

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 Bangladeshi and put behind bars'
 » 'Why didn't you take steps to ensure their release from jail. If they are Bangladeshi 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, Banerjee launched a sharp attack on the BJP and its state president and Union minister Suktanta 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 infrastructure 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**

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

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-

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

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 Chandrakar 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 REVISION 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 Rathi told

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

SIR PHASE 2

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

AAISHA SABIR



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

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

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

PASSPORT

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

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

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 Marilena. In a statement carried by the state-run **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 procurements in the RMS 2026-27 season, describing it as a state-sanc-

tioned 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 bags (one bag 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 bags (one bag 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

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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

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.

ASHA workers stage stir, seek pay hike

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 bowers 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

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'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.

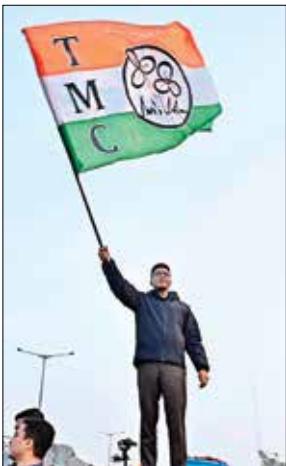
Banerjee said: "Under



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



“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.

along NH-12 in Itahar, drawing a massive crowd, before addressing a public meeting at Chowrasta More. Banerjee criticised the Election Commission's SIR process, alleging it harasses genuine citizens and risks deleting real voters from the rolls. He further alleged that

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



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

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

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.

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 Kachheria and Sagar this year. Buses have already started reaching Kachheria by vessel and are

scheduled to begin operations from January 11, with the return of buses scheduled to begin from January 16.

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Meanwhile, the state government has made the installation of speed governors or speed limiters mandatory on all government and private buses

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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

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



SAMPRITA CHOUDHURY SANYAL

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 Election Commission alone was inappropriate.

troversy, 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.

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

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 Buragunj 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.

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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.

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

RADHAMADHAB SAHA

RAIGAN: 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 Satvita 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 Satvita 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.

Mohammad 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, carrying 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.

Tea worker escapes death in leopard attack; another leopard is found dead

RAJDEEP MONDAL

JALPAIGURI: A tea garden worker narrowly escaped death after being attacked by a leopard in Nagrakata, while another leopard was found dead following a suspected fight over a mate in the Matiali block.

On Wednesday morning, Chaiti Oraon was plucking tea leaves with fellow workers in the Kabuli Danga area of Nagrakata Khasbasti when a leopard suddenly pounced on her from behind. Displaying remarkable presence of mind, she immediately lay face down and covered herself with a sack of tea leaves. As a result, the leopard failed to bite her neck but managed to injure her ear.

In Short

» On Wednesday morning, Chaiti Oraon was plucking tea leaves with fellow workers in the Kabuli Danga area of Nagrakata Khasbasti when a leopard suddenly pounced on her from behind.

» Meanwhile, in a separate incident, a leopard was found dead at the Nageswari Tea Garden under the Matiali block. Forest workers of the Khunia Range recovered the body from a drain inside the tea garden on Wednesday morning and sent it to the Lataguri Nature Interpretation Centre for post-mortem examination.

According to local resident Jaydeep Mahali, two leopards were heard fighting violently



Displaying remarkable presence of mind, she immediately lay face down and covered herself with a sack of tea leaves. As a result, the leopard failed to bite her neck but managed to injure her ear.

» Deceased leopard was a fully grown male and is suspected to have died during a fight with another leopard: Khunia Range Ranger Sajal Kumar Dey

in Section No. 20 of the garden late Tuesday night. "Terrifying roars echoed for a long time and later turned into groans. The next morning, one leopard was found dead," he said.

Khunia Range Ranger Sajal Kumar Dey stated that the injured worker is receiving treatment as per govern-

ment norms, with medical expenses to be borne by the forest department. He added, "The deceased leopard was a fully grown male and is suspected to have died during a fight with another leopard. The exact cause of death will be confirmed after the post-mortem."

Forest workers of the Khunia Range recovered the body from a drain inside the tea garden on Wednesday morning and sent it to the Lataguri Nature Interpretation Centre for post-mortem examination.

According to local resident Jaydeep Mahali, two leopards were heard fighting violently

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.

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

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

OUR CORRESPONDENT

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.

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ers to resume duties for winter cultivation ahead of the 2026 season. Rajya Sabha MP Prakash Chik Barail 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."

Ailing folk drummer Sudhir Mali battles paralysis, poverty; seeks admin support

PINAK PANI CHOWDHURY



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

Sudhir Mali 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-

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, Balurhat 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."

PARK IS THE ONLY FACILITY IN STATE TO HOUSE MANDRILLS

Bengal Safari Park: Rare mandrill birth boosts conservation efforts



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

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.

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

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

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 rescue, capacity skimmers, portable barges, and a pollution control laboratory.

The vessel's primary role is pollution response at sea, supported by state-of-the-art systems including side-sweeping arms, floating booms, high-

capacity skimmers, portable barges, and a pollution control laboratory.

The ship is also fitted with an external fire-fighting system and integrates advanced systems such as dynamic positioning, integrated bridge

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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,

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 Brihamumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the country's richest civic body.

Close relatives of some former citizens of the metropolis 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), Shradhha 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 Mahadevshwar, wife of former mayor Vishwanath Mahadevshwar (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.

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 parts 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

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.

Prior to this meeting, UPPL president Pramod Boro had also met Shah, he added.

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-

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Prior

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 Barot 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 Barot during bilateral discussions

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

operation. In his opening remarks at the meeting, Jaishankar, elaborating the importance of the talks, mentioned the larger context of "consider-

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

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

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, Kushtamandi, Tapan, Hariparup 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 houseling operations. Registrar General of India and Census Commissioner Mrityunjay Kumar Narayan said, "The Central government hereby declares that the houseling operations of the Census of India 2027 shall take place between 1st April, 2026 and 30 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 houseling 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

growth assumed in the Union Budget presented in February last year. In dollar terms, GDP is estimated at about USD 3.97 trillion, using an exchange rate of Rs 90 to the dollar.

Sectoral data point to broad-based momentum. Gross value added is seen growing by 7.3 per cent, compared with 6.4 per cent last year. Manufacturing output is expected to rise by 7 per cent, a sharp improvement from 4.5 per cent in 2024-25. Services growth is estimated at 9.1 per cent, up from 7.2 per cent, while agriculture and allied activities are projected to grow by 3.1 per cent, slower than the 4.6 per cent recorded previously.

On the demand side, real private final consumption expenditure is forecast to grow by 7 per cent. Gross fixed capital formation is estimated to increase by 7.8 per cent, compared with 7.1 per cent last year, reflecting continued investment.

Global institutions remain more cautious. The International Monetary Fund last month projected India's growth at 6.6 per cent in fiscal 2026, easing to 6.2 per cent the following year, assuming delays in a US-India trade agreement. The World Bank expects China to grow at 4.9 per cent in 2025 and 4.4 per cent in 2026.

Economists said the domestic outlook remains steady. Rahul Agrawal of ICRA said fiscal slippage beyond the 4.4 per cent of GDP target is unlikely due to stronger non-tax revenues and potential expenditure savings. Dharmakirti Joshi, chief economist at Crisil, said growth this year would be nearly 100 basis points higher than anticipated at the start of the fiscal, citing supportive policies and favourable conditions such as above-normal monsoons and low crude prices.

Jahnavi Prabhakar, economist at Bank of Baroda, noted that festive demand and improving activity levels continue to underpin resilience. She said strong sales during festivals, along with GST rationalisation and income tax cuts, are expected to lift consumption, with post-festive demand also holding up.

The First Advance Estimates form the basis for the Union Budget, scheduled to be presented on February 1.

Centre seeks

taken in relation to the Grok-related content. Officials said crucial information was missing, particularly on enforcement steps and future controls.

X had been given additional time until Wednesday, 5 PM, to submit an action taken report after the ministry issued a stern warning over the generation of sexually explicit content through AI-based services such as Grok and similar tools.

In its submission, the company said it respects Indian laws and complies with all applicable guidelines, noting that India remains a significant market for the platform. It also outlined the content take-down policies it follows, especially in cases involving misleading information and non-consensual sexualised images.

However, sources said the ministry remains dissatisfied, as the response did not sufficiently explain how the Grok AI issue was handled or what specific steps were taken to address the objectionable material. Officials are now awaiting further details from the platform.

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.

Bella

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territories covered by the exercise.

The petition argued that

employees earning above the

prescribed ceiling are automatic-

ally excluded from EPFO cover-

age, undermining the objective of

the Employees' Provident Fund

Scheme, 1952, which was framed

under the Employees' Provident

Fund and Miscellaneous Provi-

sions Act, 1952. Nautiyal said the

plea sought enforcement of fun-

damental rights under Articles 14

and 21 of the Constitution, alleg-

ing arbitrary and irregular revi-

sions of the wage ceiling.

According to the petition,

revisions to the wage ceiling over

the decades have been inconsis-

tent, with gaps of 13 to 14 years at

times, and without any fixed peri-

odicity or linkage to economic

indicators such as inflation, mini-

mum wages, per capita income

or the consumer price index.

It stated that this approach has

gradually excluded large sections

of the workforce, contrary to the

scheme's stated aim of providing

social security to employees in

the organised sector.

The plea referred to findings

of the Public Accounts Commit-

tee of the 16th Lok Sabha and a

2022 report of an EPFO sub-

committee, both of which recom-

mended periodic and rational

revision of the wage ceiling. It

noted that these recommenda-

tions were approved by the Cen-

tral Board of Trustees of EPFO in

July 2022 but have yet to be acted

upon by the central government.

The petition also cited a sta-

tistical analysis of wage ceiling

revisions over the past 70 years,

claiming they have not aligned

with benchmarks such as mini-

mum pay of central government

employees, income tax exemp-

tion limits, growth in per capita

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 army 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 Ghaemnaah, 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 ALEPO

Hundreds flee through corridors opened by Syria's government

ALEPO: 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 Maqsoud 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 Maqsoud 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-Daraogaon, 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. B/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.

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.
- 2) Tender No.: WBDMC/W/152(APAS) of 25-26 (2nd Call) Tender ID: 2026_MAD_5008505.1 • Estimated Amount : 5,81,404.00/-
- 3) Name of the Work: Construction of Shed at Surya Sen Nagar Gobinda Mandir Street No. 01 under Ward No. 20, under DMC.
- 4) Tender No.: WBDMC/W/307(APAS) of 25-26 (2nd Call) Tender ID: 2026_MAD_5008579_2 • Estimated Amount : 7,64,396.00/-
- 5) Name of the Work: Construction of C.G.I. Shed at Hari Mandir within Ward No. 18 under DMC.
- 6) Tender No.: WBDMC/W/290(APAS) of 25-26 (2nd Call) Tender ID: 2026_MAD_5008766_1 • Estimated Amount : 9,19,457.00/-
- 7) 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.
- 8) Tender No.: WBDMC/W/435(APAS) of 25-26 (2nd Call) Tender ID: 2026_MAD_5008800_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: GEMI/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 station.

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, **Tender Notice is also available at websites :** www.er.indianrailways.gov.in / www.reps.gov.in

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 Shri Krishan Sarda.

I, Pranab Banerjee S/O S N Bandyopadhyay, R/o Flat No-C-4/5, Manjulika -A Co-op Housing, E M Bypass Ecp Phase-4, E.K.T, Kolkata, West Bengal-700107, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Pranab Kumar Bandyopadhyay.

I, Joydeep Panda S/O Udaynath Panda, R/o Post - Gidhni, Vill - Kherejora, Khery Juri, Gidni, Jamboni, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal- 721505, I have changed the name of my minor daughter Gyanika Panda aged about 4 Months and She shall hereafter be known as Saanvi Panda.

I, Chandan Kumar Das, s/o Chittaranjan Das of Ananda Nivas Apartment, DE-3, Deshbandhu Nagar, P.S. Baguiati, PIN 700059 (Aadhar no xxxxxxxx1782) hereby declare that in my Passport (no. N5047477) my name is wrongly recorded as Chandan Das and my wife's name is wrongly recorded as Jhumur Das instead of her correct name Jhumur Das Sikdar. Further in some of my documents my date of birth is wrongly mentioned as 03.05.1979 which is actually 05.05.1985 (as recorded in my School Transfer Certificate). So vide affidavit before Notary Public at Kolkata (dt. Jan 06, 2026) I have been known as Chandan Kumar Das and my wife's name is changed to Jhumur Das Sikdar. Chandan Kumar Das and Chandan Das & Jhumur Das Sikdar and Jhumur Das are the same and identical persons respectively.

I, Alauddin Mandal alias Md Alauddin Mandal S/O Tamij Uddin Mondal, R/o Kamari Para-Kurmaili Kamarpara Balurhat 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, 10A Alipore Park Place, VTC: Alipore, PO: Alipore Dist:Kolkata, West Bengal-700027, I have changed the name of my minor daughter Gyanika Panda aged about 17 Years and She shall hereafter be known as Saanvi Panda.

I, Jhumur Das Sikdar, d/o Jagannath Sikdar of Ananda Nivas Apartment, DE-3, Deshbandhu Nagar, P.S. Baguiati, PIN 700059 (Aadhar no xxxxxxxx2179) hereby declare that in my Passport (no. M4314390) my husband's name is wrongly recorded as Chandan Das instead of Chandan Kumar Das and my wife's name is changed to Jhumur Das Sikdar. Chandan Kumar Das and Chandan Das & Jhumur Das Sikdar and Jhumur Das are the same and identical persons respectively.

I, Naazneen Sofeo D/O Sk Nagyib Hossain, R/o Denan, Amalhanda, Kolaghat, Amalhara, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal-721134. Declare that Name of My Father and My Mother are Sre Nagyib Hossain and Satara Begum, which may be amended accordingly.

I, Sk Shahrukh Saba S/O Sk Nagyib Hossain, R/o Vill Denan, Dakshin Para Amalhanda, Kolaghat, East Midnapore, 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 Sre Nagyib 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-545 dated 07.01.2026 that KISHAN AGARWAL, KISHAN KUMAR AGARWAL and KISHAN KUMAR JHUNJHUNWALA refer to one and the same person.

I, 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 AGARWAL, KISHAN KUMAR AGARWAL and KISHAN KUMAR JHUNJHUNWALA refer to one and the same person.

I, Vineeta Nemanji 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, Kwallity, Salt, Bidhannagar CC Block S.O., Dist-Kolkata, West Bengal-700064. have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Draupadi Devi Agarwal.

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 Maqsoud 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

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

Barajor (MIN_BIR_26) Sand Mine over an area of 20.01 Ha (49.45 Acres) on the Ajay River bed at Mouza: Barajor, Plot Nos. 3400(P), 3401(P), 3398(P), J.L. No. 113, Block: Khoiyasol, District: Birbhum, West Bengal by M/s. West Bengal Mineral Development & Trading Corporation Ltd.

11.02.2026 at 12:00 hr. At the Khoiyasol Panchayat Samity Meeting Hall, Khoiyasol, Birbhum Birbhum

Dakshin Ekdala (MIN_BIR_37) Sand Mine over an area of 20.02 Ha (49.47 Acres) on the Ajay River bed at Mouza: Dakshin E

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 Pitsufik 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

Preserving our Planet's Prehistoric Legacy

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.

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 (star-like 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



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 Surguja

Until recently, the Surguja 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



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, reas-



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,
LUCKNOW**

millenniumpost.in

Send your letters to letter2editor.mp@gmail.com. You can also send your comments to The Editor, Millennium Post, Pratap Bhawan, 5 Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi 110 002

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 'rajdharma' 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 *rajdharma* 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.

Yudhishtira 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 *rajdharma* emphasises the happiness of people being of utmost importance to the kings. The etymology of *rājā* is "one



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

who pleases his subjects" (*rājā rañjayati 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*, *desh-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 (*vayasa*) 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 *Ramrajya*, 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 *Ramila*, 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, unfaltering 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



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

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



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

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-

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, now appears more pragmatic. Rather than pressuring 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 India's maritime sector.

Germany's backing amplifies 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.

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 Seyed, 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

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

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.

AGENCIES

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 megathrusts

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

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 Yamana, the watchdog's chair.

AGENCIES

Israeli bus runs over and kills ultra-Orthodox boy

Netanyahu tries to calm tensions



Israel's PM Benjamin Netanyahu

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

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.

AGENCIES

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.

AGENCIES

AFTER NEPAL'S PROTESTS 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 ACHIEVEMENT FROM 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.

AGENCIES

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

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 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

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.

AGENCIES



Representational Image

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”

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.

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.

AGENCIES

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



Representational Image

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.

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

area illegal and an obstacle to peace.

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China is North Korea's biggest trading partner and major diplomatic backer

in televised comments. "President Xi appraised our efforts and said we need to be patient."

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

in a statement.

China is North Korea's biggest trading partner and major diplomatic backer.

China has urged all parties involved in North Korean issues to exercise restraint, and in recent years repeatedly blocked the US and others' 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.

AGENCIES

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.

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."

AGENCIES

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 administered ceiling price.

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

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.

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

Highlights

- » The IGX benchmark price index, GIXI, averaged Rs 994 or \$11 per MMBtu in December 2025
- » 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 Mhaskar.

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.

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.

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

IndiGo flight disruptions: CCI seeks info from airline

Commission also seeks information from DGCA

MPOST BUREAU



REPRESENTATIVE PIC

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.

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 (TSLPL), 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.

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

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

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.

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-

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

'Presence of Indian cos, start-ups continues to grow at CES platform'

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 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 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 should boost silver processing, diversify imports: GTRI

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 comprising 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

'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, AGENCIES

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



emissions, while diesel-heavy fleets remain a major source of nitrogen oxides (NOx) and PM_{2.5}. Current PM_{2.5} 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.

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-



REPRESENTATIVE PIC

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-wheeler sales 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-wheeler, 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

15.5 per cent, FADA president Vigneshwar 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, Vigneshwar stated.

Need to reduce imports, increase exports to become 3rd-largest economy, says Gadkari

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.

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

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.

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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.

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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-minutes 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 of Japan.

Miyazaki, 2022 world junior champion, advanced after her 10th-ranked opponent, Sim Yu Jin of South Korea, retired hurt when the Japanese was leading 21-19, 1-2.

Sindhu has a 1-1 record against Miyazaki, whom she beat in the 2025 China Masters during their last meeting.

Later, Satwik and Chirag, the former World No.1 pair,



PV Sindhu defeated Chinese Taipei's Sung Shuo Yun 21-14 22-20

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

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 Febriliana Dwipuji Kusuma and Meilyana 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

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 Championships in Guwahati. AGENCIES

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

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

REQUESTED FOR VENUE CHANGE

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 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.

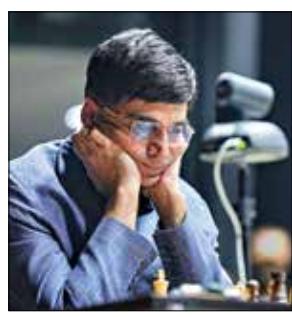
In a letter put out by the BCB, what is also clear is that they are in no position to bar-gain or arm-twist the ICC.

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.

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 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 year back, who held centrestage.

In Round 3, the player-cum-administrator once again showed his class, using clever rook play to defeat Aravindh with black. AGENCIES

Man U candidates for interim coach include Solskjaer and Carrick



MANCHESTER: Manchester United has approached Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and Michael Carrick in its search for an interim coach to take over until the end of the season, a person with knowledge of the situation confirmed to The Associated Press on Tuesday.

The person spoke on the condition of anonymity because the recruitment process has not been made public.

United is considering a short-term replacement for Ruben Amorim, who was fired on Monday, with a view to a long-term appointment in the summer.

Talks were being held with former players Solskjaer and Carrick. United youth coach Darren Fletcher has been installed as interim for Wednesday's game against Burnley and may also put himself in contention if he impresses.

"Honestly, it's not something I've thought about. I'm focusing on Burnley," Fletcher said in his pre-game news conference.

He said discussions about his potential candidacy were for after the game. "There's been that much going on, it's all happened so quickly, all my concentration and efforts and thoughts are going into Burnley," Fletcher said.

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 Albany (59') scored the goals for HIL GC, while Captain Jugraj Singh (12'), Tom Grambsch (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 Mazarlo 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

WPL

Harman credits WPL, MI for 'winning mindset'



MI's head coach Lisa Keightley, captain Harmanpreet Kaur and mentor Jhulan Goswami during a press conference on Wednesday

PTI

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."

AGENCIES

Gauff leads defending champions US into the United Cup semi-finals

Unfazed Coco lets racquet talk



Coco Gauff was in top form against Greece

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

Gauff won twice — once in singles and then a clinching victory in mixed doubles — to send the Americans into the semifinals

pair rallied to level it at 6-6. Gauff and Harrison held on for the win.

"I think I was striking the

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

AGENCIES



THE POWER OF SLOWNESS IN AGE OF NOISE

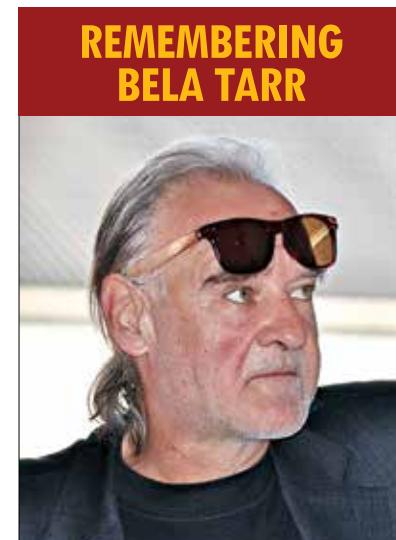
The celebrated Hungarian director of 'Satantango' and 'The Turin Horse' passes away at 70

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

ago. "I don't know if that collection is available anywhere for viewing. I watched it during the Chicago International Film Festival," he wrote. National Award-winning director Supriyo Sen also shared a photograph with the Hungarian maestro,

recalling that both served as jurors in different sections at the Busan International Film Festival in 2012. "In the times we are living through, we will deeply miss his profound vision, not just as a filmmaker, but as a way of seeing the world," he wrote.

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

'HISTORY HAS BEEN REWRITTEN'

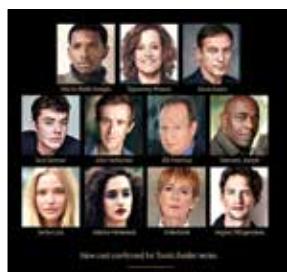
Aditya Dhar's 'Dhurandhar' becomes biggest Hindi film ever

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



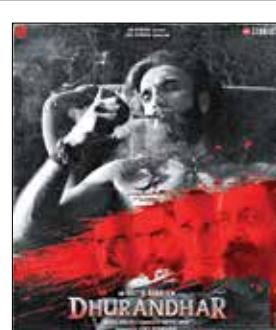
model!" said Sophie Turner.

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!"

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 million US dollars at the worldwide box office.

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'.

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."



Kristen Stewart would love to readapt 'Twilight' franchise

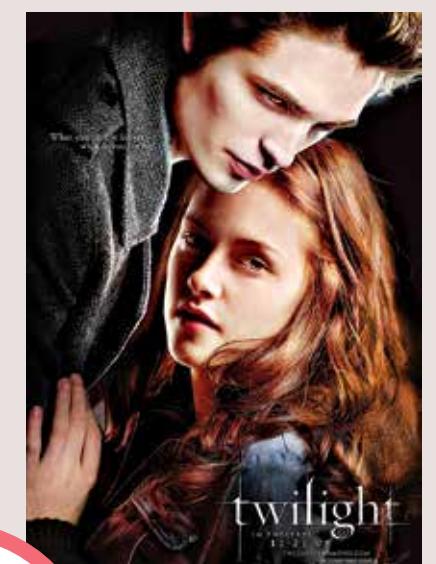
She played Bella in the vampire romance drama where she falls for Edward Cullen, a 108-year-old vampire

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 squirrelly 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 Hardwick, Chris Weitz followed it up with 'New Moon', David Slade directed 'Eclipse' and Bill Condon directed the two-part 'Breaking Dawn' instalments.

CEO
SPEAKSIF 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 STUDENT IN 2026, I WOULD ASK MYSELF THREE QUESTIONS: WHAT GENUINELY INTERESTS ME? WHAT SKILLS CAN I REALISTICALLY DEVELOP TO A HIGH LEVEL? WHERE DOES THIS INTERSECT WITH REAL-WORLD DEMAND?

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

Q1 WHO WON THE 2025 BOOKER PRIZE?

Send us your replies to 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 Roji, 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

literacy in 2026. "Employment growth will be strongest in sectors where skill requirements are accelerating. Financial services and insurance will see steady job creation as analytics and risk-focused roles gain priority. Healthcare, manufacturing, automotive, and aerospace will also expand, supported by digital systems and advanced production needs. In parallel, energy, utilities, and sustainability-linked sectors will add roles as environmental and compliance-driven skills gain relevance," added Alug.

Khurma placed his bet on graduates in 2026, who have experienced exchange programmes, interdisciplinary learning modules, and cross-cultural projects will stand out in a market that values diversity and global mindset. He also highlighted that technology and AI will see steady growth because businesses everywhere are adopting digital tools and automation. Also, Global Capability Centers (GCCs) in India are expanding, creating jobs in software development, data analytics, cybersecurity, and AI applications. "Electric vehicles and electronics need strong supply chains, so jobs will grow in robotics, quality control, and logistics technology. With ageing populations and tech-enabled healthcare, demand for doctors, nurses, and health tech specialists are always on the surge. Telemedicine and AI-driven diagnostics will also create new roles in digital health," said Khurma.

Rooj mentioned that technology-enabled sectors including digital services, AI-led platforms, manufacturing linked to automation, healthcare, and green energy, are expected to drive employment growth in 2026. "Hiring will concentrate on roles that require specialised skills rather than volume-driven labour," he said.

PLACEMENTS TODAY DEMAND A SHIFT FROM 'PLACEMENT-READY' TO 'FUTURE-READY' TALENT. EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS MUST MIRROR THIS BY OFFERING INDUSTRY-ALIGNED PROGRAMS & EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING



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,

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 bright 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 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.

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.



BACHELORS OF SCIENCE IN:

- Game Design
- Cybersecurity
- Computer Science