



# THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

TIRUPATI • FRIDAY • DECEMBER 05, 2025 • ₹9.00 • PAGES 12 • LATE CITY EDITION



Hany Babu, Ex DU prof

READ SHARE FOLLOW  
newindianexpress.com  
facebook.com/newindianexpress  
twitter.com/newindianexpress  
instagram.com/newindianexpress



### EX-DU PROF HANY BABU, HELD IN ELGAR CASE, GETS BAIL AFTER 5 YRS

A bench of Justices A S Gadhari and R R Bhonsale of the Bombay High Court granted him bail due to prolonged incarceration without proper trial

### ALL ABOUT NIA CASE AGAINST THE PROFESSOR

The NIA had accused Hany Babu of being a co-conspirator for propagating Maoist activities and ideology for the banned CPI(Maoist). The case relates to "inciting people and giving provocative speeches during an Elgar Parishad event organised by Kabir Kala Manch at Shaniwarwada in Pune on December 31, 2017, which promoted enmity between caste groups"

### TEN OTHER ACCUSED ALREADY OUT ON BAIL

- Ten other accused, including Varavara Rao, Sudha Bharadwaj, Anand Teltumbde, Vernon Gonsalves, Arun Ferreira, Shoma Sen, Gautam Navlakha, Sudhir Dhawale, and Rona Wilson, are out on bail
- Babu's counsel argued for bail on the basis that charges are yet to be framed and a discharge application is still pending before a trial court

2018

WAS WHEN PUNE POLICE HAD FILED THE CASE, WHICH LATER WENT TO NIA

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURGI

## DAY'S DEVELOPMENTS

### FM, RM meet delegation

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman met a Russian delegation led by First Deputy PM Denis Manturov and discussed various issues, while Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held a delegation-level meeting with his Russian counterpart Andrey Belousov

### RT India to go live today

On Friday, Putin will launch RT India, the Indian arm of state-funded Russia Today. The TV channel will air English news programmes and it aims to "boost the traditional ties between India and Russia and the countries' influence in a multipolar world"



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Narendra Modi sit inside a limousine at New Delhi's Palam Air Base on Thursday | PTI



### PAIN POINTS

Transitional challenges in crew availability under FDTL Phase-2, which capped night landings by pilots to two as against six, says IndiGo

## IndiGo to cut ops from Monday, full normalcy in Feb

S LALITHA @ New Delhi

ON a day when 300 more flights were cancelled, IndiGo told the Directorate of Civil Aviation (DGCA) that normal and stable operations can be fully restored by the airline only by February 10.

It said flight cancellations would continue for the next 2-3 days, adding it would start cutting down on flight operations from December 8 to minimise disruption.

The airline urged the regulator to exempt its A320s from certain Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) norms, which mandate a maximum of two night landings as against the earlier six.

The DGCA advised it to submit in detail the FDTL relaxations it required to normalise flights operations.

IndiGo made its presentation at a high level meet with the Director General of the DGCA. "IndiGo has assured DGCA that corrective actions are underway and that normalised and stable operations will be fully restored by 10 February 2026," the regulator

said. More cancellations will continue over the next 2-3 days, the airlines said. IndiGo acknowledged that the disruptions arose primarily from misjudgment and planning gaps in implementing Phase 2 of FDTL, which kicked in on November 1. "Indigo has been directed to normalise operations at the earliest and also ensure that it does not lead to increase in fares," the DGCA added.



Passengers crowd an IndiGo ticket counter in Mumbai on Thursday | PTI

## SIPB clears ₹20,444 crore investments

S VISWANATH @ Vijayawada

THE 13th State Investment Promotion Board (SIPB) meeting held under the chairmanship of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu at the State Secretariat on Thursday, approved investment proposals to the tune of ₹20,444 crore to generate employment for 56,278 people.

A total of ₹8.29 lakh crore investment proposals with a potential to generate 7.62 lakh jobs have come up before the SIPB so far. Six companies that signed agreements at the CII Partnership Summit in Visakhapatnam have got approvals.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said more than 50% of MoUs signed at the Partnership Summit have already moved to the approval stage, and directed officials to ensure that foundation stones for these projects are laid within 45 days.

"Leading companies are choosing Andhra Pradesh for investments because of the government's speed of doing business. We are providing water, electricity, land, and all necessary support. Transparency is bringing new projects to the State," he said. P4

## Red-carpet welcome

### IN RARE GESTURE, MODI RECEIVES PUTIN AT AIRPORT

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi stood on the tarmac of Delhi's Palam airport on Thursday evening greeting Russian President Vladimir Putin with a warm hug and a rare personal welcome in an unmistakable signal of the weight India attaches to its relationship with Russia. Traditional dancers swayed, cameras flashed and the red carpet stretched long as the two leaders slipped into the same car, echoing their drive together just three months ago after the SCO summit in Tianjin, China.

Soon after Putin's touchdown in Delhi, Modi hosted him for a private dinner mirroring the hospitality the Russian leader extended to him in Moscow last year. "Delighted to welcome my friend, President Putin to India. Looking forward to our interactions later this evening and tomorrow. India-Russia friendship is a time

tested one that has greatly benefitted our people," Modi said in a post on X, shared in both English and Russian.

Their conversation on Thursday would set the tone for the 23rd India-Russia annual summit on Friday, a meeting watched closely in Western capitals as both nations navigate a tense global climate amid efforts to bring a halt to the war in Ukraine.

On Friday morning, Putin will receive a ceremonial welcome at Rashtrapati Bhavan before laying a wreath at Rajghat and heading to Hyderabad House for formal talks over a working lunch.

Defence cooperation will dominate the talks and both sides are expected to unravel a set of agreements and blueprint for economic cooperation. Hours before Putin landed, the two countries' defence ministers held wide-ranging talks on India's plans to procure additional S-400 missiles that proved decisive during Operation

Sindoor and to explore further military hardware, including the Su-57 fifth-generation fighter jet. Agreements on logistics support and the movement of Indian workers to Russia are also expected to be sealed.

Trade and energy will feature prominently as India seeks to address a ballooning deficit and navigate the impact of US tariffs and sanctions tied to Russian crude purchases.

Moscow has offered additional discounts on oil after India's intake dipped in recent weeks, and cooperation in fertilisers, small modular reactors and a proposed free trade pact with the Eurasian Economic Union will also be on the table.

Putin is expected to brief Modi on the latest diplomatic developments around the Ukraine conflict, with India reiterating its stance that diplomacy alone can end the war.

Putin is scheduled to depart Delhi around 9 pm on Friday.

## Deploy more staff for SIR, SC tells states

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY @ New Delhi

TAKING note of a plea alleging extreme work pressure faced by booth level officers (BLOs) engaged in the special revision of polls roll, the Supreme Court on Thursday asked states and Union Territories to consider roping in additional staff so that work pressure of BLOs is eased.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi said, "In case they are facing hardships, including being overburdened, the state government can obviate such hardships."

The court was hearing an application by actor Vijay's party TVK seeking a fiat to ECI to not take coercive actions against BLOs for failing to perform their duties.

If any employee has a 'specific reason' for seeking exemption from SIR duty, a competent officer of the state government can consider it on a case-to-case basis and replace that an employee with another, the bench said.

### EXPRESS READ

#### Dy CM inaugurates 77 DDOs across AP

Chittoor: Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan inaugurated 77 Divisional Development Offices (DDOs) across the State on Thursday, marking a major step towards strengthening rural governance and the Panchayati Raj system | P4

बैंक ऑफ़ बड़ौदा  
Bank of Baroda

Powering your business growth is a Masterstroke.

bob DIGI UDYAM (MSME) Loan

100% Digital Process  
Approval in Minutes

Call Toll Free No. (24x7) 1800 5700 | 1800 5000  
https://bankofbaroda.bank.in | Follow us on

Ensuring Their Smiles  
Plus Protection

LIC's Introducing  
PROTECTION Plus

SALIENT FEATURES:  
◆ Multiple Investment Fund options available to suit your needs  
◆ Increase your Risk Cover with Top up Premium Payments  
◆ Option to Choose Higher Sum Assured as per Age and Term  
◆ Partial Withdrawals allowed after 5 years  
A Non-Par, Linked, Life, Individual, Savings Plan

Plan No.: 886 UIN: 512L361V01

Also Available Online

Our WhatsApp No. 8976862090 Say 'Hi' For details, contact your Agent/Nearest LIC Branch/ visit www.licindia.in

Download LIC Mobile App Visit licindia.in Call Centre Services (022) 6827 6827

Follow us: LIC India Forever IRDAI Regn No.: 512

BEWARE OF SPURIOUS PHONE CALLS AND FICTITIOUS / FRAUDULENT OFFERS. IRDAI or its officials do not involve in any activities of insurance business like selling insurance policies, announcing bonus or investment of premiums, refund of amounts. Policyholders or the prospects receiving such phone calls are requested to lodge a police complaint. For more details on risk factors, terms and conditions, please read sales brochure carefully before concluding a sale.

Linked insurance products are different from the traditional insurance products and are subject to the risk factors. The premium paid in linked insurance policies are subject to investment risks associated with capital markets and publicly available index. NAVs of the units may go up or down based on the performance of fund and factors influencing the capital market/publicly available index and the insured is responsible for his/her decisions. Life Insurance Corporation of India is only the name of the Life Insurance Company and Protection Plus is only the name of the linked insurance contract and does not in any way indicate the quality of the contract, its future prospects or returns. Please know the associated risks and the applicable charges, from your insurance agent or intermediary or policy document issued by the insurance company. The various funds offered under this contract are the names of the funds and do not in any way indicate the quality of these plans, their future prospects and returns.

Har Pal Aapke Saath

Min Savitha focuses on admin reforms

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Anantapur

BC Welfare Minister S Savitha on Thursday inaugurated a new DDO office in Penukonda and praised the coalition government's Panchayati Raj reforms, saying mini-collectorates will provide platforms to resolve public issues.

Speaking at the event, Savitha said bringing all divisional-level offices under one roof benefits both citizens and administration. She congratulated Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan for initiating his-

toric reforms and suggested that mini-collectorates should have permanent buildings, a proposal to which he responded positively.

The Minister criticised YSR-RCP chief for demolishing the 'Praja Vedika,' which she said was built with public funds, and highlighted her government's efforts in constructing offices for public welfare. She said the coalition government is establishing 77 DDO offices across the state, consolidating departments at the divisional level, and prioritising village infrastructure development.



Minister for BC Welfare S Savitha inaugurating the new Divisional Development Office in Penukonda on Thursday | EXPRESS

Police step up helmet drive for road safety

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Kurnool

KURNOOL district police on Thursday intensified a special Helmet Awareness Drive to enforce helmet rules and promote safe riding among two-wheeler users.

Police teams across all station limits conducted checks, issued penalties to violators, and educated motorists on the importance of wearing helmets. Officers said the drive aims to reduce fatalities caused by riders failing to use protective gear.

Superintendent of Police (SP) Vikrant Patil said most road accident deaths occur because riders do not wear helmets. He urged motorists to follow traffic rules and use good-quality helmets consistently. "Wearing a helmet is not just a legal requirement but a vital safety measure," he said.

Patil said the department will continue strict enforcement to ensure compliance. Officers reiterated that helmets significantly reduce injury severity and save lives. The SP appealed to all two-wheeler riders to prioritise safety.



Arch Univ Prof figures in Global Index '26

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Kadapa

YSR Architecture and Fine Arts University Physics faculty member Guddeti Phaneendra Reddy has secured a place in the Global AD Scientific Index - 2026, earning recognition among the world's leading scientists.

University Vice-Chancellor (V-C) Prof B Jayaramireddy

said Phaneendra was selected for the Alper-Doger Scientific H-Index Rankings for his contributions to solar energy generation and energy storage.

Phaneendra Reddy, a native of Kanneluru village in Jammalamadugu mandal, completed his schooling at AP Gurukula Vidyalayam, Kalvabugga. He cleared the CSIR-NET exam in 2012 with an All-India Rank of

88 and earned his PhD from SVU under Prof KT Ramakrishna Reddy. He pursued research as a Visiting Student Fellow at Northumbria University, England.

He collaborates with scientists from South Korea, Taiwan, China, Dubai and other countries. He received the AP Young Scientist Award - 2020 from the AP Academy of Sciences.

Court reserves orders on ghee case accused's bail

Granting bail now will allow accused to tamper with witnesses: SIT

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Tirupati

THE Supreme Court-appointed CBI-led Joint Special Investigation Team (SIT) has urged the court not to grant bail to Accused No. 16, Delhi-based trader Aajaykumar Sugandh, who is currently in judicial custody in the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) laddu ghee adulteration case.

The SIT has also filed a custody petition seeking the remand of Accused No 29, former General Manager (Procurement) RSSV Subramanyam, as the investigation continues.

Arguments on the judicial custody extension and bail petition of A16 were completed on Thursday in Nellore ACB Court, and the court has reserved orders for December 8, 2025.

During the hearing, Assistant Public Prosecutor (APP) Jayashekar strongly opposed the bail petition.

He said the chemicals allegedly supplied by Aajaykumar to Bhole Baba Company were artificially synthesised substances, posing a serious threat to public health.

The prosecution submitted that laddus made using adulterated ghee could cause severe health disorders among devotees.

The APP added that being directly linked to the supply chain, Aajaykumar played a crucial role in the suspected adulteration operation.

The prosecution argued that granting bail at this stage could allow the accused to tamper with key witnesses, hamper the ongoing investigation, and influence evidence.

Citing multiple relevant

court precedents, the APP urged the court not to grant bail, emphasising the seriousness of the allegations and potential consequences.

APP Jayashekar said Subramanyam, as General Manager (Procurement), allegedly misled the TTD administration by concealing critical information, influencing senior officials, and facilitating multiple irregular procurement transactions.

The prosecution asserted that he engaged in serious misconduct and manipulation of official procedures, significantly contributing to the adulteration activity and financial loss to the institution.

Given the nature of the allegations and his suspected role in the conspiracy, the prosecution prayed for police custody to thoroughly examine Subramanyam's involvement and extract further evidence.

Be committed to nat'l service, students told

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Nellore

THE 10 Andhra Naval Unit NCC Commanding Officer Lt Commander Ganesh Godangave urged youth to commit to national service from an early age.

Marking Indian Navy Day, the 10 Andhra Naval Unit NCC organised a fruit distribution programme at Viyani Orphanage Home near Dargamitta Road Centre in Nellore.

Lt Commander Ganesh Godangave said the Indian Navy played a key role in India's victory in the 1971 Indo-Pak war. He said the Pakistani Navy suf-

fered a decisive defeat on December 4, 1971, prompting the nation to commemorate Navy Day annually to honour naval personnel and pay tribute to martyrs. He said the Eastern Naval Command's annual operational demonstrations on the Vizag coast showcased the Navy's strength, preparedness and strategic capability, inspiring people across the country.

Associate NCC Officer G Narendra Babu said, "Soldiers serve the nation with utmost dedication and selflessness. The youth must look up to them as role models and work for the progress of the country."

Class 6 girl sets Bharatanatyam world record

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Nellore

CLASS 6 student Suddapalli Bhaswita of Narayana Olympiad e-Techno School, AC Nagar, has entered the World Book of Records and Genius Book of World Records after performing over 12 hours of uninterrupted Bharatanatyam.

The marathon performance, held at Sri Venkateswara Swamivari Devasthanam in Narukooru, drew admiration from the audience and displayed her discipline and talent.

Narayana Educational Institutions General Manager Vemireddy Vijayabaskar Reddy congratulated Bhaswita and praised her commitment. School Principal Vandana said the achievement brought pride to the institution and to Nellore district. She said school provides training in cultural activities, skill development and yoga along with academics.

Reform education and healthcare systems, TTD EO directs officials

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Tirumala

TIRUMALA Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) EO Anil Kumar Singhal held a review on Sri Venkateswara Sarva Shreyas, Vidyadana and Pranadana Trusts, run by TTD.

A meeting was held with the officials concerned at the conference hall of the TTD administrative building on Thursday.

The EO said that if students studying in TTD educational institutions are taught Sanatana Dharma, moral values, devotion, personality development, and other topics along with education, they will become exemplary citizens. He said that taking students for field observation along with education would increase their knowledge.

He instructed the officials to set up laboratories to correct the shortcomings in the crea-



tioning of the students, provide training with experts for skill development, and provide infrastructure facilities.

He wanted to provide training with experts to children studying in TTD Bala Mandir and other schools to increase the pass percentage.

Similarly, the EO instructed to make arrangements to distribute hearing aids to the children of the Sravanam Project after the training was completed. He also directed to set up a special system to identify the shortage of medicines in TTD hospitals, which medicines are

needed, and to identify the medicines required by the patients from time to time.

Likewise, the EO instructed to use funds from Sri Venkateswara Pranadana Trust to treat cases and special cases of patients in hospitals.

A nine member committee should be formed to monitor the supply of medicines, the process of purchasing and basic facilities in TTD hospitals from time to time and prepare a report accordingly. The Staff should be appointed to provide necessary medical services in PAC-5 of Tirumala.

Villager missing in Mali, family seeks govt help

Anantapur: Ramachandra of Kovvuru Vandlapalli in Talupula mandal has gone missing in Mali, West Africa, where he worked as a borewell operator. He last contacted his family on November 22. The company later informed them he was allegedly abducted. His family has sought government intervention, while Kadiri police are gathering details though no complaint is filed

R&B Min inaugurates DDO in Dhone

Kurnool: Roads & Buildings Minister BC Janardhan Reddy on Thursday said the blessings of Shri Shirdi Saibaba will protect people and ensure their prosperity. He visited the Shirdi Saibaba Temple in Dhone. He inaugurated the DDO office of the Panchayati Raj and Rural Development Department in Dhone. Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan was virtually present

PC Rayulu submits plea for Balaji rly division

Tirupati: Dr PC Rayulu, Chairman of Kasturba Gandhi Kendra Trust, Tirupati, met Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav at Parliament House in New Delhi on Thursday and submitted a proposal to establish a new Balaji Railway Division with its headquarters in Tirupati. The Trust appealed to support the initiative by raising awareness of the proposal

Nandividy Nateswari prog a big draw in Tirupati

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Tirupati

A grand cultural programme, Nandividy Nateswari, was held on Thursday at Mahati Auditorium in Tirupati under the guidance of Sri Sri Vijayendra Saraswathi Swamikal, Peetadhipathi of Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam. The event was jointly organised by the Kanchi Peetam and TTD HDPF wing. The programme began with



Sri Vijayendra Saraswathi Swamikal addressing students during Nandividy Nateswari programme | EXPRESS

a Bharatanatyam performance by renowned Chennai-based dancer Smt Revati Ramachandran from 9.30 am to 11.00 am, captivating the audience and highlighting the rich tradition of classical dance.

This was followed by a special mridangam recital from 11.00 am to 12.30 pm by maestro K Ramakrishnan of Kerala, whose performance enthralled attendees for more than an hour.

As part of the initiative, simultaneous mridangam and dance recitals are being conducted in 50 schools, including 40 government schools and 10 TTD schools, as directed by the pontiff, to encourage students to learn and appreciate Indian classical arts.

Sri Sri Vijayendra Swamikal addressed students from various educational institutions and blessed them for their artistic journey.

Horoscopes By Holiday

HOLIDAY MATHS

05th December: Cold Moon Afterparty The Cold Moon afterparty features warm drinks and the sort of giddy social fun that happens when people would rather linger in company than face the chill outside. Whatever is happening beyond the walls of a gathering can feel very far away when the fire of connection burns brighter than anything the weather can do.

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

Don't get so concerned with doing the right thing that it blocks you from doing the interesting thing, the thing you want to do or the thing you've never done. You'll never be in quite this situation again. You may as well play it like only you can.

TAURUS (Apr 20 - May 20)

Here comes a challenge that seems custom-made for you. You'll be so into it, you may even raise the stakes to make things more interesting. It's not about who wins the game when it's your favorite game to play.

GEMINI (May 21 - June 21)

Real trust is as attractive as disloyalty is unattractive. It can take a lot of effort to be true to your word. You'll go to great lengths to deliver as promised. Expect the same standard from others.

CANCER (June 22 - July 22)

Your contributions to a project will be considerable, though it's nothing flashy in the delivery. Simple acts of cooperation are what keep production flowing. You influence by just showing up ready to work.

LEO (July 23 - Aug 22)

To feel life's poetry, you need a big heart and a wide range of experience. Thinking and feeling deeply is a gift, even when it hurts. The same depth that aches also lets you love and create fully.

VIRGO (Aug 23 - Sept 22)

You've been an emotional barista lately, serving comfort, pep and reassurance on demand. Slip yourself a refill. A single kind thought toward yourself changes the flavor of your whole day.

LIBRA (Sept 23 - Oct 23)

Tension can be a source of beauty. For instance, the tension of a guitar string is necessary for melodious expression. The strain you feel now may be tuning you -- aligning effort and purpose so something harmonious can emerge.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 21)

Cut the static out of a relationship. Speak from the heart. You shouldn't have to explain too much, just tell the truth. You'll be understood. If not now, then in time. The important thing is to clear the air.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 22 - Dec 21)

You've had help with a project along the way, but today it's all you. Your effort, your instincts, your follow-through -- these are what's bringing it home. Let the satisfaction sink in. You deserve to feel good about this.

CAPRICORN (Dec 22 - Jan 19)

People will work out their differences in their own way. It's very likely that your interference isn't necessary, so you can relax. Sometimes getting involved only makes things more dramatic than they need to be.

AQUARIUS (Jan 20 - Feb 18)

You're feeling emotionally full. The love, friendship and connection flow easily. You're around good people, and your natural warmth multiplies in their company. It's a day to enjoy togetherness and affection without effort.

PISCES (Feb 19 - Mar 20)

You're gathering new information and asking great questions, and you'll be around people who really do know what they are talking about. You absorb all you can, and whatever doesn't apply now could be helpful to you later.

Sudoku puzzle grid with numbers 1-9.

Sudoku puzzle instructions: Fill in the grid with digits in such a manner that every row, every column and every 3x3 box accommodates the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any.

Crossword puzzle grid with numbers 1-25.

Crossword puzzle solutions: Across: 1 Astronomer, 8 Spain, 9 Perusal, 10 Pirthee, 11 Lasso, 12 Relief, 14 Astrid, 17 Outdo, 19 Oarsmen, 21 Talics, 22 Manor, 23 Greengages.

Crossword puzzle solutions: Down: 1 Animals straying about a road are easily scared (7), 2 Put in a drink it could give a sour tang (9), 3 Appear to act? (5), 4 Greek god, part herald, part messenger (6), 5 Merit of French translation of verse (7), 6 Bit of bother in the head office (3), 7 It splits up the levy (5), 8 True, these letters are for the leading lady (9), 9 It makes one wild what those who retire do (3,4), 10 Granted it might be searchingly used (7), 11 District in capital of France and Holland (6), 12 Damage reportedly found in hatches (5), 13 Club he joined for a swim (5), 14 Eggs of no value (3).

Yesterday's Solutions: Across: 1 Astronomer, 8 Spain, 9 Perusal, 10 Pirthee, 11 Lasso, 12 Relief, 14 Astrid, 17 Outdo, 19 Oarsmen, 21 Talics, 22 Manor, 23 Greengages.

Jumble puzzle: UNSCRAMBLE THESE JUMBLES, ONE LETTER TO EACH SQUARE, TO FORM FOUR ORDINARY WORDS. BTYBA, DTIAM, MHIOYL, ETDFAE.

Answers to jumble puzzle: QUART, NINTH, WRENCH, ENGLUF. Answer: The overheated jogger was very happy to come across some -- RUNNING WATER.

Fishers stage 'Rasta Roko' at Kakinada beach

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Kakinada

FISHERMEN on Thursday staged a dharna and rasta roko at Kakinada Beach Road to protest against the discharge of chemical waste into the sea.

Officials from the Pollution Control Board, Kakinada Rural Revenue, Fisheries Department, and Sarpavaram police inspected the tankers involved. Police seized a lorry and collected water samples.

The protest was followed by mass fish deaths near Suryapeta, suspecting chemical waste from tankers.

They reported tankers discharging contaminated wastewater into the canal between Vakalapudi and Suryapeta villages, alleging three to five tankers had been dumping toxic liquids for two years.

On Wednesday night, an oil tanker released 24,000 litres into the sea. Trade union leader T Raja and Left-party leader Chintapalli Ajay Kumar blamed industrial waste for marine deaths. Fishers demanded a CBI probe, action against polluters, and a Pollution Control Board investigation.

Min unveils AMTZ-designed purple building accessibility framework

Says mandatory provisions will ensure compliance, and empower people with disabilities

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Visakhapatnam

DEVELOPED by the Andhra Pradesh MedTech Zone (AMTZ), Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari has launched the Purple Building Certification Scheme, the country's first dedicated accessibility rating system for public and private buildings.

The initiative has been developed by AMTZ, in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), and the Inclusive Divyangian Entrepreneur Association (IDEA). The launch coincided with the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, observed on December 3.

Gadkari called for making accessibility a legal requirement for all buildings and public spaces. He suggested that NITI Aayog draft a proposal for mandatory standards, and that the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment prepare a



Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari launched the AMTZ's Purple Building Certification Scheme | EXPRESS

Bill to be introduced in Parliament. "Mandatory provisions will help ensure compliance, and empower people with disabilities," he said.

He also commended AMTZ and ICMR for developing the certification framework, noting AMTZ's growing role in setting standards for affordable medical technologies.

Explaining the development of the framework, Dr Jitendra Sharma, MD and founder-CEO

of AMTZ, said accessibility must become a basic feature of infrastructure. He noted AMTZ, aligned with International Accreditation Forum standards, will work with the Quality Council of India (QCI) to train auditors and certification bodies. Expert committees supported by ICMR contributed to designing the standards.

At the event held in New Delhi, NITI Aayog member Dr VK Paul suggested that the govern-

ment adopt the certification in its own buildings to set an example.

Dr Mallika Nadda, president of Special Olympics Bharat, opined that accessible infrastructure is essential as India prepares to host major international sporting events.

The Purple Building Certification Scheme is a voluntary national programme that evaluates, and recognises accessibility in schools, hospitals, transport hubs, commercial complexes, recreational facilities, and residential spaces.

It aims to integrate universal design principles into India's expanding urban landscape, benefiting persons with disabilities, senior citizens, pregnant women and people with temporary or permanent mobility or sensory needs.

Officials from the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities emphasised that accessibility should be treated as a shared responsibility across ministries.

Lok Adalat settlement: High Court reviews Prakamani theft case

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Vijayawada

THE High Court clarified that courts can intervene suo motu in cases of temple irregularities, charitable institution issues, or violation of minors' rights, acting as guardian of temple interests.

The division bench, led by Chief Justice Dhiraj Singh Thakur and Justice R Raghunandana Rao, reviewed the Par-

akamani theft case, noting the Lok Adalat compromise involving former AVSO Y Satish Kumar and accused CV Ravikumar raised legal concerns.

The single judge had referred it to the division bench to determine the legality of the award. Senior advocates debated jurisdiction, Ravikumar's public servant status, and a petition to include AP Sadhu Parishad president Swami Srinivasananda Saraswati as a respondent.

FiberNet case: Gowtham file plea in court

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Vijayawada

IN a major development in the sensational FiberNet scam — in which CM Nara Chandrababu Naidu was named as an accused and later given a clean chit by the ACB Court — former FiberNet Chairman and YSR-CPD senior leader P Gowtham Reddy filed a petition in the ACB Court on Thursday.

The move comes after the Andhra Pradesh Crime Investigation Department (APCID)

submitted an affidavit stating that no irregularities occurred in the execution of the project and that Andhra Pradesh State FiberNet Limited (APSFL) suffered no financial loss.

In a twist, former APSFL Managing Director M. Madhusudhan Reddy — the official who initially lodged the complaint with the CID — has now informed the court that he has no objection to closing the case and concurs with the CID's clean chit to Naidu.

Reacting to these develop-

ments, Gowtham Reddy filed a petition seeking to intervene before any closure order is issued. In his petition, Gowtham Reddy stated that he had earlier written to Managing Director Madhusudhan, flagging alleged irregularities and urging a detailed inquiry.

Seeking protection, he asked the court to allow him to present his arguments before any decision is taken.

The matter is likely to come up for hearing in the ACB Court on Friday.



Roadside bund inundated due to heavy rains in Nellore district | EXPRESS

Nellore, Tirupati & Kadapa dists reel under heavy rain

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Nellore

HEAVY to moderate rain triggered by Cyclone Ditwah continued to lash Nellore, Tirupati and Kadapa districts on Wednesday and Thursday, flooding low-lying areas, disrupting road connectivity and causing streams and reservoirs to overflow.

Nellore city and rural mandals witnessed relentless overnight rain that inundated neighbourhoods. Overflowing tanks sent water onto the National Highway, slowing traffic. Suburban areas were marooned, and key routes resembled swollen streams. Parts of the Chennai-Kolkata and Nellore-Mumbai national highways faced flood threats, with water crossing the road at four locations between Nellore and Tada. Hundreds of vehicles were stranded for kilometres on NH-16, hitting movement toward Chennai and Tirupati.

Drains overflowed across Nellore, turning roads into canals. Underpasses at Vijayamahahal Gate, Ramalingapuram and Magunta Layout were submerged, halting traffic.

Floodwater entered homes in Perareddypalli and BC Colony. The Pinneeru stream overflowed on the Saidapuram-Po-

dalakur causeway, cutting off traffic since Wednesday night.

Several Nellore mandals recorded heavy rainfall, leading to waterlogging and widespread disruptions. The district average stood at 1.82 cm.

Officials said overflow from tanks, streams and drains slowed traffic across urban and semi-urban areas. Revenue, irrigation and disaster management teams remained on high alert, with more rain forecast in the next 24 hours.

Nellore District Collector Himanshu Shukla inspected the reservoir; which held 59.5 TMC on Thursday. He said spillway gates may be opened if the level reaches 61 TMC.

Nellore RDO Anusha was directed to ensure revenue staff remain available in Kandaleru-side villages and provide relief. Sarvepalli MLA Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy advised residents along river belts to stay alert. Kandaleru inflows rose sharply from 6,000 cusecs at 6 am to 28,000 cusecs by 11 am. Kadapa recorded moderate rain for four consecutive days. Cold winds swept across the region, and overflowing forest streams filled Gangala Cheruvu in Vontimitta, Chalamarredy Cheruvu in Mantampalle and tanks in Chinakottapalli.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH Police Department TENDER NOTIFICATION Dt.03.12.2025. Tender Notice No.378/H3/2022-25. For supply of Blue Peak Cap under Annual Rate Contract. ECV-Rs.25.00 lakh.

CHANGE OF SURNAME I. Palamkota Chengala Rayudu (Old Name) S/o Palemkota Avulaiah, R/o. 4-35, NVS Girjana Colony, Venkatareddy Pally, RLY Kudur, Annamayya Dist., A.P.-516101. I changed my Surname to PALEMKOTA CHENGAL RAYUDU (NEW NAME) S/o PALEMKOTA AVULAIHAH.

EASTERN POWER DISTRIBUTION COMPANY OF A.P. LTD Corporate Office, P&T Colony, Seethammadhara, Visakhapatnam-13. "ape-Procurement Tender Notice". Tenders are invited from APEPDC for supply of 11kV & 33kV Metering CTs of various ratios through ape-Procurement.

Government of India, Department of Space ISRO Propulsion Complex (IPRC) Mahendragiri P.O., Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu-627 133, India. Telephone: 04637-281803/40611672; Fax: 04637-281681. CORRIGENDUM Dated : 04.12.2025

శ్రీ వరాహ లక్ష్మీ స్వీనింహ స్వామి వారి దేవస్థానం, సింహాచలం, విశాఖపట్నం రోడ్ నెంబర్-530028. ఇ-ప్రొక్యూరింగ్ లింకులకు ప్రకటన (ఇవ్వబడుతుంది) SVLNDS-TMPLOCs/1/2025-JA(F2)-SVLNDSVSP, DL.01.12.2025

ICICI Bank PUBLIC NOTICE Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd. 40-1, Mythree Tower, Bommanhalli Hosur Main Road Bengaluru - 560068. The following borrower(s) has/have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest towards the Loan facility(ies) availed from ICICI Bank Ltd.

ICICI Bank PUBLIC NOTICE-TENDER CUM E-AUCTION FOR SALE OF SECURED ASSET [See proviso to rule 8(i)] Notice for sale of immovable assets E-Auction Sale Notice for the sale of immovable asset(s) under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (b) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

ANDHRA PRADESH MEDICAL SERVICES & INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION Plot No.9, Survey No.49, IT Park, Mangalagiri-522 503, Guntur District. Amaravathi Region, Andhra Pradesh email: ce\_aphmhidco@gmail.com

TAMIL NADU GREEN ENERGY CORPORATION LIMITED Notice Inviting Tenders (E-Tendering Process) Tender Specification No. Tender Inviting Authority Name of the Work

The Brihanmumbai Electric Supply & Transport Undertaking (OF THE BRIHANMUMBAI MAHANAGARPALIKA) BEST TENDER NOTICE E-tender is re-invited for the supply of following item.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS SHORT TENDER NOTICE Tender Notice No.2222/Exh/2025. Dated: 04.12.2025 Sealed tenders are invited for the following works in connection with Republic Day Celebrations -2026

BUY YOUR COPY THIS SUNDAY THE NEW SUNDAY EXPRESS. Looming Large 'A Story Makes an Actor a Star'. REVIEW PRIMITIVE WAR A Self-serious Storm of Clichés. A Poet Between Civilisations. ALSO: Engage Astrogaze. Breaking the Mould. AMMASPEAK Accept Everything as God's Gift. VOICES Devdutt Pattanaik Anuja Chandramouli Dinesh Singh Ravi Shankar. Pure Mettle. Sleeping Like a Soldier. RAK 'n' Roll.



Water Resources Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu inspects Gap-1 and Gap-2 works of the Polavaram Project during his field visit on Thursday | EXPRESS

## Polavaram Project will be completed ahead of schedule, says Nimmala

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Vijayawada

THE State government has announced plans to complete the Polavaram irrigation project ahead of schedule, coinciding with the upcoming Godavari Pushkarams in 2027.

Water Resources Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu, who inspected the project works on Thursday, directed officials and engineers to accelerate progress so that the project can be dedicated to the nation before the originally set deadline of December 2027.

During a review meeting held at the project site, the minister emphasised Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's instructions to ensure completion by the time of the sacred Pushkaram festival. He urged engineering experts, construction agencies, and officials to work with renewed vigour to achieve this historic milestone.

Prior to the meeting, Ramanaidu personally inspected key works including rock filling at Gap-1 of the main dam, diaphragm wall construction at Gap-2, and complex lining works in the twin tunnels of the right canal. Expressing satisfaction with the pace of progress, he congratulated the teams and motivated them to aim for early completion, stating that finishing before Pushkaralu would be a 'historic achievement.'

Providing updates, the minister revealed that 950 metres of the diaphragm wall have been constructed, marking 75 per cent completion. He noted that overall project progress now stands at 88 per cent — 72 per cent achieved during the 2014-2019 Telugu Desam Party (TDP) government, and an additional 12 per cent completed in the past 17 months under the current coalition. He contrasted this with the previous administration, claiming only 2 per cent progress was made in five years.

### 'Hydel proj too will be ready'

Ramanaidu confirmed that the hydel power project linked to Polavaram will also be completed simultaneously. He expressed gratitude to the Central government, PM Modi, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan for their support

Ramanaidu highlighted that right canal connectivity works are 82 per cent complete, while left canal connectivity has reached 62 per cent. He credited the coalition government for ensuring uninterrupted progress even during monsoon season, including completion of the buttress dam. He added that despite damage to the diaphragm wall during the previous regime, reconstruction is underway at a cost of ₹900 crore and will be finished by February 2026.

The minister also pointed out that rehabilitation efforts have advanced significantly, with ₹2,000 crore disbursed to displaced families within a single year. He announced that the left main canal works, costing ₹600 crore, will be completed to carry Godavari waters to Anakapalli by the 2026 irrigation season.

## CM Naidu puts Amaravati works in fast lane

CRDA meet clears key projects including Guv' residence & AP Judicial Academy complexes, and land pooling plans

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Vijayawada

CHIEF Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has reaffirmed his vision of Amaravati as a 'creative city', directing officials to ensure that every building in the capital reflects distinctive design and environmental harmony.

Chairing the 55th meeting of the Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) at the Secretariat, he emphasised speed and uncompromising quality in construction, urging completion of projects ahead of schedule.

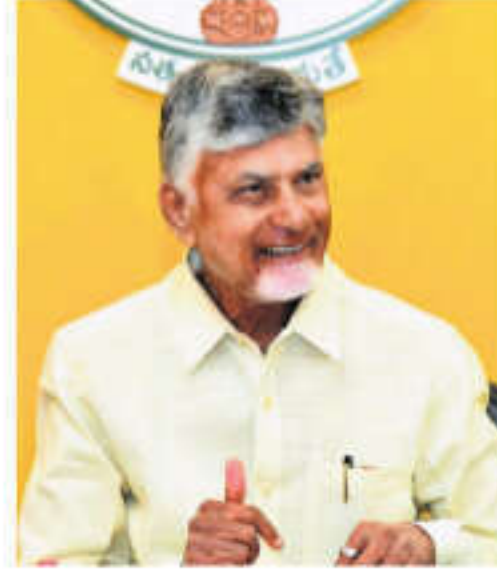
The CRDA approved several major proposals during the meeting. These include construction of the Governor's residence complex, Lok Bhanu, at a cost of ₹169 crore, and

the Andhra Pradesh Judicial Academy at ₹165 crore.

The Authority also sanctioned acceptance of a ₹7,380 crore loan from NABARD to fund infrastructure projects in Amaravati. Additionally, tenders worth ₹532 crore were cleared to connect the Seed Access Road with National Highway 16, while the 2024-25 annual statistical reports were formally approved.

Municipal Administration Minister Ponguru Narayana later briefed the media, confirming administrative sanction for judicial and other complexes, with tenders to be floated shortly.

He announced that 16,666 acres will be pooled for projects such as the International Sports City, Inner Ring Road, and railway track. Farmers in



the capital region have expressed willingness to contribute land, and the government has assured them of a 10-year benefit package, similar to earlier arrangements.

Officials reported that 85 construction works are currently underway, including govern-

ment offices, residences for ministers, judges, civil servants, and employees, as well as roads, electricity, water supply, and layouts.

Narayana highlighted that 15 Anganwadi centers, schools, and primary health buildings are already complete and will be inaugurated by the end of December. Housing complexes for officials are targeted for completion by March.

Infrastructure expansion is progressing rapidly. The Seed Access Road will first be linked to Mangalagiri Road by January-end, followed by extension to NH-16. Plans also include widening the Karakatta Road into four lanes, with steel bridges and flyovers where necessary. CRDA has already brought 1,500 km of LPS roads into use, strengthening connectivity

across the capital region.

Beyond infrastructure, Chief Minister Naidu directed CRDA to undertake beautification works and announced plans to erect a grand statue of N.T. Rama Rao at Neerukonda. He described the project as a symbol of Telugu pride, drawing inspiration from national and international monuments.

The statue will incorporate elements of Telugu culture, traditions, and the lives of iconic figures such as Alluri Sitarama Raju and Potti Sriramulu, making it a historic and inspirational landmark built with the participation of all Telugu people.

The meeting was attended by Minister P. Narayana, Chief Secretary K. Vijayanand, senior CRDA and ADC officials, and other dignitaries.

## Durgesh calls for promotion of Telugu films on world stage

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Vijayawada

CINEMATOGRAPHY Minister Kandula Durgesh has called for greater promotion of Telugu cinema at international film festivals, urging the Film Development Corporation (FDC) to take proactive steps in showcasing the State's cultural and cinematic achievements.

On Thursday, FDC Managing Director K.S. Viswanathan met the Minister at the Velagapudi Secretariat and presented the first prize won by Andhra Pradesh's state float at the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in Goa, held from November 20 to 28. The float, themed "Heartbeat of Indian Cinema", featured 20 live performers and was introduced for the first time by FDC, earning wide acclaim.

During the meeting, discussions focused on strengthening the film, television, and theatre sectors in Andhra Pradesh. Minister Durgesh emphasized the need to revive and institutionalize cultural programs such as the Nandi Awards and Nandi Natakotsavams, suggesting they be organized annually.

He also proposed that the prestigious Kandukuri Awards be presented every year on April 16.

## Dy CM launches 77 DDOs across State

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Chittoor

AP Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan inaugurated 77 Divisional Development Offices (DDOs) across the State on Thursday, marking a major step toward strengthening rural governance and the Panchayati Raj system.

The offices were launched virtually from Chittoor, in line with Government Orders (GO) Nos. 57 and 58.

Speaking on the occasion, Pawan Kalyan emphasised that with 70 per cent of the State's population living in villages, the government's priority is to deliver welfare and development services quickly, transparently, and efficiently to rural citizens. He described the DDOs as vital bridges between the government and the people, ensuring that administration becomes simpler and activities at the grassroots level are carried out more swiftly.

The Deputy Chief Minister hailed the simultaneous opening of 77 offices as a 'positive sign' for governance. He noted that these institutions will not only strengthen the Panchayati Raj system but also introduce reforms that align with the principles of Mahatma Gandhi, who envisioned villages as the backbone of the nation.

Pawan Kalyan stated that with inspiration from the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, several administrative reforms have been introduced in the Panchayat Raj and Rural Development



Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan goes around a photo exhibition after inaugurating the Divisional Development Office in Chittoor on Thursday | EXPRESS

departments. He said the establishment of Divisional Development Offices will help strengthen decentralised governance and enable faster monitoring of government development and welfare programmes at the field level.

Pawan Kalyan highlighted that the government has reorganised rural administrative systems by abolishing 7,244 clusters and converting 13,350 village panchayats into independent self-governing units. Each panchayat will now have a dedicated Panchayat Secretary, and villages with over 10,000 population will get a gazetted Panchayat Development Officer.

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan said his father's journey inspired him to ensure transparency and justice in government employee promo-

otions. Speaking during his visit to Chittoor district on Thursday, he recalled that his father worked in the Excise Department and rose from constable to Assistant Commissioner after many years of service.

Pawan Kalyan said that after taking charge of the Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Department, he realised that several employees had not received promotions for decades.

He added that nearly 10,000 employees received long-pending promotions through structural changes made in the department. Issues related to seniority and stagnation especially among officials appointed through Group-1 services have finally been resolved, he said.

Earlier, Pawan Kalyan arrived at Renigunta Airport as part of his Chittoor tour.

## Pawan stresses coalition unity for long-term development

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Chittoor

DEPUTY Chief Minister and JSP president Konidela Pawan Kalyan on Thursday said unity among NDA coalition leaders is essential to restore governance and ensure long-term development in the State.

Pawan held a meeting with leaders of the JSP, TDP and BJP after inaugurating the newly established Divisional Development Office at Reddigunta in Chittoor.

Speaking on the occasion, he said, "Though the three coalition parties have different ideologies, we all came together with one common goal to build a better state and stop lawlessness." He said minor communication gaps or misunderstandings among leaders are normal and can be resolved through discussions.

The Chief Minister said the NDA government is working to rebuild the administration, which he said had collapsed under the previous regime. "If we work with the same unity for the next 15 years, Andhra Pradesh will witness sustainable development," he said.



## Naidu violating bail terms, says YSRCP chief

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Vijayawada

FORMER chief minister and YSRCP president YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Thursday accused Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu of violating his bail conditions in the 2023 liquor scam case and of allegedly coercing officials to withdraw cases. Addressing the media at the YSRCP central office in Tadepalli, Jagan said the party would pursue appropriate legal action.

He launched a broad attack on the TDP-led NDA government, alleging failures in agriculture, education, and health-care, and accusing it of "misusing the police to target political opponents" while dragging religion, including the Tirumala Lord Venkateswara Swamy temple, into politics.

He said Naidu had earlier faced a CID case over alleged irregularities in liquor licensing, which reportedly caused an annual loss of more than ₹1,300 crore to the exchequer.

## 15 HELD SO FAR IN PENCHALAI AH MURDER CASE: NELLORE SP

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Nellore

NELLORE district Superintendent of Police Dr Ajitha Vedula on Thursday said that 15 accused have been arrested so far in connection with the murder of social activist K Penchalaiah, while searches are continuing for three more suspects. She assured that strict legal action would be taken against all those involved and reiterated that police remain committed to maintaining peace and safety across the district.

Addressing the media at the district police office in Nellore city, Dr Ajitha said the investi-

gation had uncovered a long history of criminal activity linked to Arava Kamakshi and her family, who have been at the centre of illegal operations in Kallurupalli Housing Board Colony. Kamakshi has several cases registered at Nawabpet and Nellore Rural police stations, including cases under the NDPS Act and a previous murder case. She is also listed under the suspect sheet at Nawabpet Police Station.

Explaining the family background, the SP said Kamakshi's parents migrated from Jabalpur around 35 years ago and settled in Bodigadi Thota, where her

mother Shanti was involved in the ganja trade. Although the family later moved to Kallurupalli Housing Board Colony after being allotted a house site by the district administration, they allegedly continued illegal business. While Kamakshi also collected funds for renovating the Mutyalamma temple—completing about 70% of the work—residents remained strongly opposed to the criminal activities.

Three months ago, a colony committee was formed under the leadership of Penchalaiah,

a Nellore district Prajanatya Mandali member, to resist the illegal operations. The committee conducted awareness drives and mobilised support to curb the family's influence. Tensions escalated on November 19, 2025 during the temple inauguration, when Kamakshi and associate Palakeerthi Ravi tried to pressure the committee for membership but were refused unless they abandoned illegal trade. Matters worsened on November 27, when Kamakshi's brother Arava James entered the colony with his girl-



friend, violating the committee's restrictions. When confronted by Penchalaiah, James was slapped, which reportedly prompted the family to plot revenge.

According to the SP, the family conspired with associates to eliminate Penchalaiah, whom they viewed as a threat to their dominance. On November 28, James and his accomplices intercepted Penchalaiah as he returned home on a scooter with his children, rammed his vehicle, and brutally attacked him after he fell.

The SP also identified another suspect, Samudrala David of

Allimadugu Sangam, who faces 11 cases at Bitragunta Police Station.

Meanwhile, Dr Ajitha announced a special operation to crack down on fraud gangs involved in fake gold, counterfeit currency, and trap-based scams. She explained that the gangs use elaborate methods involving agents, staged police raids, and confidence-building tactics to cheat victims. She said strict instructions had been issued to Law & Order and CCS wings to act firmly against such networks, and she urged the public to remain alert and report suspicious activities immediately.

## Launch 75 MSMEs before WEF meet, orders CM

Continued from page 1

Earlier disruptions had damaged investor confidence. "We have rebuilt AP's image, which is why the recent summit received such a tremendous response," he said.

Naidu mentioned that within just 20 days after the Partnership Summit, agreements worth ₹7.69 lakh crore have already moved to implementation stage. Land allotment for the projects has begun. "We should lay the foundation stones for 75 MSME parks in the State before the upcoming World Economic Forum Summit in Davos. The Chief Secretary should review MoUs grounding every week. District Collectors should also monitor

progress. Prepare a policy for grounding industries, and place it before the Cabinet. A monitoring mechanism should include the Chief Minister, Cabinet Sub-Committee, Chief Secretary, ministers, and senior officials. Land acquisition should be smooth, and both those giving land, and those receiving it should be satisfied," he said.

He further directed the establishment of a Logistics University, Civil Aviation University, and Green Energy University. An advisory body for Quantum Valley will handle mentoring, monitoring, and venture capital, while the Ratan Tata Innovation Hub will mentor startups.

He also proposed that six towers of Quantum Valley be strategically allocated, with two dedicated to quantum algorithms, two to artificial intelligence, and the remaining two to other emerging technologies, ensuring a balanced focus on innovation and research. He further instructed that AI basics be taught from class 7 onwards, with a team formed in collaboration with Microsoft and Google.

The Chief Minister emphasised the creation of a holistic ecosystem for industries, and emerging technologies to thrive within the State, with a focus on end-to-end solutions. He highlighted that technologies

and their use cases must reach every household, ensuring that innovation translates into tangible benefits for citizens across Andhra Pradesh.

The CM also highlighted the need to promote tourism in a big way. He directed officials to attract national and international organisations to the hospitality sector. Fifty acres have been allotted in Visakhapatnam's Kapuluppada for hotels, and convention centres, and a master plan will be prepared soon. I

The Chief Minister said public sector companies should invest across sectors, similar to sovereign funds in the UAE and Dubai. He ordered the creation of a ₹500 crore sovereign fund for Andhra Pradesh.

## Balaji railway div sought with Tirupati as its hq

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Vijayawada

CIVIL Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu, along with TDPP Leader Lavu Srikrishna Devarayalu, several MPs, and members of the Balaji Railway Division Sadhana Samithi, have met Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and urged him to establish the proposed Balaji Railway Division with Tirupati as its headquarters.

In a representation submitted to the Railway Minister in New Delhi on Thursday, the TDP MPs and Samithi members noted that the Tirupati Railway Station, which earns



nearly ₹250 crore annually, is the third highest revenue-generating station in the South Coast Railway Zone and among the top earners in Indian Railways. Despite this, they said, Tirupati continues to face serious administrative and operational constraints due to its existing jurisdictional alignment.





Until they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious.

George Orwell

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

—Rammath Goenka

## DRYING GROUNDWATER: DIVERSIFY CROPS NOW, MODERNISE IRRIGATION

PUNJAB once fed a hungry nation. Guided by government policy and buoyed by subsidised power, farmers embraced paddy and wheat, chemical fertilisers, and the tube well. The Green Revolution delivered food security to India—but at a staggering ecological cost that Punjab is now paying alone. Today, 73 percent of its groundwater blocks are 'over-exploited'. Extraction stands at an alarming 156 percent. Nearly 97 percent of this is pulled out for irrigation—mostly for a single crop that was never native to Punjab: paddy. The science is undisputed. Punjab's groundwater in the first 100 metres might dry up by 2029. By 2039, availability could plunge below 300 metres, where extraction becomes unaffordable and the water becomes unfit for irrigation. Meanwhile, paddy still claims nearly 90 percent of Punjab's kharif acreage. The situation is turning critical in Haryana, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, and Puducherry, too.

There is no time for blame; only for a solution. The Punjab case should show the way. Farmers grew what the nation asked them to grow. Assured procurement made paddy the safest economic choice. Power subsidies kept costs low. To suddenly demand that farmers change course, without giving them viable alternatives, is unrealistic and unfair. Solutions do exist, and they must now become non-negotiable. For decades, experts—from the Johl Committee in 1986 to scientists today—have recommended reducing paddy acreage and creating stable markets for alternative crops. Farmers say they are willing to shift if the government guarantees procurement and fair prices.

Energy reform must be a part of the answer. Smarter power pricing—paired with financial incentives—can curb over-pumping while protecting farmer incomes. Results from Punjab's 'Paani bachao, paisa kamao' pilot show that such incentives work. Infrastructure, too, needs an urgent overhaul. With under a third of farmland receiving canal water, Punjab must remodel its British-era canal network to reduce groundwater dependence. Many of the state's 1.4 million abandoned borewells offer the rare opportunity of use as low-cost recharge structures to replenish the aquifers. Punjab needs coordinated Centre-state action that places farmers at the core, and this cooperation must deliver results—not repeat decades of drift, since even the Akali Dal-BJP partnership in the Vajpayee era showed that political alignment alone cannot move long-pending groundwater reforms.

## EXPANDED HYDERABAD MUST DELIVER FOR ALL

THE Telangana government's decision to fold 20 municipalities and seven municipal corporations into the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC), expanding its jurisdiction from 625 sq km to nearly 2,000 sq km, represents a significant recasting of urban governance. The GHMC is now the country's largest municipality by area. The real question is whether this restructuring can correct Hyderabad's persistent problems of uneven development, regulatory inconsistency, and overstretched civic services that have long undermined the city's growth.

For years, the fragmented jurisdictions surrounding the Outer Ring Road have struggled with potholed roads, unreliable water supply, sanitation gaps, congestion, and mounting environmental stress. These shortcomings have been particularly acute for peri-urban residents who have remained underserved despite rapid population growth. A single, enlarged GHMC offers the possibility of coherent master planning, better transport networks, stronger pollution control mechanisms, and more rational resource mobilisation. The civic body's ₹8,440-crore budget for 2025-26 will need to cross ₹10,000 crore next year to serve an expanded population of about 1.6 crore. The fiscal heft could accelerate the 23 projects under the Hyderabad City Innovative and Transformative Infrastructure initiative and advance the broader Telangana Core Urban Region vision extending across Hyderabad, Rangareddy, Medchal-Malkajgiri, and Sangareddy districts.

Execution will determine whether the merger fulfils its promise. Centralisation has always had its sceptics. Some argue that a larger civic authority could marginalise residents living far from the urban core and heighten corruption in a more sprawling bureaucracy. Others maintain that only a consolidated institution can attract investment, deploy resources efficiently, and balance development across an expanding metropolis. With the merger now a *fait accompli*, the immediate tasks are evident: fair ward delimitation, taxes that do not place disproportionate burdens on a region, and a substantial augmentation of GHMC's administrative and technical staff.

Predictably, the political dimension has surfaced quickly. The BJP has accused the Congress government of pursuing the merger with electoral calculations in mind, hoping to gain ground before the GHMC elections next year. Such allegations will continue. Ultimately, the credibility test lies in whether the enlarged GHMC can deliver equitable, effective governance to a megapolis that has long outgrown its institutional capacity.

For Hyderabad, the merger must become more than an administrative exercise. It must anchor a long-term commitment to planned growth, resilient infrastructure and civic equity across the entire metropolitan region today.

### QUICK TAKE

#### HELPING THE BRAVE

THE Supreme Court has expressed shock that an acid attack victim's plea has been stuck in a Delhi trial court for 16 years. Calling the delay "a mockery of the system", Chief Justice Surya Kant asked the solicitor general to consider such victims as divyangjan or differently abled. Such a step would go some way in helping those bearing the scars of the cruel act. There were 207 acid attack cases registered in 2023. At the same time, it's estimated that up to three-fifths of such attacks were never reported. So speeding up the trials of the brave few who come forward to report the crime would be essential, too.

IN the grand architectural blueprint of digital governance, India's digital personal data protection (DPDP) framework, comprising the DPDP Act of 2023 and its accompanying rules of 2025, present themselves as a fortress preserving and protecting individual privacy. Yet, it has a critical design flaw: its most formidable defences are oriented exclusively outwards, towards private entities, while leaving the rear gate not merely unguarded, but actively propped open for the Orwellian State.

The framework creates a perilous artificial dichotomy—imposing a rigorous, if imperfect, regime upon corporations, while anointing the State as an unassailable aggressor against the very civil right it purports to protect. It is a fundamental reorientation of the social contract, one that places the citizen's most intimate digital self at the mercy of the sovereign, devoid of the procedural safeguards that are the bedrock of a constitutional democracy.

The constitutional spirit, invigorated by the *K S Puttaswamy* (2018) verdict, recognised privacy as an intrinsic component of Article 21. This right ought not to be deprived of by a procedure established by law, as laid down in the *Maneka Gandhi* (1978) case. The DPDP framework creates the mirage of a substantive right for the individual while simultaneously constructing vast exclusion zones for the State. The exemptions culminate in the chilling expanse of the Seventh Schedule of the DPDP Rules.

Purpose 2 of the rules allows the use of personal data for the "performance of any function under any law for the time being in force". This is not a targeted exception for national security, safeguarded by judicial oversight; it is a bottomless pit of authority.

A municipal corporation clearing garbage, a transport department issuing a bus pass, or a ministry formulating a new scheme—all can invoke this provision to access, process, and share the most intimate details of a citizen's life. The privileged sanctity of attorney-client communications, the confidential dialogue between doctor and patient, the private correspondence between spouses—all can be vacuumed into the State's digital repository, not pursuant to a judicial warrant based on probable cause, but on the mere assertion of a statutory function. When this is read in conjunction with Section 15(c) of the Act, which imposes a duty on the individual not to suppress material information for State-issued documents, the framework effectively compels self-incrimination.

The new digital personal data protection framework institutionalises a surveillance apparatus. The State can access citizens' private information without any clear responsibility to protect it smartly

## BUILDING A DATA FORTRESS WITH A FLAWED DESIGN

MANISH TEWARI

MP, lawyer, and former Union I&B minister



SOURAV ROY

It grants the State and its instrumentalities a *carte blanche* to process personal data for the provision of any "subsidy, benefit, service, certificate, license or permit". The definitions provided in rule 5(2) are so breathtakingly expansive that they cover virtually every interaction an individual has with the State. This means that applying for a driver's licence, a passport, or a ration card becomes a tacit and coerced surrender of personal data. The notion of informed consent—the bedrock of any data protection regime—is rendered redundant when the alternative to providing data is the denial of an essential service or a legal entitlement. The State, which in political theory is merely an association of individuals constituted for collective good, has through this framework positioned itself as a pan-

optic entity with an insatiable appetite for the personal data of its constituents.

From a forensic standpoint, the framework's handling of data erasure and security is a testament to a profound misunderstanding of the digital substrate. The rules speak of "erasure" as if it were a simple event—a file deleted from a desktop. This is a dangerous anachronism. For example, a photograph on a smartphone is a complex constellation of data: a header, pixel arrays with colour values, metadata tags detailing the precise location, camera settings, and time stamps. When a user consents to its storage, this constellation is not merely written to the phone's flash memory; it is often synchronised to a cloud infrastructure.

Now, consider the command to 'erase'. On the device, a file system deletion of-

## HUMAN SIDE OF ONLINE LEARNING

TEACHERS, peer connection, informal conversations, and campus life are essential to a student. However, when we think of online higher education, it is not uncommon to face one pertinent question: do online students miss out on experiences that campus environments provide? Critics of digital education warn that students may become disconnected from peers and become isolated learners in virtual classrooms. Are these apprehensions valid, or is there a more hopeful way of addressing such doubts?

Cognitive research suggests that group cohesion—the sense of belonging within a learning community—remains intact when classrooms transition to virtual learning. Carefully designed digital programmes can create new kinds of bonds. Researchers at the University of Hong Kong found that students in online collaborative projects exhibited levels of trust and participation comparable to, and in some cases even stronger than, those in physical classrooms. Psychologists refer to this as 'group efficacy'.

Team-building activities play a central role in technology-enabled programmes. Debates, solving problems together, or making shared notes are easy to integrate into the online activities. These help students feel connected, more confident, and responsible for their part in the group. Studies in Taiwan have shown that when students work closely in such structured online groups, each person's performance improves. A sense of "we can succeed together" often translates into the personal belief of "I can succeed too".

This belief is particularly relevant to India today. According to the latest All India Survey on Higher Education, gross enrolment in post-secondary education has reached 28.4 percent. The National Education Policy, 2020 aims to push this to 50 percent by 2035. Traditional campuses cannot carry this load alone. Expanding access to half of India's youth would be challenging without virtual platforms.

Globally, interest in online programmes is increasing. A Unesco study predicts that cross-border student mobility will increase by a factor of two by 2030. Not all students can travel abroad. Online degrees with global recognition are the next frontier. In India, the University Grants Commission has already approved over 100 universities to offer

fully online degrees with the same status as offline ones. The Swayam platform has registered more than 3.5 crore learners. With quality design support, India can attract thousands of learners from developing nations, too.

However, concerns about losing social and intellectual growth in online set-



Virtual learning works well when digital modules are designed to foster team cohesion and interaction. If we want to expand the reach of higher education, we have to embrace online learning. An online-only IIT Madras course drew in a large number of students from far-flung places

tings linger. In physical classrooms, students can lead discussions and work in teams. Can we ensure that these exposures can be replicated in virtual classrooms? Recent research says yes. Students do not feel isolated when universities invest in virtual mentorship circles, breakout discussions, and interactive projects. On the contrary, they can feel more exposed to diversity. A learner in Kerala can team up with another in Punjab, moderated by a teacher in Delhi, while contributing to a project with a student joining in from Singapore.

India is uniquely placed to lead this change. Our digital public infrastructure has already transformed how we perceive identity and finance. Teachers are accessing high-quality resources on platforms like Diksha or Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing. The

same approach can shape online higher education. AI-adaptive tools can track a student's performance real-time. It can then adjust the level of complexity. This moderation is impossible in a lecture hall with a large number of students. Intelligent systems also support group projects. AI can ensure balanced teams by pairing students with complementary strengths in virtual platforms.

None of this means virtual classrooms do not have hurdles. Universities need to design online courses that are engaging. The responsibility is clear: online learners should not be treated as passive participants. Course instructors must build virtual communities where students become engaged through shared learning. Teachers should know how to manage online discussions and encourage student participation. Assessments must include collaborative exercises. Otherwise, students may log in, watch a lecture, but not learn much.

Take an example from IIT Madras. In 2021, it launched an online BSc course in data science, the first fully-online degree programme offered by an IIT. Many thought such a step might dilute the prestige of the IIT brand. The opposite happened. Within two years, more than 17,000 students had enrolled, including those from metros as well as towns and villages. Some were working professionals, some school-leavers, and others mid-career learners seeking to upskill.

What is the larger implication for India? Expanding access to tertiary education is about creating citizens who can think critically, debate respectfully, and collaborate effectively in both physical and digital worlds. We can use virtual classrooms to prepare our youth for an increasingly complex world.

Do students lose a lot when they enrol for online programmes? Academic findings and experiments suggest otherwise. With group cohesion, team-building, and the intelligent use of AI, online learning can build confident, thoughtful, and networked students. It's not an inferior path. It's a different path that defines the future of Indian higher education.

(Views are personal)

### MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

#### Myopic policy

Ref: *Wider consultation needed* (Dec 4). Even after the U-turn, the SIM-binding clause for apps continues to hamper those using them on wifi and for business accounts; while scammers can simply swap SIMs. The same old story: narrow consultation and zero foresight turning policy into panic. Cyberfraud is real, but knee-jerk overreach isn't the cure. **Hashir Minhaj, Lakshadweep**

#### Ditwah lesson

Ref: *Cyclone Ditwah reminds we are in the same boat* (Dec 4). We cannot depend upon the faint hope of a calamity's rarity. Coastal cities' vulnerabilities are a liability that needs a strengthened disaster management system by both the public and the government. **Siya Sarkar, Bengaluru**

#### Rupee slide

Ref: *Rupee breaches 90-mark* (Dec 4). With the rupee crossing the psychologically important mark of 90, bells have gone off. The ripple effects will stretch beyond the exchange market. Students, travellers, patients, investors and the average Indian household will have to bear the brunt. **N Rama Rao, Chennai**

#### Breakfast breather

Ref: *Ice-breaker idlis* (Dec 4). The breakfast episode is not only to divert public attention from the leadership crisis but also meant to provide breathing space for the clueless party leadership. The high command is indecisive due to intricate caste factors and the recalcitrance of both leaders. **Rajarao Kumar, Bengaluru**

#### Palace intrigue

The uneasy calm in Karnataka shows how leadership tussles can drain a government's focus even without street agitation. When governance becomes hostage to private bargaining, public trust inevitably slips. A clearer power-sharing roadmap—set early and honoured sincerely—would help the Congress shift attention from the palace intrigue to delivering stable administration. **K Sakunthala, Coimbatore**

#### Long conflict

Ref: *Banishing the Maoist phoenix* (Dec 4). There have been heavy losses of life and resources on both sides in this time-testing war. Sincere efforts are must to mitigate regional imbalances by proper distribution of resources, development measures, and the weeding out of middlemen who radicalise and exploit rural tribal masses. **Ramalingeswara Rao, email**



**Sagarika Ghose** @sagarikaghose  
"I am speaking in Bangla. @narendramodi and his gov calls Bangla 'Bangladeshi' language. Perhaps they will call me Bangladeshi and try to throw me out."



**Shashi Tharoor** @ShashiTharoor  
What are our deprived tribals to do when the Kerala Government slashes 27 out of 49 tribal schemes, claiming it doesn't have the money?



**Pawan Khera** @Pawankhera  
Discussed various issues with Mikhail Murashko, Health Minister of Russian Federation and agreed to enhance bilateral collaboration in a health sector.

● Proposed cess will be levied only on demerit goods but Oppn says it will revive 'inspector raj' ● Sitharaman accuses TMC of stalling development in Bengal



**POWER CORRIDOR**

**FIX THE PROBLEM, SAYS OPPN ON HIGH AQI**

Various opposition MPs on Thursday staged a protest in Parliament complex over the issue of air pollution in the capital, with Congress leader Sonia Gandhi asking the government to take action. Carrying placards they raised slogans outside the Makar Dwar of Parliament asking the Prime Minister to stop making statements and fix the problem. Some of the MPs also wore masks at the protest to highlight the problem of air pollution. They also carried a big banner that said 'mausam ka mazaa lijiye' (Enjoy the weather) carrying a picture of the PM, who had made these remarks at the start of the Winter session of Parliament. Protesting MPs of various parties also raised slogans that read - "Make polluters pay, not citizens", 'Air quality - action now', 'Don't choke our future', 'Clean air is a right, not a luxury'.

**20% NOT ELIGIBLE FOR CASHLESS TREATMENT**

Out of the total 6,833 treatment requests raised by road accident victims under the Cashless Treatment of Road Accident Victims Scheme so far, only 5,480 victims have been found eligible, and the remaining 1,353 cases (nearly 20%) have been rejected by the police, Parliament was informed on Thursday. Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari, in a written reply to Lok Sabha, said the total fund disbursed under the Motor Vehicle Accident Fund is ₹73.88 lakh. "Out of the total number of 6,833 treatment requests raised, 5,480 victims have been found eligible. The remaining cases have been rejected by police," Gadkari said.

**62 STUDENTS DENIED US ENTRY IN 5 YEARS**

Sixty-two Indian students have been denied entry to the US by foreign immigration authorities in the last five years, according to data shared by the Centre in Parliament on Thursday. Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh, in a written response to a query in Rajya Sabha, also shared country-wise data on Indian students deported from several countries over this period. Singh said that in several cases, "entry of Indian students had been denied on account of their carrying incomplete or inappropriate admission documents from their varisities, failing the administrative process, or for being unable to answer basic questions."

**Health bill in LS amid Oppn demand for select panel**

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

AMID concerns by the opposition, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman moved the Health Security and National Security Cess Bill, 2025, in Lok Sabha on Thursday, asserting that the proposed cess will be levied only on demerit goods, like pan masala, and not on essential commodities, and revenue from the levy will be shared with states for spending on health schemes.

The purpose of the bill is to create a 'dedicated and predictable resource stream' for two domains of national importance — health and national security, said Sitharaman. "This is a cess, and it is placed not on any essential commodity. We wish to impose such a cost so that it is a deterrent, so people tend not to use it," she said.

Sitharaman said pan masala will be taxed at the maximum 40% rate under Goods and Services Tax (GST) based on its consumption, and there will be no impact of this cess on GST revenues. However, participating in the debate on the Bill, several opposition MPs demanded that the bill should be sent to a select committee, voicing con-



cerns that it will hurt the MSME sector and revive 'inspector raj'.

Accusing the Centre of relying excessively on cesses to raise revenue, DMK MP Sumathi termed it as "cessification of governance, not justification of governance".

Sumathi pointed out that the finance minister herself noted how sharply cess revenues have risen. "Ambedkar had warned that good intentions are of no value if the instruments are flawed. This bill is precisely that — good intentions trapped in a flawed instrument," she said and claimed that MSMEs would be hit the hardest by it.

Opening the debate in the Lower House, Congress MP Varun Chaudhary warned the proposed legislation would re-

voke "inspector raj" and that a capacity-based cess would increase bureaucratic interference. TMC MP Saugata Roy questioned whether the cess would deter the pan masala industry, as he noted its enormous profits. He argued that government was "so desperate for funds" that it was now depending on demerit goods to finance national security.

"You need money. The Parliament building cost ₹20,000 crore; the PM's 'Sewa Teerth' will cost hundreds of crores. Now, for that, take money from pan masala? The government is thinking on two lines: on one hand, it spends money like water on unnecessary buildings; on the other, it taxes pan masala to fund security," Roy said.

**Upper House green light to excise policy to curb tobacco consumption**

PARVEZ SULTAN @ New Delhi

PARLIAMENT on Thursday passed the Central Excise (Amendment) Bill, 2025, after the Rajya Sabha approved it and returned it to the Lok Sabha. The Bill amends the Central Excise Act, 1944, with the key objective of increasing excise duties and cess on multiple tobacco products, including cigarettes, cigars, hookah tobacco, chewing tobacco, zarda and scented tobacco.

Replying to the discussion on the Bill, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman accused the West Bengal government of obstructing the state's development despite receiving full assistance from the Centre. She insisted that the Centre had never neglected West Bengal.

"In fact, it is the Trinamool Congress (TMC) government that is hurting the growth of the people of West Bengal," she said while responding to points raised by TMC members. Referring to health coverage, she reminded the House that West Bengal withdrew from the Ay-

ushman Bharat scheme in January 2019, adding, "Is that good for the people of Bengal?"

Sitharaman said industries were steadily leaving West Bengal and listed several indicators of the Centre's contributions. She noted that AIIMS Kalyani had been established and 11 medical colleges were approved under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme. She added that West Bengal received a record railway budget allocation of ₹13,955 crore for 2025-26, more than three times the 2009-14 average outlay of ₹4,380 crore. In addition, 101 Amrit Stations are being developed in the state at a cost of ₹3,847.5 crore.

The minister said that 1,650 km of railway lines had been electrified, bringing total electrification in Bengal to over 98%. She informed the House that more than 2,300 km of National Highways had been built since 2014. Responding to concerns raised by TMC MP Sagarika Ghose about the Central Road and Infrastructure Fund (CRIF), Sitharaman said that transfers had not been halted.

**Opposition upset at V-P rejecting all notices under Rule 267**

PARVEZ SULTAN @ New Delhi

RAJYA Sabha Chairman C P Radhakrishnan on Thursday clarified in detail on the scope and permissible use of Rule 267, stressing that the provision cannot be invoked to raise matters unrelated to the day's listed agenda. His remarks came amid a sharp rise in notices from Opposition MPs seeking

to suspend scheduled business and take up other issues.

Throughout the ongoing winter session, all notices moved under Rule 267 have been rejected by the Chair for failing to meet the requirements of the rule. On Wednesday, he turned down two more such notices and said the rule was being

misused through "routine notices" intended to suspend the day's business.

Radhakrishnan underlined that Rule 267 cannot be equated with an adjournment motion in the Lok Sabha, which is explicitly permitted under Article 75(3) of the Constitution. "There is no constitutional or procedural provision

authorising Rajya Sabha Members to give any adjournment notice in any manner... A notice must specify the rule sought to be suspended and include a properly drafted motion. Any notice concerning a matter outside the List of Business is invalid," he said.

Responding to the explanation, LoP Mallikarjun Kharge said MPs turn to Rule 267 be-

cause "there is no chance of getting a short-duration or even a short notice question." He added, "We are not getting the opportunity to discuss important things immediately... the government is avoiding."

Leader of the House JP Nadda disagreed, saying the government had not avoided any discussion and was prepared for "every topic".

**'Shame': Trial against accused of acid attack pending before court for 16 yrs**

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY @ New Delhi

STUNNED to learn from an acid attack survivor that the trial against her accused has been pending for 16 years, the Supreme Court described the situation as "a national shame" that makes "a mockery of the system." The Court directed all High Courts to furnish details of pending acid attack cases within four weeks.

"If the national capital cannot handle such a situation, then who will? This is such a shame! This (the delay in criminal trial) is a mockery of the system," remarked a two-judge bench of the apex court headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi on Thursday.

The victim's lawyer detailed the 2009 attack on his client and informed the Court that many other similar cases were still pending. "There are others who are made to drink acid, and

**ALSO IN TOP COURT**

**Ensure 30% quota for women lawyers**

The Supreme Court on Thursday in its order asked the Bar Council of India (BCI) to ensure 30 per cent reservation for women in the upcoming state bar council elections. BCI told the top court that implementing such a reservation would require making amendments to the Advocates Act.

they suffer equally. They are made to eat food through the food pipe."

Hearing this, an outraged CJI Kant asked whether the trial against the person who attacked the petitioner was still pending. The lawyer replied that the criminal trial is continuing before a Rohini court in New Delhi.

The CJI observed that such

an extraordinary delay in concluding the trial reflected a shameful state of affairs. Subsequently, in its order, the Bench sought nationwide information about all pending trials involving acid attack victims and listed the matter for further hearing next week.

"Issue notice. We direct the Registrar General of all High Courts to furnish details of all pending trials in matters concerning acid attack victims," the Court said in its order.

During the hearing, Solicitor General of India (SG) Tushar Mehta, who was present in the courtroom, concurred with the Court's concerns and said that perpetrators should be dealt with the same ruthlessness they exhibited. No agency can oppose this, he added.

The court asked the acid attack survivor to file an application. "Tell us why the trial has not been completed since 2009. We will take suo motu cognizance!" CJI Kant said.

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

AT a meeting with the parliamentary panel on 'One nation, one election', the Law Commission said that the proposed power to the Election Commission that seeks to lay a legal framework to hold 'simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies' is not excessive. However, the provision of giving 'unfettered power' to the EC in the proposed legislation has come under criticism from various quarters.

The law panel top brass briefed the Joint Committee of Parliament examining the Bills on simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. During the briefing, members said the law panel also noted that the Constitution Amendment Bill does not require ratification by at least 50 per cent of the state assemblies to come into force.

According to sources, Opposition MPs questioned the law commission officials on the constitutionality and adherence to the federal spirit in the Bill. The law commission offi-



**PANEL ARGUES**

The Law Commission of India told Joint Parliamentary Committee that the One Nation, One Election proposal aligns with constitutional principles and it doesn't affect the Basic Structure of the Constitution

ONOE Bill does not violate the Constitution's Basic Structure

Affirms Parliament's power to enact ONOE within Basic Structure limits

Voting is a statutory right, so synchronising elections does not affect it

Bill's limited curtailment of House tenures stays within constitutional bounds

India's union-federal setup remains untouched by ONOE

Emphasises House's explicit constitutional authority to legislate on all elections

State ratification isn't needed, it doesn't amend federal norms

Dismisses constitutional concerns, calling the bill sound and legally well-grounded

EC already has wide powers under Article 324, validating clauses 82A(3) and 82A(5)

Article 324's "reservoir of power" covers all functions proposed in the Bill

the joint panel, it has "not even an iota of doubt" that the proposed Article 82A(5) does not suffer from excessive delegation. Regarding the proposed legislation's impact on the tenure of the House and state legislative assemblies, the commission argued that the bill introduces only a limited and rational curtailment, which does not infringe the basic structure in any manner.

The power conferred upon the EC to recommend postponement of elections is neither arbitrary nor unbounded; rather, it flows naturally from the plenary constitutional authority that has been vested in the EC under Article 324, the law panel has said. The law panel underlined that the proposed amendment does not disturb the basic structure of the Constitution in any way. The commission said federalism as envisaged and formulated in the Indian Constitution is not that of compartmentalisation of different units; it is rather that of weaving different units together with a strong centre as the pivot.

**Rahul's remarks on foreign leaders 'not true'**

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

LEADER of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Thursday alleged that the government tells visiting foreign dignitaries not to meet the Leader of the Opposition due to its "insecurity".

The remarks came hours before Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in Delhi. Putin is on a two-day visit to India. Gandhi said it is a tradition that visiting foreign dignitaries meet the LoP, but Prime Minister Modi and the Ministry of External Affairs were not following this norm.

"This used to happen during Atal Bihari Vajpayee ji's time and Manmohan Singh ji's time; it has been a tradition, but what happens these days is that when foreign dignitaries come and when I go abroad, the govern-



**'6 meetings as LoP'**

Though there was no official reply from government, sources said that MEA organises meetings for the incoming dignitary with government officials and government bodies. It is up to the visiting delegation to organise meetings outside that, said the source. The source also cited at least six instances of Gandhi's meetings with visiting dignitaries since he became the LoP in 2024.

ment suggests to them to not meet the LoP," Gandhi said.

"We get the message that they have been told that the government has said 'not to meet you'," he added.

Highlighting the importance of such meetings, he said the LoP gives another perspective. We also represent India; only the government does not repre-

sent India. Modi ji does not follow these norm; the foreign ministry does not follow this norm," Gandhi said without naming Putin. Asked why the government was doing so, he said, "It is their insecurity."

Congress general secretary in charge of organisation K C Venugopal said the LoP meeting foreign dignitaries visiting

India is a time-tested democratic tradition so that India's international engagement is deeper and more meaningful. "But those who only wish to speak their own Man ki Baat clearly have no regard for these traditions that serve as important pillars of our foreign policy engagement," Venugopal said on X.

Though there was no official response from the government, sources said that MEA organises meetings for the incoming dignitary with government officials and government bodies during a visit. It is up to the visiting delegation to organise meetings outside the government, said the source.

**Awareness drive to make India free of child marriage by 2030 launched**

KAVITA BAJELI-DATT @ New Delhi

TO reduce prevalence of child marriages to 10% by 2026 and to make India child marriage free by 2030, a 100-day 'intensive awareness campaign for a child marriage-free Bharat' was launched on Thursday by Women and Child Development (WCD) Minister Annapurna Devi. The campaign will focus on targeted outreach each month: beginning with schools and colleges, followed by religious institutions and service providers, and culminating with local self-governments.

Speaking at the launch of the intensive awareness campaign, which will run till March 8, celebrated as International Women's Day, Devi said, "Child mar-



riage snatches childhood away from daughters and pushes them towards early maternity and unimaginable suffering." She stressed that the country must adopt "zero tolerance" towards child marriage and urged states, civil society groups, and community leaders to unite with an "unwavering commitment" to eliminate the practice.

She said though India has made "historic progress," far more remains to be done. "Even one child marriage is unacceptable for us," she said. The minister traced the journey from the Sarda Act, 1929 to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, noting that the legal framework had become stronger over the decades, yet harmful social norms persisted. "Child marriage is not just a violation of the law. It takes away a daughter's childhood and pushes her towards early maternity and unimaginable suffering," she said.

WCD Secretary, Anil Malik, said that laws alone cannot eradicate the practice, child marriage "a crime against humanity".

Security agencies launched a search operation in Ajmer on Thursday after the district administration received an email threatening to blow up the Ajmer Sharif dargah and the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant.

4 DEAD AFTER CAR RAMS INTO PARKED TRUCK IN AMROHA

INDIA	Max	Min	Mumbai	Max	Min
Ahmedabad	28	17	Mumbai	31	25
Bhopal	23	10	Panaji	33	25
Jaipur	23	11	Patna	24	13
Amritsar	22	06	Lucknow	24	09
Chennai	29	26	Port Blair	31	26
Kolkata	27	16	Imphal	24	10
Srinagar	13	-1	Chandigarh	22	07

After JMM's review call over Bihar rout, INDIA bloc signals unity

TMC chief says BJP playing religious politics over SIR ahead of polls

# Soren meets allies amid buzz over change of guard

MUKESH RANJAN @ Ranchi

PUTTING an end to speculation that Jharkhand's political equations might change in the coming days, the INDIA bloc in the state displayed unity during a meeting of alliance partners conducted by CM Hemant Soren on Thursday.

The meeting, held ahead of the Winter Session of Jharkhand Assembly beginning December 5, was significant because rumours had circulated after Soren and his MLA wife, Kalpana Soren, visited Delhi, claiming they had allegedly met senior BJP leaders. These reports suggested dissatisfaction within the JMM over the performance of its allies, the Congress and the RJD, in the recent Bihar polls.

The concerns had intensified after the JMM's decision to withdraw from the 2025 Bihar elections, citing what it called a "political conspiracy" by its allies in Bihar. Days after the Mahagathbandhan's rout in the polls, JMM general secretary Vinod Pandey said that it was time to review the alliance "not only in Jharkhand, but at the central level too."

However, after the Thursday meeting, sources said the coalition is focused on governance and the upcoming Assembly session. All four ministers from the Congress quota, along



Whispers of dissatisfaction within JMM grow loud

The meeting, held ahead of Winter Session of Jharkhand Assembly, comes amid speculation about Soren and his MLA wife, Kalpana Soren, visiting Delhi and claiming they had met senior BJP leaders. These reports suggested dissatisfaction within the JMM over the performance of its allies, the Congress and the RJD, in the Bihar polls.

with Jharkhand in-charge K Raju and state Congress president Keshav Mahto Kamlesh, attended the meeting.

"All the 16 MLAs will be present during the Winter Session of Jharkhand Assembly and put the questions in the interest of the people of the state," said State Congress Chief Keshav Mahto. Finance and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Radhakrishna Kishore said the speculation about a change in power had been proven baseless.

He added, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently stated during the winter session of Parliament that the Lok Sabha is a place for delivery, not drama. BJP MLAs should also keep this in mind."

Agriculture Minister Shilpi Neha Tirkey said they would not allow the BJP narrative to succeed. Health Minister Dr Irnan Ansari said the BJP had "no issues to raise" and had resorted to drama. JMM ministers and MLAs, however, avoided speaking to the media.

# No NRC, detention camps in Bengal: Didi ups ante

SUBHENDU MAITI @ Kolkata

CONTINUING her attack on the BJP over the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said she would never allow National Register of Citizens (NRC) in the state.

"I will not allow NRC or detention camps in Bengal. Even if they slit my throat, no one will be driven out. If anyone is removed, we will bring them back legally. Bengal will remain safe and inclusive," Banerjee said, while addressing an anti-SIR rally in Behrampur of minority-majority district Murshidabad district.

The TMC chief claimed that NRC was the real intent behind the SIR. She alleged that the EC pushed the SIR to create panic, claiming that had her government blocked the exercise, the Centre would have imposed President's Rule in the state. She said the state was "not foolish enough to walk into the trap" and urged people not to fear the enumeration exercise but to simply file their documents.

"The BJP is indulging in religious politics over SIR ahead of assembly elections. More than half of those who died in SIR-related incidents were Hindus. Don't cut the very branch you are sitting on," she said.



TMC suspends MLA Kabir firm on 'Babri masjid'

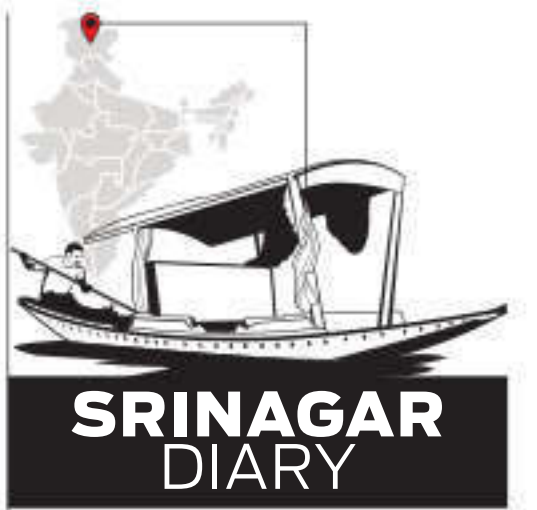
The TMC on Thursday suspended its MLA Humayun Kabir, who is firm on his proposal to build a mosque modelled on Babri Masjid in Murshidabad. "Humayun Kabir has been suspended from the party for communal politics," state minister Firhad Hakim said. After the action, Kabir said, "I will resign from the party on Friday and float a new political platform to fight against the communal forces."

Her remarks came a day after she accused Union Home Minister Amit Shah of "orchestrating" SIR to unsettle voters and "capture Bengal by trickery".

"Turning to the Waqf controversy, Banerjee said, "For days, some miscreants have been spreading lies about waqf properties. Nothing has been reclassified. Not one Waqf property will be taken away." Clarifying that data of nearly 82,000 waqf properties already existed on the Centre's portal, she said, "We passed a resolution in the

Assembly that Waqf properties cannot be taken forcefully. Mutawallis (custodians of waqf property) will upload the documents and give them to the state. There is nothing to fear."

Her comments came amid renewed heat after the state government instructed district magistrates to upload Waqf data to the Centre's UMEED portal by the December 6 deadline, a move critics say signals a climbdown from her earlier opposition to the amended Waqf Act.



## SRINAGAR DIARY

FAYAZ WANI

Our correspondent in Jammu and Kashmir fayazwani123@gmail.com

### Ex-gratia revised for L&O disturbances' victims

The J&K government has issued a fresh framework for relief under to victims of law & order disturbances. The revised compensation covers magistrates, police personnel, CAPF jawans, defence forces personnel, government employees, civilians and others who may suffer death, disability or property loss arising out of conflict-related incidents. For magistrates, police personnel including SPOs, the relief has been fixed at ₹2 lakh and 5 lakh, respectively, while ₹2 lakh will be granted to NOKs of ex-servicemen. While non-domiciles CAPF personnel are entitled to ₹5 lakh upon death, J&K domiciles who die either within or outside UT are to get ₹25 lakh.



### HC relief: PDP MLA can travel outside J&K

The J&K HC has allowed PDP MLA Waheed-ur-Rehman Parra, who is facing trial under UAPA, to travel outside the UT and within the country without the trial court's permission. A division bench passed the order on an application moved by the MLA seeking relaxation of condition of 2022 bail order, which required him not to leave J&K without prior approval of the trial court. He has been asked to inform about his location and purpose of visit to the trial court. Para was arrested by NIA on Nov 25, 2020, in a terror funding case. He was granted bail by NIA court in Jan 2021 but re-arrested by Counter Intelligence (Kashmir) unit of J&K Police.

### Two master craftsmen win national award

Two master craftsmen of Kashmir have won the National Award in the handicraft category, as announced by the Union Ministry of Textiles. Manzoor Ahmad Khan and Khawaja Nazir Ali, both residents of Srinagar, shall be conferred with the award by the President for excellence in the field of hand-knotted carpet weaving and sozni embroidery in New Delhi on December 9. Each awards come with a citation and a cash prize of ₹2 lakh cheque. Khan is a renowned weaver of hand-knotted carpet and recently won first prize in the UT Awards for 2024. Ali has also distinguished himself in the field of sozni embroidery, earning him the prestigious National Award.

# HC grants bail to former DU prof Hany Babu in Bhima Koregaon case

SUDHIR SURYAWANSHI @ Mumbai

THE Bombay High Court on Thursday granted bail to former Delhi University professor Hany Babu, an accused in the 2018 Bhima Koregaon-Elgar Parishad case, on the grounds of incarceration of over five years without trial. A division bench of Justices A S Gadkari and R R Bhonsale ordered release of Babu on furnishing a personal bond of ₹1 lakh with sureties of the same amount.

The NIA urged the HC to stay the order so that an appeal could be filed in the Supreme Court but it was rejected citing the length of time Babu, 59, had spent behind bars and also that the trial was "not likely to complete soon". The NIA had arrested Babu, a resident of Gautam Buddha Nagar in UP, in July 2020. He has since been lodged in Taloja prison. Babu's counsel Yug Mohit Chaudhary argued for bail on the basis that charges have yet to be framed and a discharge application is still pending before the trial court. Chaudhary had said eight co-accused were released on bail by the Supreme Court or the HC, so Babu



Three still in jail

The Elgar Parishad case has seen the arrest of 16 people accused of furthering the cause of the banned CPI (Maoist). Lawyer Surendra Gadling and cultural activists Sagar Gorkhe and Ramesh Gaichor are among those yet to secure bail in the case.

was also entitled to seek bail on the ground of prolonged incarceration without trial.

The NIA has accused Babu of being a co-conspirator in propagating Maoist activities. The case relates to inciting people and giving provocative speeches during an Elgar Parishad event organised by the Kabir Kala Manch at Shaniwarwada in Pune on December 31, 2017.

# Bodies of 6 more Maoists found after encounter

EJAZ KAISER @ Raipur

SECURITY forces engaged in anti-Maoist operations along the Bijapur-Dantewada inter-district border have recovered the bodies of six more Maoist cadres, taking the toll of Naxalites killed in the gunfight to 18.

Three personnel of the District Reserve Guard, a unit of the state police, were also killed in the encounter, which took place on Wednesday. Following a prolonged intermittent exchange of fire that lasted for around 12 hours, bodies of 12 Naxalites were recovered till late Wednesday evening. Bastar Range IGP Sundarraj Pattilingam said. Six more bodies were found till Thursday morning during a search in the area.

"The bodies of 18 Maoists, including nine female cadres, and huge quantities of weapons & explosive materials were recovered by forces during the search operation," Pattilingam said, adding that it was a decisive breakthrough. Owing to strong coordination among the police, paramilitary security forces and various stakeholders, the anti-Maoist operations in the region have become even more effective, the IG added.

# Biren warns of existential crisis, tribes flag illegal influx

PRASANTA MAZUMDAR @ Guwahati

FORMER Manipur CM N Biren Singh has warned of an existential crisis for the state, highlighting the destruction of forests for poppy plantations. He shared a video on X, showing purported poppy plantations in Kuki-majority Kangpokpi.

"This video recorded today (Wednesday) shows why recurrent floods have taken place in the state. The footage shows poppy plantation at Kolten and Selsi Hill Ranges of IT-Road under T Waichong Sub-division in Kangpokpi district," he posted. "All our forest(s) have been destroyed while we are trying to pull each other down. None of our leaders has spoken out against such wide-scale devastation," he said. He asked why forest department officials did not take action.

The Joint Tribes Council Manipur (JTCM) on Thursday petitioned PM Narendra Modi, drawing his attention to the unchecked illegal migration and its far-reaching consequences on the indigenous population, social security, and demographic balance of Manipur.

"In recent years, Manipur has witnessed a growing influx

## POPPY CULTIVATION ROW

Former Manipur CM N Biren Singh warns of an existential crisis, linking recurrent floods to large-scale forest destruction for poppy cultivation

Singh has shared a video of purported poppy plantations in Kangpokpi, alleging armed militant involvement and inaction by forest officials

He cautioned that continued deforestation and illicit activities could push the state toward ecological and social collapse

JTCM links new settlements along highways to deforestation and says they are protected by militant groups



**THE JOINT TRIBES COUNCIL MANIPUR (JTCM) PETITIONED PM MODI ABOUT UNCHECKED ILLEGAL MIGRATION AFFECTING MANIPUR'S DEMOGRAPHIC BALANCE AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

of illegal migrants from war-torn Myanmar and from Indian states where NRC exercise is being implemented. This continuous inflow has strained local resources and now poses a serious threat to cultural identity, economic stability, and traditional livelihoods of native indigenous communities in Manipur," the JTCM said in a memorandum submitted to Modi through the governor. The JTCM is a conglomerate of Liangmai Naga Council,

Rongmei Naga Council, Zeme Naga Council and Inpui Naga Union. It claimed that the situation was critical along the major highways. "Many of these settlements have links to mass deforestations for illicit activity - large-scale poppy cultivation. Several militant groups are known to protect these villages," the JTCM alleged.

The JTCM claimed that there had been a consistent increase in Manipur's Kuki population between 1951 and 2011.

# Raj gov replaces jail term for minor violations with monetary penalties

RAJESH ASNANI @ Jaipur

THE Rajasthan Cabinet on Wednesday approved the Rajasthan Jan Vishwas Ordinance, a major reform aimed at reducing litigation and promoting greater "ease of living" and "ease of doing business" in the state. Modelled on the Centre's Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023, the ordinance seeks to replace jail terms with monetary penalties for minor or technical violations under 11 state laws.

According to Parliamentary Affairs Minister Jogaram Patel, the measure is designed to ease compliance, curb unnecessary criminal proceedings, and foster trust among citizens, businesses, and regulatory authorities. The Cabinet also cleared the Rajasthan Public Trust (Amendment of Provisions) Ordinance, 2025, which forms a



## CABINET SOPS

- Under the Industrial Units Act, minor procedural lapses will not attract jail terms
- Instead, financial penalties will be imposed
- It reduces fear of inspector raj, offering relief to MSMEs
- Similar changes introduced in Jaipur Water Supply & Sewerage Board Act

key part of these reforms. Significant amendments include changes to the Forest Act, where the earlier provision of

imprisonment for grazing cattle on forest land has been removed. Only fines and compensation for damage will now apply, a move the government says will particularly benefit tribal and rural communities that often face criminal charges for unintentional entry into forest areas.

Under the Industrial Units Act, minor procedural lapses—such as failing to produce documents during inspections—will no longer attract jail terms. Instead, financial penalties will be imposed, offering relief to MSMEs and reducing the fear of an inspector raj. Similar changes have been introduced in the Jaipur Water Supply and Sewerage Board Act, where offences such as water wastage or unauthorised connections will now only lead to fines. Faster resolution of cases will minimise business disruptions and enhance compliance.

# U'khand highly vulnerable, says new seismic map

NARENDRA SETHI @ Dehradun

THE Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has issued a new seismic map, placing the entire Uttarakhand, including its plains and mountainous regions, into Seismic Zone 6—the highest category for earthquake vulnerability.

This drastic revision supersedes the previous classification, which had divided the state between Zone 4 and Zone 5. The new classification signals that any future seismic event could cause uniform, high-level damage across all parts of Uttarakhand.

The shift mandates a complete overhaul of infrastructure development policies, as the state must now adhere to stringent, unified building codes. An officer familiar with the development strategy said, "The implication of being placed entirely in Zone 6 is that infrastructure damage, should an earthquake strike, will be uniform across every region."



## SHIFTING SCENARIO

BIS has reclassified all of Uttarakhand into Seismic Zone 6, the highest earthquake-vulnerability category

This new map replaces the earlier split between Zones 4 and 5, implying uniformly high seismic risk statewide

The shift requires a complete overhaul of infrastructure policies and unified, stringent building codes

Officials warn that earthquake damage could now be uniformly severe across plains and mountains

Previously, the older building bylaws offered slight concessions for development in areas classified under Zone 4. With the entire state now under the most severe classification, building codes must be standardised to withstand the highest seismic risks, potentially up to magnitude 8.

This presents a formidable financial challenge for Uttara-

khand, which already operates under constrained economic resources. Developing infrastructure—including roads, bridges, government offices, and schools—to withstand such powerful tremors will require significant capital investment.

State Disaster Management Secretary, Vinod Kumar Suman, confirmed the gravity of the situation. "In the older map, parts

of Uttarakhand were in Zone 4 and some in Zone 5. The newly issued map places the entire state in Zone 6, making the state significantly more vulnerable to earthquakes and disasters."

Suman emphasised the immediate steps required. "This involves amending the Building Bylaws. The Housing Department and the Central Building Research Institute (CBRI) in Roorkee will collaborate on this. We also need to focus on public training and awareness regarding protective measures and structural design."

Housing Department Principal Secretary R Meenakshi Sundaram clarified the existing regulations, noting that even under the older norms, earthquake-resistant technology was mandatory based on location, not just height. "People often incorrectly associate sensitivity only with multi-story buildings. If you are in a sensitive zone, you must build earthquake-resistant structures," Sundaram stated.

# Putin flags 'unacceptable' terms in US plan amid renewed bid to end war

Key differences remain on borders and how Ukraine will be shielded from future attacks

## UK sanctions GRU over Salisbury attack

LONDON: Britain on Thursday sanctioned Russia's Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces (GRU) and summoned Moscow's ambassador after an inquiry blamed Vladimir Putin for the 2018 nerve agent attack in Salisbury. Former spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter were poisoned with Novichok and survived, but British citizen Dawn Sturgess later died after exposure from a discarded perfume bottle. The inquiry said the operation was authorised at the highest level. Russia denied involvement and dismissed Skripal as irrelevant.

## UK, Norway step up naval defence

LONDON: Britain and Norway will launch joint naval patrols to protect undersea cables from Russia, the UK said on Thursday, after Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Norwegian counterpart Jonas Gahr Store held defence talks. A combined fleet of 13 warships will hunt Russian submarines and guard critical North Atlantic infrastructure. The move follows Norway's £10-billion frigate deal with Britain. The agreement was signed in London as leaders prepared to visit RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland, where crews track rising Russian naval activity closely.

## MOSCOW

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin says some proposals in a US plan to end the war in Ukraine are unacceptable to the Kremlin, indicating in comments published Thursday that any deal is still some ways off.

US President Donald Trump has set in motion the most intense diplomatic push to stop the fighting since Russia launched the full-scale invasion of its neighbor nearly four years ago. But the effort has once again run into demands that are hard to reconcile, especially over whether Ukraine must give up land to Russia and how it can be kept safe from any future aggression by Moscow.

Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, and son-in-law Jared Kushner, are set to meet with Ukraine's lead negotiator, Rustem Umerov, later Thursday in Miami for further talks, according to a senior Trump administration official who wasn't authorised to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. Putin said his five-hour talks Tuesday in the Kremlin with Witkoff and Kushner were "necessary" and "useful," but also "difficult work," and some proposals were unacceptable.

Putin spoke to the India Today TV channel before he landed Thursday in New Delhi for a state visit. Ahead of the broadcast of the full interview, Russian state news agencies Tass



The heavily-bombed city of Myrnohrad in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk region | AP

and RIA Novosti quoted some of his remarks in it.

Tass quoted Putin as saying that in Tuesday's talks, the sides "had to go through each point" of the US peace proposal, "which is why it took so long." "This was a necessary conversation, a very concrete one," he said, with provisions that Moscow was ready to discuss, while others "we can't agree to." Trump said Wednesday that Witkoff and Kushner came away from their marathon session confident that he wants to find an end to the war.

"Their impression was very strongly that he'd like to make a deal," he added. Putin refused to elaborate on what Russia could accept or reject, and none of the other officials involved offered details of the talks.

"I think it is premature. Because it could simply disrupt the working regime" of the peace effort, Tass quoted Putin as saying. European leaders, left on the sidelines by Washington as US officials engage directly with Moscow and Kyiv, have accused Putin of feigning interest in Trump's peace drive.

The Kherson Thermal Power Plant, which provides heat for over 40,000 residents, shut down Thursday after Russia pounded it with drones and artillery for several days, he said. Authorities planned emergency meetings to find alternate sources of heating, he said. Until then, tents were erected across the city where residents could warm up and charge electronic devices. AP

# KHALEDA ZIA TO BE FLOWN TO LONDON FOR TREATMENT

## DHAKA

A medical board looking after critically ill former Bangladesh prime minister Khaleda Zia on Thursday decided to send her to London for advanced treatment, her personal physician AZM Zahid Hossain said.

Zia, the 80-year-old Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson, will be flown in an air ambulance late after midnight or early Friday to London, where her elder son and acting BNP chief Tarique Rahman lives. After she developed a chest infection that affected both her heart and lungs, Zia was admitted to a private hospital here on November 23 and four days later, shifted to the coronary care unit (CCU) after several of her health complications worsened.

"The medical board has unanimously decided that she will be taken to London via the Qatar Royal Air Ambulance, either after midnight tonight or early tomorrow morning," Hossain told reporters during a briefing outside the hospital.

Hossain, who is also a member of BNP's policy making standing committee, however, did not explicitly

comment on Zia's current health condition.

During the last such briefing on Tuesday, he said Zia was responding to the treatment. Hossain's briefing confirmed earlier media reports that Zia's family was preparing to transfer her to London while adding that the decision for her urgent transfer was made by the extended medical board incorporating the recently arrived specialist teams from China and the United Kingdom. The BNP also issued a list saying 14 people, one of them being Syeda Shameela Rahman, wife of Zia's deceased younger son Arafat Rahman and six being doctors, who will accompany Zia to London. The others include a party leader and Zia's adviser Enamul Haque Chowdhury, two agents of the elite Special Security Force (SSF) provided by Muhammad Yunus' interim government and her personal aides.

Qatar had already offered to provide the air ambulance for Zia for taking her to London even as two military and air force helicopters on Thursday staged landing tests at the rooftop of the hospital, where she is admitted. She is likely to be flown from hospital to the airport by helicopter. PTI



Khaleda Zia

# Admiral briefs Congress on fiat to kill drug boat survivors

## WASHINGTON

THE Navy admiral who reportedly issued orders for the US military to fire upon survivors of an attack on an alleged drug boat arrived on Capitol Hill for a classified briefing Thursday with top congressional lawmakers overseeing national security.

Joining Adm Frank "Mitch" Bradley for the closed-door meeting was Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The information the Pentagon is expected to provide comes at a potentially crucial moment in the unfolding congressional investigation into how Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth handled the military operation in international waters near Venezuela. There are mounting questions over whether the strike may have violated the law.

Lawmakers are seeking a full accounting of the strikes after The Washington Post reported that Bradley on September 2 ordered an attack on two survivors to comply with Hegseth's directive to "kill everybody." Legal experts say the attack amounts to a crime if the survivors were targeted, and lawmakers on both sides of the aisle are demanding accountability.

The briefing in secure facility at the Capitol is with congressional leaders, including the Republican chairs and ranking Democrats of the House and Senate Armed Services committees, and separately to the GOP chairman and Democratic vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. AP

# Thai hostage's body returned from Gaza under ceasefire deal

## JERUSALEM

Remains that militants in Gaza handed to Israel as part of the first phase of the ceasefire deal were those of a Thai agricultural worker, Israeli and Thai officials said Thursday. The return of Sudthisak Rinthalak's remains leaves just one more hostage to be returned under the agreement.

Sudthisak was an agricultural worker who had been employed at Kibbutz Be'eri, one of the hardest-hit communities in the attack. Israeli officials said the 42-year-old was killed on Oct. 7, 2023, during the Hamas-led attack in Israel that triggered the Israel-Hamas war and that his body was taken by the militant group Islamic Jihad. He was officially declared dead on May 16, 2024.

Sudthisak's remains were returned Wednesday, a day after militants handed over remains that didn't match either of the last two hostages.

Thai Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nikorndej Balankura said Sudthisak's family has been notified and thanked the Israeli government for assistance that led to the release of all 31 Thai hostages taken at the start of the war. Of those, 28 were returned alive and three dead. Thai was the largest group of foreigners to be held in captivity. The Thai Foreign Ministry has said in addition to the hostages, 46 Thais have been killed during the war.

Israeli Ran Gvili is now the last hostage whose remains have yet to be returned. Gvili was an Israeli police officer



Sudthisak Rinthalak, an agricultural worker from Thailand who was abducted and brought to Gaza | AP

**WAR WATCH**  
ISRAEL-GAZA: DAY 788

**TOLL SO FAR**  
**70,142**

who helped people escape from the Nova music festival during the Oct. 7 attack and was killed fighting at another location.

Since the October 10 start of the ceasefire, 20 living hostages and the remains of 27 others have been returned to Israel.

# China, France pledge more cooperation on Kyiv, trade

## BEIJING

THE China and France pledged deeper cooperation on global issues like the war in Ukraine and trade, as France prepares to take on the presidency of the Group of Seven next year.

French President Emmanuel Macron met with China's Xi Jinping on Thursday morning as part of a three-day state visit focusing on trade and diplomacy. The French leader is seeking to involve Beijing in pressuring Russia toward a ceasefire with Ukraine after a recent burst of diplomacy around a US-led peace plan.

"We are facing the risk of the disintegration of the interna-

tional order that brought peace to the world for decades, and in this context, the dialogue between China and France is even more essential than ever," Macron said Thursday.

"I hope that China will join our call, our efforts to achieve, as soon as possible, at the very least a ceasefire in the form of a moratorium on strikes targeting critical infrastructure," he said. Xi did not say respond to France's call, but said that "China supports all efforts that work towards peace" and called for a peace deal that all parties will accept. China has provided strong diplomatic support to Russia since its invasion of Ukraine and has also extended



France's President Emmanuel Macron and China's President Xi Jinping walk during a state visit at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing | AP

an economic lifeline through increased trade. Xi also announced that China will provide \$100 million to help Gaza's ongoing humanitarian crisis and to support the territory's

recovery and reconstruction.

Xi called for building greater political trust with France by showing each other support while demonstrating each side's "independence."

"No matter how the external environment changes, both sides as major powers should always demonstrate independence and strategic vision, show mutual understanding and mutual support for each other on core matters and major critical issues," he said.

"China and France should demonstrate their sense of responsibility, raise high the banner of multilateralism ... and firmly stand on the right side of history," he added. AP

## EXPRESS READ

### Pak opens crossings for Afghan UN aid

PESHAWAR: Pakistan will allow the United Nations to send relief supplies to Afghanistan through the Chaman and Torkham border crossings, closed for nearly two months, an official said Thursday. Only UN cargo will be allowed, not trade or travel. Initial shipments will include food and medicines. The crossings were shut after cross-border attacks in October. Though a Qatar-brokered ceasefire holds, talks have stalled, and both sides blame each other today publicly.

## ASIA MATTERS

### INDONESIA

#### SEA WALL WORKS TO RESUME IN 2026

The provincial government has set aside funds to resume work on the giant coastal protection project in 2026, covering new sections in Pluit, Muara Angke and Kali Lencong, the governor said. By next year, 11.8 km of the planned 28.2-km wall will have been completed, with another 1.2 km targeted this year and next. Authorities said progress on sections handled by the central government is urgent. A key embankment finished earlier cost Rp52 billion. The project aims to curb tidal flooding and protect low-lying coastal districts from rising sea levels.



### MALAYSIA

#### PARLIAMENT WRAPS 35-DAY SESSION

Parliament ended its 35-day sitting on Thursday after passing 15 Bills, including the 2026 Budget. The Speaker said lawmakers also approved an Auditor General's report motion and two ministry motions. The session featured multiple briefings and outreach programmes, with more public engagement planned next year.

### THAILAND

#### ARMY FLAGS NEW LANDMINE PLANTING

Cambodian forces were accused on Thursday of planting newly manufactured PMN-2 anti-personnel landmines along the border after military investigators said they matched training footage with images taken at the site. Photographs, uniforms, equipment and identifying marks linked the soldiers in June drills to those burying mines. The army said the weapons violate the Ottawa Convention banning their use and deployment. It warned the fresh planting endangers lives and urged Cambodia to halt the activity, allow joint inspections and brief the international community.

# Asia flood death toll hits 1K

## PADANG

THE death toll from last week's catastrophic floods and landslides in parts of Asia surged past 1,500 on Thursday as rescue teams raced to reach survivors isolated by the disaster with hundreds of people still unaccounted for across the region.

The latest figure came as meteorologists warned of renewed rainfall across North Sumatra, West Sumatra, and Aceh in coming days, sparking fears of devastation in areas reeling under floods.

Tragedy was compounded by warnings, decades of deforestation by unchecked development, mining palm plantations may worsened devastation. AP

## LAST RESORT

# A 'frozen' sperm bank of hope in the race to save cheetahs

## CAPE TOWN

FOR 35 years, American zoologist Laurie Marker has been collecting and storing specimens in a cheetah sperm bank in Namibia, hoping conservationists never have to use them. But she worries that the world's fastest land animal might be on the brink of extinction one day and need artificial reproduction to save it.

Marker says the sperm bank

at the Cheetah Conservation Fund she founded in the southern African nation is a "frozen zoo" of cheetahs she's been building since 1990. It would be utilized in a worst-case scenario for the big cats, whose numbers have dropped alarmingly in the wild over the last 50 years.

"You don't do anything with it unless until it's needed," Marker, one of the foremost experts on cheetahs, told *The Associated Press* from her research



FILE: A cheetah descends from on top of a mound in the savannah of the Maasai Mara, Kenya | AP

center near the Namibian city of Otjiwarongo. "And we never want to get to that point."

Conservationists mark World Cheetah Day on Thursday with less than 7,000 of them left in the wild, similar numbers to the critically endangered black rhino. There are only around 33 populations of cheetahs spread out in pockets mainly across Africa, with most of those populations having less than 100 animals, Marker said.

Like so many species, the sleek cats that can run at speeds of 70 miles per hour are in danger from habitat loss, human-wildlife conflict and the illegal animal trade. Their shrinking, isolated groups are also narrowing the gene pool, hurting reproduction rates.

Globally, cheetah numbers in the wild have dropped by 80% in the last half-century and they've been pushed out of 90% of their historical range. AP



# Over half of NSE 500 stocks trade below peak levels

ARSHAD KHAN @ New Delhi

MORE than half of the companies in the NSE 500 index are currently trading at least 30% below their all-time peak levels, with many stocks continuing to hit fresh lows. This occurs even as the benchmark indices — the BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty50 — reached record highs in recent sessions. According to market experts, the rally in the market is primarily led by select bluechips while the overall sentiment, especially in the small-cap segment, remains muted.

“There isn’t one single trigger behind this fall. A combination of sector-wise cyclical moves, profit-booking, the ongoing US-India tariff tensions, and a weakening rupee has contributed to the pressure, despite the Nifty benchmark itself hitting new highs,” said Kunal V. Parar, Vice-President of Technical Research and Algo, Choice Broking. He advised that at current levels, investors should shift their focus toward value buying, where there is better visibility and a sense of capital safety.

As per an analysis of NSE 500 stocks, there are a handful of stocks that have fallen more than half from their 52-week highs. Stocks like Ola Electric,

TARIL, Isolation Energy, ZEN-TEC and PGEL have taken a big beating in the last 1 year.

Analysis of market activity indicates that small-cap stocks are facing the highest selling pressure among segments. While the benchmark Nifty50 and the Nifty Midcap 100 both reached new record highs earlier this week, the Nifty Small-cap 100 continues to lag significantly. In 2025, the small-cap index remains down by more than 6% and is still over 10% below its previous all-time high of 19,761 Prar of Choice Broking said that the coming year is expected to stay highly volatile, with the Union Budget in February, four key state elections, and global uncertainty around the tariff dispute likely to influence sentiment.

“These factors may create phases of weakness, but investors can use this volatility to accumulate quality stocks — only where long-term fundamentals remain strong. It is better to stay away from companies with poor financials or unclear visibility, rather than getting trapped in long periods of underperformance and losing opportunity cost,” he added. Despite the downturn, the NSE 500 pack is showing signs of a revival on hopes of better earnings by mid-cap stocks.



Investors should shift their focus toward value buying, where there is better visibility and a capital safety

Kunal V. Parar of Choice Broking

# RBI's balancing act ahead of MPC

With rupee on a free fall, experts feel MPC may prioritise currency stability over growth

BENN KOCHUVEEDAN @ Mumbai

THE Reserve Bank of India's monetary policy announcement on Friday is shaping up to be the toughest test yet for Governor Sanjay Malhotra in his first year at the helm. The MPC under him is navigating a rare trilemma: robust economic growth, a sharply weakening rupee, and inflation at multi-decade lows — conditions that ordinarily would have pointed to further monetary easing.

Complicating the policy calculus further is the unusually wide gap between the overnight repo rate and benchmark 10-year bond yields — now at 100-110 basis points, the highest ever — signalling tight liquidity conditions.

Despite this, many economists argue there is still room for a 25 bps repo rate cut, after the RBI reduced rates by 100 bps between February and June to 5.5%. But fund managers and currency experts warn that any such move could worsen the rupee's slide, which has fallen over 5.5% this fiscal.

On Thursday, the rupee hit a



## 'RBI intervention to rupee's swift fall'

LKP Securities' Jateen Trivedi said muted RBI intervention has contributed to the rupee's swift fall. Markets now await policy cues on whether the RBI is prepared to step in more decisively. Governor Malhotra has repeatedly stated that the RBI does not defend a particular rupee level/volatility. He recently remarked that the currency's weakness reflects “natural market dynamics”

fresh low of 90.49 against the dollar before clawing back to 89.92, helped by reported RBI intervention. The currency has now weakened for six straight sessions. The rupee's performance stands out for the wrong reasons: it is currently the

worst-performing Asian currency, and the third-weakest among emerging markets, behind the Argentine peso (-29.18%) and Turkish lira (-16.69%). “A repo rate cut now would invite further selling pressure on the rupee,” Anil

Kumar Bhansali, Finrex Treasury Advisors

DBS Bank economist Radhika Rao noted that authorities appear keen to keep the currency “competitive”, highlighted by the real effective exchange rate slipping below 100.

Gaura Sengupta, chief economist at IDFC First Bank, said the RBI faces a delicate trade-off between “preserving monetary policy independence and maintaining currency stability”.

An Axis Mutual Fund manager said the central bank will likely stay accommodative to prevent tighter financial conditions weighing on next year's GDP. They pointed to the rising trade deficit and delay in a tariff pact with the US as key drivers of the rupee's weakness.

Currency strategists remain wary of any premature easing. Abhishek Goenka, India Forex Asset Management, said the RBI appears to be following a “soft-touch” intervention strategy, partly because it is already running large short forward positions, including in offshore NDF markets.

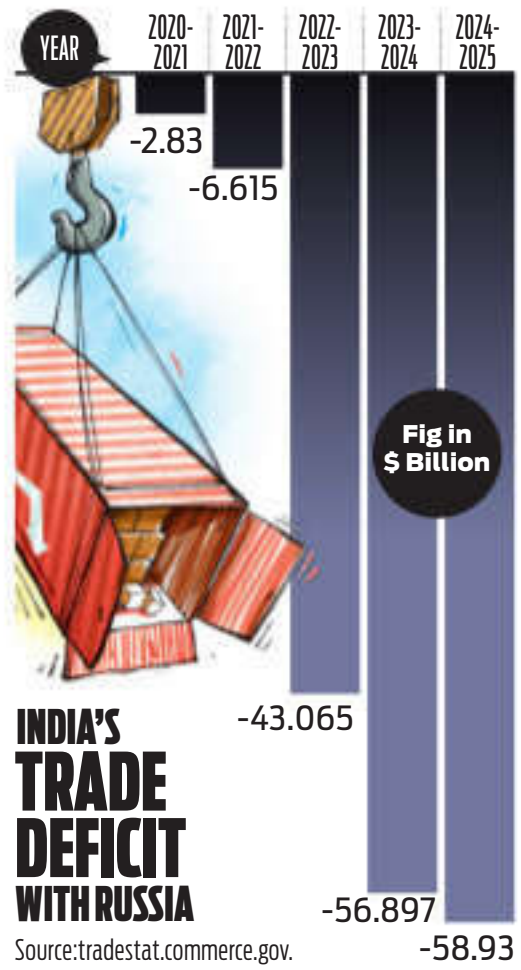
# Gold price to rise by 15-30% in 2026: WGC

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ New Delhi

GOLD prices could surge by 15-30% in 2026 if a severe, synchronised global downturn, fuelled by escalating geopolitical tensions, would intensify flight-to-safety trades, World Gold Council, a body of 30 gold mining companies, said in its latest report on Thursday. It, however, says if a renewed economic expansion forces the Fed to pause or even raise rates, higher yields and a stronger dollar could drive a 5-20% correction in gold as investors rotate into risk assets.

After a blockbuster year that saw gold soar more than 60% and repeatedly hit fresh highs, the WGC expects 2026 to be marked by heightened volatility as geopolitical and macroeconomic risks dictate market direction. Gold is currently trading around \$4,200/oz. It says even after strong investment flows — with \$77 billion flowing into gold ETFs in 2025 — total holdings remain well below levels seen in previous rally phases, giving “ample room for growth”.

# Moscow finds 6 key export areas for India, ready to ease rules



EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

RUSSIA has identified six key areas, including consumer goods, pharmaceuticals, telecom equipment where Indian exporters can sell its product in the former's market. As India Russia Business Forum began on Thursday, both the countries addressed the massive trade deficit India has with Russia, and they committed to minimise the trade imbalance, allowing more Indian exports to Russia.

## Ease conditions

Meanwhile, Russian bureaucrats further said that they are willing to ease several conditions, be it in terms of payments, certifications and other aspects, to ensure Indian exporters can enter the Rus-

sian markets.

“We need to bring more diversity in our trade basket. We need to make it more balanced, inter-state Russia and India. We need to add more variety,” said Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal during his opening remark at the Business Forum.

## Trade to \$100 bn

India and Russia aim to raise two-way trade to \$100 billion by 2030.

He highlighted that bilateral commerce between India and Russia has been heavily skewed.

Maxim Oreshkin, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office of the Russian Federation said, “There are six key areas where India can increase their ex-

ports of goods and services to Russia such as consumer goods, food and agricultural items, generic medicines and pharmaceuticals, telecom equipment, labour resources and machine parts.”

India's imports from Russia have risen nearly 12 times — from \$5.48 billion in FY2020-21 to \$63.81 billion in FY2024-25, according to data from the Ministry of Commerce.

However, India's exports to Russia have grown by only 84% over the same period, with Indian exporters continuing to face challenges in tapping the Russian market.

India's trade deficit with Russia has gone up by more than 20 times in just five years as it went \$2.8 billion in 2020-21 to

\$58.9 billion in FY 2024-25.

## 'Balanced trade'

“One of the key aspects that we need to address is not that how we trade more of what we are trading today, but we also need to look at how differently we can trade to make it balanced because we can't have a balanced trade until and unless the composition of goods that we trade with each other undergoes a change and that is where we feel India has a lot to offer,” said Rajesh Agrawal, Secretary, Department of Commerce.

India has faced several non-tariff barriers including more than 65 non-tariff barriers faced by its marine exports to Russia along with several other hurdles that its agricultural exports also face.

# EXPANSION PLAN ASG Eye Hosp to invest ₹2k cr to open 600 clinics by 2030

BENN KOCHUVEEDAN @ Mumbai

INDIA'S leading superspecialty eyecare chain ASG Eye Hospital has targeted to invest ₹2,000 crore to increase its footprint from 200 clinics to 600 clinics by 2030.

The hospital chain is already planning to raise ₹1,000-crore funds through IPO in the next 12-18 months.

The city-based hospital chain was founded by Dr Arun Singhvi a former MD with the AIIMS, New Delhi, 20 years ago. It is backed by private equity firms General Atlantic and Kedaara which had together put in \$188 million in July 2022 and Foundation Holdings.

The hospital chain's first investor was Sequea Capital in 2013, which had invested ₹40 crore and exited in 2019. These equity firms have 70% stakes in the chain.

The remaining 30% is held by him and has no plans to dilute further.

“Our plan is to reach every district in the country by 2030. Currently we are present in 175 full-fledged clinics in 75 cities across 24 states. By next March, we should be operating 220 clinics and by 2030 we should have 600-700 clinics or presence in all the districts,” MD and CEO Dr Arun Singhvi said here on Thursday.

On the revenue side, he said they are likely to close the current fiscal with ₹1,500 crore in topline, up from ₹1,142 crore in the past fiscal.

The company which follows a partnership model with other standalone clinics or doctors, has been profitable for many years now and has a cash balance of ₹400 crore, he said.

# E2W maker Ultraviolette gets \$45 million funding from Zoho, Italy's Lingotto

ARSHAD KHAN @ New Delhi

Electric motorcycle maker Ultraviolette secured \$45 million (nearly ₹404 crore) funding from India's Zoho Corporation, and Italy-based investment firm Lingotto as part of its ongoing Series E round, it said in a statement on Thursday. While the investment from Zoho Corporation was led by Sridhar Vembu, Mani Vembu and Kumar Vembu, Lingotto is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Exor NV, controlled by Italy's Agnelli family.

“Lingotto's legacy of backing iconic performance and mobility brands, combined with Zoho's long-term commitment to fostering cutting-edge Indian innovation, aligns perfectly with Ultraviolette's mission to build category-defining electric mobility solutions for India

and global markets,” said Narayan Subramaniam, co-founder & CEO, Ultraviolette.

The Bengaluru-based company did not disclose the full size of the round or on what valuations the funds were raised. A few months back, Ultraviolette had announced raising \$21 million from TDK Ventures, as part of this continuing fundraise. The funding comes at a time when Ultraviolette is planning to launch an IPO by the FY2027-28.

This capital raised is being used to accelerate the domestic and international scale-up of current products F77 and X-47 and future product platforms Shockwave and Tesseract, said the company in a statement. Ultraviolette has expanded to 30 cities across India and has plans to be in 100 cities by mid-2026.



# Fitch raises India's FY26 GDP growth estimate to 7.4% from 6.9%

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ New Delhi

INDIA'S strong economic momentum has prompted analysts to lift the country's GDP growth forecast for FY26. Rating agency Fitch has revised its India GDP estimate for FY26 to 7.4%, up from 6.9% projected earlier, after growth in the September quarter (Q2FY26) accelerated faster than expected.

GDP grew 8.2% year-on-year in Q2, compared to 7.8% in the previous quarter, led by resilient private consumption and improved real income levels. A sharp moderation in price pressures narrowed the gap between nominal and real GDP, with the GDP deflator rising just 0.5% from a year earlier.

Fitch in a report said that private consumption is expected to remain the main growth driver through the year, aided by improving consumer sentiment and the ongoing impact of GST reforms. It, however, anticipates some cooling in mo-



Private consumption is expected to remain the main growth driver through the year, aided by improving consumer sentiment and the ongoing impact of GST reforms

Fitch report

mentum in the second half of the fiscal year.

The agency has forecast the growth to gradually return toward trend levels over the medium term — easing to 6.4% in FY27 and further to 6.2% in FY28 — as inflation pressures trim purchasing power and public investment consolidates

under a tighter fiscal stance. Fitch says in its report that private investment is likely to pick up in the latter half of FY27 as financial conditions loosen. Net trade is expected to contribute modestly to growth as import demand normalises after a strong rebound in FY26.

Inflation hit a record low of 0.3% in October, thanks to a 3.7% year-on-year drop in food and beverage prices on the back of good monsoon rainfall and adequate stock levels. Core inflation remains above 4%, driven partly by high gold and silver prices. Base effects are expected to push headline inflation back above the RBI's target by end-2026.

With inflation softening and activity staying firm, Fitch expects the Reserve Bank of India to deliver one final policy rate cut in December, taking the repo rate to 5.25%, following 100 basis points of easing this year and a reduction in the cash reserve ratio to 3%.

# Syrma aims to make 2.1 mn sq mt of PCB as AP plant starts construction

SANAL SUDEVAN @ Chennai

SYRMA SGS Technology Ltd, an electronic manufacturing services (EMS) company, has commenced construction of its printed circuit board (PCB) manufacturing facility at Naidupeta in Andhra Pradesh.

The facility, being set up through its subsidiary Syrma Strategic Electronics Pvt Ltd at the Naidupeta Industrial Zone, is part of a ₹700-crore investment for which the company has secured a 50% capital subsidy from the state government. Syrma plans to initially manufacture 7.2 lakh sq mt of multi-layer PCBs and 4.8 lakh sq mt of single-layer PCBs annually.

At full operational capacity, the plant will be able to produce up to 2.1 million sq mt of multi-layer PCBs. Trial production is expected by December 2026, with commercial production scheduled to begin in April 2027. Civil construction is targeted for completion by June 2026, after which machinery installations will begin from July 2026. It currently operates two other facilities — a PCB assembly plant in Pune and a laptop assembly unit at the Tamarbar SEZ in Chennai.

To build skilled capabilities, Syrma will begin sending employees to South Korea and China for three-to-four-week training stints in semiconductor



manufacturing and machine operations. Employees will be trained in batches of four to five, with semiconductor training provided by its South Ko-

rean partner Shinhyup Electronics, which entered into a strategic joint venture with Syrma in September.

“We are in discussions with

companies in industrial electronics, automotive, energy metering and other sectors,” said Jasbir Singh Gujral, Managing Director, Syrma SGS. He said India's semiconductor ecosystem is moving toward backward integration — starting with PCB and motherboard manufacturing, with localisation of raw materials planned in the next phase.

While raw materials for PCBs and semiconductors will continue to be imported for now, domestic PCB supply is expected to grow significantly over the next two years. “We will start with copper-clad laminate (CCL) and high-density interconnect (HDI) PCBs two to

three years after commercial production of multi-layer PCBs begins in 2027,” he added.

The global PCB market is valued at about \$5 billion, with India accounting for ₹40,000-45,000 crore of demand. Nearly 90% of this is imported. The Indian PCB market is projected to expand to ₹70,000 crore by 2030, while domestic supply is expected to rise to ₹15,000-20,000 crore. “Cumulative investment capacity is around ₹7,000-10,000 crore. With an asset turnover ratio of 1-1.25 times, once the new plants become fully operational, India's PCB production should reach ₹15,000-20,000 crore — around 30% of domestic demand,” he said.



Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo began his first full four-year term as president of the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) after he was elected unopposed during its general body meeting here on Thursday. Pawan Singh was elected as the new secretary general as results of the sports body's elections were officially declared.

# Selection, bad timing, NADA presence behind mess

KIUG supposed to be for last academic session students; athletics, wrestling & weightlifting most affected because of doping history; other sports also affected

LIKE one national sports federation official puts it quite succinctly: It was like there were 20 officials for one competitor: The Khelo India University Games in Rajasthan is turning out to be an embarrassment for all stakeholders. As reported by this newspaper on Tuesday there were at least 20 athletics, one each in weightlifting and wrestling events where there was only one competitor.

kayaking and canoeing faced the same problem.

Each of the events had its own issues. The selection of athletes is done by the Association of India Universities (AIU) and its sports board. The NSF's provide officials for technical conduct of the Khelo India University Games. What makes it even more intriguing is that most of the NSF's where there have been low turnouts don't even recognize AIU sports. In inter-varsity events, technical conduct is not done by most NSF's either. Take for example, Athletics Federation of India, swimming federation, wrestling federation do not send their technical officials to conduct the inter-university competitions.

Late hosting After speaking with a handful of officials across sports and organizations, it can be safely surmised that the malaise runs deeper. One SAI official pointed out that there were more than



one reasons for low turnout. According to one official, selection is done by the AIU (and its sports board) with top eight given the spots in individual disciplines and is based on their all India inter-varsity results. And the cut off for this year's KIUG was last academic year. The hosting of KIUG in November-December led to more complication. This KIUG was supposed to be held for students of previous academic year. Timing has always been the biggest problem for both KIUG and Khelo India Youth Games. Take for instance the first KIUG was conducted in February-March, the next one in April-May, another in May-June. And November-December is usually considered end of the season in most sports. There is no fixed date or month in which

The KIUG, held under the aegis of the Sports Authority of India, is a flagship programme of the sports ministry. This time it is being held in Jaipur in collaboration with state sports council. The National Sports Federations provide technical support. Even on Wednesday, there were events in athletics where two or three athletes competed. This trend is not restricted to just athletics, wrestling and weightlifting. In fact other sports like swimming,

After speaking with a handful of officials across sports and organizations, it can be safely surmised that the malaise runs deeper. One SAI official pointed out that there were more than

one reasons for low turnout. According to one official, selection is done by the AIU (and its sports board) with top eight given the spots in individual disciplines and is based on their all India inter-varsity results. And the cut off for this year's KIUG was last academic year. The hosting of KIUG in November-December led to more complication. This KIUG was supposed to be held for students of previous academic year. Timing has always been the biggest problem for both KIUG and Khelo India Youth Games. Take for instance the first KIUG was conducted in February-March, the next one in April-May, another in May-June. And November-December is usually considered end of the season in most sports. There is no fixed date or month in which



FLIPSIDE INDRANEEL DAS

one reasons for low turnout. According to one official, selection is done by the AIU (and its sports board) with top eight given the spots in individual disciplines and is based on their all India inter-varsity results. And the cut off for this year's KIUG was last academic year. The hosting of KIUG in November-December led to more complication. This KIUG was supposed to be held for students of previous academic year. Timing has always been the biggest problem for both KIUG and Khelo India Youth Games. Take for instance the first KIUG was conducted in February-March, the next one in April-May, another in May-June. And November-December is usually considered end of the season in most sports. There is no fixed date or month in which



Page grab from December 3 edition highlighting low turnouts in athletics & few other sports in ongoing KIUG

the KIUG is hosted. There have been instances when vacant spots were filled (first KIUG). AIU had formed criteria where host University gets the first preference and co-host the second.

Add to this the athletes who have qualified. According to SAI, top eight are selected based on their rankings in their respective events. Some of them would have graduated or moved to some other university after completing their final academic session. Some of them would have got jobs and would have been here without 'bonafide certificate' and not eligible to com-

pete. In case an athlete has left the college and is working then he or she is not allowed to compete. Perhaps AIU should have been diligent enough to check whether all eight players were available. Even SAI should have cross-checked this. Interestingly, the AIU itself was in trouble after the World University Games. The sports ministry had reportedly said that they would disband the AIU back in July.

### No anti-doping in AIU?

The low turnout in athletics, weightlifting and wrestling — three sports with the worst doping record in the country — can

be attributed to presence of National Anti-Doping Agency's Dope Control Officials (DCOs). According to an official, the AIU doesn't follow anti-doping rules and do not involve NADA for sample collections as strictly as NSF's. The AIU's sports division itself is in trouble. A new director has been made in charge. A September circular on calendar said that a copy of the competitions both zonal and all India inter-university tournaments has been shared with NADA. "This calendar has already been communicated to the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) for planning dope

testing at Inter University Tournaments," said the circular published on AIU website. According to former AIU officials since last year they are getting more serious. The number of students is huge and could be a daunting task for NADA as well.

When it comes to the conduct of the all India inter-university Games, the AIU too is under the scanner. According to multiple NSF's, they do not send technical officials to conduct the inter-university competitions. The September circular this time says the AIU is planning to organize events with the help of NSF's. But whether it will be implemented needs to be seen.

### Category mess in lifting

New weight categories were introduced by the International Weightlifting Federation this season. The revised categories are eight, but the weightlifting competitions in inter-varsity competitions were held in 10 different weight categories.

Full story: newindianexpress.com

## Rishabh and middle-order conundrum for hosts India

GOMESH S @ Chennai

THREE FIVE EIGHT. That's a lot of runs across 50-overs. When India posted it batting first, they may have thought they were in a good place. Because South Africa needed a record to chase it down. A day removed from that record chase, attention has invariably turned towards India's squad construction.



It may be a case of hindsight but in an era when teams have tried to maximize power-hitting in the lower middle-order to set above par scores, especially on batting decks, there's a growing theory that India may be shortchanging themselves by picking both Washington Sundar and Ravindra Jadeja in the same team. They are both fine operators but they do not provide the kick needed in the last five-10 overs, that thrust.

Twice in as many games, the lack of that thrust meant the team just about made par after seemingly set for a score in excess of 370. It didn't matter in the first ODI when Washington

dya will walk into the XI in a full-strength team. When that happens, one of Jadeja or Sundar will not play. But for the time being, the leadership group wants a spin-bowling all-rounder in the top five. While there is merit to having a spin-bowling all-rounder (in this case Washington) in the top five, it becomes an issue when combined with KL Rahul and Jadeja in the middle-order. To put into context, Jadeja strikes at 117.3 in the last ten overs of ODIs since 2020. In this phase and period, Rahul averages 46.7 and strikes at 149. In 19 innings, Washington averages 20.27 and strikes at 82.02 in death overs.

### What about Pant

Which brings focus on Rishabh Pant. Post Pant's injury, Rahul has made the middle-order his own. In his limited career, Pant strikes at 180.1 and averages 28.6 during the last 10 overs. In Visakhapatnam, India have a chance to use him as keeper-batter.

Full story: newindianexpress.com

## LEFT IS RIGHT FOR MIDFIELDER HUGHSON OF ENG

CHANDRA PRABHU @ Chennai

IN a sport where 'left is apparently not right', Matthew Hughson of England may well be continuing the trend of left-handed hockey players from the country after midfielder Ashley Jackson retired in 2021.

Hughson has been a rock at the back for England in the ongoing FIH Hockey Men's Junior World Cup campaign. Apart from the 3-5 defeat to the Netherlands in the pool stage, which eventually cost them a place in the quarterfinals, the 21-year-old has been part of the defence that would concede only two goals in their next two pool games (13-0 vs Austria, 3-1 vs Malaysia). On Thursday, the defender helped maintain that defensive authority in their 3-1 win against Chile in the 9-16 quarterfinals here at the Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium.



The left-handed player grew up playing multiple sports in Surrey, in the South of England. His parents Jo and Eric Hughson, who were amongst the handful of English supporters in the pavilion, explained how their son initially played multiple sports. "He played cricket and golf with his right hand, and tennis with his left hand," Jo, the mother, told this daily.

But the sport of hockey had captured his imagination, according to the parents. "He played hockey in school (in Scotland) amongst other sports like rugby and cricket, but hockey was his passion.

He has gone from school to club and then the country," said Eric, Matthew's father.

Playing sports which involved using both hands has made it easy for Matthew to play hockey with his right hand "Playing them definitely helped. Getting your hand-eye coordination right helped with moving across," he said after England's win.

His position in the current team as a defender demands him to defend as well as contribute to the attack. His left handedness, he says, helps him with making "punching passes." "I think it is a bit of physics, like, top of the stick — stronger lever. This helps me with the punching passes," he added.

### 'Rules are fine'

The International Hockey Federation (FIH) effectively prohibits left-handed sticks by requiring that the playing side of the stick must be on the left of the player. This makes all the players, right handed players. This could be in force in a bid to maintain uniformity.

Hughson felt that uniformity should remain. "I think it would be so confusing to defend (if left-handed sticks are introduced). If some people would carry on one side and others on the other side, it'd just be tough work, wouldn't it?" he explained.

Presently, Hughson is a third year student at Durham University and plays for the Surbiton Hockey Club based in Surrey. He is touted as one of the burgeoning talents



Action from the match between South Africa & Malaysia at the Junior Hockey WC in Chennai on Thursday. South Africa won the match 3-1 | ASHWIN PRASATH

## Belgium challenge for home team

CHENNAI: The hosts, who have impressed with their brand of hockey, face Belgium for a place in the last four. The PR Sreejesh-coached team, yet to concede a single goal, went to Madurai and came back with a neat 5-0 win to round out their pool obligations but the business end of the tournament starts now. They will fancy themselves against Belgium, a vastly inexperienced side, whose juniors don't play as often as a group. The tourists also lost a game in the group stage before relying on goal difference to make it through. In fact, the last time the junior World Cup was held in India, these two sides faced each other in the quarterfinals, with India prevailing 1-0. India's forwards have been on song even though penalty corner conversions have remained a worry but this is now a global trend. "Definitely, there are areas to improve," Sreejesh said after the final group game against Switzerland. "From the next match onwards, the real tournament is starting and it is really important for us to focus on those areas. "The amount of times we are entering the circle, we need to convert them into PCs or goals or shots. And we need to tighten our defence too, we are conceding some unwanted PCs. It is really important for us to focus on the defensive structure more and allow the forwards to go up and attack."

### Quarterfinal fixtures

(From noon, India match slated to begin at 8.00 PM): Spain vs New Zealand, France vs Germany, Netherlands vs Argentina, India vs Belgium

### Results

Madurai: Namibia 2-2 Austria (Austria won 2-0 in penalty shootouts); Bangladesh 13-0 Oman, Korea 6-3 Egypt, China 3-2 Canada

Chennai: England 3-1 Chile, South Africa 3-1 Malaysia, Switzerland 2-5 Ireland, Australia 1-0 Japan

LIVE ON JIHOTSTAR AND STAR SPORTS

back home, and would be keen to emulate someone like Jackson, one of the country's leading goal scorers.

Hughson recalled the time where he played against Jackson in a club-level match. "I

have not got the opportunity to talk to him but as our coach Barry Middleton (of Surbiton) said, there are loads of good players who are left-handed. You can use it as an advantage," he explained.

### EXPRESS READ

#### Erigaisi beats Anand to win Jerusalem Masters

JERUSALEM: GM Arjun Erigaisi beat five-time world champ Viswanathan Anand in an all-Indian final to clinch the Jerusalem Masters title here. After the duo drew the opening rapid games, Erigaisi struck in the first blitz tie-break match by winning with white pieces to take a decisive lead. He also held a winning position in the second blitz tie before settling for a draw.



Chennai's Roos van Reek (R) hits a return on Thursday | INDIAN PICKLEBALL LEAGUE

## Indian Pickleball League: Chennai seal playoffs spot

ENS/AGENCIES @ New Delhi

WITH a perfect record after four games, Chennai Super Warriors became the first team to confirm a playoff spot in the Indian Pickleball League — which is sanctioned by the Indian Pickleball Association under the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports. Chennai beat Bengaluru Blasters 4-2, after Lucknow Leopards and Capital Warriors Gurgaon had earlier played out a 3-3 draw.

Bengaluru, fresh off their maiden win a day earlier, ran into unbeaten Chennai in the second tie of the day. Phuc Huynh gave Bengaluru the ideal launch, outlasting Aman Patel 15-13 in men's singles. Chennai steadied through Mitchell Hargreaves and Harsh Mehta, who edged Huynh and Arjun Singh 15-12 after a gritty, point-

for-point kitchen-line battle.

From there on, Roos van Reek took charge once again, racing to a 10-5 lead before closing out a commanding 15-5 win — her fourth straight in the league — over Pei Chuan Kao. Bengaluru snapped Chennai's unbeaten women's doubles run with a crisp 15-8 victory, leveling the tie again at 2-2. Chennai, however, were in no mood to let their perfect record slip. They burst ahead in the Grand Rally and closed out a dominant 21-10 finish to seal their fourth straight tie, 4-2. Mehta and Van Reek claimed the Players of the Tie honours.

Chennai lead with 12 points after four straight wins. Hyderabad are second while Lucknow occupy the third spot. Gurgaon, Bengaluru are fourth and fifth, respectively.

### RESULTS

Chennai Super Warriors 4-2 Bengaluru Blasters; Lucknow Leopards 3-3 Capital Warriors Gurgaon.

#### Arsenal extend PL lead, Chelsea beaten at Leeds

LONDON: Arsenal edged out Brentford 2-0 to restore their five-point lead at the top of the Premier League on Wednesday as Chelsea slumped to a 3-1 defeat at struggling Leeds. Liverpool needed a late Nordi Mukiele own-goal to avoid another damaging defeat at home in a 1-1 draw with Sunderland, while Aston Villa climbed up to third after a 4-3 victory at Brighton.

#### Guwahati Masters: Tanvi, Ashmita in last 8

GUWAHATI: Indian shuttlers, including Tanvi Sharma and Ashmita Chahla, continued the country's dominance at the Guwahati Masters Super 100 badminton tournament, the duo entering the quarterfinals in women's singles here. Tanvi beat Thailand's Passa-Orn Phannachet 21-17, 23-21 while Chahla beat compatriot Anmol Kharb 16-21, 21-17, 21-16.

### THE ASHES

## Root, Starc share honours on Day 1

AFP @ Brisbane

JOE Root finally scored his maiden Test century in Australia on his fourth Ashes tour to guide England from a precarious 5-2 to 325-9 at stumps after a pulsating first day of the second Ashes Test in Brisbane on Thursday.

Mitchell Starc became the most successful left-arm fast bowler in history as he claimed 6-71, but the opening sessions of the day-night contest were dominated by Root, who scored a masterful 135 not out.

Number 11 Jofra Archer thrilled the travelling army of fans as he smashed a career-

best unbeaten 32 off 26 balls with two sixes to provide some late fireworks.

His unbroken 10th-wicket partnership of 61 with Root was a record for England at the Gabba. The world's top-ranked batsman, Root had failed to reach triple figures on three previous Ashes tours. But the man who is



England's Joe Root celebrates after hitting a century against Australia on Thursday | AP

second on the all-time run-scoring list behind only Sachin Tendulkar silenced the critics who said he couldn't be considered a true batting great until he had made a century in Australia.

"Unbelievable day for Joe. He has had that coming for a long time. I'm chuffed for him," said Zak Crawley, who made 76 and shared a 117-run stand for the third wicket with Root.

Coming to the crease in the third over at 5-2 with Starc swinging the new pink ball, he embarked on an epic knock, bringing up his century with a leg glance to the fine leg boundary off Scott Boland.

## Sai Kishore and Jagadeesan lift Tamil Nadu

ENS @ Chennai

R Sai's Kishore (87 n.o off 39) and Narayan Jagadeesan (83 off 49) helped Tamil Nadu post a 61-run victory over Tripura in the Group D clash of the ongoing Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy in Ahmedabad.

TN were in reeling at 4/26 when Sai Kishore joined captain Narayan Jagadeesan. The duo stitched a partnership of 119 runs to help team post 204/5 in 20 overs. Tripura, in reply, were bowled out for 143.

Brief scores (select): Kerala 178/5 in 20 ovs (S Samson 46) bt Mumbai 163 in 19.4 ovs (S Khan 52, KM Asif 5/24); Chhattisgarh 158/6 in 20 ovs (S Singh 46) lost to Andhra 159/2 in 18.5 ovs (S Rasheed 59 n.o); J&K 112 in 19.3 ovs (S Khajuria 35) lost to Hyderabad 115/6 in 15.1 ovs; TN 204/5 in 20 ovs (N Jagadeesan 83, Sai Kishore 87) bt Tripura 143 in 18.5 ovs.

## COMPONENT SHORTAGE, PRODUCT DELAYS TO DENT SMARTPHONE INDUSTRY GROWTH IN 2026

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

GLOBAL smartphone shipments in 2026 are expected to decline 0.9% against the previous projection of 1.2% growth, IDC said in its latest report. The downward revision in forecast is mainly due to component shortages and changes in product launch schedules.

IDC reports that Apple's decision to shift the launch of its next base iPhone model from late 2026 to early 2027 will reduce iPhone shipments by 4.2% next year. In addition, a continuing global memory shortage is expected to limit supply and increase component prices. This will affect low- and mid-range Android smartphones the most, as they are more sensitive to rising costs.

Because of these issues, total smartphone shipments are expected to see a small decline in 2026. However, the average selling price of smartphones is projected to rise to \$465, pushing the market's overall value to a record \$578.9 billion.

"As memory components become more limited and more expensive, manufacturers face increasing pressure to raise prices," said Anthony Scarsella, research director at IDC's Worldwide Quarterly Mobile Phone Tracker. "Some brands will have no choice but to increase prices, while others will shift their product mix toward higher-priced models to absorb the impact. Next year will be challenging for the industry, but IDC still expects record ASPs."

Meanwhile, Apple is on track for a record year in 2025, with shipments expected to exceed 247 million units, according to IDC. The report credits this strong performance to the exceptional success of the iPhone 17 series.



# Why Sanchar Saathi is in the eye of storm

RAKESH KUMAR @ New Delhi

LAST week, a surprise directive from the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) to pre-install the government's Sanchar Saathi App on all smartphones sold in India created a huge uproar. Mobile manufacturers such as Apple, Samsung, Xiaomi, and others were instructed to install this cybersecurity app on all new devices. Companies were given 90 days to comply, and the order specified that users should not be able to remove or disable the app.

While the government called it a cybersecurity app, the Opposition criticised it as a surveillance tool. Later, Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia clarified that the app would not be mandatory and users can delete it anytime.

According to the government, the app has been proved to be effective in fighting mobile-related crimes. With over 1.2 billion mobile users in India, issues ranging from mobile fraud to impersonation to phone theft are common. Official figures show that the app has helped recover over 7 lakh stolen phones, of which 50,000

were recovered in October alone. This has raised questions about what the Sanchar Saathi app is and why the government wanted it pre-installed on all devices.

### What is the app for?

According to the DoT portal, Sanchar Saathi is a citizen-centric initiative aimed at empowering mobile subscribers, improving their security, and raising awareness about government initiatives. The app is available for download on smartphones and also as a web portal at [www.sancharsaathi.gov.in](http://www.sancharsaathi.gov.in). It offers a variety of services to keep users informed and secure.

### Major features

Chakshu: The Chakshu feature lets users report suspicious communications that could be related to fraud, cybercrime, financial scams, or impersonation. This includes calls, SMS, or WhatsApp messages that appear to be from official sources such as DoT, TRAI, or the police. It's important to note that Chakshu is not for reporting financial frauds or cybercrimes; for



### REPORT ILLEGAL INTERNATIONAL CALLS

Users can report international calls that appear to be from a local Indian number. These calls often originate from illegal telecom exchanges abroad and are sent to Indian citizens disguised as local calls. Reporting these helps the government stop illegal telecom operations that cause financial losses and pose national security risks

those, users should contact the cybercrime helpline at 1930 or visit [cybercrime.gov.in](http://cybercrime.gov.in).

Block Lost/Stolen Phones: Users can block their lost or stolen mobile phones through the app by filling out a form on the website. The handset will be blocked from the Indian telecom network within 24 hours.

Once the phone is traceable, users will receive an SMS with the report. This traceability report is

also shared with local police for recovery.

Track Your Mobile Connections: The app helps users track how many mobile connections are registered under their name. An individual can have up to 9 connections across all telecom providers, and 6 connections in J&K, Assam, and North East India.

This feature also helps identify SIM cards issued in the user's name without their knowledge and allows users to check if their phone's IMEI is genuine, which is useful when buying second-hand phones.



*"If you want to delete it, then delete it. If you don't want to use it, then don't register it. If you register it, it will remain active. If you don't register it, it will be inactive"*

— Jyotiraditya Scindia



RAKESH KUMAR @ New Delhi

SMARTPHONE brand Realme is scaling its market position in the AIoT (Artificial Intelligence of Things) space and become one of the top AIoT brands in India within the next 2-3 years, said an executive.

Realme, which currently holds the 9th position in India's smartphone market according to Counterpoint Research, plans to transition to a full AIoT portfolio, including end-to-end production in India for smartwatches, earbuds, and other accessories by 2027.

The company has already partnered with homegrown Optimus Electronics Limited (OEL) to manufacture Realme's AIoT devices in India. To achieve its goal, the executive explained that Realme will expand its R&D capabilities and make significant investments in India-based design and testing facilities to co-create AIoT devices.

India will serve as the foundation for Realme's global AIoT

## Realme aspires to become No 1 AIoT brand in India in 3 years

strategy, acting as the export hub for its AIoT pipeline. The company also plans to ship AIoT products from India to markets including Russia.

### Watch 5

On Thursday, Realme launched the Realme Watch 5, which is fully manufactured in India through its partnership with Optimus Electronics. As part of Realme's vision to transition 100% of its AIoT products to local production within three years, the Watch 5 showcases India-first innovation, localized component sourcing, and a growing domestic AIoT ecosystem.

In terms of features, the Realme Watch 5 boasts a 1.97-inch AMOLED display with a premium build, independent

GPS, 108 sports modes, advanced health monitoring, and up to 20 days of battery life in light mode.

### Local manufacturing

The company emphasised that local manufacturing will position India as a key hub for exporting AIoT devices to South Asia, the Middle East, and the European Union. It will also generate over 2,000 direct employment opportunities in the country while making AIoT products more accessible due to lower production costs.

"The impact of our local manufacturing in India will accelerate the localized production of critical components, including PCBs, batteries, mechanics, chargers, and cables," said the executive.

## Foldable smartphone shipments surge 14% in Q3 2025, driven by Samsung and Motorola

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

GLOBAL shipments of foldable smartphones grew by 14% year-over-year (YoY) in the third quarter of 2025, setting a new record for the category, according to a recent report by Counterpoint Research. Foldable phones now account for 2.5% of total smartphone shipments worldwide, as more premium users are adopting these devices.

### Top brands

The growth was mainly driven by book-type foldable models, led by Samsung's launch of the Galaxy Z Fold7 and the continued popularity of Huawei's Mate series. Clamshell foldables, like Samsung's updated models and Motorola's Razr 60 series, also saw increased sales.

Samsung's Galaxy Z Fold7 had a major impact on the market, thanks to its slimmer design, lighter weight, stronger hinge, and reduced crease visibility. These improvements made the device more ap-

pealing to premium users. Huawei's Mate series continued to perform well, while HONOR and vivo also contributed with refreshed foldable offerings. Motorola emerged as a strong performer, expanding its foldable market share through competitive pricing, strong partnerships, and positive reviews of its Razr 60 series.

### Future outlook

The foldable smartphone market is expected to see strong year-end growth, finishing 2025 with a solid mid-teens YoY increase. The market is growing as more premium users are drawn to the larger screens and improved durability of foldable phones. Looking ahead to 2026, the market is expected to expand further, with advancements in durability, thinner hinge structures, and AI-driven features. Apple is expected to enter the foldable

smartphone market in the second half of 2026, which could boost overall adoption.

### More innovation

The growing competition is pushing companies to focus more on innovation. Ahead of Apple's entry into the market, smartphone makers are experimenting with new designs and preparing their portfolios for the next phase of foldable devices. One example is Samsung's new tri-fold model, which goes beyond the traditional book-type foldable. While the tri-fold model will initially be available in limited quantities, it is being used as a test to improve technology and gather feedback from users.

"Samsung's first tri-fold model will ship in very limited volumes, but scale is not the objective," said Liz Lee, associate director at Counterpoint Research. "With competition expected to shift significantly in 2026, especially with Apple entering the foldable market, Samsung is using this device to test its technology, improve durability, and optimize software before a larger-scale launch."



## Cognizant doubles upskilling goal to 2 million individuals

Cognizant Technology Solutions on Thursday announced an expansion of its Synapse initiative, setting a new target to upskill a total of two million individuals by 2030. Having already surpassed its original goal of one million by 2026 ahead of

schedule, the company said the move underscores its commitment to building a digitally future-ready workforce. The rapid evolution of AI is reshaping jobs globally. Cognizant said Synapse aims to meet this challenge through a company-wide effort that advances learning and

development, strengthens technology partnerships, and increases community investments. Synapse is designed to break socio-economic, cultural and language barriers by supporting job seeker skilling, employee-led STEM education initiatives, and partnerships with governments, academic institutions, nonprofits and industry leaders.



## GIGABYTE promotes clean PC builds with new campaign

GIGABYTE, a leading global PC brand, has launched its 'Stealth Revolution' campaign, spotlighting the clean PC build aesthetic through its new Stealth Ice Series components. Built on a cableless and pure-white design theme, the campaign encourages creators to assemble and showcase their dream PC setups

using the X870 Aorus Stealth Ice motherboard. First introduced in 2022, Gigabyte's Project STEALTH adopted reverse connectors on motherboards to simplify cable management. The latest Stealth Ice series advances that design, making assembly faster, neater, and more flexible for custom cooling, RGB lighting, and decorative elements. The series includes the X870 and B850 Aorus Stealth Ice motherboards and the C500 Panoramic Stealth Ice chassis offering a seamless pure-white build with a 270-degree panoramic view.

Gigabyte has also partnered with 10 leading chassis brands—including Cooler Master, InWin and LIAN LI.



## Binance launches crypto app for kids and teenagers

Binance has rolled out Binance Junior, a new parent-controlled app and sub-account designed for users aged 6-17, offering families a safe entry into digital finance and crypto wealth creation. The platform enables parents to open and manage crypto savings accounts for their children, who can earn returns via Binance Flexible Simple Earn. Trading remains prohibited, and transfers are strictly monitored, with daily limits and restrictions on transfers to non-parent adults. Parents receive notifications on all activity and can disable the account instantly. Aimed at boosting early financial and digital literacy, the app supports teens to initiate transfers where

regulations permit, while ensuring a fully supervised environment. "With crypto becoming an integral part of daily finance, the next generation is at the crux of this revolution, highlighting the importance of investing in their future," Binance said in a statement.



## BoiPoka launches new app to connect readers through books

BoiPoka Labs has launched BoiPoka, a mobile app that digitises a user's physical bookshelf with a single photograph and helps them discover others with shared reading interests. Founded by Meera Raman, former Chief Strategy Officer at Merkle India, the platform uses AI to scan book spines and instantly turn collections into organised, searchable digital libraries. Users can then explore their catalogues, find "Book Twins", create reading groups, and build communities around shared interests.



With the global book market exceeding \$130 billion, BoiPoka aims to become a key digital interface for readers and a data-rich insights platform for publishers. The app will support curated discovery through bookstores, structured reading programmes with libraries and educational institutions, and collaborative community discussions. "Readers have always found common ground in ideas. We wanted to honour that," Raman said.