63 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. Domestic institutional investors, however, bought stocks worth Rs 1,749.35 crore.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi index and Shanghai's SSE Composite index settled higher, while Japan's Nikkei 225 index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended lower.

Rupee rises 31 paise against USD

OUR CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI: The rupee rose 31 paise to close at 89.87 against the US dollar on Wednesday on possible intervention by the Reserve Bank of India and a fall in global crude oil prices.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 90.20 against the US dollar and traded in the range of 89.75-90.23 before settling at 89.87, up 31 paise from its previous close. The rupee snapped its four-day losing streak to appreciate 12 paise to settle at 90.18 against the dollar on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.07 per cent higher at 98.65.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading 0.99 per cent lower at USD 60.10 per barrel in futures trade.

Industry Min Goyal seeks investment from Liechtenstein



Union minister Piyush Goyal, left, during a meeting with Liechtenstein Hereditary Prince Alois, in Vaduz

PTI

NEW DELHI: Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Wednesday invited companies from Liechtenstein to invest in India and leverage the India-EFTA trade pact to expand their presence.

India and the four-nation European bloc EFTA implemented a free trade agreement last year.

The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. Under the pact, India has received an investment commitment of USD 100 billion over the next 15 years.

Goyal was in Liechtenstein for an official visit.

He said India offers scale and reform momentum, a large and expanding consumer market, a deepening industrial base, and a sustained focus on ease of doing business, digitisation and infrastructure-led competitiveness.

He invited Liechtenstein companies to use the agreement as a platform to grow their India presence, build manufacturing and innovation partnerships, and participate in India's expanding opportunities across sectors.

Both sides also exchanged views on the global business environment.

With supply chains facing disruptions, uncertainties, and sharper volatility, India and Liechtenstein can combine strengths to offer stability and predictability to investors and enterprises, the Commerce ministry said.

"India's scale, talent, and manufacturing depth can complement Liechtenstein's specialised industrial capabilities, high-value innovation, and financial expertise," it added. Together, both countries can create resilient value chains and a reliable investment bridge, sending a signal of confidence and hope in an increasingly unsettled world.

AGENCIES

TRAI empanels RANext as DCRA

MPOST BUREAU

NEW DELHI: Telecom regulator TRAI has empanelled RANext Technologies as a Digital Connectivity Rating Agency (DCRA), to evaluate the digital connectivity infrastructure of properties, a release said on Wednesday.

The ratings will be conducted from a user-centric, real-world perspective, covering key assessment areas including fibre infrastructure standards, in-building connectivity, broadband and Wi-Fi performance within premises and preparedness for future smart technologies.

"...RANext Technologies has been empanelled by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) as a Digital Connectivity Rating Agency (DCRA), reinforcing its role in shaping digitally ready real estate across the country," the release said.

Need to reduce imports, increase exports to become 3rd-largest economy, says Gadkari

MPOST BUREAU

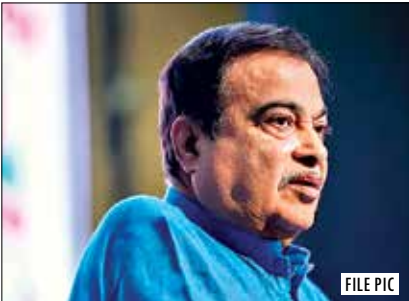
NEW DELHI: India will have to reduce imports and increase exports, if it wants to become the third-largest economy in the world, Union minister Nitin Gadkari said on Wednesday.

Speaking at 'CSIR's Technology Transfer Ceremony', Gadkari highlighted how agricultural waste can be converted into a valuable national resource and help in reducing the country's crude imports.

The road transport and highways minister noted that the use of bio-bitumen, a petroleum-free component, in road construction is a transformative step towards the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

"By utilising agro-waste, it reduces pollution caused by crop burning and strengthens the circular economy.

"With 15 per cent blending, India can save nearly USD



FILE PIC

CLOSER LOOK

- » Speaking at 'CSIR's Technology Transfer Ceremony', Gadkari highlighted how agricultural waste can be converted into a valuable national resource and help in reducing the country's crude imports
- » He noted that the use of bio-bitumen in road construction is a transformative step towards the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047

4,500 crore in foreign exchange and substantially reduce its dependence on imported crude oil," Gadkari said.

The minister said that India, which is the fourth largest economy in the world, will have to reduce its imports and increase exports to become the third-largest. "If the country wants to become the third-largest economy in the world, then it will have to reduce imports and increase exports," the road minister said.

Gadkari further said that

India is the first in the world to commercially produce bio-bitumen. This innovation will empower farmers, generate rural livelihoods, and boost the rural economy.

Bio-bitumen, he said, truly reflects the Narendra Modi-led government's commitment to sustainable development, self-reliance, and environmentally responsible growth, paving the way for a cleaner and greener future. The minister also suggested that agriculture and construction equipment man-

ufacturers should promote vehicles that run on alternative fuels and are powered by flex-engines.

He said the government has identified 10 highway stretches in different parts of the country for plying green hydrogen-powered trucks with an aim to reduce vehicular pollution.

"But transportation of hydrogen is a big problem," Gadkari lamented.

He emphasised that India should become an exporter of energy, not an importer.

Silver jumps Rs 5,000 to hit fresh peak of Rs 2.56 lakh per kg in Delhi

NEW DELHI: Silver prices surged by Rs 5,000 to hit a new record of Rs 2,56,000 per kilogram in the national capital on Wednesday, amid strong safe-haven demand and robust industrial buying, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The white metal closed at Rs 2,51,000 per kilogram on Tuesday. Traders said that escalating tensions between the US and Venezuela have boosted safe-haven appeal, while supply-side constraints and strong



industrial usage further amplified the silver prices.

"Silver prices were also driven by sustained buying by the investors and China's export curbs on silver that came into effect from January 1," an expert said.

Meanwhile, the price of

gold of 99.9 per cent purity slipped marginally by Rs 100 to Rs 1,41,400 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes), compared to the previous close of Rs 1,41,500 per 10 grams.

In the international market, spot gold fell by USD 45.22, or 1.01 per cent, to USD 4,449.87 per ounce. Spot silver was trading lower by USD 2.55, or 3.15 per cent, to USD 78.69 per ounce. During the session, the white metal hit an intraday high of USD 82.75 per ounce in the overseas trade.

MPOST

LIC rolls out whole life insurance plan Jeevan Utsav Single Premium

MUMBAI: Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) has launched a new Jeevan Utsav Single Premium plan, offering guaranteed lifelong income with life cover.

The plan was unveiled by LIC's Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, R. Doraiswamy, and will be available for purchase nationwide from January 12. It is a non-par, non-linked, individual savings plan that requires a one-time premium payment with accrual of guaranteed additions during



the guaranteed additions period. The policy is open to individuals aged between 30 days and 65 years, with a minimum basic sum assured of Rs 5 lakh. There is no upper limit on the sum assured, subject to underwriting norms. Guaranteed additions accrue at the rate

of Rs 40 per thousand of basic sum assured at the end of each policy year during the guaranteed addition period.

Policyholders can choose between two income options — a regular income benefit, under which 10% of the basic sum assured is paid annually after a deferment period of 7 to 17 years, or a flexi income benefit that allows income to be accumulated and withdrawn later with interest at 5.5% per annum, compounded yearly.

MPOST

Silox adopts Hindustan Zinc's EcoZen

UDAIPUR: Hindustan Zinc Limited and specialty chemicals manufacturer Silox India have strengthened their partnership with Silox adopting Hindustan Zinc's low-carbon zinc brand, EcoZen, across its manufacturing operations. The move is expected to help reduce the embedded carbon footprint of zinc-based chemical products while maintaining global quality and performance standards.

EcoZen is Asia's first low-carbon zinc produced entirely using renewable energy, with a verified carbon footprint of less than one tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> per tonne of zinc—around 75% lower than the global industry average. Its use in downstream applications such as galvanising can help avoid nearly 400 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per tonne of steel. Hindustan Zinc said EcoZen plays a key role in supporting customers to meet Scope 3 emission reduction targets. Silox India, a major customer in the chemical applications segment, said the adoption aligns with its ESG goals and strengthens supply-chain sustainability.

MPOST

Housing sales dip 1% last yr in top 8 cities, avg price grows up to 19%: Knight Frank

'Sales momentum continued despite rise in weighted average prices'

MPOST BUREAU

NEW DELHI: Housing sales fell 1 per cent last year to over 3.48 lakh units across eight major cities, with demand stagnating amid an average price rise of up to 19 per cent, according to Knight Frank.

In a virtual press conference on Wednesday, real estate consultant Knight Frank India noted that the decline in interest rates on home loans, strong economic growth and lower inflation were some of the key factors that helped in sustaining the housing demand during the 2025 calendar year despite fears of an impending correction.

As per the data, the housing sales declined 1 per cent in 2025 to 3,48,207 units across eight major cities of the country.

The data pertains to primary residential market only.

Knight Frank India CMD Shishir Bajjal said the sales momentum continued last year despite rise in weighted average prices.

"The contribution of NRIs



REPRESENTATIVE PIC

in housing sales has risen to 12-15 per cent from single digit a decade ago," he told reporters.

On the outlook for 2026, Bajjal said, "We are cautiously optimistic" for the residential market.

"I think the lowering of interest rates and the improving affordability should hopefully continue to promote residential sales," he said.

Among cities, sales of residential properties in Mumbai region rose 1 per cent to 97,188 units.

The average housing price rose 7 per cent in the country's financial capital to Rs 8,856 per sq ft. The housing sales in Bengaluru remained flat at 55,373 units while the average price grew 12 per cent to Rs 7,388 per sq ft.

In Pune, the sales dipped 3 per cent to 50,881 units, but prices appreciated 5 per cent to Rs 5,016 per sq ft.

Delhi-NCR saw a 9 per cent fall in sales last year to 52,452 units, while prices appreciated 19 per cent to Rs 6,028 per sq ft.

KEY POINTS

- » 'The contribution of NRIs in housing sales has risen to 12-15% from single digit a decade ago'
- » Among cities, sales of residential properties in Mumbai region rose 1%
- » The avg housing price rose 7% in Mumbai to Rs 8,856 per sq ft

Sales in Hyderabad grew 4 per cent to 38,403 units, while prices rose 13 per cent to Rs 6,721 per sq ft.

In Ahmedabad, housing sales rose 2 per cent to 18,752 units. Prices in the Gujarat capital grew 3 per cent to Rs 3,197 per sq ft.

Chennai saw a 12 per cent growth in housing sales to 18,262 units. The Tamil Nadu capital witnessed a 7 per cent rise in average housing price to Rs 5,135 per sq ft.

Sales in Kolkata declined 3

per cent annually during 2025 to 16,896 units.

The average price of residential properties in the West Bengal capital increased 6 per cent to Rs 4,037 per sq ft.

'Kolkata office leasing hits decade high in 2025, residential market steady'

Kolkata's office real estate market recorded its strongest performance in over a decade in 2025, with annual leasing volumes surging 69 per cent year-on-year to 2.3 million sq ft, Knight Frank India said.

This is the first time the city's office sector crossed the 2 million sq ft threshold, it said. The report — India Real Estate: Office and Residential Market, July-December 2025 — highlighted that office transactions in the second half of 2025 jumped 78 per cent on-year to 1.2 million sq ft.

Average office rents rose 16 per cent year-on-year to Rs 47.5 per sq ft per month, the highest rental growth recorded among India's eight major office markets, it said.

Govt targets to present Seeds Bill in Parl in Feb

NEW DELHI: The government is targeting to introduce the Seeds Bill 2025 in Parliament during the first phase of the Budget session in February, Agriculture Secretary Devesh Chaturvedi has said.

"We have received 9,000 applications with suggestions for the Seeds Bill 2025. We will process them and put a cabinet note. Our target is to first bring this bill in the first phase of the Budget session," he said.

The ministry plans to table the Pesticides Management Bill 2020 after the Parliament recess, he added.

The Seeds Bill, which will replace the 1966 Seeds Act, has provisions of mandatory registration for seed varieties, dealers, and producers

It aims to ensure quality and traceability with modern standards like QR codes on packets

It seeks to establish panels for oversight



FILE PIC

INSIGHT

- » The Seeds Bill, which will replace the 1966 Seeds Act, has provisions of mandatory registration for seed varieties, dealers, and producers
- » It aims to ensure quality and traceability with modern standards like QR codes on packets
- » It seeks to establish panels for oversight

mitted by a company, the person who is in charge of the company at the time the offence is committed, and is responsible for the conduct of the business, will face actions.

The deadline for public comments on the draft Seeds Bill, 2025, was December 11, 2024.

AGENCIES



# Sindhu makes an entrance

Malaysia Open: Starts 2026 with a bang, Satwik-Chirag make winning start

KUALA LUMPUR: Returning from a prolonged injury lay-off, PV Sindhu began the new season on a winning note along with the formidable men's doubles pair of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy as they entered the second round of the Malaysia Open Super 1000 here on Wednesday.

The 30-year-old former world champion, who had opted to withdraw from all BWF World Tour events in October last year to recover from a foot injury, defeated Chinese Taipei's Sung Shuo Yun 21-14, 22-20 in a 51-minute showdown of the women's singles opening round.

The 18th-ranked Sindhu showed no signs of discomfort as she overcame the lower-ranked Sung for the second time to take her head-to-head to 2-0 and set up a round-of-16 clash with world No.9 Tomoka Miyazaki on Wednesday.



PV Sindhu defeated Chinese Taipei's Sung Shuo Yun 21-14 22-20

FILE

saw off Chinese Taipei's Yang Po-Hsuan and Lee Jhe-Hue 21-13 21-15 in 35 minutes to also enter the pre-quarterfinals.

The Asian Games champions, who had reached the semifinals of the season-ending BWF World Tour Finals in December, will face Malaysia's Junaidi Arif and Roy King Yap.

The mixed doubles pair of Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto, ranked 17th in the world, however, bowed out in the round of 32 after losing to

sat off Chinese Taipei's Yang Po-Hsuan and Lee Jhe-Hue 21-13 21-15 in 35 minutes to also enter the pre-quarterfinals.

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**Satwik and Chirag beat Chinese Taipei's Yang Po-Hsuan and Lee Jhe-Hue 21-13 21-15**

the lower-ranked American duo of Presley Smith and Jennie Gai 15-21, 21-18, 15-21 following a hard-fought 56-minute contest.

Treesa Jolly and Gayatri

Gopichand, who won their second Syed Modi International Super 300 crown in December, put up a fight before losing 9-21 23-21 19-21 in a 66-minute battle against Indonesia's Febriana Dwipuji Kusuma and Meilysa Trias Puspitasari.

The Panda sisters -- Rutuparna and Swetaparna -- also faced defeat, going down 11-21 9-21 in a lop-sided contest against second seeded Malaysians Pearly Tan and Thinaah Muralitharan.

AGENCIES

## India Open: Lakshya to face Ayush

NEW DELHI: Indian shuttlers have been handed a tricky draw at the Yonex-Sunrise India Open Super 750 tournament here later this month, with former world champion PV Sindhu set to face Vietnam's Thuy Linh Nguyen, against whom she had lost twice recently, in the women's singles first round.

Lakshya Sen, the 2022 champion, will open campaign against the talented Ayush Shetty in an all-Indian clash. The tournament, one of the most prestigious events on the BWF World Tour, will be played from January 13 to 18 at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium.

Kidambi Srikanth will be up against Chinese-Taipei's 2024 Thomas Cup bronze medal-winning team member and world No. 12 Lin Chun-Yi, with a possible second-round clash against Christo Popov.

AGENCIES

## B'desh makes U-turn; to 'work with ICC' on T20 WC concerns

S KANNAN

NEW DELHI: The tough posturing by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) over refusal to travel to India next month for the ICC T20 World Cup is being seen as mere optics. After Mustafizur Rahman, who was signed by Kolkata Knight Riders for Rs 9.2 crores at the IPL auction was asked to be dropped by the BCCI last week, the BCB has felt slighted.

Writing to the International Cricket Council (ICC) that their matches be shifted outside India to a neutral venue has not met with the desired response. Grapevine says the BCB, now in a defiant mood, will have no other option but to travel to India.

For its part, the ICC is handling the matter with tact and calm. There have been meetings online between the ICC and Bangladesh board but there's whatsoever no hint matches will be shifted out. A few facts need to be put in perspective. Whenever the Bangladesh cricket team has travelled to India, there was never any security issue. Sources said just because the lone player who got a good deal at the IPL auction has been asked to leave due to 'political reasons' does not



The tensions have been simmering between Bangladesh and India

BCB

mean "India is unsafe". There is nothing to substantiate this, said sources.

On Wednesday, the Bangladesh cricket board put out a statement as well, which read more like an apology of sorts. "The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has received response from the International Cricket Council (ICC) regarding the Board's expressed concerns over the safety and security of the Bangladesh National Cricket Team in India for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026, including the request for relocation of the team's matches," the BCB said in a statement on Wednesday.

In a letter put out by the BCB, what is also clear is that they are in no position to bargain or arm-twisting the ICC.

Then again, insiders in the BCCI pointed out that comparing the current situation with complexities involved in cricketing ties between India and Pakistan cannot be used as a parallel.

Indeed, India versus Pakistan has grabbed eyeballs, even though results in both the T20 and ODI formats have seen the Men in Blue emerge victorious more often. As regards previous instances when Australia refused to travel to Sri Lanka for the World Cup in 1996, the situation was very different. Sri Lanka was facing internal trouble because of the LTTE.

In India, at present, there is no such threat. If anything, all venues in India for the ICC T20 World Cup have been cleared for security.

## WPL Harman credits WPL, MI for 'winning mindset'



MI's head coach Lisa Keightley, captain Harmanpreet Kaur and mentor Julian Goswami during a press conference on Wednesday

PTI

MUMBAI: Harmanpreet Kaur on Wednesday credited Women's Premier League and her franchise Mumbai Indians in helping her develop a "winning mindset", which she made good use of while leading the national team to women's ODI World Cup title.

Harmanpreet, who has led Mumbai Indians to two titles in the WPL, said working with the franchise has helped her approach competitions differently.

"I believe wherever I go, I want to think about winning because participation, we have been doing for so many years, I think that doesn't change anything," Harmanpreet said at a press conference here.

"But if you go with a winning mindset and work towards that, that can bring a lot of things to you and to your country. WPL made a lot of changes in me, especially thinking because before that, some limitations were there but when I came here and worked with MI."

Talking further about the changed mindset, she said, "MI has been winning IPL title for so many years and that winning mindset came and when I was sitting with them, they were always thinking about what best we can do to beat any team

**MI has been winning IPL title for so many years and that winning mindset came with them**

— Harmanpreet Kaur

or to win the title. "That's what has completely changed."

Lisa Keightley, the new coach of the Mumbai Indians, said Indian domestic players are getting the right amount of competition, which is now reflecting in their performances.

"The Indian international players are getting fantastic competitions to lead into international cricket in World Cups and being put under pressure," Lisa said. "And if you're doing that in your domestic competition, it's only going to enhance your performance when you go away and play international cricket. We've seen the result of that through India winning the last 50-over World Cup when they're under pressure in the semi-final to win that match, and then go on and win the final."

## Asiad gold winner Jinson Johnson retires

NEW DELHI: National record-holder and Asian Games gold-winning Indian middle distance runner Jinson Johnson announced his retirement on Wednesday, saying that "it is time for something new" after a 15-year career shaped by "relentless training, quiet struggles, and painful injuries".

The 34-year-old Kerala athlete has not competed since winning a 1500m bronze in the Hangzhou Asian Games in October 2023. His best moment was winning the 1500m gold in the 2018 Jakarta Asian Games with a time of 3 minutes 44.72 seconds. He also won a silver in 800m in the same Games.

"From a boy with dream started the journey from Kolkata and reached up to Asian Games podium in Hangzhou 2023. Thank you Athletics," Johnson wrote on Instagram. "Some journeys are measured in meters and seconds. Some are measured in tears, sacrifices, faith, and the people who never let you fall."

In 2018, Johnson broke Sri-ram Singh's 42-year-old men's 800m national record during the National Inter-State Championship in Guwahati.

## Bethell to the fore as England live to fight another day against Aussies

SYDNEY: Jacob Bethell posted his first Test century Wednesday and it couldn't have come at a more crucial time for England, ensuring the fifth and last Ashes Test will be decided on Day 5 at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

The 22-year-old, Barbados-born allrounder went to the crease in the first over of England's second innings when Mitchell Starc trapped Zac Crawley lbw on the fifth ball.

He shared an 81-run second-wicket stand with Ben Duckett (42), 32 with Joe Root (6), 102 with Harry Brook (42) and 45 with Jamie Smith (26) to help England reach 302-8 at stumps on Day 4, a lead of 119 runs.

Bethell finished 142 not out from 232 balls, helping England erase the 183-run first-innings deficit and maintain a chance of winning back-to-back tests Down Under. The Australians retained the Ashes with wins in the first three tests, but England is determined to narrow the margin after its drought-breaking win in Melbourne.

"It was special to get the milestone," Bethell said.

In just his sixth test, and second of this series, Bethell found a way to survive while wickets tumbled around him as



Jacob Bethell scored an unbeaten 142 off 229 balls

AP/PTI

**2**

**At 22 years and 78 days, Bethell became the second-youngest batter this century to score an Ashes hundred**

allrounder Beau Webster (3-51) emerged as the unlikely star for Australia by taking three wickets with his occasional offspin.

Webster took two wick-

ets in three deliveries to swing momentum. He removed Brook, trapped lbw to a ball that turned sharply out of the rough, and Will Jacks, inexcusably hitting out and caught in the deep by Cameron Green for a second-ball duck, as England slumped to 219-5.

A chaotic run out, first ball after the drinks break in the evening session, saw Jamie Smith (26) sent back by Bethell and well out of his ground when Jake Weatherald threw to Marcus Labuschagne to whip off the bails at the bowler's end.

Bethell was 123 at the time, and England at 264-6, when his injured skipper Ben Stokes went to the crease.

## Anand's still got it, in joint lead with Niemann at Tata Steel Chess

KOLKATA: Five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand showed he remains a force to reckon with in a field increasingly dominated by youngsters, notching up two wins to emerge joint leader with 2.5 points after three rounds of the Rapid games on the opening day of the Tata Steel Chess India here on Wednesday.

The 56-year-old Anand, who is returning to the tournament after six years, defeated the highly-rated American Grandmaster Wesley So by putting him in serious time trouble in the opening round to earn a full point.

He then split the point with China's Wei Yi before beating country-mate Aravindh Chithambaram in round three.

Anand is sharing the lead with American GM Hans Niemann, who overcame former World Rapid champion Volodar Murzin in the opening round, drew with India's Vidit Gujrathi and then beat young R. Praggnanandhaa, who got into a time crunch to lose the match.

In a classic game between two of India's top players, Gujrathi made a strong state-



Viswanathan Anand in action on Wednesday in Kolkata

PTI

ment with the black pieces, dominating Arjun Erigaisi -- the double bronze medalist at the World Rapid and Blitz championships in Doha recently -- to seal the win with a rare knight-and-bishop checkmate.

The second round saw Praggnanandhaa control both wings before breaking through on the kingside to defeat Erigaisi.

However it was Anand, the Blitz champion here six years back, who held centre stage.

In Round 3, the player-cum-administrator once again showed his class, using clever rook play to defeat Aravindh with black.

## Gauff leads defending champions US into the United Cup semi-finals

PERTH: After a singles loss and social media drama earlier in the week, Coco Gauff did all her talking on court Wednesday in the United Cup quarterfinals.

Gauff won twice -- once in singles and then a clinching victory in mixed doubles -- to send the Americans into the semifinals in Sydney on Saturday.

Gauff beat Maria Sakkari 6-3, 6-2 to give the defending champion United States a 1-0 lead over Greece. Taylor Fritz, affected by knee tendinitis, had a chance in his singles match to clinch the quarterfinal against Stefanos Tsitsipas, but lost 6-4 7-5. That sent the quarterfinal match to a mixed doubles decider.

In that match, Gauff and Christian Harrison beat Tsitsipas and Sakkari 4-6, 6-4, 10-8.

## Unfazed Coco lets racquet talk



Coco Gauff was in top form against Greece

FILE

It was on track for a runaway in the third-set, 10-point tie-breaker when the Americans led 4-0 and 5-1, but the Greek

pair rallied to level it at 6-6. Gauff and Harrison held on for the win.

"I think I was striking the

**Gauff won twice -- once in singles and then a clinching victory in mixed doubles -- to send the Americans into the semifinals**

ball well today, and when that happens, my movement on the court is also good," Gauff said after her singles win. "I usually know it's going to be a good day."

On Monday, Gauff dropped a post on social media about a half-hour before she started her singles match, hoping to add

context to her recent comments about American tennis fans.

The ensuing match didn't go well for the No. 4-ranked Gauff, who lost the first five games and struggled in a 6-1, 6-7 (3), 6-0 loss to No. 42 Jessica Bouzas Maneiro. But Fritz won his singles match against Spain and Gauff and Harrison combined in mixed doubles to clinch top spot in Group A.

In a night quarterfinal at Perth on Wednesday, Stan Wawrinka, playing in his farewell tour this year before retiring, was scheduled to lead Switzerland against Argentina.

At Sydney, Hubert Hurkacz and Iga Swiatek were victorious in their singles matches to give Poland a winning 2-0 lead over Netherlands and a place in the quarterfinals from Group F. Poland is expected to play Australia in the quarters.

AGENCIES

## HIL GC beat Shrachi Bengal Tigers 6-3

CHENNAI: Kane Russell produced a sensational hat-trick as HIL GC defeated Shrachi Bengal Tigers 6-3 in a high-scoring men's Hockey India League clash here on Wednesday.

Russell (19', 36', 44'), Sam Ward (19'), Sudeep Chirmako (38') and James Albery (59') scored the goals for HIL GC, while Captain Jugraj Singh (12'), Tom Grambusch (40') and Christopher Ruhr (40') were the goalscorers for Shrachi Bengal Tigers.

The first real opportunity came in the 11th minute, as Chirmako played an incisive pass to Ajeet Yadav on the left, who took a shot on goal from a tight spot and struck the post for HIL GC.

In the same minute, the Tigers were awarded four consecutive penalty corners and although HIL GC tried their best in stopping the attempts, they gave away an unfortunate penalty stroke which was converted by captain Jugraj (12') as he sent HIL GC goalkeeper James Mazarello the wrong way.

In the second quarter, HIL GC registered two quick goals in the 19th minute to claim the lead. Despite 13 circle penetrations and six shots, the Tigers still trailed by a goal at the end of two quarters. Five minutes into the third quarter, HIL GC won another PC.

AGENCIES





# THE POWER OF SLOWNESS IN AGE OF NOISE

*The celebrated Hungarian director of ‘Satantango’ and ‘The Turin Horse’ passes away at 70*

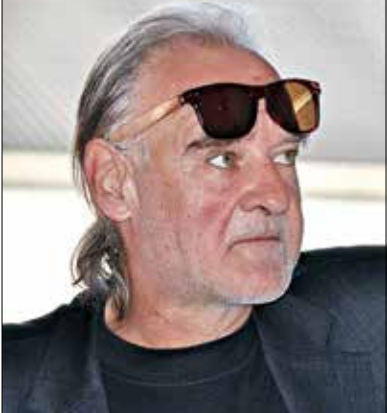
ANINDITA ACHARYA

In the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and 30-second reels, many may find Bela Tarr to be a slow filmmaker. But slowness was intrinsic to his cinema. It was the very essence of his cinema. His long, languid pacing, stunning black-and-white visuals, meticulously choreographed shots and immersive ambient sound came together to create works that asked you to slow down and stay. On Tuesday, the legendary Hungarian filmmaker passed away at the age of 70 after battling a long illness.

Over a career spanning several decades, Tarr wrote and directed nine feature films, beginning with ‘Family Nest’ in 1979 and concluding with ‘The Turin Horse’ in 2011. In ‘The Turin Horse’, the austere filmmaker used mundanity and repetition in everyday life to explore profound philosophical themes of existence, suffering and the end of the world. The film won the Silver Bear Jury Grand Prize at the Berlin International Film Festival that year.

His 1994 film ‘Satantango’, which clocks 450 minutes, is an adaptation of a

## REMEMBERING BELA TARR



novel by Hungarian writer Laszlo Krasznahorkai, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2025. The film is a textbook guide for works of the contemporary slow cinema movement. In fact, Tarr collaborated with Krasznahorkai often. Be it ‘Satantango’ or ‘Werckmeister Harmonies’,

both adapted from Krasznahorkai’s novels, have travelled across film festivals and bagged awards.

His singular style left a lasting imprint on world cinema. Directors like Jim Jarmusch and Gus Van Sant have always praised Tarr’s vision. In India, Tarr left an indelible mark on filmmakers and cinephiles alike. National Award-winning Bengali filmmaker Atanu Ghosh shared a photograph of the iconic director from the International Film Festival of Kerala 2022. The ‘Mayurakshi’ director said cinema feels lonelier after Tarr’s passing. “He had the courage to pace cinema down until it breathed like life itself. In an age obsessed with speed, explanation and constant stimulation, he trusted time, silence and the weight of human presence. His long-unbroken shots are not stylistic tricks but acts of faith, inviting us to stay back, look and endure just as his characters do,” wrote Ghosh.

A devoted cinephile, Kunal Sen, son of legendary filmmaker Mrinal Sen, described Tarr as a ‘rare breed, especially in a world that demands faster-paced cinema’. He recalled how his father and Tarr had taken part in a joint project 35 years



The legendary Hungarian filmmaker Bela Tarr became known as a founding figure of the slow cinema genre, especially after the release of ‘Satantango’ in 1994

Tarr was born on July 21, 1955, in the southeastern Hungarian university town of Pécs. His father designed theatre and film sets, while his mother worked at a local theatre. Tarr began making amateur films at the age of 16 while working various jobs, including at a shipyard and as a receptionist. Reflecting on his craft, Tarr once said, “If you are a real filmmaker, you have to have your own style, your own language.” Words that feel especially relevant today.

## ‘Amazon MGM Studios’ confirms new cast members for ‘Tomb Raider’ series

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Amazon MGM Studios’ announced the actors set to star in the new ‘Prime Video’ series Tomb Raider. Newly revealed cast members include Sigourney Weaver, Jason Isaacs, Celia Imrie, Bill Paterson and more.

The series is based on the iconic ‘Tomb Raider’ video game franchise, which follows the adventures of world-famous archaeologist and adventurer Lara Croft.

“I’ve been a long-time fan of ‘Tomb Raider’ and the character of Lara. She has always felt for me, very emboldened in a male-dominated world. She’s a fierce female role



model!” said Sophie Turner. Phoebe Waller-Bridge shared, “‘Tomb Raider’ boasts a plethora of iconic characters. I am thrilled to have been able to bring some personal and fan favourites to the screen while also introducing a few new rascals of our own to the mix. This cast is beyond my wildest dreams!”

## Tom Hiddleston is all praise for Diego Calva and Camila Morrone

*Hiddleston called his ‘The Night Manager’ season 2 co-stars ‘extraordinary actors’*

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Nearly a decade after ‘The Night Manager’ first gripped audiences worldwide on ‘Prime Video’, Tom Hiddleston returns to the highly anticipated second season, revisiting one of the most defining roles of his career. This season of the critically acclaimed series expands the world of Jonathan Pine into darker, more dangerous territory. Picking up years after the events of the first season, the new chapter finds Pine drawn back into the shadows of international espionage, navigating shifting identities, fractured loyalties and a sprawling conspiracy that stretches from London to Colombia.

With no sequel novel to lean on, season two boldly pushes the series forward, powered by creator, writer and executive producer David Farr’s original vision and a formidable new ensemble that includes



Tom expressed his admiration for David Farr’s storytelling ambition

Diego Calva and Camila Morrone. Speaking about building a continuation without John le Carré’s source material, Tom expressed his admiration for David Farr’s storytelling ambition, sharing, “David Farr has achieved the impossible. ‘The Night Manager’ was based on a novel by John le Carré - there was no second novel, no sequel. David has written it with all the sophistication and complexity that le Carré would approve of and admire. Teddy, Roxana, Colombia, Alex Goodwin and Matthew Ellis have all emerged

from David’s imagination. This is where he chose to go and we all followed him there. He’s forensic about detail and brilliant at the plotting of a complex spy thriller. It feels like a roller-coaster. David’s scripts are exciting, dangerous, edgy, mythic and complex. It’s about personal redemption, guilt, shame and truth.” Hiddleston is equally effusive when speaking about the new talent joining the series, calling both Diego Calva and Camila Morrone ‘extraordinary actors’. He added, “I have been blown away by their work in this. They’ve taken what’s on the page and given it an extra dimension in every conceivable aspect.”

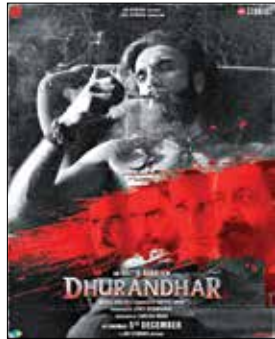
## ‘HISTORY HAS BEEN REWRITTEN’

### Aditya Dhar’s ‘Dhurandhar’ becomes biggest Hindi film ever

Filmmaker Aditya Dhar’s ‘Dhurandhar’ has become the highest-earning Hindi film ever with a net India collection of over Rs 831 crore, the makers said.

With its Day 33 earnings on Tuesday standing at Rs 5.70 crore net, the Ranveer Singh-starrer’s total India net collection climbed to Rs 831.40 crore, placing it at the No. 1 spot among all Hindi releases to date.

“History has been rewritten. With Tuesday’s collections, ‘Dhurandhar’ has officially risen to become the highest-earning Hindi film of all time,



a towering achievement that has redefined Indian box office success,” the makers said.

The top position was earlier occupied by the Hindi version

of Allu Arjun’s 2023 blockbuster ‘Pushpa 2: The Rule’. The Telugu movie had earned Rs 830 crore in Hindi. The other highest-earning Hindi titles are Shah Rukh Khan’s ‘Jawan’ and horror comedy ‘Stree 2’, which had earned Rs 643 crores and Rs 627 crores, respectively.

The India box office break-up shows a robust run across weeks, with Rs 218 crores in its opening week, followed by Rs 261.50 crores in week two, Rs 189.30 crores in week three and Rs 115.70 crores in week four. The film added Rs 35.80 crores over its fifth weekend.

*It’s not clear what role Stan will play in the film*

Sebastian Stan is in talks to join Robert Pattinson in DC Studios’ ‘The Batman Part II’.

It is not clear what character Stan, known for his role in ‘The Apprentice’ and ‘Marvel’ superhero movies like ‘Captain America: The Winter Soldier’, ‘Captain America: Civil War’, ‘Avengers: Infinity War’ and ‘Avengers: Endgame’, will play in the movie.

The long-awaited superhero sequel, directed by Matt Reeves, is expected to begin shooting this year for an October 2027 theatrical release from ‘Warner Bros’, reported ‘Variety’. Pattinson took on the role of the Caped Crusader in 2022’s ‘The Batman’, which earned 772

## Sebastian in talks to star in ‘The Batman Part II’



The second part will see Colin Farrell, Jeffrey Wright, Andy Serkis and Barry Keoghan return

Barry Keoghan returning. Other than Stan, Scarlett Johansson, who played the role of the Black Widow in a series of ‘Marvel’ movies, has also joined the DC Studios’ movie. Stan was last seen in the MCU’s ‘Thunderbolts’. He will next appear in ‘Avengers: Doomsday’ and in the thriller ‘Fjord’.

million US dollars at the worldwide box office. Reeves and Mattson Tomlin have written the second part, which will see Colin Farrell, Jeffrey Wright, Andy Serkis and

## Kristen Stewart would love to readapt ‘Twilight’ franchise

*She played Bella in the vampire romance drama where she falls for Edward Cullen, a 108-year-old vampire*

Kristen Stewart, who made her directorial debut with ‘The Chronology of Water’, would not mind directing a movie based on the ‘Twilight’ franchise that catapulted her and actor Robert Pattinson to teen stardom in 2008.

Stewart was asked whether she would like to make her version of movies, based on the popular Stephenie Meyer novel series, on the red carpet of the Palm Springs Film Festival and she said she could make the movies provided she had support and a huge budget, reported ‘Deadline’, quoting ‘Entertainment Tonight’.

“I love what all of the directors did with the movies, but they were so themselves and weird and kind of squirrely and just so present in that time when they didn’t really know what they were yet, before they blew up,” Stewart said. She added, “I know; imagine if we had a huge budget and a bunch of love and support, I don’t know. I would love to readapt - yeah,



She made her directorial debut with ‘The Chronology of Water’

sure, I’ll do the remake. I’m doing it. I’m committed.” A child star, Stewart played Bella in the vampire romance drama where she falls for her mysterious classmate Edward Cullen, who reveals himself to be a 108-year-old vampire. The first movie was directed by Catherine Harwick. Chris Weitz followed it up with ‘New Moon’, David Slade directed ‘Eclipse’ and Bill Condon directed the two-part ‘Breaking Dawn’ instalments.



CEO  
SPEAKS



IF I WERE  
A STUDENT  
AGAIN IN  
2026!

DR SANKU BOSE

If I were a student again in 2026, the first thing I would do is make peace with an uncomfortable truth: a degree, by itself, no longer guarantees a career today. It may still open doors, but it does not keep them open long enough! The world of work is changing faster than ever before, driven by technology, demographic shifts and a global labour market that is more fluid than ever before. Careers are becoming longer, less predictable, and far more demanding, not just in skill, but in judgment.

As a student today, I would, therefore, stop preparing for a specific “job” and start preparing for change itself. Previous generations could afford to train for a single role and refine it over decades. And they were appreciated for doing that! In 2026, that mindset is risky. Job titles are evolving rapidly, and many roles that sound stable today will most certainly either disappear or be fundamentally redefined within a decade. What endures is not a designation, but the ability to adapt, to learn quickly, to unlearn without ego, and to apply knowledge across contexts. The most valuable skill is no longer mastery of a narrow domain, but intellectual agility.

I would also treat technology not merely as a subject but as a language to be spoken fluently. Artificial intelligence (AI) and data systems now shape decisions across fields, from healthcare and law to design, media, education, and public policy. One does not need to become a programmer to remain relevant, but one does need to understand how technology influences outcomes, where its blind spots lie, and how its misuse can cause harm. As a student, I would focus on applied fluency: knowing how to work with intelligent tools, how to question their outputs, and how to bring human judgment where algorithms fall short.

Equally important, I would stop “polishing” my resume and start building a visible body of work. In a world flooded with degrees and certificates, proof matters more than promise. Employers and collaborators increasingly ask not just what you studied, but what you have actually built, solved, written, researched, or contributed to. If I were a student again, every academic year would leave behind tangible evidence, projects, internships, fieldwork, social initiatives, research papers, digital portfolios, or entrepreneurial experiments. Waiting until the final year to “prepare for placements” would be a missed opportunity. Employability now is not an event any longer, it is a habit built steadily over time!

I would also think globally, even if I planned to work locally. The globalisation of work is no longer only about migration. Remote teams, cross-border projects, and international collaborations mean that global competence is essential even in domestic roles. Communication skills, cultural sensitivity, professional writing, and the ability to work with diverse perspectives would be non-negotiable. Awareness of global trends, whether in sustainability,

geopolitics, or technology, would no longer be “extra knowledge,” but part of professional survival.

Another area I would take far more seriously than students traditionally do is cybersecurity and ethics. As systems become more automated and data-driven with progressive AI integration, trust becomes a critical. Every profession now carries digital risk, whether through data privacy, intellectual property, or algorithmic bias. I would not aim to become a cybersecurity expert, unless that was my calling, but I would ensure I understood digital responsibility, governance frameworks, and ethical decision-making.

When it comes to passion, I would be more honest with myself than romantic. “Follow your passion” is well-meaning advice, but dangerously incomplete. Passion without capability or market relevance often leads to frustration. If I were a student in 2026, I would continuously ask myself three questions: What genuinely interests me? What skills can I realistically develop to a high level? And where does this intersect with real-world demand? Sustainable careers emerge where curiosity, competence, and opportunity overlap, not where one’s passion is pursued in isolation.

IF I WERE A  
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Above all, I would embrace lifelong learning in its truest form. With working lives likely to span four or five decades, multiple reinventions are inevitable. Short courses, certifications, interdisciplinary learning, and periodic re-skilling will become routine. I would stop seeing education as a phase that ends with graduation and start seeing it as a permanent companion! Re-entering the classroom, physical or digital, should not feel like failure, but foresight.

The promise education must make to students in 2026 is therefore very different from the one made a generation ago. It is about building the capacity to remain relevant, resilient, and fulfilled across an entire lifetime of change. The future will belong to those who can keep reinventing themselves without losing direction.

The author is the Vice-Chancellor of Sister Nivedita University and Group CEO, Techno India Group. A visionary leader, he is shaping future-ready institutions and inspiring students to lead with purpose



AROUND THE WORLD

- » IIT Ropar launches fully-funded scholarship scheme for students from underprivileged backgrounds
- » Goa Institute of Management integrates VR lab across PGDM courses to strengthen experiential learning
- » IIT Bombay launches new certificate programme in Gen AI
- » Canadian International School to host 11th annual junior golf tournament



BUZZER ROUND

Q) WHO WON THE 2025 BOOKER PRIZE?  
Send us your replies to [careersmp22@gmail.com](mailto:careersmp22@gmail.com). We shall publish the names of the first 3 correct entries in next week’s edition

Answer to our Jan 1 edition question:  
Pratibha Patil

Correct answers were sent by: Rukshana Ahmed, Ratul Mongia, Kushal Ghosh



NEWS & VIEWS

Celebrating its 52nd edition, Saarang, the annual cultural festival of IIT Madras, will be held on campus from Jan 8 onwards. With an expected footfall of over 80,000 visitors, Saarang is one of the largest student-run cultural festivals in the country. The theme of this edition is ‘Beyond Realms’, exploring the idea that art can transcend physical boundaries and transport audiences to imagined worlds.

The Entrepreneurship Cell, IIT Kanpur, announced the opening of registrations for its annual flagship event, E-Summit’25, to be organized at campus between Jan 23-25. The event will bring together the academic community, venture capitalists and industry leaders and provide a platform for networking, workshops and more.

SKILLS-FIRST  
IS NEW NORMAL FOR JOBS IN 2026

Companies are shifting from degree-centric hiring to competency-based models

ANINDITA ACHARYA

Are you the kind who tops every exam, mugs up theories in minutes, and walks away with medals and trophies but barely works on practical skills? That might make you a university star, but it won’t guarantee you a long queue of job offers. By 2025, Artificial Intelligence (AI) stopped being just a buzzword and became part of everyday conversations. AI literacy is no longer a “good-to-have”; it’s a basic life skill, especially in education and employment. Recruiters now put AI skill sets right at the top of their priority list, and AI fluency has become the bare minimum for new hires. “Companies have moved or are moving away from degree-centric hiring to competency-based models. Graduates must demonstrate applied skills, adaptability, and agility. India will remain a strong growth hub, especially in technology, green energy, and advanced manufacturing, but hiring will be selective,” said Vishal Khurma, CEO, Woxsen University, Hyderabad.

Forbes also mentioned in their report that AI and skills-first hiring will be one of the biggest workplace trends in 2026. According to Shantanu Roop, Founder and CEO, TeamLease Edtech, the 2026 job market will be defined by selective growth rather than broad-based hiring, with employers prioritising productivity, capability and outcomes over headcount expansion. He also reminded all that overall hiring sentiment in India will remain positive, but job creation will be uneven, strong in skill-intensive roles and muted in repetitive, entry-level work that can be automated. In fact, Monster’s 2026 WorkWatch Report,



based on a national survey of 1,504 US workers, echoes the same mood. Employees are stepping into 2026 having largely accepted uncertainty as the new normal. Instead of rushing into bold career moves, many are choosing stability and income security, quietly adjusting through side hustles,

upskilling, and a more cautious, selective approach to job hunting.

Of course, AI fluency will be the baseline skill in 2026, not just for technologists but across functions, but equally important will be human capabilities like critical thinking, creativity and decision-making. Sachin Alug, CEO, NLB Services, highlighted that information technology and digital services will lead hiring, driven by continued demand for AI, data, cybersecurity, and technology



SCHOLARSHIP

UK UNIVERSITY ANNOUNCES SCHOLARSHIP FOR INDIAN POSTGRADUATES

OUR CORRESPONDENT

University of East Anglia, one of the UK’s top 30 universities, has announced its International PG Merit Scholarship for the 2026–2027 academic year. Tailored especially for meritorious Indian students, this scholarship aims to support those pursuing postgraduate studies beginning in September 2026 or January 2027.

The scholarship is available across a broad spectrum of postgraduate programmes, including Biological Sciences, Computing Sciences, Engineering, Environmental Sciences, Global Development,



Health Sciences, Law, Psychology, and several others.

Eligible Indian students will receive a guaranteed award based on their undergraduate academic performance. Those holding the equivalent of a UK 2:1 bachelor’s degree will receive GBP 7,000,

THE SCHOLARSHIP IS AVAILABLE IN PG PROGRAMMES LIKE BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES, COMPUTING SCIENCES, ENGINEERING, HEALTH SCIENCES, LAW, PSYCHOLOGY AND OTHERS

while applicants with the equivalent of a UK 2:2 classification will be granted GBP 6,000. The award will be deducted directly from tuition fees and is applicable for the first year of study. “We want to make sure that talented international students, especially, from India and the

broader South Asian region, have access to high-quality, postgraduate education, and meaningful research opportunities. These scholarships are meant to recognise strong academic achievement and reduce financial burden. We hope this assistance helps students begin their advanced studies with greater confidence, security, and a strong sense of belonging to the UEA,” said Prof Steven McGuire, UEA’s Pro-Vice-Chancellor International.

Indian applicants stand to gain as no separate application is required, and the scholarship is automatically applied for once a student receives an offer from the UEA.



TO EASE EXAM STRESS

CBSE LAUNCHES PSYCHO-SOCIAL COUNSELLING FOR CLASS 10, 12 STUDENTS, PARENTS

CBSE theory examinations for 2026 will begin on February 17

**OUR CORRESPONDENT**

Getting stressed during examinations is common for the students. But then to ease the tension, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has rolled out the first phase of its free psycho-social counselling services for CBSE Class 10 and 12 students, who are gearing up for their board examinations. This initiative is designed to help students maintain emotional well-being and mental balance during the crucial pre-exam period.

Now, examinations not only bring stress to the students but also the parents. In fact, on several occasions, it has been noticed how the parents get more anxious, thus putting additional pressure on the students. CBSE's free psycho-social counselling also caters support to the parents and will address their emotional and psychological pressure. With the CBSE theory examinations for 2026 scheduled to commence on February 17, students have been encouraged to proactively utilise these support mechanisms



while preparing for the assessments. As part of the programme, CBSE has activated a 24x7 toll-free Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) at 1800-11-8004. Available round the clock in both Hindi and English, the IVRS provides practical tips on exam preparation, time management, stress management, answers to frequently asked questions, and key CBSE contact details. The services will continue until June 1, 2026.

In addition, tele-counselling services are being offered on all working days between 9.30 am and 5.30 pm. A dedicated panel of 73 trained experts, including school principals, counsellors, special educators from CBSE-affiliated

**CBSE HAS LAUNCHED A SET OF DIGITAL RESOURCES ON ITS OFFICIAL WEBSITE TO HELP STUDENTS COPE WITH EXAMINATION STRESS**

institutions, and professional psychologists, will be available to guide students and parents.

Of the total panel, 61 professionals are based in India, while 12 are stationed in countries such as Nepal, Japan, Qatar, Oman and the UAE, ensuring a broad and inclusive support network for students both within the country and abroad.

Further strengthening the initiative, CBSE has launched a set of digital resources on its official website to help students cope with examination stress and adopt effective study habits. The online materials focus on study planning, emotional regulation and self-care, aiming to make the preparation process more structured and less daunting for students.

IIT GUWAHATI HOSTS ANNUAL AI CONFLUENCE



400 students enrolled in online BSc Data Science & AI

**OUR CORRESPONDENT**

IIT Guwahati hosted the two-day annual AI conference with 400 students enrolled in its online BSc (Hons) degree programme in Data Science and AI.

The cohort included early-career professionals, students who have completed Class XII, and learners from a wide range of academic and professional backgrounds. "Data science encompasses every domain of modern-day business. IIT Guwahati recognises the value of creating opportunities for online learners to meet, collaborate, and feel connected to the institution," said Prof Devendra Jalohal, Director, IIT Guwahati.

Alongside academic sessions, students engaged in poster presentations, AI film-making challenges, invention activities, and panel discussions on business and entrepreneurship.

The online BSc (Hons) Degree programme in Data Science and AI at IIT Guwahati is designed to support students and working professionals whose geographies, career paths, or personal cir-



**STUDENTS IN THE PROGRAMME MAY CHOOSE THEIR PACE OF STUDY AND BENEFIT FROM A FLEXIBLE ACADEMIC STRUCTURE WITH MULTIPLE ENTRY AND EXIT OPTIONS**

cumstances may not allow for full-time, on-campus education.

Students in the programme may choose their pace of study and benefit from a flexible academic structure with multiple entry and exit options, enabling them to balance learning with professional and personal commitments. Teaching is conducted fully online by IIT Guwahati faculty through recorded lectures, live sessions, and discussion hours.

IIT JODHPUR SETS RECORD WITH 86 IPR FILINGS IN 2025

**OUR CORRESPONDENT**

IIT Jodhpur has achieved a significant milestone in its innovation journey by filing a record 86 Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) during 2025, marking the highest number of IPR filings in a single year since the institute's inception.

The IPR filings in 2025 include 77 patent applications, 5 design registrations, and 4 copyrights, spanning a wide spectrum of emerging and interdisciplinary domains. The patent applications cover advanced engineering solutions, healthcare technologies, materials and manufacturing processes, energy systems, and digital innovations, among others. Several inventions are designed to address real-world challenges, with a strong



emphasis on affordability, sustainability, and scalability, aligning with national priorities and societal needs.

"Our focus has always been on creating knowledge that leads to impact, solutions that are ethical, sustainable, and nationally relevant," said Prof Avinash Kumar Agarwal, Director, IIT Jodhpur.



Admissions open for postgraduate management programmes

**OUR CORRESPONDENT**

SOIL Institute of Management has announced the commencement of its admissions cycle for the upcoming academic year. Admissions are now open for the institute's postgraduate management programmes for 2026 intake, which are designed to develop ethical, mindful, and industry-ready leaders for a rapidly evolving business environment.

SOIL offers programmes like the Post Graduate Diploma in Management (PGDM) and the Post Graduate Programme in Management (PGPM).

Both combine classroom learning with hands-on experience and leadership training.

SOIL's focus on industry alignment and leadership preparedness is reflected in its recent placement outcomes. For the PGDM programmes, 98 per cent of students opting for placements were placed with the highest package reaching Rs 20.7 LPA with graduates witnessing an average post-MBA salary growth of over two times with placements across organisations marking the relevance of SOIL's pedagogy in today's competitive job market.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- » A bachelor's degree in any discipline from a recognised university
- » For PGPM, candidates with a prior work experience of 2+ years of work experience are eligible
- » For PGDM & PGPM HR programmes, both freshers and work experienced are eligible
- » Programme-specific work experience requirements

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For over 111 years, Bowling Green State University (BGSU) has been dedicated to academic excellence. Likewise, Sister Nivedita University (SNU) combines world-class education, state-of-the-art infrastructure and industry partnerships, making this collaboration a powerful platform for building strong careers.

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BACHELORS OF SCIENCE IN:

- Computer Science
- Electronics & Computer Engineering
- Mechanical & Manufacturing Engineering
- Industrial Systems Engineering
- Robotic Engineering
- Cybersecurity

BRADLEY University

Bradley University, Illinois

THE SNU-BRADLEY PARTNERSHIP

Bradley University's legacy of academic excellence pairs with Sister Nivedita University's diverse schools and disciplines, creating a strong foundation for success and future career growth.

COURSES OFFERED

BACHELORS OF SCIENCE IN:

- Game Design
- Cybersecurity
- Computer Science

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