

# The Indian EXPRESS

JOURNALISM of COURAGE

AHMEDABAD, LATE CITY, 20 PAGES

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## Happening today

● **THE CONGRESS WORKING Committee (CWC)** will meet in New Delhi to chalk out an agitational programme seeking withdrawal of the VB-G RAM G Act, which replaced the UPA-era MGNREGA. The VB-G RAM G Bill got the Presidential assent on December 21.

● **UTTAR PRADESH** Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will chair a two-day conference in Lucknow of senior police officers, focusing on challenges ranging from cybercrime and human trafficking to emerging issues such as social media.

● **CHIEF ELECTION** Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar arrives in Odisha on a three-day visit, during which he will preside over a meeting of booth-level officers.

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## FIRST REMARKS AFTER BNP LEADER ENDS EXILE AND ARRIVES IN DHAKA

# Delhi on Rahman return: Polls must be free, inclusive and participatory

## Unremitting hostilities against minorities in Bangladesh: MEA

Divya A  
New Delhi, December 26

IN FIRST remarks on Bangladesh a day after BNP leader Faruque Rahman returned to Dhaka ending 17 years of self-exile, India said Friday that the homecoming should be seen in the context of ensuring "free, fair, inclusive and participatory elections" scheduled for February in the neighbouring country.

Rahman, son of former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia who is ailing, is the BNP's acting chairman and is tipped to be the next Prime Minister. His

party is expected to come to power after the February 12 elections. Ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League has been barred from the polls.

Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs, told reporters: "India stands for strengthening our ties with the people of Bangladesh. We favour peace and stability in Bangladesh and have consistently called for free, fair, inclusive and participatory elections in Bangladesh."

Underlining the "unremitting hostilities" against minorities in Bangladesh and flag-



BJP workers hold a protest in Karnataka's Chikkamagaluru on Friday against the alleged killing of a Hindu youth in Bangladesh. PTI

ging it "as a matter of grave concern," Jaiswal said India condemns the killing of a Hindu youth in Bangladesh. In Mysingsingh, Dipu Chandra Das

was beaten to death by a mob over alleged blasphemy, and his body was later set on fire on December 18.

"The unremitting hostilities

against the minorities in Bangladesh including Hindus, Christians and Buddhists is a matter of grave concern. We condemn the recent killing of a Hindu youth in Bangladesh and expect that the perpetrators of the crime will be brought to justice," he said.

Tensions between India and Bangladesh escalated last week following the death of July 2024 uprising leader Sharif Osman Hadi. He died on December 18, six days after he was shot in Dhaka. As protests erupted on both sides of the border, Delhi and Dhaka summoned each other's envoys earlier this week to express

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RELATED REPORT, P 17

## RUN-UP TO CWG 2030 IN AHMEDABAD

# Gujarat CM on his priority: Fix AQI, build infra

Ritu Sharma & Leena Misra  
Gandhinagar, December 26

FIXING THE air quality index and public transport systems will be the Gujarat government's top priority, along with setting up "international standard sports facilities", as it prepares to host the Commonwealth Games 2030, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel has told *The Indian Express*.

In an exclusive interview, Patel detailed how his government was streamlining processes to meet deadlines and ensure delivery. "We are working closely with the United Nations Environment Programme to align our air quality index (AQI) with global public health benchmarks... The experience of successfully managing large crowds during major concerts, festivals and cultural events has given us confidence in handling the scale and complexity of an international sporting event", he said. "We aim at not just hosting events successfully, but to leave behind infrastruc-



BHUPENDRA PATEL  
GUJARAT CHIEF MINISTER  
PAGE 4

ture that continues to improve everyday urban life long after the Games are over."

Patel's government has also been aggressively hiring and fixing its governance and administration, largely based on recommendations of the Gujarat Administrative Reforms Commission (GARC) appointed early this year.

His Cabinet saw an overhaul in October, with new ministers being sworn in along with a Deputy Chief Minister in Harsh Sanghavi, who also

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## S.I.R. OF OF ELECTORAL ROLLS

# Bihar playbook gets Bengal pushback: Officials flag notices to electors sent by EC

Atri Mitra, Ravik Bhattacharya & Damini Nath  
Kolkata, New Delhi, December 26

## E. EXPLAINED

### ERO: Sole authority for voter deletion

AT the heart of the issues raised by the West Bengal officers' association is the claim that names of persons may be deleted from voters' list without the knowledge of the Electoral Registration Officer - the competent authority to decide if a person is a legitimate voter.

Chief Election Commissioner  
»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

AS ELECTORAL Registration Officers (EROs) in West Bengal prepare to hold hearings from Saturday to decide whether lakhs of electors will remain on the rolls, an association of state service officers has flagged a serious concern over the potential of large-scale "system-driven" deletions the EROs could be blamed for, despite not being involved in generating the notices.

In a letter to West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Agarwal, with a copy to



## Nation's Pride

President Droupadi Murmu with the winners of this year's 'Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar', which recognises exceptional achievements of children between the age of 5 and 18, at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on Friday. PTI

THE NATIONAL AWARDS were conferred on the occasion of Veer Bal Diwas, which commemorates the martyrdom of two sons of Guru Gobind Singh.

20 CHILDREN got the awards this year across categories: Bravery, Social Service, Environment, Sports, Art & Culture and Science & Technology.

PM NARENDRA MODI, speaking at a Veer Bal Diwas event, said the country should resolve to rid itself of 'slave mentality' in the next 10 years. PAGE 12

# Any HC step on air purifier GST will violate basic structure: Govt

Sohini Ghosh  
New Delhi, December 26

## Centre questions motive of PIL, says it will open a Pandora's box

OPPOSING THE Delhi High Court's intervention in a PIL seeking GST reduction on air purifiers from 18% to 5% by classifying them as medical devices, the Centre said Friday that any judicial direction will amount to the court stepping into the legislative domain and violating the Constitution's basic structure of separation of powers.

Stating that entertaining the petition will "open a Pandora's box" and the government is "scared from the constitutional perspective", Additional Solicitor General N Venkataraman, appearing for the Centre, said there is already a legislative pro-

cess involved in dealing with recommendations made in Parliamentary standing committee reports as well as how GST Council meetings deliberate on proposals. "How can this process be scuttled through a court process?" he said.

Advocate Kapil Madan, appearing as party-in-person in the PIL, has submitted in the petition that an air purifier can be classified as a medical device as per a February 11, 2020 notification of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Opposing the PIL and ques-

tioning the motive, the ASG said, "This is not a PIL at all... GST is only a ruse. This will open a Pandora's box... There is a process. We will go through the process... filing a petition and getting a mandamus (a court order) issued asking the GST Council to say this or that... we are scared from the constitutional perspective, it is the doctrine of separation of powers... We can't give a committed date (on the GST Council meeting) (but) we certainly see an agenda (by the

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## Business as Usual

By EP UNNY



## THE BIG PICTURE

In Kerala, a mob and its many faces

PAGE 14

# Sengar order perverse: CBI challenges HC finding, moves SC

## His release will jeopardise victim, family: Agency

Ananthkrishnan G  
New Delhi, December 26

DESCRIBING THE Delhi High Court order suspending the life sentence of Unnao rape case convict Kuldeep Singh Sengar as "contrary to law" and "perverse", the CBI Friday moved the Supreme Court, challenging the HC finding that he was not a public servant when he



Unnao rape case convict Kuldeep Singh Sengar

committed the offence.

In its appeal against the December 23 order which led to public outrage and protests including by the victim and her family, the CBI said the HC

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

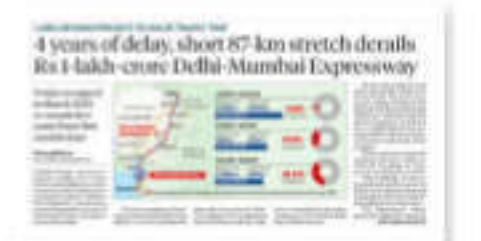
# 'Intent-to-terminate' notice to Pune contractor for 35-km stretch in Gujarat

Dheeraj Mishra  
New Delhi, December 26

THE NATIONAL Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has issued an "intent to terminate notice" to Pune-based contractor Roadway Solutions India Infra Ltd (RSIL), citing "negligible financial progress" in the 35-km Jujawa-Gandeva section (Package 8) of the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway in Gujarat, derailing the entire 1,386-km project.

On December 18, *The Indian Express* reported that a 87-km stretch in Gujarat, which included the Jujawa-Gandeva section, had derailed the Rs 1.04 lakh crore project.

It was one of the two packages re-awarded to the company after scrapping the contract over delay in works.



The Indian Express report dated Dec 18 on the delay in the project

On December 23, a 23-page letter was sent to the RSIL, giving it 15 days to respond. In its letter, the NHAI said the contractor could achieve only 4.5 per cent financial progress despite the lapse of 16 months from the date of appointment or the contractor's start date which was August 31, 2024. "As per the 18 months contract, the progress should have been 70 per cent till date... but there has been negligible progress," it stated.

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

● THE PROJECT WILL BE DEVELOPED BY NHPC LIMITED AT AN ESTIMATED COST OF RS 3277.45 CRORE

# Indus Treaty on hold, green nod for another hydel project on Chenab

Nikhil Ghanekar  
New Delhi, December 26

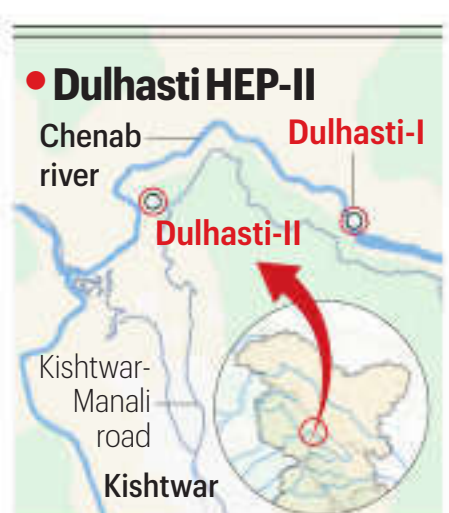
AMID THE Centre's push to expedite pending infrastructure projects in the Indus basin, the Environment Ministry's sectoral expert appraisal committee (EAC) on hydel projects has recommended the clearance for the 260-MW Dulhasti Stage-II project on the Chenab river in the Kishwar district of Jammu and Kashmir, according to min-

utes of the panel's December 19 meeting.

The project will be developed by the NHPC Limited at an estimated cost of Rs 3277.45 crore.

The 390-MW Dulhasti-I is a run-of-the-river scheme, and was commissioned in 2007 by NHPC Ltd.

Dulhasti-II will utilise the existing dam, reservoir, power intake of the Stage-I project, and draw water from the Marusudar river, a tributary of the Chenab, via the Pakal



Dul project. While giving its nod, the panel noted that the water of

the Chenab basin is shared between India and Pakistan, in accordance with provisions of the Indus Water Treaty, 1960, and parameters of the project were planned in accordance with the treaty.

"However, the Indus Water Treaty stands suspended effective from 23rd April, 2025," the panel noted in the minutes.

India put the IWT in abeyance after the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack earlier this year. Under the treaty, Pakistan controlled the waters of

Indus, Jhelum and Chenab while India controlled Ravi, Beas and Sutlej.

After the IWT was put in abeyance, the Centre has moved to expedite several hydroelectric projects in the Indus basin such as Sawalkote, Ratle, Bursar, Pakal Dul, Kwar, Kiru, Kirthai-I and II.

The clearance will be subject to general and some specific conditions, including development of a river conservation strategy to mitigate the impacts of hydrologi-

cal alterations due to the operations of Dulhasti-II and Pakal Dul dam.

"It was noted that the Dulhasti Stage-II HEP is planned to utilise surplus water to be diverted from the Marusudar river through the Pakal-Dul powerhouse into the Dulhasti reservoir. Downstream of diversion of Pakal Dul HEP, about 25 km stretch of Marusudar river will undergo significant hydrological alteration upon commissioning of the Pakal Dul Hydroelectric Project," the committee

noted. In light of this, it directed a structured river conservation strategy, covering aspects related to robust environmental flow regimes, restoration and maintenance of channel morphology, protection and conservation of aquatic and riparian biodiversity.

The Chenab basin already has three operational projects: the 390-MW Dulhasti-I at Kishwar, the 890-MW Baglihar at Ramban, and the 690-MW Salal at Reasi.

Other projects under con-

struction on Chenab include the Ratle (850 MW), Kiru (624 MW), Kwar (540 MW).

The Dulhasti Stage-II project will require an area of 60.3 hectares, according to information submitted to the EAC.

A public hearing was conducted on August 22 in Banzwar village, where the powerhouse is proposed.

Private land spread over 8.26 hectares will be acquired from 62 families in Banzwar and Palmar villages of Kishwar.



## Meeting with V-P

Vice President C P Radhakrishnan meets Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar in New Delhi on Friday. ANI

## India flags concern to the US over cancellation of H1B visa interviews

Express News Service  
New Delhi, December 26

THE MINISTRY of External Affairs on Friday said it has flagged its concerns to the US over cancellation of pre-scheduled H1B visa interviews of large numbers of Indian applicants and that both sides are engaged on the issue.

The government has received several representations from Indian nationals who are facing problems with the rescheduling of their visa appointments. MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at the weekly media briefing.

From December 15, the US expanded the vetting of social media accounts to all H1B visa applicants as well as their dependents. "In every visa case, we will take the time necessary to ensure an applicant does not pose a risk to the safety and security of the United States and that he or she has credibly established his or her eligibility for the visa sought, including that the applicant intends to engage in activities consistent with the terms of admission. The Department of State regularly shifts appointments as needed to match resource availability," the US Embassy spokesperson said. This social media scrutiny of

applications comes three months after the US administration led by President Donald Trump increased the fee for new H-1B applicants to about US \$100,000 (about Rs 89.8 lakh) from about \$2,000-\$5,000, depending on employer size and other costs.

Visa-related issues pertain to the sovereign domain of any country, Jaiswal said, adding: "We have flagged these issues and our concerns to the US side, both here in New Delhi and in Washington DC." He said several Indians have been stranded for extended periods of time in India causing a lot of "hardships" to them and their families.

Interviews of thousands of H-1B visa applicants slated from the middle of December in India have been abruptly postponed by several months to scrutinise their social media posts and on-line profiles. Some of the applicants, whose visa appointments were scheduled last week, received emails from US immigration authorities informing that their interviews are being pushed back as late as May next year. "The government of India remains actively engaged with the US side to minimise the disruptions caused to our nationals," Jaiswal said.

## Street food vendor arrested for 'abusing' customer whom he sold veg biryani with bone

Express News Service  
Ghaziabad, December 26

A STREET food vendor has been arrested in Ghaziabad's Loni after a woman alleged that she was abused and threatened when she confronted the seller on finding a bone in the vegetable biryani she had purchased from him. Rashid alias Rahul (28), a resident of the 100-foot road near Neelam Factory, was arrested on December 24.

Police said the incident took place a day earlier near the 80-Foot road, close to Neelam Factory.

The woman, Tannu Sharma, had got two plates of vegetable biryani packed from a roadside stall, RK Biryani. While eating at home, she allegedly found a piece of bone in the biryani.

Following this, she returned to the stall along with her husband to confront the vendor.

In her statement to police, the woman said that when she confronted the vendor, he abused her and threatened to kill her.

A video of the incident,

which has gone viral on social media, shows the couple handing over the biryani to the shopkeeper, saying, "Veg biryani mein hadhi mili hai (there is a bone in the veg biryani)."

The shopkeeper is seen opening the disposable paper box and responding, "I have made a mistake."

To this, the husband replies, "How can you make such a huge mistake?"

As the argument continued, several people gathered at the spot, with some of them seen hurling abuses at the vendor.

An FIR was lodged into the matter the next day at Loni Border police station.

"Based on the complaint filed by the woman, the accused was booked for abusing her, criminal intimidation and selling adulterated food," said ACP Ankur Vihar Gyan Prakash Rai.

"During questioning, the accused denied the presence of any bone in the food. The food sample has been sent for testing, and further legal action will be taken based on the report," he added.

## Paan masala advt case: Consumer court orders forensic test of Salman Khan's sign on power of attorney

Kota: A consumer court in Kota on Friday ordered Bollywood actor Salman Khan's personal appearance in a "misleading" paan masala advertisement case and forensic examination of the signature on power of attorney submitted before the court. The court noted that next hearing on the matter will be on January 20.

The complainant, advocate Indra Mohan Singh Honey, who is also a BJP leader, on October 15 filed a complaint in Kota consumer court alleging that Rajshree Pan Masala and Khan are misleading the people with advertisement of paan masala in the name of "saffron-in-

fused cardamom" and saffron-infused paan masala.

He argued that when saffron costs Rs 4 lakh per kilogram, how can it be available in a paan masala pouch of Rs 5? The actor and the company are misleading the public and the youths getting attracted towards consuming paan masala and falling victim to serious diseases like cancer.

On the previous hearing on December 9, the petitioner had raised objections to Khan's signature on the power of attorney and reply to the court notice submitted before the court and demanded an investigation into the matter. ■

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## Delhi on Rahman return: Polls must be free

concern over the situation.

According to Jaiswal, over 2,900 incidents of violence against minorities have been documented in Bangladesh by independent sources during the tenure of the interim government. "The incidents of vi-

olence against minorities in Bangladesh cannot be brushed aside as media exaggeration or dismissed as political violence," he said. Soon after he returned to Dhaka, Rahman said, "It is time for us all to build the country together. We want to

build a safe Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, no matter who a woman, man, or child is, they should be able to leave their homes safely and return safely."

Invoking Martin Luther King Jr's "I have a dream" remark, he said: "I have a plan for

the people of my country and for my country... This plan is for the interest of the people, for the development of the country, for changing the lot of the country. To implement the plan, I need the support of all the people of the country."

## Air purifier GST

petitioner), we are very, very concerned."

"If an air purifier... has to be declared a medical device... so much complication in the licensing procedure. It is extremely regulated... There is a process involved. How can this process be scuttled through a court process? I see a lot of things calculated in this petition. I may be wrong or right," he said.

To the High Court's suggestion on December 24 that the Centre should consider if a virtual meeting of the Council can be called given the air pollution situation in Delhi and its surrounding areas, Venkataraman made it clear that it will not be possible.

Justice Vikas Mahajan, who

was on bench with Justice Vinod Kumar, said, "The court's only concern was, as I can see from the order (of December 24) that having regard to the pollution situation in Delhi and surrounding areas, why the GST should not be reduced from 18 to 5%. Whatever way you want, you do it, find a way out for that. The price range for air purifiers is starting from Rs 10,000-12,000 and goes up to Rs 60,000. It is beyond the reach of a common man. Why not bring it down to a reasonable level where a common man can also afford it?... What is the difficulty in the GST Council meeting? They can take a call."

The ASG said the GST Council involves Finance Min-

isters from across the nation and "each one perceives it very differently."

"We (Union Ministry of Finance) had an urgent meeting yesterday. We have the following concerns with this petition: it is a loaded petition, we want to know who is behind this petition. This is not a PIL at all. Please come to the prayers, it has nothing to do with GST, GST is only a ruse... (on prayer seeking classification of air purifier as a medical device) Health Ministry is not even a party to the petition. Who is he (petitioner) trying to finish, we don't know. Somebody wants a monopoly in air purifiers, we don't know. We are really concerned... It is a convoluted,

loaded petition."

Warning that any court direction in this regard may breach the separation of powers between the legislature and judiciary, the ASG said, "Separation of powers is a basic structure... The report (by the Parliamentary standing committee of science and technology) has been sent to the Environment Ministry, they will in turn ask for an action taken report from the Department of Revenue. If required, the Department of Revenue will lead evidence."

The bench permitted the Centre to file a counter-affidavit and also allowed the petitioner to file a rejoinder to it by January 9, the next date of hearing.

## 'Negligible progress': NHAI notice to firm

The project milestones were revised and modified on a number of occasions, the NHAI said, noting that "despite the continuous support by the authority, the contractor failed to demonstrate any improvement."

It said the contractor was required to shift the utility from the site and despite NHAI paying supervision charges, the RSIL failed to do so, and start work. It said the contractor failed to mobilise adequate machinery as per the requirement at the site.

"Three supplementary agreements were done with the contractor to jointly resolve the issues in the project, but there has been no significant progress," the NHAI told the company. It said that upon expiry of the notice, the authority would be entitled to terminate the contract.

The Indian Express contacted the NHAI for an official comment on the letter. It is yet to respond.

Earlier, Navjeet Gadhoke, Director, RSIL, said "the delay is not on part of the contractor,

it is the default of the NHAI for non provision of land". He said the company got the work again in rebidding because "there was no default" on its part.

The expressway, which passes through Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra, is divided into 53 packages. Three packages - numbers 8 (Jujuwanda-Gandeva), 9 (Karvad-Jujuwa) and 10 (Talsari-Karvad) on the Vadodara-Virar section - were awarded to RSIL in May, July and March of 2021, respectively.

The NHAI first scrapped the contract for Jujuwanda-Gandeva and Karvad-Jujuwa in March 2023 due to delays, and issued a new tender. The RSIL participated in the tender process again, and ended up bagging the contract for both sections in November 2023 with the lowest bid.

At the end of almost four years now, less than 20 percent of the 87-km stretch under these three packages has been completed, while the rest of the expressway in Gujarat is almost ready.

## Sengar order perverse: CBI moves SC

failed to consider that a sitting MLA, by virtue of holding a constitutional office, is vested with public trust and authority over the electorate, and that such a position carries heightened responsibility arising from duties owed to the State and society."

It said the HC "has erred in law by failing to adopt a purposive interpretation that advances the object and intent of the POC SO Act, a special victim-centric legislation enacted to protect children from sexual offences."

The HC, it said, "has ignored that releasing Sengar on bail and suspending his sentence during the pendency of the appeal would not only be against the law but would also jeopardise the well-being and safety of the victim/survivor and her family".

Seeking a stay on the HC order, the CBI said the "judgment is contrary to law and is perverse... the protection of victim is paramount if the respondent is released from prison... safety and security of victim will be at peril". Sengar, it said, is a "highly influential person having muscle and money power and still can cause injury to the victim and her family".

The HC, while deciding the expelled BJP leader's plea for suspension of the sentence, had held that "at this stage", it was "satisfied that... offence under Section 5(c) of the POC SO Act is not made out against the appellant on account of him not falling within the definition of a public servant".

Challenging this, the CBI said the HC "has failed to appreciate the main objectives of the legislation while providing Section 5 (c) of the POC SO Act, is not only recognition of constitutional rights of children to care, safety and dignity but also protection from sexual abuse and exploitation. A comprehensive and meaningful reading of Section 5(c)... leads to an irrefutable conclusion that it seeks to punish exploitation and sexual abuse of children from 'public servants' owing to use of their power, position, authority or status, be it political or otherwise".

It said the HC "has failed to appreciate that the sitting local MLA is in a position of trust or authority by virtue of being a public servant to a general electorate of his constituency".

It said the HC "failed to appreciate that the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, share a common legislative purpose in regulating and penalizing abuse of authority. Both Acts target people in positions of trust or public duty, impose enhanced accountability where position is misused, and adopt a purposive interpretation of 'public servant' or 'person in authority' to advance the object of public protection. Consequently, a harmonious and constructive reading ensures that misconduct by persons holding official or authoritative positions is fully actionable under the respective statutes".

The agency said "offences

under Section 5(c) of the POC SO Act are of greater gravity than corruption offences by MPs/MLAs. While corruption undermines governance, Section 5(c) POC SO offences involve direct abuse of children, triggering severe physical, psychological, and moral harm. The legislature has therefore provided for stringent mandatory penalties, protective procedural safeguards, and enhanced liability for persons in positions of trust or authority, reflecting the higher societal interest in protecting the vulnerable over abstract institutional harm."

The CBI said that Section 42 A of POC SO Act states that the provisions of the Act shall be in addition to and not in derogation of the provisions of any other law for the time being in force and that in case of any inconsistency, the provisions of POC SO "shall have overriding effect".

It said that the HC "failed to correctly appreciate" the 1997 SC judgement "in the case of L K Advani v. CBI" wherein the accused MLA was held to be a public servant within the meaning of Section 2 (c) (viii) of Prevention of Corruption Act which was interpreted to mean each and every person who holds the office by virtue of (which) he is required to perform any public duty in the discharge of each State or public community is interested would be deemed to be a public servant".

The HC, it said, also "failed to appreciate the law laid down by the SC in the case of P V Nara-

simha Rao v. State (CBI) wherein it was "examined whether Members of Parliament and State Legislators are public servants for the purposes of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947... The Court held that an MP and a state legislator is a public servant under Section 21 IPC for the purpose of corruption prosecution and is not immune from prosecution for bribery just because of parliamentary status".

"Section 21 of the IPC, Section 2 (c) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, and Section 5 (c) of the POC SO Act, 2012, share a common legislative intent of holding persons in positions of trust, authority, or public duty accountable for misconduct. A purposive and harmonious construction of these provisions ensures that MPs, MLAs, government functionaries, and other persons exercising public functions are treated as 'public servants' or 'persons in authority' wherever abuse of office or trust occurs, thereby advancing both the objectives of anti-corruption law and protection of vulnerable persons," it said.

Pointing out that Sengar had also been convicted for culpable homicide not amounting to murder in connection with the death of the victim's father in custody, the CBI said that while considering applications for suspension of sentence, "the criminal antecedents of a convict and impact on public confidence in the justice delivery system are relevant considerations".

## Gujarat CM

holds the sports portfolio.

In the last six months, the government has hired teachers, health workers and policemen to fill the long-pending vacancies to strengthen the "frontline service delivery", Patel said, adding that his government is focusing on "moving away from reactive hiring toward a binding 10-year recruitment calendar".

About the CWG 2030, Patel said that detailed economic impact assessments are being carried out to ensure that investments remain "financially responsible and sustainable."

"Gujarat is working to ensure that the road to 2030 becomes a global benchmark - not just for hosting a sporting event, but for showcasing the idea of a truly Viksit Gujarat", he said.

Emphasising how "monitoring systems" had been put in place to ensure timelines are met, the CM said that a Governance Performance Index (GPI) is in place, which he personally monitors through the CM Dashboard.

"Some of the areas in the state which are really doing well on GPI are industries and investments. With the help of real-time tracking, I do not need to ask any department about how long the issue has been pending or what measures have been taken for people-oriented schemes," he said.

He also cited the Statewide Attention on Grievances by Application of Technology (SWAGAT) platform as an effective mechanism to address grievances of citizens, mostly about "land-related matters".

"The mechanism is completely apolitical. To date, I have not received a single reference from any political representative in support of or against the complaints or their redressal. However, certainly I have often told the district and taluka level concerned authorities to work effectively to get the complaints resolved at their level itself," the CM said.

## Bihar playbook

Gyanesh Kumar's office, the West Bengal Civil Service (Executive Officers) Association on Wednesday flagged the "suo motu system-driven deletion of electors from the draft electoral rolls in West Bengal in the ongoing SIR process bypassing the statutory role of EROs".

The EROs are the sole and competent authority to issue notices if they doubt an elector's eligibility, including citizenship, as per the Representation of the People Act, 1950. However, in the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, the ECI's centralised portal has been used to generate notices. The Indian Express had reported on December 16 that EROs across Bihar had found "pre-filled notices" appearing on their individual log-ins on the ECI's centralised portal. Significantly, while the notices bore the names of the EROs, they had not been generated by them.

An Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) in West Bengal, who did not wish to be named, said notices are generated by the ECI software, and not by the officer concerned. "We have an option/button for notice generation. When we use it, notice is automatically generated. At present, the software generates notices for voters who are not mapped with the 2002 SIR data. Accordingly, notices to these voters are sent. However, in the case of voters with 'logical discrepancies' in data, we have no power to decide which elector will be called for a hearing. That will be decided only by the ECI," the ERO in Nadia district said.

In his letter, Saikat Asraf Ali, General Secretary of the state civil service officers association said, "It is observed that names of electors might be deleted from the electoral roll without the knowledge of the ERO who is the competent authority as per the statute. The common people who will be affected by such action will only blame the ERO without knowing that the ERO has been kept out of the entire deletion process by the Commission." Ali told this newspaper that the association wants ECI to follow the law and be transparent. "If they make deletions, and what they have done so far, they should clarify to people that the ERO is not responsible for the deletions. Otherwise people will blame us. We also don't want any genuine elector's name to be deleted," he said.

An official in the West Bengal CEO office, however, said de-

tainly I have often told the district and taluka level concerned authorities to work effectively to get the complaints resolved at their level itself," the CM said. About the CWG 2030, Patel said that detailed economic impact assessments are being carried out to ensure that investments remain "financially responsible and sustainable".

"Gujarat is working to ensure that the road to 2030 becomes a global benchmark - not just for hosting a sporting event, but for showcasing the idea of a truly Viksit Gujarat", he said.

Emphasising how "monitoring systems" had been put in place to ensure timelines are met, the CM said that a Governance Performance Index (GPI) is in place, which he personally monitors through the CM Dashboard.

"Some of the areas in the state which are really doing well on GPI are industries and investments. With the help of real-time tracking, I do not need to ask any department about how long the issue has been pending or what measures have been taken for people-oriented schemes," he said.

He also cited the Statewide Attention on Grievances by Application of Technology (SWAGAT) platform as an effective mechanism to address grievances of citizens, mostly about "land-related matters".

"The mechanism is completely apolitical. To date, I have not received a single reference from any political representative in support of or against the complaints or their redressal. However, certainly I have often told the district and taluka level concerned authorities to work effectively to get the complaints resolved at their level itself," the CM said.

tailed instructions were given to all DEOs (District Election Officers), EROs and AEROs in October itself before SIR work commenced in West Bengal. "Why are the officers raising such questions now? Only those electors who have no mapping with 2002 SIR are being served notices to come for hearing. That number is around 31 lakh in West Bengal. The ECI will start scrutinising the voters with 'logical discrepancies'. Then it will be decided by ECI how those notices will be generated," the official said.

The officers' association said while the ECI, as a constitutional authority, reserves the right to issue necessary directions regarding the revision process, "large-scale deletion of entries from the electoral rolls bypassing the mandatory statutory provisions entail a legitimate apprehension that the EROs are being accountable for the act of deletion while they do not have the opportunity to exercise their statutory responsibilities through quasi-judicial hearing".

"Further, the act of system-driven deletion of so many electors at once appears to infringe upon the natural rights of electors who might well be otherwise eligible under existing provisions of the law yet, for some reasons or other, could not be present during the Enumeration process," the association wrote in its letter. "It has been found on the date of the draft publication that a considerable number of electors, whose Enumeration Forms have not been returned on alleged grounds such as death, migration, absence, or duplication, have been deleted from the draft electoral rolls," the association said.

"Seen against the existing legal provisions as enumerated in the Representation of the People Act, 1950 read with the Electoral Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, it is observed that the law clearly mandates that an elector's name can be deleted with care on special grounds such as, when 'the person concerned has ceased to be ordinarily resident in the constituency or that he is otherwise not entitled to be registered in the electoral roll of that constituency' and also, in all such cases, 'the electoral registration officer shall give the person concerned a reasonable opportunity of being heard in respect of the action proposed to be taken in relation to him' (Section 22 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950).

Ahmedabad



## 'Ominous' office?

WITH TWO Collectors of Surendranagar district now under Directorate of Enforcement (ED) scanner in connection with alleged money laundering cases within the past four years, there is talk among the power corridors to get the collector office "cleansed through a hawan or puja" before bureaucrats turn down to take the position, fearing similar fate. The most recent case is of 2015 batch IAS officer Rajendra Patel, who was posted as Surendranagar Collector since February 2025, and was removed from his post by the General Administration Department (GAD) this week and kept without posting. A 2011 batch IAS officer, K Rajesh, who was Surendranagar collector in 2021, remains under suspension since July 2022. Rajesh is also facing charges by the ED in a money laundering case.

## Ahmedabad Riverfront an example of political will: CM

Express News Service  
Vadodara, December 26

STATING THAT "political will" was of foremost priority in development of projects for the larger public interest, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel on Friday urged the Vadodara Municipal Corporation to "do quality work" so as to have surplus funds to utilise along with "peace" in the days.

Patel inaugurated projects and laid foundation stone for development works worth Rs 957 crore of the VMC, where he also cited the example of the Sabarmati Riverfront and said, "To make development projects a reality, you need vision and determination... you have all seen the Riverfront in Ahmedabad... we saw it earlier too. It is an example of political will. There are thousands of slums along the river but you can only develop when you have shifted them, allotted them homes; then the riverfront has been made... No one was crushed in the name of development. Whatever firm decisions have to be done for the larger development need political will and which is what we have done."

Stating that the Urban Development budget has increased from Rs 500 crore in 2005 when then CM Narendra Modi started the Urban Development Year to the present day budget of Rs 30,000 crore, CM Patel stressed on the quality of work. He said, "Earlier, if you wanted to complete works worth Rs 1 lakh, you had to run from pillar to post... Today, you can get work worth crores of rupees done even for a corporator. Gujarat has ranked first in finance management... So, if you do quality work, you will not only have peace for five years but you will also have surplus money..."

## Khel Mahakumbh participants rose from 16L to 72 L in 15 yrs: CM Patel

Express News Service  
Ahmedabad, December 26

CHIEF MINISTER Bhupendra Patel on Friday said the participation in the Khel Mahakumbh has increased from 16 lakh in 2010 to 72 lakh in 2025, and threw light on the fact that 16 talented players from Gujarat are representing the state and country in national and international sports competitions.

CM Patel made the statement while addressing an inaugural session of the three-day national convention of Kreedha Bharati in Ahmedabad.

Quoting CM Patel, an official release stated that Khel Mahakumbh was launched by the then CM of Gujarat and current Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2010 with a noble intention that one should develop in every sphere and sports too has its importance.

## PROUD MOMENT FOR GUJARAT: FOREST & ENVIRONMENT MINISTER

# 'Tiger State' tag regained after 33 yrs as big cat's presence in Ratanmahal confirmed

Arjun Modhwadia says Gujarat has now become the only state to host three big cat species — lion, tiger and leopard — simultaneously

Express News Service  
Ahmedabad, December 26

GUJARAT HAS regained its status as a 'Tiger State' after 33 years, with the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) confirming the presence of a tiger in the Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary in central Gujarat and including the state in the national Tiger Census.

Forest and Environment Minister Arjun Modhwadia announced the development in an official statement on Friday.

According to the statement, forest officials detected pugmarks of a tiger on February 23 this year in the Pipalgota Round of the Kanjeta Range in the sanctuary. Subsequent analysis of camera trap data revealed an image of a tiger captured on February 22 at 2:40 am.

Modhwadia said the NTCA was informed about the presence of the tiger following these findings.

"On the basis of that, a team of the NTCA carried out a study in Gujarat and confirmed the presence of a tiger in Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary in its primary report and included Gujarat for the Tiger Census in the country, while also suggesting steps to strengthen the ecosystem," the minister was quoted as saying in the official release.

The release, however, added that the Gujarat Forest Department is yet to receive an authorised communication from the NTCA in this regard.

The minister said the state Forest Department has begun efforts to strengthen the ecosystem for tiger habitation.

"The area is being constantly supervised since confirmation of the tiger's presence, and necessary steps are being taken to ensure availability of water and prey base, security, and fire prevention. The number of camera traps in the area has also been increased," Modhwadia said.



According to a government statement issued on Friday, forest officials detected pugmarks of a tiger on February 23 this year in the Pipalgota Round of the Kanjeta Range in the sanctuary. EXPRESS

He added that the sanctuary already has wild boars, blue bulls and monkeys, and that prey base species are being augmented where required. "Additionally, antelopes and spotted deer were released in the area during the monsoon. At the same time, forest department officials will be trained in conservation and breeding of tigers. Moreover, attempts are on to bring a female tiger to increase the tiger population in the region. All efforts are also being made to ensure that Ratanmahal Sanctuary is declared

a Tiger Reserve," the release said. Calling it a "proud moment for Gujarat", Modhwadia said the state has become the only one in India to host three big cat species — lion, tiger and leopard — simultaneously.

"This is a result of forest conservation work done under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel," he said.

According to the minister, tigers were once present in large numbers in Gujarat but

gradually became extinct in the state.

"The last time, in 1989, when the Tiger Census was conducted, officials spotted pugmarks of a tiger but no tiger was seen. In the 1992 Tiger Census, Gujarat was excluded and lost its status as a Tiger State. With the sighting of a tiger in 2019 in Mahisagar district, a ray of hope was raised, but unfortunately it survived only for 15 days. It is a matter of joy for us that a tiger has once again made Gujarat its home," he said.

## Criminal negligence behind Vadodara flood situation: Congress targets BJP

Express News Service  
Vadodara, December 26

THE CONGRESS party's Jan Aakrosh Yatra on Friday arrived in Vadodara city, beginning from Savli, with Congress leaders attacking the BJP for the floods faced by Vadodara city time and again due to the delay in implementing the rejuvenation of the Vishwamitri River.

Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee (GPCC) President Amit Chavda attacked the BJP for "criminal negligence" that led to floods in Vadodara. Chavda said, "Every year a flood situation is created in a city like Vadodara and only the criminal negligence and corruption of the people in power of the corporation and Gandhinagar are responsible for this. The flood-affected people are not even given assistance and on the pretext of a project worth crores in the name of deepening

the Vishwamitri river, the people in power are only filling their own pockets. They do not care about the people... There is lack of permanent jobs in the corporation, and law and order is weak, leading to incidents of rape, bootlegging and increasing drug abuse in colleges, but the BJP government is busy in politics of symbolism."

As the yatra proceeded from Manjusar, Dumad, Chhani and parts of Vadodara city, Chavda and Leader of Opposition Dr Tushar Chaudhary continued to accuse the BJP of failing to implement policies. Chaudhary said BJP is a government of industrialists. "This government can only think of industrialists. It is a government that protects industrialists no matter what wrong they do. Here the Labor Law, Factory Act and law and order do not apply to workers. If change is to be brought about, then an organised struggle is necessary

and the Congress Party is fully ready for that struggle and in the coming time we will fight for the rights and entitlements of workers from the streets to the House..."

Chavda said workers in GIDC Savli were being made to toil for over 12 hours despite the eight-hours work-a-day law and without any safety arrangements. "When workers die in accidents, their families are not given any proper compensation or assistance. Local youth are not given employment. The workers have also made a serious representation that BJP leaders are extorting huge amounts from the companies at the expense of exploiting the workers, due to which the condition of the workers is becoming more miserable. Laws were made for the workers during the Congress governments, but not a single law is being followed under the BJP rule," Chavda said.

## Earthquake of 4.6 magnitude in Kutch, no casualty reported

Press Trust of India  
Ahmedabad, December 26

AN EARTHQUAKE of 4.6 magnitude hit Kutch district in Gujarat early Friday morning, creating panic among residents, though no casualty or damage to properties was reported, officials said.

It was recorded at 4:30 am with its epicentre around 22 kilometres West North West (WNW) from Rapar in Kutch district, the Gandhinagar-

based Institute of Seismological Research (ISR) said.

The earthquake was followed by two tremors of 2.5 and 3 magnitude in the same region, the ISR said in its update.

No casualty or damage to property was reported, a Kutch district disaster management official said. Dr Gaurav Chauhan, geologist at Department of Geology in Kutch University, said the earthquake that struck near Rapar occurred on Northern Wagad fault line.

## AMC to restore and expand Subhash Bridge

Ritu Sharma  
Ahmedabad, December 26

THE Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) on Friday announced its comprehensive plan for the restoration of Subhash Bridge over the Sabarmati River, along with the construction of new two-lane bridges on both sides of the existing bridge.

The Indian Express had first reported on December 24 that the over 50-year-old Subhash Bridge — a critical nerve connecting east-west across the Sabarmati River near the Sardar Vallabhbhai International Airport — will not be pulled down but restored along with construction of a new bridge alongside.

Ahmedabad Municipal Commissioner Banchhanidhi Pani had told The Indian Express that based on the structural inspection report, the decision not to open the Subhash Bridge — which has been closed since December 4 after it developed cracks — has been taken as of now.

On Friday, while addressing a press briefing, Pani said considering the rising city traffic and future demand, the plan expanded beyond restoration to include new bridges on both sides.

"Taking into account the increasing traffic demand in the city, AMC has decided not to limit the project to restoration alone, but to also construct additional new bridges on both sides of the existing bridge. It will be an iconic bridge. The total estimated cost of the entire project is Rs 250 crore of which the restoration work is Rs 110 crore, and it will be executed under the EPC (Engineering, Procurement and Construction) model. The tender for which will be out on Monday," Pani said.

The project has been designed keeping in mind the structural safety of the existing bridge, future traffic demand, and long-term usability, and will be implemented in two phases.

### Phase 1: Restoration of the existing bridge

As Pani had told *The Indian Express*, the damage was to the superstructures and not to the pillars. Thus, in the first phase, the existing superstructure of the bridge will be completely removed and replaced with a new superstructure based on 38-metre spans using steel composite girders. The existing piers will be restored and strengthened through micro-concrete jacketing to provide adequate support for the new structure.

### Phase 2: Construction of new two-lane bridges on both sides

In the second phase, new 2-lane bridges will be constructed on both sides of the existing bridge at the same level. This will involve complete new construction, from foundation to superstructure. For both phases, a single combined tender will be invited under the EPC mode. Accordingly, the basic estimated cost of the EPC tender has been fixed at approximately Rs 250 crore.

Once completed, the project is expected to significantly reduce traffic congestion between the northern and central parts of the city and provide infrastructure capable of meeting future traffic requirements. While the restoration work is expected to take nine months, this will be followed by construction of the two bridges.

Subhash Bridge is a vital link connecting the Ranip and Shahibaug areas. Constructed in 1973, the bridge had been functioning without major issues for the past 52 years.

However, on December 4, 2025, cracks were observed in the bridge deck along with settlement in the superstructure. In the interest of public safety, a decision was taken to close the bridge to traffic.

Following the damage, detailed inspections were carried out by empanelled consultants as well as experts from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Roorkee and Sardar Vallabhbhai National Institute of Technology (SVNIT), Surat.

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# Express Interview

4

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2025

## 'We are moving away from reactive hiring toward a binding 10-year hiring calendar, aligned with projected retirements and sanctioned posts'

CHIEF MINISTER BHUPENDRA PATEL, who has completed three years in office, is being seen as the man at the helm when Gujarat prepares to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games. Alongside, Patel's government is also fixing its governance processes largely on the basis of recommendations by Gujarat Administrative Reforms Commission that submitted six reports through the year. In an exclusive interview with RITU SHARMA & LEENA MISRA, Patel talks about the way forward.



### How ready is Gujarat for the Commonwealth Games 2030?

We are steadily shaping a world-class urban governance model that is capable of meeting the demanding standards of a sporting event such as the 2030 Commonwealth Games. With a strong focus on fundamentals, we are scaling up sports infrastructure as well as building high-speed, efficient transit corridors that allow people to move easily and safely across the city.

Our first priority is to create a robust, high-capacity infrastructure that seamlessly connects modern public transport systems with international-standard sports facilities. We aim at not just hosting events successfully, but to leave behind infrastructure that continues to improve everyday urban life long after the Games are over.

We are working closely with the United Nations Environment Programme to align our Air Quality Index with global public health benchmarks. We are also prioritising river rejuvenation to enhance water quality, with special attention to creating conditions suitable for high-quality water-based sporting activities as well as ecological restoration. The experience of successfully managing large crowds during major concerts, festivals and cultural events has given us confidence in handling the scale and complexity of an international sporting event.

While detailed economic impact assessments are being carried out to ensure that investments remain financially responsible and sustainable, Gujarat is working to ensure that the road to 2030 becomes a global benchmark — not just for hosting a sporting event, but for showcasing the idea of a truly Viksit Gujarat.

“While detailed economic impact assessments are being carried out to ensure that investments remain financially responsible and sustainable, Gujarat is working to ensure that the road to (CWG) 2030 becomes a global benchmark...”

### Of late, your government has been on an aggressive recruitment drive.

Yes. Over the past few years, our government has significantly stepped up recruitment across key sectors involving direct dealing with the public to address long-pending vacancies and strengthen front-line service delivery. I recently (December 23) gave out over 11,000 appointment letters to Lok Rakshak Dal jawans that will help enhance law and order and public safety across the state. This intensified recruitment drive has already yielded tangible results — more than 14,500 teachers have been hired in the past six months to strengthen the education system, over 9,000 ICDS (including anganwadi) workers and helpers have been appointed in the past three months to reinforce nutrition and early childhood services.

While these efforts have helped bridge immediate gaps, we are now moving away from reactive hiring toward a binding 10-year recruitment calendar, aligned with projected retirements and sanctioned posts. This forward-looking system will ensure a steady inflow of regular personnel and help departments plan human resources well in advance, rather than responding only when vacancies become critical.

As recommended by the GARC (Gujarat Administrative Reforms Commission), we are actively considering the creation of a sector-specific institutional mechanism or specialised board, for instance, to address vacancies in the Health and Family Welfare Department. The objective is to progressively reduce vacancy levels to below 10 per cent within a defined time-frame, particularly in essential health-care services.

For critical frontline roles — such as laboratory technicians, pharmacists, and fire inspectors — the government is examining the feasibility of accelerated backlog clearance models which will help us fill a substantial portion of long-term workforce requirements within a compressed period, helping to quickly address

shortages in roles that have a direct impact on public service delivery.

At the same time, the recruitment process itself is being modernised. The government is exploring the adoption of end-to-end digital recruitment systems, covering vacancy requisition, examinations, and appointments. Integration with secure digital platforms is being assessed to enable real-time document verification, significantly reducing recruitment timelines while improving transparency and efficiency.

**With projections indicating that nearly 75 per cent of Gujarat's population will be living in urban areas by 2047, how does your government propose to ensure balance between urban growth and rural development?**

Our government follows Narendrabhai's (Prime Minister Narendra Modi) vision of providing urban-like amenities in rural areas to ensure equitable quality of life. While the GARC report has recommended a shift towards decentralised planning, my government has undertaken measures to strengthen rural infrastructure ensuring villages and rural regions remain strong

engines of growth.

This includes universal access to all-weather roads, drinking water, electricity, sanitation, and digital connectivity, with special focus on building of gram panchayats in one phase as efficient service delivery units.

Significant investments are being made in social infrastructure at the grassroots level. Every village is being strengthened with school buildings, while ICDS buildings are being upgraded to support early childhood care and nutrition. In healthcare, the focus spans the entire continuum — from well-equipped PHCs and CHCs in rural areas to tertiary care facilities at the district level, ensuring timely and quality healthcare closer to home.

Rural livelihoods are being strengthened through a combination of skill development, local entrepreneurship, and women-led initiatives. Non-farm employment opportunities in rural regions are being created through ITIs, Centres of Excellence, Green GIDC clusters, Kutir Udyog and soon.

We are also emphasising on women's economic empowerment through schemes such as Nammo Lakshmi (financial support for girls students) Nammo Saraswati (scholarships for girl

students taking up science).

With these measures, we try to ensure that migration becomes a matter of choice rather than compulsion.

**You often cite the success of the SWAGAT platform. What is the profile of people coming to SWAGAT? How does your government ensure grievance resolution?**

Just the other day (December 24) an aggrieved farmer from Saurashtra who was trying to get compensation for his land that was acquired by the government nine years ago, came to SWAGAT (StateWide Attention on Grievances by Application of Technology). Our inquiry revealed that the government had handed out the compensation to a woman who is not the owner of the land but her name was mistakenly added as a co-owner in the affidavit submitted to the revenue authorities for compensation. We are now in the process of handing the farmer his rightful dues of around Rs 32 lakh while the wrongful compensation case will be handled legally.

SWAGAT was launched in April 2003 during the tenure of Narendrabhai when he was chief minister, with a simple but powerful idea: citizens should be able to put forth their

grievances directly before the highest levels of government, without fear, delay, or procedural hurdles. It was meant to reduce the distance between the administration and the citizen... And the mechanism is completely apolitical. Till date, I have not received a single reference from any political representative for redressal or hearing. However, certainly I have often told the district and taluka level concerned authorities to work effectively in order to get the complaints resolved at their level itself. In the past year, till December 25, the statewide SWAGAT received 44153 applications of which over 94 per cent have been disposed of.

These include long-pending land-related matters, agriculture and allied services, and gaps in rural infrastructure — areas where delays or inaction can significantly affect livelihoods and quality of life. This shift has helped ensure that SWAGAT remains relevant to everyday concerns, not just exceptional cases.

To sustain as a transparent and accountable governance model, the platform has evolved over the past 22 years to ensure grievances do not get stuck at any level. Every complaint is assigned a clear time limit for resolution. If it is not

addressed within this time-frame at the taluka or district level, the system itself flags the case and escalates it to senior officers for immediate attention — without the citizen having to pursue it repeatedly.

Senior officers now monitor these cases through live digital dashboards, which highlight delayed or sensitive matters in real time. This ensures that no grievance disappears into files or remains confined within departmental boundaries and applicants are updated on its status.

**What, according to you, are the game-changing innovations in your systems of administration and governance?**

I believe that the key to governance is constant monitoring. We already had the CM Dashboard (an ICT platform launched in 2018) which gives us AI-driven automated alerts and swift feedback routing for proactive interventions, integrating data from across the government departments and sectors. We have a

Real Time Performance Measurement System 2.0 (RTMS) which monitors District Collectors' and District Development Officers' core activities with segment-wise performance indicators...there is Jan-

Samvad for proactive grievance outreach and satisfaction evaluation, G-PRAGATI for monitoring infrastructure projects above Rs five crore) and News Analysis which highlights issues while distinguishing factual reporting. I have said from public platforms that we always support constructive criticism.

**How has your government applied Artificial Intelligence (AI)?**

Some of the areas we are using AI are in agriculture for crop monitoring, healthcare for hospital performance analysis under PMJAY, and revenue administration, like early detection of land encroachments. These are practical applications that directly benefit citizens.

Gujarat began working seriously on AI because we see it as a means to improve governance. The idea behind setting up the AI Task Force was to ensure that AI is used in a structured, responsible, and citizen-focused manner, rather than in a scattered or experimental way.

Through the AI Task Force, the government brought together senior officers and leading institutions to identify where AI can actually make a difference and we have prepared a five-year AI Action Plan.

For instance, platforms

such as SWAGAT now use AI to analyse grievance patterns, identify recurring issues, and support faster escalation and resolution. The CM Dashboard uses AI-based analytics to flag delays, highlight trends, and enable timely intervention at the leadership level. G-SAAR, an AI-enabled document retrieval system, helps officers quickly access rules, resolutions, and circulars, improving clarity and consistency in decision-making.

At the same time, Gujarat is investing in the future through initiatives like the AI Centre of Excellence at GIFT City...The guiding principle remains clear: AI is a support system, not a replacement for human judgment. Officers remain accountable for decisions, while AI helps them act faster, plan better, and deliver more transparent and responsive governance.

**Why is your government stressing on regional development of late? How will it ensure inclusive and balanced development across regions?**

We are using the Niti Aayog's 2024 Surat Economic Masterplan for development as a reference point, because the idea is to move away from a one-size-fits-all model and instead prepare development plans that reflect the unique strengths and aspirations of each region — thus GRIT (Gujarat Rajya Institution for Transformation) initiative, our own think tank modelled on NITI Aayog has identified five major economic regions (in Gujarat)

These regional plans were formally launched on October 9, 2025 at Mehsana Vibrant Gujarat Regional Conference and now serve as a strong foundation for Gujarat's future economic planning. Each plan takes a close look at regional

“We are planning four new innovation hubs in Vadodara, Surat, Rajkot, and Mehsana, complementing the existing i-Hub in Ahmedabad to support over 16,000 active startups statewide. Our vision aligns with 'Viksit Gujarat...'”

strengths, identifies growth drivers, and maps out investment opportunities. Together, they include more than 600 actionable projects aligned with the broader vision of Viksit Gujarat@2047.

Moving forward, on December 9 we issued a GR (government resolution) appointing coordinators for these regional masterplans.

At the grassroots level, the government is strengthening the MLA Local Area Development Scheme (LADS) to ensure quicker fund release and better utilisation. The focus is on projects that have a direct and visible impact on citizens' daily lives — such as drinking water, local roads, sanitation, and community facilities — so that development is felt at the constituency level.

**How do you see women become a part of Gujarat's development story?**

Through the flagship WEST-art (pre-incubation programme for women by i-Hub, a Gujarat government initiative to promote student start-ups) we have supported 196 women-led startups, constituting nearly 30 per cent of total assisted startups, where we provide mentoring, co-working space, financial aid, and industry connections to foster job creation and economic contributions.

For broader MSME empowerment, schemes such as the Mukhyamantri Mahila Utkarsh Yojana (MMUY) we offer interest-free loans upto Rs 1 lakh per group to women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Joint Liability Groups, enabling micro-enterprises and financial independence in rural and urban areas. Till date Gujarat has 5.96 lakh Lakhpati Didis under the Central scheme.

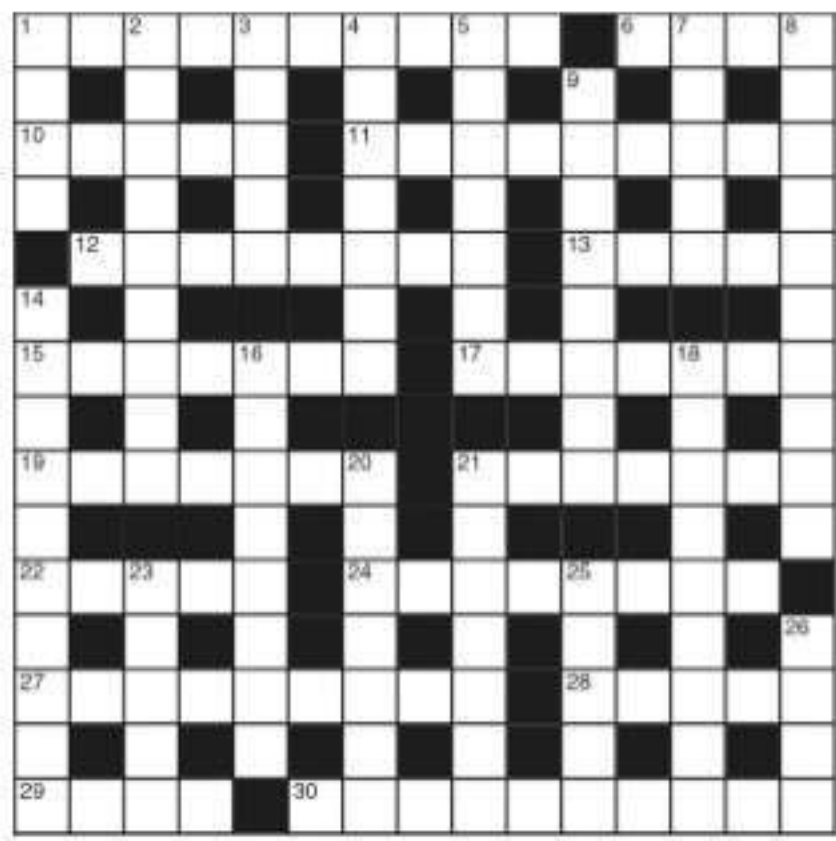
We are planning four new innovation hubs in Vadodara, Surat, Rajkot, and Mehsana, complementing the existing i-Hub in Ahmedabad to support over 16,000 active startups statewide. Our vision aligns with 'Viksit Gujarat' and national goals of women-led development, aiming for higher workforce participation, inclusive growth, and empowering women to drive Gujarat's entrepreneurial future.

Ahmedabad



• **CROSSWORD**

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**ACROSS**  
 1 Opponent of developing stagnation (10)  
 6 One might doubt its existence (4)  
 10 Make forced entry as it gets lighter (5)  
 11 A drop in the river (9)  
 12 Prank ceased being funny when father came in (8)  
 13 Second radio is worth having (5)  
 15 A thing I have for producing harmony (7)  
 17 One on a diet may turn out so (7)  
 19 Important match for the Lions maybe (3,4)  
 21 Tie up an unusually attractive plant (7)  
 22 Excuse is out of place (5)  
 24 Push the boat out and depart (5,3)  
 27 It doesn't include meals in the diner (5,4)  
 28 Possibly a test of discrimination (5)  
 29 Kind of knot sailors will be well advised to avoid (4)  
 30 Knocked flat by a hard bargainer (6,4)

**DOWN**  
 1 A pound's enough for such vestments (4)  
 2 Article about ill-advised corporal punishment (9)  
 3 She's in great form! (5)  
 4 Trend in art that may be swell (3,4)  
 5 They won't stand for personal representation (7)  
 7 Rising hack writing for papers (5)  
 8 Risk of redundancy that comes to nothing (4,6)  
 9 Player who might get roasting (8)  
 14 Attendant says nothing when pushed around (4,6)  
 16 Latin is possibly one of these (8)  
 18 Nothing to show this is a policy declaration (9)  
 20 Trap seen, ran out! (7)  
 21 Throw out proposed scheme (7)  
 23 Angry I reckon (5)  
 25 Those who have this shouldn't feel hungry (5)  
 26 Slight incline (4)

**SOLUTIONS CROSSWORD 5869** ACROSS: 1 Distant, 5 Frame, 8 Imperfect, 9 Cap, 10 Emma, 12 Calories, 14 Resent, 15 Skiers, 17 Compress, 18 Stud, 21 Rod, 22 Valentine, 24 Stair, 25 Speaker DOWN: 1 Drive, 2 Sap, 3 Airs, 4 Teocap, 5 Fetlocks, 6 Architect, 7 Exposés, 11 Mass media, 13 Engraver, 14 Records, 15 Psalms, 19 Drear, 20 Once, 23 Ink

**JUMBLLED WORDS**

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective circles below. Select the letters in the shaded circles and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

There are some things which men \_\_\_ with ease, and others with difficulty. - Epictetus (7)

CVVEO                      HIITCN  
 ○ ● ● ● ●                      ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ●

INPSS                      EPPRRF  
 ● ○ ○ ○ ●                      ○ ○ ○ ● ○ ○

ANSWER: There are some things which men confers with ease, and others with difficulty. - Epictetus

SOLUTIONS: Convey, Slips/Spins, Chitin, Prefer

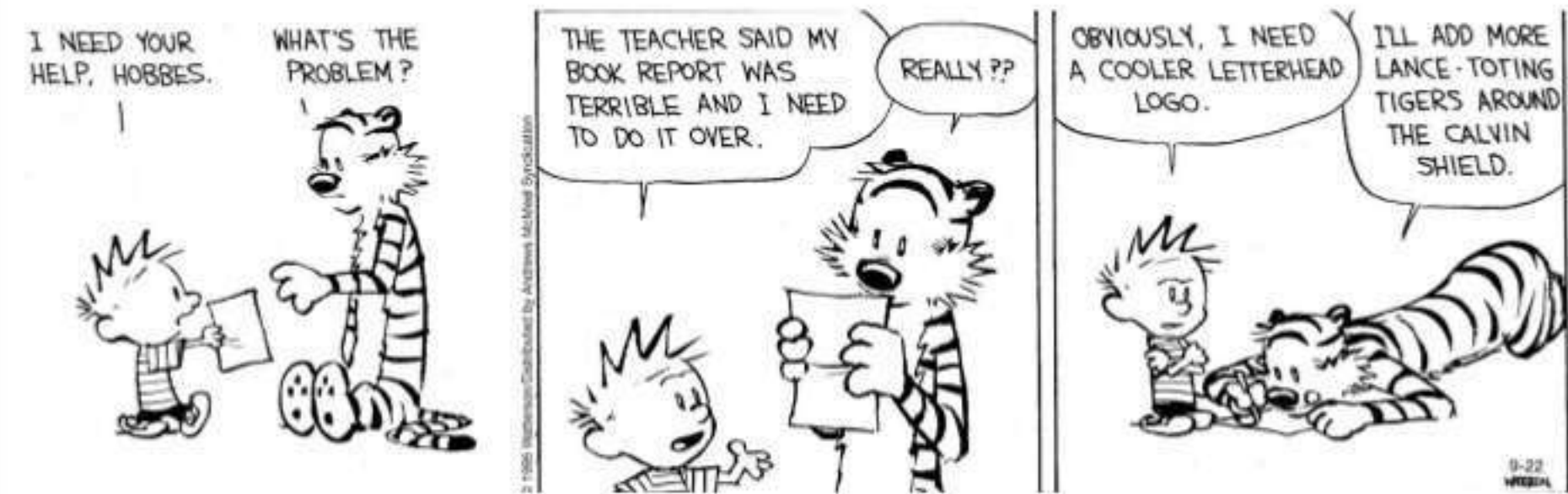
• **OVER THE HEDGE**

BY MICHAEL FRY & T LEWIS



• **CALVIN & HOBBS**

BY BILL WATTERSON



• **MARVIN**

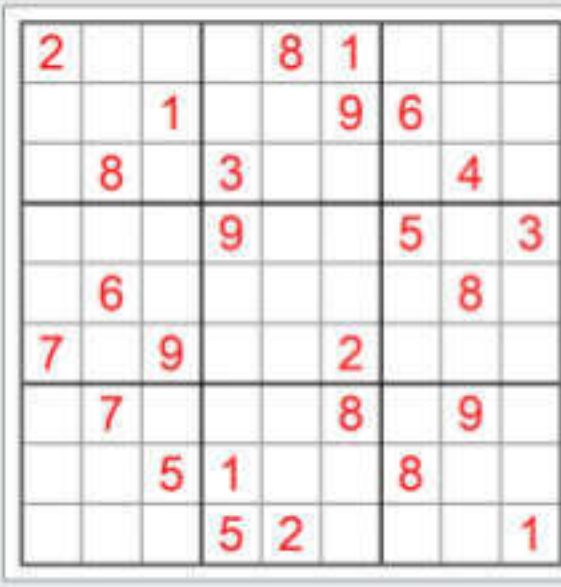
BY TOM ARMSTRONG



**DIFFICULTY LEVEL 4s INSTRUCTIONS**

To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

**DIFFICULTY LEVEL**  
 1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius



• **ROYAL STARS**

BY GEORGIA NICOLS

**ARIES (MAR 21 - APR 20):** Ask for what you want. Meanwhile, this particular Moon is at odds with your ruler Mars. Do not challenge authority figures — bosses, parents or the police. Go gently. Tonight: You're strong.

**TAURUS (APR 21 - MAY 21):** Today has its mild challenges, primarily because some people might steamroll over the wants or feelings of others. Your own sense of personal optimism is strong. Take care of financial matters and red-tape details. Tonight: Seek privacy.

**GEMINI (MAY 22 - JUNE 21):** Maintain your easygoing style and avoid friction with friends and groups about financial matters. A difference of opinion about how to spend an allocated amount of money might arise. Don't be bullied by the opinions of others. Tonight: Be friendly.

**CANCER (JUNE 22 - JULY 23):** Today people will notice you more than usual. Conversations with partners, close friends, parents and bosses might be stressful. Avoid public arguments. Tonight: Show respect.

**LEO (JULY 24 - AUG 23):** You're happiest if you're doing something to give yourself a sense of accomplishment. Don't let discussions about controversial subjects like politics or religion interfere with your work. Stay on track. Tonight: Explore and learn.

**VIRGO (AUG 24 - SEP 23):** Be patient with romantic partners especially in discussions about shared costs and responsibilities. Parents need to be patient when dealing with the demands of their kids. Focus on home repairs. Tonight: Check your finances.

**LIBRA (SEP 24 - OCT 23):** Chaos on the home front might fray your nerves and challenge the harmony you like. Conversations with partners, spouses and close friends also might be challenging. Don't let anyone push you around. Tonight: Listen and cooperate.

**SCORPIO (OCT 24 - NOV 23):** Today many people are either too pushy or impatient with each other, which can create rude encounters and insensitive discussions, especially with those who close to you. Try to rise above this. Take the high road. Tonight: Be productive.

**SAGITTARIUS (NOV 24 - DEC 22):** You are breezy and easygoing. Don't let financial matters and disputes about possessions ruin your day, especially in discussions about social outings, travel or vacations. Tonight: Socialise.

**CAPRICORN (DEC 23 - JAN 20):** You prefer to hide at home today and seek out gentle privacy. The stars are challenging for your sign today, which can trigger quarrels and irritability. Family members might be touchy or insensitive. Tonight: Relax.

**AQUARIUS (JAN 21 - FEB 19):** Start this day with the firm resolve to avoid quarrels with others, which might arise all too easily. People feel sensitive today, and are quick to take offence. Tread carefully. Do what you can to keep harmony in your surroundings. Tonight: Discussions.

**PISCES (FEB 20 - MAR 20):** Avoid quarrels about financial matters. Don't let anyone ride over your feelings or make accusations that are hurtful. Find a friend who supports you. Discussions with authority figures are solid. Tonight: Check your belongings.

**ANNUAL FUNCTION OF BRIGHT SCHOOL CBSE UNIT KARELIBAUG TITLED 'YUGON SE YATHARTH'**

The annual function of Bright School CBSE Unit Karelibaug titled "Yugon Se Yatharth" emerged as a spectacular journey, where students transformed the stage into a vibrant world of history, culture, and imagination. Shri Krishna's teachings presented in the act provided timeless wisdom. Considering to be "yatharth" or the real truth for all ages, including the current age (Kaliyuga) for navigating life. The captivating characters and striking added depth, colour, and authenticity, turning each act into a visual masterpiece. Total 500 students performed for the event beautifully connected ancient lessons with today's challenges, inspiring everyone to live with awareness and responsibility in the present age.

**THE BRIGHT SCHOOL CELEBRATES ANNUAL DAY 'SAPNO KI UDAAN' IN SILVER JUBILEE YEAR, VADODARA**



The Bright School celebrated the Annual Day for students of Std I to IV on December 20 at the Kusum Memorial Auditorium as part of its Silver Jubilee celebrations. The theme 'Sapno Ki Udaan' beautifully reflected the school's journey of 25 years in nurturing young minds and helping dreams take flight. The programme was graced by the esteemed presence of School President Saumil Shah. The event was further honoured by the presence of principals from various units of The Bright School and esteemed guest Suhani Shah. The young students presented a series of vibrant and thoughtfully curated performances portraying their aspirations to become engineers, doctors, nurses, scientists, firefighters, sportspersons, environmentalists and defence personnel. In her address, Mala Patel, Principal, highlighted the key achievements of the academic year and reflected on the school's remarkable journey over the past 25 years. She expressed heartfelt gratitude to the management, teachers, parents and students for their continued support and dedication.

**PARUL UNIVERSITY HOSTS THE 16TH GUJSTATE-CONPHYCS 2025**

Parul University successfully hosted the 16th GUJSTATE-CONPHYCS 2025, Gujarat's leading physiotherapy, which attracted a phenomenal number of 1900 students from across the state. This year's edition stands not only for the academic achievements, but for its complete focus on research, wellness, leadership, sportsmanship, and creative expression. The event was graced by a keynote speech by the esteemed chief guest, Jay Thadeshwar. At CONPHYCS 2025, the academic sessions provided students some diverse perspectives on health, compliance, and advancement in science. The Conference was inaugurated in esteemed presence of Chief Guest Dr. Yagna Unmesh Shukla - Chairperson of National Commission of Allied and Healthcare Professional, the esteemed guest panel included the Chief Guest Dr. Yagna Unmesh Shukla, Dr. Nehal Kumar Shah who is a Chairperson of GSAHC and Other Invited Speakers like Former Physiotherapist of Indian cricket team Prof Dr. Ali Irani, Dr. Sudeep Kale, Dr. Nitesh Bansal, Dr. John Solomon, Dr. Anjali Bhise, Dr. Dhruvil Patel, Dr. Nehal Shah, Dr. Megha Seth, Dr. Sumaiyya Shaikh.

**CORPORATES BRIEFS**

**RAJHANS PRECIA COMPLETES A YEAR, EMERGES AS A PREMIUM ENTERTAINMENT DESTINATION IN SURAT**

Over the past year, the multiplex has established itself as a major entertainment destination, attracting strong footfall and transforming the cinema-going experience through a blend of technology, comfort, and hospitality. A key highlight of Precia's first year has been the introduction of the IMAX format to Surat. From suite beds with quilts for extended viewing to couple recliners that offer privacy and comfort, each auditorium has been curated to prioritise relaxation and indulgence. This has positioned Precia as a premium cinematic lounge. Commenting on the milestone, Jayesh Desai, Chairman of Rajhans Group, said, "Rajhans' vision has always been to bring the world's best entertainment experiences closer to home. With Precia, we have changed the way films are watched in Surat. It is exciting to see Precia, emerge as a city landmark within a year and become a preferred destination for entertainment, leisure, and indulgence. We remain committed to delivering world-class entertainment experiences." With over 160 screens across India and 65 more under development in cities including Chandigarh, Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru, Pune, Kolkata, and Hyderabad, Rajhans Cinemas continues to expand its national footprint.

**FELICITATION PROGRAM ORGANIZED FOR RETIRED STAFF MEMBERS BY CENTRAL BANK OF INDIA, REGIONAL OFFICE, VADODARA**

Central Bank of India, Regional office, Vadodara, under the guidance of Regional Head Arun Kumar Mishra, organized a special felicitation program for all retired staff members residing in the Baroda region. The program commenced with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp and offering of flowers in front of the photograph of Sir Sorabji Pochkhanawala, followed by the rendition of the Central Anthem. A medical check-up camp was also arranged for the benefit of all former staff members present at the event. The dignitaries who graced the occasion included Regional Head Arun Kumar Mishra, MCB Assistant General Manager Ishwar, Deputy Regional Head Shishir Ranjan, Chief Managers Manoj Thakur, Yogendra Khatri, Sunil Jain, Krishna Dalal, Jai Prakash, and Kumar Praneesh. All former staff members were warmly welcomed and felicitated by the distinguished guests, and their contributions and dedicated service were sincerely appreciated. In his address, Arun Kumar Mishra highlighted the invaluable contributions of the retired staff members to the growth and progress of the Central Bank. On the occasion of the bank's 114th anniversary and its entry into the 115th year, a cake-cutting ceremony was held.

**INTER-SCHOOL PRE-PRIMARY SPORTS DAY AT GAJERA GLOBAL SCHOOL**

Gajera Global School, successfully hosted a grand Inter-School Pre-Primary Sports Day recently, with enthusiastic participation from 12 pre-primary schools across the city. Taking a pioneering initiative inspired by the spirit of the Commonwealth Games, the school organized this exclusive inter-school sports platform for pre-primary learners, promoting early childhood development through sports. Around 400 young learners participated with immense zeal and excitement. The event was graced by distinguished guests Rajesh Maheshwari, President of the Surat Pre-School Association, and Amit Patel, President of the Surat City Physical Education Association, along with founders and principals of various schools. The Principal, Shweta Parihar, warmly welcomed the gathering.

**JUNAGADH AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY ORGANIZES NATIONAL SEMINAR ON 'JUMPSTARTING AGRICULTURAL INITIATIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AND AUGMENTING REGIONAL COLLABORATIONS (JAI-SARDAR)'**

Junagadh Agricultural University, Junagadh, recently organised National Farmers' Day organised one-day national seminar on 'Jumpstarting Agricultural Initiatives for Sustainable Agriculture, Rural Development, and Augmenting Regional Collaborations (JAI-SARDAR)'. This seminar covered subject areas such as crop production, crop protection, horticulture, biotechnology, as well as social sciences. More than 350 delegates, including scientists, students, industry representatives, and progressive farmers from various states including Gujarat, participated in the seminar. The inaugural ceremony of this seminar was held under the chairmanship of Dr. V. P. Chovatia, Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor of Junagadh Agricultural University. Chief Guest Dr. A. R. Pathak, former Vice-Chancellor of JAU and NAU. Dr. A. K. Gupta, former Director of Research at S.K.N.A.U., Jobner, attended as the Guest of Honor. Dr. A. G. Pansuriya, Director of Research, Dr. N. B. Jadvav, Director of Extension Education; Dr. Y. H. Ghelani, Registrar; Gaurav Dave, Joint Director of Agriculture, Government of Gujarat; and Dr. P. D. Kumawat, Principal and Dean of the College of Agriculture, Junagadh Agricultural University, Junagadh attended the event. The session opened with a welcome address by Organizing Secretary Dr. N. J. Ardeshna and concluded with a vote of thanks by Joint Organizing Secretary Dr. B. Swaminathan.

**CENTRAL BANK OF INDIA HONORS SENIOR CITIZENS AT 'MATRU SHAKTI VANDAN' PROGRAM**

As part of its 115th Foundation Day celebrations, the Central Bank of India (Jambagar Regional Office) organized a heartfelt 'Matru Shakti Vandana' program today at the Mahila Vridhashram, managed by the Anandabava Seva Sanstha. The event focused on honoring the elderly residents of the ashram, recognizing the invaluable role of mothers and senior citizens in society. In a gesture of respect and social responsibility, the bank officials spent time with the residents and organized a felicitation ceremony to mark the bank's long-standing legacy of service to the nation. The program was held in the presence of Deepak Mangal, Regional Manager (Central Bank of India), Nilesh Mishra, Chief Manager (Regional Office), Kishor Sanghani, Trustee of Anandabava Seva Sanstha, Members of the Anandabava Seva Sanstha team and bank staff.

**GRAND INAUGURATION OF INDIAN BANK'S VYARA BRANCH**

The new branch of Indian Bank was formally inaugurated today in Vyara. Operating under the Surat Zone of Indian Bank, the branch was inaugurated by the Chairman of the Vyara Municipality, Riteshbhai H. Upadhyay. The inauguration ceremony saw the special presence of several key officials, including: ?Prakashrao Nimje (Zonal Manager), ?Girish Chandra (Deputy Zonal Manager), ?Tikendra Verma (Chief Manager), ?Jayakaran Singh (Chief Manager), ?Kundan Kumar (Chief Manager), ?Shivam Srivastava (Zonal Security Officer). ?Addressing the gathering, the Chief Guest noted that the opening of the Vyara branch will provide local traders, farmers, women, and the general public with access to modern banking facilities. Bank also provide ?Digital Solutions like a focus on fast, secure, and simple digital banking and reliable financial solutions. ?The Zonal Manager reiterated the bank's commitment to customer service and stated that the new branch aims to provide seamless banking experiences to the residents of Vyara and surrounding areas. Local citizens expressed their happiness at the launch, calling it a positive step forward for the community.

# Vedant's Mission Viksit Bharat

## 4th International Virtual Multidisciplinary Conference "From Gurukul to Global: Paving the Path to Viksit Bharat@2047: Restructuring Higher Education with Indic Priorities" Commencing Today

Hon'ble Governor Acharya Devvrat Ji and Pujya Swami Parmatmanand Saraswati ji to address august gathering at Vedant's International Virtual Conference on Viksit Bharat

### DISTINGUISHED RESEARCHERS AND PARTICIPANTS PRESENTING THEIR RESEARCH

At a time when India stands at the threshold of its centenary of Independence, Vedant Knowledge Systems has emerged as a prominent academic and intellectual platform translating the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047 into concrete action through education, research, and national dialogue. As part of its larger mission to organize 20 academic and intellectual events dedicated to nation-building, Vedant is hosting its 4th International Virtual Multidisciplinary Conference titled "From Gurukul to Global: Paving the Path to Viksit Bharat@2047: Restructuring Higher Education with Indic Priorities."

Speaking on the occasion, Directors of Vedant, Dr. Arjun Dave and CS Raj Soni stated that the conference is not merely an academic event, but part of a larger national mission to reconnect India's educational future with its civilizational roots while preparing youth for global leadership. "From Gurukul to Global is not a slogan; it is a roadmap," the organizers noted, emphasizing that knowledge must serve society, culture, and nation.

#### Impact So Far

- 30,000+ participants engaged across Vedant events
- Participation from 100+ universities and institutions
- 10 million+ digital views across conferences, talks, and academic content.

Vedant Knowledge Systems is a nationally recognized organization committed to the mission of Viksit Bharat, working at the intersection of education, research publications in indexed journals, research events and meaningful interventions in higher educational institutions. Through conferences, publications, talks, and outreach programs, Vedant aims to create a knowledge ecosystem aligned with NEP 2020 and the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047.

#### National Recognition

Vedant's Viksit Bharat initiatives have received blessings and appreciations from:

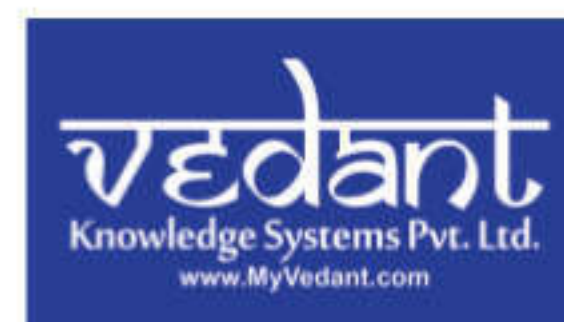
- Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji
- Hon'ble Home Minister Shri Amit Shah Ji.
- Hon'ble Education Minister Shri Dharmendra Pradhan Ji
- Hon'ble Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Bhupendra Patel Ji
- Hon'ble Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Shri Yogi Adityanath Ji

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Shruthi B S	Dr. Mrinalini Thaker	Archana Singh	Kamatichi Shanmugavel	Dr. Swati Punjani	Mr. Aarif	Dr. Ruma Arora
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## Tepid foreign investor interest is worrying

**T**HE YEAR 2025 has seen foreign portfolio investors (FPI) pull out a record \$18 billion (Rs 1,58,000 crore) plus from Indian markets through net sales of equity. This, together with declining foreign direct investment, notably since 2023-24, should be cause for concern. If GDP growth in India is averaging 8 per cent annually, why isn't that being reflected in foreign capital inflows? An economy growing at these rates should be attracting commensurate interest from overseas investors wanting to partake in the growth story. If the large IPOs by the South Korean companies Hyundai Motors and LG Electronics — or the Chinese home appliances major, Haier, recently offloading a 49 per cent stake in its wholly owned Indian arm — are any indication, foreign investors seem more inclined to raise money from, rather than infuse fresh capital into, India.

This lack of enthusiasm is quite in contrast to the bullishness of domestic investors, at least when it comes to collections by mutual funds under systematic investment plans. These totalled Rs 3,03,978 crore during January-November, more than twice the net equity sales of Rs 1,43,675 crore by FPIs for the same period. What is holding back foreign investors? Is it something about the Indian economy, or even the official growth numbers? One reason may be relatively high global interest rates. When 10-year bond yields are at 4.1-4.2 per cent in the US and 2.2-2.1 per cent in Japan, it draws that much capital away from emerging markets. But FPIs have been net sellers only in Indian equities. In debt and other non-equity instruments, they have actually been net buyers to the tune of \$7.2 billion so far this calendar year. Thus, they appear comfortable investing in safe government bonds, as against riskier equity assets, which entails taking a more bullish view of the Indian economy's growth prospects.

The lukewarm foreign investor interest in India may also have to do with its not being part of the artificial intelligence euphoria, which has fuelled equity markets in the US as well as China, Taiwan and Korea. But limited AI exposure shouldn't be a liability in itself when India can boast of advantages in other sectors such as renewables, digital platforms, IT and financial services. At the end of the day, India needs foreign capital not only to fund its current account balance of payments deficits, but also for investment leading to job generation, knowledge diffusion and technology. All the more reason for the government to address the concerns of investors, both foreign and domestic, and ask why they aren't investing.

## Unnao survivor's battle for justice goes on

**I**CAN'T GO back to where I started; this fight can't end like this." These words, uttered by the survivor of the 2017 Unnao rape, following the suspension of former BJP MLA Kuldeep Sengar's life sentence in the case by the Delhi High Court — five years after he was found guilty and convicted by a court in Delhi — carry a grim resonance. They're a reminder of how, in a society with deeply entrenched hierarchies, even conviction can become just a temporary pause for the powerful, especially in cases of sexual assault.

This was a case defined by the impunity with which the politically connected accused, who had long held sway in Unnao district, acted. Right from the start, the system was weaponised against the survivor. After the rape of the young woman, who was a minor at the time, in 2017, there was an attempt to erase the crime: The assault was registered as a case of kidnapping, Sengar's name was omitted from the FIR. For the survivor, getting the police to register a case against the influential local leader was merely the first obstacle. Right until Sengar's conviction in December 2019, her life, as well as that of her family, remained shadowed by threats: In 2018, her father was assaulted by thugs for refusing to withdraw the case. He was then arrested on a fabricated charge, following which he died in custody.

This is the battle that survivors of sexual assault have to fight, particularly when the perpetrators are shielded by power. The police refuse to record the truth, political goons act with impunity and the system grinds on, painfully slow and halting. Sengar may not be freed immediately — he is also serving a 10-year sentence for the custodial death of the survivor's father. But the saga of the Unnao survivor paints a stark picture of how rocky the road to justice can be.

## My rights, in my language

**W**HEN PRESIDENT Droupadi Murmu released the Constitution of India in the Santhali language, written in Ol Chiki script, it marked a much-awaited moment of inclusion. It carried echoes of a mid-20th-century debate in socio-cultural theory, and its unselfconscious resolution in a diverse country. The debate was on whether language precedes thought. While Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky emphasised the relevance of language in cognitive development, Swiss scholar Jean Piaget framed it differently. Far away from this debate, culturally and geographically, the best political minds of India, in Constitution Hall, were discussing the trajectory of a new democracy in which everyday politics and culture is shaped by language hierarchy. One of the few Adivasi members of the Constituent Assembly, Jaipal Singh Munda, stood up and spoke in Mundari, and demanded recognition for tribal languages and identities.

The Constitution in Santhali offers the Santhali people easier access to a document that enshrines the rights for which leaders like Munda fought. With a population of over 7 million, the Santhals are the third-largest tribe in the country. Yet, it was only in 2003 that the Santhali language was included in Schedule VIII. Notably, it was on Murmu's insistence — as a minister in Odisha, she requested the then Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, to give official status to Santhali — that the language got its long-due recognition.

On the centenary of the Ol Chiki script, invented in 1925 by Raghunath Murmu, this event is not merely symbolic. It underlines the promise of a more inclusive India where every community will be able to read, defend and celebrate their enshrined rights in their own languages. A person from the Ho community would read the Preamble aloud in the Varang Kshiti script, a Mundari woman would find the promises of gender equality written in Nag Mundari, an Oraon scholar would defend her doctoral thesis in the Kurukh language.

# Uddhav & Rajbury hatchet but can they refresh Brand Thackeray for future?

**T**HE POLITICAL landscape in India today is broadly divided into two sections. In the first section are those parties that, at some point, were associated with the BJP and were later stung and suffered at its hands. The others are those trying to avoid being swallowed up and swamped by the BJP. The Thackeray cousins are attempting to migrate from the former to the latter.

Estranged till recently, Uddhav Thackeray, head of a truncated Shiv Sena, and his cousin Raj, whose perceived importance has often outstripped his actual political strength, have decided to join hands for the forthcoming municipal corporation elections, including in the coveted Mumbai region. Beaten by the BJP, the two wish to turn the tables on the saffron samrat whose blessing both were jostling for not so long ago. With the announcement of the alliance, the Shiv Sena (UBT) and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) have buried two decades of animosity.

Raj, once considered heir apparent to his charismatic uncle Bal Thackeray, set up his own outfit, the MNS, when the Shiv Sena patriarch chose his son Uddhav to lead the party. In March 2026, the MNS will enter its 21st year. Having survived two decades, during which Raj's political pendulum swung from being a staunch supporter of the BJP to becoming one of its harshest critics, the MNS has witnessed a massive erosion of its support base. On the other hand, the Shiv Sena, led by Uddhav Thackeray, was in a state of happy coexistence with the BJP for three-and-a-half dec-

ades before it decided to embrace the Shrad Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party and Congress to form the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) that robbed Devendra Fadnavis of a second stint as Chief Minister in the 2019 assembly elections.

The BJP, as part of its larger game plan, first outflanked the Shiv Sena on the Hindutva agenda and later robbed the latter of its "Marathi" plank. Way back in December 1987, long before the BJP's Lal Krishna Advani undertook the nationwide *rath yatra* for the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, it was Bal Thackeray who made Hindutva an election issue in a by-election in a Mumbai suburb. Bal Thackeray, while campaigning for Ramesh Prabhu, sought votes on communal lines, for which he was later disfranchised for six years by the courts and the Election Commission.

A little before this, the late Pramod Mahajan had successfully forged an alliance with the Thackeray-led Sena to oust Congress from the BMC. Later, Advani's *yatra* and the subsequent Ayodhya agitation only strengthened the bond between the two. All was well when it was going well. However, post 2019, Uddhav's escapades with Congress-NCP angered the BJP, which taught him a lesson by engineering defections in the Shiv Sena and taking away Uddhav's right-hand man and the party's most resourceful person, Eknath Shinde. With Bal Thackeray no more, Shinde's defection was a double blow to Uddhav. Along with the chief ministership, he was to



GIRISH KUBER

Neither of them is a Bal Thackeray who would have taken the opportunity to galvanise the state. However, Raj and Uddhav can take a cue from M K Stalin or Mamata Banerjee on how to make regionalism more appealing in order to counter the BJP's religionism

realise that an extended alliance with the BJP had taken away the Shiv Sena's "Marathi" plank. When it was with the BJP, the Uddhav-led Shiv Sena enjoyed power and quietly sidestepped, if not buried, its Marathi agenda. The BJP's shock treatment compelled it to go back to its roots.

On the other hand, the BJP hobbled with the MNS but stopped short of a formal alliance. While the BJP initially saw in the MNS an alternative to the Shiv Sena, Raj Thackeray's anti-migrant (read: Anti-Hindi) stance prevented it from bringing him into the fold. Once it successfully split the Shiv Sena, the BJP no longer needed either of the Thackeray brothers.

This explains why the Thackeray brothers were compelled to bury their two-decades-old hatchet and join hands to challenge the BJP's hegemony. Though much has changed in the last three decades — most significantly, Mumbai's demography — there certainly is a section, though weak and small as of now, that supports the Thackeray cousins. And this is not the only reason they garner sympathy.

The BJP is seen as making various states its "vassals" and revealing an apparently anti-federal facet to its politics. This is the reason the BJP had to make a hasty retreat and stay the state government's decision to introduce Hindi at the pre-primary level in schools. The first person to challenge the Fadnavis government on the issue was Raj Thackeray, who received active support from Uddhav. The state's ill-timed deci-

sion on Hindi helped the Thackeray cousins revive and polish their original plank, that of the "Marathi *Manoos*".

This newfound bonhomie, however, raises some questions: Is it too late for them to pose any challenge to the BJP? Is the issue of Marathi pride still relevant? And, most importantly, can it stoke the embers and create political fire?

The answers will lie in the cousins' ability to widen their appeal and convert the issue into a regionalism versus religion battle, since the BJP is set to play — yet again — its minority-majority card. A senior BJP leader recently raised the bogey of Mumbai getting a mayor from the minority community if voters didn't support the party. In its desperation to bag the BMC, the BJP seems to have forgotten that J Boman Behram, Mumbai's first mayor way back in 1931, was from the minority community. Since then, the city has been led by 22 mayors who weren't from the majority. This is the virtue of the country's first megalopolis, which the BJP is trying to portray as its vice. The communal pitch will become only more shrill as election fever is heightened.

This gives the Thackeray cousins an opportunity to prove their political mettle. Neither of them is a Bal Thackeray who would have taken the opportunity to galvanise the state. However, Raj and Uddhav can take a cue from M K Stalin or Mamata Banerjee on how to make regionalism more appealing in order to counter the BJP's religionism. This battle will also determine the longevity of Brand Thackeray.

The writer is editor, Loksatta

## Rebuilding trust in police, in shadow of doubt, under scrutiny



OP SINGH

**I** ASSUMED charge as Director General of Police, Haryana, in mid-October, at a time when cynicism hung heavily over the institution I was sworn to lead. Public trust in policing was fragile. Within the force, morale was uneven. Then came a moment that shook us deeply — the suicide of a serving Inspector General, accompanied by allegations of caste-based discrimination.

There are no manuals for inheriting grief, anger and suspicion all at once. But leadership, I have learnt, is tested in moments when the institution is under moral scrutiny. The death of a senior officer was not merely a personal tragedy. It was an institutional wound. Allegations of discrimination strike at the very idea of a uniformed service — rank, responsibility and respect flow from duty, not from identity. To pretend otherwise would be dishonest. To dismiss the pain such allegations cause would be worse.

At such times, the temptation for any organisation is to retreat into procedure — to say that inquiries will be held, files examined, rules followed. Those things matter. But they are not enough. What the moment demanded was clarity — about values, intent, and what policing must stand for in a constitutional democracy.

Policing today does not operate in a forgiving environment. Citizens are more questioning than before. Social media has ensured that silence is no longer neutral — it is interpreted as avoidance. Within the force, too, officers expect fairness, transparency and dignity. I was conscious, therefore, that restoring confidence — outside and inside the organisation — would require more than operational success. It would require credibility. From the outset, my belief has been simple: Policing cannot survive on fear or distance. In a democracy, authority does not come from the uniform alone; it comes from trust. And trust follows when the police are visible in action, honest in intent, and clear in communication.

We moved decisively against criminal networks — habitual offenders, illegal arms suppliers, narcotics chains, and crime-prone pockets. Operations such as Trackdown and Hotspot Domination were not about optics. They were about signalling that the state had not vacated

the field. Crime cannot be wished away, but it can be disrupted.

At the same time, we tried to explain what we were doing and why. When citizens know what to expect, mistrust begins to ease, even if slowly. This approach was equally necessary within the force. The police is a hierarchical organisation, but it cannot afford to be a closed one. Allegations of discrimination — whether proven or not — must be addressed with seriousness and empathy. As DGP, I see it as my duty to ensure that every officer, regardless of background, feels protected by rules, heard by leadership, and judged by performance.

Haryana's context makes these challenges sharper. The state surrounds the national capital, hosts major industrial corridors, and faces complex crime patterns — cyber fraud, organised extortion, narcotics, and interstate gangs. Law and order here affects livelihoods, investment, and everyday life. Citizens do not expect perfection from the police. They expect presence, responsiveness and fairness. Technology has helped us, but it is not a cure-all. Systems and platforms can support policing, but they cannot replace leadership. Ultimately, trust flows from how officers behave, how decisions are made, how mistakes are acknowledged.

I am conscious that structural change in policing does not happen in months. The real work lies ahead: Embedding transparency in processes, consistency in postings, fairness in evaluations, and accountability at all levels. It also means accepting criticism that is informed and rejecting only that which is malicious. The tragedy that marked the early days of my tenure will not be forgotten. Institutions grow stronger not by erasing uncomfortable moments, but by learning from them.

Policing today stands at a crossroads. We can cling to distance and authority and watch trust erode. Or we can choose visibility, explanation and fairness, even when it is uncomfortable. I have chosen the latter path — not because it is easy, but because it is necessary. Policing, if it is to serve the Republic with honour, must be worthy of the trust it seeks.

The writer is DGP, Haryana

## Something about the price of petrol doesn't add up



SHIFALI GOYAL

**I**N RECENT parliamentary sessions, the government has underscored the importance of the ethanol blending programme. With the blending rate climbing from 1.5 per cent in 2013-14 to 20 per cent by 2025-26, ethanol is fast becoming a significant component of India's energy mix. However, this shift necessitates a corresponding update in how fuel prices are reported. While blending targets are ambitious, the pricing structure remains static. Petrol sold in retail outlets is now blended with ethanol. From a production standpoint, however, they are two entirely different products: Ethanol is taxed under the GST regime, whereas petrol remains outside it. This distinction is crucial and consumers deserve greater transparency in the determination of the final price of blended petrol.

Ethanol used for blending attracts 5 per cent GST, while petrol is taxed through central excise and state-level VAT. This dual structure originates from India's partially reformed fuel taxation regime. Consequently, oil marketing companies pay GST on ethanol purchases but cannot claim an input tax credit, since the final product, petrol, is not a GST-taxable item. This makes the ethanol component appear more expensive than it is, as the GST paid becomes a non-recoverable cost. In 2024-25, as per official data, the weighted average procurement cost of ethanol was Rs 71.32 per litre (including the ex-mill price, GST, and transportation charges). In contrast, the base price of petrol charged to dealers (excluding excise, VAT, and commission) was Rs 53.07 per litre, which increases to Rs 74.97 after adding central excise duty.

According to the latest price break-up for Delhi, the current structure is: Base price Rs 53.07, central excise duty Rs 21.90, dealer commission Rs 4.40, and state VAT Rs 15.40. These add-ons bring the retail selling price to Rs 94.77 per litre. However, these numbers correspond to pure petrol, not the ethanol-blended petrol (E20), which now constitutes nearly all petrol sold across India. Despite this major shift in composition, there is no published price build-up for blended petrol. The public disclosure still reflects the structure of 100 per cent petrol. This lack of transparency hides important fiscal information. Under current tax provisions, ethanol blended into petrol is exempt from central excise duty. However, the VAT levied by states applies to the entire blended fuel. As a result, even though ethanol is taxed under GST, the blended product is again taxed under VAT, with no clarity on how this affects the effective tax incidence.

The key issue is not double taxation per se, but the absence of clarity on how much each component contributes to the final price. With ethanol now forming one-fifth of every litre sold, treating the entire fuel as if it were pure petrol distorts fiscal understanding. This opacity prevents a meaningful evaluation of whether blending leads to lower or higher costs for the economy and at the pump. Making the price build-up of blended petrol public, including the ethanol share, procurement cost, and tax treatment, would enhance accountability and improve fiscal coordination between the Centre and states. Publishing a detailed price build-up for blended petrol, alongside the existing one for pure petrol, would be a simple yet powerful reform.

The writer is research associate at CSEP. Views are personal

## 40 YEARS AGO

December 27, 1985



### New package for NRIs

While conceding several demands of non-resident Indians regarding investment in India, Finance Minister V P Singh said in New Delhi that the issue of a 5 per cent ceiling on investment in Indian companies would have to be discussed further before any decision could be taken. At the first open house session with about 250 non-resident Indians, Singh, flanked by top officials of the finance ministry, listened to first-hand accounts of these investors' problems with Indian regulations and red tape. Singh announced that the government would introduce a special non-resident exchange (NRE) cheque system to speed up the allotment and purchase of shares by NRIs in Indian companies.

### Tensions mount in Punjab

Suspected terrorist activity continued in Punjab, claiming one life during the past 24 hours, and there was no relaxation in the curfew imposed at Gurdaspur after a clash between members of two communities two days ago. Reports said there was tension in some urban areas following a state-wide bandh call given jointly by the Shiv Sena and the Punjab Brahmin Sabha in protest against the Gurdaspur incident, in which one person was killed.

### Congress centenary

Amidst much confusion and lots of excitement, Bombay is all set to witness the historic centenary celebrations of the birth of

the Indian National Congress, an event for which the metropolis had waited a whole year. The entire city wore a festive look while activities at the main venues of the great show reached a fierce pace.

### Lebanese civil war

Lebanon's three most powerful militants have reached agreement over a Syrian-sponsored pact to end the nation's 10-year-old civil war and will sign the accord before year's end, state-run *Beirut Radio* reported. It said negotiators of the Druze, Shia Muslim and Christian militias resolved the last point of contention in the agreement during a round of talks held at Syrian Vice-President Abdul Halim Khaddam's office in Damascus.



# India moves towards unlocking nuclear energy. The hard work begins now



AKSHAY JAITLEY

**T**HE SUSTAINABLE Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act marks the most significant reform of India's nuclear sector since the Atomic Energy Act of 1962. This is bold, substantive legislation, opening up a sector that holds great promise for India's climate commitments, energy security, and the technological innovations that a liberalised, private-sector-led nuclear power sector could bring. The Act deserves praise for ending six decades of state monopoly, creating a credible, licence-based pathway for private investment, and giving the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, which will act as the sector regulator, an independent statutory foundation.

For India to realise the full potential of this reform, which will require the confidence of overseas suppliers and the interests of long-term investors who seek a low-risk, predictable business environment, some important work remains.

The most consequential change is the restructuring of civil nuclear liability. The Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010, despite its well-intentioned origins in the Bhopal tragedy, had become a threshold obstacle for foreign suppliers. Section 17(b), which permitted operators to seek recourse against suppliers for defective equipment or substandard services, diverged fundamentally from international norms under the Convention on Supplementary Compensation. Neither the CLND Rules nor the government's FAQs, which lacked statutory force, reassured the American, French and Japanese OEMs whose participation India sought.

The SHANTI Act addresses this. Operator recourse against suppliers now exists only where expressly provided in contract, or where the nuclear incident resulted from intentional acts to cause damage. This aligns India with the international liability architecture and removes the problem that has long troubled potential projects at Kovvada and Jaitapur.

One gap remains: The Act does not define "supplier". Earlier proposals for a CLND amendment had recommended a



ILLUSTRATION: CR SASIKUMAR

statutory definition, distinguishing between those who manufacture and supply systems or components on functional specifications, those who provide design specifications to vendors, and those who provide quality assurance or design services. Such clarity would complete the liability picture and eliminate residual uncertainty about who bears what responsibility through the nuclear supply chain.

Private investors committing capital to long-gestation, capital-intensive and sensitive (from a safety and security perspective) nuclear projects will require high levels of predictability. The Act leaves significant details to rules and regulations, and how these are framed will be crucial to determine whether the reform achieves its objectives. Three areas will benefit from closer attention.

The scope of key terms remains unclear. "Sensitive" activities (which cannot be patented by private parties), matters with "national security implications" (which may be carved out from AERB jurisdiction), and those of a "strategic nature" (which may trigger the creation of separate regulatory bodies).

Without at least indicative definitions or procedures for advance determination, start-ups developing technology, especially small modular reactors (SMRs), will not know whether their innovation efforts will ultimately become the property of the central government. This will choke investment in R&D.

Second, Section 25 permits the constitution of additional

regulatory bodies for "strategic" activities. The open-ended nature of this provision creates uncertainty as investors will not know whether their facilities might be subjected to a different, yet-undefined regulatory regime. Circumstances requiring additional oversight could be anticipated and specified in rules, or procedural safeguards could be established before any new bodies assume jurisdiction.

Third, the selection of AERB members is through a committee constituted by the Atomic Energy Commission, which falls under the Department of Atomic Energy. Established Indian regulatory practice, such as that embodied in the Financial Sector Legislative Reforms Commission model, would suggest a search committee comprising independent experts and retired judges alongside government representatives. Section 17(5) permits rules to prescribe the committee's procedure. These could specify an AERB composition that promotes structural independence while retaining a right for the central government to approve members from a security perspective.

Section 37 of the SHANTI Act vests pricing authority for nuclear electricity in the central government, explicitly overriding the Electricity Act, 2003. This creates avoidable problems.

Once produced, an electron is an electron. There is no principled reason to treat electricity generated from nuclear plants differently from that generated by any other source. The Electricity Act

provides a well-understood framework for tariff determination, open access, captive power, power exchanges, and bilateral contracts, one that has enabled India's renewable energy explosion. Nuclear power should benefit from this architecture, rather than be excluded from it.

The rationale for central government control possibly lies in nuclear power's high cost. But this is precisely why administered pricing is not the way to go. Nuclear power is expensive and state discoms, already in precarious financial condition, should not be burdened with mandated procurement of high-cost power.

What will contribute to the scaling and success of India's nuclear programme is matching the right producers with the right buyers and promoting captive nuclear power generation. Power-hungry data centres and other industries seeking reliable, clean, baseload supply are natural customers for SMRs. Industrial clusters, SEZs and commercial consumers, including GCCs, are more likely to pay a premium for round-the-clock, non-fossil generation and such demand could sustain larger plants. One of the proposed models for offshore wind, where generators find their own commercial and industrial customers rather than relying on discom offtake, provides a way forward.

These are transactions between willing private parties and there is no policy rationale for central government price intervention here. Long-term stability will come from commercial relationships between producers and consumers who value what nuclear power offers, not from a top-down system of fixed tariffs that insulates generators from the market.

Ideally, this would require legislative amendment to Section 37. Alternatively, a notification could exempt private-to-private transactions from administered pricing. If felt necessary, central government tariff-setting powers could be retained for transactions involving PSUs (including discoms), leaving purely private arrangements to mutual agreement, with grid access on non-discriminatory terms.

India has taken a decisive step toward unlocking nuclear energy's potential for its development goals. A robust legislative framework is in place. The next phase, involving rulemaking, regulatory design, and tariff policy, will be crucial to its success.

The writer is a founding partner of Trilegal

## For Opposition today, lessons from Atal Bihari Vajpayee

RAM RAJYA  
BY RAM MADHAV

**D**ECEMBER 25 marked the end of the centenary year of one of India's greatest sons, a leader whom many described as an "ajatshatru" — one without enemies. Atal Bihari Vajpayee was a gifted orator and poet, a leader for whom the nation came first above everything else, including his own party. He was, above all, a sterling human being. Not all leaders are remembered after 100 years. But some, like Vajpayee, are unforgettable because the "Vajpayee era spanned generations", as Arun Jaitly once commented, and his aura will span decades, probably centuries.

Vajpayee had many firsts to his credit. From an ideological standpoint, he was India's first genuine non-Congress prime minister. He was also the first leader to show that coalitions work. Earlier, most coalitions were seen as unstable political compulsions. Vajpayee would say that coalitions should not be seen as a political compulsion, but they should be taken as "the aspiration of the people". He was the first PM to run a coalition government, comprising more than 20 parties for a full five-year term. The term "coalition dharma" was a product of his politics.

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote in an obituary, Vajpayee was "ahead of his times". "Character of power is the same always," Vajpayee once said, adding that "we should try to transform that character through personal example". He tried to set such an example — initially as the leader of the Opposition for several years and later as the leader of the House. The speech he delivered while demitting office, after the 13-day government he formed in 1996 failed to muster numbers, was one of his best. "Sarkaren aayengi aur jaayengi, partiyen banengi aur bigadengi, magar ye desh rehna chahiye, desh ka loktantra amar rehna chahiye (Governments will be formed and dissolved, parties come and go, but this nation should remain and its democracy should be eternal)." This message to

parties to change their character didn't register with them. He lost power again in 1999 when a coalition partner withdrew support, and he failed to secure the vote of confidence in Parliament by just one vote. What if the character of power doesn't change? "Just make sure you don't lose your laughter," he once said. He had the last laugh when he led a much stronger coalition to office in the elections that followed — it completed a full term in 2004.

Although Vajpayee couldn't completely change the character of power politics, he did influence the character of his own party. The BJP functioned as a constructive Opposition to the scam-ridden UPA government. Sushma Swaraj's final address as the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament in 2014 was a glowing testimony to the democratic spirit Vajpayee had infused in the BJP leadership. She praised leaders on the ruling side, including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Sonia Gandhi, Kamal Nath and Sushil Kumar Shinde, for enabling the House's functioning, and concluded in true Vajpayee spirit by emphasising that "there is one strong message at the root of Indian democracy — we are adversaries, not enemies".

After assuming office in 2014, PM Modi upheld the Vajpayee spirit by running a coalition government despite the BJP securing an absolute majority in 2014 and 2019. He extended an olive branch to Congress by granting it the status of the principal opposition party, although it failed to secure the number of seats (10 per cent of the House) required to qualify for that. He has tried to engage with the Opposition in matters of national interest.

Some opposition leaders used to tell Vajpayee that he was the "right man in the wrong party". "What good is this right man for you anyway?" he once asked. He was right. The last few years have shown that the Opposition's politics has no place for the Vajpayee spirit.

In 1928, after getting elected to the German Reichstag as one of the 12 delegates of Adolf Hitler's party, Joseph Goebbels, who would become Hitler's minister for propaganda seven years later, was surprised to find that he and his colleagues had the capacity to paralyse democratic processes. "The big joke of democracy is that it gives its mortal enemies the means to its own destruction," he wrote. Will the Opposition in India remain Goebbellian, or can they find the "right man" in their party?

The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the BJP

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Christmas disruptions

THIS REFERS to the editorial, "Goons can't hijack Merry Christmas" (IE, December 26). Despite the Prime Minister himself attending a Christmas morning service at a Delhi church to deliver a message of peace and harmony, several incidents of disruption and vandalism occurred during Christmas celebrations across India. It sends a disturbing message against the pluralist spirit of our nation. India is a country of many religions, and our Constitution stands for a secular state.

—Vaibhav Goyal, Chandigarh

### Science and caution

THIS REFERS to the article, "Revised definition of Aravallis will hurt its ecology" (IE, December 26). The Aravallis are not just isolated hills but a connected ecological system. Low hills, foothills and aquifers play an important role in groundwater recharge, biodiversity and climate balance. Ignoring these aspects may allow mining and construction in ecologically sensitive areas, causing long-term damage.

—Dattatray S Giri, Pune

### Look inwards

THIS REFERS to the editorial, "New year resolutions for the powerful" (IE, December 26). New Year resolutions for the powerful should begin with indoor voices. Keir Starmer and Emmanuel Macron could first persuade their own publics before rehearsing speeches about leading "Europe" and the "Anglosphere". Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, like a jaded couple at a bad party, will smile stiffly and hope that the other isn't flirting across the room. Across the Atlantic, Donald Trump might resolve to break fewer global norms, while Elon Musk could rediscover the radical idea of running his companies rather than the internet.

—K Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru



MANJIRI INDURKAR

## On the jumbotron, the woman on trial

BACK IN the '90s, there was a girl in my class who was academically sharp and a little quirky. She chewed through her pens and pencils; her fingers, face, and uniform were often stained with ink and lead. We were friends for a while. Then we went to different colleges and lost touch.

Except we lived in a small town. In small towns, it isn't easy to disappear. You always heard things about people you once knew, filtered through others who knew them now. Somewhere in my second year of college, I heard that she'd had a meltdown, that she'd been put on medication, and institutionalised. In 2006, we didn't have the language for mental health. I was a depressed kid without the vocabulary for it, and so, I think, was she. The rumour mill worked overtime.

To some, she was weird; to others, she was mad. One conversation with a mutual acquaintance remains etched in my memory. It was our final year, placement season. Companies were visiting campuses, and she got placed. To me, this was never surprising. She was smart. But in her college, where she was known as the mad, psychotic weirdo, it didn't make sense to people. How could she be hired? She threw a fit, the acquaintance

told me. Probably offered things. That's why she got the job. She used tactics.

By then, I had heard too many stories. My small-town, partially informed brain had made up its mind. When I ran into her once in Delhi, and she tried to reconnect, I didn't know what to do. So I did nothing. I didn't ask how she was, I didn't ask if she was well. I, instead, gave her the wrong phone number and hoped she would never try to find me on social media.

Her mental health was visibly fragile. Her marriage collapsed. The rumours about her behaviour followed her everywhere. I don't know where she is today. I found myself thinking of her while reading Kristin Cabot's *New York Times* interview, months after a private moment with her boss had been turned into a public spectacle.

The piece details how Cabot was subjected to relentless shaming, humiliation, and even death threats. Memes proliferated. Even corporate advertising found a way to capitalise on her humiliation. Gwyneth Paltrow, an actor, a woman, and Chris Martin's ex-wife, appeared in a "smart and cocky" campaign for Astronomer, Cabot's former employer. All of this came at the cost of a single woman.

**This impulse to comment on a woman's life is not a new invention. Social media may have accelerated it, but the public sphere has always been a court without rules, where women are tried in real time and sentenced by consensus**

Indurkar is the author of *It's all in your head*. Mand Origami Aai



NEERAJ BUNKAR

## Not just another sports story

perience rather than slogans — a balance still rare in mainstream sports cinema.

At the narrative's core are a father and son bound by blood and a shared understanding of how power operates and whom it marginalises. Pasupathy delivers one of recent Tamil cinema's most affecting performances as the father — a flawed, angry, often helpless man who nonetheless carries an unwavering belief in his son, even as society insists on seeing that son only through caste. Dhruv Vikram plays Kittan with controlled intensity. His performance is deeply physical, yet never hollow. The weight is visible in his eyes long before it appears on the kabaddi court. Kittan is constantly in motion — running from humiliation, inherited rage, and a social order determined to keep him in place.

Sport here is not escape; it is confrontation.

One of the film's most devastating sequences is when the father, driven to desperation, pleads with the police so his son can play. There is no swelling music, no emotional orchestration. Just a man begging the state for permission to hope. The scene lingers because it reveals power exactly as it functions in real life: Quietly, bureaucrati-

**At the narrative's core are a father and son bound not only by blood but by a shared understanding of how power operates and whom it marginalises**

cally, and without apology.

Then, the respite, with Kittan's Arjuna Award win. The father watches, his eyes filling not only with pride but with something heavier — relief, perhaps, or the sense that a generational burden has shifted, if only slightly. In their final meeting, Kittan places the award in his father's hands. Behind them hangs a portrait of B R Ambedkar in his barrister's attire. Selvaraj does not underline the symbolism. He trusts the audience, and that trust becomes the film's strength.

What sets *Bison Kaalamaadan* apart is its refusal to detach sport from society. Kabaddi is not a neutral arena. It is embedded in caste, violence, access, and survival. The film understands that the body is political long before it becomes athletic. Moving between

past and present, the narrative treats memory not as nostalgia but as intrusion — each tackle echoing an earlier wound.

Inspired by the life of kabaddi player Manathi Ganesan, the film honours its subject without reducing his journey to a checklist of achievements. *Bison Kaalamaadan* rejects uncomplicated victory. Hope appears fragile and hard-won, glimpsed in a father's tears or a phone call urging a son to play against impossible odds. Selvaraj captures an unsettling truth: In such worlds, love is not merely emotional sustenance, but a survival strategy — and that clarity gives the film its enduring force.

The writer is a researcher specialising in caste and cinema

Court frames charges against two accused of attacking Delhi CM Rekha Gupta

Press Trust of India  
New Delhi, December 26

SETTING THE stage for trial, a Delhi court on Friday formally framed charges, including for attempt to murder, against two persons accused of attacking Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta at a public event earlier this year.

Sakriya Rajeshbhai Khimjibhai and Tahsin Raza Rafullah Shaikh pleaded not guilty to the charges when they were physically produced in the court. Additional Sessions Judge Ekta Gauba Mann summoned Gupta to give testimony at 2 pm on February 28, and said all future testimonies from her should be part of in-camera proceedings. The judge said in-camera proceedings are directed to avoid overcrowding in the court and to safeguard the right to privacy of the victim who is a public servant, a woman and a public figure. Earlier, on December 20, the court ordered framing of charges against the duo under various penal provisions.

Rs 13,000-CRORE DRUG BUST IN 2024

## On trail of cartel, police look for mystery drug lord

Pragnesh & Nirbhay Thakur  
New Delhi, December 26

AN ALLEGED “international” drug lord whom the police know only by name – Rana Tarandeep – has emerged as the latest person of interest for Delhi Police Special Cell in its probe into the Rs 13,000-crore drug trafficking case, in which cocaine and Thai marijuana were seized while being smuggled into Delhi by a Dubai-based cartel last October.

Sources in the police said the probe has found that WhatsApp texts exchanged between two accused in the case have shown that a man named Rana Tarandeep was hand-in-glove with Dubai-based drug cartel leader Virender Basoiya alias Veeru in smuggling the cocaine, and was directing it to be refined and processed in Gujarat. Officers said they are still investigating whether Tarandeep is the man's real name.

On Monday, Delhi Police Special Cell had arrested one of the key suppliers of the drugs,



The drugs were seized in October last year. FILE

Ritik Bajaj, from the UAE. Besides Bajaj, 18 people have been arrested in the case so far.

On October 1 last year, 562 kg of cocaine was seized in Mahipalpur in South Delhi, while on October 10, 208 kg of cocaine was seized from a shop in West Delhi's Ramesh Nagar. The third seizure was made on October 13, when Special Cell sleuths and the Gujarat Police recovered 518 kg of cocaine worth Rs 5,000 crore during a raid at a firm called Aavkar Drugs in Gujarat's Ankleshwar. Tarandeep, an of-

ficer said, was in touch with chemists working at Aavkar Drugs, where cocaine supplied from South America via Dubai reached through multiple ports in South India. After being processed, the drugs were then moved out of Gujarat as medical consignments. “These were transported as medicine packages of Pharma Solutions Services via road to Delhi-NCR,” an officer said. As per court records, one of the 19 people arrested in the case – Mayur Desale, a chemist working for

Pharma Solutions Services – was in touch with Tarandeep and kept him updated on everything: from the colour of the cocaine mixture to the quantity being prepared.

“Though Mayur had joined the company just 30 days before his arrest, he had been in touch with Tarandeep since before. However, none of the accused have met Tarandeep, and we are still investigating whether it is his real name,” the officer said.

Police said Tarandeep was also in contact with Amit Kumar Masoriya, another accused who allegedly worked as a middleman by striking deals between Pharma Solutions and Aavkar Drugs for processing the drugs.

As per court records, Masoriya conducted the first “transaction” with Tarandeep and then set up the contract between Aavkar Drugs and Pharma Solutions. Further, the probe has found that multiple fake firms – at least three – were set up in the names of rickshaw drivers in South India and were later used to move the drugs.

## Truck driver with ‘social media following’ held for ‘attacking’ Gujarat cop at checkpost

Express News Service  
Vadodra, December 26

A TRUCK driver was arrested in Gujarat's Dahod district on Friday for allegedly attempting to murder a police inspector while trying to flee an inter-state check post.

Dahod district police said the incident occurred around 1 am at the Khangela inter-state check post, which is a key entry point into Gujarat used to check smuggling, particularly of liquor. When a team from Katvara police station signalled a truck to stop, the driver allegedly ignored the signal and sped away, prompting a police chase.

The police chased the truck for nearly two kilometres before intercepting it. According to officials, the driver initially got into a verbal argument with the police and repeatedly boasted about his large social media following.

When the police attempted to search the vehicle, he allegedly tried to flee on foot and attacked Katvara Police Inspector Umesh Gavit with a stone, causing serious injury to his right eye.

Deputy Superintendent of Police (Dahod Division) Jag-

dish Bhandari told *The Indian Express*, “When the driver tried to escape from the Khangela check post, which is a crucial point of vigilance for entry into Gujarat, the police patrol team suspected he was carrying contraband. They chased the truck as per instinct and intercepted it. Initially, the driver began arguing, citing his huge social media following. When the police sought to search the truck, he darted away to escape.”

Bhandari said that as Inspector Gavit chased the accused along with four other personnel, the driver turned back and allegedly pelted a stone at him. “The stone hit him in the eye. There has been injury and primary damage to the right eye. Only after the swelling subsides in a couple of days will it be possible to ascertain whether his vision is intact,” he said.

Police said the truck was found to be carrying only vegetables and no contraband.

Following the attack, the Dahod police launched a night-long combing operation. Teams from the Local Crime Branch and the Special

Operations Group (SOG) arrested the accused from a nearby field where he had been “hiding overnight”.

The accused has been identified as Ankush Hemraj Damor, a native of Jhabua district in Madhya Pradesh. Police said Damor is active on social media and frequently uploads reels showing stunts and issuing challenges.

In primary questioning, he admitted his mistake but did not explain why he tried to flee, an officer said.

“We checked his social media profile... In one reel, he claims he can drive while drinking. However, in this case, nothing except vegetables was found in the truck. Our preliminary checks also show that he is not wanted in any other criminal case. Further probe is on.”

Damor has been booked for attempt to murder under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and will be produced before a court on Saturday.

Inspector Gavit, a 2013-batch officer of the Gujarat Police, was promoted to the rank of Police Inspector a few years ago and has been posted as in-charge of Katvara police station for over a year.

## HC orders deletion of content with morphed images, videos of actor

Omkar Gokhale  
Mumbai, December 26

THE BOMBAY High Court Friday directed social media platforms, AI-linked entities and others, including all unknown persons, to forthwith delete and pull down links, posts, URLs and websites carrying allegedly morphed and manipulated images and videos of actor Shilpa Shetty.

The HC said that the material on record was “prima facie extremely disturbing” and “no personality, much less a person and or a woman can be portrayed in a fashion which affects her fundamental right to privacy and that too, without her knowledge or consent”. A vacation bench of Justice Advait M Sethna passed an order on an interim plea by Shetty in her commercial intellectual property rights suit against the alleged misuse of her



Actor Shilpa Shetty alleged AI tools were used to clone her voice and mannerisms for morphed images, merchandise and books, without her consent

personality rights and image, and against deepfake content.

In her suit, Shetty alleged that AI tools were used to clone her voice and mannerisms to create morphed images, books, and other merchandise without her authorisation, and such material would also expose her to “unsavoury humour and ridicule”. Therefore, she sought in-

junction orders to take down such content and restrain them from using her name, voice, image or likeness through AI-generated content, deepfake videos, and voice cloning and also sought damages of Rs 5 lakh against some of the defendants.

“The plaintiff has tendered pictures apparently from social media platforms, which depict the plaintiff in an inappropriate, unacceptable fashion. These pictures prima facie appear shocking,” the judge noted. “She is a well-known film personality and active on social media platforms. Portrayal of such images through URLs would tarnish her image and reputation and this cannot be countenanced.”

The Bombay HC also directed the Department of Telecommunications to pull down links, posts and websites that “unlawfully infringe privacy rights of the plaintiff”.

## On Day One, Kankaria Carnival sees 1.31 lakh footfall

Ritu Sharma  
Ahmedabad, December 26

MORE THAN 1.31 lakh people visited the ongoing Kankaria Carnival around Ahmedabad city's 15th century lake on Thursday, coinciding with Christmas, when the festival opens leading to the New Year.

Launched in 2008, after extensive restoration and renovation work of the Kankaria Lakefront was completed, Narendra Modi inaugurated the first Kankaria Carnival in December 2008. Organised by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) every year, an estimated 20-25 lakh people visit the seven-day-long Kankaria Carnival.

Retired bureaucrat and former Ahmedabad municipal commissioner IP Gautam, during whose tenure it was launched, tells *The Indian Express*, “The Kankaria Lakefront revitalisation work that went on from November 2006 till December 2008, then CM Narendra Modi wanted to connect all the cultural associations in Ahmedabad on a common platform. The first carnival was organised by nearly 16-17 cultural associations in Ahmedabad from Bihar, Bengali, Odia, Tamil, Malayalam, and others. Though this has gradually changed over time, it is good to see only for good as the Carnival is getting better and better every year.”

With the aim of providing



A music performance during the event in Ahmedabad, Friday. EXPRESS

quality entertainment to citizens, a platform for local artists, and promoting tourism in the city, the Kankaria Carnival is said to be not just a major entertainment festival for Ahmedabad but an important centre for the city's cultural identity, collective enjoyment, and tourism development.

Gautam, who is now heading the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Corporation Limited (SRFDCL) as its Chairman, told *The Indian Express*, “I still remember that during the first Carnival, people dressed up in different cultural attires and reached the Carnival representing each of the city's zones. It was during the first Carnival that Atal Bhatta was also launched at Kankaria Lakefront as the PM wanted to

pay his respects to (late prime minister) Atal Bihari Vajpayee.”

AMC officials who were associated with the revitalisation and beautification of the Kankaria Lakefront recalled that only a countable number of international parks would have that kind of toy train. “The train was sourced from the United Kingdom. Looking at the popularity, it was followed by a second toy train in 2012-13,” a former AMC official said.

Some also recalled how there would be smaller events at the Lakefront and the adjoining Football Ground, which was earlier a part of Kankaria Lakefront, now and then, including the ‘millennium festival’ held in 1997 during Keshubhai Patel's tenure to celebrate 50 years of

independence. “It used to have different stages and was chaotic. Only after 2008 did it become a well-planned and organised event. The first Carnival had five stages, which was reduced to three soon after and still continues,” the official said.

For safety and security reasons, as lakhs of people are expected, more than 110 CCTV cameras have been installed inside and outside the Kankaria premises for the safety of all people, including small children and women. With the help of CCTV cameras, the police will keep a close eye on every corner of Kankaria. Apart from this, more than 34 CCTV cameras have been installed at all seven gates of Kankaria for headcount and face recognition by the police team as part of security. Apart from this, personal accident insurance, fire insurance, and public liability policies have been taken for the visitors coming to the Kankaria premises. The evening of each day of the carnival will conclude with performances by renowned artists including Kirtidan Gadhvi, Parth Oza, Geeta Rabari, Brijdan Gadhvi, Ishani Dave, Rehan Khan, Priyanka Basu, and Orchestra. Along with this, programs including rock band performance, musical night, DJ night, live Bhavai, and live singing will be organised.

While there was an attempt on the first day, on the morning of December 25, to create a Guinness

World Record for the largest balloon mosaic prepared by the people.

More than 3,500 sanitation workers of Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation gathered to prepare this balloon mosaic. The decision from the Guinness World Records is expected soon.

During these seven days, programmes including Bollywood fusion, folk dance, Indian classical dance, patriotic songs, Sufi ghazals, dance drama, police band performance, Talwar Raas, carnival parade, diary, storytelling, stand-up comedy show, pet fashion show, art and craft show, science experiment science show, motivational talk, handicraft workshops, healthy living workshop, social media workshop, jewellery making workshop, clay workshop, wellness talk, music night, live concert, Lok Bhavai, karate and self-defence, painting workshop, live karaoke competition, singing and instrumental competition, mime and nukkad natak will be organised.

In between all this, live performers will entertain the visitors. Apart from this, light and sound show and laser show will be presented every night along with drone show. During the carnival, visitors will be able to enjoy the main attractions of the Kankaria complex, including Kids City, Zoo, Nocturnal Zoo, Balvatika, Butterfly Garden, Nagina Wadi, Musical Fountain, various amusement and recreational activities, and Fish Aquarium.

## 20-year-old Indian shot dead in Toronto, suspect on the run

Investigators have not disclosed a motive and insist that the incident appears “isolated” with no ongoing threat to the public

Express News Service  
Chandigarh, December 26

A 20-YEAR-OLD Indian doctoral student was found shot dead near the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus (UTSC) in Canada, less than a week after a 30-year-old Indian woman was found dead at her residence — also in Toronto — shaking the diaspora while reigniting concerns about the safety of international students.

The shooting allegedly took place Tuesday, with the Toronto Police identifying the victim as Shivank Avasthi.

In New Delhi, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India has been in touch with the local authorities in Canada. “We are in touch with his family. It's very unfortunate. We convey our deepest condolences. We are also in touch with local authorities as to what were the circumstances that led to the death. Our consulate is extending all possible support to the family of the person who died,” he said.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation said the Toronto Police, at around 3:30 pm Tuesday, responded to reports of an “unknown trouble” and of an “injured person lying on the ground” in the Highland Creek Trail and Old Kingston Road area. Officers found Avasthi with a gunshot wound. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

Duty Inspector Jeff Allington said the police are probing the case as a homicide. “Our immediate focus is on preserving evidence at the scene, determining what happened and notifying this individual's next of kin. Because of that, there is very little information that I am able to share with you,” Allington said.

The suspects had fled before police arrived, and no arrests had been made as of December 26 and no suspect description has been released.

Meanwhile, India's Consulate in Toronto expressed “deep anguish” over the student's “tragic death”.

“We express deep anguish over the tragic death of a young Indian doctoral student, Shivank Avasthi, in a fatal shooting incident... The Consulate is in touch with the bereaved family during this difficult time, and is extending all necessary assistance in close coordination with the local authorities,” the Consulate posted on X.

Avasthi was a student at UTSC, reportedly in his third year of life sciences, and a member of the university's cheerleading team. The team paid tribute to him on Instagram, remembering him as a “supportive teammate who brought smiles to everyone's faces” and noting that he would “always be part of our UTSC Cheer family.” The shooting occurred near

one of the university's popular trail systems along the Highland Creek valley, prompting a brief lockdown on campus. The university issued a “shelter-in-place advisory” while police investigated the area. Several students took to social media platforms to voice their fear and frustration over long-standing safety concerns around the off-campus trail network, which many consider poorly lit and inadequately patrolled.

While the Consulate referred to him as a “young Indian doctoral student,” a UTSC spokesperson only said that the university was “extremely saddened” to learn about the death near their campus. The spokesperson did not confirm if he was a student. “We cannot comment on the identity of the victim at this time,” the spokesperson said in a statement Wednesday evening. The UTSC also issued a safety alert advising anyone in a building to stay inside and anyone outdoors to leave the area. Investigators have not disclosed a motive and say the incident appears “isolated” with no ongoing threat to the public. The incident comes days after Toronto Police launched a homicide investigation after a 30-year-old India-origin woman Himanshi Khurana was found dead at her residence in the city's west end. The suspect has been identified as Abdul Ghafoori, 32, also of Toronto. Police said the victim and the suspect were known to each other. Ghafoori is wanted on a Canada-wide warrant on a charge of first-degree murder. Toronto Police had released an image of the suspect and appealed to the public for assistance in locating him.

## ‘USA’, as in ‘Umarti Sikligar Arms’, an MP village in the shadow of the gun

Chandan Haygunde  
Umarti (Madhya Pradesh),  
December 26

“SAAVDHAN. ARE you purchasing country-made pistols? Beware. Police are watching you...,” warns a board installed on a road leading towards Umarti.

While the warning is meant for those going to Umarti village in Barwani district of Madhya Pradesh, it is installed at Umarti village in Maharashtra's Jalgaon district. The villages, sharing the same name, are connected by a small bridge over the river Aner on the Maharashtra-Madhya Pradesh border.

There is a reason the warning is put up at Maharashtra Umarti too — the rise of its counterpart as a hub of illegal weapons, sold under the unofficial brand name ‘Umarti Sikligar Arms’, or ‘USA’.

The village with around 300 homes has a population of about 2,000, mainly comprising a Sikh sub-community called Sikligars, and tribals from the



A board on the road towards Umarti village in MP warns: ‘Purchasing country-made pistols? Beware. Police are watching you’. ARUL HORIZON

Barela and Bhil communities. The Sikligars, with a history of working in metallurgy, are said to have supplied weapons to the Khalsa Army led by Sixth Sikh Guru Hargobind Singh and later to princely states and revolutionaries who fought the British in the freedom struggle. As per police, that old profession has now carried on into illegal firearms trade, with other Sikligar settlements in parts of Madhya Pradesh also alleged to

be involved.

Last month, the Pune city police conducted one of the biggest raids on Umarti's illegal firearm units, after probes into several sensational gang war murders in the city and seizure of country-made pistols kept throwing up the village's name. The raid came days after six minor boys detained from Pimpri Chinchwad in Pune over a murder were alleged to have procured two pistols and two

cartridges from a weapons dealer in Umarti for Rs 50,000.

Travelling about 500 km, 105 police personnel, led by Deputy Commissioner of Police Somay Munde and accompanied by counterparts from Jalgaon and Barwani police teams, entered Umarti in the early hours of November 22. The cover of dark was essential given the experience of February, when the Jalgaon police was attacked, with a constable abducted, after they had arrested a firearms dealer from Umarti. The constable was later released.

DCP Munde, a recipient of Shaurya Chakra for his participation in anti-Maoist operations, says their preparation for Umarti was rigorous. “We started the raid at 4 am, and carried arms, ammunition and bullet-proof jackets. A temporary wireless network was set up, and the men wore body cameras linked to a live-feed monitoring system in Pune. Drones were deployed for aerial surveillance.”

Police claimed to have destroyed 50 kilns used for moulding and production of weapons, at four illegal units. They seized country-made pistols, cartridges, magazines, over a hundred barrels, 14 grinding machines, 15 pistol bodies, a few sharp weapons and several firearm spare parts buried in the ground.

Forty-seven people, all Sikligars, were detained. Barring 10, all were released later.

While the units were found to be rudimentary, working out of households, an officer said this was deceptive. A trained Sikligar could manufacture a pistol in two-three days in Umarti, said a source. Mostly, spare parts were kept ready, to be assembled into guns as per orders from customers.

Narayan Rawal, the in-charge of Warla Police Station under which Umarti falls, points out that the units are hard to crack as pistols are made from raw material “that is easily available in scrap and hardware shops”.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

**Gujarat State Electricity Corporation Limited**  
 Sikka Thermal Power Station  
 At: PO Sikka, Dist. Jamnagar - 361140  
 CIN: U40100DL1993GGC19988  
 An ISO 9001:2015 Certified Company  
 Phone: 0288-2344108

**E-Tender Notice No. 420**  
 Online Tenders are invited for (1) Repairing, Retrofitting & Providing external protective painting work of IDCT #3 & 4 at GSECL Sikka TPS. (Phase-II). (2) Repairing/modifications of drains at various location in plant premises at STPS. (3) Operation & Maintenance of water supply system from Sikka patiya pump house to sikka plant as & when required at GSECL Sikka TPS. (4) Work of Fabrication & Erection of M.S. Storage Shelves, Racks, Support and other Misc works at various locations of Main Store Warehouses on as & when required basis for Main store at Sikka TPS. (5) Supply of H.V. bushings of power transformers installed at Sikka TPS.  
 Tender documents available on GSECL Website www.gsecl.in (for view, download and submission in hard). Party has to submit tender in online also on web site <http://tender.nprocure.com>  
 Vendor, Manufacturers, Contractors are requested to locate the same from above web site. Please be in touch with our above site for any future Amendment / Corrigendum  
**Chief Engineer (G), STPS.**

**GUJARAT STATE WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT**  
 "e" procurement Notice No.17 of 2025-26

**1. Name of work :-**  
 1) Construction of Bamanbor 1 check dam near highway on local vonklo At Village : Bamanbor Ta. : Rajkot District : Rajkot  
 2) Construction Of Ishwariya -3 Checkdam Near Village Ishwariya Taluka Jasdan Of Rajkot District

**2. Estimated Cost**  
 1 Rs. 56,64,223=53  
 2 Rs. 47,09,729=65

**3. Last Date/Time for receipt of Tenders (On Line)**  
 Dt. 09/01/2026 at 18.00 Hours (IST)

**4. Name & Address of the SE concerned, Phone/Fax No.**  
 Superintending Engineer, Rajkot Irrigation Circle, Opp.Prayag-C, Near M.S. Building, Race Course Rajkot 0281-2440485/ 0281-2476093

**Name & Address of the EE concerned, Phone/Fax No.**  
 Executive Engineer, Rajkot Irr. Proj. Division., 3/5 Jilla Seva Sadan, Rajkot-360 001 0281 - 2473570 / 0281 - 2473499

**5. Further details can be seen at**  
 www.statetenders.gujarat.gov.in and <https://nwrtdr.nprocure.com/>

**6. The Subsequent Correction / Editing put Online**  
 INF-RAJ-1510-25-26

**WESTERN RAILWAY VADODARA DIVISION**  
**TENDER FOR SELECTION OF A MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT**  
 1) Tender no.: WR-BRC-002-616931 2) Name of Work and location: Tender for selection of a Management Consultant for strategic advisory services for enhancement of freight / parcel traffic at Jhagadia area of Vadodara Division, Western Railway 3) Estimated period for completion of services: 05 (Five) Months from the date of issue of Letter of Acceptance 4) Estimated cost of work: ₹ 26,30,000/- Lakhs (including GST) (Rupees Twenty six lakhs thirty thousand only) 5) Earnest Money Deposit: ₹ 52,600/- 6) Tender closing date and time: Upto 15.00 Hrs on 19.01.2026 7) Bidding start date: 05.01.2026 8) Website & address of the office from where complete details of tender, eligibility criteria & tender documents can be obtained: Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager's Office, Pratapnagar, Vadodara-390004. Website: [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) BRC 297  
 Like us on: [facebook.com/WesternRly](https://facebook.com/WesternRly)

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**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER, RAYAGADA (R&B) CIRCLE, RAYAGADA**  
 E-mail: [oid\\_wspwd\\_rpd@sahoo.com](mailto:oid_wspwd_rpd@sahoo.com)  
 Phone/Fax No: 06856-22304

**INVITATION FOR BIDS**  
 Bid Identification No. C.C.E (R&B) RGDA- 11/2025-26 (Online) Dt. 20.12.2025 Date: 20.12.2025

**1.** The Chief Construction Engineer, Rayagada (R&B) Circle, Rayagada on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate bids in double cover mode to be received in online mode only for the construction of works as detailed in the table below:  
**2.** Nature of work: Building Work  
**3.** No. of works: 01 (One) No. of work  
**4.** Estimated cost. (Approximately): Rs. 153.56  
**5.** Bid cost (Online): Rs. 10,000/-  
**6.** EMD/Bid Security Amount (Online): One Percentage of the Estimated Cost.  
**7.** Class of Contractor: B, A & Special Class only as per Financial Eligibility.  
**8.** Availability of Bid Documents in the website: 11.00 Hours of Dt. 20.12.2025 to 17.00 Hours of Dt. 13.01.2026  
**9.** Date of opening of Bid: 11.00 Hrs of Dt. 15.01.2026  
**10.** The Bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website: <https://tendersissa.gov.in>. Any Addendum/ Corrigendum/ cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website. The authority reserves the right to reject any or all bids without assigning any reason thereof.  
 Sd/- Chief Construction Engineer Rayagada (R&B) Circle, Rayagada  
 OPR 34154/11/0027/2526

**Government of Tamil Nadu KARUR CORPORATION KARUR DISTRICT**  
**E-Tendering Tender Notice** Dated: 24.12.2025

Karur Corporation invites Bids from eligible Bidders through e-procurement portal for "Providing Under Ground Sewerage Scheme to the leftout areas and added areas of Karur Corporation with operation and maintenance for the period of 5 years for collection system and construction of STP including operation and maintenance for the period of 10 years". Bidders shall submit their Bids through online e-procurement portal <https://tenders.gov.in> up to **03.00 PM** (as per the time in the server clock of the tender portal) on **13/02/2026**. The Bids will be opened through online at **3.30 PM**, on the same day (**13.02.2026**)

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Bid Value (Rs. In lakh)	Bid Security (Rs. In lakh)	Period of availability of bid document	Date and time of Bid opening	Period of Completion
1	Providing Under Ground Sewerage Scheme to the leftout areas and added areas of Karur Corporation with operation and maintenance for the period of 5 years - package 1	11015.26	113.84	30.12.2025 to 13.02.2026 up to 3.00 PM	13.02.2026 at 3.30 PM	36 Months
	Estimated cost for Providing UGSS	368.02				
2	Providing Under Ground Sewerage Scheme to the leftout areas and added areas of Karur Corporation with operation and maintenance for the period of 5 years - package 2	21426.56	220.74	30.12.2025 to 13.02.2026 up to 3.00 PM	13.02.2026 at 3.30 PM	36 Months
	Estimated cost for Providing UGSS	647.39				
3	Construction of 35.25 MLD capacity sewage treatment plant at Arasu colony with operation and maintenance for the period of 10 years at Karur Corporation package 3	7791.39	94.89	30.12.2025 to 13.02.2026 up to 3.00 PM	13.02.2026 at 3.30 PM	18 Months
	Estimated cost for Construction of STP	1698.02				

1. The Bid documents shall be made available from **30.12.2025**.  
 2. The Bid documents may be downloaded from the website (<https://tenders.gov.in>) at free of cost up to **3.00 PM on 13.02.2026**.  
 3. Bids through e-submission shall only be accepted.  
 4. Pre-bid meeting will be held on **12.01.2026 at 11.00 AM** in the Office of the Karur Corporation, Main Road, Karur - 639 001.  
**Commissioner Karur Corporation**  
 DIPR/6851/TENDER/2025

**Online Tender Tender Notice No.18(2025-26)**  
 The Tenders are invited by the Executive Engineer, Panchayat R. & B. Division, Palanpur Pin Code No. 385001 Phone No. (02742) 257197 Road and Building Works from the contractors registered in Approval Category as per on line E-Tendering. The details notice could be seen & Download on website <https://tender.nprocure.com> from Dt.27-12-2025 onwards. Any Subsequent Amendments to the Notice will be Found only on the above website For Further particulars contact above stated office during office hours.  
**Note:-**The Work of the Tender Published earlier by this office will be available here after on above said websites.  
**DDI-PAL-656-2025-2026**

**PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LIMITED**  
 (Regd. Office PSEB Head Office, The Mall Patiala)  
 Corporate Identity Number: U40109PB2010SGC033813  
 Website: [www.pspcl.in](http://www.pspcl.in) (Contact Number 9646113230)

Tender Enq. No.: 06/DY. CE/DS CIRCLE/KHANNA/AMLOH/2025-26.  
 Dy.CE/DS PSPCL GT Road Khanna invites E-tender for Outsourcing of Labour Part for Erection, Testing & Commissioning of New 11KV/LT Lines on Rail/PCC Poles, Distribution T/Fs, Augmentation/Sagging of ACSR of HT/LT Lines, Cables laying, Guarding, Stay Set for Various Works such as Releasing of T/Well Connections, GSC/ISC Connections, De-loading of Overloaded T/Fs, Shifting of Meters Outside Consumer Premises, Earthing of DTs/Lines or any Development Works under DS Division Amloh.  
 For detailed NIT and tender specifications refer to <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from 17.12.25 09:00 AM onwards.  
**Note:-** Corrigendum and addendum, if any will be published online at <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>  
 No. 6460/PSPCL C929/25

**SARDAR SAROVAR NARMADA NIGAM LIMITED**  
 (A Wholly Owned Government of Gujarat Undertaking)  
 Works under the Executive Engineer, N. P. Canal Dn. No. 5, Miyagam-Karjan.  
**Tender Notice No.06 of 2025-26 (2nd Attempt)**  
 Name of work: Up Keeping work for Office of the Executive Engineer, Narmada Project Canal Division No. 5 at Nava Bazar, Karjan and Narmada Colony, Karjan for the One Year (2025-26)  
 Estimated Amount: Rs. 11.73 Lakh  
 Last Date / Time of online bid Submission: 03/01/2026 upto 18:00 Hrs.  
 For further details please visit website <https://tender.nprocure.com> & [www.statetenders.gujarat.gov.in](http://www.statetenders.gujarat.gov.in)  
 INF-VAD-1216-25-26

**Water Resources Deptt. "e" procurement Notice No.17 of 2025-26**

**1. Name of the work:** (1) Sauni yojna Link4 package 6 installation of New scour valve and required pipeline levelling and construction of valve chamber, air valve and structural work for filling pond/ check dam of Sanala & Nani Kukavav village, Taluka Kukavav-Vadiya, Amreli Dist.  
**2. Estimated cost:** (1) Rs. 1,46,86,286.27  
**3. Last date/ Time for receipt of tenders (on line)** Dt. 16-01-2026 Upto 18-00 Hrs. (IST) ([website.nwr.nprocure.com](http://website.nwr.nprocure.com))  
**4. Name and addresses of the Offices Phone No./Fax No.** Executive Engineer, Amreli Irrigation Division, Near Jilla Panchayat, Amreli-365 601. Phone No. (02792)-222009/223637  
**NOTE:-** Any corrigendum hereafter will be published directly on [www.nprocure.com](http://www.nprocure.com) site only.  
**5. Further details can be seen on** [www.statetenders.gujarat.gov.in](http://www.statetenders.gujarat.gov.in) and [www.nprocure.com](http://www.nprocure.com)  
 INF-AMR-484-2025-26

**Karnataka Food & Civil Supplies Corporation Ltd.**  
 (Government of Karnataka Undertaking)  
 No.16/1, MILLERS TANK BED AREA, BANGALORE-560 052  
 Ph: 080-2226 0932 E-mail: [admknfcs123@yahoo.com](mailto:admknfcs123@yahoo.com)

No:KFCSC/MKT/INDIRA KIT/02/2025-26/ Date: 26.12.2025

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

**Gujarat Water Supply & Sewerage Board**  
**Tender Notice No. 14 of 2025-26**

Executive Engineer, Public Health Works Division, Mamlatar Office Compound, Deesa-385535, District: Banaskantha. Phone No.02744-227834 invites E-Tender for Vav-Tharad District Total - 3 (Three) Project of Regional Water Supply Scheme including Civil & Mechanical works with 10 Years O & M. Estimated cost Rs.10239.30 Lakhs to 6834.31 Lakh for villages of Vav, Tharad & Lakhani Taluka, Vav-Tharad District. Last date of Submission online tender ID No.256937, 257421 & 257610 Dtd.23/01/2026 - 18.00 Hrs & Physical Document 7 (Seven) days during office hours of last date of Bid. GWSSB reserves the right to accept/ reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason. For detail information & conditions, contact office mentioned above during office hours and is binding to all & website [www.statetenders.gujarat.gov.in](http://www.statetenders.gujarat.gov.in), [www.watersupply.gujarat.gov.in](http://www.watersupply.gujarat.gov.in) and <https://tender.nprocure.com/>  
**\*GWSSB Toll free Help line 1916 for Drinking Water Supply for Rural Area.\***  
**DDI-PAL-659-2025-2026**

**Gujarat Water Supply & Sewerage Board**  
**Tender Notice No. 12 of 2025-26**  
**Tender ID- 258471**

Executive Engineer, Public Health Works Division, Mamlatar Office Compound, Deesa-385535, District: Banaskantha. Phone No.02744-227834 invites E-Tender of Civil Work as under. (1) Name of work: Banaskantha District, Dhanera Taluka's  
 Providing & Supplying of Chiled Mineral Water in 20 Lit. Cap. Jug, Plastic Mineral Water Bottle having different capacity. For Government Programme. Tal. Various Places on different dates in Vav-Tharad District. (2) Estimated cost Rs.33.57 Lakh (3) Eligibility of contractor- Bidder having Registration with R&B/ GWSSB/ WRD in "E-1" Class and above however the bidder will have to post qualify as per Technical criteria given in the bid documents. (4) Last date of submission online of tender Dtd.00/00/2025 up to 18.00 Hrs & Physical Document Dtd.00/00/2025 during office hours GWSSB reserves the right to accept/ reject any or all tenders without assigning any reason. For detail information & conditions, contact office mentioned above during office hours and is binding to all & website [www.statetenders.gujarat.gov.in](http://www.statetenders.gujarat.gov.in), [www.watersupply.gujarat.gov.in](http://www.watersupply.gujarat.gov.in) and <https://tender.nprocure.com/>  
**\*GWSSB Toll free Help line 1916 for Drinking Water Supply for Rural Area.\***  
**DDI-PAL-658-2025-2026**

**Classifieds PERSONAL**

**CHANGE OF NAME**  
 I have Changed My Old Name From Chintan Arvindkumar Shah To New Name is Chintan Arvindkumar Shah  
 B-603, Saheli Sannidhya Apartment, New Shardaandir Road, Vasantkunj, Paldi, Ahmedabad-380007

**CHANGE OF NAME**  
 I Hira Been DOB 08-10-1948 spouse of No. 13817406, Rank Ex Sep. Name Bhalil Bhai Patel, resident VPO-Kandach, Teh-Kalol, Dist-Panchmahal (Gujarat) 399310 have changed my name and DOB from Hira Been DOB 08-10-1948 to Patel Heeraben DOB 23-06-1949 vide Affidavit dated 16-12-2025

**CHANGE OF NAME**  
 I MANJULA BEN W/O No 4008161W HAV Bhagora Sarjanbhai Kachrabhai R/O Village Rajgol Po= Kunol Ta: Meghraj Dist: Arvalli 383350 Gujarat Have changed my name from MANJULA BEN to Bhagora Manjulaben. vide affidavit no:- 904 Date 23/12/2025

**Change Of Name**  
 I Have Change My Old Name From Shaikh Arkan Ramijbhai To My New Name Shekh Mohammad Arkan Ramizbhai. R/O. 68, Golvad, Siddhpuri Bazar, Mahesana-384001

**Change of Name**  
 I RATHVA ANILBHAI RAMESHBHAI Army No. 1579223A Rank: HAVD'S Father Name: RATHVA RAMESHBHAI Residing At: Village: Rampura- Thalki, Po: Vaghva, Ta: Jetpur Pavi, Dist. Chhotaudepur, State: Gujarat. In my Service Record my Father's Name recorded as Rathva Rameshbhai which is incorrect. I have to change my Father's Name from RATHVA RAMESHBHAI TO RATHVA RAMESHBHAI

**CHANGE OF NAME**  
 I, KIRANKUMAR NATHABHAI SANGANI resident of Khandhera, KHANDHERA, Jamnagar, 361013 have changed my name from KIRANKUMAR NATHABHAI SANGANI to KIRANBHAI NATHABHAI SANGANI and henceforth I will be known as KIRANBHAI NATHABHAI SANGANI.

**CHANGE OF NAME**  
 I, BIRBHAI CHIRAGKUMAR Dineshbhai Army no. 15452709X residing at Ramana, Tal. Dhansura, Dist. Arvalli, Gujarat have changed my son's old name KRISHV TO KRISHV CHIRAGKUMAR BHARWAD affidavit dt 26/12/25 Notary Sarojben Rathod

**POULTRY STERILIZED HATCHERY MEAL FOR FISH FEED/ FARMING**  
 Nutritional specification  
 Moisture - 8 to 10 %  
 Protein - 18 to 20 %  
 Fat - 8 to 9 %  
 Calcium - 18 to 20 %  
**- Contact - 8888829707**  
 I Parveen Kumar resident of M-303, Haveli Resi Cum Plaza, Near Air Force Station Makarpura, Vadodara, Gujarat 390014. I have changed my daughter name from PRANSHI to PRANSHI MOKHARIYA vide affidavit dated 19 Nov 25 before VADODARA COURT  
 0050280759-1

**TENDER NOTICE NO. 50/2025-26**  
 Online tenders for 05 works of Estimated cost of Rs. 19.59 to 171.92 Lacs and total cost Rs. 485.41 Lacs, under different schemes are invited from Regd. Class Contractors by Executive Engineer, Panchayat R & B Dn. Jamnagar. (Ph. No. 2670286). These tenders are available on <https://tender.nprocure.com> and tenders are to be quoted online from this site. Tender notice is available on Notice board of this online tender submission date are as under. Tenders are not accepted by post or in person. Further Corrigendum not published in newspaper but Corrigendum seen only online at website.  

Doc. Down loading and submission Date & Time	Dt. 30-12-2025 to 07-01-2026 up to 18.00 hours.
Tender Opening Time & Date	Dt. 08-01-2026 at 12.00 hours.

**INFO-821-JAM-2025**

**N.W.R.W.S. & Kalpsar Department, Gandhinagar**  
 Short term Tender notice No SBD-19 of 2025-26

**1. ITEM (UNIT) RATE FOR THE COMPOSITE ITEMS FOR MAINTENANCE AND REPAIRS WORK OF DAM, CHECKDAM, T.B.C., CANALS, BANDHARA & OTHER STRUCTURES ETC. UNDER VARIOUS DIVISION OFFICE OF KACHCHH IRRIGATION CIRCLE, KACHCHH FOR THE PERIOD OF ONE YEAR (2025-26) (2nd Try)**  
 2. Deepening work of 3 No. Ponds in village Dabhunda (Matiyavalu Talav, Vanvayavalu Talav, Pabusari Talav) in Ta-Rapar Di-Kachchh. (Estimated cost Rs :- 48.26 Lakh) (2nd Try)  
 3. Deepening work of 6 Numbers ponds At Village Makhel(Lakhiasar Talav,Gangavariyo Talav, Dumsari Talav) and sai Village (kharakhatta Talav),Kidiyanagar Village (Bhaktavalu Talav),Dhanidhar Village (Madhiyari Talav) Ta.Rapar Di. Kachchh. (Estimated cost Rs :- 52.85 Lakh) (2nd Try)  
**Name & address of the E.E & S.E. :-**  
 (1) Executive Engineer, Water Resources Investigation Division, 312, Multi Storied Building, Bhuj-Kachchh. (Ph. 02832-223502)  
 (2) Superintending Engineer Kachchh Irrigation Circle, "Sinchai Sadan" Near Jubilee Ground, Bhuj-Kachchh.  
 Further details can be seen at [www.statetenders.gujarat.gov.in](http://www.statetenders.gujarat.gov.in) & [www.tender.nprocure.com](http://www.tender.nprocure.com) and notice board of this office. (Any further updates in the tender will be put online only) Downloading of Bid documents Last date & time of submission of on line bid: - up to Date: 04/01/2026 up to 18:00 hours IST only on Web site **D.D.I-KUTCH-1190-2025-26**

**V.O.CHIDAMBARANAR PORT AUTHORITY**  
 Civil Engineering Department  
 TUTICORIN - 628 004.

**GLOBAL NOTICE INVITING TENDER**  
 No. CIV-OFCD-PRJ-DEVEL-V1-21(50298)/D.4101 Date:26.12.2025  
 V.O.Chidambaranar Port invites Application from interested parties (Applicants) in accordance with the Request For Proposal (RFP) for the project "Construction of Breakwater, Rock Bund, Wharf and capital dredging and reclamation for backup yard and allied onshore facilities including maintenance thereof on Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) under Development of Outer Harbour at V.O. Chidambaranar Port".

Name of Work	Construction of Breakwater, Rock Bund, Wharf and capital dredging and reclamation for backup yard and allied onshore facilities including maintenance thereof on Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) under Development of Outer Harbour at V.O. Chidambaranar Port.
Indicative Project Cost	Rs.9,859.45 Crs
Sale of bid Documents	26.12.2025 to 09.02.2026
Bid document fee	Rs.11,63,416/- (inclusive of GST @ 18%)
Bid Security	Rs 116,34,15,100/- (as per cl. 1.2.4 of RFP)
Last date of receiving queries	07.01.2026
Pre-Application Conference	08.01.2026 at 12:00 noon (Hybrid mode)
Last date and time for submission of Tender through online	09.02.2026 up to 15:00 hours (IST)
Date RFP Bid opening date and time	10.02.2026 at 15:30 hours (IST)
Validity of offer	180 days from the last date fixed for submission of Tender

For downloading of RFP & further details, visit port Website: [www.vocport.gov.in](http://www.vocport.gov.in) & <https://etenders.gov.in/eprocure/app>.  
 Ph. No: 0461-2372306  
 Email: [ce@vocport.gov.in](mailto:ce@vocport.gov.in) Sd/- CHIEF ENGINEER

**SARDAR SAROVAR NARMADA NIGAM LIMITED**  
 (A Wholly owned Govt. of Gujarat Undertaking)  
**TENDER NOTICE NO. 45 OF 2025-26**

Online Tenders (E-tendering) for following work of Sardar Sarovar (Narmada) Project are publicly invited by the Executive Engineer, N. P. Colony Division No.3, New administrative Office, 5th Floor, Ektanagar- 393151 Phone No.02640-232098 from the contractors registered in appropriate class.

Name of work	1. Estimated Cost Rs. in Lacs as per Rate Analysis	1. Tender fee	2. Time for Completion of Work
Providing DG Cable System for Power BackUp and Repair/Replacements of DG set parts at Package 3&4 quarters at Ektanagar	1. Rs 10.11 Lacs 2. 11000 3. E-2 and above (Civil or Electrical)	1. Rs 900+162 (18%GST)=Rs 1062.00	2. 03 Months

**Schedule for e-tendering**

1. Pre-bid Meeting	Not applicable
2. Receiving of Tender documents	Up to date 15-01-2026 Up to 18.00 hours
3. Submission of tender documents i.e. last date of receipt of tender by SSNNL	Up to date 15-01-2026 Up to 18.00 hours
4. Physical submission of Tender fee, EMD and other documents in separate cover in person only	On or Before date 23-01-2026 up to 18.00 hours in the office of the Executive Engineer, N.P.Colony Division No.3, New Administrative Office, Fifth Floor, Ektanagar-393151
5. Verification of EMD & other documents	On date 16-01-2026 from 11.00 hours onwards in the Office of the Executive Engineer, N.P.Colony Division No.3, New Administrative Office, Fifth Floor, Kevadia Colony-393151 (if possible)
6. Opening of "Technical Bid" (online)	on date 16-01-2026 from 12.00 hours onwards in the Office of the Executive Engineer, N.P.Colony Division No.3, New Administrative Office, Fifth Floor, Kevadia Colony-393151 (if possible)
7. Opening of Price Bid of qualified bidders only	On date 16.01.2026 @ 16.00 hours onwards (if possible)

The details of above notice will be available on SSNNL website: [www.sardarsarovardam.org](http://www.sardarsarovardam.org) and GOG web site [www.statetenders.com](http://www.statetenders.com) and tender documents are available on <https://tender.nprocure.com>  
**INF-NARMADA-417-2025-26**  
 Ahmedabad

20 CHILDREN AWARDED PRADHAN MANTRI RASHTRIYA BAL PURASKAR BY PRESIDENT DROUPADI MURMU

# Modi: Linguistic diversity our strength to end slave mentality

## 160 MPs delivered speeches in their languages in Winter Session, says Modi

Express News Service  
New Delhi, December 26

HIGHLIGHTING THAT during the recently concluded Winter Session of Parliament 160 members delivered speeches in their own languages, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Friday described it as a glimpse of the campaign to free the country of "slave mentality" sown by British politician Thomas Macaulay in 1835, which was not eradicated even after Independence. "Around 50 speeches were delivered in Tamil, more than 40 were in Marathi, around 25 were in Bangla. This would be difficult to see in any other country. It is a matter of pride for all of us. Macaulay had tried to crush the linguistic diversity of the country. As we become free of slave mentality, linguistic diversity is becoming our strength," PM Modi said at an event in Delhi organised on Veer Bal Diwas to commemorate the martyrdom of Sahibzade Baba Zorawar Singh and

Baba Fateh Singh.

This year, 20 children were awarded the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar.

"Bharat has now decided we must be free from this slave mentality. Memories of the sacrifice and courage of Indians will not be suppressed," he said.

Modi said the country is remembering the brave sons who represent the pinnacle of India's indomitable courage, valour and bravery.

"Today, we remember the brave Sahibzade, the pride of our nation. They embody India's indomitable courage and the highest ideals of valour. Those brave Sahibzade broke the limits of age and circumstance. They stood like a rock against the cruel Mughal Sultanate, shaking the very existence of religious fanaticism and terror. A nation with such a glorious past, whose young generation has inherited such inspirations, what can that nation not achieve?" he said.

The PM said the Sahibzade



PM Narendra Modi interacts with Sharvan Singh, who had offered soldiers tea during Operation Sindoor, in New Delhi on Friday. PTI

were quite young at the time, but Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's cruelty was unmovable by that.

"Aurangzeb knew if he wanted to instil fear among the people of India and force religious conversion, he would first have to break the morale of Indians. That is why he made Sahibzade his target. But Aurangzeb and his commanders forgot that our gurus were not ordinary human beings. They were living embodiments of penance and sacrifice, divine incarnations in

spirit and action," he said.

"... The fight was between the fundamental ideas of the country and religious fanaticism. That fight was between truth and falsehood. On one side was Guru Gobind Singh, and on the other side was cruel Aurangzeb's rule..." he said.

The story of the sacrifice of the Sahibzades should have been "on the lips of every person", but "unfortunately, even after Independence, gulami ki mansikta (slave mentality) remained in

the country", Modi said.

"Bharat has now decided we must be free from this slave mentality. Memories of the sacrifice and courage of Indians will not be suppressed... that is why we are celebrating Veer Bal Diwas. We have not stopped there. The conspiracy that Macaulay hatched... it will be 200 years since then... we have 10 years till that... in these 10 years, we will rid the nation completely of the slave mentality," he said.

Referring to the youth, he said, "Your generation will take the country towards its goal of Viksit Bharat. I see and understand the capability and confidence of Gen Z. That's why I trust you very much... Earlier, the youth was scared to even dream; the old systems gave rise to an atmosphere where the belief was that nothing good could happen. There was disappointment all around. But today, the country is searching for talent, and giving it a platform."

Pointing out that the youth today is growing up at a time when more opportunities are available, he said that important reforms have been made through the NEP 2020 to lay the foundation for Viksit Bharat.

# Boy who offered tea to troops, orphan who took care of special needs child among recipients

Upasika Singhal

New Delhi, December 26

IN 2020, Chandigarh resident Vansh Tayal was only 12 when he lost both his parents to the Covid pandemic. At the child care institute he was sent to, Vansh was battling feelings of abandonment, anger and grief when he came across a child half his age. "Due to cerebral palsy, he doesn't have motor skills to even feed himself. My first thought was, 'if this child can survive and continue living, what's stopping me?'" says Vansh, now 17.

Under the supervision of his mentors at Snehalaya, Vansh began taking care of the child — from helping him with his physiotherapy to feeding and toilet training him. Months shy of 18, Vansh says he wouldn't stop taking care of the boy even after leaving the institute. "I will be shifted to an adult centre... But I'll get a job and pay for the things he needs... I want to pursue clinical psychology and do social work in the future," he says.

Vansh was among the 20 children who were awarded the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar (PMRBP) by President Droupadi Murmu Friday.

Conferred annually, the award recognises exceptional achievements of children across six categories: Bravery, Social Service, Environment, Sports, Art & Culture, and Science & Technology.

Another recipient of the award is Yogita Mandavi (14) from Chhattisgarh. Like Vansh, she was orphaned at a young age. At the state home for girls in Kondagaon she was sent to, all that Yogita could think of was going back to her village. "Mera mann nahi lagta tha (I did not feel at home)," she says softly, smiling at her teachers who accompanied her to Delhi.

It was these teachers who convinced her to take up a hobby. Yogita distinctly remembers watching Ranjita Koreti, a fellow inmate, flip grown adults on the judo mat. "I never thought I could excel at it. But when I won the state championship in 2023, I thought maybe I was actually good at the sport," she says, adding she wants to get medals like "Ranjita didi," and "maybe one day, go to the Olympics as well."

Earlier this year, Sharvan Singh (10) watched in awe as truckloads of soldiers during Op-

eration Sindoor entered the small Punjab hamlet he lives in, barely 2km from India-Pakistan border. With the armies of the two countries exchanging fire, Sharvan wanted to be of some help to the soldiers posted near his house. Despite orders to not venture out, Sharvan went to the encampments with glasses of tea, milk, and lassi. "I want to become an army officer when I grow up," he shares with pride after receiving his medal.

For Agra resident Ajay Raj (9), watching his father draw water from the Yamuna was a daily affair. But one day, he noticed an odd movement in the water. Before he could yell out a warning, a crocodile emerged and grabbed his father's right leg. Raj caught hold of a stick and began tackling the massive reptile.

"It was not like I was not scared for my life. At one point, the crocodile began moving towards me too... but at that moment, all that I could think of was my father," he says. Ajay's father, who accompanied his son to Delhi, still bears a massive scar from the attack. "It still hurts from time to time, but I am glad my son saved me..." he says.

# 'Irresponsible': China denounces Pentagon report flagging Beijing interest in Arunachal

Divya A  
New Delhi, December 26

CALLING IT "irresponsible" and "groundless", China has denounced a recent Pentagon report submitted to the US Congress that flagged Beijing's claim over Arunachal Pradesh as part of the country's stated "core interests".

The report had also accused Beijing of leveraging reduced border tensions with New Delhi to undermine India-US ties while deepening its own defence ties with Pakistan.

On being asked what the US was trying to achieve by claims that China probably seeks to "capitalise" on decreased tensions along the border with India to "prevent the deepening of US-India ties", Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said Thursday that Beijing views its relations with New Delhi from a strategic height and a long-term perspective.

"We stand ready to strengthen communication, enhance mutual trust, promote cooperation, and properly handle differences with India, and advance a sound and stable bilateral relationship," he said.

"The Pentagon's report distorts China's defence policy, sows discord between China and other countries, and aims

at finding a pretext for the US to maintain its military supremacy," Jian said at a media briefing when asked about the US Department of War report submitted to the US Congress. China firmly opposes the report, the official added.

On the references to the Line of Actual Control in the report titled "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2025", Lin Jian said, "The boundary question is a matter between China and India, and the current border situation between the two countries is generally stable with smooth communication channels". "China opposes (the) relevant country's groundless and irresponsible comments."

Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Zhang Xiaogang denounced the Pentagon report, saying that the US releases such reports year after year, "grossly interfering in China's internal affairs".

The report referred to a meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in October 2024, just days after a border agreement was signed between two countries to disengage from standoff sites along the Line of Actual Control.

## MVA AT A CROSSROADS

# As Thackerays rejoin forces, NCP unity a possibility, what happens to Opp alliance?

Shubhangi Khapre  
Mumbai, December 26

ON THE ropes since the Assembly elections last year, the past week has seen two developments that have led to questions about the direction that the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) is headed in. First, the Thackeray brothers have reunited for the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) polls next month and second, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) factions led by Ajit Pawar and Sharad Pawar are in talks for a tie-up for the civic body polls in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad.

The Congress is the only party in the Opposition alliance that has been left to chart its own course, with its allies moving in different directions to pursue strategies to preserve their hold in areas considered to be their turf.

"Frankly, we are at a crossroads," admitted a Congress leader. "A section believes we should tread cautiously and consolidate by reverting to our ideology. Some insist on pragmatic politics, adopting flexibility and alliance."

However, an influential part of the state leadership believes that if the party were to join the Thackeray alliance, it would be seen as the fourth partner in the anti-BJP coalition. By contesting alone, the party hopes to hold on to some of its traditional Muslim-Dalit-North In-

dian pockets in Mumbai. These leaders see a silver lining in its allies walking their different paths, reasoning that it provides the Congress with the opportunity to emerge from the shadow of its regional allies that loom over it in state politics.

Congress leaders, including state president Harshvardhan Sapkal, believe that this is an opportunity for the party to focus on ideology and work on rebuilding and consolidating its electoral base. Instead of a piecemeal approach, the party has to work on long-term strategies to consolidate its vote share when the regional parties are weak and without any concrete agenda, a party insider said.

"The Congress is the only party which is still pursuing its politics of ideology. In the given political situation, the Congress alone can take on the RSS-BJP, which has left the society divided," said Sapkal.

However, a major challenge for the party is that, unlike the others, it does not have a strong leadership team in place in the state. With individual leaders often going their own way, the dream of collective leadership remains unfulfilled. However, what has given the party a degree of optimism is that in the first two phases of the local elections, while the Mahayuti dominated by winning over 200 of the 288 municipal councils and nagar panchayats and

the MVA failed to cross 50, the party's tally was higher than that of its allies Sena (UBT) and NCP (SP).

"The Congress is an inclusive party that takes everybody along. In the first two phases, we did well in Vidarbha, which happens to be the home turf of CM Devendra Fadnis and Union Minister Nitin Gadkari," said Congress leader Vijay Wadetiwar.

Congress opposed to MNS

Though the Congress has decided to go solo in the Mumbai civic polls, the Sena (UBT) claims it made every effort to bring its ally on board. "The Opposition should come together to give a tough fight to defeat the Modi-Shah design to undermine Mumbai. It is not just any civic poll, it is a battle for Mumbai's identity and Maharashtra's identity," Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray said recently.

The party's Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut tried to persuade the Congress high command to reconsider going solo and is also holding talks with the NCP (SP), said Sena insiders. "If the MVA, along with the MNS (Maharashtra Navnirman Sena), come together, it will help keep the non-BJP vote share intact. With the Congress contesting alone, the division of secular votes will help the BJP-led Mahayuti," said a Sena (UBT) leader.



RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat and Andhra Pradesh CM N Chandrababu Naidu at Bharatiya Vignana Sammelan in Tirupati on Friday. PTI

# Hanuman stronger than Superman: Naidu

Sreenivas Janyala  
Hyderabad, December 26

ANDHRA PRADESH Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said Friday that Indian epics are far greater than Hollywood superheroes and that the youth must learn about Rama, Krishna and Ram Rajya.

Speaking at the inaugural session of the Bharatiya Vignana Sammelan (BVS) at Tirupati's National Sanskrit University, Naidu said: "Lord Hanuman's strength surpasses that of Superman, Arjuna was a greater warrior than Iron Man or Batman".

Naidu, who is known for speaking on information technology and AI and has recently focused on quantum technology, called upon parents, teachers and society to instil knowledge of India's epics and cultural heritage among children and youth, instead of limiting them to Western superhero narratives.

He said India's mythological heroes embody far greater values, strength and ideals than

fictional characters like Spider-Man, Batman or Superman.

"Lord Rama remains the ultimate symbol of righteousness, with Ram Rajya representing ideal governance," he said, urging people to teach children about the greatness of Hindu gods Krishna and Lord Shiva, and the lessons from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, stating that these epics "are more profound than even popular films like Avatar".

The CM highlighted the importance of teaching children the distinction between good and evil through stories of characters such as Bakasura and Kansa, and recalled how former CM N T Rama Rao popularised mythological stories through cinema while upholding strong values in both films and politics.

Naidu also spoke about national development, crediting former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee for laying strong foundations and PM Narendra Modi for taking India forward with remarkable progress.

Licences of commercial units on PGR/VGR land to be cancelled, says Himanta

Express News Service  
Guwahati, December 26

ASSAM CM Himanta Biswa Sarma said the state government has decided that while cases Gauhati HC on evictions in Village Grazing Reserve (VGR) and Professional Grazing Reserve (PGR) lands in West Karbi Anglong continue, the remaining vacant PGR/VGR lands will be fenced off and trading licences of all commercial establishments on them will be cancelled.

The decision was taken after a meeting with representatives of Karbi community organisations and the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council on Friday following tensions earlier this week. Sarma also announced that all cases — except those in connection with the death of a man in arson during the protests — will be withdrawn.

Assam's West Karbi Anglong district has been on edge this week, with the Kheroni area seeing violence resulting in death of two residents — Suraj Dey, who was killed when his house was set on fire, and Linus Phangocho, who died of injuries suffered during police action against the protesting mob — and dozens of police personnel getting injured and a trail of arson and destruction.

The tensions in the area, which comes under Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and has special protections for tribal rights under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, are primarily linked to the demand for eviction of non-Karbi populations, particularly from Bihar who have settled there, allegedly encroaching on vast tracts of reserved PGR and VGR lands.

Following Friday's meeting, Sarma said KAAC has been directed to file its affidavit by January 5 and that Karbi groups will also present their views to the court as a party to the case.

"The state government will also appeal to the court that since the matter is sensitive, the decision on this should be made soon so that we can act according to its orders," he said.

He said it has also been decided that all government offices that had been built on PGR/VGR lands will be shifted from there and KAAC will soon fence around 8,000 bighas of vacant PGR/VGR land and carry out afforestation to prevent future encroachment.

He said that the next meeting on this issue will be held with stakeholders on either January 16 or 17.

Representatives of Karbi groups who were present in the meeting said that it was a starting point.

● AT FIRST INDIAN COMMUNIST CONFERENCE IN KANPUR IN 1925, M SINGARAVELU TERMED CONG 'BOURGEOIS' PARTY AND FRAMED UNTOUCHABILITY AS A 'PURELY ECONOMIC PROBLEM'

# 100 yrs of CPI: In 1st conclave, it criticised Gandhi's khadi push, hailed Tilak

Vikas Pathak  
New Delhi, December 26

FROM DESCRIBING untouchability as a purely economic problem, calling khadi for the masses a "problematic" idea, seeing Buddha and Jesus Christ as communists, to terming Congress a "bourgeois" party and hailing Lenin and Lokmanya Tilak—the presidential speech of M Singaravelu at the first Communist Party of India (CPI) conference —during December 25-27, 1925, in Kanpur—highlighted a wide range of pressing national and international issues from the lens of communism.

"It should be clearly understood that from the standpoint of communism, this question of untouchability is a purely economic problem," Singaravelu told the delegates at the First Indian Communist Conference. "The question of untouchability is essentially associated with economic dependence of the vast mass of

these Indians. No sooner their economic dependence is solved, the social stigma of untouchability is bound to disappear."

He said "mere entry" into temples, tanks and roads will not "raise these unfortunates in the social scale in equal terms", asserting that "the problem of untouchability is essentially an agrarian problem, and unless this economic dependence is relieved, talk of removing untouchability is basely insincere".

One of the founding leaders of the CPI, Singaravelu was a freedom fighter and a pioneer of trade union movement, who organised the first ever May Day celebrations in India in Madras (now Chennai). He chaired the Kanpur conference of communist groups, which adopted a resolution for formation of CPI.

At the conclave, Singaravelu took a swipe at "no changer" reformers who, he said, issued platitudes about injustice to un-



One of the founding leaders of the CPI, Singaravelu was a freedom fighter and a pioneer of trade union movement

touchables without talking about their "famished homes". "Here is an example of the bourgeois mentality of the Indian reformer who while waxing eloquent against social wrongs is significantly silent on the economic degradation to which the country's bourgeoisie have confined these millions of our agrarian workers."

"To talk of removing un-

touchability by itself is obviously insincere and grotesque," he said, stressing that communists should press for "a living wage" for them to make their lives endurable.

Singaravelu disagreed with Mahatma Gandhi's khadi campaign as a way forward for the Indian masses. Recalling that the economic logic of "khaddar" was celebrated during the non-cooperation movement from 1920-22, he said its limitations became obvious later. He said it could serve as a "national costume in the fight for Swaraj" in the absence of a national uniform, "but that it would supplement machine-made cloth is an impossible feat".

He said it was bad economics to see the campaign for boycotting foreign clothes as a salvation for masses. "To ask the famishing worker to drudge at the charkha for a few more hours... is simply cruel... Mankind has been steadily growing out of the manual drudgery by the aid of the machine, and this has se-

cured them some leisure for higher pursuit of life which has raised him higher in the scale of animal existence," he added.

Singaravelu also defined communism for delegates: "The means of production should be in the hands of the producers themselves in order that everyone can have a fair share in all the things produced by them..."

He then sought to look at communism in the distant past, saying that "Communism is as old as history. It was taught by Buddha in a form and practised by his disciples. Jesus as an Essene was himself a communist."

He pointed out that Karl Marx gave communism a scientific form. He explained the Marxian communism as a theory that human society was a class struggle between the ones who controlled capital and the ones who put in the labour, with the former imposing exploitative conditions on the latter. Singaravelu made it clear



### Aim High

BJP's GARHWAL MP Anil Baluni is taking steps to use the topography of his state Uttarakhand to give a boost to Indian sports. The MP met Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Mansukh Mandaviya recently and requested him to set up a centre of sports excellence in Pauni. The town already has a stadium situated at roughly 6,800 feet above sea level — the second highest stadium in Asia — and Baluni wants a swimming pool and other facilities to be developed around it. The reason: the low oxygen levels at high altitudes help build the stamina of sportspersons practising there. Indian swimmers sometimes go to Europe to practice at higher altitudes. Similar facilities in the hill state can help Indian athletes perform better at international events, Baluni is learnt to have told the minister.

### Minister's Woes

WHEN REPEATED requests for prompt action elicited no response from a traffic police inspector, a Delhi minister approached the city Police Commissioner Satish Golchha with his grievance. During a recent visit to his Assembly constituency, the minister observed a huge traffic congestion due to unauthorised roadside parking of commercial vehicles, encroachment by street vendors and unregulated movement of e-rickshaws. He approached the traffic inspector concerned to take necessary steps to decongest the area. However, even after multiple reminders, no action was taken by the officer. In his communication to the Police Commissioner, a miffed minister asked him to instruct the DCP (traffic) to take swift action to streamline the traffic flow and submit an action-taken report within a week.

### On-Spot Solution

TWO RETIRED Doordarshan camerapersons received long-awaited relief following a Cabinet briefing recently. Their pay-related issue, dating back to 1997, was resolved not because of a policy decision taken in the Cabinet meeting but during the post-briefing interaction of Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting Ashwini Vaishnaw with mediapersons on Wednesday. Devendra Sharma, one of the two aggrieved, approached Vaishnaw with his grievance and the minister directed the officials present to address the matter on the spot. The corrected pay orders of the two retired camerapersons were issued within hours the same day. The case involved proper implementation of Rule-8 of CCS (Revised Pay) Rules, 1997, which entitled both the former employees to an additional increment during the 6th Pay Commission transition.

## CWC meet today: Party focus on MGNREGA as next big fight

Asad Rehman  
New Delhi, December 26

WHILE THE VB-G RAM G Act, 2025, has got the President's assent and replaced MGNREGA, the Congress will hope to keep the matter alive and chart its next steps when the Congress Working Committee (CWC) meets in New Delhi Saturday.

For the party, it is crucial to be seen responding to the BJP government's move to rename the law that was seen as its marquee achievement, with insiders saying it is both an oppor-

# Shah: Agencies world over will study Pahalgam probe in coming days

Express News Service  
New Delhi, December 26

APPRECIATING THE NIA's "complete and successful" investigation into the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack, Union Home Minister Amit Shah Friday said that agencies around the world will study the probe in the coming days.

Inaugurating a two-day 'Anti-Terrorism Conference-2025' here, Shah said that the investigation into the Pahalgam terror attack will put Pakistan in the dock on international platforms. Shah said the attack in Pahalgam's Baisaran valley, in which 25 tourists and a local resident were killed by Pakistan-based terrorists, had shaken the entire country. "Through this attack, the terrorists wanted to disrupt communal harmony in the country and deliver a blow to the new era of development and tourism that has begun in Kashmir. Based on



Union Home Minister Amit Shah at the Anti-Terrorism Conference in New Delhi on Friday. PTI

extremely precise intelligence, our forces neutralised all three terrorists, delivering a stern message to Pakistan," he said, addressing a conference of Director Generals of Police (DGPs).

"This was the first terrorist incident in which those who planned the act were punished by us through Operation Sindoor, and those who carried out the act with the weapons pro-

vided to them were neutralised through Operation Mahadev. At both ends, the Centre, the Indian security forces, and the people of India have given a strong and befitting reply to Pakistan's terrorist masters..." he added.

Shah said, "Our team has conducted a complete and successful investigation of the Pahalgam terror attack, which agencies around the world will

study in the coming days. The results of the investigation into the attack will put Pakistan in the dock on international platforms."

On the November 10 blast near Red Fort, the Union Minister said, "The Jammu and Kashmir Police conducted a very thorough investigation into the blast that occurred in Delhi. All our agencies did an excellent job in investigating the entire network."

Drawing parallels between the probe into Red Fort blast and Baisaran Valley attack case, Shah said, "The investigations into the Pahalgam and Delhi blast cases are not ordinary policing, but outstanding examples of watertight investigation. This (Red Fort case) is also a great example of how an alert officer can save the country from such a major crisis by remaining vigilant at all times."

Shah said, "The NIA has

worked very hard to create a common ATS (Anti-Terrorism Squad) structure and has sent it to the police forces of the states. When we establish a common ATS structure across the entire country, it provides us an opportunity for uniform preparation at every level. A common ATS structure for the police across the country is extremely important, and all DGPs from the states should implement it as soon as possible."

Shah urged states and central agencies to forge a seamless national security framework, emphasising operational uniformity — from investigation to prosecution level — in order to tackle evolving threats like cyber warfare, economic network misuse, and hybrid terrorism.

Shah also warned that as India's economy surges, challenges will grow proportionally, demanding heightened vigilance.



CJI Surya Kant with Chief Minister Pramod Sawant and other dignitaries in Goa on Friday. ANI

## CJI condoles Goa fire deaths: 'Tragedy for the entire nation'

Pavneet Singh Chadha  
Panaji, December 26

CHIEF JUSTICE OF India (CJI) Surya Kant on Friday offered condolences to those killed in the recent fire at a nightclub in Goa, calling it a "tragedy for the entire nation".

"We mourn the loss of many young lives... individuals who were there to enjoy a well-earned break, as well as those working hard to support their families. This is a profound loss for their loved ones and a tragedy for our entire nation," CJI Kant said at the inauguration of a special awareness campaign titled 'Drugs: A Menace to the Society', organised by the Goa State Legal Services Authority.

At the gathering, the CJI said drug use is a reality that unfolds quietly in ordinary lives.

"It enters homes without warning, often without immediate consequence, and reveals its damage only after it has taken firm root... What starts as a private act soon exerts a public cost on families, on education, on livelihoods, and ultimately on the institutions that hold our society together," he said.

The CJI said substance abuse cannot be addressed through isolated responses and demands a collective effort, involving families, educators, health professionals, communities and institutions working in coordination. "Within this larger framework, the law has a role to play, but it is not the only choice or the voice, nor should it be the first response in every case." He said the legal system in the country has long acknowledged that "justice is not served by punishment alone, particularly where human frailty, youth and social vulnerability are involved."

"...especially in matters concerning addiction, [it] has therefore evolved with a conscious reformatory orientation, one that seeks not only to ensure wrongdoing and censor it very strongly, but to prevent its repetition and restore individuals to the social mainstream where possible."

The CJI said the legal frame-

work draws a clear and deliberate distinction between those who traffic in narcotics, organise supply chains and profit from human vulnerability.

"...Society cannot afford ambiguity when faced with organised exploitation, but the law's response must be different when it encounters a first-time user, a student or a young adult struggling with dependency," CJI Surya Kant said.

In such cases, the central question is no longer one of culpability.

"It becomes a question of recovery. Punishment, by itself, cannot be the end. Justice must ask whether it is merely closing a case or preserving a future that might otherwise be lost. This approach is not leniency, it is realism," the CJI said.

Earlier Friday, speaking at the Bar Council of India's National Conference and Symposium on Mediation, the CJI outlined a vision for India's courts to evolve into "multi-door courthouses", where courts function as comprehensive centres for dispute resolution rather than merely venues for trials. "...this is a visionary concept where the court ceases to be a singular venue for trial; rather, it becomes a comprehensive centre for dispute resolution," he said.

When a seeker of justice approaches our institutions, they should not be reflexively funnelled into the adversarial gauntlet, he said.

"Instead, they must find an array of doors, and those doors are mediation, arbitration, and eventually, ultimately, it can be litigation also, if tailored to the specific nature of their grievances," he said.

The CJI said it must be acknowledged that some cases cannot be resolved through arbitration or mediation. "The judicial system is and will always remain prepared to provide a fair litigation trial to adjudicate those disputes. This is the ultimate empowerment of the litigant, ensuring that the method of resolution is as nuanced and varied as the dispute itself," he said.

## Over 7K illegal mining FIRs in Rajasthan in 7 yrs; 4,000+ in Aravalli districts alone

Hamza Khan  
Jaipur, December 26

AS MANY as 7,173 FIRs in connection with illegal mining, transportation, stocking, etc, have been reported in the last seven years in Rajasthan, of which 4,181 have been filed in the Aravalli districts alone.

The state recorded 71,322 instances of illegal mining — these include both major and minor violations, including many that are dealt with using challans instead of police cases — in last seven years, of which 40,175 instances have been reported from Aravalli districts alone.

Contrasting figures from the five-year Congress rule with two years of BJP government, the latter's spokesperson and former MLA Ram Lal Sharma said, "It is the clear intention of the Rajasthan government and the CM not a single stone will be damaged in Aravalli." He said that the BJP government has taken decisive action "against illegal mining, and mining mafia in the last two years"

Official data shared by Sharma shows 29,209 instances of illegal mining were reported in Aravalli districts between December 15, 2018 and December 14, 2023, while this figure was 10,966 in the first two years of CM Bhajan Lal Sharma-led government, from December 15, 2023, to December 15, 2025. Rajasthan has 20 districts in the Aravalli belt.

### State govt won't allow damage to even a single stone in the hills: BJP



Congress leader Sachin Pilot joins NSUI members during 'Save Aravalli, Save Future' foot march in Jaipur, Friday. ROHIT JAIN PARAS

While 3,179 FIRs for illegal mining activities were lodged in Aravalli districts under Congress rule, 1,002 FIRs have been lodged in the two years of the BJP government.

On the difference between instances reported and FIRs lodged, T Ravikanth, principal secretary, Mines and Petroleum Department, said, "Instances reported means all kinds of cases where the mining department took action on its own, by giving a notice, imposing penalty etc — which is also a form of punishment — while the FIR is only the cases lodged in a police station."

He said the instances reported include illegal mining, transportation, and storage, most of which are compound-

able, and that it may translate into an FIR in case there is an assault, theft, etc. "Hence the FIRs are fewer," he said.

In response to an Assembly question by Leader of Opposition Tika Ram Jully earlier this year, the government had said that there were 93 attacks against 311 officials and workers by the "mining mafia" in 2024.

Overall, a penalty of Rs 637.16 crore has been collected in last seven years in the state. Of this, Rs 231.75 crore was collected from the Aravalli districts under Congress rule, and Rs 136.78 crore has been collected under the incumbent BJP government. As many as 3,736 people have been arrested in seven years for illegal mining across

state; of this, 1,415 people were arrested from the Aravalli districts during the Ashok Gehlot government and 300 during the Sharma government.

Additionally, 70,399 vehicles, machines, etc, have been seized in the last seven years from across the state. Of these, 29,138 were seized from Aravalli districts under Congress rule and 10,616 under the BJP government.

With the hills already under severe pressure for the last few decades from mining, both legal and illegal, and other activities, the new definition has triggered widespread protests in Rajasthan and beyond. The definition, proposed by a committee under the Environment Secretary and approved by the Supreme Court on November 20, states that any landform that is at an elevation of 100 metres or more above the local relief will be considered as part of the Aravalli Hills, along with its slopes and adjacent land. This has triggered fears it would open the Hills to mining, although the Environment Ministry has said no new mining leases would be allowed until a detailed study is undertaken, according to the November 20 order.

Senior Congress leader Sachin Pilot Friday accused the BJP-led government of endangering the Aravalli range and failing to curb illegal mining, saying the issue goes far beyond paperwork and court affidavits.

## In pre-poll boost, BJP gets first-ever Mayor in Kerala: Meet V V Rajesh

Shaju Philip  
Thiruvananthapuram,  
December 26

SENIOR BJP leader V V Rajesh was on Friday sworn in as the mayor of the Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation.

In the recent elections, the BJP had emerged as the single largest party in the corporation, winning 50 of the 101 seats, ending the 45-year-long uninterrupted regime of CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF).

Currently one of the state secretaries of the BJP, Rajesh has been a Councillor since 2020. He was fielded again after the party decided for a crucial battle in the state capital region, which has emerged as key to its electoral plans in Kerala.

In the 2021 Assembly elections, Rajesh, then the BJP district president, unsuccessfully



Currently one of the state secretaries of the BJP, Rajesh has been a Councillor since 2020

contested from Vattiyoorkavu seat.

The 50-year-old leader, who has risen through the party youth wing Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), is a lawyer by profession. On Thursday, a day before voting was held to

elected the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, the BJP ensured the support of Independent councillor Radhakrishnan.

A former spokesperson of the party and a familiar face on TV debates, Rajesh has been in the forefront of agitations.

In 2018, when the BJP led massive protests against the entry of menstruating women into the sanctum sanctorum of the Sabarimala temple, Rajesh had led the agitations in the state capital. By selecting Rajesh to head the corporation, the BJP has sent a strong message that leaders and cadres who have toiled over decades matter for the party.

After getting elected as mayor, Rajesh told the media. "In the next five years, the capital will be converted into one of the three most developed cities of the country."

## Congress councillor in Kerala: Mayor post sold for 'bags of money'

Shaju Philip  
Thiruvananthapuram,  
December 26

A CASH-FOR-MAYORSHIP scandal has rocked Congress in Kerala, where it has been riding high on the recent local body polls that saw the party-led UDF win a majority of seats across the three-tier spectrum.

Four-time councillor in the Thrissur corporation, Laly James, on Friday alleged her fellow councillor in the corporation, Dr Nijji Justin, had bagged the mayorship after paying money to senior leaders.

On Thursday, Thrissur district leadership of the Congress had selected Dr Nijji, also a vice president of the DCC, for the post of mayor in the corpor-

ation, which the party wrested from LDF after a decade.

Laly said, "I think the party has gone after money... Her (Nijji's) family is rich... I was told leaders are running with money bags. I don't know where the money has gone," she claimed.

DCC Thrissur president Joseph Tajet said the decision was taken after consulting councillors and the party leadership. "She (Laly) had contested four times. Has she given a money box to anyone to get a ticket? She says she is poor. That shows we have given a seat to a poor person. The party will examine why she said what she did."

Nijji, who was elected as the mayor, said, "Only the party leadership has to answer to this allegation."

## RLM MLAs revolt as Kushwaha's son is made state minister

Santosh Singh  
Patna, December 26

TROUBLE HAS mounted for Upendra Kushwaha-led Rashtriya Lok Morcha (RLM), a BJP ally in Bihar, after three of its four MLAs raised the banner of revolt over Kushwaha's son Deepak Prakash being made a state minister despite not being a legislator. They accused the RLM chief of "blatantly promoting" his family.

MLAs Alok Kumar Singh (Dinara), Rameshwar Mahto (Bajpatti), and Madhwan Anand (Madhubani) skipped Kushwaha's litti-chokha party on Wednesday and instead met with BJP national working president Nitin Nabin. The buzz of revolt further intensified after Anand and Mahto left for Delhi later in the day, reportedly to meet BJP leaders.

The RLM won four of the six seats it contested in the recent Bihar Assembly polls. Its fourth legislator is Kushwaha's wife, Snehlata (Sasaram).

"Kushwaha promoting dynasty in politics is a suicidal step. He is a Rajya Sabha MP, his wife is the MLA, and his son is a minister. The three of us (MLAs) are against this, but we are not quitting the party. Meeting Nabin was a courtesy call. Even Kushwaha ji met him," Anand told The Indian Express. He also hit back at Kushwaha for questioning his loyalty.

Echoing Anand's views, Mahto said Kushwaha used to



Three MLAs skipped Kushwaha's litti-chokha party and instead met with BJP national working president

be "dead against dynastic politics". "All of sudden, he has forgotten about it. He did not consult us before making his son a minister. But, we are with the party. Just meeting Nabinji does not mean we are joining the BJP. However, we registered our protest by skipping the dinner party," he added.

While Kushwaha himself was not available for comment, a source close to him said the MLAs' absence from the dinner was being overblown. "Things will settle down soon," the source said.

Wednesday's development comes barely a month after seven party leaders, including former RLM number two Jitendra Nath, quit the party in protest against making Prakash a minister.

Ahmedabad

# The Big Picture

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2025

14

## In Kerala, a mob and its many faces

On a December afternoon, Ramnarayan Baghel strayed into a village in Palakkad, walked straight into a whirlpool of suspicion and fear, and ended up dead — an unsettling incident in a state where migrants or “guest workers” form the backbone of the economy. NARAYANAN S and ARUN JANARDHANAN join the dots



Ramnarayan Baghel soon after he was attacked. VIDEO GRAB

80 injuries, including severe wounds on the head. Dr Hithesh Shankar, who conducted the post-mortem procedure, told the media, “His ribs were shattered and his spine was broken. Most of the wounds were inflicted with sticks. I have conducted more than 10,000 post-mortem examinations, but I have never seen a body subjected to such severe violence.”

Sreedharan, a resident of Attappalam, says Ramnarayan may have lost his way and ended up on the village road. “Usually, migrant workers don’t take these roads. They are mostly based in Kanjikode. That could be one of the reasons why people got suspicious when they saw him.”

But the suspicion attached to someone who didn’t seemingly belong — Ramnarayan appeared dishevelled, disoriented, spoke haltingly — was shaped by other factors.

In recent months, the area had lived with an undercurrent of anxiety. Only two weeks before the attack on Ramnarayan, an alleged robbery attempt at a temple about 6 km away had circulated in the form of images and WhatsApp forwards. In those images, accessed by *The Indian Express*, people are seen beating up a dis-



The spot where Ramnarayan was attacked. NARAYANAN S

oriented man outside the Vinayaka temple after he allegedly tried to enter the sanctum sanctorum. The case went nowhere — it remains unresolved and undocumented, unknown even to the Special Branch, the intelligence wing of the Kerala Police. But the

memory lingered.

Sreedharan talks of another incident that was at the back of people’s minds. “The Saturday before the attack (on Ramnarayan), an unidentified person had put his hands through the window of one of the

**1. K BIPIN, 30:** A “BJP sympathiser”, accused in an attack on DYFI workers

**2. MURALI, 38:** A fabrication worker, police say he is a “BJP sympathiser”

**3. C PRASAD, 34:** A welder and a “BJP sympathiser”, say police sources

**4. ANANDAN, 55:** A head-load worker affiliated with CITU

**5. A ANU, 38:** A driver, he has more than 15 cases, ranging from assault to rioting. Accused in earlier attack on DYFI members. Police sources say he is a “BJP sympathiser”, but not party worker

homes in eastern Attappalam and attempted to rob the ankle of a woman who was sleeping,” he says. Here, too, no case was registered.

So when Ramnarayan came to Attappalam that afternoon, without the social codes needed to move unnoticed, he did not know the place was already primed by fear.

### The mob that attacked

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, MB Rajesh, Minister for Local Self Governments and MLA from Thrithala in Palakkad, calls the murder a “result of right-wing propaganda”.

“The BJP’s politics of hate and violence is clear. Their propaganda is that all outsiders are illegal migrants and such people have to be dealt with forcefully. BJP-RSS workers stopped a Christmas carol in the same village this year. This is not just a law-and-order issue. The government will take all measures to address such hate politics,” he says.

However, what linked the attackers that afternoon was not party allegiance, but atmosphere. “There is politics here, yes, but it is not black and white,” says a senior police officer who is aware of the facts of the investigation. “It was not an organised Sangh Parivar mob. But the language and suspicion shaped by right-wing narratives played a part,” he says.

And so, the suspicion swiftly shifted shape — from thief to outsider to “Bangladeshi”, a word that, in the current political climate, is often weaponised as a moral accusation. “Once ‘Bangladeshi’ entered the conversation, maybe everything the mob did after seemed justifiable to them,” says the officer.

By the time the police arrived, the crowd had dispersed. What remained were videos, injuries, and a familiar pattern: faceless, collective violence.

Yet, many of the phones that captured the violence were never seized. By the time the SIT took over, several suspects had fled, reportedly to Tamil Nadu.

There were other flaws in the early investigation. The original FIR did not include mob-lynching provisions and police took their time to invoke the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, citing difficulties in securing a caste certification for the victim. All political parties claimed ignorance or denied reports about the political affiliations of the accused.

Police records list seven accused so far. Most of them, police say, have prior cases involving violence. All held precarious jobs in the local economy — drivers, casual workers, fabricators.

Anu, 38, a driver who has been intermittently jobless, is described in police records as having more than 15 prior cases across stations, ranging from assault to rioting. He is a “BJP sympathiser”, police sources and local residents say, but not a party worker. He has previously been accused in an attack on DYFI members.

C Prasad, 34, a welder and a “BJP sympathiser”, is alleged to have beaten Ramnarayan with a stick. Murali, 38, an aluminium fabrication worker, too is described by investigators as a BJP sympathiser. Anandan, 55, a head-load worker affiliated with CITU, the CPI(M)-backed trade union, allegedly kicked Ramnarayan in the abdomen. K Bipin, 30, a BJP sympathiser and co-accused with Anu in the case involving DYFI workers, is accused of assaulting Ramnarayan.

The SIT later arrested two other daily-wage labourers — Jagadeesh Kumar, 47, and Vinod Kumar, 54. While police have identified Vinod as a Congress sympathiser, there is no mention of Jagadeesh’s political affiliation.

### A huge mistake

Unnikrishnan, the uncle of first accused Anu, says his nephew did not intend to kill Ramnarayan. “They all thought he was a thief. In fact, after the first few blows, Anu asked the others to step back and hand him over to the police. Whatever happened was a huge mistake, but it wasn’t intentional. Anu even took the man to the hospital.”

He says Anu’s BJP’s links are exaggerated. “He is just a BJP supporter. He may be wearing a saffron *mundu* and sporting a thread on his hand, but that does not make him a member of the party,” says Unnikrishnan, who lives in eastern Attappalam.

He says there was no malicious intent behind the crowd asking Ramnarayan if he was a Bangladeshi. “It is a routine question we ask when we see a stranger in our area.” Chandran, the father of another accused, Prasad, says the attack and his son’s arrest have worsened the family’s precarity. “My son is a fabric welding worker. His earnings were our main income. I go for some painting work. We don’t have any land. Even our house is mortgaged for my daughter’s wedding,” says Chandran.

Around 5 km away, at the nearby KINFRA park where Ramnarayan would have worked had things gone to plan, Nazir Hussain looks surprised when told about the lynching.

A worker from Assam, he is on his way to his room at Apna Ghar, the Kerala government’s lodging facility for migrant workers, with a packet of tomatoes and eggs for dinner. “Here, we don’t have much connection with the outside world. We go to work and our shift usually lasts 12 hours. After that, we return, cook, eat and sleep,” he says.

But the incident had taken on a life of its own on social media.

Hussain takes out his keypad phone. “I have no Facebook. I use my phone only to call my family.”

THE SPEAKERS on the private bus blare a *dappankuthu* song, the raw, high-energy music that travels easily across the Tamil Nadu-Kerala border. On both sides of National Highway 544, election posters from the recently concluded Kerala local body polls remain intact, suggesting that human-animal conflict is a hot-button political issue in Walar, the Kerala town in Palakkad district that borders Tamil Nadu.

That the growing population of stray dogs poses a significant civic concern for the residents, alongside the threat of wild animals, is evident as one gets off the bus at Attappalam, about 18 km from Palakkad town on the route to Coimbatore.

Ramnarayan Baghel likely experienced this threat during the short time he was in the area. That was perhaps why he carried a stick and a stone in his hands as he walked through those largely secluded roads on December 17, Wednesday.

The dogs did not attack him. Humans did.

From Karhi village in Sakti district of Chhattisgarh, Ramnarayan, 31, had arrived in Kerala only two days earlier as a migrant worker. That afternoon, as Ramnarayan, wearing a green t-shirt and a pair of grey trousers, walked down the Puthusseri panchayat road in Attappalam, the attack unfolded not with suddenness but with gathering intent. The men — and some women — came to the spot in ones and twos, some still in work clothes, almost all holding mobile phones.

By the time it ended, Ramnarayan lay fatally injured, the victim of a mob whose members cut across party lines, occupations and age groups, and whose suspicions were sharpened by a now familiar and dangerous idea: that he might be a “Bangladeshi”.

In a state where migrants or “guest workers” form the backbone of the economy, where the government has gone out of its way to accommodate them, the attack was unsettling. The ruling CPI(M) has called the murder a result of “Sangh Parivar’s hate politics” since four of the seven men arrested so far are reportedly linked to the BJP or the RSS. The BJP, in turn, has blamed the CPI(M), with its leader V Muralidharan saying, “The ruling CPI(M) is trying to put the blame for the mob lynching in Palakkad on the BJP and RSS. Around 15-20 people were involved in the lynching, including CPI(M) workers.”

A Special Investigation Team led by Crime Branch Deputy Superintendent of Police M Gopakumar is probing the case. The State Human Rights Commission has also taken suo motu cognisance of the incident, ordered an inquiry, and directed the Palakkad district police chief to submit a detailed report in three weeks.

### In the wrong place, wrong time

Ramnarayan and a few other men from Chhattisgarh reached Palakkad on the morning of December 15, Monday. Construction worker supervisor Shashikant Baghel, who hails from Ramnarayan’s village and is a relative, had brought them to Kerala, hoping to find them work at Bharat Petroleum’s facility within the KINFRA Integrated Industrial and Textile Park at Kanjikode in Palakkad. Those who accompanied him say Ramnarayan did not want to work at the facility and insisted on returning home. They say he left their lodging at Kanjikode on December 16, barely 24 hours after arriving in Kerala. That’s the last they saw of him. They know little of how he reached Attappalam a day later, or what he did in the intervening period.

At Attappalam junction, Babu Antony, an auto driver, is among those who saw Ramnarayan before the mob attack. “I was on my way from Attappalam to Coimbatore to deliver an order. It must have been around 2 pm. I saw a man approaching from the opposite direction, holding a stick in his left hand and a stone in the right. He looked mentally unstable. And something in my mind said it was not safe to proceed,” recalls Babu.

Babu swerved the auto into a narrow street to his right, and shouted at the houses, urging people to come out. By the time a few of them emerged, and they returned to the original spot, Ramnarayan was gone.

“I did not waste any more time there and proceeded with my delivery. It was only the next morning that I got to know that the man I saw was beaten to death by a few people,” says Babu.

From the spot where Babu saw him, Ramnarayan is believed to have moved to a coconut grove where women were working under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (now VB-G RAM G).

Sasikala, among those in the group that day, says, “Seeing the stone and stick in his hands, some women thought he would attack. They yelled ‘thief’ and cried for help.”

That’s when a few men led by A Anu, 38, now identified as the main accused, jumped into the scene. As Ramnarayan started to run, they caught hold of him, started interrogating him and allegedly beat him up.

Though some reports claimed that the women in the village also thrashed Ramnarayan, Sasikala denies this. “In fact, we asked the men to stop. But they continued to hit him, thinking he was a thief.”

The attack continued for at least an hour before Ramnarayan reportedly vomited blood. The police reached the spot and took him to the Palakkad district government hospital, where, around 7.35 pm, he succumbed to internal injuries.

The post-mortem report revealed over

## In Chhattisgarh, what’s undone: a migrant’s dream

Jayprakash S Naidu  
Raipur, December 26

KARHI IS no Kerala. A village in Chhattisgarh’s Sakti district, it struggles for basic needs — the groundwater is fast depleting, the health system is broken, and the nearest high school is 15 km away.

Yet, this was Ramnarayan Baghel’s home, where he longed to go back to, soon after arriving in Kerala for work with three others.

“*Mujhe nahi jamega, bahut door hai, mein Chhattisgarh me hi kaam kar loonga* (This won’t work, it’s too far from home...I will work in Chhattisgarh),” he had told Ranjit Kumar Baghel, 40, with whom he had made the journey to Kerala.

“The day after we reached Kerala, we left for work and Ramnarayan said he was returning home. He looked like he was missing his wife. We could not persuade him to stay but now I wish I had,” says Ranjit, speaking on the phone from Kerala.

On December 17, Ramnarayan was lynched in Attappalam, in Kerala’s Palakkad district, by a mob that mistook him for a thief and accused him of being a Bangladeshi.

Home to around 4,000 residents, Karhi is a paddy-growing village. Over the last decade, villagers have made their own arrangements for irrigation, allow-

ing them to sow rice twice a year. Villagers say that most of them choose to stay unemployed for a few months in between the two paddy cycles or work as labourers for the groups that illegally mine sand from the Mahanadi river.

Ramnarayan didn’t have much of a choice. He could have either stayed back in his village to watch his loans accumulate, his two boys, aged 9 and 10, struggle through school and his dream home stuck for want of funds — or he could move to Kerala for a few months.

“He did not want to leave Chhattisgarh. But earlier this year, he fell sick from all that dust at the construction sites he worked on, and had to rest for a month. We borrowed some Rs 60,000 to pay for his medical expenses and run the house. We also took a loan to complete the construction for the home under the PM Awas Yojana. He kept telling me that others from the village were making good money in Kerala and that he would travel there,” says Ramnarayan’s wife Lalita.

The Baghels live as part of a larger family, with four to five households staying in as many brick-and-asbestos homes next to each other in the Dalit (Satnamis) part of the village.

Ramnarayan, the youngest of the three siblings, owned two small rooms here. The rooms, with exposed bricks,



Ramnarayan’s home in Karhi village.

JAYPRAKASH S NAIDU

and with dupattas for doors, are mostly bare, except for a cot in one of the rooms and a few utensils and cow dung cakes.

But right in front of these rooms, separated by a patch of scruffy outgrowth, was Ramnarayan’s home that was being built under the PM Awas Yojana. Lalita says Ramnarayan ran out of money after the walls were built.

Three months ago, Ramnarayan and Lalita got in touch with his cousin Shashikant Baghel, 35, who had started as a migrant worker when he was 16 and had done well enough to build a separate home by the main road for his family. Shashikant, who moved to Kerala six months ago, is now a labour supervisor in the state. “Ramnarayan had never worked out of Chhattisgarh. But he said

## These Fangs Don't Bite

ANACONDA

★★★

DIRECTOR: Tom Gormican

CAST: Paul Rudd, Jack Black, Steve Zahn, Thandiwe Newton, Daniela Melchior, Selton Mello



Shubhra Gupta

HELP, THE ssssnake is back. Not just any old wriggly creature, but the giant anaconda, which is out hunting humans again in the jungles of South America.

Those who've seen the 1997 original, starring Jennifer Lopez-Owen Wilson-Jon Voight-Ice Cube and the reptile with a monstrous maw, will remember just how scary it was. The relentless chase—this is a snake which hunts in water, over land, and on tall tree-tops—was all kinds of scary with people falling off boats, thrashing in the jaws of the snake, turning the water bloody.

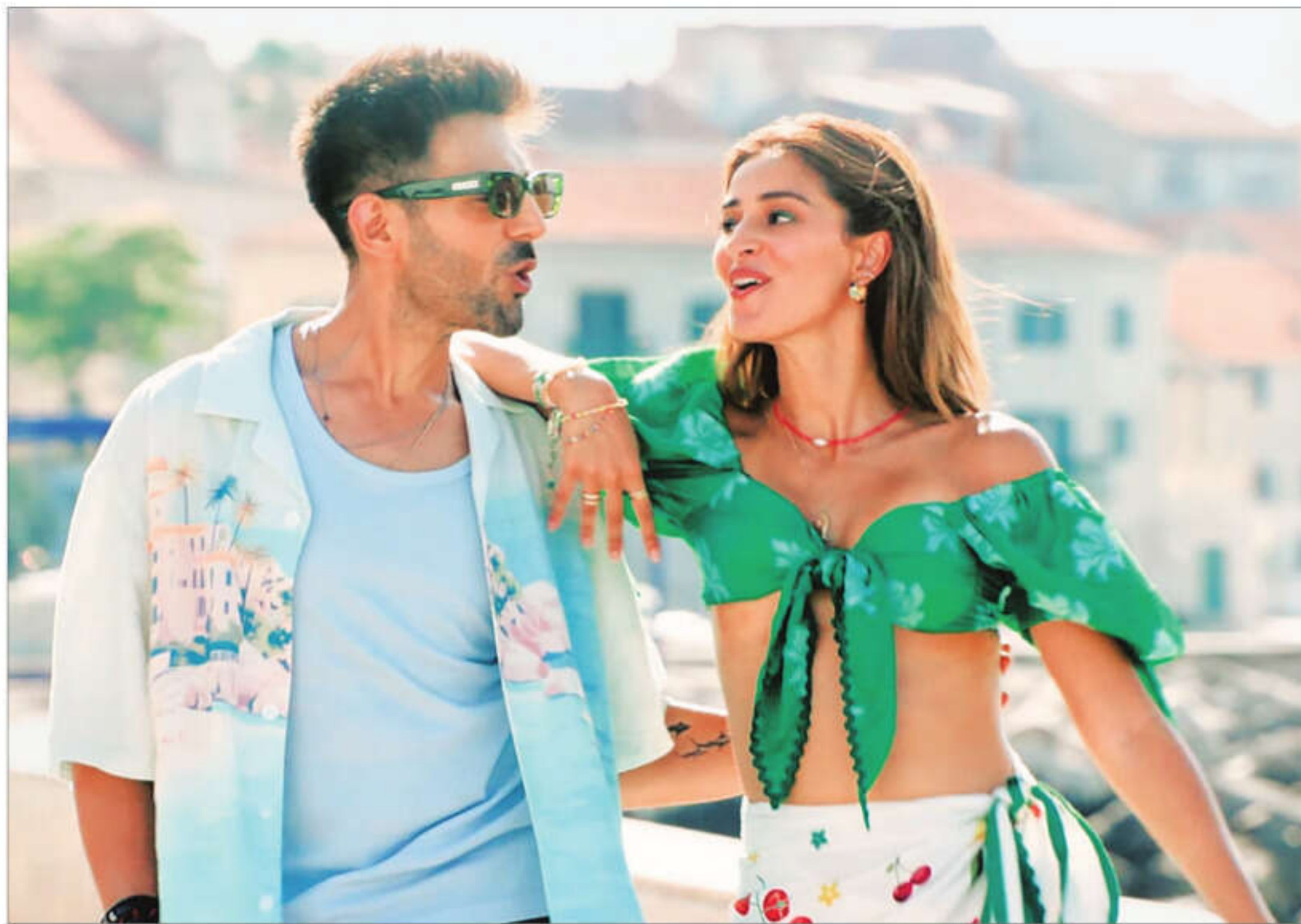
This one is 'not' a reboot. We're not saying this. It is Doug McCallister (Jack Black), a Buffalo-based failed filmmaker-turned-video producer, who keeps calling it a spiritual sequel, just in case we didn't get the first time. Arrayed alongside are Doug's childhood friends—Ronald Griffin aka Griff (Paul Rudd) still struggling to land parts in movies, amateur cinematographer Kenny Trent (Steve Zahn) and mom-of-two Claire Simons (Thandiwe Newton)—who were once bright-kids-with-a-movie-camera.

Now adults, and far from intrepid, they set out to remake the film, starting from scratch. Snake wrangler Santiago (Selton Mello), their companion on the trek into the Amazon rainforest, is a welcome addition to the party, as is mystery woman Ana Almeida (Daniela Melchior) who appears to be running from a couple of armed men.

But in the forest, it's not humans who are most dangerous: it is, of course, the Anaconda, with a capital A. The susurrant begins, the wind murmurs, the boat sways, a scaly tale roils the water, and the reptile claims its first victim. And you wait, heart in mouth, for the feeling of danger to escalate, and the tension mount.

Except nothing of the sort happens. This new version of one of Hollywood's most popular creature features is so desperate to pitch in the laughs along with the scares that it renders everything dull and diluted. The actors playing the foursome are amiable, bringing in a touch of old-friends shaginess, but the writing overall is lax, with only Mello leaping over it every once in a while.

Even the poor anaconda feels underwhelming, whenever it does get in a look-see: the star of the show would have sued, if it could, given that everyone else has a bigger part in a film which is called by its name.



## That '90s Show No One Wants

Shubhra Gupta

SEVERAL QUESTIONS confront you as soon as you get into this romcom, which marks the end of 2025. What do you do when the two leads who are meant to do the usual squabble-make-up-make-out thing exhibit zero chemistry from the get-go? What happens when the film looks like a full-blown advert for a European country—Croatia, in this instance—where the first half is set? What can you do when the characters look like they've been cobbled together without a thought of whether they gel as a family?

And the biggest question looming over us as we struggle through two-and-a-half hours of this glossily vacuous tosh: is this the best that mainstream Bollywood can come up with, for its clearly demarcated Gen Z audience?

US-based wedding planner Rehaan—call me Ray—Mehra (Kartik Aaryan) and Agra-ki-ladki Rumi (Ananya Panday) meet-not-very-cute at an airport bookshop. She is tall enough to wear small heels to not tower over Ray, but is having trouble reaching for some volumes placed on the top

TU MERI MAIN TERA MAIN TERA TU MERI

★★★

DIRECTOR: Sameer Vidwans

CAST: Kartik Aaryan, Ananya Panday, Neena Gupta, Jackie Shroff, Chandni Bhabha, Grusha Kapoor, Tiku Talsania, Gaurav Pandey, Lokesh Mittal

shelf: she's the author of a book, see, and she wants to bring it within easy reach, see; he's the annoying one, of course, who is seated next to her in the flight, flirting with an air-hostess. And of course, they find themselves booked on the same yacht, and believe it or faint, also the same cabin.

We know how this tourism tour will end. As they pass through picturesque cafes and beaches, reminding you of the hapless Harry and Sejal (remember them?), Cupid does its thing. Both are smitten. And then comes the conflict—Ray helpfully calling it the Big C (nope, not kidding)—and parental opposition. Actually not: the trouble lies somewhere else. Sure, parents are involved: Col Singh (Jackie Shroff) as Ananya's dad, retired army man dripping patriotism, singing *Yeh mera India*, and Pinky Mehta (Neena Gupta) as Ray's single mom, who comes in warbling *Choli ke peeche kya hai*. Yes, for real.

Are we back in the '90s? Yes, yes, because that's what the kids are thirsting for, apparently: a '90s style romance, stuffed with glycerine and melodrama and songs-and-dances from that era.

A couple of subplots give other characters some room. Rumi's sister Jia

(Chandni Bhabha) and her Tinder hook-up is turned speedily into a *shaadi*: how else do you get the morose wedding planner back in play, who has been Pinky-promised into winning over his *dulhaniya*?

At some point, the plot remembers to pull out a mooney-eyed fellow (Gaurav Pandey) to hover around Rumi. Other sets of uncles and aunts—who keep sighing over Ray's abs—show up, with the *Saat Samundar paar laadka* who's turned up *peeche peeche*, burning up the dance floor. Kartik and Ananya looked good together in the 2019 *Pati Patni Aur Woh*: reunited after six years, they don't for a minute convince you as lovers who can't bear to part. Shroff gives us sonorous dialogue delivery, with a few nice moments with Kartik and Neena Gupta is flat-out fabulous as the supportive mom, more *tu mera, main teri* than the hero and heroine.

It says something about us as viewers that we like our filmy romances to masquerade as soppy family dramas, and how they only kick in when the *gaana-bajana* and *rona-dhona* starts. Or do we? Is this a myth Bollywood refuses to walk past? Whatever happened to being in sync with changing times? It's almost 2026, bro, no?

## A Family Drama Without Depth

Alaka Sahani

IT'S A moment worth celebrating that one of the finest contemporary actors—Kate Winslet—makes her directorial debut with *Goodbye June* as well as acts in it. Written by her son Joe Anders, is a sappy and poignant movie centred around a much-adored matriarch, who is hospitalised some days ahead of Christmas.

The matriarch, June, played by Helen Mirren, is the glue who keeps the family together in spite of their differences. Her sudden hospitalisation due to cancer relapse brings the four siblings and their exasperated father together. This also reveals the messy family dynamics and resentments. As the film is soaked in pre-Christmas vibes, one gets the feeling that these issues will be sorted out and they eventually do. However, the process of how that happens is not as engaging for the viewers as it should have been.

Anders, of course, seems sincere as he draws the story from a personal place, remembering how his family was around his grandmother when they lost her. While he has drawn out the characters well and created some moving moments, the script lacks nuance and layers. Even



though the movie features several brilliant actors—Toni Collette, Johnny Flynn, Andrea Riseborough and Timothy Spall—and their heartfelt performances, it still remains simplistic, leaning on emotional shortcuts.

As someone whose presence looms large even as her health declines, Mirren's character is meant to be quick-witted and spirited. But the script fails to bring that

out. In one of the moving scenes, Kate Winslet, who plays the role of her professionally successful and responsible daughter, moves Mirren's bed close to the hospital window so that she can watch the snowfall. Mirren asks Winslet for mascara and lipstick to look better and perk herself up. This offers a glimpse of Mirren's spirit.

Though Mirren is the titular protagonist, Winslet does the heavy lifting as a prominent member of this ensemble cast. She and Andrea Riseborough, who plays her younger sister, have an emotionally-charged scene where they address their years of conflict. It reveals how, at times, certain things inexplicably go wrong between siblings. But the film offers a quick resolution to this with the help of a bar of chocolate. The differences between Johnny Flynn and Timothy Spall, who play son and father respectively, are also resolved similarly, albeit with the help of music.

*Goodbye June* works as a Christmas film steeped in sentiment and nostalgia, one that celebrates the strength of a family. With greater emotional depth and narrative complexity, it could have secured a place in favourite festival watchlists.

## STREAMING WATCHLIST



Americana

PRIME VIDEO

WRITTEN AND directed by Tony Tost, the film follows a gallery of dynamic characters, who clash over the possession of a rare Native American artefact in this modern-day western. After the artefact falls onto the black market, a shy waitress with big dreams teams up with a lovelorn military veteran to gain possession of it, putting them in the crosshairs of a ruthless criminal working on behalf of a Western antiquities dealer. Bloodshed ensues when others join, including the leader of an indigenous group and a desperate woman fleeing her past. The film's cast features Sydney Sweeney, Paul Walter Hauser, Halsey, Eric Dane, Zahn McClarnon and Simon Rex.



Cover Up

NETFLIX

SHORTLISTED FOR the Oscar in the 'Documentary Feature Film' category, *Cover Up* depicts Seymour Hersh's half-century of reporting and exposing what Hersh believes is a pattern of impunity within the US military and intelligence agencies, told through Hersh's meticulous notes and archival footage. The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist exposed some of the most unconscionable events covered up by the US government, including the My Lai massacre of women, children and the elderly during the Vietnam War and the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib. It is directed by Academy Award winner Laura Poitras (*Citizenfour*) and Emmy Award winner Mark O'Brien (*Steep*).



Blue Moon

BOOKMYSHOW STREAM

FEATURING ETHAN Hawke as lyricist Lorenz Hart, *Blue Moon* marks yet another compelling collaboration between Richard Linklater and the actor. Written and directed by Linklater, *Blue Moon* is the story of one evening in 1943 when Hart confronts his shattered self-confidence in a bar as his former collaborator, Richard Rodgers (Andrew Scott), celebrates the opening night of his groundbreaking hit musical *Oklahoma!* The dialogue-driven film also features Margaret Qualley as Hart's protégé, Elizabeth.

## Now You See Me: Now You Don't

APPLE

DIRECTED BY Ruben Fleischer, *Now You See Me: Now You Don't* marks the return of the Four Horsemen alongside a new generation of illusionists. The film continues the franchise's signature mix of spectacle and suspense, raising the stakes with audacious illusions and high-energy storytelling. The film features Jesse Eisenberg, Woody Harrelson and Dave Franco, in an ensemble cast. Known for its stylish visuals and clever plotting, the *Now You See Me* franchise offers a unique fusion of magic and crime. The heist-adventure spectacle is set to make its digital debut in India on December 26 and will be available on Prime Video, Apple TV and Google/YouTube. ALAKA SAHANI



## An Epic Trainwreck

Anandu Suresh

GENUINE DOUBT: Mohanlal hates December now, or what? First, it was his directorial debut, the unwatchable *Barroz* last year. Then this year, he started the month by making a painful cameo in Dilip's latest stinker, *Bha Bha Ba*. And now, he has wrapped up December 2025 by headlining what can only be described as a fossilised version of the pan-Indian formula, *Vrusshabha*.

The movie begins centuries ago in the kingdom of Trilinga, ruled by Vijayendra Vrusshabha (Mohanlal). A rare *shivlinga* is believed to be the source of the kingdom's prosperity, and Vrusshabha, along with his clan, is dedicated to protecting it and serving the people. However, during a battle, he makes a grave mistake, which results in a curse: he will suffer the woes

VRUSSHABHA

★

DIRECTOR: Nanda Kishore

CAST: Mohanlal, Samarjit Lankesh, Nayan Sarika, Ragini Dwivedi, Ajay

inflicted by his own son. Shaken but resolved, the king carries on with his duties. He and queen Trilochan Devi (Ragini Dwivedi) are eventually blessed with a baby boy. However, in an unfortunate incident, they end up losing him, scarring Vrusshabha forever.

Cut to Mumbai, 2025. Aadi Deva Varma (Mohanlal) is one of the city's top business moguls, and his son, Tej (Samarjit Lankesh), is his trusted right-hand man. They also share an extremely friendly bond. Despite their success, Aadi begins experiencing chilling nightmares. Concerned, Tej



sets out to uncover the truth. He travels to Aadi's native village of Devanagari with his girlfriend Dhamini (Nayan Sarika) and once there, uncovers shocking revelations that connect them to a past life, revealing that both Aadi and Tej are reincarnations

of Vrusshabha and his son, Hayagreeva. Worse still, then, Hayagreeva had vowed to kill his father if they met again.

It feels like an idea that sparked in the minds of its makers after watching SS Rajamouli's *Magadheera* (2009), released 16 years ago. While sticking to certain aspects of that same template, writer-director Nanda Kishore has also freely lifted from far too many films. Sadly, though, team Vrusshabha has even failed at basic copy-pasting.

Here too, there are empires, righteous kings, a Shiva idol, reincarnation, an idiotic love angle, *Appa paasam*, *Amma paasam*, a random villain and his gang who have little connection to the main plot, sword fights, lectures on right-wrong, and, to top it all, far too many references to Hindu mythology and beliefs. While directors Rajamouli and Rishab Shetty created widely impressive works with these elements, Nanda Kishore's film ultimately appears as an amateurish attempt at emulating that success, but with-

out realising that ingredients alone don't make good movies.

The biggest failure of *Vrusshabha* is its extremely poor writing. From obsolete moments and pointless conflicts to disastrous character arcs and cringy dialogues, the movie's script is a masterclass in what not to do.

There's the quintessential "widely renowned psychiatrist" character who believes in pseudoscience here as well. This is always hilarious to see because, although filmmakers keep making such movies blending myths and fantasy—here, even an AI-generated Shiva makes an appearance in the end—they still need a scholar character to say that such things could be true with their outdated dialogue: "There are things that even science hasn't figured out yet." Overall, *Vrusshabha*'s writing is as bad as it can get.

While most actors are equally bad, Nayan Sarika is the only person who offers a tiny bit of respite. To Mohanlal, I just have one question: Why?

GLOBAL

## 'A poll win for Tarique Rahman is not a forgone conclusion'



VEENA SIKRI

AMID VIOLENCE in Bangladesh, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader Tarique Rahman returned to his country on December 25 after a 17-year exile. The chaos has also seen strong anti-India rhetoric. **Veena Sikri**, former High Commissioner of India to Bangladesh, breaks down what is happening. She spoke to **Yashvee**.

### What is driving the turmoil in Bangladesh?

To understand what is happening, we have to go back to July-August 2024. The events of that period have been called a "revolution", a "spontaneous student uprising", and so on, but the reality is more complex. It was a planned operation, with regime change as the goal.

In fact, Bangladesh's chief adviser Muhammad Yunus himself said this was a planned operation, in New York last September. Speaking at the Clinton Global Initiative event, he introduced his special assistant Mahfuz Alam as the "brain behind the whole operation". And the hard-right Jamaat-e-Islami, always in league with Pakistan, was a major driving agent behind the operation.

Now, the Jamaat-e-Islami is prevailing over the Yunus administration, and three streams flow from this one fact.

First, they want to destroy not just the Awami League, but every representation of post-1971 order. The second is to clamp down on minorities and Islam-ise the country in a much more visible way. The third stream is the unravelling of the economy. The Yunus regime has shaken up the economic cooperation with India built up over decades under Sheikh Hasina. So the Bangladesh economy, which had been growing at 6.5-7% a year for 15 years, is seeing a slide. Growth has halved, unemployment is rampant because factories are closing and there is no private investment. Inflation is high.

Jamaat-e-Islami activities are always accompanied by violence and unrest, because that is their method of establishing control. The two prominent strands here have been mobocracy and control of the media. Over the past year, there have been attacks on media houses and personnel. By mobocracy, I mean the surrounding of government offices, officials, judges, till the demands of the mob are met.

### Tarique Rahman is expected to win the upcoming polls. What role can he play?

If the elections happen in the current climate, they will be neither free nor fair with Hasina's Awami League banned from contesting. Hasina's critics often talk of her crackdown against Rahman's mother, Khaleida Zia, but she never banned the BNP from elections. Ironically, Hasina's detractors are doing exactly what she has been accused of — enforced disappearances, violence, throwing people in jail without just cause.

Rahman will initially see a huge outpouring of support, in part, because his mother is very ill. But his election win is not a foregone conclusion.

The BNP and the Jamaat have shared power in the past, but the Jamaat has always wanted pole position, and in today's changed circumstances, that desire is much stronger.

I was India's High Commissioner to Bangladesh in 2003-06 when the BNP and the Jamaat ran the government. Even then, there were push and pulls, with the Jamaat seeking to assert itself and the more liberal faction of the BNP maintaining a distance. Those liberal voices are much weaker today. The Jamaat would prefer stitching together an alliance of the smaller Islamist parties and winning what they can together.

The BNP over the past year has faced accusations of extortion at various levels. The Jamaat has very cleverly allowed them to do that and earn bad press.

Then there is the fact that more than half the BNP is strongly pro-Jamaat, ready to align with them. So Tarique Rahman coming back does not change the basic facts materially.

### Anti-India rhetoric has been rising in Bangladesh. What should India look out for?

Even in 1971, around 20% of the people were against the Liberation War and against India. Their anti-Indianism has continued. But alongside, there has been strong economic cooperation and people-to-people ties.

India needs to do two things. First is to send out the message that we have goodwill for the people of Bangladesh. New Delhi has already been doing that, by continuing aid and trade where possible and keeping communication channels open. Very recently, we agreed to export one more tranche of 50,000 metric tonnes of rice. And we have to keep talking to all principal actors in the country. Second is to insist on a free, fair and inclusive election, in which all parties, including Awami League, can participate, because only then can the people of Bangladesh truly exercise their choice.

### How important is Bangladesh for India?

Bangladesh and India respect our shared civilisational heritage. This is vital. But right now, security issues are paramount. The two countries share a over 4,000-km highly porous border. In the past, we have seen terror operatives from Pakistan and insurgents from the Northeast use Bangladesh as a haven. The Hasina government had helped us crack down on that.

Since August 2024, the Pakistan State and army has gone far in establishing the pre-1971 command and control structure with Bangladesh. The Pakistan army seeks to embed itself with the Bangladesh army, even near the India-Bangladesh border.

Any restricted elections that are not free, fair and inclusive will worsen the already adverse situation.

FULL INTERVIEW ON [WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](http://WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM)

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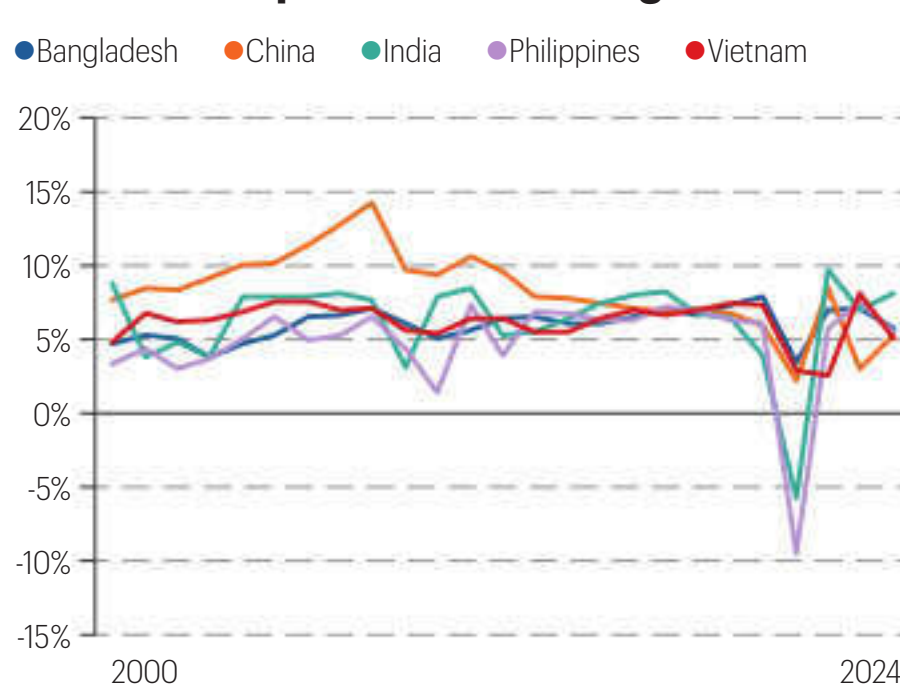
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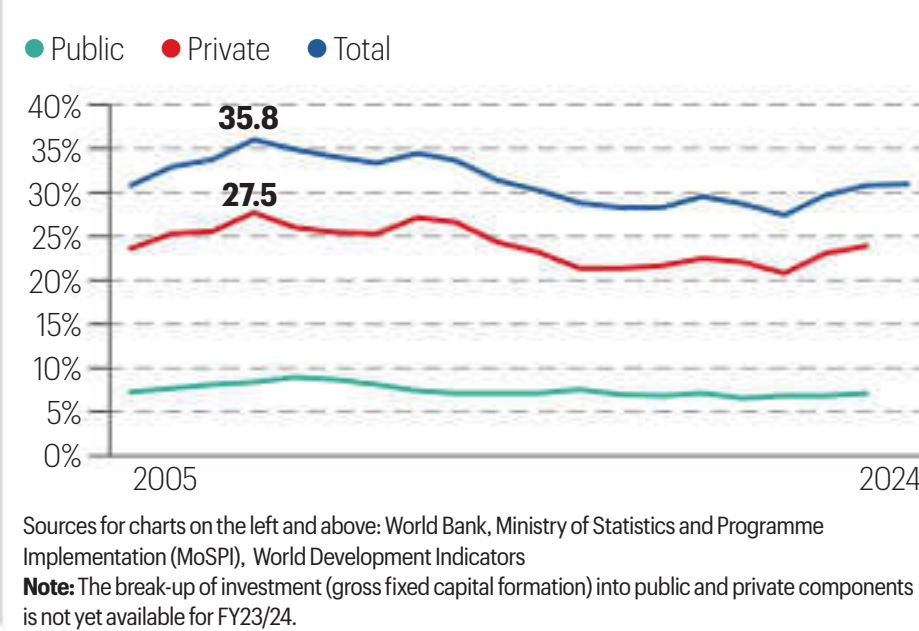
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### India and its peers: Annual GDP growth rate (%)



### The investment rate has declined since 2008, with slight pick-up in 2022 and 2023



### Trend growth has been at 6-7% for 25 years



# India weathers tariff storm for now, but consumption headwinds await

India has ended the year with a fairly strong set of macroeconomic numbers, but external uncertainties such as tariffs and AI will continue into 2026. The government's big challenge is reviving consumption to stoke private investment

LOOKING AT **2026** ECONOMY

ANIL SASI

IT IS often said of the Indian economy that "it lets down both its optimists and pessimists". In 2025, the world's fourth-largest economy did little to deviate from that script.

The year started with the broad assumption in New Delhi's policy circles that India would emerge relatively unscathed from President Donald Trump's tariff onslaught and wrap up an early trade deal with the US. Nearly 12 months on, both assumptions have turned out to be wrong: India now faces the highest effective tariffs into the US, higher than China, and a trade deal is nowhere in sight.

When the Trump administration unleashed the 25% reciprocal tariff, following it up with the additional 25% penalty for India's purchase of Russian crude, the consensus was on the possibility of the Indian export engine stalling. The immigration clampdown on H-1B visa holders meant a two-pronged attack on both goods and services from India.

And yet, as the year draws to a close, India's exports to the US have seen a robust uptick in November after declining through September, thanks to buoyant exports of tariff-exempt goods such as pharmaceuticals and electronics, and some genuine success in market diversification (exporters cracking alternative markets). Domestically, Indian businesses have managed steady growth in recent quarters and the Indian economy wrapped up 2025 with a fairly strong set of macroeconomic numbers, including tepid inflation and low interest rates.

The other adage that proved true again is that India's policymakers are adept at using a crisis to push through reforms. Amid the US tariffs, the NDA government shrugged off the widely-held belief that it had lost the appetite for major reforms after the diminished 2024 general election verdict.

The second half of the year saw a series of legislative actions and policy steps: Belated GST rate tweaks, movement on the moribund labour laws and nuclear sector amendments that could foster private and foreign investment — at the cost of diluted supplier liability provisions.

A raft of financial services reforms, including 100% foreign ownership of insurance firms and new investment rules for banks and pension funds, could set the stage for a possible foreign capital surge amid concerns around capital outflows and a widened current account deficit (CAD). There were other significant legislative amendments, including a curtailment of the rural safety net, MGNREGA. Some of the so-called quality control orders (QCOs), a bug-bear for smaller companies in sectors from textiles to steel, have finally been revoked.

A late surge in foreign direct investment in 2025, anchored by commitments from tech majors Google, Amazon and Microsoft in cloud and AI infrastructure, helped allay some concerns around capital flows. A managed depreciation of the rupee, now over 90 to the dollar, could act in part as a buffer against the 50% American tariff barrier.

### Domestic outlook for 2026

India continues to be the world's fast-



est-growing major economy, with GDP forecast to grow 7.3 per cent in fiscal 2026.

But global tariff shocks will likely continue to influence the economic outlook for the next year. A lot depends on how domestic buffers and policy levers can be deployed to act as counterbalances.

High-frequency indicators suggest that domestic economic activity is holding up in the October-December quarter although signs of weakness are emerging in other indicators.

The impact of the GST rationalisation and festival-related spending supported domestic demand during October-November, but it's a divided house on whether this will continue for long. Rural demand continues to be robust while urban demand is still only recovering.

Investment activity remains mildly robust, with some signs of private investment picking up on the back of expansion in non-food bank credit, and higher capacity utilisation. It remains to be seen if that continues, given that capacity utilisation still remains bound in the 75-77% range.

Agricultural growth continued to be positive, helped by healthy kharif crop production, and better rabi crop sowing. "Now we can say comfortably the full-year growth will be either 7 per cent or to the north of 7 per cent rather than to the south of 7 per cent... basically we are saying the growth rate will be at least 7 per cent for 2025-26," Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran said on November 29 after the second quarter GDP data was released.

### Encouraging signs

Going into 2026, some domestic tailwinds such as healthy agricultural prospects, the continued impact of GST rationalisation, low inflation, and healthy balance sheets of corporations and financial institutions should continue to support economic activity.

Continuing reform initiatives will facili-

### NEW IN THE NEW YEAR

#### Reviving domestic demand

Private investment is crucial for India as government spending tapers and exports face challenges.

Companies need to step up capacity utilisation from the 75-77% range. But for that to happen, they must first see demand.

#### External headwinds

On the external front, things look more uncertain. Though the implementation of the tariffs has been far less potent than was feared, there is a lack of clarity on where all this is heading. Merchandise exports also face challenges. "Given significant economic slack, growth can stay above trend for a while before inflationary pressures warrant policy tightening. The incessant structural pressure of Chinese exports (to India's export markets) and higher global capital costs are challenges, but not enough to derail growth," according to Neelkanth Mishra and team at Axis Capital.

tate growth. The opening up of the nuclear sector could see investments returning to the power sector at a pivotal transition period, when renewable investments are slowing.

In terms of services exports, India's global market share has gone from 2% to 4.5% in less than a decade. This attests to the fact that the global population is ageing and there is a need for younger workers. But immigration policies are becoming tougher in the US and in Europe. Given that visas are a problem, work has to be done remotely, which is probably to India's advantage for now. Whether this will sustain is a policy opportunity, and challenge.

Growth headwinds from the mosty intended fiscal and largely unintended monetary tightening that slowed the economy in FY25 have abated, resulting in growth revival in FY26, according to Axis Capital's 2026 Outlook. In FY27E, Axis economists expect monetary easing to drive above-trend growth of 7.5%. While regulatory easing — revoked QCOs, new labour codes — will boost growth over the medium term, their announcement boosts sentiment.

#### External headwinds

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According to Sajjid Z Chinoy, Managing Director and Chief India Economist at JP Morgan, the AI boom is masking some of the effects of the tariffs in the US, but the American labour market has weakened materially. And the tariffs will slowly begin to bite as American inflation goes up.

The American trade blockade of China could have another repercussion. There is concern over Chinese exports being diverted away from the US — flooding Asia,

coming into India, parts of Africa, even Latin America. So emerging markets, including India, have a problem.

While there is still no clarity on the US trade deal, the speedy conclusion of on-going trade and investment negotiations with the EU and other countries could present upside potential, the RBI said, while upgrading real GDP growth for the first quarter of 2026-27 to 6.7% and Q2 to 6.8%.

While India's current account deficit at 1.3% in the second quarter of 2025-26 doesn't seem alarming, amid robust services exports and strong remittances, there are some concerns on financing it if foreign investment outflows continue. Healthy services exports coupled with strong remittance receipts are expected to help manage the CAD in FY26.

For the Indian stock markets, a slowdown in corporate earnings and uncertainties stemming from US tariffs led to persistent outflows of foreign investors. This could continue amid outflows in the equity segment. Flows under external commercial borrowings and non-resident deposit accounts moderated as compared to last year.

### Can demand drive growth?

A World Bank report from February 2025 said India would need to grow by 7.8% on an average over the next 22 years to achieve its aspirations of reaching high-income status by 2047. Over the past three decades, trend growth (seen as five-year average) through varying external environments, fiscal stances and under different governments, has been at 6-7%. The five-year CAGR came close to 8% only in the FY03-08 period, when the workforce was expanding rapidly and up-cycles in power generation, real estate and global growth boosted capital formation. Replicating that is a challenge.

There are some positive factors that can help. Corporate balance sheets are strong and leverage is low. And India needs to build on its one sustained success story, where even China has failed: Stoking domestic consumption demand.

That could have a cyclical impact on reviving private investments — the one enduring struggle of the NDA government.

Talk to corporates and, in private, most would attest to the fact that one needs to have more demand visibility to step up investments. Capacity utilisation has to be around 80% for at least three or more quarters for companies to plan greenfield projections.

Tepid private investments have an impact on FDI inflows too. Both high-end urban consumption and government spending, which have held up the economic momentum since the pandemic, are ebbing. Exports are forecast to be sluggish.

### Questions for the coming year

As 2025 wraps up, there are perhaps more questions than when the year started. Will the US economy go into recession? Will the AI exuberance end? Will the AI-fuelled stock market bubble in the US burst? What would that do to countries such as India? Then there are larger questions over the advent of AI and to what extent this could be labour substituting versus labor augmenting.

The rising debts and deficits of countries, especially in the developed world, means that at some point, all of these gaps will have to be inflated away. Inflating away debt refers to a situation where a government deliberately pursues a policy of generating inflation, including by printing money, as a means to reduce the debt burden.

Analysts point to the surge in gold being predicated on the notion that at some point, the only way to rein this rising debt across economies, especially the developed world, is that central banks will be forced to inflate it. If this were to happen in the US or Europe, it could have an impact on markets around the world.

For most governments, another big question is this: Given that capital productivity is rising every year, how does policy enable labour the best chance to compete with capital? Generally speaking, economic output must flow either to the owners of capital in the form of profits and dividends, or to labour as wages or salaries. If labour productivity is seen as suboptimal, the benefits of economic output are typically extracted by business owners in the form of capital. For India, the new labour codes are a small beginning, but a lot needs to be done to harness the demographic dividend.

## Blast at Alawite mosque in Syria's Homs kills eight

Associated Press  
Homs, December 26

A BOMBING at a mosque located in the Syrian city of Homs during Friday prayers killed at least eight people and wounded 18 others, authorities said.

Images released by Syria's state-run Arab News Agency (SANA) showed blood on the mosque's carpets, holes in the walls, shattered windows and fire damage.

The Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib Mosque is located in an area of the Wadi al-Dhabab neighborhood dominated by the Alawite minority in Homs, Syria's third-largest city.

SANA, citing a security source, said that preliminary investigations indicate that explosive devices were planted inside the mosque. Authorities were searching for the perpetrators of the attack.

A security cordon was placed around the mosque, Syria's Interior Ministry said in a statement. Tensions have flared across several parts of

### E. EXPLAINED

#### Who are Alawites?

Alawites are a minority ethno-religious group, mainly in Syria. They trace their faith to a mystical offshoot of Shia sect in Islam. Alawites revere Islam's fourth Caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib as divine, blend traditions with esoteric practices. They were considered influential during the Assad regime in Syria.

Syria in recent weeks as long-running sectarian, ethnic and political fault lines continue to destabilize the country, even as large-scale fighting has subsided.

The country has experienced several waves of sectarian clashes since the fall of President Bashar Assad last year. Assad, himself an Alawite, fled the country to Russia.

IT WAS A JOINT OPERATION TO TARGET TERRORISTS: NIGERIAN MINISTER

## US carries out strike on Islamic State in Nigeria

Associated Press  
Florida, December 26

THE UNITED States carried out a strike against Islamic State (IS) militants in northwest Nigeria at the request of Nigeria's government, President Donald Trump and the US military said on Thursday, claiming the group had been targeting Christians in the region.

"Tonight, at my direction as Commander in Chief, the United States launched a powerful and deadly strike against ISIS Terrorist Scum in Northwest Nigeria, who have been targeting and viciously killing, primarily, innocent Christians, at levels not seen for many years, and even Centuries!" Trump said in a post on Truth Social.

The US military's Africa Command said the strike was carried out in Sokoto state in coordination with Nigerian authorities and killed IS militants.

Nigerian Foreign Minister Yusuf Maitama Tuggar told the British Broadcasting Corp the strike was a "joint operation" tar-



People inspect the damage after US forces launched a strike against Islamic State militants in Nigeria on Friday. REUTERS

getting "terrorists", and it "has nothing to do with a particular religion". Without naming ISIS specifically, Tuggar said the operation had been planned "for quite some time" and had used intelligence information provided by the Nigerian side. He did not rule out further strikes, adding that this depended on "decisions to be taken by the leadership of the two countries".

The strike comes after Trump in late October began warning that Christianity faces an "existential threat" in Nigeria and threatened to militarily intervene in the West African country over what he says is its failure to stop violence targeting Christian communities.

Reuters reported Monday the US had been conducting intelligence-gathering flights over



large parts of Nigeria since late November. Nigeria's foreign ministry said the strike was carried out as part of ongoing security cooperation with the United States, involving intelligence sharing and strategic coordination to target militant groups.

"This has led to precision hits on terrorist targets in Nigeria by air strikes in the North West," the ministry said in a post on X. A video posted by the Pentagon showed at least one projectile launched from a warship. A U.S. defence official said the strike targeted multiple militants at known IS camps.

## 15 injured in chemical and knife attack at factory in Japan

Associated Press  
Tokyo, December 26

A MAN was arrested after stabbing eight people and injuring seven others with what was believed to be bleach at a rubber factory in central Japan on Friday, officials said.

Eight people were taken to hospitals after being stabbed by the man with a knife at the Yokohama Rubber Company in the city of Mishima, in the Shizuoka prefecture, west of Tokyo, according to the Fujisan Nanto Fire Department.

The department told The Associated Press that five of the people who were stabbed were in serious condition but other details were not available.

Seven others were also injured by the bleach thrown at them during the attack, the fire department said. No other details were immediately known.



Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) acting chairman Tarique Rahman waves to his supporters as he arrives to pay tribute to his father and former President Ziaur Rahman in Dhaka on Friday. REUTERS

## BNP leader Tarique Rahman visits father's grave in Dhaka

Press Trust of India  
Dhaka, New Delhi, Dec 26

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

Rahman reached Zia Uddin in a red-and-green bulletproof bus and paid floral tributes at the grave, offering 'dua' and 'munajat' for the eternal peace of his father's soul, news portal [bangla.daily-sun.com](http://bangla.daily-sun.com) reported.

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

The last time he did so was on September 1, 2006, when he was serving as BNP's Senior Joint Secretary General, mark-

ing the party's founding anniversary, it said.

BNP founder Ziaur Rahman was a Bangladeshi military officer who served as the sixth president of Bangladesh from 1977 until his assassination in 1981. He retired from the army in 1978 with the rank of lieutenant general.

Rahman stood before the grave with visible emotion and offered fateha. He was seen wiping tears with a handkerchief, *The Daily Star* newspaper reported. He was accompanied by senior party leaders during the visit.

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

Throughout the journey, he waved to supporters from in-

side the bus.

While Rahman was paying respects, party leaders and activists gathered in front of the entrance and chanted slogans.

Meanwhile, slain radical leader Sharif Osman Hadi's party activists on Friday blocked one of Dhaka's busiest intersections, demanding justice for his killing, disrupting traffic in the capital for several hours.

After Friday prayers, leaders and supporters of Inqilab Moncho and July Moncho, joined by students and members of the public, brought out a protest procession from the Dhaka University Central Mosque and marched towards Shahbagh, where they staged a sit-in demonstration, *The Daily Star* newspaper reported.

Md Moniruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station, said the agitators began blocking the intersection at around 2:30 pm local time and traffic has remained suspended since then.

## Zelenskyy says he will meet Trump in Florida Sunday

Associated Press  
Kyiv, December 26

UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Friday that he will meet with US President Donald Trump in Florida over the weekend.

Zelenskyy told journalists that the two leaders will discuss security guarantees for Ukraine during Sunday's talks, and that the 20-point plan under discussion "is about 90 per cent ready." An "economic agreement" also will be discussed, Zelenskyy said, but that he was unable to confirm "whether anything will be finalised by the end." The Ukrainian side will also raise "territorial issues", he said.

Zelenskyy said that Ukraine "would like the Europeans to be involved," but doubted whether it would be possible at short notice.

"We must, without doubt, find some format in the near future in which not only Ukraine and the US are present, but Europe is represented as well," he said.

The announced meeting is the latest development in an extensive US-led diplomatic push to end the nearly four-year Russia-Ukraine war, but efforts have run into sharply conflicting demands by Moscow and Kyiv.

Zelenskyy's comments came after he said Thursday that he had a "good conversation" with US special envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Friday that the Kremlin had already been in contact with US representatives since Russian presidential envoy Kirill Dmitriev recently met with US envoys in Florida. "It was agreed upon to continue the dialogue," he said. Trump is engaged in a di-



Ukrainian Armed Forces load a shell into a multiple rocket launch system in Donetsk on Friday. REUTERS

plomatic push to end Russia's all-out war, which began on February 24, 2022, but his efforts have run into sharply conflicting demands by Moscow and Kyiv.

Zelenskyy said Tuesday that he would be willing to withdraw troops from Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland as part of a plan to end the war, if Russia also pulls back and the area becomes a demilitarised zone monitored by international forces.

Though Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said Thursday that there had been "slow but steady progress" in the peace talks, Russia has given no indication that it will agree to any kind of withdrawal from land it has seized.

In fact, Moscow has insisted that Ukraine relinquish the remaining territory it still holds in the Donbas — an ultimatum that Ukraine has rejected. Russia has captured most of Luhansk and about 70 per cent of Donetsk — the two areas that make up the Donbas.

### • BRIEFLY

#### MALAYSIA

### Former PM Razak convicted in corruption scandal case



Former Malaysian PM Najib Razak. AP

IMPRISONED FORMER Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak was convicted Friday following a corruption trial tied to a multibillion-dollar looting of the IMDB state investment fund. The nation's High Court found Najib, 72, guilty on four counts of abuse of power and 21 charges of money laundering related to more than \$700 million channelled into his personal bank accounts from the IMDB fund. Najib's defence team was expected to

make mitigation arguments before sentencing later Friday. Najib denied any wrongdoing and maintained the funds were a political donation from Saudi Arabia and that he had been misled by rogue financiers led by Low Taek Jho. Low, thought to be the scandal's mastermind, remains at large. AP

#### IRAN

### Forces seize oil tanker in Strait of Hormuz

IRAN SEIZED a foreign oil tanker as it travelled the strategic Strait of Hormuz, state media said Friday. Mojtaba Ghahramani, a provincial chief of the justice department, said the tanker was carrying some 4 million litres, of smuggled fuel when the naval forces seized the vessel, IRNA news agency reported. Ghahramani said the forces also detained 16 foreign crew members of the tanker, adding that the seizure was a remarkable "blow" to smugglers. AP

#### UNITED STATES

### Prosecutors seek 10-year sentence for ex-President

AN INDEPENDENT counsel on Friday demanded a 10-year prison term for South Korea's ousted President Yoon Suk Yeol in the first of seven criminal cases related to his ill-fated attempt to impose martial law in 2024 and other allegations that flared when he was in office. The first of Yoon's trials to wrap up covers charges including his defiance of authorities' attempts to investigate and detain him. The court is expected to render a verdict as early as next month. AP

### • NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

#### NEPAL

### Balananda Sharma new foreign minister

LT GEN (ret) Balananda Sharma was appointed Nepal's foreign affairs minister Friday. President Ramchandra Paudel administered the oath of office and secrecy to Sharma at the President's Office in Sheetal Niwas, according to a notice issued by his office. This is the fifth Cabinet expansion by Prime Minister Sushila Karki. ENS

#### PAKISTAN

### 9 children injured in drone strike on KPK madrasa

NINE CHILDREN, including three girls, were injured when a drone struck a madrasa in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, officials said on Friday. The drone targeted the religious seminary located in Shadikhel village in Tank district on Thursday. Traffic remained suspended and markets were closed due to the protest. PTI

## Turkey nabs IS militant, says he was 'planning attacks on New Year'

Associated Press  
Kyiv, December 26

TURKISH AUTHORITIES said Friday that they have apprehended a suspected member of the extremist Islamic State group who was planning attacks on New Year's celebrations.

State-run Anadolu Agency reported that Ibrahim Burtakucin was captured in a joint operation carried out by police and the National Intelligence Agency in Malatya.

Security officials told Anadolu that Burtakucin was in contact with many IS sympathizers in Turkey and abroad and was also looking for an opportunity to join the ongoing fighting in conflict zones.

Authorities also seized digital materials and banned pub-

lications belonging to IS during the raid of his home.

The arrest was reported a day after Istanbul's prosecutor's office said Turkish authorities carried out simultaneous raids in which they detained over a hundred suspected members of the militant Islamic State group who were allegedly planning attacks against Christmas and New Year's celebrations.

Syrian security forces have also launched operations against IS in recent days, including two raids on the outskirts of Damascus, the Syrian capital. In those raids, Syrian officials said Taha al-Zoubi, identified as the IS leader in the Damascus area, was captured and Mohammed Shahadeh, a senior IS commander in Syria, was killed.

### • EXPERTS ALSO EXPECT WORLDWIDE GRAPHITE DEMAND TO SOAR IN THE NEXT DECADE

## Amid global battery boom, graphite mining gets a fresh look in the US

Michael Hill  
New York, December 26

GRAPHITE MINES in the United States largely closed down seven decades ago. Mining the ubiquitous mineral found in everything from nuclear reactors to pencils seemed to lack little sense when it could be imported inexpensively from other nations, especially China.

That view is changing now. Demand for graphite, a key material in the lithium-ion batteries that power everything from phones to electric cars, is surging as trade tensions with China persist. With federal offi-

cials concerned about the steady supply of a number of critical minerals, several companies have plans to mine graphite.

In New York, Titan Mining Corp. has mined a limited amount of ore from a deposit in snowy woods about 25 miles (40 kilometers) from the Canadian border, aiming for commercial sales by 2028. Company officials believe the geopolitical winds are at their backs to sell graphite concentrate for high-tech, industrial and military uses. That could include heat-resistant coatings in factories, anodes in large lithium-ion batteries connected

to electrical grids and lubricants for military vehicles, according to the company.

"We believe there is a real opportunity here," said company CEO Rita Adiani. "We have the ability to supply a significant portion of U.S. needs. And that's largely because you can't see China now as a reliable supply-chain partner."

Trade tensions with China rose this year as President Donald Trump's administration imposed higher tariffs, though those tensions eased somewhat after Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping met in October during a regional economic summit in South Korea.



Graphite can conduct electricity and withstand high temperatures. AP

The northern New York deposit is in a rural region with a rich history of graphite, iron ore

and garnet mining. The iconic yellow Ticonderoga pencil was named for a town several hours

east of this deposit where graphite was mined long ago.

Titan's Joel Rheault recently held up a rock from the newly mined area. It was an ordinary-looking flecked fragment of schist, glistening slightly in the sun. But it was comprised of roughly 3% graphite.

"You can see how gray the rock is here," said Rheault, the company's vice president of operations. "That's because of that graphite."

Graphite can conduct electricity and withstand high temperatures, making it useful for a host of commercial and military applications. As such, the Department of Energy has

said the need for graphite is critical, and the Department of the Interior lists it as one of 60 "critical minerals," along with more than a dozen rare earth elements.

Forecasters also expect global graphite demand to continue soaring in the next decade, alongside the battery boom. That includes both mined, or "natural," graphite and manufactured, or "synthetic," graphite, which tends to be purer but pricier. Lithium-ion batteries' anodes can use a mix of both.

China dominance in supplying both of natural and synthetic graphite has worried

US policymakers for years. Concerns spiked recently when China placed new export controls on graphite and several other minerals, only to relax them for a year.

Federal officials trying to shore up supply chains for critical minerals like graphite included a tax credit for critical mineral production in the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act. More recently, the Trump administration struck critical mineral deals with other countries to diversify supplies. It also has emphasized critical minerals through government funding and streamlined reviews. AP

NONPROFIT STICHTING FRISSE WIND.NU ALLEGES ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

# Dutch NGO files €1.4-bn claim against Tata Steel Netherlands

Akash Mandal

Mumbai, December 26

DUTCH NONPROFIT Stichting Frisse Wind.nu (SFW) has claimed 1.4 billion euros in compensation from Tata Steel's Dutch subsidiaries — Tata Steel Nederland BV and Tata Steel IJmuiden BV — as part of a class action suit over alleged damages caused by the companies' operations in the Velsen-Noord area in the Netherlands. The accusations levelled by SFW, which claims to be acting on behalf of the residents living in the vicinity of the Tata Steel Netherlands (TSN) IJmuiden plant, include emission of hazardous substances, increased susceptibility of the local residents to various health issues, and a negative impact of the steel plant on property prices in the area.

TSN, which includes Tata Steel Nederland BV and Tata Steel IJmuiden BV, is "fully prepared" to defend against the claim that has been filed in the District Court North Holland, and believes that SFW faces

**Tata Steel said that while TSN is yet to receive material from SFW on which the NGO intends to rely in the case, it has 'already identified substantial grounds for defence'**

"considerable challenges regarding both admissibility and the merits of its case", the parent company said in a stock exchange filing in India. Tata Steel added that while TSN is yet to receive material from SFW on which the nonprofit intends to rely in the case, it has "already identified substantial grounds for defence".

The TSN plant in IJmuiden in the province of North Holland spans 750 hectares, and is spread over three municipalities — Velsen, Beverwijk, and Heemskerk. The plant produces 7 million tonnes of high-quality steel every year, and employs over 9,200 people, according to the TSN website. The plant came into the Tata Steel fold when the Indian company acquired British-Dutch steelmaker Corus

Group plc in 2007. The proceedings initiated by SFW concern a collective action under the Dutch Act on Collective Settlement of Mass Claims (WAMCA), Tata Steel said.

WAMCA is the legal framework for class action lawsuits in the Netherlands. In a class action suit, typically a few people or entities sue a large company or organisation on behalf of a large group of people who claim to have suffered similar harm from that defendant company or organisation. Such lawsuits allow individuals with small claims to pool resources and share legal costs of the case.

"According to TSN, SFW has provided no supporting evidence for the claim, making it unsubstantiated and speculative. TSN rejects their claims

being without any basis," Tata Steel said. It added that the proceedings of the lawsuit, which is being funded by third party financiers, will be conducted in two phases — admissibility and merits — each of which is likely to take two-three years to conclude. Therefore, the debate on the quantum of claims is not expected in the upcoming years. Following the disclosure by Tata Steel, shares of the company fell over 1 per cent intraday on Friday, before recovering slightly to end 0.6 per cent lower at Rs 169.05 on the NSE.

"TSN considers that it has strong arguments to defend against the claims and will vehemently defend itself against these claims. Health and a clean living environment remain key priorities for TSN, as they do for local residents and stakeholders. Through substantial investments... TSN has achieved significant improvements in areas of concern for the neighbouring community over the past five years. Additionally, TSN consistently ranks among the leading

global blast furnace-based steel producers in terms of CO<sub>2</sub> (carbon dioxide) efficiency, with performance metrics well below both European and global averages," Tata Steel said.

It said that TSN has been investing in and working on initiatives to improve the living environment and reduce impact of its operations on the surrounding community.

"As part of the Green Steel Plan, developed through a Joint Letter of Intent with the Dutch government, the Company and TSN have engaged with stakeholders to define additional targeted measures that extend further beyond legal requirements. Alongside decarbonisation initiatives intended to promote a healthier living environment, TSN is dedicated to minimising its contributions to coarse and fine particulate matter (PM10) emissions, as well as reducing annual releases of substances of very high concern, NO<sub>x</sub>, SO<sub>2</sub>, odours, and noise," Tata Steel said.

AHEAD OF BUDGET 2026-27

# MSMEs seek better credit access, protection from tariff shocks, exchange rate risks

ENS Economic Bureau  
New Delhi, December 26

A "FAIR ACCESS" to credit, an export risk equalisation fund to compensate micro exporters impacted by sudden tariff hikes, temporary duty drawback enhancement and interest relief during tariff shocks — these are some of the measures being sought by representatives of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) from the Finance Ministry in the upcoming Union Budget for 2026-27.

The MSMEs have also sought reasonable compliance norms from the government, seeking higher exemption thresholds under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime and a single simplified GST return for micro units.

In a letter to Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on December 26, the Association of Indian Entrepreneurs (AIE), a Chennai-based association of gig workers, traders, micro entrepreneurs, and self-em-

ployed, also sought statutory collateral-free lending up to Rs 1 crore for micro enterprises with a 6-7 per cent interest cap in addition to interest subvention during stress periods, as a built-in counter-cyclical tool. Also, the AIE has sought interest-free loan assistance to be extended for import substitution development costs to micro enterprises.

"Micro enterprises today are operating under extraordinary stress — not due to inefficiency, but due to policy asymmetry, external shocks, and structural neglect. While India aspires to become a global manufacturing and export hub, the smallest units that feed the supply chain are being systematically weakened. Unless decisive, budget-backed interventions are announced in Union Budget 2026-27, a large section of micro enterprises will silently exit, causing irreversible damage to employment and domestic manufacturing capacity," KE Raghunathan, Founder Chairman, AIE said in

the letter. The MSMEs are seeking simplified compliance norms from the government in the form of higher exemption thresholds and a single simplified GST return for micro units. They have also sought time-bound GST refunds within 15 days with statutory interest for government delays. "Complete decriminalisation of procedural lapses — no prosecution for minor errors. Unified Annual Compliance Return replacing multiple filings under GST, labour, and local laws," the letter stated.

Given the global tariff war, the AIE has also sought coverage from exchange rate shocks, recommending a forex fluctuation protection scheme for micro enterprises with limited hedging capacity. The MSMEs have also suggested that the Reserve Bank of India consider simplified hedging instruments with subsidised cost for micro units.

FULL REPORT ON

WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

PNB reports Rs 2,400 crore fraud in SREI's accounts

Kshipra Petkar

Mumbai, December 26

STATE-OWNED lender Punjab National Bank (PNB) on Friday said it has reported a borrowal fraud of Rs 2,433.99 crore to the Reserve Bank of India involving the erstwhile promoters of SREI Equipment Finance and SREI Infrastructure Finance.

In a regulatory filing to the stock exchanges, the New Delhi-headquartered lender said of the total amount, Rs 1,240.94 crore relates to SREI Equipment Finance while the remaining Rs 1,193.06 crore relates to SREI Infrastructure Finance.

The lender clarified that since it has already provided to the extent of 100 per cent for the entire amount outstanding there would be no additional impact on its financials.

The bank also clarified that a resolution has been arrived at for both the entities under the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process and that it had been approved by the National Company Law Tribunal.

The cases had been referred for insolvency in October 2021. FE

# 2 years after Silkyara collapse, new norms could shape tunnel building

Dheeraj Mishra

New Delhi, December 26

THE AMBITIOUS Silkyara Bend-Barkot Tunnel on the Dharasu-Yamunotri highway section of NH-134 (old NH-94), being built as part of the Char Dham Mahamarg Pariyojana, suddenly collapsed on November 12, 2023. After a gruelling 17-day operation, all 41 workers were safely rescued. The incident underscored an urgent need for measures to ensure this is not repeated going forward. Now, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has released comprehensive guidelines to prevent and mitigate road tunnel collapses.

"In recent years, multiple incidents of tunnel collapses have been reported during the construction of tunnels on national highways. These incidents have been primarily attributed to inadequate attention to detail during the planning and execution phases of tunnel projects. The recurrence of such events highlights the critical need for rigorous oversight and strict adherence to safety protocols," the ministry said while issuing guidelines on December 5.

A road tunnel is mainly



Rescue teams at the Silkyara tunnel in Uttarkashi. REUTERS/FILE

the project in-charge of the authority "shall be responsible for ascertaining the correctness of the geological and geotechnical investigation conducted as part of the DPR... The fundamental principle of risk mitigation is 'risk shall be borne by the party best equipped to manage it' and shall be central to contract design".

"The Terms of Reference for DPR consultants shall mandate the preparation of a Geotechnical Baseline Report (GBR) and a risk register. "The risk register should include the perceived hazards and associated risks for the project and indicate potential mitigation measures with comprehensive explanations for their basis, based on the DPR studies. It shall serve as a reference for determining expected efforts and aim for the highest practical accuracy... All the construction tenders shall be issued for bidding with the GBR and risk register as part of the information provided to bidders," the guidelines stated.

For tunnel projects, a detailed design and proper implementation is more crucial than other civil engineering project since the ground itself serves as a support system, according to the norms. FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

required to provide seamless passage to vehicles in difficult terrain such as mountainous regions, snow bound areas, ecologically sensitive areas, water bodies, and congested areas. These guidelines are important in light of MoRTH's long-term initiative to extend the road network to border areas.

Road projects start with the preparation of a Detailed Project Report (DPR), containing all the technical details on the terrain. However, MoRTH found many tunnel DPRs lack the necessary technical depth, reducing the exercise to just a formality instead of effective risk management tools. Under the new guidelines,

# Coforge to acquire US-based AI firm Encora for \$2.35 bn

Urvi Malvania

Mumbai, December 26

COFORGE ON Friday said that it has agreed to acquire US-based digital engineering firm Encora in an all-stock transaction valued at an enterprise value of \$2.35 billion (around Rs 21,140 crore), marking one of the largest overseas acquisitions by an Indian mid-tier IT services firm and shifting towards AI-led engineering, data and cloud services.

The deal pegs Encora's equity value at about \$1.89 billion (around Rs 17,000 crore) and will see Coforge acquire 100 per cent of the firm from private equity investors Advent International, Warburg Pincus and other minority shareholders. The balance between the equity value and enterprise value, amounting to up to \$550 million (around Rs 4,100 crore), will be used to retire Encora's existing term loan.

Coforge said the transaction will be executed entirely through a share swap, with no cash consideration being paid. As part of the acquisition, Coforge will issue about 93.8 million equity shares at an issue price of Rs 1,815.91 per share, implying a premium of about 8.5 per cent to the firm's closing

**Coforge will acquire 100% of the company from private equity investors Advent International, Warburg Pincus and other minority shareholders**

price on Friday. Post-transaction, Encora's shareholders will collectively hold about 20-21 per cent of Coforge's expanded equity capital. The company said the debt repayment component will be funded through a bridge facility or a qualified institutional placement, if required. Its board has approved raising up to \$550 million (around Rs 4,100 crore) through a QIP or other routes, although Coforge said a share sale may not be triggered if alternative funding options are finalised.

"This reflects the confidence that incoming shareholders have in the prospects of the expanded firm," Coforge said in its exchange filing. The transaction would create a technology services firm with projected annual revenue of about \$2.5 billion (around Rs 22,500 crore), it said. FE

## • BRIEFLY

**No relaxation for filing financial statements: MCA**

New Delhi: The Corporate Affairs Ministry on Friday said it has not issued any circular mentioning that relaxations have been provided for additional fees and extension of the timelines for filing financial statements under the Companies Law. "It has come to the notice of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) that a fake General Circular No. 08/2025 dated 26 December, 2025 is being circulated, which falsely claims relaxation of additional fees and extension of timelines for filing of Financial Statements and Annual Returns under the Companies Act, 2013," the ministry said on X. PTI

**Forex reserves rise by \$4.36 bn to \$693 bn**

Mumbai: India's forex reserves jumped by \$4.368 billion to \$693.318 billion during the week ended December 19, the Reserve Bank said on Friday. The overall kitty had increased by \$1.689 billion to \$688.949 billion in the previous week. For the week ended December 19, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased by \$1.641 billion to \$559.428 billion, according to the RBI data. Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include effects of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units, such as the euro, pound, and yen, held in the foreign exchange reserves. PTI

## • MARKETS TODAY

Sensex	NIFTY	Gold	US Dollar
85,041.45	26,042.30	₹1,42,300	₹89.90
367.25	99.80	Silver	Oil
0.43%	0.38%	₹2,36,350	\$62.60

NOTE: GOLD, SILVER RATES AS PER ALL INDIA SARFAA ASSOCIATION DATA  
GOLD PER 10G, SILVER PER 1KG, CRUDE OIL (INDIAN BASKET) AS OF DECEMBER 24

# DGCA's 4-member inquiry committee probing IndiGo meltdown submits report

Sukalp Sharma

New Delhi, December 26

THE FOUR-member inquiry committee set up by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to probe the massive operational disruption at IndiGo earlier this month submitted its report to the regulator on Friday. Senior officials with the DGCA said the report is currently confidential, and details are likely to be made public after a few days.

The committee, headed by DGCA's Joint Director General Sanjay K Bramhane, was initially asked to submit its findings by December 20. It was later given an additional week to submit the report. The panel was asked to identify underlying causes for the disruption, assess manpower planning by IndiGo and

its preparedness for the new rest and duty duration rules for pilots, review IndiGo's compliance with the new rules, and fix accountability and responsibility for the airline's planning failures, among others.

The regulator and the government are likely to decide on action against the airline and its management based on the report. Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu had assured stringent action basis the report against those found responsible for the IndiGo meltdown. He had blamed lapses on the airline's part for the disruption, adding that the government action in this case will "set an example", indicating even the top leadership's jobs may be on the line.

FULL REPORT ON

WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

**BENGALURU NORTH CITY CORPORATION**  
Office of the Executive Engineer, Byatarayanapura Division, Zone-1, No. 2152/20, Defence colony, 9th Main, D Block, Sahakarnagara, BNCC Office, Bengaluru-560092

No.: BNCC-ZI/EE/BTP/KPPP/PR/03/2025-26 Date: 26.12.2025

**SHORT TERM TENDER NOTIFICATION**  
(Through GOK Karnataka Public Procurement Portal only)

Tenders on item rate basis are invited by the undersigned for the works mentioned below from the registered contractors of Bengaluru North City Corporation or equivalent registration with CPWD / KPWD / Railways / MES or any State Government Organizations. (Standard Tender Document KW-1,2,3,4)

Sl. No.	Name of the Work
<b>Single Cover Tender</b>	
1	Removal of silt & other maintenance of roads and drains in new ward no. 05 Kogilu. <b>Approximate value of work (Rs. in Lakhs): 30.00, EMD (in Rupees): 60,000/-, Category:</b> Others.
2	Removal of silt & other maintenance of roads and drains in new ward no. 06 Jakkuru. <b>Approximate value of work (Rs. in Lakhs): 30.00, EMD (in Rupees): 60,000/-, Category:</b> Others.
3	Removal of silt & other maintenance of roads and drains in new ward no. 07 Thanisandra. <b>Approximate value of work (Rs. in Lakhs): 30.00, EMD (in Rupees): 60,000/-, Category:</b> Others.
4	Removal of silt & other maintenance of roads and drains in new ward no. 08 Amruthahalli. <b>Approximate value of work (Rs. in Lakhs): 30.00, EMD (in Rupees): 30,000/-, Category:</b> SC.
5	Removal of silt & other maintenance of roads and drains in new ward no. 09 Hebbala Kempapura. <b>Approximate value of work (Rs. in Lakhs): 30.00, EMD (in Rupees): 30,000/-, Category:</b> CAT-I.
6	Removal of silt & other maintenance of roads and drains in new ward no. 10 Byatarayanapura. <b>Approximate value of work (Rs. in Lakhs): 30.00, EMD (in Rupees): 30,000/-, Category:</b> CAT-II(A).
<b>Two Cover Tender</b>	
7	Improvements and Refurbishment of Railway Underbridge at Kodigehalli ward no. 8. <b>Approximate value of work (Rs. in Lakhs): 100.00, EMD (in Rupees): 1,00,000/-, Category:</b> ST.

**Calendar of Events:** (1) Tender documents can be downloaded from the GOK KPPP website <https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in>. (2) Pre-Bid Meeting will be held on **05.01.2026 at 3:00 p.m.** in the Office of the Executive Engineer, Byatarayanapura Division, No. 2152/20, Defence Colony, BWSB Tank Road, Sahakarnagara Office, Bengaluru-560 092. (3) Last Date for uploading the Filled proposals is **09.01.2026 up to 4:00 p.m.** (4) Date of Opening of Technical Bid is **12.01.2026 after 4:00 p.m.** (5) Date of Opening of Financial Bid after Approval of Technical Bid. Further details may be obtained from the above office, during office hours or website <https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in>.

Sd/- Executive Engineer,  
Byatarayanapura Division, Zone-1, BNCC

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

**GREENSURE TRADING PRIVATE LIMITED (GREENSURE)**  
NO 5/2, KAY ARR TRUMP, 102, 1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR, EAGLES ST, CMP CENTRE AND SCHOOL, BANGALORE, BANGALORE NORTH, KARNATAKA, INDIA - 560025.  
NOTICE UNDER SUB-SECTION (2) OF SECTION 15 OF THE ELECTRICITY ACT, 2003

1. The Person above-named, a company incorporated under the companies Act, 2013 (the applicant) has made an application under sub-section (1) of section 15 of the Electricity Act, 2003 for grant of category V License for Interstate Trading in Electricity in geographical region of India before the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission, New Delhi. The Necessary details in respect of the applicant are given hereunder:

(i) Share Capital

1. Authorized Share Capital	INR 2,00,00,000/-
2. Issued Share Capital	INR 2,00,00,000/-
3. Subscribed Share Capital	INR 2,00,00,000/-
4. Paid Up Share Capital	INR 2,00,00,000/-

(ii) Shareholding Pattern (Details of Shareholders)

Name of the Shareholder	Citizenship	Residential status	Type of Shares	No. of Shares	% age
NAGESWARAN MAGESWARAN	Indian	Resident	Equity	90,000	4.50%
SADHASIVAM VIGNESH	Indian	Resident	Equity	90,000	4.50%
GREENSURE POWER PRIVATE LIMITED	Indian	NA	Equity	20,000	1.00%
GREENSURE POWER PRIVATE LIMITED	Indian	NA	Compulsory Convertible Preference Shares	18,00,000	90%

(iii) Financial and Technical Strength — GREENSURE team has extensive experience in power trading, power operations, and regulatory compliance, and meets all requisite financial criteria to operate power trading activities in accordance with CEREC norms.

(iv) Management Profile of applicant including details of experiences of the applicant and/or the person on the management of the applicant in generation, transmission, distribution and trading of electricity or similar activity.

a. Mr. Mageswaran N - Director is an enterprising leader with an MBA in Marketing and a B.Tech in Energy & Environmental Engineering from TNAU, Coimbatore. With 12+ years of experience, he specializes in renewable power, open access power facilitation, solar rooftop solutions, captive power, and regulatory compliance. He has worked across major DISCOMs in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra, and manages over 750 MW of renewable energy projects under Open Access in India.

b. Mr. Vignesh Sadhasivam - Director is a young entrepreneur with an MBA in Marketing and a B.Tech in Energy & Environmental Engineering from TNAU, Coimbatore, giving him strong expertise in power marketing and the renewable energy sector. With over 10+ years of experience in Business Development and Finance, he is proficient in renewable power, open access facilitation, solar rooftop solutions, contractual negotiations, captive power, and regulatory and policy frameworks of electricity boards.

(v) Volume of electricity intended to be traded during the first year after grant of license and future plans of the applicant to expand volume of trading - GREENSURE aims to commence inter-state/intra-state trading operations in India by tying up contracts of expected 200 MU per year during its first year and is expected to increase marginally at 10% per annum over the subsequent 5 years.

(vi) Geographical area within which the applicant will undertake trading in electricity - All India and the area as may be permitted under the provisions of the Electricity Act, 2003 and relevant regulations.

(vii) Net worth as on 31<sup>st</sup> March of three consecutive years immediately preceding the year of application or for lesser period as may be applicable and on the date of the special balance sheet accompanying the application-

As per Special Balance sheet dated 15.12.2025	As on 31.03.2025	
Net Worth	Rs. 2,00,12,580/-	NA

(viii) Year-wise current ratio and liquidity ratio of the applicant for three preceding the year in which the application is made, or for such lesser period as may be applicable and on the date of the special balance sheet accompanying the application:

As per Special Balance sheet dated 15.12.2025	As on 31.03.2025	
Current Ratio	6254.93:1	NA
Liquidity Ratio	6254.93:1	NA

(ix) GREENSURE is authorized to undertake trading in electricity under the MoA in the main object are To establish and Carry on the business of trading in electricity and act as a trader in sale and purchase of electricity and electrical energy in any form and in any market including power exchange and derivative market and by any process and in any fuel, derivative and enter into demand side management contracts energy Conversion contracts including energy performance contract, megawatt contract enter into contract for banking of electricity or any other contract and to operate as an electricity as an energy trading company and to get registered with appropriate agency in accordance with the electricity act, 2003 or any other act regulations/rules framed therein, policy, guidelines laid down by the central government/state government or any nodal agency from time to time or any statutory modification or re-enactment thereof and do all act and things necessary or required for doing aforesaid business, including providing advisory and consultancy in issue related energy and trading of energy  
To generate electrical power by wind power by converting wind energy into a useful form of energy using wind turbines and also by conventional, non-conventional, thermal, solar, hydel, and tidal waves, to develop and accumulate electrical power at the place or places contemplated by the licenses obtained from government and transmit, trade, distribute and supply of power.

(x) Details of cases, if any, where the applicant or any of its associates, or partner, or promoters, or directors has been declared insolvent and has not been discharged - None.

(xi) Details of cases, if any, in which the Applicant or any of its Associates or partners or Promoters or Directors has been convicted of an offence involving moral turpitude, fraud or any economic offence during the previous three years preceding the year of making the application and the year of making the applicant and the date of release of the above person from imprisonment, if any, consequent to such conviction - None

(xii) Whether the Applicant or any of its Associates, or partners or promoters, or Directors was ever refused license, and if so the detailed particular of the application, date of making application date of order refusing license and reasons for such refusal - NO

(xiii) Whether the Applicant has been granted a license for transmission of electricity - NO

(xiv) Whether an order cancelling the license of the Applicant, or any of its Associates, or Partners, or promoters, or Directors has been passed by the Commission - NO

(xv) Whether the Applicant or any of its Associates, or partners, or promoters or Directors ever found guilty in any proceedings for contravention non-compliance of any of the provisions of the Act or the rules or the regulations made thereunder or an order made by the Appropriate Commission, during the year of making the application or five years immediately preceding that year? - NO

2. The application made and other documents filed before the Commission are available for inspection by any person with Mr. Vignesh Sadhasivam, No 5/2, Kay Arr Trump, 102, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Eagles St, CMP Centre And School, Bangalore, Bangalore North, Karnataka, India, 560025. Mobile: +91 7349264332, E-Mail: accounts@greensure.com

3. The application made and other documents filed before the Commission have been posted on [www.greensure.com](http://www.greensure.com)

4. Objection and suggestion, if any, on the Application made before the commission may sent to the Secretary, Central Electricity Regulatory Commission 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Floors, Tower 8, World Trade Centre, Naurusji Nagar, New Delhi- 110029. E-mail: secy@cerind.gov.in within 30 days of publication of this notice with a copy to the applicant.

5. No objections or suggestions shall be considered by the commission if received after expiry of 30 days of publication of this notice.

Place: Bengaluru  
Date: 27.12.2025

Mr. Vignesh Sadhasivam  
(Director)  
DIN: 0766510

Ahmedabad

## 2025 Her Year

Sree Charani's ice-cool control. Sheetal Devi's grit. Divya Deshmukh unleashing gambits. In 2025, India's sportswomen didn't just compete — they conquered. From Unnati Hooda & Tanvi Sharma ushering in a new era in badminton to the emergence of another 'Phogat' — Suruchi — this time on the shooting range; Ankita Bhakat rattling Korean archery dynasty, Preeti Pawar's power in the ring, or Antim Panghal reminding she still owns the mat. Express Sports dives deep into the rise of 'Gen She'.

# FASTEST TRIGGER FIRST

Behind pistol shooter Suruchi Phogat's rise as India's next Olympic medal hope, a 'Chinese shooting style'



Suruchi Phogat trains at the make shift range that her family built for her in the backyard of their home in Sasroli village, Jhajjar. ANIL SHARMA

Mihir Vasavda

Mumbai, December 26

AROUND INDIA'S shooting ranges, there's been a growing buzz this year about a 'Chinese style' teenage shooter. It's a nod not just to her performances — though they have been spectacular — but to a philosophy: fast, aggressive and unflinchingly clinical; the hallmark of China's shooting dominance.

At the center of this buzz is Suruchi Phogat, the 19-year-old whose ascent has been so rapid that it has left even seasoned observers scrambling for comparisons: a hat-trick of World Cup gold medals, a junior world record, and climbing to the top of the world rankings before ending the year at number 2.

But she's been turning heads not just because she wins — India has seen many wonderkids, Saurabh Chaudhary and Manu Bhaker to name a couple. But it's because of how she does it: with speed, composure, and a striking immunity to pressure.

In a sport where patience is often preached as gospel, Suruchi operates on a different rhythm. A Pant in the sport of Pujaras. Many elite shooters favour a long, deliberate aim, holding the pistol steady for extended seconds as they wait for the perfect sight picture. The risk, coaches warn, is 'muscle creep' — the subtle tremors that build as muscles fatigue.

Suruchi avoids that trap entirely. She typically releases her shot within six to eight seconds of raising the pistol, a quick-release approach that limits the impact of heart-rate fluctuations and visual strain, according to her coach Suresh Singh.

"It looks rushed if you're not used to it," says Suresh, who also coached Manu Bhaker in her early days. "But it's actually very efficient and helpful. If you shoot fast, there's no time for doubt."

Suresh says he got this idea after watching pistol shooter Anish Bhanwala around three years ago. The 2025 World Championship silver medallist, Suresh observed, shot five times in four seconds in the rapid fire event. "In contrast, 10m pistol shooters sometimes took up to one minute for one shot. The more you think, the higher are chances of the mind getting muddled. *Sochega toh gadbad karega baccha* (the more you think, the greater the chance of a mistake)," he says.

Suruchi was still a rookie when Suresh watched Bhanwala and decided to teach the then 16-year-old to shoot fast. She turned out faster than he anticipated. Shooters get 75 minutes to complete 60 shots during the qualification round. Suruchi needs just 35 or 40 minutes to complete her match, Suresh says. "And her scores aren't impacted. She isn't rushing into the shots at any moment," he says.

That efficiency is paired with what may be her most lethal attribute: recovery. In pistol shooting, a single poor shot can derail an entire final, triggering panic. Suruchi, however, treats low scores as statistical noise. "She doesn't get disturbed, doesn't take much tension. She thinks, 'If I have made a mistake, I only can amend it,'" Suresh says.

At the ISSF World Cup Final in Doha, she opened one series with an uncharacteristic 8.8 — normally the kind of score that invites

panic. Instead, her next four shots were all above 10.5, capped by a flawless 10.9. The group, as shooters say, held tight.

### Wrestling's impact

Coaches often trace that stability back to an unlikely source: wrestling. Before she ever picked up a pistol, Suruchi was on the mat, doing what Phogats (no relation to the wrestler sisters) have earned fame for

While most teenagers would be thrilled just to make a senior final, she appeared allergic to anything but the top step of the podium.

Her senior debut in Buenos Aires was meant to be a learning experience. Instead, it became a statement of intent. She shot 244.6 in the final to claim gold, announcing herself not as a prospect, but as a contender.

In Lima, she proved the performance was no beginner's luck, edging out double Olympic medalist Manu Bhaker for her second consecutive gold.

Then came Munich — the self-styled 'Mecca of Shooting' — where history weighs heavily on every competitor. In a final that tested composure as much as technique, Suruchi com-

pleted a golden hat-trick, beating France's Camille Jedrzejewski by a razor-thin 0.2 points.

If the early season was about winning, the year's closing act was about legacy. At the ISSF World Cup Final in Doha this December, the field was stacked: Paris Olympic champion Oh Ye-jin, former world number ones, and veterans who had seen every imaginable scenario play out on the range. Suruchi started slowly, trailing in the early series. For many, that would have been the beginning of the end. Instead, it was familiar territory for her.

Shot by shot, she reeled the leaders back in, her tempo unchanged, expressions unreadable. When the final shot rang out, the scoreboard told the story: 245.1. Not only was it her fourth gold of the year, it was a Junior World Record, eclipsing the mark held by Manu Bhaker since 2019.

"Just pick up the pistol and shoot," Suruchi had said after the gold in Munich. "I don't think too much about the final; I just stick to the process."

For now, that process seems unstoppable. And as her quick shots echo across ranges from Delhi to Doha, the whispers grow louder. Chinese style, they say. Only this time, it's Indian.



### SURUCHI'S FILE

**GOLDEN HAT-TRICK WORLD CUP, BUENOS AIRES** Gold medal on debut  
**SCORE:** 244.6

**WORLD CUP, LIMA** Gold medal, pips Manu Bhaker  
**SCORE:** 243.6

**WORLD CUP, MUNICH** Gold medal, completes hat-

trick  
**SCORE:** 241.9  
Eclipsing Manu's six-year junior world record

**WORLD CUP FINAL, DOHA** Gold medal, sets junior world record  
**SCORE:** 245.1

Suruchi Phogat also won the gold at the National Games.



SURESH SINGH  
SURUCHI'S COACH

"She doesn't get disturbed, doesn't take much tension. She thinks, 'If I have made a mistake, I only can amend it'... She isn't rushing into shots at any moment."

NIHAL KOSHIE

### SEARCHING FOR A SOLUTION

## AIFF's proposed ISL revival plan: Rs 1cr fee, promotion and relegation

Mihir Vasavda

Mumbai, December 26

THE ALL India Football Federation (AIFF) presented a 20-year plan to the Indian Super League clubs on Friday in which it would own and operate the top-division, which would run from a June to May cycle, and share half of the central revenue equally among the participating teams.

The governing body's proposal comes days after it rejected the clubs' blueprint, where they recommended to own the league.

The latest suggestion comes following a meeting of the committee in charge to come up with a solution to kick-start India's stalled domestic season — comprising AIFF and ISL club officials — on Friday.

Mandar Tamhane, the chief executive of John Abraham-owned NorthEast United, said



The clubs and the AIFF will meet again in New Delhi on Monday.

the AIFF's proposal laid a 'solid foundation' for further talks. The clubs and the federation will meet again in New Delhi on Monday, December 29.

"What they have proposed is something the clubs will now

discuss internally. Following that, we will get back to the AIFF to fine tune the proposal. There will be a lot of discussions, but prima-facie this lays solid foundation to build something concrete," Tamhane told *The Indian Express*.

### Revenue sharing

The federation, in its suggestion, said they would keep 10 per cent of the total revenue share — down from the 14 per cent proposed by the Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL) in their plan to renew the deal. Since the ISL came into existence in 2014, it was owned and operated by the FSDL, a Reliance Industries subsidiary. Their deal with the AIFF expired on December 8 and did not submit an official bid when the AIFF floated a tender to find a commercial partner.

Under their plan, the AIFF

said the first season of the renewed ISL would run with an operational budget of Rs 70 crore. Every club, it added, would pay a 'standard participation fee' of Rs 1 crore annually. This amount, the federation added, would be 'reimbursed' from the central revenue pool.

The league's governance, it said, would be handled by a board with limited autonomy, while AIFF would retain final financial control. The structure also preserves promotion and relegation to protect sporting merit.

However, concerns remain over costs, player salary caps, investment security, and the continued uncertainty around the ISL 2025-26 start date. There are concerns also over broadcast partners and quality, given that Star Sports was a co-owner of the ISL until the agreement expired.

## Goutham, 15-year-old International Master, stuns GMs at world rapid chess championship

Amit Kamath

Mumbai, December 26

ON A day when all of India's golden generation of chess stars were in action on day 1 of the World Rapid and Blitz, it was an International Master from Kerala's Trivandrum, Goutham Krishna H, who made heads turn with some big conquests in Doha.

Aged just 15, Goutham is ranked 80th among Indians — not to mention 1,204th in the world — in the FIDE list with a rating of 2,433 (and rapid rating of 2,392), but that didn't prevent him from defeating strong grandmasters like Aleksandar Indjic, Aravindh Chithambaram VR and Teimour Radjabov and holding a speed demon like Alexander Grischuk to a draw. At the time of going to press, Goutham was locked in battle with Dutch GM Anish Giri in the final game of the day.

Goutham made heads turn

on day 1 of the Rapid and Blitz in Doha with some of his unconventional moves: like playing 1.b3 with white (the Nimzowitsch-Larsen Attack) against Azerbaijan's Teimour Radjabov before eliciting a resignation in 33 moves or playing a rare 1...b6 with black (Owen Defence) against Grischuk before holding the former three-time World Blitz Champion to a draw.

Those two opening moves typified the kind of player Goutham is, say both his current coach Srinath Narayanan and his first coach and current mentor Sreejith GS.

Srinath started working with him just after he stopped training Arjun Erigaisi exclusively a couple of years back.

"When I started training Goutham, I noticed that he was very sharp and very fast. That was one of his biggest strengths. He was around 2,200 or 2,250 at that time. Definitely



International Master Goutham Krishna H is from Thiruvananthapuram.

underrated. He was quite raw in terms of someone who was very talented but hadn't had a lot of formal training. His play was largely natural. Not a lot of openings work or formal knowledge. Not a lot of theoretical positions that he was familiar with. But he had that sense and intuition," Srinath told *The Indian Express*.

Srinath points out how while Goutham's classical play requires improvement, his

Unlike other top Indian players, Goutham still has to balance chess with academics.

strengths like intuition are best suited for rapid play.

"His strengths work really well in the shorter formats. In classical, calculation is more relevant. You have to calculate and go deeper into the position. Whereas in rapid, you just don't have as much time to calculate. You have to be good at making fast, on-the-go decisions," Srinath added.

Unlike other top Indian players, Goutham still has to balance chess with academics. Right after he returns from Doha, he will have to appear for the Kerala Pre-Model exam (prelim exam before the CBSE Boards).

A turn of fortune, a stroke of luck or a quirk of fate which could have altered the sporting path of teams and individuals this year.

### 2025 Reimagined: WHAT IF...

#### Kipyegon broke the 4-minute mile barrier



Faith Kipyegon. REUTERS

THREE CONSECUTIVE Olympic gold medals in the 1,500 metres cemented her legendary status, but Kenya's Faith Kipyegon had the chance to do what no woman had done before — run the mile in less than four minutes. Dedicated pace makers, an aerodynamic suit with 3D-printed aeronodes to reduce wind resistance, new super spikes, a head band to reduce drag — Nike had kitted up Kipyegon to help her run faster than she ever had. She had trained with the pacemakers for months to ensure she got the best-possible advantage.

But she had to run nearly eight seconds faster than her previous best to emulate Roger Bannister, who became the first man to run a four-minute mile. However, it was not to be even for one of the greatest distance runners. In June, at the Stade Charléty in Paris, Kipyegon clocked 4:06.42, faster than her official world record of 4:07.64 but the barrier-breaking run remained a dream.

However, going six seconds faster will be a monumental achievement for her or anyone else. There's no doubting her spirit, fortitude and endurance but skeptics would have pointed to the assistance she got in a controlled race environment. The naysayers would have had a point.

In 2019, Kenya's Eliud Kipchoge became the first man to break the two-hour barrier in the marathon in Vienna with the help of dedicated pace makers and the latest version of Nike's shoes. His time of 1:59:40.2 was just under the two-hour mark but is not an official record. Yet after six years, Kipchoge is the only man to ever do so. His World Athletics recognised fastest time in the marathon is 2:01:09, only bettered by Kelvin Kiptum's 2:00:35. Kiptum died in a car crash and Kipchoge is in his twilight years. Kipchoge wouldn't have been a lesser athlete if he had missed the mark. Nor is Kipyegon.

## Nadal rules out comeback, says tennis 'chapter is closed for me'



Rafael Nadal with his son during his felicitation at this year's French Open. REUTERS

Express News Service  
Mumbai, December 26

RAFAEL NADAL may have been among the top 10 highest ranked men's tennis players in the world less than two years ago but the Spanish great has reiterated that he has very much adjusted to retired life, and a return to the sport as a player is not something that even crosses his mind. The 39-year-old ended his illustrious playing career on November 19, 2024 in the Davis Cup Finals.

"I don't live thinking that I am or was a tennis player. That chapter is closed. Obviously, I am here because of that, not because I did something else. That's clear, so it will always be there in the memory. But I don't live my day-to-day life thinking about tennis, beyond specific moments when I feel like watching something or, of course, at the Academy, where I'm closer to it on a daily basis, but from a completely different perspective," Nadal is quoted as saying by AS.

The 22-time Grand Slam winner was known for meticulously sticking to routine and his discipline throughout his career. He now says that he has lost that routine and once that happens, it is impossible to get back to it. Nadal further said that he had said the same to Marc Lopez, the former Spanish tennis player who teamed up with him in doubles a number of times and was part of his last coaching team.

"My life is a bit more random than before. Before, my work was A, B, C: get up at a certain time, train, do physical work. Everything was practically the same every day. Now I work on my own things. I have meetings many mornings, work trips, and I usually try to keep afternoons free to be with my family.

"I wasn't healthy anymore. Thankfully, that chapter is completely closed, and well closed. I've never been one of those people who thinks "if only I could..." I told Marc Lopez that when he was retired and we trained, he thought that if he came back, maybe he could still do something. And I told him, "That chapter is closed, my friend." Now the body gives what it gives, and I think the mind does too. There comes a moment, once you've stopped the routine, when you can't latch back on," said Nadal.

## INDIA VS SRI LANKA, 3RD T20I

# Renuka, Shafali heroics guide India to easy win, series victory

Medium pacer's four-for and opener's unbeaten 79 in the run chase help hosts to take unassailable 3-0 lead

Shankar Narayan  
Mumbai, December 26

A COUPLE of months ago, Shafali Verma was recalled to Team India for the ODI World Cup knockouts after an injury to Pratika Rawal. Since returning to the side after the lucky break, the 21-year-old has barely put a foot wrong and continues to influence games.

It was no different on Friday in the third T20I against Sri Lanka at the Greenfield Stadium in Thiruvananthapuram, where her sparkling unbeaten knock of 79 runs off 42 balls played a decisive role in helping the hosts clinch an eight-wicket win and seal the series 3-0 with two matches to go.

Chasing a sub-par 113 for a series victory, Shafali got off the blocks in the opening over, taking 14 runs off Malsha Shehani and backed that with 10 runs in the third over, bowled by Nimesha Madushani, to take India to 26/0.

At the other end, it seemed like Smriti Mandhana was batting on a completely different surface, struggling to get going and eventually falling for a run, lbw to Kaveesha Dilhari. Her dismissal for the third lowest score this series, however, had no effect on Verma. The right-hander, who had made an unbeaten 69 in the second T20I, continued to toy with the Sri Lankan attack. She took a liking for Madushani, smashing her for 19 runs in her second over to take India to 46/0 after five overs.

She secured her fifty off 24 balls in the sixth over and ensured that India had erased nearly half the score, ending the power play at 55/1. Sri Lanka were in dire need of more than a couple of wickets to stay in the contest, and while Dilhari claimed her second wicket of the evening, dismissing Rodrigues, bowled for nine runs, the bare nature of the pitch, with hardly any help for pace or spin, meant that it had to take something truly spectacular to take the game close.

Verma, in the company of captain Harmanpreet Kaur, ensured that would not happen, closing out the match with a boundary off Shehani and putting on 48 runs off 32 balls for the third wicket. The victory carried added significance for Harmanpreet as it was her 77th T20I win, going past former Australian captain Meg Lanning, who had 76 wins in 100 matches, to become the most successful skipper in women's T20Is.

### Shining on return

Medium pacer Renuka Singh Thakur did the groundwork in for her first match of the series, she produced two incisive spells to give India the upper hand. Her figures of 4/21 from four overs restricted Sri Lanka to 112/7. The pacer was supported by Deepti Sharma, who returned after recovering from an illness, and grabbed three wickets for 18 runs in her four overs.

Put into bat for the third match in succession, Sri Lanka



Shafali Verma's 42-ball 79 allowed India to stroll to victory over Sri Lanka on Friday. CREIMAS FOR BCCI

### Verma, who had made an unbeaten 69 in the second T20I, continued to toy with the Sri Lankan attack.

made a brisk start through Hasini Perera, who replaced Vishmi Gunaratne at the top of the order with three boundaries in the first three overs. At the other end, however, captain Chamari Athapaththu struggled to settle and was unable to match her partner's momentum. Deepti struck in the fifth over, dismissing Athapaththu for three, caught by her

counterpart Harmanpreet at mid-on.

Renuka dented the innings further, removing Perera and Harshitha Samarawickrama in the sixth over to leave the visitors in the doldrums at 32/3 after six overs. Iimesha Dulani and Dilhari began a steady recovery, with the former taking 13 runs off the 13th over bowled by Kranti Gaud. Recognising the growing partnership, Harmanpreet reintroduced Deepti. The move paid off as she struck in the 14th over, dismissing Dilhari for 20 to break the stand and claim her 150th T20I wicket.

Renuka continued to derail the Sri Lanka innings, removing Dulani for 27, caught by Ro-

drigues at point to claim her fourth wicket of the innings. Unlike at Vizag, the surface at Thiruvananthapuram did not demand Harmanpreet to use the spinners as frequently as she may have wanted to. As a result, Harmanpreet was able to bring her pacers into the game a lot more, which meant Sree Charani, who was the best bowler in the second match, ended up bowling only one over while India's pacers played a far more prominent role in shaping the outcome.

**BRIEF SCORES:** Sri Lanka 112/7 in 20 overs (Dulani 27; Renuka 4/21, Deepti 3/18) lost to India 115/2 in 13.2 overs (Verma 79 not out; Dilhari 2/18) by eight wickets.

## • BRIEFLY



A mural in Diogo Jota's memory outside Anfield. REUTERS

## Jota's sons will join mascots before Liverpool-Wolves game

DIOGO JOTA'S two sons will join the mascots at Anfield when Liverpool face Wolverhampton Wanderers in the Premier League on Saturday, the club confirmed on Friday. Portuguese forward Jota, who played for both Premier League clubs, died in a car crash alongside his younger brother in July in northwestern Spain. Saturday's match marks the first time Liverpool and Wolves have met since Jota's death. Liverpool also permanently retired his jersey number 20 following his death. REUTERS

## Shuttlers Surya, Shruti reach nationals semis

PRODUCING MAJOR upsets, local favourite Surya Charishma Tamiri and seasoned campaigner Shruti Mundada ousted the top two seeds -- Unnati Hooda and Anupama Upadhyaya -- in straight games to advance to the women's singles semifinals of the Senior National Badminton Championships. Surya was in complete control against top seed Unnati, sealing a 21-12, 21-15 win in 36 minutes. PTI

## Court restores Jaiveer Singh as EFI Sec Gen

A DELHI court has restored the position of Col (ret'd) Jaiveer Singh as Secretary General of the Equestrian Federation of India (EFI), holding his suspension by the federation's Executive Committee illegal and restored his authority over the federation's official communications and bank accounts. Singh, a former Army officer, was elected Secretary General of the EFI in 2019. PTI

## Hope to inspire kids: Soorma head coach

PHILIPPE GOLDBERG, head coach of Soorma Hockey Club, said that he hopes his team inspires Indian youth to take up hockey ahead of the Hockey India League. "We have big names and a lot of talent. The focus is on building something together, on and off the field, and playing as one unit," he said at Soorma's jersey unveiling event. "If we do that, we can inspire young kids in India through the way we play." ENS

## Kho Kho junior nationals to begin this week

AROUND 35 boys and as many girls teams will compete in the 44th Junior National Kho Kho Championship to be held in Bengaluru from December 31 to January 4. Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, Puducherry, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Delhi are the Union Territories participating in the Championship. The teams have been divided into eight groups each. PTI

## Havertz return a boost for Arsenal, says Arteta

ARSENAL FORWARD Kai Havertz, out since August with a knee injury, is close to playing again after returning to training this week, manager Mikel Arteta said. The Premier League leaders, who host Brighton & Hove Albion on Saturday, posted a video of the German striker training on Tuesday. "He's a player that we missed a lot, a player that brings the team into a different dimension. So, I'm really happy to have him back," Arteta told reporters. REUTERS

## Suraj sweeps junior, senior national titles

MADHYA PRADESH'S Suraj Sharma delivered a golden double, sweeping both the senior and junior men's titles in the 25m rapid fire pistol at the National Shooting Championships. Suraj began the senior final in dominant fashion, hitting 19 of his first 20 targets, and went on to close the contest with 31 hits, finishing three clear of defending champion Vijayveer Sidhu of Punjab, who settled for the silver. PTI

# Ashes: Batters run for cover on manic day at MCG

Reuters  
Melbourne, December 26

AUSTRALIA FINISHED marginally on top at the end of a chaotic opening day of the fourth Ashes test after an extraordinary 20 wickets fell in front of a record crowd at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Friday.

Australia nightwatchman Scott Boland was four not out with Travis Head yet to score as the hosts went to stumps at four for no loss in their second innings, carrying a 46-run lead over England.

With England bowled out for 110 in reply to Australia's first innings 152, it was the highest number of wickets in a single day at the MCG since a record 25 fell in the 1902 Ashes.

Joshi Tongue took a career-best 5-45 to skittle Australia on the grassy pitch after England captain Ben Stokes won the



Michel Nesper (L) took four wickets and also top scored for Australia. AP

toss and elected to field in the traditional Boxing Day test.

But the tourists' batters then suffered a more egregious collapse.

The batting carnage unfolded in front of a crowd of 94,199, eclipsing the stadium's previous record of 93,013 for a day of cricket at the 2015 World

### Cup final.

England, who have already lost the series after three straight defeats, came into the match under a cloud following reports that some players had taken a "stag party" attitude to a trip to Noosa between the second and third tests.

But they would have been

well pleased with their work in the field early on, rattling through Australia in 45.2 overs to bring tea early.

The alarm bells were soon ringing, however, as their top order collapsed before they were bowled out in 29.5 overs.

Former England captain Michael Vaughan labelled the pitch a "shocker" but Australia seamer Michael Neser, who led his team's bowling with 4-45 and batting with 35, had no complaints.

Neser's knock was 33 runs better than England opener Ben Duckett, who was caught for two with a loose drive at Mitchell Starc, continuing his miserable series.

New number three Jacob Bethell, the replacement for the dropped Ollie Pope, managed only one before Neser had him caught behind, while opener Zak Crawley edged Starc to Steve Smith in the slips to be

out for five.

Root was then out for a 15-ball duck, his second of the series, nicking Neser behind.

Harry Brook and Stokes dug in for a 50-run partnership to trim the deficit to 86 runs but England were then blown out of the water by a triple-strike from Boland.

The pacer took 3-11 as he trapped Brook lbw for 41, bowled Jamie Smith through the gate for two and had all-rounder Will Jacks caught behind for five.

Stokes was unable to rescue England, falling for 16 with an edge off Neser to Smith at first slip. Gus Atkinson and Tongue's 10th-wicket stand of 19 runs appeared heroic after what had gone on before.

**BRIEF SCORES:** Australia 152 all out (Neser 35; Tongue 5/45, Atkinson 2/28) & 4/0 lead England 110 all out (Brook 41; Neser 4/45, Boland 3/30) by 46 runs.

## • VIJAY HAZARE TROPHY

# Kohli, Pant show their class on a two-paced pitch

Venkata Krishna B  
Bengaluru, December 26

THE ANIMATED celebration including a shush towards the Gujarat dressing room from Virat Kohli said it all.

Having been rather subdued for the majority of his two outings in the Vijay Hazare Trophy, as the contest between Delhi and Gujarat became too close to call on a two-paced pitch, the uber competitiveness in him came to the forefront. The run-out of Gujarat's No.9 Amit Desai after a series of abysmal and comical fielding errors made Kohli bellow. It resounded at the Centre of Excellence facility.

And seven runs later as he pounced Ravi Bishnoi's catch, a nervy seven-run win was sealed by Delhi to make it two wins out of two. On a pitch where no team was able to seize control, and batsmen except for Rishabh Pant struggled, Kohli's 61-ball 77 deserved a separate pedestal for its class.

Like in the opening round, Kohli walked in early, this time it was IPL star Priyansh Arya who departed early. Gujarat came prepared for Kohli, who



Virat Kohli hit a 61-ball 77 against Gujarat in Bengaluru on Friday. PTI

had shown he meant business in the first game against Andhra.

With the ball seaming around, wicketkeeper Urvil Patel stood up to the stumps to seamers Arsan Nagwaswalla and Chintan Gaja. But Kohli didn't worry. He got going by lofting Gaja over mid-on and in his next over sent the ball over the boundary ropes in the same area. For a batsman, who was compact at the start right through his ODI career, since the South Africa series a differ-

ent Kohli has emerged — one who prefers to slip into top gear and maximise the power play restrictions. On Friday off the first 16 deliveries he faced, Kohli had 6 boundaries and a six. There were lofted drives and a couple of flicks, with his wrists coming into play. While Kohli effortlessly made runs, at the other end it was a real struggle for the likes of Arpit Rana and Nitish Rana. The dominance of Kohli was such that he brought up his fifty from 29 balls with 10 bound-

aries and a six.

As Delhi lost wickets and the spinners came on, Kohli would slow down with left-arm spinner Vishal Jayswal posing a few questions. The spinner would eventually succeed, by getting Kohli stumped. From there on, Delhi got to 254/9 thanks to Pant.

Batting at No.5, Pant couldn't find the fluency like Kohli, but knew how to get the job done on the surface. He quickly figured the key to make runs here would be to stay as long as possible. But, running out of partners at the other end, Pant would take his own calculative risks. With Bishnoi, Desai and Jayswal offering favourable match-ups, he would score 61 off his 70 off the spinners in a knock that included eight boundaries and two sixes. Like Kohli's, this was an innings of the highest calibre, where he didn't do anything silly.

With 255 to defend, Delhi didn't get the early wickets as their pace pack that included Ishant Sharma, Navdeep Saini, Simarjeet Singh and Prince Yadav were unlucky. There were two dropped catches and sloppy fielding efforts to over-

come but they bowled their hearts out. They had to wait till the 12th over for the first breakthrough (Urvil Patel) and another 12 more to remove Aarya Desai as Gujarat were 121/2 in 25 overs and cruising to the target. The script would change from there on. Saini, Ishant and Rana would make inroads in Gujarat's middle-order with three timely strikes that reduced them to 145/5. And more importantly in those 10 overs, they gave away only 20 runs.

Saurav Chauhan, then in the company of Jayswal, dragged Gujarat back into the game with a 69-run stand off 44 deliveries, where they took apart Delhi's attack. But when Simarjeet got Chauhan to nick one to Pant, Delhi got their noses in front again as Jayswal also followed soon. After a cat-and-mouse contest involving the tail-enders, Kohli's catch sealed the contest.

**BRIEF SCORES:** Delhi 254/9 in 50 overs (Virat Kohli 77, Rishabh Pant 70; Vishal Jayswal 4/42) beat Gujarat 247 all out in 47.4 overs (Aarya Desai 57, Saurav Chauhan 49; Prince Yadav 3/37) by seven runs.

# Despite Rohit's first-ball duck, Mumbai beat Uttarakhand

Express News Service  
Mumbai, December 26

ROHIT SHARMA experienced the other spectrum of life on Friday after he was dismissed for a first-ball duck in the Vijay Hazare Trophy Group C match against Uttarakhand at the Saiwansi Stadium in Jaipur. His team, however, went on to win the match by 51 runs and maintain their undefeated start to the tournament. Wicketkeeper-batter Hardik Tamore top-scored for Mumbai, with an unbeaten 93 off 82 balls. The brother duo of Sarfaraz Khan and Musheer Khan made identical scores of 55, and late cameos from Shams Mulani (48 off 35 balls) and Shardul Thakur (29 off 21 balls) took Mumbai to 331/7 in 50 overs.

Opening batter Yuvraj Chaudhary led Uttarakhand's chase, and was supported by J Suchith. But none of the other batters offered the requisite support.

**BRIEF SCORES:** Mumbai 331/7 in 50 overs (Tamore 93 not out, Sarfaraz Khan 55; Bora 3/74) beat Uttarakhand 280/9 in 50 overs (Yuvraj 96, Suchith 51;



Rohit Sharma was out first ball on Friday. ROHIT PARAS JAIN

Shardul 2/28) by 51 runs.

### Rinku stars in UP win

Centuries from Aryan Juyal and Rinku Singh, and a half-century from Dhruv Jurel helped Uttar Pradesh clinch a commanding 227-run win over Chandigarh in a Group B match at the Sanosara Cricket Ground 'A' in Rajkot. Rinku, who walked out to bat at number five, made an unbeaten 60-ball 106 with 11 fours and four sixes, three of the maximums coming on the leg-side.

**BRIEF SCORES:** Uttar Pradesh 367/4 in 50 overs (Juyal 134, Rinku 106) beat Chandigarh 140 in 29.3 overs (Ansar 4/29,

Nigam 2/35) by 227 runs.

### Shorey equals record

Vidarbha batter Dhruv Shorey equalled the record for the most consecutive hundreds in List A cricket, scoring his fifth century in a row in the Group B match against Hyderabad at the Sanosara Cricket Ground 'B' in Rajkot. His performance helped Vidarbha notch up 365/5 in 50 overs, and Hyderabad fell short by 89 runs.

**BRIEF SCORES:** Vidarbha 365/5 in 50 overs (Shorey 109, Mokhade 285/2 in 48.2 overs, Varun 85; Dubey 3/39) by 89 runs

**OTHER SCORES**  
**Group A:** In Ahmedabad: Kerala 284/7 in 50 overs lost to Karnataka 285/2 in 48.2 overs.

**Group B:** In Rajkot: Bengal 205 all out in 38.3 overs lost to Baroda 209/6 in 38.5 overs by four wickets.

**Group C:** In Jaipur: Chhattisgarh 253 all out in 48.4 overs lost to Punjab 254/1 in 42.1 overs by nine wickets.

**Group D:** In Hyderabad: Saurashtra 253 all out in 48.1 overs lost to Haryana 256/4 in 39 overs.