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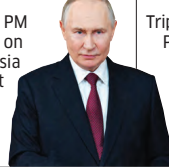
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Triple punch: Lovlina,
Parveen, Ankush
strike gold at
Asian Games



PIONEER IN SHORT

SIR: ECI ORDERS TO RESTORE VOTERS

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has directed State Poll officials to launch a special drive to identify 'left-out' and new voters in electoral rolls in areas where the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) has been completed. The exercise will seek to re-enrol eligible voters omitted or deleted during the revision and register first-time and young voters. In an official communication issued on Thursday after a virtual meeting with state chief electoral officers, the ECI stressed that voter registration is an ongoing process and no eligible citizen should be disenfranchised for not being included during SIR enumeration. Booth Level Officers (BLOs) have been asked to compare current rolls with pre-SIR lists, identify voters whose names were dropped and conduct house-to-house verification. Each BLO has been tasked with covering 20-25 electors a week, with the exercise to be completed within a month. BLOs will collect Form 6 applications on the spot and share lists with Booth Level Agents of recognised parties. The move follows Opposition allegations that the SIR exercise disenfranchised eligible voters and that the ECI and the CEO acted in tandem with the BJP.

The Bystander



NINE HELD IN LPU VIOLENCE CASE

Nine people, including seven Lovely Professional University (LPU) students, have been arrested in connection with violence on the university campus, Jalandhar Range DIG Hoven Singh said on Friday. Two FIRs have been registered over arson, looting, rioting, damage to infrastructure, torching of police vehicles, attacks on police and blocking of the national highway. Singh said the arrests were based on CCTV footage, technical analysis and social media and media posts. One of those arrested is a juvenile. Four people were arrested in Phagwara, two in Jammu and Kashmir and two in Mumbai. The ninth suspect was also identified by police. Twenty people have been nominated in the case, the DIG said. Police said the violence followed a viral social media post on September 26 alleging that a female student had been raped in a hostel and that no action had been taken.

NEW RULES TO GOVERN TRIBUNAL POSTS, PAY

The Government has notified rules governing the National Tribunals Commission, aimed at standardising recruitment, eligibility, service conditions and remuneration for tribunal chairpersons and members. The rules, issued by the Union Law Ministry on September 30 and published on Thursday, empower the newly constituted commission to appoint chairpersons and members to 16 tribunals and appellate bodies. Under the National Tribunals Commission and Qualification, Selection and Conditions of Service of Chairpersons and Members of Tribunals Rules, 2026, the commission chairperson will receive ₹2.5 lakh a month and members ₹2.25 lakh. Similar remuneration will apply to tribunal chairpersons and members, subject to specified exceptions.

Women break 44-year jinx, win Asiad hockey gold

Alongside hockey glory, Indian boxers, wrestlers and archers powered a remarkable medal haul on one of the biggest days for the country

RAHUL DATTA ■ New Delhi

Indian athletes stood atop the Asian Games podium six times on Friday. On a day of gold medals rush, the women's hockey team emerged winners defeating defending champions China in the final, ending the 44-year drought. Boxers Ankush Panghal, Parveen Hooda and Lovlina Borgohain punched their way for the gold medal besides Sujet starring in wrestling. Lovlina Borgohain won the coveted medal for the first time on her birthday. The women's recurve team's stunning win over 10-time Olympic champions South Korea for a historic gold headlined a highly productive day for the country in the archery competition. It was India's best achievement. This sterling performance by the Indian sports persons is praiseworthy as the Asia Games are considered the most competitive after the Olympics.

While the outstanding show by our sports persons deserves all the accolade, it is hockey which rules the hearts of the nation. Our women ended a 44-year wait for the Asian Games women's hockey gold and qualified for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics with a performance built on one stunning strike and an extraordinary rearguard action beating Olympic silver-medallists



Indian players pose for photographs after winning gold medal in the women's hockey in the ongoing Asian Games 2026 in Gifu, Japan on Friday. India's first Asian Games gold medal in women's hockey secures a direct berth at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics

China 1-0 in the final. Lalremliam's superb reverse-stick strike in the 10th minute gave India the lead, but it was goalkeeper Bichu Devi's heroics and defence that refused to yield that ultimately settled the final. With China throwing everything at them, India absorbed wave after wave of pressure, putting their bodies on the line to protect their slender advantage and complete a memorable triumph. For India, the victory delivered two long-awaited prizes — their first Asian Games women's hockey gold since 1982 and direct qualification for the Los Angeles Olympics, a key target for coach Soer Marjine's side.

The final began an hour behind schedule after the team buses of both teams were caught in a traffic snarl caused by an accident unrelated to either side. But once the contest got underway, India made their mark early and then showed the resilience to withstand everything China threw at them. The breakthrough came when Sakshi Rana threaded a pass into the circle to find Lalremliam near the goal. The forward made no mistake, unleashing a fierce reverse-stick hit on the run that sent the ball crashing into the upper netting, leaving the Chinese goalkeeper with no chance.

CONTINUED ON ► P4

VANDE BHARAT SETS 100 KMPH RECORD OVER CHENAB BRIDGE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jammu

Minister for Railways Ashwini Vaishnaw on Friday announced that Vande Bharat Express has set a new record by crossing the world's highest railway bridge, the Chenab Bridge, and India's first cable-stayed railway bridge, the Anji Bridge, at 100 km/h on the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL).



Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw speaking at a cabinet briefing

Minister shared a video of Vande Bharat Express crossing the Chenab Bridge. "100 km/h over India's engineering pride", wrote the Railways Minister. "The maximum permissible speed on the 11-km-long Shri Mata Devi Kaaba-Banailal section has been increased from 75 kmph to 100 kmph," Senior Divisional Commercial Manager Uchit Singh said in a statement here in Jammu. The upgrade is expected to make train operations on the USBRL smoother, cut travel time, and offer passengers a faster, safer, and more comfortable journey.

CONTINUED ON ► P4



Passengers check in their luggage with Flydubai at Ben Gurion International Airport, near Tel Aviv, Israel

UAE terms flydubai attack a terrorist act

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has termed the mid-air attack aboard a flydubai flight from Dubai to Tel Aviv as a terrorist act and praised Indian captain Smit Machchhar, who was stabbed while helping avert a potential disaster involving more than 170 passengers. UAE presidential adviser Anwar Gargash said on Friday that Machchhar was a hero and deserved "every appreciation, for in confronting a serious terrorist act and a potential disaster, he embodied the true meaning of courage and responsibility." "100 km/h over India's engineering pride", wrote the Railways Minister. "The maximum permissible speed on the 11-km-long Shri Mata Devi Kaaba-Banailal section has been increased from 75 kmph to 100 kmph," Senior Divisional Commercial Manager Uchit Singh said in a statement here in Jammu. The upgrade is expected to make train operations on the USBRL smoother, cut travel time, and offer passengers a faster, safer, and more comfortable journey.

CO-PILOT PLANNED CRASH: NETANYAHU

New Delhi: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Friday that the co-pilot accused of attacking the captain of a flydubai flight underwent radicalisation and wanted to bring the aircraft down with everyone on board. "As time passes, the picture becomes clearer: the perpetrator underwent Islamist radicalisation. He came to smash the plane with its passengers on board," Netanyahu said. "We are investigating whether he was sent, and whoever sent him will pay a very heavy price."

aircraft lost significant altitude before diverting and landing safely.

CONTINUED ON ► P4

Couldn't let them die: Captain Machchhar tells PM

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday spoke over the phone with Captain Smit Machchhar, who averted an alleged terror incident on board an Israel-bound flydubai flight. Machchhar is currently undergoing treatment at a hospital in the UAE. During the conversation, the PM observed how the incident could have affected the perception of Indian pilots had events unfolded differently. Modi spoke to the pilot, who, "I was fighting for my life, but I was determined not to let others die. It was such a crucial moment. There was a moment when I realised that if I don't do something — because I was lying on the



PM Modi interacting with Captain Smit Machchhar, who is currently undergoing treatment at a hospital in the UAE, during a video call, in New Delhi

ground (in cockpit), I could feel that the aircraft was going down," flydubai Captain Smit Machchhar told PM Modi on Friday while recounting the incident. Machchhar, who was stabbed and seriously

injured by his co-pilot in the cockpit of flydubai flight FZ1073 while travelling from Dubai to Tel Aviv on Wednesday, gave a detailed account of the incident to the PM during the video call. He, however, did not disclose

what triggered the attack on him or the motive of the co-pilot. PM Modi lauded the pilot's bravery, presence of mind and composure, and said Machchhar took a split-second decision that saved lives. Machchhar shared that whenever he faces difficulty, he recites the Hanuman Chalisa, a hymn devoted to Lord Hanuman. "I was on the floor (of the cockpit) injured. With whatever energy that was left with me, I managed to act properly and saved the plane," the pilot said. Machchhar said he was repeatedly beaten and sustained multiple injuries, but he told himself that he had to get up and act.

CONTINUED ON ► P4

India maps Ladakh features amid China border row

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

India has formally recorded 28 places and landmarks in Ladakh on Survey of India maps, a step the Government says is meant to fix their names in official records and make them easier for the public to recognise. The Ministry of Home Affairs said on Friday that the list was prepared in coordination with the Union Territory administration. The places will now appear under standardised names on the official map of Ladakh. The exercise follows a similar move in August, when the Union Government standardised the names of 27 places and features in Arunachal Pradesh.

The Ladakh list mixes peaks, passes, glaciers, valleys, rivers and other features. Among the peaks are Zorawar Peak, Kanishka Peak, Atisha Giri, Martand Giri, Rinchen Zangpo, Sakyasri Giri, Marpa Lotsava Ri, Milarepa Kangri, Shiva Ri and Maheshvara Ri. Mountains named



Drang-Druk Glacier located near the Pensi La mountain pass in the Zaskar Range of Ladakh. Representative image

in the exercise include Karun Pir, Drak Karpo and Jolmori. Passes include Chapchinal Pass and Shachmirk Pass. Glaciers on the list are Parpik and Skamri, along with Shkorga Valley. Other features identified are Brangsa, Kukseil, Dehra Compass, Gogri, Kumarayana Point, Panglung and

Shamal Lungpa, as well as Guru Rinpoche Lake, the Yangpa river and hot spring. The timing is significant because Beijing has for years issued Chinese names for locations inside territory India regards as its own.

CONTINUED ON ► P4

SIR row turns Gandhi Jayanti into a day of street protests across cities

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi/Mumbai

On Gandhi Jayanti, protests calling for the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar were held in multiple cities, including in both Mumbai and Delhi. The protests are a result of the controversial the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and concerns about transparency in the poll panel's work. Fellow election commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi had formally objected at least 14 times over ten months to decisions and also alleged that decisions were made without their knowledge. While in Mumbai, celebrities and memes marked their presence at a denied venue,

in Delhi, Opposition leaders and protesters spent Gandhi Jayanti in police buses. The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) used Mumbai as the starting point for a larger campaign. Meanwhile, Opposition parties and student groups brought the same demand to Jantar Mantar in Delhi. Police in both cities had denied permission for the protests. In Mumbai, the protesters under the CJP banner gathered at Shivaji Park in Dadar. Officials cited a 2013 Bombay High Court order limiting the ground's use and the lack of civic clearance. Barricades were set up near Dadar station and security was tight, but young men and women still made it to the maidan, which has hosted major politi-



Members of political parties and student organizations including AISA, SFI, and NSUI staged a protest against Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar; the protesters were detained during the demonstration at Jantar Mantar, in New Delhi

cal rallies for years. Founder and national convener of CJP, Abhijeet Dipke scheduled the gathering for 4 pm and described it as the first in a series of protests planned for Coa, Bengaluru, Kolkata, and other cities. The campaign would end in Delhi by the end of the month if Kumar did not resign. Dipke said the party would not join India bloc protests, but still called for broader political support. Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena offered their backing. The ground was filled with tricolours while placards read "Gyanesh BRO, JUST RESIGN". Memes, film-dialogue references and satirical posters sat alongside student flags from the Students' Federation of India and the All India

Students' Federation. Veteran actor Naseeruddin Shah appeared and was filmed embracing Dipke; the convener posted the clip with the caption "Am I dreaming or what?" Singer Vishal Dadani was among those present, as were Shabana Azmi and Tusshar Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi's great-grandson. Speaking to the crowd, Dipke criticised the Union Government and repeated the party's demands. These included Kumar's resignation, criminal charges against him, a freeze on the SIR, restoration of the January 2025 voter list, repeal of the 2023 law on appointments to the poll panel, and a more transparent selection process involving civil society.

CONTINUED ON ► P4

Satya Niketan victim's father seeks Govt support for son

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

"Tu sher hai sher", 67-year-old Darshan Dass says as he caresses his son's forehead, sitting by his ICU bed, reminding the 20-year-old that enduring the darkness under tonnes of debris from the five-storey building that collapsed in Delhi's Satya Niketan was an act of sheer courage.

When Neeraj, a second-year undergraduate at Motilal Nehru College, left his home in Jammu for Delhi on a scholarship programme, the father thought his only son was headed towards the life he had worked to give him—college education, a promising career, and the ability to 'stand on his own feet'.

It has been 25 days since

the building in which his paying-guest accommodation was housed crumbled into dust and debris—killing seven, including five students. Dass no longer thinks about his son's career. All he wants now is to see his son standing on his feet again—made difficult by a fractured hip, deep lacerations around the groin and upper thighs, and injuries on his abdomen and back.

The distraught father wants assurance that his son—who remains in the ICU (intensive care unit) of AIMS nearly a month after the September 6 tragedy—has a future.

"I want the Government to give him some job. If he is not in a condition to study or work as he did before, he should at least have something to fall back on. Today he

is in the hospital, and the government is helping, but what happens when he comes out? How will I afford his physiotherapy, medicines, equipment and any further treatment?" the retired serviceman tells PTI.

Dass said his son has undergone around six surgeries. "A machine has been inserted in his hip, and another surgery is due soon. His left leg is completely stiff; only his right foot moves. The doctors have not told me how long this will continue or when he will be able to stand," Dass says, his eyes welling up.

The 67-year-old said he spends his days in the corridor outside the ICU, waiting for the next opportunity to see his son or for someone to tell him if Neeraj needs something. He



Darshan Dass



Neeraj

goes inside when allowed, sits with his son for a while and, once again, returns to the corridor—where the hours pass around the same unanswered question: "What will happen after this?"

For now, Dass said, Neeraj is being provided treatment free of cost. The Delhi

Government has also given the family ₹5 lakh in assistance, which he said has helped a lot. But the retired serviceman, who receives an ₹35,000 monthly pension, is worried about how he will manage once his son is released from the hospital.

Dass' wife died of pneumonia in 2016. Of their five children, four are daughters—Neeraj the only son. "Neeraj's mother died of pneumonia. I have done whatever I could for my family, but now, when I see my son lying like this, I keep thinking if his mother were here, perhaps he would have been better taken care of," the father laments.

The accident has also stalled Neeraj's education. His college principal has offered to arrange online classes, but Dass says his son is currently not in a condition to think about studies or examinations.

"He asks me, 'How will I focus?' How can he study when he is lying there; he cannot even move his legs. He can attend classes online maybe, but how will he sit for exami-

nations? Earlier, he was always thinking about what to do with his career; now, he doesn't know if he will ever be able to walk again," the father said.

Dass finds it difficult to recall the boy he watched leave Jammu for Delhi. Neeraj had been a quiet, introverted child who spent most of his time studying. He studied at an Army school and loved football. "He became a different boy after coming to Delhi. He worked on himself, became confident and made so many friends," Dass said.

He remembers the night he learnt his son was trapped beneath the collapsed building. Neeraj had returned to Delhi on August 29 after visiting Jammu for Raksha Bandhan on August 26. When footage of the Satya Niketan building collapse

appeared on television, Dass noticed a rakhi on the wrist of one of the victims and recognised it as his son's.

Beta, dekhna, yeh tera bhai toh nahai hai? (Look, is that your brother?) He recalled asking one of his daughters. The PG in-charge took him several hours later. Dass said he borrowed money from his daughters, hired a taxi, and left for Delhi immediately.

"On the way, I kept thinking what I would find. A building had collapsed on him—tonnes and tonnes of stone and rubble. I wondered what could be left of him. What must have happened to his body? When I finally saw him, his face and upper body were intact. It was some relief. Then I saw the injuries."

Govt clears reserved forest status for Northern Ridge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi's Northern Ridge, long described as the city's green lungs, will receive formal legal protection. The Rekha Gupta Government approved the Phase-I notification to declare 112,328 hectares, or 277.56 acres, of the area as reserved forest under Section 20 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927.

The Northern Ridge is part of the Aravalli mountain range and serves as an important green and ecological zone for Delhi. The Chief Minister said the area is an invaluable part of Delhi's natural heritage, and that protecting it is crucial for the city's environmental health and for future generations.

The Chief Minister said the move reflects the government's commitment

to protecting Delhi's green areas and making the capital healthier, greener and more resilient to environmental challenges, giving legal backing to long-term conservation of what she called Delhi's ecological hub.

Comparing the pace of forest protection across Governments, the Chief Minister said only 96.16 hectares, or 237.61 acres, had been notified as reserved forest under previous Governments in Delhi. Under the current Government, 5,267,009 hectares, or 13,014.77 acres, have been notified so far.

With the Northern Ridge notification, the total reserved forest area in Delhi will rise to 5,363.16 hectares, or approximately 13,252.390 acres, a scale of protection residents of the capital have not seen in previous years.

This latest step builds on a



notification approved last month covering around 1,000 acres, or 400 hectares, of additional land in the Southern Ridge as reserved forest, part of a wider drive to protect Delhi's Ridge areas and natural green heritage.

The Chief Minister said tackling pollution cannot be limited to addressing its immediate effects, and strengthening the city's natural ecology is equally important for residents' long-term wellbeing. She said protecting areas like the Northern Ridge, expanding green cover and maintaining ecological balance would give Delhi greater resilience against air pollution and climate-related challenges that direct-

ly affect citizens' daily lives, from air quality to groundwater availability.

"She said Delhi has planted more than 73 lakh saplings this year, with the plantation drive still ongoing. Citizens have also been encouraged to plant trees around their homes through the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign and the 'Vriksh Rath' initiative, extending the conservation effort beyond government batches.

Work is also underway to construct check dams and support natural regeneration in Ridge areas to improve groundwater recharge, a measure with direct implications for the city's water supply in the coming years. School and college students have been engaged as 'Eco-Warriors' to raise awareness about

climate and biodiversity among younger residents.

The Chief Minister said the protection of the Northern Ridge will continue, with the next phase focused on demarcation of the area, habitat management and community participation, steps intended to strengthen conservation of the Ridge and reinforce its role as the city's green lungs and ecological hub.

She said protecting Delhi's greenery and natural heritage remains a sustained Government priority, describing green areas and natural resources as the foundation of the Capital's sustainable future, with further steps planned to protect them in the years ahead and shape the environmental conditions future generations of Delhi residents will inherit.

E-book maps 243 heritage structures across Delhi Ridge



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi residents now have a single digital resource to explore 243 geo-coordinated heritage structures scattered across the city's Ridge area. The Lieutenant Governor Tarunjit Singh Sandhu launched an e-book titled "Exploring the Delhi Ridge: Reviving the Heritage of Lungs of Delhi" in collaboration with INTACH Delhi Chapter on Friday.

The launch took place during a Heritage Walk Sandhu led at Sanjay Van, aimed at highlighting Delhi's natural and built heritage and strengthening public engagement with its historic legacy. South Delhi MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, Mehrauli MLA Gajender Yadav, DDA Vice Chairman N Saravana Kumar, and around 200 heritage and nature enthusiasts took part.

The walk covered the Small Fortification and the Large Fortification and the historic Lalkot Wall at Sanjay Van, with Swarna Liddle, Advisor at INTACH Delhi Chapter, guiding participants and

explaining the history, architecture and significance of the conserved structures, giving citizens a rare chance to experience Delhi's heritage within its natural setting.

For ordinary visitors to the Ridge, the e-book's practical value lies in its design for on-ground use. The publication integrates eight heritage trails across the Ridge area with QR-enabled interpretation and digital maps, so visitors can scan codes at heritage sites while walking the trails and instantly access photographs and researched narratives about what they are seeing. The e-book brings together monuments across the Northern, Central, South Central and Southern Ridge zones in one comprehensive resource.

Alongside the e-book, DDA has prepared an "Inventory of Built Heritage Sites, Ridges of Delhi", documenting all 243 geo-coordinated heritage structures across the Ridge and combining scholarship, documentation, and digital technology to make this heritage more accessible to the public than before.

LOST & FOUND
1. JUNEJA KCHHRA, S/o Late Sh. Rajesh Singh, R/o B-62, Sector-14, Gautam Nagar, U.P. which is registered on 20/10/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PUBLIC NOTICE
This is to inform general public that Mrs. Kamini Devi, wife of late Sh. Kamini Devi, who is registered on 20/10/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

The Pioneer CLASSIFIED
[SWATCHE OF NAME]

I, Swati Devi, W/o No. 17005897X Nk Anand Kumar, Kannauiya, R/o- Vill- Amari, P.O- Amarahat, Dist- Mau, U.P.- 276403, have changed my name from Swati Devi to Swati Kannauiya, vide affidavit dated 02/10/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

I, Asaram, Father of No.13571712F Hay Turewale Ganesh Asaram, R/o- Ad-Dhamangori, Post- Borkha, Teh- Khulabad, Dist- Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar, Maharashtra- 431152, have changed my name from Asaram to Asaram Turewale, vide Affidavit dated 02/10/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

I, Tulasabai, Mother of No.13571712F Hay Turewale Ganesh Asaram, R/o- Ad-Dhamangori, Post- Borkha, Teh- Khulabad, Dist- Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar, Maharashtra- 431152, have changed my name from Tulasabai to Tulasabai Asaram Turewale, vide Affidavit dated 02/10/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

I, Chaudhary Bherabhai Bhimaji, Father of No.15748208Y S/M Chaudhary Maheshkumar Bherabhai, R/o- Vill- Dera, P.O- Jalodha, TA- Lakhni, Dist- Banaskantha, Gujarat- 385330, have changed my name from Chaudhary Bherabhai Bhimaji to Chaudhary Bheraji Bhimaji, vide affidavit dated 02/10/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

I, Savitaben, W/o No.15721567H L/NK Chaudhary Hareshbhai Babubhai, R/o- Vill- Dhokadava, Teh- Una, Dist- Junagadh, Gujarat- 362565, have changed my name from Savitaben to Chauhan Savitaben Hareshbhai, vide affidavit dated 02/10/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

PUBLIC NOTICE
This is to inform to all concerned that SMT. SITA JHA Wife Late L.L. Col. Brijaya Nand Jha R/o 303, Church View Enclave, Arun Vihar, Sector-29, NOIDA, District Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P., alongwith her son SRI SRINAND JHA was the joint owner of property Plot No.303, Sector-29, NOIDA, District Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P. which is registered on 26/08/2019. So it is informed to all concerned that SMT. SITA JHA share in the said property Plot No.303, Sector-29, NOIDA is going to be transferred in favour of SRI SRINAND JHA S/o Late L.L. Col. Brijaya Nand Jha R/o 303, Church View Enclave, Arun Vihar, Sector-29, NOIDA, District Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P. if any one has objection, please inform the undersigned on or before 15 days from the date of publication of this notice.

Names of the Transferee SRI SRINAND JHA S/o Late L.L. Col. Brijaya Nand Jha R/o 303, Church View Enclave, Arun Vihar, Sector-29, NOIDA, District Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P. - 201301.

IDBI BANK LTD., 15 North Avenue Road, West Punjabi Bagh, Delhi-110026

Order by the Competent Authority

Borrower: Mr. Bijay Rai
Residence Address- 648 Block B Gali No.22 Harsh Vihar, Mandoli, Nand Nagar Dist. North East Delhi, Delhi-110093

In the matter of classification of Mr. Bijay Rai (Borrower) as Fraud, Notice is hereby given to the person mentioned below that the order issued by the bank in terms of RBI Master Directions on Fraud Risk Management in Financial Institutions dated 15, 2024 (Master Directions) has been returned un-served.

Name Address Designation
Mr. BIJAY RAI 648 Block B Gali No.22 Harsh Vihar, Mandoli, Nand Nagar Dist. North East Delhi, Delhi-110093

DU relaxes passing criteria for 2025-26 batch

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The University of Delhi (DU) has relaxed the passing criteria for students of the 2025-26 batch as a one-time measure, prompting concerns among teachers over the timing of the decision and its implications for transparency and consistency in the examination system.

According to a notification issued by the university's Controller of Examinations on Thursday, students of the 2025-26 academic batch who have completed one year of study will

be exempted from the requirement of securing 28 credits out of 44 credits for promotion. The exemption applies only to the 2025-26 batch, not to subsequent batches.

The notification said all other provisions of the earlier notifications issued would remain unchanged and that the decision had been taken with the approval of the competent authority.

But Union teachers, who have questioned the rationale and timing of the move, particularly since the students concerned have already moved into their third semester.

Abha Dev Habib, secretary of the

Delhi University Teachers' Federation (DTF) and an associate professor at Miranda House, questioned why the passing criteria had been changed without specifying the circumstances or hardships that necessitated the exemption.

"Passing criteria for a specific batch (2025-26) are being relaxed without explaining which circumstances, hardships or systemic failure warrant such a change," Habib said.

She also questioned whether the move was necessitated by a large number of students failing to meet the prescribed criteria.

CM assures solution to Azadpur vendor issues

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, during a detailed inspection of Azadpur on Friday, directly interacted with footpath fruit vendors. The Chief Minister promised a solution that balances their livelihood needs with pedestrian access and cleanliness. The interaction took place as part of the Gandhi Jayanti cleanliness drive under the 'Seva Mera Yodgan' campaign.



Rekha Gupta

The Chief Minister took part in the cleanliness drive and inspected the area's central verge, footpaths, roadside walls, drainage system and nearby public spaces. She sought information from officials on garbage accumulation, encroachment of footpaths by fruit vendors, unauthorised wall advertisements and damaged public infrastructure.

She asked officials and local representatives to coordinate better on common issues, face inconveniences, while also making suitable arrangements for the vendors themselves.

She appealed separately to fruit vendors and workers at Azadpur Mandi to help maintain cleanliness, saying that merely

respecting the hard work of those selling fruit from carts to earn a living, it was equally important that no waste be left behind after business hours. She noted that waste left on footpaths could enter drains and affect the drainage system, calling for a proper cleanliness arrangement built on cooperation between officials and mandi workers.

The Chief Minister also inspected the central verge in Azadpur and directed officials to ensure its regular cleaning, along with improving the underpass and surrounding public spaces. She said the cleanliness pledge would only be meaningful when put into practice, pointing to small efforts such as disposing of waste at designated places, not littering public spaces, and ensuring ageing others to maintain cleanliness as the foundation for larger change. MLA Rajkumar Bhatia, Municipal Corporation officials, other public representatives, and prominent social workers were present during the drive.

Govt plans 11-storey DTC headquarters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi



Rekha Gupta

The Delhi Government is constructing an 11-storey building for the DTC headquarters estimated to cost around ₹128.23 crore, officials said on Friday.

The new building comprising two basements, a ground floor and 11 storeys, will be constructed on the land of the existing headquarters building of the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) at IP Estate Bus Depot, Laxmi Nagar. The signed agreement with the Delhi State Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (DSIIDC) to construct the building. The DSIIIC has issued a tender inviting construction agencies for the project, officials said.

The estimated cost of the building will be ₹128.23 crore, and it will be built over the next two years after the work is awarded, according to the tender document. The new building will cover 26,000 square metres (2.6 hectares) and will replace the old building which will be ₹128.23 crore, and it will be built over the next two years after the work is awarded, according to the tender document. The new building will cover 26,000 square metres (2.6 hectares) and will replace the old building which will be ₹128.23 crore, and it will be built over the next two years after the work is awarded, according to the tender document.

According to the officials, the existing one has grown structurally outdated and inadequate to support the operational needs of DTC's rapidly expanding transport network. The 26,000 square metres, the operational area will be 12,334 square metres, while the new building will occupy 6,158 square metres. The plan also incorporates a green area of 9,681.71 square metres, 20 per cent of the total land, ensuring an "environmentally-conscious and future-ready campus," officials said.

According to the MoU, 50 per cent of the commercial usage rights will remain with the DSIIIC for 30 years.

The new complex will park 200 buses and will have space in the basement for more than 200 cars.

The new building will include fire-fighting, an audio-visual system, access control, a CCTV network, lifts, and high-low voltage HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) systems.

SIR row: Opposition, youth groups protest at Jantar Mantar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Hundreds of protesters from Left parties, the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), along with student and youth organisations, gathered at Delhi's Jantar Mantar on Friday, defying police restrictions and barricades to demand the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar over alleged irregularities in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and the mass deletion of voters.

The protest, held on Gandhi Jayanti, featured dramatic scenes as protesters crossed barricades and tried to move toward Jantar Mantar despite prohibitory orders and the denial of police permission. Several opposition leaders, including former Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, CPI(M) General Secretary MA Baidya, AAP leaders Saurabh Bhardwaj and Sanjeev Jha, and activists from student and youth organisations, joined the demonstrations.

The Delhi Metro temporarily closed entry and exit at 12 stations in central Delhi, including Rajiv Chowk, Central Secretariat and Jantar Mantar, as part of security arrangements around the protest.



Security personnel detain protesters during a protest organised by various student bodies, including AISA, SFI, and NSUI, demanding the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Friday.

protest. Internet services were also suspended at the protest site and in surrounding areas. Despite the restrictions, protesters gathered in large numbers at Jantar Mantar. Several protesters crossed barricades as police personnel tried to stop them from proceeding towards the protest site.

Slogans including "Ek kachori, dosamosa, Gyanesh tumhara kya barosar", "Vote chor gaadi chor", "Jai Bihari", "Jab jab Modi darta hai police ko aage karta hai" and "Gali-gali mein shor hai, Modi-Gyanesh vote chor hai" were raised during the protest. AISA president Neha Bora and other members of the organisation were seen running towards Jantar Mantar but were stopped midway by the Delhi Police. At several places like Firoz Shah Road and Ashoka Road, the protesters tried to go past barricades as police personnel prevented them from proceeding towards the protest site.

of her own residence as backup, and submitted the lot. She still does not know why the name was removed in the first place, since she says she had already filed the correct forms earlier. Officials have told her she will only find out in November whether the resubmission was accepted at all.

the designated protest site. The area around Jantar Mantar and the roads leading to it were cordoned off as the protesters attempted to make their way through the barricades. Police personnel repeatedly made public announcements, asking people not to assemble at Jantar Mantar and saying no gathering was allowed there.

Delhi Police sources said around 700 people were detained across Delhi during

the day's protests, though some were later released. Among those detained were AAP's Saurabh Bhardwaj and Atishi, AISA national president Neha Bora, activist Yogendra Yadav, and CPI(M) Liberation general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, along with activists from AISA, SFI, NSUI and other student bodies.

Footage and photographs from the scene showed security personnel physically carrying and dragging protesters into waiting buses, with



Delhi AAP President Saurabh Bhardwaj being detained by police personnel during a protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Friday.

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Footage and photographs from the scene showed security personnel physically carrying and dragging protesters into waiting buses, with

police lined up outside the vehicles to manage the detentions.

The protesters were not allowed to enter the designated protest site. Instead, the roads around Jantar Mantar were turned into a heavily guarded zone. Delhi Police personnel, Rapid Action Force and Central Reserve Police Force personnel formed a human barricade. At the same time, DTC, government, and private buses stood ready to transport those that detained away from the area.

The Youth Congress protesters marched from the IYC office on Raisina Road towards Jantar Mantar, wearing masks bearing the faces of Kumar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and carrying posters and banners demanding accountability of the poll panel. AISA national president Neha Bora, reacting to her own detention, posted on social media, "Jantar Mantar 2.0 is on! Gyanesh will soon be gone!" Ghosh said, "Delhi Police is not able to stop crimes in the capital, but when it comes to protection of someone like Gyanesh Kumar, they get down on the streets."

Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita was in force across the New Delhi district, restricting gatherings of five or more people,

processions, demonstrations, dharmas, slogans and speeches without permission. Police barricaded major roads leading to Jantar Mantar, including Sansad Marg, Tolstoy Marg and Jantar Mantar Road. Several protesters were seen trying to cross barricades at Firoz Shah Road as police attempted to stop them from reaching the protest site.

By around 3 pm, the character of the area had changed completely. Hundreds of security personnel had taken over the roads, while only scattered groups of protesters remained outside the barricades, holding placards and attempting to locate friends who had been detained.

For ordinary Delhi residents, Friday's scenes at Jantar Mantar raise a pointed question: the venue itself has long functioned as the city's designated space for public dissent, the one corner of the capital where citizens are meant to gather and be heard. The scale of Friday's detentions, with hundreds physically removed within hours of the protest beginning, has reopened debate over how freely that right can actually be exercised when organisers and police disagree over permission.

Why stand in line to prove we exist? Voters ask

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A particular kind of exhaustion settles into a person's voice after weeks of chasing the same government office for the same unanswered question. That exhaustion was everywhere at Jantar Mantar on Friday, carried by people who had not come here so much as for an answer nobody would give them.

Among the crowd was a homemaker in her fifties from Vishwas Nagar, who had spent the past several weeks moving between offices after learning her family person's name had been struck off the electoral rolls during the



ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR). Her own name had passed through the process cleanly. Her children had not, even though they voted in previous elections without incident. To fix it, she gathered every document she could find: identity cards, a marketplace, Aadhaar, PAN, voter ID, proof

of her own residence as backup, and submitted the lot. She still does not know why the name was removed in the first place, since she says she had already filed the correct forms earlier. Officials have told her she will only find out in November whether the resubmission was accepted at all.

Getting to that point of resubmission was its own ordeal. She was directed to specific SIR booths scattered across the city, forcing her to make repeated trips. At the booths themselves, she described standing in long queues, pushing through crowds, waiting roughly ninety minutes each time before her turn came, only to be sent away with no firm answer, just a wait stretching into November, months after she had filed everything before the August 24 deadline.

A few feet away, a younger voice cut through the crowd with a different kind of anger, not weary but sharp. Ayesha, a college student who said

she had turned 18 only this year, had come to the protest not for herself but for her grandmother, who cannot read the forms being handed to her and has no one at home free during working hours to stand in the lines the process demands.

Ayesha said the exercise seemed built for people who have time to spare and paperwork to spare, two things her family has in short supply. She said she kept wondering what happens to the households where no one can take a day off, where no one can read the notices taped to a booth wall, where the absence of a signature is mistaken for the absence of a citizen.



Delhi AAP President Saurabh Bhardwaj being detained by police personnel during a protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Friday.

DDA audit flags 190 high-risk parks, scant CCTV coverage

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A week-long safety audit of all 736 Delhi Development Authority (DDA) parks in Delhi has classified 190 as high risk, exposing major gaps in the city's green spaces, including the finding that only 16 parks had any CCTV coverage before the review began.

The audit was completed within a strict one-week deadline set by Lieutenant Governor Tarunjit Singh Sandhu, who had directed DDA to inspect every park under its jurisdiction. Based on the findings, parks were sorted into three priority categories: 190 high risk, 258 medium risk and 288 low risk, with DDA now concentrating immediate attention on the high-risk list first.

Lighting emerged as one of the biggest concerns, with 520 parks identified as needing additional illumination. Urgent lighting work is currently underway in 231 of these, while an earlier audit conducted the previous week has already resulted in completed lighting upgrades at



106 parks. Entry security was another weak point. Officials identified 163 parks with no locking mechanism at all, and these are now being fitted with lockable gates. Safety information boards have gone up in 115 parks so far, with 484 more signs planned across the network. Perhaps the starkest finding involved surveillance. Just 16 of Delhi's 736 DDA parks had functioning CCTV cameras before this audit. In response, 323 additional parks have now been earmarked for new camera installations, a scale of expansion that underlines how thin the city's park surveillance network had become.

Structural safety also came under scrutiny. Of 399 parks

flagged for boundary issues, repair work and fixing of missing grills have been completed at 233 so far. Separately, officials have marked out areas around public toilets and abandoned structures inside parks for dedicated improvement work, locations they consider particularly vulnerable.

On the ground, night patrolling has begun at 245 of the city's larger parks, and bike patrols are now operating across every park classified as high risk. Yet the audit also revealed a staffing shortfall, with 134 parks still requiring armed guards that have not yet been deployed. To address these gaps, DDA held a coordinated meeting with all relevant security

agencies at the Principal Commissioner's office on September 28.

Accountability measures for existing security staff have also been tightened. Biometric attendance systems have been activated in 602 parks, with the rollout continuing across the remaining locations to ensure guards are actually present and verified during their shifts.

Coordination with police has also been strengthened. Contact details of local beat officers have been shared with DDA's field staff, and field staff information has similarly been passed to police, alongside a push to raise awareness around incident reporting. This exchange of contact information is now complete across all 736 parks.

Looking ahead, DDA said it is drafting standard operating procedures covering patrolling routines, guard responsibilities, supervisor accountability, attendance tracking, reporting protocols and coordination with police, while also updating the terms of security-related service level agreements to reflect these new standards.

3 held in Greater Faridabad minors' assault case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Three local youths have been arrested in connection with the alleged gang rape of a 13-year-old girl and the sexual assault of her 16-year-old male friend inside an abandoned building in Sector 78, Greater Faridabad. Police said three other suspects remain at large. The case, registered more than a month after the incident, has renewed attention to the safety of minors in public and semi-public spaces across the Delhi-NCR region.

According to the complaint and police accounts, the alleged offences took place on the evening of 24 August, between approximately 7 pm and 8 pm. The girl, described as a Class 8 student, had finished her tuition classes and gone to meet her friend. While they were together near a vacant, dilapidated structure, a group of six youths reportedly followed and cornered them. Investigators said the two minors were taken inside the building,



assaulted and robbed before the attackers fled.

The family's complaint alleges that the girl was gang-raped and her friend was also sexually assaulted. Some reports state that the youths demanded money, beat the minors when they resisted, and that the children later said they had cried for help for an extended period. Faridabad police have confirmed the arrests and the registration of a case under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, along with provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita relating to causing hurt, criminal intimidation and extortion. Officers have also indicated that the allegation of

gang rape remains under investigation and has not yet been independently confirmed in every detail. The complaint was filed at BPT police station on 29 September, after the girl's mother approached the police. Both minors had kept the case under their families for several weeks. According to police and family accounts, the girl later showed signs of severe distress. When her mother questioned her, she disclosed what had happened. Medical examinations were subsequently conducted.

Within hours of the formal complaint, police teams arrested three of the suspects, identified as Kunal,

Deepak and Yash. They were produced before a local court and remanded to police custody for further questioning, with reports citing a period of three or four days. Investigators described the arrested men as local youths with a history of drug abuse. One suspect was identified after a name was allegedly used during the attack. The case, in which police are still trying to locate the remaining accused. The Faridabad case comes amid renewed concerns over the safety of women and minors following a series of sexual assault cases reported in Delhi and the National Capital Region.

On September 21, a 17-year-old girl was gang-raped by three men residing in Ashwini Park in Delhi's Kalkaji area. According to Delhi Police, the accused posed as police personnel before separating the teenager from her male friend and taking her to an isolated part of the park. The accused were subsequently arrested. The issue also came under the Supreme Court's scrutiny after several sexual assault cases involving minors were reported in Delhi.

Delhi Police bust Goldy Brar-linked extortion racket, three arrested

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi Police busted an alleged India-Dubai extortion racket linked to the Goldy Brar gang and arrested three key operatives, foiling a planned firing at the residence of a Delhi businessman, officials said on Friday. The accused called the businessman through a UAE-based number, threatening his family with dire consequences and demanding ₹1 crore, they said.

On September 16, businessman Praveen Jain received three missed calls around 8.15 pm. Later, his son Ayush received a call from a UAE-based mobile number around 9.27 pm, and the

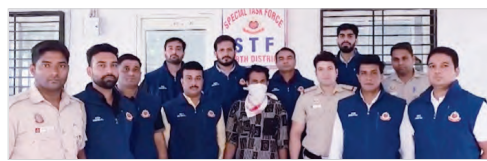
caller allegedly identified himself as an associate of gangster Goldy Brar.

Police said they then registered an India-Dubai extortion racket station on September 17. During the investigation, police analysed the communication trail and found that the calls were allegedly routed through virtual private server data-centre infrastructure, with links to the UAE. Deputy Commissioner of Police (North) Niharika Bhatt said.

A technical and intelligence-based investigation led police to several Indian associates and eventually to Aarif alias Pistol, 32, who allegedly acted as an operational link between the Dubai-based callers and their associates in India, police said. Police arrested

ed Aarif in Vejalpur, Ahmedabad, on September 24 with the assistance of Gujarat Police, they said. Police said Aarif allegedly offered money to a Dubai-based associate, identified as Aarif, to make the extortion call. He allegedly told him to speak in Haryanvi, so the threat would appear to come from a local criminal associate.

The investigation led police to Mubarak alias Gullu, a resident of Tittwara, who was allegedly identified as a key conspirator. Police arrested him in Delhi on September 25. Police alleged that Mubarak had helped hatch the plan and arranged accommodation in Kirari for shooters who had allegedly been engaged to carry out the



threats if the extortion demand was not met.

The police said intelligence later revealed that the conspirators were allegedly planning to fire multiple rounds at the victim's residence in Roop Nagar and then renew the extortion demand. The plan was allegedly to be executed within days.

Acting on the intelligence, police deployed preventive arrangements at the victim's residence in coordination with the local police station, thereby foiling the alleged attack before it could be carried out, officials said.

During the investigation, police also found that the same UAE-based number had allegedly been used to target another Delhi businessman

in Rohini with an identical ₹1 crore demand.

On September 19, the younger brother of a contractor following the alleged attack before it could be carried out, officials said. During the investigation, police also found that the same UAE-based number had allegedly been used to target another Delhi businessman

Mahendragan, claimed affiliation with the Goldy Brar gang and demanded ₹1 crore within 48 hours while threatening firing and other consequences. Police subsequently registered a separate case at Vijay Vihar police station on September 24.

Police said their investigation indicated that four suspected shooters, two from Panipat and two from Khlapur in Muzaffarnagar, had allegedly been engaged to execute the threats.

One of the alleged shooters, Nawab Ali alias Sonil, a resident of Akhappur, was apprehended on October 1 with the assistance of the Railway Protection Force from a moving train near Rewari station while he was

allegedly attempting to escape, police said.

Police said Aarif has previously been involved in 12 cases registered between 2016 and 2026 at police station Kairana in Shamli district, including cases related to attempt to murder, extortion, criminal intimidation, rioting and offences under the Arms Act.

The police are now trying to apprehend the remaining accused, including the suspected shooters, and trace the Dubai-based caller. They are also examining communication records, digital evidence, and financial transactions to map the full network and determine whether the same group was involved in other extortion cases.

ED attaches property in madrasa fraud case

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi/Lucknow

On Friday, the Enforcement Directorate (ED)'s Lucknow office provisionally attached a residential land parcel worth ₹53.46 lakh under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002. This action is part of a money-laundering investigation involving Shamsul Huda Khan, a madrasa teacher from Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, and others. Khan is accused of acquiring British citizenship, hiding it from Indian authorities, continuing to receive a salary, and buying property in the state.

The attached property is a 189.75-square-metre plot registered in Khan's name in Khalilabad, Sant Kabir Nagar District, Uttar Pradesh. This attachment is provisional and needs confirmation from the adjudicating authority under the PMLA.



The case is based on several first information reports filed by Uttar Pradesh Police under sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita that deal with cheating, forgery, using forged documents, criminal conspiracy, and related fraud. The ED began investigating money laundering after police filed these cases.

Investigators allege that Khan acquired British citizenship in 2013 and, by that act, ceased to be an Indian citizen, but concealed the change and continued to project himself as an Indian national. He is accused of using his surrendered Indian passport along with his PAN, Aadhaar,

and voter identity documents, to purchase immovable property in Sant Kabir Nagar. At the same time, he remained in service as a teacher in a government-aided madrasa and continued to draw salary and later retirement benefits from the state exchequer.

The agency found that Khan became a British citizen on December 19, 2013. After that, he reportedly lost his Indian citizenship but kept working as an assistant teacher at a Government-aided madrasa in Mubarakpur, Azamgarh. An inquiry by the Uttar Pradesh Minority Welfare and Waqf Department revealed that his service from 2007 to 2017 was never verified. Even so, he was allowed to retire voluntarily in 2017 and started receiving a regular pension. The ED found that the state paid ₹53.46 lakh into Khan's bank account as salary, pension, and General

Provident Fund payments. They consider this money proceeds of crime, since Khan allegedly received it after becoming a foreign citizen and no longer being legally employed. Since the money is no longer available, the agency has seized property of the same value instead.

Earlier in the investigation, the ED searched two locations on February 11, 2026 and collected documents under the PMLA. The next step was the attachment order issued on October 2. The agency says the investigation is still ongoing. The case centres on two main claims: Khan hid his change in citizenship after 2013, and he continued to receive public salary, pension, and provident fund payments even though his service record is being verified. The criminal allegations are linked to the police FIRs that charge the money-laundering investigation.

Women farmers must be at forefront of policymaking: RSS leader Ramlal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

RSS leader Ramlal described the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh's first national women farmers' conference as both a manifestation of women's empowerment in Indian agriculture and a call to restructure agricultural policies.

RSS All-India contact chief (Sampark Pramukh) Ramlal said 5,000 women farmers and office-bearers from across the country, including Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur, travelled to Delhi at their own expense to attend the All India Women Farmers' Workers Council at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium here on Wednesday.

Ramlal, who attended the conference, said women farmers must be placed at the forefront of decision-making when India talks about sustainable agriculture and a prosperous rural economy.

"They must be given legal and social recognition not merely as a workforce labouring on the land, but as farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs capable of making independent decisions with self-reliance and discernment," he said in a statement.

He congratulated the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh for focusing on women's empowerment and urged other organisations to learn from such initiatives.

"These women, who travelled to Delhi at their own expense and raised the slogan, 'We, the women of India, will bring prosperity', have given the term Annadata (food provider) a new sense of pride and dignity and have set in motion what could become a historic transformation towards a disease-free and prosperous future for the country," Ramlal said.

He said women have historically played a major role in Indian agriculture, undertaking work ranging from sowing and harvesting to preserving indigenous seeds and rearing livestock.

"Women undertake nearly 60 to 70 per cent of the physical labour associated with agriculture. Despite this, they have often been viewed in the social structure and Government records merely as 'agricultural labourers' or as family helpers," he said.

Ramlal said the conference was organised under the guidance of the women's wing of the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh to change this perception and give women farmers their rightful identity, dignity and self-respect. "Organised against the backdrop of the United Nations-declared International Year of the Woman Farmer 2026," the conference was not merely an organisational meeting but a manifestation of the empowerment of women in Indian agriculture and a new call for restructuring agricultural policies," he said.



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Ramlal said the conference discussed the role of women in agriculture in achieving the vision of a developed and healthy India by 2047, with *Gau-Krishhi-Vaniyam* (cattle, agriculture and commerce) forming part of the discussion.

Opposition to genetically modified (GM) seeds and gene-editing technology was also a key issue, he said. The conference identified five major pillars — toxin-free farming and cow-based organic agriculture, nutritious food, disease-free living, an addition-free and remunerative prices for agricultural produce, the RSS leader said.

He said the Centre and State Governments should place women farmers at the centre of their policies and tailor schemes to their needs, with easy access to credit, local processing units, and marketing of organic products. "Existing policies often favour large corporate and chemical-based farming, whereas the ground reality is that the success of rural development lies in the hands of women's power," he said.

TN CM Vijay rolls out expanded free bus travel for women

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chennai

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Jayaprakash Narayan on Friday launched the expanded 'Vetri Payanam' — free bus travel for women — coinciding with Gandhi Jayanti, issuing zero-fare tickets to women passengers at Koyambedu Bus Terminus.

The scheme, originally announced by the chief minister under Rule 110 in the Assembly on August 24, aims to ensure that women across Tamil Nadu are not deprived of social and economic opportunities due to transport costs.

Under the expanded initiative, the free travel facility — previously restricted to ordinary city and town buses and up to 40 km in hilly regions — has now been extended to cover Express, Limited Stop Services (LSS), Deluxe, Suburban Ordinary



(Mofussil Ordinary), and Ghat Ordinary services running over 40 km operated by the state's seven State Transport Corporations (STCs). With this expansion, a total of 12,695 buses will operate 1,68,500 single trips daily

under the scheme, benefiting an estimated 84.32 lakh women passengers across the State every day.

The Government stated that the initiative will significantly improve access to public transport, enabling female students to commute to distant colleges, assisting working women and transgender persons in reaching their workplaces, and facilitating free travel for medical and essential needs.

There would be no income ceiling for the beneficiaries to avail services, and there will also be no limit on the number of daily trips.

The welfare scheme's name is derived from the

uling party — Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam — to mean "victorious journey" (Vetri payanam) for women.

During the event, the chief minister interacted with passengers and distributed free bus tickets to mark the official commencement of the welfare initiative.

Speaking on the occasion, Transport Minister A. Vijayapalan said the initiative aimed to provide free bus travel for women and transgender persons to support their economic empowerment, livelihoods, and economic empowerment, ensuring that travel costs do not become a barrier to their progress.

2.42 lakh Special Gram Sabhas held on Gandhi Jayanti

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

More than 2.42 lakh Special Gram Sabhas were held across India on Gandhi Jayanti, marking the start of a direct platform to discuss Government schemes that affect their daily lives, from a guaranteed 125 days of annual wage employment to the piped drinking water supply and land records and consumer protection helplines.

The Gram Sabhas, scheduled on the GPDP Portal and Panchayat NIRNAY Portal, actively participated, with the People's Plan Campaign 2026-27, 'Sabki Yojana, Sabka Vikas', under which Panchayats will prepare their Development Plans for 2027-28. Local residents, elected



Representative image

representatives, Panchayat functionaries and officials actively participated, with the People's Plan Campaign 2026-27, 'Sabki Yojana, Sabka Vikas', under which Panchayats will prepare their Development Plans for 2027-28. Local residents, elected

On employment, the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar

days have been generated, benefiting over 2.81 crore workers from around 2.23 crore households, with works under way in nearly 2.31 lakh Gram Panchayats. An interim allocation of ₹5,93,841 crore has been made to states and union territories for 2026-27.

On drinking water, rural tap connections under the India's drinking water mission have risen from about 3.23 crore households, 17 percent, to more than 16 crore households, over 80 percent. Under the Swachh Bharat Mission, Gramin, 12.22 wage employment every financial year to eligible rural households, verified through Face Authentication with digital payments. So far, more than 31.69 crore person

Connaught Place to go car-free this Sunday for Raahgiri Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Connaught Place's Inner Circle will turn into a car-free public space this Sunday, October 4, from 7 am to 10 am, as New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) invites Delhi residents to experience cleaner air, safer streets and a traffic-free morning as part of the Raahgiri Day celebration marking Gandhi Jayanti.

The event is being organised by the Raahgiri Foundation, Delhi Traffic Police and Fit India, in association with NDMC, to bring together citizens, families, children, cyclists and fitness enthusiasts for a morning centred on active and sustainable living. For three hours, residents will be able to walk,



cycle and move through the Inner Circle without any vehicular traffic, a rare experience in one of Delhi's busiest commercial hubs. The centrepiece of the morning will be Fit India's "Sundays on Cycle" ride, expected to draw hundreds of cyclists across different age groups onto the car-free Inner Circle, positioning cycling as a clean, safe and sustainable

way to move through the city. Alongside the ride, the morning will feature yoga, Zumba, street games, sports activities for children and open-air art, creating space for residents of every age group to participate in what-ever activity suits them. Adding a musical close to the celebrations, rock band Euphoria will perform live at Central Park, Connaught

Place, capping off the morning's events.

NDMC Chairperson Manoj Kumar Dwivedi said Mahatma Gandhi believed the health and wellbeing of a community begins with how people live every day. He said that on Gandhi's birth anniversary, NDMC was inviting Delhi residents to experience what a street without traffic can offer, cleaner air, greater freedom of movement, safe spaces for children and senior citizens, and a healthier rhythm to a Sunday morning. He said the goal was for residents to experience the benefits of a car-free street and carry forward the idea that these benefits could become part of neighbourhoods across Delhi, not just a one-time event in the city centre.

Women break 44-year jinx, seal hockey...

It was a goal of outstanding quality and an early statement of intent from India, who had begun the contest with purpose against an opponent that had claimed silver at the Paris Olympics.

China enjoyed marginally greater possession in the opening exchanges, but India's compact defensive structure made it difficult for them to create clear openings.

China gradually began to push forward, probing down the flank through Li Hong, Zou Meirong and Tan Jinzhuang. Their attacks, however, lacked the depth and support needed to seriously test Bichu Devi.

China earned their first penalty corner in the 18th minute, but India read the indirect variation well, with a defender intercepting the routine.

The second attempt was directed towards the goal but was comfortably dealt with by Bichu Devi. The goalkeeper, however, was called into action in the 24th minute when China were awarded a penalty stroke after Lalremliani was penalised for obstructing a forward from behind.

When the defending champions were presented with a chance to draw level, veteran Savita Punia was at the goal and produced a crucial save, diving sharply to her left to keep out the low shot and preserve India's lead.

It was a defining moment in the final, with the goalkeeper displaying the composure and reflexes that would prove vital to India's resistance.

Vande Bharat sets 100 kmph record over...

The 111-km Katra-Banihal section is a crucial and technically challenging component of the USBRL project, which is aimed at providing seamless rail connectivity between the Kashmir Valley and the rest of the country.

The Railway Ministry approved the enhancement of the maximum permissible speed to 100 kmph after all prescribed safety conditions were complied with by the Railways in August this year, official sources said.

Earlier, trains were permitted to operate at a

maximum speed of 85 kmph on the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra-Sangaldan section and 75 kmph on the Sangaldan-Banihal section.

The Katra-Banihal section traverses some of the most difficult and rugged terrain of the Pir Panjal and lower Himalayan ranges, involving deep valleys, steep mountain slopes, major rivers and highly complex geological formations.

The section has some of the country's most prestigious and challenging engineering structures, including the Chenab Railway Bridge, the world's highest railway bridge, constructed over the Chenab River near Reasi, and the Anj Khad Railway Bridge, India's first cable-stayed railway bridge.

The section also has 33 tunnels. Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off the Katra-Srinagar Vande Bharat Express from Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra on June 6, 2025.

UAE terms flydubai attack a terrorist act

Israel's Consul General in Mumbai, Yaniv Revach expressed Israel's "deepest gratitude" and said the country wished to honour captain Machchhar's "exceptional behaviour."

Investigators are examining the sequence of events with the help of the aircraft's voice and data recorders. Bloomberg reported that the two pilots were moved to the UAE for further questioning after medical clearance. A State-run Saudi Press Agency reported that both pilots departed Saudi Arabia for Abu Dhabi on Thursday, October 1, accompanied by a UAE security team. The incident has also renewed questions over cockpit security and pilot mental-health screening, with experts saying airlines may need to review checks and procedures to reduce the risk of a similar attack.

Co-pilot planned crash: Netanyahu

The comments follow the incident aboard flydubai flight FZ1073, which was travelling from Dubai to Tel Aviv on Wednesday with 174

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people. The co-pilot allegedly stabbed Indian captain Smit Machchhar. The jet dropped nearly 14,000 feet in under 30 seconds before control was restored. Wounded, Machchhar still managed to open the cockpit door.

Passengers and crew then entered and overpowered the attacker. Two off-duty flydubai pilots who were travelling on the flight helped fly the aircraft, which landed safely in Tabuk, Saudi Arabia.

Netanyahu said earlier that the attacker was being questioned and that Israeli investigators had joined the interrogation. "The attacker, the pilot who attacked the captain, is now being interrogated. What we know so far is that he underwent Islamist radical indoctrination," he said.

He also said the early inquiry indicated the co-pilot was suicidal, describing him as lying on the floor and calling out to the crew to kill him. "It is clear that he was suicidal and was going to down the plane," Netanyahu said.

Israel's Consul General in Mumbai, Yaniv Revach, said, "I don't think that it might be a terrorist attack. It is a terrorist act. So there's not even a question or a doubt about it." The motive of the co-pilot has not been established.

Netanyahu has praised the captain and the passengers who stepped in. "I think what happened is a tremendous act of heroism that prevented another 9/11-style crash of an entire airplane," he said.

Couldn't let them die: Captain Machchhar...

"At that time, I thought if I don't get up... I have been flying planes for 17 years, I have been a Captain for the last 11 years, and I know what is happening in an aircraft even with my eyes closed. When I was lying down below, I knew for a fact that if I could not get up, the plane would be right there. Even while I was still taking blood, I could just open the door," he said.

The pilot said that after the cockpit door was opened, everyone else came in, and everyone played an equally important role. "But honestly, I was the only one who was not pushed down. I knew I couldn't let all of them die," he said.

"At that time, you received so many injuries and were engaged in a fight of life and death. But you ignored your own safety and were concerned about the safety of the passengers. You have enhanced the honour of 140 crore Indians."

I feel proud from the bottom of my heart," the pilot said. "I will be eternally proud of you. Getting your call makes me feel so proud. Now I feel proud of myself, until now I wasn't, but now I do. I am sorry I am crying in front of you," Machchhar said.

The pilot said the hospital staff are taking good care of him with immense love and attention. Machchhar also told the prime minister that he was not viewing his injury merely as a wound, as doing so would make his recovery even harder.

"You are a brave man. India is waiting to welcome you," PM Modi told the pilot. Modi also spoke about Machchhar's mother, Geeta Ben, noting that she raised him with the values and teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. The PM told the pilot that people across India and around the world are eager to speak with him.

The prime minister expressed his gratitude to the Governments of Saudi Arabia and the UAE for taking care of Machchhar. "Today is Gandhi Jayanti. You have shown the world what the true meaning of *ahimsa* is," he added.

Flydubai flight FZ1073, travelling from Dubai to Tel Aviv, transmitted emergency signals on Wednesday and made a rapid descent of over 17,000 feet from 34,000 feet before diverting to Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Airport in Saudi Arabia's Tabuk city. The flight was carrying 174 passengers, including 27 children.

India maps Ladakh features amid China...

Since 2017 it has released successive lists, starting with 11 features in 2017, 13 in 2018, 15 in 2023 and 2024, and another 23 in April 2026. Commentators have called the practice cartographic pressure, arguing that repeated renaming is meant to bolster territorial claims and shape how disputed areas appear on maps. China has also released its own list of features in the region, with the Chinese government referring to the area as the "Zaskagan" or southern Tibet, and has announced fresh

Chinese names for places there more than once. Tibet itself was taken over by Chinese forces in 1950, sending large numbers of Tibetans into India and Nepal.

New Delhi has rejected those moves, saying a change of name does not alter the status of Indian territory. The August 2026 list included locations such as Thag La, Dzo La, Riza La, Pukur La and Jawsant Garh. The Ladakh mapping extends that approach to another stretch of the frontier where India and China remain in dispute.

SIR row turns Gandhi Jayanti into a day...

Protests in the national Capital, meanwhile, played out in different forms. Neha Bora, for a gathering at Jantar Mantar had been refused while prohibitory orders were in force in the New Delhi district. Multiple Metro stations including Rajiv Chowk, Central Secretariat and Jantar Mantar were shut down and mobile internet was restricted in parts of the area. Protesters still tried to reach the site from Ashoka Road, Janpath and Tolstoy Road.

Delhi Police stopped protesters at roundabouts, put groups into buses, and took them to the stations such as Fatehpur Beri and Badli. Early reports said police detained more than 500 people. Later, police estimates rose to about 700.

Those detained included AAP's Saurabh Bhargava, Sanjeev Jha, former chief minister Atishi, and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, who was stopped at North Avenue. Bhargava said he and others were detained despite the peaceful protest and encouraged supporters to keep coming. Atishi, speaking from a police bus, called the police response barbaric and said the fight against what the party calls "vote chori" would go on.

Protesters also gathered for a gathering at Yogenendra Yadav and RTI activist Nikhil Dey after many had already been detained. CPI(M) general secretary MA Babu and BJP's Manoj Jha were also among those held or blocked. Protesters asked why a designated protest site needed new permission, but police of the area. Protesters still tried and kept warning people not to gather.

Nine arrested over LPU violence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chandigarh

Nine persons including seven students have been apprehended in connection with the violence on the Lovely Professional University (LPU) campus, police said on Friday.

DIG Jalandhar Range Naveen Singla told reporters on Friday that two FIRs were registered in connection with the incidents of arson, loot, rioting, infrastructure damage, police vehicles being torched, unprovoked attack on police force and blockade of the national highway.

"In both these FIRs based on CCTV footage, technical analysis, media posts, social media posts and other corroborative evidence, we have carried out nine arrests so far," the DIG said.

Among those apprehended is a juvenile, he said.

In another incident in which students of Chitkara University in Patiala district had held a protest a week ago and also damaged a police vehicle over unverified claims that two female students allegedly committed suicide on the campus, Patiala police on Friday said they have arrested two people for spreading rumours on social media and other platforms leading to the incident.

In the incident involving LPU University in Phagwara,



Punjab Police personnel stand guard at the Lovely Professional University (LPU) campus as students depart for their hometowns in Phagwara. FILE PHOTO

DIG Singla said four were apprehended from Phagwara, two were rounded up from Jammu and Kashmir while two were apprehended from Mumbai. "Seven are students who are of LPU while two are outsiders," Singla said, adding that 20 have been nominated in the case and the remaining will be arrested soon.

Asked if social media influencer and student Mohammad Farhat has not been nominated, "We have nominated Mohd Farhat. You must have seen posts on social media in which he is

seen causing damage... We will arrest and question him." Farhat, however, had denied being involved in the violent protest.

Giving details of the sequence of events which led to the violence, DIG Singla said on September 26 evening, a social media post went viral in which it was mentioned that a girl had been raped in one of the hostels, but no action had been taken. Students gathered during the night and blocked the national highway and indulged in vandalism, he said.

"I, along with my three SSPs, reached the spot with heavy police force and we controlled the situation by the next morning. I want to state here that no force was

used against students and restraint was exercised.

"The next morning, some students again blocked the national highway and we talked to them. Their demand was to register a case and we registered a rape case against unknown persons," the DIG said.

The victim in the case was also unknown, as no one had any name, he said, and added,

"We constituted a Special Investigation Team which is conducting investigations." LPU students had held a massive protest on Sunday and also blocked a stretch of the New Delhi-Amritsar Highway outside their campus over claims that an outsider had raped a female student on the university premises.

ED raids 14 sites in Haryana bank fraud case

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
■ New Delhi/Chandigarh

The Directorate of Enforcement (ED)'s Chandigarh Zonal Office-II on Friday searched 14 locations in Chandigarh, Mohali, and Panchkula under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002. This was part of an ongoing investigation into the alleged embezzlement of about ₹645 crore in public funds from the Government of Haryana, the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation, and other Government accounts.

The investigation started after Haryana Police filed an FIR in February 2026. The complaint was about unexplained differences in the bank balances of the Development and Panchayat Department of Haryana at IDFC First Bank and AU Small Finance Bank. Investigators later found that large amounts had been taken from these and other official accounts and moved through intermediaries to hide the money's source.

The searches targeted jewellers and related businesses that were identified as recipients of the diverted funds. Locations included Malik Jewellers, companies in the KLG Group (KLG Jewels, KLG Traders, and KLG & Co.), MB Gold Traders, Sham Jewellers, and Sunder Jewellers. Officers also searched places linked to Gourav Kansal, who is accused of acting as a middleman in money laundering and disguising the stolen money. The agency said



that the embezzled public funds were put into these jewellers' bank accounts and recorded as regular business transactions, making illegal money look like legitimate business income.

Investigators say that shell companies, reportedly set up by Ribhav Rishi, who is called the mastermind, sent specific amounts to the jewellers. Malik Jewellers received about ₹58 crore, the KLG Group about ₹26 crore, MB Gold Traders about ₹5 crore, Sham Jewellers about ₹3.66 crore, and Sunder Jewellers about ₹3.15 crore. The Enforcement Directorate claims these jewellers laundered money taken from various Haryana Government departments and the Chandigarh Union Territory administration, and that some of the funds eventually went to accused IAS officers and other Government employees involved in the bank fraud.

In a separate criminal investigation, the Central Bureau of Investigation has filed a third chargesheet with the Special Court in Panchkula. This stolen money. The agency said

Haryana-cadre IAS officers and other public servants in connection with the bank fraud case.

During the searches on October 2, officers found and froze about ₹72 crore in bank accounts belonging to the jewellers and related businesses. They also took incriminating documents and digital evidence. Earlier in this case, the Enforcement Directorate arrested four people for alleged money laundering and seized or froze assets worth about ₹211 crore. The agency has also filed a prosecution complaint against 14 accused people in the Special Court (PMLA) at Panchkula.

The ED said the investigation is still ongoing. The case involves the alleged large-scale diversion of departmental and municipal funds through two private banks, followed by efforts to hide the money using jewellery businesses and shell companies. Authorities are investigating both private intermediaries and current or former public servants in related cases.

PM, Rahul pay tributes to Gandhi, Shastri

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union ministers, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, among others, paid floral tributes to the portraits of Mahatma Gandhi and former prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri at the Samvidhan Sadan on Friday. Among those who paid tributes to the two leaders were Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Union ministers Rajnath Singh, JP Nadda, Kiren Rijiju, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and others.

The function was attended by the students of several schools with whom the prime minister, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi, among others, interacted. During the event, the prime minister also enquired about the health of one of the visitors who had slipped at the venue. Later, addressing the school students at the Central Hall of the Samvidhan Sadan (old Parliament House) under the "Know Your Leader" programme, Birla said he felt that the present generation is imbibing the life philosophy of Gandhi and Shastri.

Fake PMO official arrested in Delhi after security breach in West Bengal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi/Kolkata

A woman who secured a meeting inside West Bengal's state secretariat with the state secretary to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) was arrested in Delhi the next day, after the minister she met questioned her credentials and police traced her to her home and arrested her.

Akangsha Vidyarthi, in her thirties, came to Nabanna on Wednesday afternoon for an appointment with the state secretary to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). She said she was a senior official from the PMO and passed through security to reach the minister's office at the secure complex on the Hooghly in Howrah. Once inside, she talked with Poddar and other department officials, asked about the Public Works



Department, and requested administrative information. The meeting was brief. Poddar noticed her state-ments did not add up and started asking more questions about who she was. Realising her story was falling apart, she left quickly. Staff then checked her credentials and found no real connection to the PMO. By

the time police sent a complaint to Howrah City Police, she was already on a flight back to Delhi.

Shibpur police filed a case for impersonating a public servant, cheating by pretending to be someone else, and using fake documents. Investigators confirmed she had no official ties to the PMO. A team led by a woman

officer travelled overnight and worked with Delhi Police. On Thursday, they found Vidyarthi at a home in central Delhi's Anand Pavat area and took her into custody after questioning. Police are now working to get permission to bring her to Howrah.

The motive is still unclear. Officers are trying to find out why she entered Nabanna using a false central Government identity and whether she acted alone or as part of a larger plan. Investigators say they are looking into possible links to an organised group, but so far, no such network has been confirmed. Some early local reports suggested she might have been contacted about a private issue before going to the secretariat, but police have

not confirmed this.

It seems she did not take anything important from the building. The breach is being taken seriously because of the location. Nabanna is the state Government's main office, and just an appointment, a claimed PMO title, and unchecked documents at the gate allowed her to meet a Cabinet minister. The response after the incident was quick, but the initial check was not.

Vidyarthi remains in custody as Howrah police pursue the impersonation and forgery charges and keep questioning her about her reasons and methods. For the state administration, this incident is a clear reminder that even a secure secretariat relies on careful verification at the entrance, an official said.

Warring hands over resignation as Congress Punjab chief to Rahul

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Congress leader Amarinder Singh Raja Warring on Friday met former party president Rahul Gandhi and handed him his formal resignation as the chief of the Punjab unit.

Warring headed the State Congress for over four years, and his resignation comes ahead of Assembly polls in the State due early next year. Longstanding in-fight in the State unit preceded his resignation.

The Congress recently replaced its AICC in-charge Bhupesh Baghel—who spent weeks in Punjab recently to placate fighting factions—and appointed Sachin Pilot in his place.



Amarinder Singh Raja Warring

Former state minister Vijay Inder Singla already leads the race to become the new party chief in Punjab. Singla is also a co-treasurer of AICC and oversees the party's properties. "I met Rahul Gandhi and formally gave him my resignation," Warring told reporters after meeting Gandhi.

"He (Rahul Gandhi) gave me a lot of love. He sought

information about the current political situation in Punjab on what is happening with the Government and what we should be doing there. This was the information he sought," he said.

Warring said he told Congress leaders about the challenges and how he wants to fight those challenges and where our strengths lie.

"He made me the state Congress chief, and I thanked him for giving me the opportunity to lead the state Congress in difficult circumstances," assured him that I am ready to serve the party whenever the party requires me," Warring said.

Shivakumar, Vijayendra trade charges over voter deletion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bengaluru

A war of words erupted between Karnataka Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and BJP State President BY Vijayendra on Friday over the ongoing SIR exercise with the two leaders accusing each other over Form-7, and alleged attempts to delete electors from the voters list.

Vijayendra accused Shivakumar of staging a "sham drama" by staging a protest at the Chief Electoral



Karnataka CM DK Shivakumar, BJP State President BY Vijayendra

Officer's office, while Shivakumar hit back, saying the BJP's "strategy, conspiracy

and plans" were being exposed. Speaking to reporters, the

BJP leader claimed that over the last two elections, the number of voters in Mysuru's Narasimharaja Assembly Constituency increased by 1.30 lakh, and this was an "example" of alleged irregularities in electoral rolls encouraged by the Congress party.

Vijayendra alleged: "Wherever there is a high concentration of minorities, such illegal additions to the voter list have been taking place in the past as well, with the encouragement of the Congress party."

Ex-SC, HC judges form independent panel to look into SIR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A lawyers' association has set up a panel of former Supreme Court and high court judges to examine the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the Electoral roll undertaken by the Election Commission of India (ECI).

The Lawyers Association for Constitution (LAFEC), in a release, said the five-member commission, headed by former Supreme Court judge Madan B Lokur, will examine the constitutional and statutory validity, methodology and overall impact of the exercise to revise the voter list.



"The newly-formed independent commission of former judges on the Special Intensive Revision of the elec-

toral roll will function with complete autonomy to examine the constitutional and statutory validity, methodology and overall impact of the SIR exercise on eligible voters," it said.

Besides Lokur, the panel will comprise former Supreme Court judge AK Patil, former Chief Justice of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court Badar Durrez Ahmad and former judges Rekha Sharma and Anjana Prakash.

The commission will examine, among other issues, whether eligible citizens were retained on the electoral roll and whether ineligible entries were appropriately excluded, the release said.

Ahmedabad railway track cleaned up

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Ahmedabad

On the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti, the Ahmedabad Division of Western Railway organised a large-scale "Swachh Track Mega Campaign" today as part of the nationwide cleanliness initiatives. Led by Ved Prakash, Divisional Railway Manager, Ahmedabad, the campaign witnessed the active participation of more than 10,000 railway officials, employees and other participating groups across major stations and railway premises of the division.

As part of the campaign, nearly 3,000 kilometres of railway track were cleaned in a single day, a distance broadly equivalent to the distance from Kanyakumari to Kashmir. The simultaneous participation of railway officials and employees across different parts of the division gave the cleanliness drive the character of a large-scale collective effort based on public participation and shared responsibility. The campaign commenced



with a cleanliness pledge administered to railway officers, employees, sanitation personnel and members of Scouts & Guides. Thereafter, Station Masters, Supervisors, cleaning staff and other railway employees at various stations actively participated in cleaning the railway track and station premises from their respective home stations towards the adjoining stations. Special cleanliness drives were simultaneously undertaken at around 140 railway

stations, including Ahmedabad, Sabarmati, Viramgam, Ralya Miyana, Radhanpur, Dhargadhra, Mehsana, Palanpur, Bhuj, Gandhidham, Asarva and Himmatnagar, as well as at railway yards, colonies, health units and trackside areas across Ahmedabad Division. All cleanliness activities in track and trackside areas were carried out by adhering to prescribed safety standards and operational precautions.

Ladakh starts saffron cultivation pilot in cold desert

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jammu

The cold desert region of Ladakh is set to grow its own variety of saffron and give tough competition to Kashmir's saffron growers. Boosted by the stupendous success of the Lilium flower fields in Ladakh, Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has undertaken another agricultural diversification exercise of growing saffron in the cold desert of Ladakh.

The UT administration has planted nearly 800 kg corms (90,000 nos.) of premium Iranian saffron plants over nearly 4,000 square meters of land, which was earlier barren and has been recently restored and rejuvenated, as part of Project Him Sarovar.

Agriculture experts said these saffron corms are expected to produce a good quantity of saffron in the coming season. The initiative is guided by



Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision of diversifying traditional agricultural practices for financial sustainability and economic empowerment of the farmers and the youth. The pilot saffron cultivation is being undertaken at Command Area Gate No. 27 at Spituk Pharka in Leh. For this purpose, high-



quality Iranian saffron corms with a circumference of 8 to 10 cm, a diameter of 2.5 to 3 cm or larger, and a weight of 10 grams or more, which are considered the best corms, have been planted. These specifications are considered suitable for high-quality saffron production. LG Saxena said the saffron

"Our endeavour is to transform degraded and barren land into productive assets and create new opportunities for our farmers. The introduction of saffron is another important experiment in crop diversification, which can open a new avenue for enhancing farmers' incomes through a premium-value crop," said LG Saxena.

Saffron is a high-value crop with strong market demand and commands a premium price, offering the potential to provide farmers with an additional and remunerative source of income.

Jammu and Kashmir is the primary region for saffron cultivation in India, accounting for approximately 90 per cent of the country's total production. Its introduction in Ladakh is, therefore, being undertaken as a pilot to assess its suitability to the region's climatic conditions and explore its economic potential.



Editor's TAKE

The Captain who would not fall

A terrorist tried to turn an aircraft into a weapon. A brave Indian Captain stood like a wall between his passengers and a certain catastrophe

On the morning of September 30, flydubai flight FZ1073, a Boeing 737 MAX carrying 174 people from Dubai to Tel Aviv, sent an emergency alert shortly after take-off. By evening, every passenger was safe. That outcome owes much to one Indian: Captain Smit Machchhar.

Here is what has been reported. Machchhar, 39, a Dubai-based pilot with 13 years of flying experience, was stabbed in the cockpit by his co-pilot, who stands accused of trying to seize the aircraft and crash it. The jet pitched into a dive. Bloodied and on the floor, the captain, according to the Israeli Prime Minister's Office, summoned the last of his strength to release the cockpit door. Passengers and crew rushed in, dragged the attacker from the controls and bound him.

One passenger pulled back on the controls to level the aircraft. Pilots travelling abroad then landed it at Tabuk in Saudi Arabia. An Israeli doctor on board stemmed the captain's bleeding. India's embassy in Riyadh says he is in stable condition in hospital and that it is in touch with his family. Pilots train for engine failures and storms; none trains to be hunted inside his own cockpit. Wounded and helpless, Machchhar's last deliberate act was to open a door and let help in. India should honour him formally.

The consequences are already spreading. flydubai has suspended all flights to and from Israel while investigators work. Israel says it will tighten identity and security checks on every pilot flying into the country, foreign carriers included. Its Foreign Ministry has called the episode an attempted terrorist attack on Israelis, the UAE and the Abraham Accords, and the two countries' foreign ministers have pledged to cooperate against extremist elements. The motive is not yet established; Israeli media report no sign so far that the accused acted on anyone's orders. A harder question hangs over aviation itself: how are the people who fly us vetted? The UAE's aviation regulator did not respond to Reuters when asked. India needs no lessons on what a hijacked aircraft means. The seizure of Indian Airlines IC-814 in December 1999, and its flight to Kandahar, remains a national scar. Terror has no flag, faith or cause that can excuse it.

Whether it is the work of an organised network or a lone fanatic, it targets the defenceless; here, that included parents travelling with young children. It must be condemned in every form and against every victim, without selectivity and without the quiet qualifiers that dress murder as grievance. Equally, we must refuse collective blame. The fight is against violence, not against any nation or faith.

Governments must share intelligence, vet crews rigorously and harden cockpits against insider threats. Due process must deliver swift, certain justice to those responsible. And the rest of us should remember a name.

The future of tourism lies in partnership

If we can bring together political will, public investment, private enterprise and the participation of our people, tourism can become far more than an economic sector



GAJENDRA SINGH SHEKHAWAT

Tourism has never been, and can never be, the enterprise of government alone.

Every journey undertaken by a traveller is sustained by an intricate ecosystem: governments and local authorities, airlines and transport providers, hotels and homestays, tour operators and guides, technology platforms and content creators, artisans and entrepreneurs and, above all, the communities whose lives, traditions and landscapes give a destination its distinctive character.

The task of government, therefore, is not merely to promote destinations. It is to create the conditions in which this entire ecosystem can flourish.

India stands today at an important juncture in its tourism journey. The traveller of the present is increasingly seeking not merely monuments to be seen, but experiences to be remembered. Local food, living traditions, music, crafts, nature, homestays and encounters with communities are becoming as important as conventional sightseeing. This transformation demands a corresponding transformation in the way we conceive tourism.

We must move from destinations to experiences, from isolated attractions to integrated ecosystems, and from government-led promotion to partnerships that bring together the capabilities of the public and private sectors and the energies of our people.

The experience of recent partnerships in Indian tourism illustrates the possibilities before us. The Ministry of Tourism has increasingly engaged with industry and other stakeholders to bring together capabilities in technology, mobility, hospitality, content and digital outreach. Such partnerships are valuable not merely because they extend the reach of incredible India, but because they connect inspiration with access, and access with experience.

The example of Varanasi is particularly instructive. A destination can be presented not simply as a collection of monuments, but as a living cultural experience – combining the Ganga, classical music, heritage, Banarasi weaving, local communities and traditional hospitality.

This is the direction in which tourism must now evolve. But partnerships alone cannot create a successful tourism economy. They must be underpinned by three essential foundations: political will, public investment and people's participation.

The first is political will. Tourism touches almost every dimension of public policy. A visitor's experience of a destination is determined not merely by what he or she has come to see, but by the quality of roads, airports, railways, public transport, sanitation, safety, digital connectivity, urban planning, heritage conservation and local services.

Tourism, therefore, cannot remain confined within the administrative boundaries of a tourism department.

It requires a whole-of-government approach. Transport, civil aviation, railways, culture, urban development, environment, skill development, commerce and



digital technology must converge around a common understanding of what makes a destination successful.

Political will, in this context, means recognising tourism not as an ancillary economic activity, but as an instrument of employment, enterprise, cultural preservation, regional development and international engagement.

It also means having the courage to look beyond the most celebrated destinations and invest in those lesser-known places whose potential remains largely untapped.

The second indispensable element is public investment.

Tourism infrastructure is no longer confined to airports, highways and hotels. These remain essential, but the modern traveller also needs clean public spaces, well-maintained heritage precincts, interpretation centres, signage, pedestrian infrastructure, last-mile connectivity, digital information and trained personnel.

The quality of the experience begins long before a visitor enters a monument and continues long after he leaves it.

Public investment has another important function: it creates the conditions in which private investment becomes viable.

The question, therefore, should not be whether the government or the private sector ought to invest in tourism. The more meaningful question is how public investment can create the foundations upon which private capital, enterprise and innovation can build.

A well-connected destination attracts hotels.

A well-preserved heritage precinct attracts experiences.

A vibrant local economy attracts entrepreneurs.

And an ecosystem in which these elements reinforce one another creates sustainable tourism.

Yet there is a third element without which neither political will nor public investment can fulfil its promise: people's participation.

The true custodians of a destination are its people. A village does not become attractive merely because it possesses a beautiful landscape. Its identity resides in its traditions, its cuisine, its crafts, its stories, its music and the manner in which its people welcome a visitor.

It is to be generally acknowledged that the local community must not merely be an object of tourism; it must become its principal participant and beneficiary.

Homestays, local cuisine, handicrafts, folk performances, community guides and locally managed experiences can transform tourism from an external economic activity into a source of local prosperity.

Recent initiatives to strengthen the digital capabilities

of homestay hosts, give greater visibility to lesser-known destinations and connect unexplored villages with bookable homestays demonstrate the possibilities of this approach.

The objective must be to ensure that when a destination enters the imagination of the traveller, the economic opportunity created by that attention reaches the people who give the destination its identity. A young person in a village should be able to become a guide, entrepreneur, photographer or hospitality professional.

A woman-led enterprise should be able to take local food or handicrafts to a national and international market.

An artisan should be able to derive a dignified livelihood from the knowledge inherited from generations before him.

That is when tourism becomes an instrument of inclusive development.

There is, however, an important distinction between partnerships and partnership outcomes.

The signing of an agreement is only the beginning.

The real measure of success must be visible on the ground: Have destinations become more accessible? Have visitor experiences improved? Have local enterprises grown? Has employment increased? Have artisans and communities gained new markets? Has cultural heritage been preserved rather than merely consumed?

Partnerships must therefore be judged by the value they create, not merely by the number of agreements signed.

The future of Indian tourism will ultimately be built upon a web of such relationships: between the Centre and the States; between government and industry; between technology and tradition; between global platforms and local communities; and between public investment and private enterprise.

India possesses an extraordinary inheritance of civilisation, culture, nature and diversity. What we require now is the institutional imagination to connect that inheritance with the aspirations of a new generation of travellers and entrepreneurs.

The objective should not merely be to bring more tourists to India.

It should be to ensure that the opportunities created by tourism reach deeper into India.

The true measure of our success, therefore, will not be only the number of visitors who arrive at our shores, but the number of lives that are enriched by their arrival.

Tourism, at its finest, is an exchange: the traveller discovers a place, and the place discovers new possibilities through the traveller.

If we can bring together political will, public investment, private enterprise and the participation of our people, tourism can become far more than an economic sector.

It can become one of the great instruments through which India presents her civilisation to the world, strengthens her communities at home, creates livelihoods for her youth, preserves her cultural inheritance and opens new avenues of shared prosperity. The future of Indian tourism, in the final reckoning, will not be built by government alone. It will be built by partnership and by the conviction that the prosperity created by tourism must belong, in meaningful measure, to the people and places that make India worth travelling to.

The writer is Union Minister for Culture & Tourism, Government of India

Daiv Vani

WISDOM FOR A MEANINGFUL LIFE

The King Who Chose Truth Over His Throne

Some stories test not our physical strength or courage, but simply our willingness to keep a promise once honoring it becomes genuinely costly.

King Harishchandra, renowned throughout the scriptures for his absolute devotion to truth, was severely tested by the sage Vishwamitra, who first demanded his entire kingdom as a ritual gift, then further demanded additional payment even after Harishchandra had already given away everything he owned in the world. Left with nothing at all, the king sold both himself and his devoted wife into servitude, working thereafter at a cremation ground merely to repay the remaining debt he still owed. Even when he was later asked to charge a fee to cremate his own beloved son, tragically bitten by a snake, Harishchandra still refused to abandon his sworn duty or lie about the required payment, choosing truth over even his own most devastating personal grief.

His unwavering honesty, sustained through poverty, public humiliation, and profound personal loss, finally moved the gods themselves to restore everything he had sacrificed along the way.

We often treat truth as quietly negotiable the moment upholding it becomes inconvenient or costly, assuming small compromises here and there don't really count against us.

Today, hold firmly to one truth or commitment you're tempted to bend, simply because keeping it has genuinely become difficult.

—DAIV

When engineers plan for the unknown



SIDDHARTH ROY

2ND OPINION

Engineers rarely speak of wisdom. They speak of loads, stresses, tolerances, margins and safety factors. Yet hidden inside one of engineering's most practical numbers is a philosophical idea: safety begins with admitting that we do not know everything.

A safety factor is a numerical expression of humility. A bridge may be designed to carry a certain load, but the engineer does not assume that every calculation, material property, construction detail or future circumstance will behave exactly as predicted. Instead, the structure is given additional capacity. If a column is expected to carry a particular load, it is designed to withstand more. The excess is not waste. It is an acknowledgement of uncertainty.

This principle is misunderstood in an age confident

in models, sensors and artificial intelligence. Better data can reduce uncertainty, but it cannot abolish it. A structural engineer can calculate the effects of wind, earthquakes and traffic with precision, yet cannot know every gust, vibration, material defect or alteration a building may experience. Nature does not sign the assumptions written in a design report.

The safety factor represents more than a technical precaution. It embodies a philosophy of decision-making. When knowledge is incomplete, wisdom does not demand absolute certainty before action. Nor does it encourage reckless optimism. It creates a margin between what we expect and what might happen. This margin extends far beyond engineering. Public policy, economics, medicine and personal decisions confront the same problem. Forecasts can be sophisticated and still be wrong. Economic growth can disappoint, rainfall can exceed historical records, and technologies can behave in ways their creators did not anticipate. The sensible response is not paralysis. It is to build resilience into systems before uncertainty becomes failure.

Yet safety margins can also become distorted. Excessive conservatism can make infrastructure unnecessarily expensive and inaccessible, just as inadequate margins can make it dangerously fragile. The challenge is to choose a margin that reflects both the consequences of failure and the limits of available

knowledge. Safety is therefore not simply about adding more. It is about understanding what we cannot confidently predict.

There is a lesson here for an age fascinated by optimisation. We increasingly design systems to operate at efficiency: fuller roads, leaner inventories, tighter budgets and faster construction schedules. But efficiency without slack can turn small disruptions into systemic crises. A little unused capacity can appear inefficient on paper while proving invaluable when reality refuses to follow the plan.

Perhaps this is why the engineer's idea of safety has philosophical significance. It asks us to distinguish confidence from certainty. Confidence says that our knowledge is sufficient to act; certainty assumes that nothing unexpected will occur.

The strongest structures are not those designed by people who believe they can predict everything. They are designed by people who know that they cannot.

In engineering, the safety factor protects a structure from uncertainty. In life, intellectual humility can protect us from the same illusion: that because we have calculated the future, we have conquered it.

The writer, a civil engineer, is a consultant at Rashtriya Raksha University under the Ministry of Home Affairs

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A Captain's courage above the clouds

There are rare, defining moments when the line between tragedy and survival rests on the actions of one person. The harrowing mid-air ordeal aboard a flydubai flight was one such moment, offering a powerful testament to human courage through Captain Smit Machchhar.

In the isolation of a locked cockpit, facing a sudden and violent attack by his co-pilot, Captain Machchhar chose the safety of his passengers over his own survival. Though grievously wounded and bleeding, he summoned the strength to signal an emergency and unlock the cockpit door, allowing the crew and passengers to intervene and avert a potentially catastrophic disaster.

By helping save the lives of 174 people on board, Captain Machchhar demonstrated not only exceptional courage and professionalism, but also a profound sense of duty. His actions reflect the highest values of humanity: courage, selflessness and responsibility in the face of danger.

As the captain recovers, he carries the gratitude of those whose lives were protected by his actions. His courage will remain a powerful reminder of what one individual can do in a moment of extreme crisis.

RANGANATHAN SIVAKUMAR | CHENNAI

A silver medal, a historic milestone

Nitesh Siwach's silver medal in the 97kg category deserves widespread celebration, despite his narrow defeat to Japan's Yuki Nakazato in the final.

Winning a Greco-Roman silver medal at the Asian Games ends a 64-year drought for India in this discipline. Greco-Roman wrestling has historically seen limited success in India compared with freestyle, making Nitesh's dominant run through the preliminary rounds and his appearance in the final a significant achievement. His journey from delivering milk on a motorbike while recovering from knee surgery to standing on the Asian Games podium exemplifies resilience and unwavering dedication.

Rather than viewing the result as a stumble at the final hurdle, we should recognise it as a momentous milestone. Nitesh's silver medal has set a new benchmark for Indian Greco-Roman wrestling and will undoubtedly inspire young athletes across the nation to pursue excellence on the international stage. His achievement demonstrates that perseverance can overcome difficult circumstances and that success in a less celebrated discipline can inspire a new generation of athletes to dream bigger and compete with confidence at the highest level of international competition.

SANJAY CHOPRA | PUNJAB

India's case for a permanent seat

With reference to the article "India's long road to a permanent UNSC seat" (October 2), India's aspiration for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council is understandable, but the immediate task should be to strengthen the diplomacy needed to make that aspiration credible. Reform remains difficult because it involves disagreements over the number of new members, regional representation and veto powers. India should therefore pursue a two-track approach. Alongside its long-term campaign for permanent membership, it must secure wider support for its immediate non-permanent seat bid, particularly among the Global South, African nations, small island states and countries in Asia. India could also make its reform proposal more flexible by supporting expansion without insisting that new permanent members receive veto powers immediately. Such an approach may reduce resistance from existing permanent members while keeping the larger objective alive.

At the same time, India's case should rest not merely on its size, economy or democratic credentials, but on what it can contribute to the Council. Its record in UN peace-keeping, development partnerships and ability to bridge differing interests can strengthen the argument for greater representation.

SM JEEVA | CHENNAI



Nadia: A man collects water lilies from a pond, in Nadia district, West Bengal.

PHOTO: PTI

Bihar's flood risk is changing, not just repeating

Bihar's flood story is both familiar and evolving. While many communities face recurring inundation, erosion and infrastructure damage, changing flood patterns are pushing the geography of risk into new settlements, exposing more households to river floods, embankment breaches, flash floods and prolonged waterlogging



EKLAVYA PRASAD

Every year, Bihar counts its floods. Districts affected, Gram Panchayats affected. People evacuated, relief camps, boats, damaged houses, families receiving gratuitous relief. These numbers matter; they let the state mobilise quickly. But after three consecutive years of flood figures, a harder question is becoming difficult to avoid: what does Bihar learn from one flood before the next arrives?

The Disaster Management Department's reports offer a starting point. On October 15, 2024, it recorded 28 affected districts, 979 Gram Panchayats and 52.46 lakh people. On October 15, 2025, the figures stood at 23 districts, 600 Gram Panchayats and 48 lakh people. The September 24, 2026 report shows 15 districts, 576 Gram Panchayats and 50.49 lakh people, a total likely to rise after the recent flooding along the Gandak. These are snapshots from different stages of different floods, so they do not measure severity. Yet the pattern is striking. The reported geography of impact has shifted considerably, while the number of people affected stays in a similar range. What changed because of what Bihar experienced the year before?

Vulnerability in Bihar is neither wholly repetitive nor wholly new. Some embankments, settlements, roads and households face recurring exposure and accumulating loss. Elsewhere, a river shifts course, a breach redirects water, or a flash flood reaches people never considered at high risk. A single breach is an event; repeated breaches near the same spot signal persistent vulnerability, demanding a different response from a newly affected area. And when a flood behaves unexpectedly, that should reshape the state's understanding of risk.

Every flood produces information. Breaches are reported, roads cut, crops lost. Engineers inspect embankments; communities know where water entered and where it stagnated. When the water recedes, what happens to all this knowledge? Does a recurring flood connecting an area acquire a risk profile? Does a newly affected area prompt a revision of vulnerability maps? Does a known breach or drainage failure shape how infrastructure is designed and maintained before the next monsoon?

Bihar's machinery for emergency response is extensive. What is harder to see is a learning loop connecting one year's experience to the next year's decisions. A response system asks: what must we do now?

A learning system asks: why did this happen here, what did we learn, what must change, and who will make sure it does before it happens again? The first is indispensable during a flood. The second decides whether the state can move from recurring emergency management towards sustained risk reduction.

Once the emergency passes, the questions should change. Why did the breach occur? Had the location already been flagged? Were earlier interventions temporary or permanent? Did the flood contradict existing risk assessments? Most importantly, what must change before the next monsoon?

The answers cannot stay locked in departmental files. Water Resources handles embankments, Disaster Management coordinates relief, Public Health Engineering handles drinking water. A household experiences none of these separately. A breached embankment, a flooded road, a damaged handpump, a lost crop, a closed school and an unusable house are one flood. Flood learning must see them as one system. Development partners have a role here. Bihar has long worked with bilateral and multilateral agencies, academic institutions and civil society on risk reduction, forecasting, livelihoods and community preparedness. The opportunity now is to deepen that engagement, supporting systematic post-flood assessments, documenting recurring and emerging vulnerabilities, bringing together evidence across sectors, and translating it into preparedness before the next monsoon.

None of this requires another large survey. It requires the reporting system to capture what the administrative record largely misses: what happens inside affected households. Every significant flood location could have a post-flood action record. It could document damage to houses, stored grain, livestock and productive assets; disrupted livelihoods and lost school days; health challenges, especially for women and adolescent girls when water, sanitation and menstrual hygiene facilities fail; and how



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

long displaced families take to resume normal life. It could also record the suspected cause, the flood typology, the infrastructure involved, the corrective action required, the responsible institution, the deadline and the status before the next monsoon.

Status is the important word here. A repaired embankment is not a resolved vulnerability. A family receiving relief has not necessarily recovered. A reopened road does not mean the local economy has resumed. A restored handpump does not prove a household has safe drinking water.

A rebuilt school may stay empty because children's homes and livelihoods have not recovered. The record must therefore distinguish the event, the action taken, the household consequences, the extent of recovery, and whether the intervention actually reduced the risk of repeated loss. That is a far better measure of governance than another annual total of people affected. The same logic applies to places that flood repeatedly. Bihar could maintain a simple repeat-imprint register at ward or Gram Panchayat level, recording how often a location has been affected, by what type of flooding, which infrastructure failed, what was done, and whether it changed the outcome. A location hit once needs emergency response; repeated exposure points to persistent vulnerability that demands prevention. That steers public money towards reducing known risks rather than repairing damage.

Embankments need the same discipline. A breach should trigger a documented technical review: was the cause overtopping, seepage, erosion, animal burrowing, poor maintenance or unusual hydraulics? What was done afterwards? Did it recur? Such reviews should aim not at blame but at ensuring that what the incident revealed is available when planning, maintenance and budgeting begin.

The principle extends further. Drainage congestion, road closures, crop losses and displacement all need memory. Even relief does. A household receiving assistance year after year shows that the relief mechanism works, but also need prompt the question of why the exposure persists. This is no argument against relief, which remains essential. But a good system must distinguish between responding well to a recurring problem and reducing the recurrence itself.

Megh Pyne Abhiyan's household-level loss assessment of the 2024 floods, supported by the Tata Trusts, shows how such evidence-gathering can begin. It showed that vulnerability is multidimensional and varies across flood typologies. Its value lies in continuing across successive floods rather than ending with a report. Repeated ground evidence shows what recurs, what changes, and where interventions work.

That is how evidence becomes institutional memory. The aim is not another parallel reporting system but a stronger capacity within the existing one to retain, compare and use what it learns. The three-year figures matter again here: the number of people affected stays in roughly the same range despite wide variation in spread. That should prompt an annual review, which vulnerabilities persisted, and which were addressed? Which interventions worked, and which failed? Which locations flooded again, and which households were displaced again? And what changed because the system learned?

Such questions would move flood governance from a cycle of incident, response and expenditure towards one of incident, evidence, learning, correction and prevention. The annual report can remain the rapid snapshot. Alongside it, Bihar needs a post-flood learning record that follows significant incidents beyond the receding water and separates damage from recovery, and repair from risk reduction.

Bihar will still keep having floods. Rivers will rise, embankments will be tested, settlements will stay exposed. Progress cannot be measured by the absence of the next flood. It should be measured by whether the next flood finds Bihar less vulnerable because it remembered the last one. Not simply how it counts a flood, but how it remembers one.

The writer is the Managing Trustee of Megh Pyne Abhiyan

Gandhi: The fire behind folded hands



ACHARYA PRASHANT

Gandhiji's 157th birth anniversary falls on October 2nd. Few faces are more familiar to Indians than his. For decades, speeches have lamented that the country is forgetting his thought. The truth is quieter: the country never quite understood him.

Out of that half-understanding, two Gandhis have grown. One is garlanded every October as a gentle saint. The other has been thrown at his statue, a villain whose every choice is called a betrayal. Between the garland and the stone, the man himself has gone missing.

Truth is not an ideology, and neither is ahimsa. Bind lofty words to one man, and when the man is rejected, the words fall with him. Truth does not mean declaring the 555 rupees in my pocket. At one end of every duality sits the ego; when the ego turns and looks at itself, the duality is seen to have no ground. That seeing is truth.

Nor does ahimsa mean that someone slaps me and I offer him jaggery and water. Ahimsa is older than the Buddha; it is there in the Upanishads. Human beings first commit violence against themselves. To sell oneself from within and accept bondage is violence. To refuse to be sold, and to keep moving against bondage, is a love that wants one's freedom rather than one's comfort. That love is ahimsa. It means fighting the enemy within fiercely and, where necessary, the one outside as well.

What has been taught instead is ahimsa performed only on the outside: speak sweetly to everyone. Speak sweetly to Duryodhana? With him, the conversation is through arrows.

Gandhi called the Gita his mother, and the Gita is spoken on a battlefield. Arjuna fought after his confusion and ego had been laid bare before Krishna; Timur killed in Delhi to expand an empire. Violence is measured not by whether blood was shed but by whether the mind stands with consciousness or against it.

Gandhi saw the danger of confusing ahimsa with weakness; in 1920, he wrote that between cowardice and violence, he would advise violence. Still, his meaning stayed at the level of behaviour. At root, the other, simply by being other, is held as a stranger, and that estrangement is the violence.

What makes the other an other is the ego, and that ego is false. Ahimsa, finally, means there is no other. Gandhi never spoke at that depth, and I find many holes in his reading of the Gita. But his life went further than his words, and it is in the life that he must be read.

He hated no one, but he was fiercely confrontational: with the British, with Jinnah and Mountbatten, with the Congress, with rioting crowds of his own people. You are wrong, he would say; bend, or I fast from this moment.

Learn agraah from Gandhi, not ahimsa. Once something seemed right to him, he stood on it and a frail old man standing immovably unnerved the British and his own party alike. Insistence by itself is no virtue; every stubborn ego insists. His counted because it was first turned against himself.

He stole the meat, went to a brothel, told lies, and left his dying father's side for his wife. He admitted every failing and set himself against each one. His life, he said, was his message: what was possible for him is possible for anyone.

In 1915, he admitted a Dalit family to his first ashram; donors withdrew, residents protested, and even Kasturba resisted. If this child could not stay, he said, nobody would. That was his method, non-cooperation: if he could not stop a wrong, he could at least withdraw his hand from it.

Saint or politician? Saintliness is not a profession but a devotion to truth, and such devotion does whatever the time demands. The time demanded politics. To the poorest he gave dignity: you have no weapons, no money, no voice, but you have your own life. He stood up to a few islanders' rule on August 15, 1947, while Delhi celebrated, he was fasting in riot-torn Calcutta against his own people's hatred. In the end, he took the bullets for it. Those who throw the stone are the least interested in him. To build a society that is illiberal and split along communal lines, the symbol of liberalism and communal harmony must first be dragged down. The stone is aimed at the thought, not the man. The heaviest charge is that he made Indians cowards. But why did the raiders had entered Kashmir three months before it was paid. Did he make Pakistan? He called the vivisection of India a sin, and the one man Jinnah decried was Gandhi.

Criticism is fair; I have disagreed with him more than once. Slander is another thing. He is mocked today for what he himself confessed. How much of your own life would you lay open?

The garland is no truer. He never asked to be called Mahatma or Father of the Nation. If this nation has fathers, they are the Upanishads, and Truth itself.

He had limits too. Studying textile engineering at IIT Delhi, I saw how his economics held the industry back. But to say he contributed nothing is far more wrong. Keep the grain, as Kabir Saheb said, and let the husk blow away.

The stone and the garland do the same work both spare us the trouble of reading him, and of reading ourselves. India today needs neither satyagraha nor ahimsa of the old mould. It needs rebellion and fire, and the first thing that rebellion must refuse to cooperate with is whatever keeps pulling our eyes outward, away from ourselves. Nobody need follow his path. But he deserves to be read once, properly. The question he leaves is smaller and harder: what has been sold within, and which chains accepted, for the sake of being left in peace?

Acharya Prashant is a philosopher and author whose work centres on self-inquiry and its application to contemporary life

Is headcount all that matters for Viksit Bharat?



AMITABH RANJAN

also, let me be frank, badly out of date.

The arithmetic of an older century

India's total fertility rate has settled at roughly 2.0, a shade below the replacement level of 2.1, and several southern states now sit well under it. This is not a collapse. It is the quiet success of girls' education, better child survival, wider access to contraception and women's growing authority over their own lives. A mother who no longer needs to bear six children so that two may survive is not a demographic failure. She is a development outcome.

Consider, too, the scale of what we are being asked to protect. India is already the most populous country on earth, with over 1.4 billion people. Even on the United Nations' cautious projections, our numbers will keep climbing for roughly four more decades before peaking near 1.7 billion. The fear of a sinking India concerns a date well beyond 2060, while today's real

constraints are jobs, water, clean air, housing and land. A country that cannot yet offer every graduate a dignified livelihood should not be lamenting a shortage of people.

Nor is the ageing India of popular imagination imminent. Roughly one in ten Indians is above sixty today, and that share is projected to double by mid-century. This gives us a generation to prepare, provided we use it.

The old logic of labour

The case for ever-larger populations rests on an industrial-age equation: more hands, more output. It made sense when growth meant more workers on more assembly lines and more clerks in more offices. That equation is being rewritten before our own eyes. Algorithms now draft contracts, read medical scans, write codes and answer customer calls. Robots weld, sort, pack and, increasingly, harvest. Every year a machine-hour costs less, and every year a human hour paired with a machine is worth more.

India's own experience is instructive. The IT and business-process sectors that lifted millions into the middle class are precisely the ones generative AI touches first. To bet our future on sheer numbers of entry-level workers is to bet on the very jobs most exposed. The winners will be economies that pair fewer, highly skilled people with powerful tools.

Ageing societies have long answered scarcity of workers with an abundance of productivity. Japan, South Korea and Germany learned or some of the world's highest robot densities to



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sustain output as their workforces shrank. India holds a rarer privilege: to build an automated, AI-enabled economy while its workforce is still young, and not after the greying has begun. The demographic dividend and the technological dividend can, for once, arrive together.

Greying is not fading

The phrase ageing population evokes frailty and dependence, a burden on the young. Yet longevity is the finest achievement of the past century, and we misread it when we file it under liability. A sixty-five-year-old today is healthier, better educated and more digitally fluent than her grandmother was at fifty. With AI copilots absorbing routine cognitive load, what remains scarce is judgement, mentoring and institutional memory, qualities that grow with years. The silver-haired professional with an intelligent machine at her elbow may well out-produce a twenty-five-year-old without one.

Care itself has been reimagined. Assistive

robotics, tele-medicine, AI-assisted diagnostics and smart homes can extend independent living and reach the village where no geriatrician has, even practices that have never been replaced human affection, but it can ensure that dignity in old age no longer depends on the accident of having five children.

The danger of chasing numbers

There is a graver risk in the pro-natalist reflex: it turns women into instruments of national arithmetic. Countries that have tried to engineer births through cash incentives and exhortation, Hungary and South Korea among them, have spent heavily and seen little lasting change. Fertility, it turns out, does not obey slogans. It responds to security, opportunity and choice. Nor is there any shame in a smaller family. It frees household savings for schooling, draws women into the workforce and eases the pressure on cities already bursting at the seams.

India's real deficit lies not in the number of births but in what each child receives: nutrition, foundational learning, health and skills. A child who is stunted or unschooled adds to the headcount and subtracts from the future. In an economy where machines will handle the routine, fewer children who each grow into capable, creative citizens are worth more than many left at the margins.

What Viksit Bharat demands

Policy must therefore pivot from quantity to quality. Four priorities stand out. First, treat

human capital as the nation's central asset, beginning with nutrition and health in a child's first thousand days and foundational literacy and numeracy by Grade Three. Second, launch mission-mode reskilling in AI and digital fluency across the workforce, government included, so that transition becomes a ladder rather than a trapdoor. Third, build an ageing-ready framework of portable pensions, universal health cover and age-friendly workplaces that welcome contribution beyond sixty. Fourth, ensure that automation's gains are shared, so that productivity dividends flow into wages, social security and public services rather than pooling in a few hands.

Honest caveats remain. Automation will not arrive evenly; jobs will be displaced before new ones are created, and states with older populations will need fiscal solidarity and thoughtful federalism. But these are challenges of governance, not verdicts of demography, and governance is precisely what can be improved.

The future belongs to the capable

A nation's strength was once counted in its soldiers and its farmlands. Tomorrow it will be counted in its skills, its algorithms and the well-being of its citizens at every stage of life. Viksit Bharat 2047 will be measured not in millions born but in the prosperity, health and dignity of each person living. India does not need a bigger crowd. It needs a braver idea of what each of its people can become.

The writer is a public policy expert based in New Delhi



Dharavi Experience Centre unveiled

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

On Gandhi Jayanti, marking Mahatma Gandhi's 157th birth anniversary, Honourable Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis inaugurated the Dharavi Experience Centre, where residents could step inside sample homes, explore a 3D walkthrough of the proposed township and see how housing, livelihoods, public amenities and open spaces are planned to come together. He also unveiled a Dharavi anthem and released a coffee table book celebrating the neighbourhood, one of Asia's largest informal settlements, and its more than one million residents.

Spread across 22,500 sq ft, the Dharavi Experience Centre gives residents a first-hand look at the redevelopment plan through life-size home models, digital displays and interactive exhibits. It brings together the different elements of the plan, from homes and workplaces to



transport and community infrastructure.

A detailed 3D walkthrough takes visitors through the wider neighbourhood, showing residential and commercial areas, roads, transport links, public amenities and open spaces. Interactive exhibits trace Dharavi's history and highlight the businesses and entrepreneurial activity that have shaped its identity and contributed to Mumbai's economy. At the heart of the centre are life-size sample homes. Visitors can walk through unfurnished and

fully furnished 350 sq ft and 500 sq ft apartments, experience the proposed layouts and understand how the spaces could be used.

The redevelopment plan seeks to retain Dharavi's close link between homes and livelihoods, while providing schools, healthcare facilities, places of worship, public transport, parks and other social infrastructure.

The plan also includes a Multimodal Transport Hub designed to bring different modes of transport together and improve connectivity for residents and other

Mumbaikars.

The centre also highlights the proposed rejuvenation of the Mithi river, around 40,000 trees across Dharavi and a 3.3-km public riverfront. The plan also provides for parks and open spaces, adding more greenery and public areas to the neighbourhood.

Digital and assisted channels at the centre provide information on surveys, eligibility, documentation and rehabilitation, helping residents understand provisions and processes that will shape their homes and livelihoods.

Pranav Adani addresses Invest Maharashtra event

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Hon'ble Chief Minister of Maharashtra Devendra Fadnis ji, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Aji Pawar ji, Distinguished members of the State Cabinet, Respected government officials, industry leaders, and esteemed guests,

Namaskar and good evening. It is an immense privilege to be with all of you and participate in the launch of "Invest Maharashtra."

Today marks an institutional milestone in the state's path-breaking economic journey under the visionary leadership of Fadnis ji. I see this as a nod to investment promotion body as an engine designed to propel the vision of Viksit Maharashtra into actionable reality. As India accelerates its growth story, it is financing it, building it and redefining it. If India is the rocket,



Maharashtra is the launchpad. And if Maharashtra has found an architect of modern infrastructure who has systematically redefined what execution at scale means.

For what Maharashtra and Mumbai have achieved, and are still achieving, the political leadership, the ministers, the administrators and the officials deserve a tremendous amount of praise - for not just the vision but the tireless execution that provides tremendous ease of doing business.

I heartily commend the State Government for its people-first approach, ensuring dignity, inclusivity and well-being for millions.

In you, Shri Devendra Fadnis ji, Maharashtra has found an architect of modern infrastructure who has systematically redefined what execution at scale means.

Through your War Room model and pioneering Ease of Doing Business reforms, you are ensuring that global capital translates into concrete, steel and employment. Sunetra Pawar, in you, Maharashtra has a visionary leader - who has spent decades championing grassroots environmental conservation and rural empowerment. Your leadership as the first woman Deputy Chief Minister brings a powerful, compassionate perspective

to the state's development. Friends, the drive of this government resonates deeply with me.

At the Adani Group, our commitment to this state is foundational to our core philosophy of nation-building. Our partnership with Maharashtra state spans decades, but our recent commitments reflect a quantum leap in nature, scale and conviction - at a time when the state aims to be a one-trillion-dollar economy by 2030, with the Mumbai Metropolitan Region playing a central role.

At the World Economic Forum in Davos and through state partnerships, the Adani Group has committed to an investment blueprint exceeding six lakh crore rupees across critical and upcoming sectors like energy, aviation and aerodistricts, urban regeneration, data centres and coal gasification. Projects worth 2.6 lakh crore rupees are already completed or under execution. Let me share a few examples of projects that we are excited about.

No women excluded: BAPS in Eiffel tour row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The BAPS (Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha) has said an investigation into a controversial visit by its delegation to the Eiffel Tower in Paris found that the organisation did not ask for female employees to be hidden, removed or excluded from the visitor route.

The clarification comes after Eiffel Tower employees went on strike last month following allegations that female staff members were moved away during a September 5 visit by around 100 people associated with BAPS. The protest resulted in the temporary closure of the iconic Paris landmark.

In a statement issued on Thursday, BAPS Paris reiterated that it had never requested that women working at the Eiffel Tower be excluded



from the delegation's route.

"The investigation establishes this fact that BAPS made no such request for women to be excluded along the visitor route," the organisation said. BAPS also expressed concern for the employees affected by the controversy and said it hoped the findings would help clarify the circumstances surrounding the visit and allow those involved

to move forward.

The statement followed an announcement by the Société d'Exploitation de la Tour Eiffel, the company operating the monument, that its chief executive Patrick Branco Ruivo would step down at the end of the year.

The decision came after an independent investigation identified several operational failures linked to the BAPS delegation's visit.

Employees represented by the CGT trade union had alleged that workplace instructions resulted in female staff being sidelined, replaced or made invisible because of their gender.

The BAPS Hindu temple in Paris had earlier apologised to anyone who may have been hurt or inconvenienced by the episode, while maintaining that, to its knowledge, access to the Eiffel Tower had not been denied to anyone.

The BAPS delegation had travelled to France in connection with the inauguration of the BAPS Hindu temple near Paris, which was consecrated in September.

According to its website, BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha describes itself as a socio-spiritual Hindu organisation with more than 1,300 temples across North America, Europe, Africa, West Asia, India and the Asia-Pacific region.

AAIB seeks standard pilot training

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Probe agency AAIB has recommended that an investigation into DCCA should ask all flying training organisations to adopt a standardised training syllabus depending on licence categories and ensure trainee pilots have adequately practised all critical exercises and emergency procedures before operating solo flights.

The recommendations are part of the probe agency's 61-page final report into the crash of a four-seater Cessna 172S trainer aircraft operated by Chimes Aviation Academy while landing at Guna airfield in Madhya Pradesh on March 6, 2024. The student pilot who was operating the plane suffered minor injuries. In a report dated September 29, the Aircraft Accident Investigation Board (AAIB) said the accident occurred when the student pilot could



Flying Academy, Guna

not stop the aircraft within the runway, and subsequently, when a go-around was attempted, it overran and hit a tree on a steep slope, resulting in damage to the aircraft. Unstable approach, late decision to initiate go-around and no timely communication from the air traffic controller, even after a very long flare, have been cited as among the contributory factors for the accident. Guna airfield is an 'uncontrolled airfield' while an air traffic control tower has been set up by Sha Shih Aviation Academy for flight coordination. Coming out with various safety recommendations, AAIB said the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) may suggest all FTOs to assess their runway characteristics and, in case of terrain or steep slope beyond the runway end is present, they may be advised to take proactive actions to stop overrun.

Another recommendation is that DGCA should ask all FTOs to devise a comprehensive training syllabus as per the category of license for standardisation of syllabus across all such organisations. "DGCA may issue instructions to all FTOs to ensure that

trainees have adequately practised all critical exercises and emergency procedures prior to being authorised for solo flights," the report said.

To Chimes Aviation Academy, the probe agency said it must issue instructions directing trainees to initiate a go-around without hesitation whenever the aircraft is not properly configured or aligned for a safe landing.

Among other suggestions, AAIB has said that Sha Shih Flying Academy may caution crew members of other organisations regarding a significant downward slope towards runway 14 at Guna airfield and that the FTO must ensure that no aircraft touches down beyond half of the runway, where the negative slope adversely affects braking. Guna airfield is owned by the Madhya Pradesh Government and leased to Sha Shih Flying Academy, which is an FTO.

Makhana exported to Greece and Canada

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

India has exported one tonne of makhana from Purnea, Bihar, to Greece and 24 tonnes of frozen food products from Sonapat, Haryana, to Canada, the commerce ministry said on Friday.

Export of these products mark another step towards expanding international market access for Indian food items, it said. India is the leader in Makhana production, with Bihar contributing 80-85 per cent of country's production. Makhana cultivation in Bihar spans over 35,000 hectares across 15 districts. The sector is backed by technical interventions at the



Makhana field, Bihar

grassroots level from Bihar Agricultural University (BAU), Sabour, and ICAR-National Research Centre for Makhana, Darbhanga. On exports from Sonapat, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said export of products like green peas, mixed vegetables, sweet corn, and samosas is a significant step towards connecting farmers to global value chain.

Delhi Govt organises Indraprastha Nritya Mahotsav 2026

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Indraprastha Nritya Mahotsav 2026 was inaugurated by Hon'ble Tourism Minister Kapil Mishra, Padma Shri Guru Dr. Raja Raddha Reddy and MD & CEO, Delhi Tourism, on 2nd Oct. 26. The festival is known for showcasing the rich traditions of Indian classical dance against the historic backdrop of Delhi's Purana Qila (Old Fort).

The festival provided a platform for over 150 dancers from India and abroad, showcasing a vibrant collection of traditional, talent and creativity. The festival celebrated the timeless beauty of Indian classical dance and its profound cultural heritage.



The highlight of the festival was the light and sound show underlining the history of Indraprastha and Yamuna. Deeply rooted in tradition, these dance forms are presented to contemporary

audiences in Delhi. The second edition of the festival features the participation of distinguished gurus, eminent performers and emerging talents from across the country.

The festival brings together artists honoured with Padma Awards, Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards and Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskars, along with Doordarshan's top-grade artists and distinguished dancers and dance groups. The festival offers a cultural journey through rhythm, expression, emotion and movement, celebrating the diversity of Indian classical dance and its profound cultural heritage. The festival promises a special experience for art lovers and connoisseurs, as well as new audiences and visitors from India and abroad, offering a unique confluence of history, tradition and creativity.

For the people of Delhi and visitors to the city, the Indraprastha Dance Festival offers a unique opportunity to experience India's rich classical dance traditions up close at a historic venue such as Purana Qila.

Artists and Dance Performances: Kuchipudi - Natya Tarangini, Delhi Guna Padma Bhushan Raja Reddy and Radha Reddy, along with their troupe. Odissi - Malaysia Padma Shri Ramli Ibrahim. Bharatanatyam - Kalakshetra, Chennai Kathak

— Dhvani, Delhi Guna Vaswati Mishra, recipient of the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, along with her troupe.

Bharatanatyam - Bengaluru Parshwanath Upadhye, recipient of the Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar, and Aditya P. V. Gatturiya Assam Guna Sharma, recipient of the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, along with her troupe.

Kuchipudi - Natya Tarangini, Delhi Guna Padma Bhushan Raja Reddy and Radha Reddy, along with their troupe. Odissi - Malaysia Padma Shri Ramli Ibrahim. Bharatanatyam - Kalakshetra, Chennai Kathak

Panigrahi takes over as ED(HR), NTPC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Surya Narayan Panigrahi has taken charge as Executive Director (HR) of NTPC Limited. Prior to this elevation, he served as Executive Director (HR) cum-Regional Head of HR for the Northern and Southern Regions of NTPC.

A distinguished HR professional with over 36 years of experience with NTPC, Panigrahi has held key assignments across recruitment, training and development, industrial relations, employee welfare, administration, security, CSR and HR digitalisation.

According to a NTPC Press note, Over the course of his career, he has served at several major NTPC establishments, including Talcher Kanha in Odisha, Vindhyachal in Madhya Pradesh, APCPL Jhajjar in Haryana, Tanda in Uttar Pradesh, the Corporate Centre in New Delhi, and the Southern and Northern Regional Headquarters at



Surya Narayan Panigrahi

Hyderabad and Lucknow, respectively.

During his tenure at the Corporate Centre, Panigrahi played a pivotal role in the implementation of PeopleSoft HRMS and SAP ERP systems, supporting the digital transformation of NTPC's HR processes. He also played a significant role in the development of integrated security systems across the organisation.

He subsequently headed HR at Tanda Super Thermal Power Station and went on to lead HR for the Southern and Northern Regions. In December 2025, he assumed additional responsibility as

Regional Head of HR for the Northern Region, alongside his existing responsibilities for the Southern Region. He was elevated to the position of Executive Director (HR) with effect from June 8, 2026.

Known for his people-centric approach, strategic perspective and commitment to organisational excellence, Shri Panigrahi brings extensive experience and a broad understanding of human resource management. He has been actively associated with leading professional bodies, including NIPM, AIMA, NHRD, SHRM, Power HR Forum and ISTD. He has also addressed several professional forums as a guest and keynote speaker, sharing his insights on HR, leadership and organisational development.

In his new role, Panigrahi is expected to further strengthen NTPC's people and HR strategy, while advancing the organisation's agenda of transformation, capability building and sustainable growth.

CEO UPSIDA Dr Balkar Singh Inspects IMC Prayagraj

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Prayagraj

Dr Balkar Singh, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Uttar Pradesh State Industrial Development Authority (UPSIDA), on Friday conducted a site inspection of the Integrated Manufacturing Cluster (IMC), Prayagraj, Sarawati Hi-Tech City and Naini Industrial Area.

During the visit, he reviewed the progress of various development works and directed officials to ensure their completion within the stipulated timelines while maintaining the prescribed quality standards in all construction activities. On the occasion, the CEO also visited Varun Beverages and Bisleri. Marking the occasion of October 2, a cleanliness drive was launched from Varun Beverages. Special emphasis was laid on maintaining cleanliness and creating a better working environment across industrial units for Sarawati Hi-Tech City,

directions were issued to prepare a comprehensive beautification and development plan.

Discussions were also held on developing the available green spaces as recreational areas along with exploring the feasibility of developing a world-class golf course and a helipad. Officials were further directed to ensure the availability of essential basic amenities and allottees and maintain proper cleanliness across the area.

At the Integrated Manufacturing Cluster (IMC), Prayagraj, discussions were held on developing the existing BPCL structures and plots for commercial use. A plan to develop these plots through the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model for projects such as luxury hotels and marriage gardens was also discussed. During the inspection of the Naini Industrial Area, the concerned officials were directed to ensure necessary action, as per applica-

ble rules, regarding vacant plots. Directions were also issued to shift the offices of the Regional Manager and Senior Manager and the newly renovated office building located within the Naini Industrial Area. The Chief Executive Officer laid particular emphasis on ensuring that all works related to the Integrated Manufacturing Cluster (IMC), Prayagraj are completed within the stipulated timelines while maintaining the required quality standards in all construction activities.

During the inspection, Additional Chief Executive Officer Anita Yadav, PGM Mr. Rajeev Tyagi, General Manager PK Kaushik, Senior Manager Patel, Regional Manager Santosh Kumar, and Industrial Area In-charge Manish Lakha, along with other officials and representatives and of the executing agencies, were present.

Haryana CM inspects Ladwa grain market

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini said that the State Government is serious about safeguarding the interests of farmers and that no farmer will be put to unnecessary inconvenience during paddy procurement.

Every single grain of paddy brought by farmers to the grain markets will be procured. Government ministers, MLAs and he himself are inspecting the grain markets. Directions have also been issued to all Deputy

Commissioners to closely monitor the procurement arrangements. In addition, a senior officer has been appointed as a nodal officer for each grain market. Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini made a surprise visit to the Ladwa Grain Market in Kurukshetra district on Friday evening to take stock of the paddy procurement arrangements. He checked the moisture content of the paddy crop that had arrived at the market and interacted with farmers and arthiyas to gather information about the procurement process.



Sebi penalises SMC Global Securities for compliance lapses



Capital market regulator Sebi has levied a Rs 1 lakh fine on city-based SMC Global Securities for failing to comply with norms on maintaining client order placement records and supervision of an authorised person. The order came after the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) conducted a thematic inspection of the stock broker for the period January-September 2024, focusing on unauthorised trading complaints and client order placement. The market watchdog found that SMC Global Securities had not maintained appropriate pre-order placement records for certain clients and could not provide relevant records for multiple orders, Sebi said in an order passed on Thursday.

Sebi also found deficiencies in the broker's supervision of authorised person Amit Lihare, including failure to adequately monitor bank accounts receiving commissions and verify payout requests from clients. The order said that 161 of 343 active clients mapped to Lihare showed a pattern of fixed payouts, involving client investments of Rs 6.11 crore and payouts of over ₹1.84 crore during the inspection period. (PTI)

Two limestone blocks auctioned in Jammu and Kashmir



The Centre on Friday said the two mineral blocks in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir have been successfully auctioned, marking the beginning of organised mineral development in the region. The government of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) had entrusted the auction of mineral blocks to the mines ministry.

The sale of the two limestone blocks is likely to catalyse new investment and economic activity in the Union Territory. As mining and associated activities develop, they are expected to generate a large number of direct and indirect employment opportunities and create avenues for local businesses, entrepreneurs, service providers and allied industries.

Koot-Kapran limestone block has an estimated limestone resources of 4.75 million tonnes. The block has been explored up to the G-4 stage, providing scope for further detailed exploration and development, the mines ministry said in a statement. G-4 stage mining refers to the reconnaissance survey phase, which is the earliest regional exploration stage used to identify areas with enhanced mineral potential.

The Wantraj limestone block has an estimated resources of 10.853 million tonnes. The block has been explored up to the G-3 stage, including 159 metres of drilling, providing an important geological basis for further exploration, development, A G-3 stage in mining refers to the prospecting or preliminary exploration phase. The Government of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) had entrusted the auction of mineral blocks to the mines ministry. The successful completion of the auction reflects the use of a transparent and competitive mineral auction process for the systematic development of mineral resources, the statement added. (PTI)

Weakest monsoon since 2015 prompts ICRA to cut FY27 farm growth forecast

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Southwest monsoon rainfall fell to 87 per cent of the long-period average in 2026, the lowest since 2015, prompting rating agency ICRA to cut its agriculture, forestry and fishing growth forecast for the fiscal year to about 1 per cent from 1.3 per cent.

The deficient and uneven rains have already weighed on kharif sowing, which was 1 per cent below year-earlier levels by end-September, while depleted reservoir levels raise concerns over the upcoming rabi season, particularly in southern and some northern states, ICRA said in its monsoon wrap-up.

"ICRA remains circumspect around the potential impact of the weak monsoon on crop output and farm incomes," the agency said, warning that



weaker farm incomes could dampen rural demand in the second half of FY27 and create upside risks to food inflation. Rainfall during June-September was 87 per cent of the long-period average, with the season affected by the development of El Nino conditions. June rainfall was just 60 per cent of the LPA, while July saw 103 per cent, fol-



Goyal rejects excess capacity

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said India does not have structural excess manufacturing capacity in the sectors identified by the G20 Presidency, asserting that the country's manufacturing capacity serves both domestic and global needs.

The US holds the G20 Presidency in 2026.

He also said industrial capacity in itself is not the issue; however, distortions can arise where geographical concentration of production is driven by hidden subsidies and support. The minister added that diversification of production and supply chains is a legitimate objective, but it cannot be used as a pretext for measures outside WTO (World Trade Organisation) rules or shifting the burden of adjustment onto developing countries, which must retain policy space to industrialise.

"India's manufacturing capacity serves its domestic and global needs and that, in the sectors identified by the G20 Presidency, India does not have structural excess capacity," Goyal said.

India shares the concern of several G20 members that trade-distorting support in some countries leads to dumping and predatory



Union Minister Piyush Goyal attends the G20 Meeting in UK

pricing, and it addresses such practices through evidence-based WTO measures, including anti-dumping and countervailing duties, he added. These remarks are important as the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) launched two separate Section 301 investigations on March 11 and 12, covering 60 economies over concerns related to forced labour and excess industrial capacity. One probe on forced labour concluded, and a 10 per cent duty was imposed on certain countries, including India. Final findings on the other

probe are awaited.

The US has flagged excess capacity issues in sectors such as steel, textiles, aluminium, automobiles, batteries, cement, chemicals, electronics, energy goods, glass, machine tools, machinery, non-ferrous metals, paper, plastics, processed food and beverages, robotics, satellites, semiconductors, ships, solar modules, and transportation equipment.

"India shares the concern of many members that trade-distorting support in some economies leads to dumping and predatory

pricing and addresses it through WTO (World Trade Organisation) measures such as anti-dumping and countervailing duties, based on evidence, which are open to judicial review," the commerce ministry, in a statement, quoted Goyal as saying.

India is the fastest-growing large economy in the world, with a domestic-demand-driven economy serving 1.4 billion people, and is building manufacturing value chains from design to finished goods as a trusted link in global supply chains, he said.

Goyal participated in the concluding day of the G20 Trade Ministers' Meeting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and spoke in sessions on structural excess capacity and production, updating the Most-Favoured-Nation principle ending forced labour in global supply chains, and the closing session.

Speaking on ending forced labour in global supply chains, Goyal said India's commitment to forced labour elimination is absolute and unconditional.

Measures at the border must be based on specific and verifiable evidence rather than presumptions about entire countries, regions or sectors, and must respect due process and WTO rules, he added.

Reliance to invest ₹1 lakh crore in Andhra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Madanapalle

Reliance Industries plans to invest ₹1 lakh crore in Andhra Pradesh to set up compressed biogas plants, creating more than 3 lakh jobs and generating nearly ₹60,000 crore in revenue for the state over the coming decades, the company's executive director Anant M Ambani said on Friday.

Speaking at the foundation stone laying ceremony for the Rayalaseema Horticulture Hub and Indian School of Agriculture in Madanapalle, Ambani said the investment would support the state's transition towards cleaner energy while creating new opportunities for farmers.

"Our kisans, who ensure India's food security, will now strengthen India's energy security too - making



India self-reliant in energy," he said. "That is why Reliance Industries is grateful to the Government of Andhra Pradesh for the opportunity to invest ₹1 lakh crore in the state to set up compressed biogas (CBG) plants."

CBG is a renewable fuel produced by processing organic waste such as agricultural residue, animal dung, food waste and other biomass into methane-rich gas that can be used as a

cleaner alternative to conventional natural gas, including in transport, industry and commercial applications.

Beyond reducing waste and emissions, CBG can help cut dependence on imported fossil fuels, create new markets for agricultural and organic waste, generate rural jobs and income, and support a more circular economy by converting waste into energy and nutrient-rich bio-manure.

Amazon expands ultra-fast delivery service to more than 120 Indian cities

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Bengaluru

Amazon has expanded its ultra-fast delivery service, Amazon Now, to more than 120 cities across India, doubling its footprint in two weeks as the e-commerce giant steps up its delivery network ahead of the festive season.

The service is now available in cities including Amritsar, Abohar, Jalandhar, Ambala, Mangalore, Manipal, Visakhapatnam, Kochi, Changanassery, Bhubaneswar and Karwar, Amazon said in a statement on Friday. Amazon Now offers tens of

thousands of products, including groceries, fruits and vegetables, frozen food, personal care items, fashion and beauty products, small appliances, and home and kitchen goods. Orders are fulfilled through a network of nearly 800 micro-fulfilment and urban fulfilment centres, the company said.

"We are delighted to take ultra-fast deliveries with Amazon Now to India's hinterland - from Amritsar & Abohar in the north to Kochi & Changanassery in the south - ahead of the Amazon Great Indian Festival. Amazon Now continues to be the fastest-growing e-commerce busi-



ness unit in Amazon India's history, with orders doubling every quarter.

"This accelerated rollout underscores our commit-

ment to making fast & reliable delivery accessible to customers across the country. We look forward to continuing to scale up and offering

the widest selection of products at the fastest delivery speeds this festive season," said Harsh Goyal, Vice President - Everyday Essentials, Amazon India. Amazon said in September that Amazona Now had crossed USD 1 billion in annualised gross sales in India based on the previous three-month period. The company plans to expand the service to more than 300 cities and build what it describes as India's largest "delivery-in-minutes" network.

The company said its broader fulfilment network can offer tens of thousands of products within minutes or a

few hours, more than one million products through same-day delivery, more than four million the next day and millions more through Prime delivery. Amazon Now will also offer deals during the Amazon Great Indian Festival, which begins October 8.

Amazon said customers can access deals across categories including smartphones, electronics, fashion, home and home appliances, while SBI credit and debit card customers can receive a 10 per cent instant discount on eligible transactions. Prime members will be eligible for additional savings of up to 10 per cent.

UPI volume rises 27% to touch 145 billion in first half of FY27

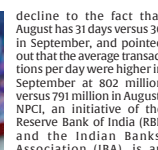
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

UPI transactions through popular Unified Payments Interface (UPI) in volume terms have witnessed a 27 per cent jump to around 145 billion in the first half of the current fiscal year.

This is against UPI volume of 114 billion in the first half of the previous financial year, according to data released by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI). However, the UPI transaction during the value term rose a slightly lower rate of 20 per cent to ₹177 lakh crore as against ₹148 lakh crore during the first six months of the current financial year. As regards September, the UPI volume

decline to the fact that August has 31 days versus 30 in September, and pointed out that the average transactions per day were higher in September at 802 million versus 791 million in August. NPCI, an initiative of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Indian Banks' Association (IBA), is an umbrella organisation for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India. It runs the UPI used for real-time payments between peers or at merchants' end while making purchases.

Effective October 15, a 0.4 per cent merchant discount rate will be levied on merchants for UPI payments. However, no charge will be levied on person-to-person transactions regardless of the amount.



GOBARdhan scheme targets 10-fold CBG output: Puri

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The ₹23,731-crore GOBARdhan scheme aims to drive increase in compressed biogas (CBG) production, save more than ₹40,000 crore in fuel imports, add over ₹75,000 crore to GDP and create more than 1.5 lakh jobs, as the government seeks to harness agricultural and organic waste into a new source of domestic energy.

Speaking at the formal launch of the scheme, Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said the scheme provides capital assistance as well as guaranteed offtake of the renewable fuel produced by processing organic waste such as agricultural residue, animal dung, food waste and other biomass.

Capital support plus guaranteed offtake is likely to lift CBG (essentially methane-rich gas) from current 0.4 million standard cubic metres per day to 4.4 mmscmd, he said, hoping this would help in achieving the target of raising share of natural gas - a cleaner-burning, lower-pol-



Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri along with others unveil the GOBARdhan Handbook during the launch of GOBARdhan Scheme, at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi

lution fuel - in India's energy basket to 15 per cent by 2030 from current 6.7 per cent.

The scheme is designed to replace about 10 million tonnes of fossil fuel with clean gas, potentially cutting more than 40 million tonnes of CO2 emissions and while producing around 250 million tonnes of organic

manure for farmers. Puri said the programme would help turn farmers from "Annadatas to also being the Ujjadatas".

GOBARdhan - Galvanising Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan - will convert agricultural residue, cattle dung, press mud, food waste and segregated biodegradable municipi-

pal waste into CBG and organic manure. The CBG can be supplied through city-gas networks for CNG transport and domestic PNG use.

It provides capital assistance of up to ₹30 crore per project across the two eligible capital-support components. For new greenfield plants, assistance is set at ₹125 crore per tonne per day (TPD) of eligible CBG capacity. Brownfield projects can receive support at 50 per cent of the applicable greenfield rate for additional capacity created through fresh investment.

Existing biogas plants upgraded to produce CBG can receive ₹0.60 crore per TPD, subject to a ₹5-crore project ceiling.

To make CBG projects more commercially viable, the government is offering producers assured offtake of up to 100 per cent of eligible output, at an administered price of ₹2,110 per million British thermal units - equivalent to about ₹98 per ckg. The administered price is set to remain in place until March 2036, providing a great revenue visibility to investors.

Putin praises PM Modi's ideas on Ukraine-Russia settlement

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ MOSCOW

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has "very good ideas" on a mutual settlement of the Ukraine conflict and raises the issue at "every meeting", Russian President Vladimir Putin has said.

Putin made the remarks on Thursday at the annual meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, according to state-run TASS news agency.

"As for Prime Minister Modi's position on ending wars, I can say that he is one of those world leaders who, despite our very good, even friendly relations, including at the personal level, constantly raises the issue and asks questions about ending the conflict in Ukraine," Putin said. The Russian leader said Modi "brings up these matters at every meeting we have and takes a keen interest in them".

"He has very good ideas aimed at finding mutually acceptable solutions," Putin added.

Ahead of the BRICS summit in New Delhi last month, Putin and Modi held talks, during which the Russian leader briefed Modi on the overall situation regarding the Ukraine war, which began in February 2022, and ongoing peace initiatives. A few days before that, Kremlin



spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Russia would welcome any peace efforts by India to end the Ukraine conflict, noting that Moscow's strategy aligns closely with New Delhi's position for a resolution through dialogue and diplomacy.

Putin, at the forum on Wednesday, also expressed appreciation for India's cultural diversity and unity. "India cannot fail to amaze with its scale and diversity," he said. "Few people know this, but Mr (Indian Prime

Minister Narendra) Modi told me that of the 1.5 billion people, 600 million Indians speak their native language, Hindi, while most speak their own languages, and they all live together — amazing," he said.

Asserting that this cannot fail to inspire admiration, he said, "There is something unique about Indian culture that can certainly serve as an example of how diversity and unity can coexist. It is certainly something to learn from."

NO PLAN TO ATTACK EUROPE, SAYS PUTIN

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin on reiterated Moscow's long-held position that Russia is not planning to attack European countries but will respond to aggression with "all weapons" in its arsenal. In remarks at a foreign policy forum, Putin accused the West and Europe of escalating tensions by talking about preparing for war with Moscow in the coming years, conducting military drills in the Baltic Sea, and seizing Russian vessels. His remarks followed Moscow's warning to NATO that it would not hesitate to use nuclear weapons to defend Kaliningrad should any members of the military alliance try to cut off the Baltic exclave from the rest of Russia.

Several Russian embassies in Europe this week issued statements that said Moscow has "information that NATO is preparing (an) air and naval blockade of Kaliningrad and (the) Kaliningrad region."

"They accused European leaders of 'playing a dangerous game' by saying Russia might attack another country or ramp up a campaign of destabilising attacks with drones and sabotage." (AP)



Indian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom P. Kumaran marks Gandhi Jayanti at Tavistock Square in London

Global celebrations mark Gandhi's birth anniversary

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Beijing/Islamabad

Indian missions in China, Japan, Pakistan and several other countries marked Mahatma Gandhi's 157th birth anniversary on Friday by highlighting the enduring relevance of his universal message of peace, truth and non-violence.

In Beijing, Indian diplomats, members of the Indian diaspora and local dignitaries joined commemorative events across the globe to pay tributes to Gandhi.

In Beijing, Indian Ambassador Vikram Doraiswami offered floral tributes to Gandhi at an

event organised by the Indian mission.

@OIBeijing, together with the Indian community and Friends of India, commemorated the 157th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi at the Jintai Art Museum today, the Indian Embassy in China said in a post on X. Doraiswami was joined by Yuan Xikun, curator of Jintai Art Museum, in offering floral tributes to Gandhi, it said.

A soulful musical tribute by Chinese artists and moving renditions of Gandhi's favourite bhajans by members of the Indian diaspora marked a celebration of peace, harmony, and

non-violence in Beijing.

In Shanghai, Indian Consul General Pratik Mathur was joined by consul generals of BRICS countries in paying floral tributes to Gandhi. Remembering Bapu, Mathur and distinguished speakers reflected on Gandhi's life, teachings and their relevance in today's world, the Indian consulate said in a social media post.

During the event, Ambassador Mallick highlighted Gandhi's guiding principles and the universal values he left behind, including the spirit of "Antyodaya" — prioritising the needs of the most vulnerable — cleanliness, and service to society,

the Indian mission in Tokyo said in a social media post.

Also in Japan, youth groups performed devotional songs along the Edo River, carrying forward Gandhi's enduring message of peace and non-violence.

In Islamabad, India's Charge d'Affaires Satyanjal Pandey and other members of the mission paid floral tributes to Gandhi. "GdA @DRSatyanjal and @IndiaInIslamabad members paid floral tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on the occasion of #GandhiJayanti, remembering his message of truth and non-violence," the mission said in a social media post.

Taiwan receives 2 long-delayed US F-16Vs, awaits additional fighter jets

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Bangkok

Taiwan on Friday received the first two of 65 F-16V fighter jets ordered from the US, the island's air force said, following years of delays.

The two F-16V Block 70 jets landed at Chinghai Air Base in Taichung. They are 63 more to be delivered. The self-ruled island, which is also claimed by Beijing as part of its territory, placed an order for the F-16Vs in 2019.

Taiwan largely purchases arms from the US, its largest unofficial ally, to boost its defences in the face of a military threat from China. China sends fighter jets and ships toward the island almost daily. Taiwan's



defence minister said on Tuesday that the island remains in continuous discussions with the US about its weapons sales.

The shipment is the first in a long list of backlogged US orders worth almost \$30 billion. The F-16Vs represent

\$8 billion, or roughly 25 per cent of the entire backlog, according to Taiwan Security Monitor at George Mason University. The order had been delayed partly owing to production and supply chain issues.

The delivery of the jets comes as the island waits for the US administration to approve an additional \$14 billion arms package.

That package has stalled after US President Donald Trump met with China's President Xi Jinping in May. US defence sales to Taiwan are a major source of tension between the US and China. Beijing has repeatedly called for Washington to halt sales to Taiwan, with President Xi Jinping personally raising the issue.

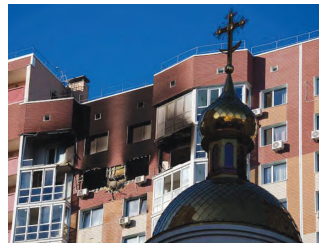
Russian aerial strikes snarl traffic on Kyiv bridges

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Kyiv

Russian aerial attacks forced the partial closure Friday of three bridges over the Dnipro River in Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital's mayor said, in Moscow's latest effort to disrupt life in the city.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's top diplomat said officials have received separate proposals for a partial truce with Russia from the United States, India, Turkey and Japan. The proposals envision halting attacks on energy infrastructure, which have caused fuel shortages in Russia and power outages in Ukraine, and on Black Sea shipping.

The Russian strikes forcing the full or partial closure of three of Kyiv's six road bridges caused traffic logjams and appeared to be a new



tactic in its campaign to torment the city's residents. Previously, Russia has hit apartment blocks, supermarket warehouses, gas stations and data centres, among other targets, in an escalation of attacks.

Civilians "are bearing the brunt of this war," the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, said in Geneva on Friday.

"The war in Ukraine is a human rights catastrophe that is growing and intensifying by the week, causing unfathomable pain to civilians," he said. "Across Ukraine, people are living in constant dread." While the aerial war has intensified in recent months, fighting along the roughly 1,250-kilometre front line snaking through northern, eastern and southern Ukraine has been virtually deadlocked, Russia's invasion of its neighbour more than 4½ years ago, and there are no concrete signs that a peace settlement might be possible.

However, Ukraine's this year made some progress against Russia's bigger army, according to the Institute for the Study of War.

Russian forces lost control over almost 300 square kilometres (116 square miles) of Ukraine between March and September, the Washington-based think tank said in a report late Thursday. Also, it said that the Russian military suffered over 46,000 casualties.

Macron presided over the International Energy Agency will coordinate the effort to combat soaring fuel prices. "We will implement our commitments with a coordinated release

about the need to address rising fuel prices and the availability of petroleum products, according to the French Embassy in the US. Macron on Friday then chaired a video conference

of G7 leaders to discuss the issue. France holds the rotating presidency of the G7 group and made the announcement in a statement released after video-conference talks that

Indian-founded Dubai events firm HOP to go global

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Dubai/New Delhi

An Indian-founded Dubai events company that has staged concerts featuring AR Rahman, Arijit Singh and Lucky Ali is planning a major international expansion, with a target of operating across 25 cities over the next two years.

HOP Events, founded by Dubai-based Indian entrepreneur Kalpesh Kinariwala, said it plans to stage more than 250 events a year across 75 venues, drawing a combined annual audience of more than one million. The expansion will take HOP into cities including London, New York, Doha and Singapore, as it looks beyond its UAE base and increasingly



towards international audiences. HOP has also signed on as the exclusive global touring partner for Lucky Ali for an eight-city tour planned for 2027, with Doha, Singapore and London among the announced destinations.

Kinariwala said the company now wants to broaden its focus beyond large concerts to include storytelling, art and other cultural formats.

G-7 agree to release 100 million barrels of oil, boost for Trump

COLLIN BINKLEY
■ Washington

The Group of Seven industrial nations said they agreed to release 100 million barrels of oil, starting with "substantial" amounts of diesel after the fuel recently hit record high prices in the United States, where President Donald Trump said the diesel release would happen "immediately."

Trump and his Republican Party face pressure to address surging prices ahead of November's midterm elections. Trump announced the action Friday on social media, saying, "Europe has just agreed to release a massive amount of their heavily stockpiled Diesel Oil. The process will begin

immediately." The president faces lagging approval ratings as the Iran war and his trade battles have increased US prices for oil and other goods.

Gas prices in the US and abroad have soared during the eight-month-long war, a cost Trump has repeatedly said is worth it for making sure Iran does not obtain nuclear weapons. Trump has insisted prices will come down after the war, though there's no end in sight.

The national average for a gallon of diesel in the US was \$6.37 on Friday, according to AAA, after hitting a record \$6.52 on September 22. Trump had a conversation overnight with French President Emmanuel Macron, the chair of the G7,



about the need to address rising fuel prices and the availability of petroleum products, according to the French Embassy in the US. Macron on Friday then chaired a video conference

of G7 leaders to discuss the issue. France holds the rotating presidency of the G7 group and made the announcement in a statement released after video-conference talks that

Macron presided over the International Energy Agency will coordinate the effort to combat soaring fuel prices. "We will implement our commitments with a coordinated release

through the IEA of 100 million barrels (MB) to begin immediately over 4 months, including a frontloaded substantial diesel release within the first 20 days by G7 members and partners," the statement said.

A new AP-NORC poll found that a majority of adults blame Trump for higher prices, and approval on his handling of the economy hit a new low.

Trump has grown increasingly frustrated with what he sees as a disconnect between his achievements and the public's view of his work. Trump this week gave himself an A-plus for his work on the economy but said "We're doing an extremely poor job of promotion." (AP)

Ebola treatment centre burned down as death toll in Congo passes 4,000

DEUDONNE DIROLE/
OPE ADATAYO ■ Bunia

Congo's Ebola outbreak has recorded more than 4,000 deaths, authorities said, as they struggle to contain the spread of the virus.

The latest figures released by the Health Ministry on Thursday showed that 4,018 people have died, making up nearly half of the 8,300 confirmed cases, in what has become the fastest-growing Ebola outbreak in history.

Congo announced an outbreak on May 15, caused by the rare Bundibugyo virus, which has no known treatment or vaccine. Some health workers gathered in Bunia, the capital of northeast

ern Ituri province, the heart of the outbreak. They were demanding payment for wages owed but were quickly dispersed by officials. The protesting workers included surveillance team members, who identify people exposed to infected patients. They waved placards saying "No money, no data!" and "No payment for months!"

Front-line workers have gone on strike several times since the outbreak began, further hampering efforts to contain the disease. A senior UN official said that an Ebola-hit camp housing a transit centre for infected patients was burned by soldiers earlier this week as they were looking for weapons in Kigonzo, on the outskirts of Bunia, forcing 19,000 people in the camp to flee.



A healthcare worker in protective clothing is disinfecting by a colleague inside a treatment centre for Ebola patients in Beni, North Kivu province, Congo

"The enormous challenge of halting the spread of Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) just became even harder after a key transit centre for patients requiring treatment burned down in Ituri province," the United Nations said.

Julien Harneis, the UN senior Ebola coordinator, said creating Ebola transit and treatment centres has been a struggle, requiring money and staff, all of which are in short supply.

"When we lose a centre, that means we lose capacity, we lose investment, and we have to start again. And above all, it means that people do not get access to the care that they really need," Harneis said.

An aid worker with Medecins

Sans Frontiers, known in English as Doctors Without Borders, was infected with Ebola while working in Congo, the group said in a statement. The worker arrived late Thursday night after being flown to the Netherlands on a special medical flight and was transferred to a high-level isolation unit, the Leiden University Medical Centre said in a statement.

"The human cost of this crisis is unprecedented in the DRC, with communities facing the largest Ebola disease outbreak ever recorded in the country," MSF said. More than 50 health workers have died after contracting the virus.

The World Health Organisation has recently raised the alarm about the virus' rapid spread into

new health zones, stretching limited resources. Africa CDC said in its latest news conference that the number of newly confirmed cases is falling, but that could be attributed to insecurity and challenges in getting communities to cooperate in some of the hot spots. While the spread of the disease has slowed down in some areas, it has accelerated in others, creating what experts see as a delicate situation.

Confirmed cases have slowed in recent weeks. The outbreak saw 850 cases and 470 deaths a week in mid-July to an average of 490 cases and 230 deaths in September. Overall, the outbreak also saw a similar jump of 33 per cent in both confirmed cases and deaths through September. (AP)

Triple punch: Lovlina, Parveen, Ankush strike gold at Asian Games

PHILEM DIPAK SINGH ■ Nishio (Japan)

Indian boxers delivered a sensational hat-trick of gold medals at the Asian Games with Lovlina Borgohain (75kg), Parveen Hooda (65kg) and Ankush Panghal (80kg) producing contrasting but stirring performances in their respective finals here on Friday.

Lovlina and Parveen ended a 12-year wait by joining legendary MC Mary Kom in the select group of Indian women boxers to have won Asian Games gold. The Manipuri had claimed the fly-weight (51kg) title at the 2014 Games in Incheon.

India thus finished atop the boxing medals tally, signing off with six medals, including three golds, its

best-ever performance at the Asian Games in terms of gold medals.

Besides the gold, Priya Ghanghas (60kg), Kapil Pokhariya (90kg) and Narender Berwal (+90kg) won bronze medals.

The country's best overall haul came at the Guangzhou 2010 edition, where the contingent won nine medals — two gold, three silver and four bronze. Lovlina defeated China's Ziyi Bao 5-0 in her 29th birthday to upgrade the silver she had won at the last edition. Parveen then eked out a narrow 3-2 split-decision win over Paris Olympic bronze-medallist Chen Nien-chin of Chinese Taipei to claim her maiden Asian Games gold.

Ankush then became the first Indian male boxer since Amit Panghal in 2018 to win an Asian Games gold medal.

Lovlina gives herself a birthday present

"Today is my birthday. It's a very special birthday. I'm feeling really good. I thought I'd have to gift myself a gold medal on my birthday. It's the first time that I got a present for myself. I gave it my all. I didn't think for a second that I would lose," Lovlina said after the win.

"It was a very tough fight. But I was always thinking that I just had to win. The last round was very tough. I was winning by 2-1 in the first and second rounds. So I thought I had to just win the third round."



Lovlina made the most of her considerable height advantage, while the 20-year-old Bao constantly tried to close the distance and deny the Indian space to work.

The approach made for a messy contest, with Bao resorting to repeated clinches.

In a departure from her usual approach, Lovlina started aggressively, landing a few punches right away, but Bao was equally fierce with her counters. The Chinese southpaw connected a couple of com-

bination before Lovlina finished the round strongly with some clean, heavy punches to edge it 3-2.

Trailing, Bao came out aggressively in the second round, looking to close the distance, while Lovlina tried to keep her at bay and create room for her punches.

The Indian managed to find her range towards the end of the round, landing a series of clean blows to take it 4-1 on the judges' cards. The same pattern continued in the final round, with Bao throwing punches in abundance but struggling to land cleanly. Lovlina remained compact in defence and picked her moments to counter.

Having done enough to establish her lead, Lovlina slowed the pace in the closing stages and chose not to engage unnecessarily, keeping Bao at a distance and seeing out the contest.

At the last edition, Lovlina had lost to another Chinese boxer, Li Qian, in the final, settling for silver. This time, she made sure that didn't happen again.

Parveen's redemption

The victory marked redemption for Parveen, whose bronze medal from the 2022 Hangzhou Asian Games was stripped following a suspension for whereabouts failures, an episode that also derailed her Olympic hopes amid her father's health issues.

"When all that happened to me, whereabouts came, I was mentally down. Everything was over. I had to start from zero. But I was sad for a few days. Then I reset my mind. If I don't train now, and don't make a comeback, I will live in regret all my life," she said. "Because of a small mistake, so much happened. So I decided to take everything the other way around, with interest."

"In Haryana, gold medal winners get the post of deputy director. It was my dream job. So, I just told myself, 'Oh, deputy director. Then I went and took the round in my favour.'"

Ankush's golden rise

Ankush has steadily emerged as one of India's most promising young boxers and, in his first year on the senior circuit, the 21-year-old added the Asian Games title to the Commonwealth Games gold he won earlier this year. He delivered an assured, dominant performance against Kim. "I was doing well in the training camp for eight months. This is the best year I have seen in 10 years. I got a gold medal. I am feeling good," he said. "I have seen my opponent's bouts. I practised according to him. I was confident that I would win. I was never over-confident that I would beat everyone. I just wanted to do my best." (PTI)



Sujeet wins Asian Games gold, beats Olympic champ; Dipanshi misses bronze

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Nagoya

Sujeet Kalkal underlined his growing supremacy in the men's 65kg category by clinching the Asian Games gold here on Friday, defeating an Olympic champion en route to the title and erasing a massive 2-9 deficit in the final to add yet another crown to his tally in a stunning year of domination.

Stronger Iranian and Japanese rivals were expected to make life tough for Sujeet in a tricky draw but it was Tajikistan's Abdulmashid Kudiev who tested the Indian most by racing to a 2-2 lead.

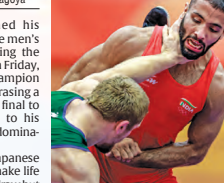
Using his tremendous speed and technical skills, Sujeet found a way to make a dramatic turnaround and prevail 10-9, scoring eight points in a row and holding off his rival.

Kudiev did not let Sujeet attack, using arm locks in the first period. Once Sujeet got a measure of his rival's style he did not let him make any attacking move.

While Kudiev matched the Indian with strength, Sujeet trumped his rival with speed, repeatedly going behind the Tajik to execute takedowns.

One after another successful moves cut the deficit to 8-9, and with about 20 seconds left in the bout, Sujeet found a decisive takedown and defended his one-point lead to emerge the winner.

Before that thrilling final, Sujeet outclassed Afghanistan's Sayed Omar Zazai by technical superiority (19-3) to begin his campaign and produced a clinical performance



against Iran's Abbas Ebrahimpourzadeh in the quarterfinal, winning by technical superiority without losing a point. He then prevailed 3-0 on criteria against Japanese Olympic champion Kotaro Kiyooka in the semifinal. It was a near-perfect show of strength, tactical acumen, and endurance.

It is Sujeet's first Asian Games gold, and the 23-year-old Indian has now swept the U23 World Championships, Asian Championships, Zagreb Open, and Tirana title in the last 12 months, winning virtually everything that has come his way.

His only setback came at the Mongolian Open in June, where a knee injury forced him to withdraw; otherwise, Sujeet has been unbeaten in his pursuit of the biggest titles on offer.

Sujeet was also a worthy candidate for the Hangzhou Games, but the ad-hoc committee did not allow him to challenge Bajrang Punia in trials, awarding Bajrang a direct entry.

Neeru Dhandra to be flag bearer at Asian Games closing

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Nagoya

Ace Indian trap shooter Neeru Dhandra will be the women's flag bearer at the closing ceremony of the Asian Games on Sunday after capping a remarkable campaign with two gold medals and a team silver to emerge as one of the most successful athletes at the continental showpiece.

The 27-year-old, who returned to India a day after winning her third medal — a gold in the trap mixed team event alongside Kynan Chenai — will travel back to Nagoya on Saturday morning to lead the Indian contingent at the closing ceremony.

"She is returning to Nagoya tomorrow morning to be the woman flag bearer. The decision on the male flag bearer will be taken tomorrow," deputy chief de mission Anjali Bhagwat said on Friday. Bhagwat was present at the Gifu Prefectural Green Stadium to watch the women's hockey final between India and China.



Neeru enjoyed a stellar campaign in Nagoya, winning the women's individual trap gold before combining with Manisha Keer and Ashwina Ahlawat to clinch silver in the women's team event.

She then partnered Chenai to win the trap mixed team gold on the penultimate day of the shooting competition, taking her medal tally to three. Her two gold medals and a silver were her best ever.

out performers at the Games, capping a historic campaign for the shooter, who had also won the women's trap gold at the ISSF World Cup in Lonato earlier this year.

Indian men's hockey team eyes back-to-back Asiad Gold

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kakamigahara (Japan)

Indian men's team will look to bring their 'A' game forward in their bid to defend the gold medal as well as book a spot in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, when they take on Malaysia in the Asian Games' summit clash here on Saturday. India have never won successive Asian Games gold medals, which makes the final here on Saturday a golden opportunity to write a new chapter in history.

But, for India, who had a wobbly run in the semifinal against arch rivals Pakistan, it will be a challenge to pull up their socks against Malaysia who have remained unbeaten in the Asian Games with five consecutive wins.

In fact, both the finalists enter the



gold medal match after tough outings in their respective semifinals. The Indians were certainly on top of their game against Pakistan on Thursday, wasting a plethora of penalty corners while also conceding a three-all lead.

India looked firmly in control after establishing a 3-0 lead, but Pakistan fought their way back into the contest and levelled the score at 3-3. With the match seemingly heading for a shootout, India scored the decisive goal in the last minute of regulation time through Abhishek to seal a dramatic 4-3 victory.

Golfer Pranavi Uir takes sole lead in pursuit of Asian Games gold

V KRISHNASWAMY ■ Nagoya

India's Pranavi Uir returned a superb four-under 66 in the third round to take a three-stroke lead and place herself in strong contention for an individual gold medal at the Asian Games women's golf competition here on Friday.

The 23-year-old from Mysore, who is making her Games debut, has a total of 15-under 195, which is three shots clear of Shannon Tan of Singapore, who stumbled to a one-over 71 in the third round to lose the lead position that she held overnight.

A stroke adrift of Shannon was China's Yin Ruoning. She signed on a flawless four-under 66 for a total of 11-under 199.

Pranavi's card was studded with five birdies against a solitary bogey that she dropped on the par-four 14th hole. She played out a blemish-free front-nine, picking up shots on the first, third and eighth holes. Her other two birdies came on the 13th and 18th holes.

It was a big third-day leap, traditionally called the 'moving day' in golf, and it put the Indian women's team, comprising Pranavi (66-63-66), Aditi Ashok (71-74-70) and Diksha Dagar (71-73-71), in second place, four shots behind the Chinese. China's total of the best two

scores on each of the three days is 405. India has a cumulative score of 409, and Hong Kong is at 411.

After three days of golf in Nagoya, the country has given itself two genuine opportunities to add to its Asian Games medal tally.

For the second successive Asian Games, an Indian woman will hold the 54-hole lead at the Asian Games. Aditi Ashok did so in Hangzhou in 2023.

Despite taking a seven-shot lead into the final round last time in China, Aditi crashed to a 77 on the final day and ended second with a silver. The team finished fourth, and Aditi's silver is India's only women's golf medal.

Pranavi, who is the only Indian woman golfer to have won a mixed pro event, which she did at the IGPL Invitational Mumbai last year, was happy with her showing, but had a few regrets too. (PTI)



TAPAN MOHANTA ■ Kolkata

The biggest football night India has ever seen is finally here, with five-time world champions Brazil arriving in Kolkata to face a national side still searching for a place among Asia's established teams, in an invitational friendly at the iconic Salt Lake Stadium, here on Saturday.

Brazil, ranked fifth in the world, will meet India in their first-ever international meeting, bringing Real Madrid forward Vinicius Junior, Arsenal defender Gabriel Magalhães, midfielder Bruno Guimarães and veteran Marquinhos.

They have arrived in a city where the iconic Yellow jersey enjoys a massive following, so much so that during any World Cup, the 'para' (localities and neighbourhood) split into a passionate divide, with half the city draped in Brazil flags and the other half backing Argentina.

Misadventure in the 2027 Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia, underlining the huge gap between the Blue Tigers and Asia's stronger teams.

The AIFC on the other hand sees Saturday's game differently with president Kalyan Chaubey calling it



a 'historic' opportunity, while the federation hopes exposure to a team of Kolkata and suggested that money could instead have gone into struggling domestic clubs.

Bhutta has also questioned the reported cost of bringing Brazil to Kolkata and suggested that money could instead have gone into struggling domestic clubs. The ambition has also brought widespread criticism. India withdrew from the inaugural FIFA ASEAN Cup to accommodate the Brazil fixture after the two competitions created a scheduling clash.

Former India captain Bhaichung Bhutia has questioned that choice, arguing that competitive matches and long-term investment in Indian football would offer greater value than spending heavily on a single high-profile friendly.

grassroots football. Reports have put the overall cost in the range of Rs 50-70 crore, while a separate report said the AIFC had spent about Rs 6 crore on a charter flight for Brazil's 90-member delegation.

The country remains a cricket-dominated sporting market, while Indian football continues to grapple with financial and structural problems, with the top-tier Indian Super League itself was caught in a quagmire of uncertainty over its future and format during last year.

The timing of Brazil's visit also carries a political backdrop. The match has received the full backing of West Bengal's newly formed BJP government, which took office less than a year after the Lionel Messi event at the same Salt Lake Stadium descended into chaos under the previous Trinamool Congress administration.

It had spent less than 20 minutes at the venue on December 13, 2025, before being escorted out as angry spectators complained that they could not see the Argentine star.

The incident spilled into vandalism, with chairs and other stadium property damaged. However that was a promotional event and this is a full-fledged international friendly. (PTI)

