

PAGE 5
NATION

Karat seeks President's intervention in Akhlaq lynching case

PAGE 6
NATION

Nadda targets Himachal Congress Govt over funds

PAGE 9
GLOBAL

US lawmakers introduce resolution to end 50% tariffs on India

PAGE 10
SPORT

Shooting nationals: Raiza Dhillon wins double gold



AGENDA

THE LIONS OF LONGEWALA

PIONEER IN SHORT

FRESH UNREST IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh's interim Government, led by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, has ordered a nationwide security clampdown after fresh unrest erupted following the shooting of right-wing cultural group youth leader Sharif Osmann Hadi in Dhaka. Hadi, leader of Inqilab Mancha and an independent candidate in the February 12 general elections, was shot in the head at close range on Friday while launching his campaign in the Bijoyanagar area. Doctors say his condition remains critical, though stable, and he is on life support at a private hospital. Home Affairs Adviser Lt Gen (Retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury announced the launch of the second phase of "Operation Devil Hunt" to curb illegal arms and rising violence. A reward of Tk 50 lakh has been announced for information leading to the arrest of suspect Faisal Karim Masud, identified as one of three motorcycle-borne assailants. Yunus ordered a manhunt and met Hadi's family, pledging full support. Political parties and student groups condemned the attack, warning against a return of violence ahead of the elections.

UK HONOURS DADABHAI NAOJI

The House of Lords in London hosted a special reception to mark the 200th birth anniversary of Dadabhai Naoroji, the nationalist leader remembered as the "grand old man of India" and the first Indian elected to the British Parliament. Born in Mumbai in September 1825 to a Parsi family, Naoroji travelled to Britain in 1855 and went on to play a significant role in its political and intellectual life. The event was hosted by Lord Karan Bilmoria, the Parsi peer and founder of Cobra Beer, who highlighted Naoroji's pioneering journey as a businessman, academic and politician, and his historic election to Parliament in 1892. Indian High Commissioner to the UK Vikram Doraiswami reflected on Naoroji's enduring legacy and the outsized contribution of the Parsi community to public life in India and Britain. Former UK minister Sir Vince Cable recalled Naoroji's influential "drain theory", which exposed the economic costs of British colonial rule in India. The bicentenary event also featured an exhibition tracing key milestones of Naoroji's life and career.

DELHI FUELS HEALTH CRISIS

Delhi's prolonged pollution crisis is triggering a sharp rise in health problems, with hospitals reporting a 20-30 per cent increase in respiratory patients, including many first-time cases and young adults, doctors said. On Saturday, air quality worsened from "very poor" to "severe", with the Air Quality Index crossing 400, a level that affects even healthy individuals. At 4 pm, the 24-hour average AQI stood at 431, according to official data. Doctors across the city said outpatient departments and emergency rooms are seeing a surge in patients with breathlessness, chest tightness, wheeze and persistent cough. Pulmonologists warned that symptoms are more severe and prolonged this year, often requiring higher medication doses. Alarmingly, people with no prior respiratory illness are showing reduced oxygen levels and airway inflammation. Health experts attributed the spike to sustained exposure to toxic pollutants such as PM2.5, PM10, nitrogen oxides and ozone, which penetrate deep into the lungs and bloodstream. Vulnerable groups, including children, the elderly and diabetics, are most affected. Doctors have advised residents to limit outdoor activity, use N95 masks if necessary, and seek medical care for persistent symptoms.

Messi mania ends in mayhem

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata



Fans of Lionel Messi breaking past barriers during an event as part of G.O.A.T. India Tour 2025 at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Kirangan (VYBK) in Kolkata

A political free-for-all after chaos

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kolkata

As the Messi event turned into a mayhem, the TMC, the BJP, the Congress and the Left parties took the opportunity to settle their political scores.

The BJP demanded immediate resignation of Chief Minister Mamta Banerjee for "discrediting West Bengal before the world". While the Congress also attacked the TMC Government describing the episode as "terrible mismanagement and a mockery of law and order". The CPIM called it a "black day" for West Bengal.

The Congress, Left and others took the opportunity to settle their political scores. Union minister and senior BJP leader Sukanta Majumdar slammed the TMC and the State administration for the chaos. Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly, Suvidha Adhikari, launched a scathing attack on the State Government, alleging that ministers and leaders "clung to Messi like leeches", while football fans who paid thousands of rupees were left watching him on the giant screen for barely a few minutes.



Lionel Messi during an event as part of his G.O.A.T. India Tour 2025 at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Kirangan (VYBK) in Kolkata

PTI

crowd Messi and take selfies with him prevented the spectators from the gallery, who shelled out hefty amounts for the event, from having a proper view of the football star, and it infuriated them.

"Why should no action be taken against the organisers for this mess? Why was there no proper planning? Why did chaos break out? It forced Messi to leave the stadium and the chief minister of West Bengal could not attend and accord him a warm welcome on behalf of the people of the State," the TMC State general secretary said.

Union minister and senior BJP leader Sukanta Majumdar slammed the TMC and the State administration for the chaos. Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly, Suvidha Adhikari, launched a scathing attack on the State Government, alleging that ministers and leaders "clung to Messi like leeches", while football fans who paid thousands of rupees were left watching him on the giant screen for barely a few minutes.

CONTINUED ON ■ P4

Tax department targets bogus deductions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has stepped up its efforts to curb bogus deduction and exemption claims, nudging taxpayers to voluntarily correct their income tax returns before stricter action follows.

The Income Tax department has started sending SMS and email advisories to taxpayers for wrongful deduction claims related to unrecognised political parties or charitable institutions.

The department has come across cases of fake deduction claims filed under Section 80C of the Income Tax Act, which covers a series of investments, and even Section 80GGC, which relates to donations to Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPPs) or Charitable Institutions and reduced their tax obligations and have also claimed bogus refunds.

The CBDT said through data analysis it has observed that huge amount of bogus claims have been made on account of donation to Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPPs) or Charitable Institutions and reduced their tax obligations and have also claimed bogus refunds.

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BJP abuzz with speculation on possible leadership shift

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi/Bhopal/Lucknow



Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Winter session of Parliament, in New Delhi

PTI

Road, while additional police personnel were also seen in the residential area of Chouhan, who arrived at the residence late Friday night and left for Delhi on Saturday afternoon. Party sources said the sudden increase in security led to speculation in local political circles that Chouhan could soon be appointed as BJP president.

A party functionary confirmed both the development and that Chaudhary's name as the next Uttar Pradesh BJP president is likely to be announced on Sunday by the central election officer and Union Minister Piyush Goyal.

Sources said security was tightened around the Bhopal residence of Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Saturday, though officials said it could be part of a routine exercise following a periodic review. A makeshift tent was erected outside the main gate, and a number of barricades were placed along the busy Link

Road, while additional police personnel were also seen in the residential area of Chouhan, who arrived at the residence late Friday night and left for Delhi on Saturday afternoon. Party sources said the sudden increase in security led to speculation in local political circles that Chouhan could soon be appointed as BJP president.

Chaudhary submitted the papers to former Union minister and BJP State election officer Mahendra Nath Pandey and central election observer Vinod Tawde. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Deputy Chief Ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak and Jal Shakti Minister Rajnath Singh.

Chaudhary is a seven-time MP from the Maharaiganj parliamentary constituency. A member of the Kurmi caste, categorised as Other Backwards Classes (OBC), he is considered a trusted confidante of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

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3 held in ₹1.16 crore digital scam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

The Delhi Police has arrested three alleged members of a cyber fraud syndicate for duping an 82-year-old woman of ₹1.16 crore by placing her under digital arrest and coercing her to transfer money.

The victim is a resident of south Delhi. She was married to a Government employee who passed away, and has a daughter who lives abroad.

"She was intimidated after the accused impersonated law enforcement officials on April 25 and showed him a fake arrest order during a video call. Under sustained psychological pressure and the threat of legal action, the elderly woman was forced to go to the bank and transfer a total of ₹1.16 crore through RTGS," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Aditya Gautam said.

During the investigation, police found that a major

portion of the cheated amount—around ₹1.10 crore—was credited to a current account belonging to a Himachal Pradesh-based NGO. The account, however, was allegedly being operated by fraudsters from Patna in Bihar. The police said as many as 32 complaints have been registered against the same bank account on the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (NCCR), involving an overall fraud amount of approximately ₹24 crore.

Following technical analysis and financial trail examination, multiple raids were conducted in Himachal Pradesh and Bihar, leading to the arrest of three accused persons, they said. Those arrested are Prabhakar Kumar (27) from Nalanda district in Bihar, Rupesh Kumar Singh (37) from Bihar's Vaishali district and Dev Raj (46) from Sirmour district in Himachal Pradesh.

Out of the total defrauded

amount, ₹17 lakh was put on hold and returned to the victim, while efforts are underway to recover the remaining sum.

The police said Prabhakar Kumar installed a malicious APK file on the mobile phone of co-accused Dev Raj, enabling the activation of SIM cards linked to fraudulent bank accounts.

He allegedly remained in constant touch with cyber fraudsters through internet-based virtual numbers, received cash commissions, distributed proceeds among associates and earned a substantial share for his role. Rupesh Kumar Singh allegedly received the bank account kit through postal delivery and coordinated meetings of co-accused in Patna.

The police said he facilitated the execution of fraudulent transactions from a hotel, acted as a key mediator between the account holder and the fraudsters, and received a substantial

commission. Dev Raj, who runs an NGO in Himachal Pradesh, allegedly opened a current account in the name of the NGO in connivance with his father Ved Prakash, the authorised signatory. For easy money, they handed over the account to Rupesh Kumar in Bihar, they said.

Dev Raj allegedly shared internet banking credentials and OTPs, travelled to Patna to execute transactions and received commission from the fraud proceeds.

According to the police, the accused impersonated law enforcement agencies, placed the victim under "digital arrest", routed the cheated money through NGO and personal bank accounts, misused internet banking credentials and OTPs, and laundered the funds before distributing them as commission.

Further investigation is underway to identify other members of the syndicate and trace additional proceeds of crime.

NSUT holds third convocation ceremony with great splendour



Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena and Chief Minister Rekha Gupta attended the convocation

PANKAJ KUMAR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

inclusivity and environmental responsibility.

He observed that NSUT has established itself as an institution that prepares students not only for professional success, but also for nation-building and social transformation.

Saxena urged young graduates to align their professional futures with these objectives so as to ensure sustainable, balanced and equitable development for the country and the world.

Speaking on the occasion the chief minister said Netaji Subhas University of Technology (NSUT) is moving towards excellence, not only in academics but also in preparing students to serve society and the nation.

The Chief Minister said the university's progress report reflected sustained efforts to improve the quality of education and holistic training of students, including through its Centre of Excellence initiatives.

Addressing the convocation on the theme 'Engineering Education for Sustainable and Inclusive Development', Lt Governor Saxena emphasised the paramount importance of ecological balance and environmental sustainability in all developmental and progressive efforts. He stated that engineering today is not limited to technical proficiency alone, but also entails providing solutions grounded in sustainability,

India's freedom fighters has placed a responsibility on the present generation to decide the country's future direction, particularly as the country completes 78 years of independence.

Highlighting the role of technology and development in recent years, the chief minister said digital initiatives have transformed everyday life across social and economic sectors. She urged graduating students, especially engineers, to apply their knowledge and innovation to address long-standing urban and national challenges.

The chief minister further said that obtaining a degree should be seen as a milestone rather than a final destination, encouraging students to remain open to learning and new paths. She added that education and knowledge gained would remain valuable regardless of the field they choose to pursue.

Citing JK Rowling's story of persistence despite 12 rejections, Sood stressed that innovation begins not in a lab but in a "moment of courage" and the willingness to listen to one's inner voice. He then presented four key mantras for their careers, inspired by the Prime Minister: Quality, Scalability, Reliability, and Adaptability.

Murder accused held after absconding for 14 months

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

arrest since then. Proceedings to declare him a proclaimed offender had already been initiated by a court, police said.

The case relates to an incident on October 15, 2024, when Subhan and his associates allegedly opened fire at the residence of a man named Nasir. During the firing, two persons sustained bullet injuries, one of whom, Shahrukh, later succumbed to his injuries.

The accused, identified as Subhan Khan, was wanted in a murder case registered at Bhalswa Dairy police station in October 2024 and had been evading

case was registered under relevant sections of the BNS and the Arms Act. During the course of the investigation, four other accused, Shakeel, Ankit, Prince and Zuber, were arrested earlier, while Subhan remained at large, the police said.

The police on Friday laid a trap near the GT Road at Tikari Khurd bus stand after receiving information that the accused would arrive there to meet an associate.

The team apprehended Subhan around 3 pm, a senior police officer said.

"Initially, the accused tried to mislead the police by disclosing false identities, but during sustained questioning, he confessed to his role in the Bhalswa Dairy firing and murder case," the officer said.

Despite repeated notices and directives issued by the administration to halt construction, the villagers continued with unauthorised building activity in an attempt to gain undue benefit under the land acquisition and rehabilitation policy, police said.

Fake no-entry sticker racket busted in Delhi, 3 arrested

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

connected to another extortion syndicate.

Police said, Rinku Rana was running a well-organised network that facilitated the movement of commercial goods vehicles during restricted hours by selling fake 'marka' or stickers for ₹2,000 to ₹5,000 per vehicle every month. The stickers were falsely projected as authorisation to evade traffic challans.

During raids, the police recovered ₹31 lakh in cash, property documents worth several crores of rupees, over 500 fake stickers and six mobile phones.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
ASSAM INLAND WATER TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

E-Procurement Notice :: Request for Bids

Name of Project : Assam Inland Water Transport Project (AIWTP)

RFB Reference no: IN-IWT-527562-GO-RFB

Assignment Title: Supply, Installation, and Commissioning of Vessel Tracking, Communication and Support System (VTCSS) under Assam Inland Water Transport Project (AIWTP)

The Government of India has obtained financing from the World Bank towards cost of the Assam IWT Project. Under the project, State Project Director, Assam Inland Water Transport Development Society (AIWTP) invites Request for Bid through National Open Competitive bidding process from eligible bidders for the aforesaid assignment. Complete documents of the RFB shall be available on website www.assamtenders.gov.in & www.aiwtdevelopment.assam.gov.in. Intending bidders are required to register at e-tender portal of the Assam Govt. www.assamtenders.gov.in and participate through e-tender portal only.

The last date and time of online submission of bid is on 09/ 01/2026 at 14:00 HRS(IST).

DIPR/CF/PIO/3097/14-Dec-25

28 villagers booked for illegal construction on Noida airport land

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Noida

A case has been registered against 28 villagers for allegedly carrying out unauthorised construction in the notified area earmarked for the expansion of the Noida International Airport at J ewar.

The FIR was lodged on Friday at Rabupura police station under sections 223 (Disobedience to a lawful order by a public servant) and 329(3) (Criminal Trespass and House-Trespass) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and sections 2 and 3 of the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984.

Action was taken following a complaint filed by Lekhpal (revenue officer) Pratyush Rahi Pathak on behalf of the district administration in connection with illegal construction in Nagia Hukum Singh village under the Rabupura police station area, officials said.

According to the complaint, the process of acquiring around 1,182 hectares of land in Dayanantpur, Beerampur, Mudhrha, Ranhera, Kuraib and Karauli Bangar villages for the second phase of the Noida International Airport project is currently underway.

A notification issued in 2022 clearly barred the sale, purchase or any new construction on the notified land without prior permission of the Gautam Buddha Nagar district collector until the acquisition process is completed, officials said.

Despite repeated notices and directives issued by the administration to halt construction, the villagers continued with unauthorised building activity in an attempt to gain undue benefit under the land acquisition and rehabilitation policy, police said.

The team apprehended Subhan around 3 pm, a senior police officer said. "Initially, the accused tried to mislead the police by disclosing false identities, but during sustained questioning, he confessed to his role in the Bhalswa Dairy firing and murder case," the officer said.

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During raids, the police recovered ₹31 lakh in cash, property documents worth several crores of rupees, over 500 fake stickers and six mobile phones.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES O/T THE CHIEF ENGINEER & BASIN MANAGER, MAHANADI BASIN, AT-BURLA, DISTRICT-SAMBALPUR, PIN-768017 E-mail id - cebumburba@gmail.com	
'e' Procurement Notice No-CE & BM-MB-33/2025-2026 (Online)	
BID IDENTIFICATION NO- CE & BM-MB-33/2025-2026 (Online)	
GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES O/T THE CHIEF ENGINEER & BASIN MANAGER, MAHANADI BASIN, AT-BURLA, DISTRICT-SAMBALPUR, PIN-768017 E-mail id - cebumburba@gmail.com	
Procurement Notice No-CE & BM-MB-33/2025-2026 (Online)	

1. Any addendum/corrigendum/ cancellation/ erratum of tender can also be seen in the said website.

2. Further details can be seen from Government Website <http://tendersodisha.gov.in>.

OIPR-32509/11/0052/2526

Chief Engineer & Basin Manager,
Mahanadi Basin, Burla.

NORTHERN RAILWAY				
TENDER NOTICE No. 71/2025-2026 Dated: 12/12/2025				
Invitation of Tenders through E-Procurement system				
Principal Chief Materials Manager, Northern Railway, New Delhi -110001, for and on behalf of the President of India, invites e-tenders through e-procurement system for supply of the following items :-				
S.No. Tender No. Brief Description Qty. Closing Date				
01	092502904	MODIFIED ELASTOMERIC PAD	217223 NOS	02-01-26
02	09252488	CENTRE PIVOT TOP FOR BLC WAGON	2260 NOS	05-01-26
03	16250003	NICKEL CADMIUM BATTERY	298 NOS	05-01-26
04	09252475	CAST STEEL SIDE FRAME FOR BLC WAGON	209 NOS	05-01-26
05	16250057	KIT FOR OVERHAULING OF GD	35 SET	07-01-26
06	09252418A	SIDE FRAME FRICTION LINER	6399 SET	07-01-26
07	09255013	CAST STEEL BOGIE COMPLETE ASSEMBLY FOR BLCA & BLCB	34 NOS	12-01-26
08	09255012	LIGHT WEIGHT LOW HEIGHT 25T AXLE LOAD	50 NOS	12-01-26
09	09262285	SLIDING DOOR ARRANGEMENT COMPLETE FOR BCNHL WAGON	192 NOS	19-01-26
10	09262427	TWIST LOCK FOR AUTOMATIC TWIST LOCK OF BLC, WAGON	4520 NOS	19-01-26

Note : 1. Vendors may visit the IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for details. 2. No Manual offer will be entertained.

3661/2025

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

PUBLIC NOTICE	
To be known to all that I.GAURAV BERA S/o SH. R.K. BERA R/o 81, JOR BAGH, LODI ROAD, DELHI-110003, AUTHORISED DIRECTOR OF M/S. BERNIE ENTERPRISES, PVT. LTD. has filed a suit on behalf of his company in the Court of M/s. BERNIE ENTERPRISES v. P. K. KALYAN, D/o Mr. S. K. KALYAN, at PLOT NO. 203, BLOCK-B, SITUATED IN THE LAYOUT PLAN OF OKHA INDUSTRIAL AREA PH-1, have been lodged in Crime Branch Police Station, Delhi. This effect has been lodged in Crime Branch Police Station, Delhi.	



Delhi chokes under toxic smog, AQI hits 431

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

A thick layer of toxic smog blanketed Delhi on Saturday, with the air quality index slipping into the 'severe' category at 431, the worst recorded so far this year.

The 24-hour average air quality index (AQI) stood at 431, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), while the Air Quality Early Warning System predicted the AQI to remain 'severe' on Sunday as well.

Saturday recorded the worst air quality of the year so far, surpassing the earlier high of 428 recorded on November 11, official data showed.

Among the Delhi-NCR cities, Delhi's AQI was the third worst after Noida at 455 and Greater Noida at 442, reflecting severe air pollution across the region.

The Air Quality Early Warning System said conditions remained unfavourable for the dispersion of pollutants on Saturday, noting

that the ventilation index was below 6,000 square metres per second, while the average wind speed was less than 10 kmph, restricting the dilution and movement of pollutants.

According to the Decision Support System for Air Quality Management, Delhi's pollution load was led by the transport sector, which contributed 14.2 per cent, followed by Delhi and peripheral industries at 6.8 per cent. Construction activities accounted for 1.8 per cent, while residential sources contributed 3.6 per cent.

Among the neighbouring NCR cities, Ghaziabad emerged as a major contributor with 13.7 per cent, followed by Baghpat (9.8 per cent), Gautam Buddha Nagar (7.6 per cent), Bulandshahar (4.8 per cent), Sonipat (4.4 per cent) and Muzaffarnagar (2.2 per cent).

Smaller contributions were recorded from Faridabad (1.9 per cent) and Gurugram (1.3 per cent), data showed.



Smog engulfing Kartavya Path as people take a stroll amid low visibility near the India Gate

PANKAJ KUMAR

(431), Mundka (430), Bawana (429), ITO (429) and Nehru Nagar (429). Chandni Chowk (423) and Punjabi Bagh (423) recorded severe air pollution, while Siri Fort (424) and Sonia Vihar (424) remained close behind.

Burari Crossing (414), Karni Singh Shooting Range (409), North Campus (408), RK Puram (408) and Okhla Phase 2 (404) also stayed in the severe zone.

On the weather front, Delhi on Saturday recorded a maximum temperature of 25.5 degrees Celsius, 2.5 notches above normal, while the minimum settled at 8 degrees Celsius, 0.6 notch below normal, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

For Sunday, the IMD has forecast a minimum temperature of 10 degrees Celsius and a maximum of 24 degrees Celsius, with moderate fog likely, a combination expected to further trap pollutants close to the surface.

Earlier in the day, a thick blanket of toxic smog hung over the national Capital as Delhi's overall AQI stood at 397 at 9 am, with haze clinging low to the ground and muting the morning skyline.

Among the monitoring stations recorded in the morning hours, 21 were in the 'severe' category with AQI readings of above 400, according to the CPCB.

Wazirpur (445) recorded the highest AQI, followed by Vivek Vihar (444) and

Jahangirpuri (442). Anand Vihar (439), Ashok Vihar (437) and Rohini (437) also reported severe air pollution. Several other areas continued to choke under hazardous air, including Narela (432), Patparganj

Govt to tackle air pollution with monthly meetings

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has directed the Delhi Government to hold monthly meetings to address congestion at identified hotspots, intensify vacuum sweeping of roads, and ensure proper waste collection and night patrolling to check biomass and MSW burning.

The CAQM observed that Delhi needs to effectively tackle traffic congestion at various hotspots, road dust, disposal of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) and its burning. The CAQM's observation came after a review meeting of the commission's sub-committee on safeguarding and enforcement held on December 12.

The CAQM directed the Delhi government to convene focused monthly meeting(s) on de-congestion of identified hotspots. The Delhi Government has identified 62 traffic congestion hot spots or choke points across the Capital.

These choke points stretch across nearly every district: from the chronically clogged Bhavbhati Marg outside New Delhi Railway Station to Madhuban Chowk in northwest Delhi, Mayur Vihar Phase III in the east, South Extension in the south, Punjabi Bagh in the west, and the dense transit corridors around

Kashmere Gate and Anand Vihar. More than half of the 62 sites see severe jams during morning and evening rush hours, it showed. Prominent among those are Safdarjung Hospital, Ajmeri Gate, the road outside Max Hospital in Saket and the Punjabi Bagh roundabout on Ring Road.

Another 11 locations, such as Chelmsford Road near New Delhi Railway Station and Purana Quila Road adjacent to Patiala House Court, experience intense evening load. Six areas such as South Extension Part I, Majnu Ka Tila and Mayur Vihar Phase-3 were found to be choked on weekends or "market days". At several locations, the triggers are hyperlocal.

At Boulevard Road near Tis Hazari, advocates' cars routinely occupy both carriageways and obstruct two DTC bus stands, causing hours-long snarls on working days. At Majnu Ka Tila, ongoing work on a foot overbridge, narrow lanes, unregulated parking and weekend

rush to the Tibetan market create gridlock. In Burari, dug-up Delhi Jal Board stretches, broken dividers and heavy school-hour traffic slow movement daily.

Only two locations — Guru Ravidas Marg and Najafgarh Road — were flagged as remaining heavily choked almost throughout the day.

5-POINT ACTION PLAN

- Stop entry of BS-IV truck traffic into Delhi (except for trucks carrying essential commodities/providing essential services). All LNG/CNG/Electric/BS-VI Diesel trucks shall, however, be permitted to enter Delhi.
- Enforce a strict ban on plying of Delhi-registered diesel-operated BS-IV and below Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) in Delhi, except those carrying essential commodities/providing essential services.
- Ban C&D activities, as in the GRAP Stage-III, also for linear public projects such as highways, roads, flyovers, overbridges, power transmission, pipelines, tele-communication, etc.
- State Governments in the NCR and the GNCTD to mandatorily conduct classes in schools for children even for higher classes i.e. from class VI to IX and XI in a "Hybrid" mode i.e. both in physical and online mode (wherever online mode is feasible) in the territorial jurisdiction of the NCT of Delhi and in the districts of Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad and Gautam Buddha Nagar.
- State Governments may consider additional emergency measures like closure of colleges/educational institutions and closure of non-emergency commercial activities, permitting running of vehicles on an odd-even basis of registration numbers, etc.

Doctors report 20%-30% jump in respiratory cases

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Amid sustained high pollution levels, hospitals in Delhi are witnessing a 20-30 per cent spike in respiratory patients, including many first-time cases and young adults, doctors said. They emphasised that the ongoing pollution crisis is a serious public health risk rather than a seasonal inconvenience.

On Saturday, the city's air quality deteriorated further, slipping from the "very poor" to the "severe" category — a level that also affects otherwise healthy individuals — with readings crossing 400 in the red zone.

At 4 pm, the 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 431, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). Similar to winters in the several past years, Delhi continues to choke due to the toxic air, with pollution levels reported above 300 on most days. As a result, hospitals across the city are reporting a sharp rise in patients with respiratory distress, chest tightness and persistent cough.

Doctors said pollution levels worsen each year, and the number of people affected by poor air quality is steadily increasing.

Several doctors in Delhi said

outpatient departments and emergency rooms have recorded a 20-30 per cent increase in patients presenting with acute and subacute respiratory symptoms over the past few weeks, coinciding with the prolonged high pollution levels.

"There is a distinct rise in patients coming in with cold, cough, breathlessness and chest tightness, which can be directly attributed to the poor air quality around us. The increase is nearly 15-20 per cent compared to earlier weeks," Dr Avi Kumar, senior consultant pulmonologist at Fortis Hospital, Okhla, said.

What is worrying, he added, is the severity and persistence of symptoms. "Many patients have relentless symptoms that are not settling despite routine treatment. They are requiring higher doses of steroids and prolonged medication. Another distinct feature is the number of new patients — people who have never had respiratory issues before. Youngsters playing outdoors are also affected," he said.

The polluted air is not a singular threat; a dangerous mix of PM2.5, PM10, nitrogen oxides, ozone, sulphur dioxide and hundreds of toxic chemicals released from vehicular emissions, industrial activity and waste burning compound the crisis.

Doctors said pollution levels worsen each year, and the number of people affected by poor air quality is steadily increasing.

Several doctors in Delhi said

Over 40 start-up founders meet to discuss solutions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

About 40 startup founders and business representatives met on Saturday to discuss problem-focused solutions to tackle Delhi's air pollution, a statement said.

The meeting, held at Central Park, was attended by representatives from venture capital and private equity firms. Startups working in areas such as mobility, agriculture and air purification shared their approaches and discussed challenges in expanding these interventions, the statement added.

Vishal Lavti, co-founder of carpooling and bike-pooling platform Quick Ride, said private vehicles contribute significantly to the city's pollution levels.

"While long-term solutions like electric vehicles will help, there are simple actions that can be taken immediately. Carpooling is one of the easiest and most

effective options as it requires no additional infrastructure, only awareness and participation," he said.

Another entrepreneur, Roshan Shankar of Saroja Earth, said incomplete burning of crop residue remains a major source of air pollution in North India.

"Decentralised utilisation of rice straw as fuel

pellets, fertiliser pellets, biochar and cutlery can help prevent stubble burning," said Shankar, who specialises in the study of parali burning.

Ish Anand, a Delhi resident who runs a private equity fund operating in Europe, Singapore and India, said startup founders have the ability to build

solutions at scale and said he plans to support some of the ventures discussed at the meeting.

Shradha Sharma, founder of The Bharat Project, which organised the meeting, said the focus is on building capacity over the next 11 months so that the city is better prepared to deal with air pollution next year.

She said some of the ideas will be presented to the city administration to seek support for broader adoption of the initiatives, the statement added.

Similar to winters in the several past years, Delhi continues to choke due to the toxic air, with pollution levels reported above 300 on most days.

On Saturday, the city's air quality deteriorated further, slipping from the "very poor" to the "severe" category — a level that also affects otherwise healthy individuals — with readings crossing 400 in the red zone.

Govt directs women employees should not stay beyond office hours

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Delhi Government's Women and Child Development department has directed its branches to ensure that women employees are not made to stay in office beyond working hours, until absolutely necessary.

In an advisory issued earlier this week, the department also asked the branches to ensure that if women are made to work late, they should be dropped off at home safely.

The advisory said that "safety, dignity and well-being of women employees is of paramount importance",

and stressed it is the duty of the department to ensure a secure and enabling work environment at all times.

It said instances of women employees having to remain in office beyond normal working hours require clear safeguards, structured responsibility and strict oversight so that no woman is placed at risk while performing official duties.

"It is hereby directed that no woman employee shall be required or expected to remain in office beyond normal working hours unless absolutely unavoidable. In all such exceptional circumstances, the concerned branch

head/reporting officer shall be personally responsible for ensuring her safe return," the advisory said.

Remain fully accountable for ensuring that such arrangements are actually made and executed in a timely manner," it said.

The advisory also reminded all officers, branch heads, "to maintain a humane, gender-sensitive and responsible managerial approach, keeping foremost the safety and dignity of women employees".

In case late sitting becomes unavoidable, the department should coordinate to make appropriate arrangements so that the woman employee is

Speed limit on Noida and Yamuna Expressway reduced

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

The speed limit for light vehicles on the Noida-Greater Noida Expressway and the Yamuna Expressway has been lowered from 100 kmph to 75 kmph. The new speed restriction will come into effect on December 15. The Gautam Buddha Nagar Traffic Police on Saturday issued a traffic advisory reducing speed limits on major roads and expressways in the district to prevent accidents during foggy winter conditions.

The advisory followed a pile-up on the Eastern Peripheral Expressway on Saturday morning, in which several people were injured after multiple vehicles collided amid dense fog. Poor visibility due to thick fog led to the crash, which involved several vehicles.

According to the advisory, the revised speed limits will remain in force from December 15 to February 15, 2026. On the Yamuna Expressway, the maximum speed has been capped at 75



kmph for light motor vehicles and 60 kmph for heavy motor vehicles.

On the Noida-Greater Noida Expressway, light motor vehicles will be allowed to travel at a maximum speed of 75 kmph, while the limit for heavy motor vehicles has been reduced to 50 kmph. The upper speed limit otherwise on the two crucial expressways is 100 km per hour for light vehicles and 80 km per hour for heavy vehicles, according to officials.

The advisory further stated that on the Noida Elevated Road, the maximum permissible speed is 50 kmph for light motor vehicles and 40

kmph for heavy motor vehicles. The traffic police have appealed to motorists to strictly adhere to the prescribed speed limits on these roads in the interest of road safety during the winter season.

Traffic police officials said strict enforcement will be carried out during the period, and vehicles found overspeeding will be penalised. Drivers have also been advised to use fog lamps, maintain safe distances and avoid sudden lane changes during low-visibility conditions.

Meanwhile, two separate accidents were reported on Saturday on the Eastern Peripheral Expressway under

the Dadri police station area due to dense fog. Police said three vehicles collided at the Chakrasenpur flyover, while around a dozen vehicles were involved in a pile-up at the Samadhipur flyover. Local police teams rushed to the spots and cleared the damaged vehicles from the roadway, parking them at safe locations.

"There were no casualties in these accidents and traffic is flowing normally. Necessary legal action is being taken," a police spokesperson said. Following the collision, traffic movement on the stretch came to a standstill.

Police, with the help of toll plaza management, deployed cranes to remove the damaged vehicles from the roadway and gradually clear the congestion. Visuals from the accident site show a white car that had climbed onto the divider with its bonnet severely damaged. A truck stands adjacent to it. Another car is seen stuck under a truck. Vehicles appear to have rammed into one another owing to reduced visibility amid thick smog.

The post-mortem examinations of the three bodies are scheduled to be conducted on Monday.

Police said the incident came to light around 2.47 pm when a police team reached the flat to execute a court order related to possession of the property, after the landlord filed a case over non-payment of rent.

According to investigators, the family had not paid a monthly rent of Rs 35,000 for the past one-and-a-half years.

"When repeated knocks went unanswered, the staff used a duplicate key to open the door," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southeast) Hemant Tiwari said earlier.

Police sources said the family had been under severe mental stress due to prolonged financial difficulties and repeated requests to vacate the flat.

Officers had earlier visited the premises in connection with the eviction process, they said.

Relatives who were informed after the incident told police they had not been in touch with the family for several years and were unaware of the extent of their financial and emotional distress. Investigators are also verifying details of loans and liabilities amounting to several lakhs of rupees, police said.

Residents of the neighbour-

hood said the family was quiet and rarely interacted with others. Some neighbours also claimed that the two sons had attempted suicide around 15-20 days ago, following which police and ambulances had arrived, a claim that police said is being verified.

The bodies have been shifted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) mortuary for post-mortem examination and other legal formalities under Section 194 of the Bharatiya Sanhita (BNS), police said.

Police said the case prima facie appears to be one of mass suicide, but all angles are being thoroughly examined. Statements of relatives, neighbours and the landlord are being recorded to ascertain whether any form of pressure or harassment was involved.

Further investigation is underway, officials said.



IN FOCUS



COAS General Upendra Dwivedi with others during the Passing Out Parade ceremony at the Indian Military Academy in Dehradun

Ex-bureaucrat Raj Kumar Goyal to take oath as CIC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi

Former IAS officer Raj Kumar Goyal will be sworn in as Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) by President Droupadi Murmu on Monday, officials said.

A three-member panel headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi had recommended Goyal's name, they said on Saturday.

Goyal is a 1990-batch (retired) Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of Arunachal Pradesh-Goa-Mizoram-Union Territories (AGMUT) cadre. He superannuated as Secretary, Department of Justice under the Ministry of Law and Justice, on August 31. He also served as Secretary (Border Management) in the Home Ministry and held key posts both at the Centre and in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. President Murmu will administer the oath of office and secrecy to Goyal on Monday, the offi-



cials said. The post of CIC fell vacant after Heeralal Samariya completed his term on September 13.

The panel, headed by PM Modi, has also recommended the names of eight Information Commissioners (ICs) in the transparency watchdog Central Information Commission during its meeting held on Wednesday. With this, the Commission will be in its full strength, after a gap of over

nine years, once the newly selected CIC and ICs join, according to transparency activists. The Commission is headed by a CIC and can have a maximum of ten ICs. At present, Anandi Ramalingam and Vinod Kumar Tiwari have been working as the Information Commissioners.

Former Railway Board chief Jaya Verma Sinha, former Indian Police Service (IPS) officer Swagat Das, who

held key posts in Intelligence Bureau, Home Ministry and Cabinet Secretariat, among others, the then Central Secretariat Service (CSS) officer Sanjeev Kumar Jindal, former IAS officer Surendra Singh Meena and ex-Indian Forest Service officer Khushwant Singh Sethi have been recommended for appointment as Information Commissioners, the officials said. Senior journalists PR Ramesh and Ashutosh Chaturvedi, and Sudha Rani Relangi, Member (Legal), Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) have also been selected by the panel for appointment as ICs, they said.

Relangi has also worked as Director of Prosecution, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Joint Secretary & Legislative Counsel, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India, the officials said. These eight Information Commissioners will subscribe to oath of office before the newly sworn in CIC, they said.

Two Naxals surrender in Gariaband: Police

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Gariaband

A woman cadre among two Naxalites, carrying cumulative rewards of Rs 10 lakh, surrendered before security forces in Chhattisgarh's Gariaband district on Saturday, police said.

The duo was involved in several Maoist violence instances, including an encounter with security personnel in which ten Naxalites were killed and an improvised explosive device (IED) blast that claimed the lives of two policemen, an official said.

The surrendered cadres, identified as Santosh, alias Lalpawan, and Manju, alias Nande, told the security forces that they were motivated by the Government's rehabilitation policy. They also cited the success stories of previously surrendered cadres, he said.

According to police, the two were active in the Dhamtari-Gariaband-Nuapada division of the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) organisation, he added.

and each carried a bounty of ₹5 lakh on their heads.

Santosh joined the Maoist outfit in 2005 in the Awapalli Local Organisation Squad in Bijapur district, while Manju was active as a 'Bal Sangham' member since 2002 in Sukma district, the official said.

He said that Santosh was involved in several instances of Maoist violence, including the killing of two policemen in an IED blast in 2018, the official said. Both Santosh and Manju were part of a Naxal group when exchanged fire with security personnel in the district in September this year.

Ten Naxalites, including Central Committee Member Manoj, member of Special Zonal Committee Pramod, alias Pandu and Odisha State Committee member Vimal were killed in the encounter, he said. Santosh was also present during an encounter between Naxalites and security forces in January this year. Altogether, 16 Maoists, Central Committee member CCM Chalapathi, were killed, he added.

Prayer meet held for Dharmendra in Mathura

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Mathura

People gathered in large numbers here on Saturday to offer prayers for legendary actor Dharmendra at a prayer meet organised by Mathura MP and actor Hema Malini.

Dharmendra died on November 24, just weeks shy of his 90th birthday after prolonged illness.

Addressing the gathering in an emotional speech, Hema Malini said she never imagined she would have to organise a prayer meeting for her "beloved Dharmji". "It was an inconsolable shock. We shared an association of 57 years and worked together in 45 films, more than 25 of which were super hits," she said. Describing him as simple, humble and joyful, Hema Malini said Dharmendra remained deeply connected to his roots despite immense stardom. "I still feel surprised and happy that my onscreen love became my life partner in real life. Since our love was

true, we faced challenges together and got married," she said, calling Dharmendra a loving husband, devoted father to daughters Esha and Ahana, and an affectionate grandfather to his five grandchildren. Hema Malini's daughters Esha and Ahana Deol could not attend due to personal reasons.

Recalling his illustrious career, the Mathura MP said Dharmendra was passionate about acting and appeared in over 300 films, excelling in action, romance, comedy and intense roles, though comedy remained his favourite. She also highlighted his lesser-known talent as an Urdu poet and said she would ensure the publication of a book of his Urdu shayari, a project he had planned.

Hema Malini also recalled that Dharmendra won the Bikaner Lok Sabha seat in 2004 but later left politics as acting remained his true love. "He campaigned for me in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections," she added.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Nagpur

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Shinde on Saturday said slum redevelopment schemes will now be implemented collectively on private, Government, or semi-Government lands measuring 50 acres or more.

Speaking in the legislative council, Shinde also made a few announcements about slum redevelopment projects in Mumbai, including the declaration of SRA (Slum Rehabilitation Authority) group redevelopment projects and extension of the 'SRA Amnesty Scheme'.

The announcements come ahead of elections to civic bodies, including the cash-rich Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, which are to be completed



before January 31 next year. The deputy CM heads the Urban Development and Housing departments.

In recent days, Shinde has announced additional housing relief measures for Mumbaikars, such as the occupancy certificate (OC) amnesty scheme to regularise nearly 20,000 buildings in Mumbai and a new regulatory framework to redevelop buildings under the "Pagdi" system (a traditional tenancy rental model) in the metropolis.

"Slum redevelopment schemes will now be implemented collectively on private, Government, or semi-Government lands measuring 50 acres or more," said Shinde in the Upper House of the state legislature on Saturday.

In the first phase, he said, 17 major locations across

Mumbai have been selected, including Antop Hill, Krishna Nagar and Ketkripada (Borivali), Gopikrishna Nagar (Dahisar), Oshiwara, Govandi, Chitta Camp (Trombay), Chembur, Tagore Nagar (Vikhroli), Vikhroli Parksite, and Bhandup.

"This initiative is expected to provide significant relief to lakhs of slum dwellers in Mumbai," he said.

Shinde said the state will implement the initiative on a joint venture basis with the assistance of Government bodies such as MMRDA, CIDCO, MIDC, MSRDC, MHADA, and the BMC. In the second phase, additional projects will be undertaken, which will help transform Mumbai's landscape and promote well-

AIIMS conducts India's first dedicated clinical trial of advanced brain stent

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi

AIIMS Delhi has achieved a milestone in stroke care by conducting the country's first dedicated clinical trial of a cutting-edge and advanced brain stent made for treating severe strokes.

The GRASSROOT trial, which evaluated the Supernova stent (Gravity Medical Technology), has found excellent safety and efficacy outcomes in the treatment of severe strokes, officials said.

The results were published in the "Journal of Neurointerventional Surgery" (JNIS), part of the prestigious British Medical Journal group.

AIIMS Delhi was the national coordinating centre and the lead enrolling site for the GRASSROOT trial-India's first clinical trial of a new and advanced stroke treatment device, the Supernova stent, the officials said.

"This is a turning point for stroke treatment in India," Dr Shailesh B Gaikwad, professor and head, Department



of Neuroimaging and Neuroradiology, AIIMS, and national principal investigator of the GRASSROOT trial, said. According to the JNIS, the GRASSROOT trial evaluating the Supernova stent has found excellent safety and efficacy outcomes in the treatment of severe strokes.

Earlier this year, data from the GRASSROOT trial were accepted by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) and the Supernova stent-retriever was approved for

routine use in India.

"This is the nation's first stroke device cleared based on a domestic clinical trial. The approval follows the GRASSROOT India trial, which confirmed the device's safety and efficacy in treating life-threatening strokes," AIIMS said in a statement.

"Conducted across eight centres, the trial marks a milestone for the Make-in-India initiative and positions India as a global player in advanced stroke care," it said.

Noting that it produced

world-class clinical evidence entirely within the country, Dr Ashutosh Jadhav, Chief Scientific Officer, Gravity Medical Technology, said the effort built a "robust framework for future large-scale, high-quality trials". Dr Deepi Vibha, professor of neurology, AIIMS Delhi, emphasised the role of patients and families whose participation will "bring faster, more affordable treatments to millions".

Dr Shashvat M Desai, Chief Technology Officer at Gravity Medical Technology, described the approval as "more than just a regulatory milestone". This achievement demonstrates that India can design and deliver clinical trials of global significance, accelerating access to advanced therapies while upholding equity," he said.

Desai noted that the trial and subsequent device approval stand as a testament to the expertise of Indian leaders such as Dr Gaikwad and his team, who bring over three decades of experience in advancing stroke treatment.

Bajwa slams SEC for 'inaction' over 'misuse' of Govt machinery

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Chandigarh

Senior Punjab Congress leader Partap Singh Bajwa on Saturday slammed the State Election Commission (SEC) for its alleged "inaction" despite detailed written representations to it, flagging "blatant misuse of police machinery, voter intimidation, and systematic attempts to vitiate" the Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti elections.

Voting for the Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti polls will be held on Sunday. In a statement, Bajwa said more than 24 hours have passed since he formally wrote to the state election commissioner, placing on record serious apprehensions about violence, booth capturing, vote rigging and partisan policing at sensitive polling stations across the Gurdaspur district. He had sought deployment of adequate security forces, quick reaction teams, mandatory CCTV coverage with live streaming on the SEC website, and assured

access to footage for candidates to ensure transparency. However, despite the urgency of the situation and the ongoing election process, no action whatsoever has been taken by the SEC so far, he said.

The leader of opposition (LoP) in the Punjab Assembly further said that he had also brought to the commission's notice an incident from the Alma village, where police officials allegedly conducted an "intimidation-driven raid" at the residence of a Congress worker at the behest of senior police lead-

ership "acting under political pressure". Women family members were harassed, properties were forcibly searched, and no incriminating material was found, clearly exposing the intent to "terrorise" opposition workers, he said.

Bajwa said he had categorically demanded stern disciplinary action and immediate transfer of "partisan" police officers, warning that their continued presence would destroy the fairness of elections in the Qadian constituency.

"Following the introduction of a stringent system to establish user identity, the number of new user IDs being added daily on the IRCTC website has declined to about 5,000 from nearly one lakh, officials said on Saturday.

After fake ID crackdown, IRCTC daily new accounts down to 5,000 from one lakh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi

With a new, stringent system to establish user identity, the number of new user IDs being added daily on the IRCTC website has declined to about 5,000 from nearly one lakh, officials said on Saturday.

Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw noted that the crackdown by Indian Railways on train ticket booking through fake identities is yielding positive results, according to a press note. Before the latest reforms, this number had touched nearly one lakh new user IDs per day, it said.

"Following the introduction of a stringent system to establish user identity and detect fake IDs, about 5,000 new user IDs are now being added daily on the IRCTC website," the note said.

The officials stated that these steps have already helped Indian Railways deactivate 3.03 crore fake accounts. "Another 2.7 crore user IDs have either been temporarily suspended or identified for suspension based on the suspicious activities they are indulging in," they said.

The Union minister directed officials to ensure that the ticketing system is reformed to a level where all travellers are able to book tickets easily through a real and genuine user ID, the press note added.

Additionally, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has directed officials to provide local cuisine of the region in Vande Bharat trains.

Introducing local cuisine that reflects the culture and tastes of the regions being traversed will significantly enhance the passenger experience, officials said.

FROM PAGE - 1

A political free-for-all after chaos

BJP State president and Rajya Sabha MP Samik Bhattacharya alleged that "some fraudsters, in their greed to mint money, created this situation". Stating that the entire responsibility for this mess lies with the State Government, he alleged that TMC leaders indulged "greedy organisers, who were busy with self publicity, depriving people, who bought tickets, to have a proper view of the football icon". Bhattacharya said that the incident tarnished the image of the State.

West Bengal Congress president Subhankar Sarkar described the episode as "terrible mismanagement and a mockery of law and order". He alleged that in the name of Messi, tickets were sold at exorbitant prices to innocent fans, while the footballer was surrounded only by TMC leaders and members of their families.

Describing the incident as a big let-down for the sport-lovers of the State, Ghosh said that in 2011, when Messi came to the stadium for the first time, the event was so well-organised.

GRAP IV invoked as Capital turns toxic

"This prevailing meteorological condition has (seen a) marked reduction in wind speed, at times becoming calm, a shift in wind direction from westerly to easterly, and an increase in moisture content in the lower atmosphere. Such conditions during the winter season are conducive to the formation of smog and fog, resulting in poor dispersion and trapping of pollutants near the surface. Owing to these adverse meteorological conditions, a sudden deterioration in air quality has been observed," a CAQM statement read.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Lucknow

Akhilesh Yadav alleged that a company, which had donated electoral bonds to the BJP, was involved in the SIR-related mapping. Yadav questioned the credibility of the mapping app being used in the exercise, alleging discrepancies in the data. Yadav said the Government is using the SIR of electoral rolls as an "NRC", claiming that the exercise can potentially affect the votes of nearly three crore people.

The SP chief said, "The Election Commission's job is to make votes, not cut them. No one's vote should be deleted, but in the name of SIR, the Government is conducting the NRC. In Uttar Pradesh, votes of nearly three crore people are

Akhilesh alleges company involved in SIR mapping donated electoral bonds

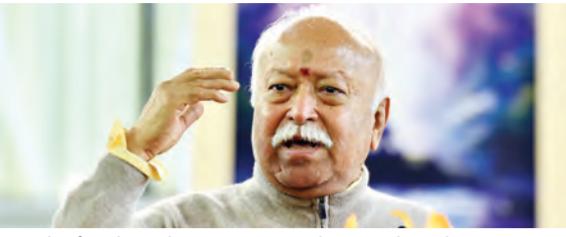
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Lucknow

being cut." Yadav further said politics in the country should be based on "vision, not division". "We want to do politics of vision. The politics of division and polarisation in the country must be stopped," he said. Speaking about technology and artificial intelligence (AI), Yadav said Party believed in development politics. He said rapid technological changes were taking place globally and stressed that the benefits of technology should reach everyone without discrimination on the basis of caste or religion.

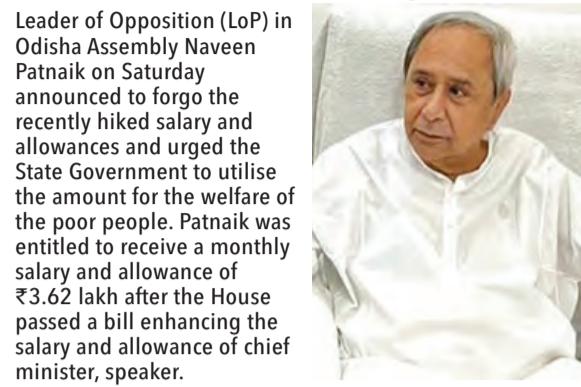


Bhagwat urges Hindus to follow Vivekananda's vision



RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Saturday urged Hindu society to draw inspiration from Swami Vivekananda's message that every nation has a mission to fulfil and a destiny to reach. Addressing a public meeting organised by the Virat Hindu Sammelan Samiti at the Netaji Stadium here, Bhagwat said strength, rather than truth alone, shaped global recognition in the present times.

Naveen Patnaik to forgo enhanced LoP salary



Leader of Opposition (LoP) in Odisha Assembly Naveen Patnaik on Saturday announced to forgo the recently hiked salary and allowances and urged the State Government to utilise the amount for the welfare of the poor people. Patnaik was entitled to receive a monthly salary and allowance of ₹3.62 lakh after the House passed a bill enhancing the salary and allowance of chief minister, speaker.

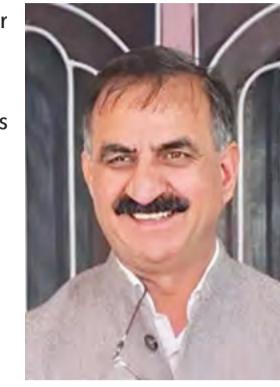
Jharkhand's Usri waterfall to welcome eco-tourists soon



Popular tourist destination Usri Waterfall in Giridih district of Jharkhand will be developed as an eco-tourism site, officials said. State Tourism Minister Sudhiva Kumar on Saturday laid the foundation for an eco-tourism project at Giridih Sadar Block. The Hemant Soren-led Government is committed to the overall development of tourism, he said.

HP bans mobile in schools from next academic session

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhinder Singh Sukhu on Saturday announced that there would be a complete ban on students carrying mobile phones in school premises from pre-nursery to Class XII from the upcoming academic session. Speaking on the occasion, CM said these advanced facilities would not only enhance administrative and academic efficiency but would also mark the beginning of a new era of digital education.



VP pays tribute to 2001 Parliament attack martyrs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Vice President CP Radhakrishnan on Saturday led Parliamentarians in paying floral tributes to those who died fighting off terrorists who attacked the Parliament House in 2001. On the 24th anniversary of the attack, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Radhakrishnan, who is also the Rajya Sabha Chair, were among the first to offer tributes. A function was held outside the now old Parliament building (Samvidhan Sadan) every December 13 to mark the day.

Separately, President Droupadi Murmu paid tributes to the "courageous heroes" who laid down their lives while protecting Parliament, and said the country remains indebted to them and their families. "On this day, we reaffirm India's commitment to fight terrorism in all its forms," Murmu said in a social media post.

Modi said on this day, "Our nation remembers those



Vice President CP Radhakrishnan paying tribute to the martyrs of the 2001 Parliament attack during a ceremony to mark its 24th anniversary at Samvidhan Sadan in New Delhi on Saturday

Congress leader Sonia Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, and his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, a senior party leader, were also present at the event. Union ministers Kiren Rijiju, Jitendra Singh and Arjun Ram Meghwal also lined up to offer flower petals at the photographs of the personnel who went down foiling the attack.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla is in Latur to attend the funeral of former speaker of the Lower House of Parliament and ex-Union minister Shivraj Patil.

The attack was carried out by five armed terrorists, but personnel from the now former Parliament Security Service, CRPF and Delhi Police foiled the attack, with no terrorist being able to enter the building.

Six Delhi Police personnel, two Parliament Security Service personnel, a gardener and a TV journalist were killed in the attack. All five terrorists were gunned down in the forecourt of the then Parliament building.

Simultaneous action has inflicted severe moral and psychological damage on urban Naxals and tightened control over their information warfare networks," the statement said.

Giving exhaustive details of action taken against the Maoist extremists, the Government said only three districts remain "most-affected" by Naxalism in 2025 compared to 36 in 2014. In 2025 so far, 317 Naxals have been neutralised, 862 arrested and 1,973 surrendered, it said.

"A total of 28 top Naxal leaders have been neutralised, including one Central Committee Member in 2024 and five in 2025," it said.

Listing out major successes by security forces, the Government said 27 hardcore Naxals were killed in Operation Black Forest, 24 surrendered in Bijapur on May 23, 2025, and 258 surrendered in October 2025 across Chhattisgarh (197) and Maharashtra (61), including 10 senior Naxals.

"Total Naxal-affected districts have been reduced from

126 in 2014 to just 11 in 2025.

Fortified police stations increased from only 66 until 2014 to 586 constructed in the last 10 years," it said.

Police stations recording Naxal incidents dropped sharply from 330 across 76 districts in 2013 to merely 52 in 22 districts by June 2025. In addition, 361 new security camps have been established in the last six years and 68 night-landing helipads have been built to strengthen operational reach.

"The Government has adopted a unified, multi-dimensional and decisive strategy against Naxalism, replacing the scattered approach of previous Governments," the statement said. The Government has also given a parallel push to improve infrastructure in the Naxal-infested zones with 12,000 km of roads constructed in the areas between May 2014 and August 2025.

Projects for a total of 17,589 km have been approved at a cost of ₹20,815 crore, ensuring all-weather connectivity and mobility in previously inaccessible areas, it said.

A major project to improve mobile connectivity was also undertaken with 2,343 (2G) mobile towers installed at a cost of ₹4,080 crore in the first phase, followed by 2,542 towers sanctioned in the second phase with an investment of ₹2,210 crore, of which 1,154 are already installed.

"Additionally, under the Aspirational Districts and 4G Saturation schemes, 8,527 (4G) towers have been approved, with 2,596 and 2,761 towers, respectively, now functional, dramatically improving communication and intelligence reach in core Naxal zones," it said.

Banking services were promoted in the Naxal zones with the setting up of 1,804 bank branches, 1,321 ATMs and posting of 37,850 banking correspondents to give deep financial inclusion a boost.

and two other direct witnesses are to give their statements," she said.

"At such a time, the UP Government has taken a decision to withdraw the case on utterly indefensible grounds, such as *lathis* were used, not guns, there was no personal animosity with the victim, continuing the case will lead to communal disharmony and so on," the letter read.

Karat alleged that the case has been delayed by the prosecution — by not giving notice to the witnesses to appear — and now the delay has been cited as the grounds to withdraw the case.

PM renamed MGNREGA to change its spirit, not name: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi



BJP on Saturday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to rename the rural job guarantee scheme was not to alter its name but to change its "spirit". Hitting back at the Congress following its criticism on renaming MGNREGA, BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said the Opposition party and its leaders cannot understand the decision as they function with a sense of entitlement.

"The name on which the Congress considers its exclusive right belongs to the entire country," the BJP leader said in an apparent

reference to Mahatma Gandhi's name. The Union Cabinet approved a Bill on Friday to rename the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) as 'Pooya Bapu Grameen Rozgar Yojna'. "The prime minister is not changing

the name (of the scheme) but its spirit," Trivedi said.

Prime Minister Modi has dedicated his entire life to the service of the nation and the people and he works with this spirit, the BJP leader said. "But the Congress, which has worked with the principle of 'age-

peache hamri sarkar, hum hain yahan ke rajkumar' (we are in rule everywhere, we are the royals), cannot understand the spirit with which the prime minister works," he said, when asked about the Congress's criticism of renaming MGNREGA.

On the Congress's charge that the Government was claiming credit for the scheme, Trivedi said the Congress has neither done any work that is useful nor worth taking any credit for.

"You renamed Kingsway as Rajpath because of the sense of raj (power). After

Prime Minister Modi renamed it as Kartavya Path, it brought in a sense of duty," Trivedi said.

Akhlaq lynching case: Karat seeks President's intervention in UP Govt's move

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Senior CPI(M) leader Brinda Karat on Saturday wrote to President Droupadi Murmu, demanding her intervention in the Uttar Pradesh Government's move to withdraw charges against the accused in the 2015 mob lynching of Mohammad Akhlaq.

In a letter to the President, Karat called it a "politically motivated" step by the Government, and also questioned the role of the governor. "I write to draw your urgent attention to the role of the Uttar Pradesh governor

in the matter of the mob lynching case of Md Akhlaq, which occurred in September 2015. The governor has given written permission to the UP Government to go ahead in its wholly illegal and unjust attempt to subvert the processes of justice and to withdraw the entire case even though the main witness has already given evidence," Karat said.

She said the Government has filed an affidavit in the Greater Noida district court to withdraw the case, with the governor's permission. "I regret that I am forced to write to you on this matter, but since the governor has

been appointed by you and is answerable to you, I felt it

in the interests of justice to inform you of the facts and to request your urgent intervention," she said.

On September 28, 2015, a mob gathered outside Akhlaq's house in Uttar Pradesh's Bisahada village after an alleged announcement from a village temple claiming that he had slaughtered a cow. He, along with his son Daanish, was dragged out of their home and assaulted, leading to Akhlaq's death.

"Even today, Daanish has

not fully recovered and carries the impact of the grievous wounds inflicted on him,"

and use in the past 30 days. Compared to grade VIII students, grade IX students were more likely, and grade XI/XII students were twice as likely to have used any substance (ever). The likelihood of past-year use of any substance was also higher for grade IX students and for grade XI/XII students as compared to grade VIII students.

About 40 per cent of students mentioned that they had a family member who used tobacco or alcohol each. The use of cannabis (any product) and opioid (any product) by a family member was reported by 8.2 per cent and 3.9 per cent of students, respectively, while the use of other substances, such as inhalants/sedatives by

family was 2-3 per cent, the study found.

A relatively smaller percentage of students reported use of tobacco or alcohol among peers as compared to among family members, while a higher percentage reported inhalants, sedatives, cannabis or opioid use among peers. Children using substances (past year) compared to non-users reported significantly higher any substance use by their family members and peers.

There were 25.7 per cent students who replied 'yes' to the question 'conflicts/fights often occur in your family'. Most students also replied affirmatively to 'family members are aware of how their time is being spent'.

AIIMS-Delhi survey reveals alarming rise in substance abuse among school children

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

School-going children are picking up drug and smoking habits and engaging in consumption of alcohol, with the average age of introduction to such harmful substances found to be around 13 years, suggesting a need for earlier interventions as early as primary school, a multi-city survey by AIIMS-Delhi said.

The findings also showed substance use increased in higher grades, with grade XI/XII students two times more likely to report use of substances when compared with grade VIII students. This emphasised the importance of continued prevention and intervention through middle

and high school. The study led by Dr Anju Dhawan of AIIMS's National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre, published in the National Medical Journal of India this month, looks at adolescent substance use across diverse regions.

The survey included 5,920 students from classes 8, 9, 11 and 12 in urban Government, private and rural schools across 10 cities: Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Delhi, Dibrugarh, Hyderabad, Imphal, Jammu, Lucknow, Mumbai, and Ranchi. The data were collected between May 2018 and June 2019. The average age of initiation for any substance was 12.9 (2.8) years. It was lowest for inhalants (11.3 years) followed by heroin (12.3 years)

and opioid pharmaceuticals (without prescription; 12.5 years). Overall, 15.1 per cent of participants reported lifetime use, 10.3 per cent reported past year use, and 7.2 per cent reported use in the past month of any substance, the study found.

The most common substances used in the past year, after tobacco (4 per cent) and alcohol (3.8 per cent), were opioids (2.8 per cent), followed by cannabis (2 per cent) and inhalants (1.9 per cent). Use of non-prescribed pharmaceutical opioids was most common among opioid users (90.2 per cent).

On being asked, 'Do you think this substance is easily available for a person of your age' separately for each sub-



stance category, nearly half the students (46.3 per cent) endorsed that tobacco products and more than one-third of the students (36.5 per cent) agreed that a person of their age can easily procure alcohol products. Similarly, for Bhang (21.9 per cent), ganja/charas (16.1 per cent), inhalants (15.2 per cent), sedatives (13.7 per cent), opium and heroin (10 per cent each), the students endorsed that these can be easily procured. About 95 per cent of the children, irrespective of their grade, agreed with the statement that 'drug use is harmful'. The rates of substance use (any) among boys were significantly higher than those of girls for substance use (ever), use in the past year



States Focus



MP TO GIVE SPECIAL PACKAGE TO FORMER NAXAL-HIT DISTRICTS

After declaring the State to be free of Naxalism, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Saturday said his Government would provide a special package to the districts of Balaghat, Mandla and Dindori, once affected by Maoist violence. The elimination of Naxalism was the biggest achievement of his government's tenure so far, Yadav said in an interview on completing two years in office. "A special package will be provided for Naxal-affected Balaghat, Mandla and Dindori for development. We want them to become model districts for the future. The last 20-25 years have been very bad, so we are preparing a concrete plan to bring them closer to the rest of the advanced districts," he said.



J&K CM ABDULLAH INAUGURATES ASIA'S LONGEST SKI DRAG LIFT

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Saturday threw open Asia's longest ski drag lift at Gulmarg, widely known as the 'skiing capital of India', officials said. Abdullah also inaugurated the world's highest revolving multi-purpose hall in the Affarwut area of Gulmarg, which also houses a restaurant, they said. Abdullah said the ski drag lift at Kongdori in Gulmarg in Baramulla district will significantly enhance the skiing infrastructure in the hill station and strengthen its standing on the international winter sports map.

Nadda targets Himachal Congress Govt over funds

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Shimla

BJP President JP Nadda on Saturday alleged that the Congress Government in Himachal Pradesh has failed to utilise the funds allocated by the Centre and therefore has no right to remain in power, accusing the State administration of functioning with a carefree mindset.

"Congress Government in Himachal Pradesh is working with a mindset of 'Kha Piya Mauf karo, aage kisne dekhna hai' (indulge in merry making, who has seen the future)," he said and stressed that "double engine Government is the only way to ensure development of the State".

Addressing an event, Nadda accused the State Government of corruption and misutilisation of funds given by the Centre under



BJP National President and Union Minister JP Nadda with LoP in the Himachal Pradesh Assembly and party leader Jairam Thakur during a public meeting in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh on Saturday

various heads, including building of houses, repair of roads and smart city.

Refuting the allegations of the Congress Government that the Centre is not giving enough funds to the State, Nadda claimed, "₹3,789 crore were given for disaster relief, over ₹1,000 crore for Smart Cities besides funds for Vibrant Village development, medical colleges, AIIMS Bilaspur, a bulk drug park, four-lane highways and developed Baddi as a pharmaceutical hub in the State yet the Congress continues to spread falsehoods and mislead the innocent people of Himachal."

Targeting the Sukhu-led Government for its incompetence, he claimed that the Centre has sent over ₹2,000 crore as special assistance and approved ₹1,442 crore under JICA funding, but the Congress Government utilised only

about 50 per cent of the funds in several schemes.

Taking a jibe at the Congress, Nadda said that Himachal's treasury is frequently shut, the entire administration runs on ad-hoc arrangements with the chief secretary and director general of police working on additional charge and there is no coordination between the chief minister and his ministers.

The Congress Government has not brought even a single concrete project to the Centre, he said, and called upon BJP workers to take these facts and truths to every village and town, so that the "people of Himachal can free themselves from Congress misrule" and move decisively towards development and good governance.

Nadda alleged that "earlier the Government used to come to power with the support of all but used to

be limited to a particular caste, segment and religion, but 11 years back Prime Minister Narendra Modi changed the political scenario of the country by becoming the 'Pradhan Sevak' of the nation and moved from Rajpath to Kartavya Path."

He said the "BJP Government is a performance (report-card) based government, what it promised, it delivered and in contrast, the UPA politics revolved around casteism, appeasement and nepotism, while BJP politics is rooted in accountability and good governance."

State BJP president Rajiv Bindal said that Congress was reduced to only six seats in Bihar, which is proof of its declining credibility and claimed that the same situation will prevail in the upcoming 2027 Himachal Pradesh assembly elections, where the Congress will not even reach double digits and will be reduced to only two seats.

CM Nitish allocates portfolios of new departments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Patna

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has allocated portfolios of newly created departments among ministers, keeping Civil Aviation with himself, an official notification said.

The Bihar cabinet on December 9 approved proposals to create three new departments — Youth, Employment and Skill Development Department, Higher Education Department and the Civil Aviation Department — and changed the names of three other departments.

The Animal and Fisheries Resource Department was renamed as Dairy, Fisheries and Animal Resources Department; the Labour Resources Department as Labour Resources and Migrant Workers Welfare Department, and Art, Culture and Youth Department as Art and Culture Department.



According to the notification, issued on December 12, the CM allocated the portfolio of Youth, Employment and Skill Development Department to Sanjay Singh 'Tiger', who is holding the portfolio of Labour Resources and Migrant Workers Welfare Department.

State Education Minister Sunil Kumar has been given the portfolio of the newly created Higher Education Department. The CM has kept the Civil Aviation Department with himself, the notification said. The CM had recently announced on social media platforms the State government's decision to create three new departments.

"We have set a target to provide jobs to one crore youth over the next five years (2025-30). For this, it's essential that more youth be trained for skill development. Instructions have been given to create three new departments: Youth, Employment and Skill Development

Department, Higher Education Department, and Civil Aviation Department," the CM had said.

On the need for a dedicated Higher Education Department, Kumar had said its objective was to "bring about qualitative improvement in learning, promote research and innovation, develop technical and vocational education, and ensure that youth from all sections of society receive quality employment-oriented education".

Arunachal municipal, panchayat elections campaigning ends

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Guwahati/Itanagar

Campaigning for the December 15 municipal and panchayat elections in Arunachal Pradesh ended on Saturday. Panchayat and civic elections to Itanagar Municipal Corporation (IMC) and Pasighat Municipal Council (PMC) will be held on December 15.

The polling, which will begin at 7 am on Monday, will end at 4 pm, State Election Commissioner (SEC) Rinchin Tashi said. The campaigning for the polls ended at 4 pm on Saturday. Tashi, in an order, said that no person shall convene, hold or attend any public meeting relating to panchayat and municipal elections in the State in the next 48 hours.

As many as 63 candidates have already been elected uncontested in municipal and rural elections in the State. The

ruling BJP won unopposed in 58 zilla parishad constituencies, besides one candidate from the National People's Party (NPP).

A total of 5,037 BJP candidates for gram panchayat member seats have also been declared elected without contest. Four BJP candidates were also elected unopposed for the Itanagar Municipal Corporation (IMC).

A total of 440 candidates will contest 186 zilla parishad seats, along with 39 candidates for 16 IMC wards, and 21 candidates for eight PMC wards. The SEC said that a total of 13 gram panchayat constituencies received no nominations, while all nominations in 14 gram panchayat constituencies were rejected during scrutiny. Polling in the Dumba Singpho gram panchayat constituency has been countermanded due to the death of a validly nominated candidate.

IMA Passing Out Parade: 491 cadets join Indian Army

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Dehradun

After undergoing rigorous training at the Indian Military Academy (IMA) in Dehradun, 491 cadets participated in a grand Passing Out Parade on Saturday and will now be commissioned as officers in the Indian Army.

The spectacular parade, held at the historic Drill Square in front of the academy's Chatwood Building, was reviewed by Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi, who served as the reviewing officer. Along with 491 Indian cadets, 34 foreign cadets from 14 friendly countries also participated in the Autumn Term 2025 Passing Out Parade.

A total of 525 officer cadets from the 157th Regular Course, 46th Technical Entry Scheme, 140th Technical Graduate Course, 55th Special Commissioned Officers Course, and Territorial Army Online Entrance Exam 2023



may have ebbed, but Operation Sindoar continues, he said. "You (new officers) also join the Air Force at a moment when a new normal has firmly taken shape. An era defined by a high degree of operational preparedness, 24x7, 365 days. The intensity of operations may have ebbed, but Operation Sindoar continues," he said.

Asserting that war and warfare are at the cusp of a major revolution, General Chauhan said the Defence forces are committed to adapt to changing environment and imbibing reforms to remain ready and relevant. He further said battles in the older domains will always remain contested, often brutal. But in the new domains, they will be smart, swift, and shaped by intellect, innovation, and initiative. The force that masters new frontiers is more likely to prevail in future conflicts. General Chauhan reviewed the Combined Graduation Parade of 216 Course.

The intensity of operations

on the Civil Aviation Department, the CM had written, "All of you know that the construction of several new airports is underway in the State, and in the future, under the UDAN scheme, construction of many new airports has been proposed. The creation of the Civil Aviation Department will accelerate this, enhance the industrial environment, create employment opportunities, and help in the export of products manufactured in the State".

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The silver medal for securing first place in the 'Technical Entry Scheme-46' was awarded to WCC Abhinav Mehrotra. The silver medal for the 'Special Commission Officer Course' was given to Officer Cadet Sunil Kumar Chhetri.

Among the foreign cadets, the first place in merit was secured by Bangladesh's JUO Mohammad Safin Ashraf. The Army Chief's Banner for overall best performance in the Autumn Term was awarded to Imphal Company.

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The restoration of these two holidays was included in its election manifesto by the National Conference during the Assembly polls.

After forming the government, many leaders and legislators, including the party's general secretary, had passionately appealed to the LG to declare December 5, 2024 as a public holiday, but in vain.

State holidays on July 13 and December 5 were deleted from the list of public holidays by the LG administration on December 28, 2019, after the Abrogation of Articles 35A and 35B.

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Jointness, self reliance, innovation key to combat power: CDS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Hyderabad



Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan reviews the Combined Graduation Parade of the 216th course at the Air Force Academy (AFA) in Dundigal, near Hyderabad, Telangana on Saturday

may have ebbed, but Operation Sindoar continues, he said. "You (new officers) also join the Air Force at a moment when a new normal has firmly taken shape. An era defined by a high degree of operational preparedness, 24x7, 365 days. The intensity of operations may have ebbed, but Operation Sindoar continues," he said.

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PROSPECT



Swami Avimuktешwaranand Saraswati Ji Maharaj felicitating New Delhi Station Manager Rakesh Sharma with the Martand Honour for dedicating his selfless service to hundreds of railway passengers during his three decades as a serving Rail-man. The honour was bestowed in the event organised by Kurukshetra Gurukul Foundation led by its Founder President Sandeep Deo. Sharma is credited with reaching out to people/passengers and help them in searching for lost and found items in trains, platforms.

Raj Kumar Goyal to be sworn in as new CIC

Former IAS officer Raj Kumar Goyal will be sworn in as Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) by President Droupadi Murmu on Monday.

Former Railway Board chief Jaya Verma Sinha, former IPS officer Swagat Das, former CSS officer Sanjeev Kumar Jindal, former IAS officer Surendra Singh Meena and ex-Indian Forest Service officer Khushwant Singh Sethi have been recommended as Information Commissioners.

Senior journalists P R Ramesh and Ashutosh Chaturvedi, and Sudha Rani Relangi, Member (Legal), PNGRB will take oath as ICs by newly sworn in CIC.

Cooperatives key to India's self-reliance: Minister Gurjar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Guwahati

Union Minister Krishan Pal Gurjar on Saturday emphasised the role of the cooperative movement in making the country self-reliant, with States like Assam to play a special part in it. He was speaking at the opening of the 4th Cooperative Mela 2025, organised by the State's Cooperation department, under the guidance of the Ministry of Cooperation.

The three-day event will showcase the strength, diversity and potential of the cooperative movement in the State. Gurjar, the Union Minister of State for Cooperation, said that the cooperative movement in Assam is a natural extension of the State's deep cultural and spiritual ethos.

He paid tribute to the great Vaishnavite saints, Srimanta Shankaradev and Madhavdev, whose teachings on unity, equality and service to society form the very foundation of the cooperative spirit.

He maintained that under the leadership of the Prime Minister, and the focused guidance of the Union Minister of Cooperation, the national vision of 'Sahkar Se Samriddhi' (Prosperity through Cooperation) is transforming into a vibrant reality.

Gurjar highlighted the establishment of the Ministry of Cooperation in 2021 as a historic step, providing the necessary institutional impetus and a clear blueprint for an all-round, world-class cooperative system in the country. Praising Assam's reforms in this sector, the Union minister said this State-level proactive implementation has posi-

tioned it as a leader in key national initiatives, including the 100 per cent computerisation of Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS), with over 800 PACS already adopting the new Model Byelaws.

He said that this progress is empowering youth and women, fostering entrepreneurship in diverse sectors and contributing to financial inclusion for over 32 lakh members. Assam is now firmly aligned with the National Cooperative Policy 2025's goal of establishing one cooperative in every village by 2026, Gurjar said, urging collective effort to build a prosperous, self-reliant and cooperative-led future for the State.

State Minister for Cooperation Jogen Mohan, also speaking on the occasion, said the exhibition is a celebration of grassroots empowerment. He praised the participants for achieving self-dependence and demonstrating remarkable resourcefulness by successfully turning waste into valuable resources using locally available materials.

He detailed the comprehensive benefits these cooperatives are bringing to the people, spanning diverse sectors—from the production of essential goods to the success of women's Self-Help Groups.

The Cooperative Mela features participation from 160 cooperative societies representing key sectors such as handloom, fishery, dairy, agriculture and youth, and women-led enterprises, providing a vibrant platform for showcasing local products, innovations and cooperative success stories.

CJI seeks unified judicial policy, tech for courts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Jaisalmer

Pushing for a "unified judicial policy", Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Saturday said technology can help align standards and practices across courts, creating a "seamless experience" for citizens, regardless of their location.

He said high courts—due to the federal structure—have had their own practices and technological capacities, and "regional barriers" can be broken down with technology to create a more unified judicial ecosystem.

Delivering the keynote address at the West Zone Regional Conference in Jaisalmer, Kant proposed the idea of a "national judicial ecosystem" and called for an overhaul of India's judicial system with the integration of technology.

"Today, as technology reduces geographical barriers and enables convergence, it invites us to think of justice not as regional systems operating in parallel,

but as one national ecosystem with shared standards, seamless interfaces, and coordinated goals," he said.

He emphasised how the role of technology in the judiciary has evolved over time.

"Technology is no longer merely an administrative convenience. It has evolved into a constitutional instrument that strengthens equality before the law, expands access to justice, and enhances institutional efficiency," he said, highlighting how digital tools can bridge gaps in the judicial system.

Kant pointed out that technology enables the judiciary to overcome the limitations of physical distance and bureaucratic hurdles.

"It allows the judiciary to transcend physical barriers and bureaucratic rigidities to deliver outcomes that are timely, transparent and principled," he said, adding that the effective use of technology can modernise the delivery of justice and make it more accessible to citizens across the country.

He pointed to the potential of technology in improving predictability.

"Technology enables us to

The CJI called for implementing a "unified judicial policy".

He said India's judicial system has long been shaped by its federal structure, and different high courts have their own practices and technological capacities.

"India's vast diversity has led to different high courts evolving their own practices, administrative priorities and technological capacities. This variation, though natural in a federal democracy, has resulted in uneven experiences for litigants across the country," he said.

Kant underscored that predictability is crucial for building trust in the judicial system.

"A core expectation citizens place upon the courts is predictability," he said, adding that citizens should not only expect fair treatment but also consistency in how cases are handled across the country.

He pointed to the potential of technology in improving predictability.

"Technology enables us to

track systemic delays and make problems visible rather than concealed," he said.

By identifying areas where delays occur, such as in bail matters or cases involving certain types of disputes, courts can take targeted action to address these issues and improve efficiency, Kant said.

The CJI explained that data-driven tools could identify the reasons behind delays or bottlenecks, allowing for faster, more focused solutions.

"Technology enables prioritisation by flagging sensitive case categories, monitoring pendency in real time and ensuring transparent listing protocols," he said.

Justice Surya Kant also discussed the importance of prioritising urgent cases where delays could result in significant harm. He highlighted his recent administrative order that ensures urgent cases, such as bail petitions or habeas corpus cases, are listed within two days of curing defects.

"Where delay causes deep

harm, the system must respond with urgency," he said, explaining that technology can help courts identify and expedite such cases. Kant also raised the issue of the clarity of judicial decisions.

He noted that many litigants, despite winning cases, often struggle to understand the terms of their judgment due to complex legal language.

"Although the orders had gone in their favour, they remained unsure of what relief they had actually secured because the language was too technical, vague or evasive to understand," he said.

He advocated for more uniformity in how judgments are written. "A unified judicial approach must therefore extend to how we communicate outcomes," he said.

The CJI also discussed the role of AI and digital tools in improving case management. He pointed to the potential of AI-based research assistants and digital case management

systems to streamline judicial processes.

"Emerging technological tools are now capable of performing once-unthinkable functions. They can highlight missing precedent references, cluster similar legal questions, and simplify factual narration," he said, explaining how these technologies can help judges make more consistent decisions.

He also highlighted tools like the National Judicial Data Grid and e-courts, which are already helping to standardise processes like case filings and tracking.

Kant reiterated that the integration of technology into the judicial process is not just about improving efficiency but about upholding the integrity of the system and strengthening public trust. "The measure of innovation is not the complexity of the software we deploy, but the simplicity with which a citizen understands the outcome of their case and believes that justice has been served," he said.

Papon lights up IRFC 40th Foundation Day

GYANVI SHARMA
■ New Delhi

The Indian Railways Finance Corporation (IRFC) celebrated its 40th foundation day on December 12, 2025 in a spectacular evening filled with music, joy and nostalgia.

The highlight of the evening was none other than the renowned singer Papon (Angaraag Mahanta), whose performance left the audience mesmerised.

The night began with a captivating short film showcasing Papon's journey—glimpses of his blockbuster hits, achievements and memorable past performances.

The cinematic introduction seamlessly led to his grand entry on stage, greeted by the roaring applause of the audience.

"Qayde Se" from the movie Metro In Dino, which had the audience swaying to the rhythm, their flashlights illuminating the hall like a sea of stars.

He delighted the crowd further with a surprise selection of ghazals by Jagjit

Setting the tone for the evening, Papon opened with his iconic song "Kyon" from the movie Barfi, instantly winning hearts and raising the energy in the auditorium.

What followed was a performance that combined raw enthusiasm with a soft, enduring charm. Papon's voice resonated deeply, touching not just the ears but the hearts of everyone present. Among the highlights was his rendition of the latest hit

"Qayde Se" from the movie Metro In Dino, which had the audience swaying to the rhythm, their flashlights illuminating the hall like a sea of stars.

He delighted the crowd further with a surprise selection of ghazals by Jagjit

Singh, including the soulful "Tum Itna Jo Muskura Rahe Ho," along with evergreen classics like "Pehla Nasha Pehla Khumar," originally rendered by Sadhana Sargam and Udit Narayan. Each note and each verse carried a serene and almost magical quality that held the audience spellbound.

The energy peaked when the crowd passionately requested the chart-topping song "Bulleya" from the movie Sultan. Papon answered with an intriguing performance, doing full justice to the audience's excitement.

Accompanied by a talented team of musicians, including a skilled guitarist, flute player and percussionists, Papon's ensemble delivered flawless musical synergy, creating an unforgettable experience.

As the evening drew to a close, Papon and his band members were felicitated with mementos and warm appreciation from Indian Railways CEO Satish Kumar and the entire IRFC team led by CMD Manoj Kumar Dubey, recognising their remarkable contribution to the celebration.

The event was more than a musical performance, it was a celebration of talent, emotion and the enduring power of music to bring people together. The 40th foundation day of IRFC will be remembered not only for its milestone but also for the magical night when Papon's voice transformed the evening into a heartfelt musical journey.

Chennai dams full: 27-year record broken after monsoon and cyclone

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chennai

For the first time in nearly 27 years, water in three chief dams supplying drinking water to Chennai have reached their full reservoir level. Three other dams, too, are brimming with water as their levels have reached the maximum level, thanks to the northeast monsoon and cyclone Ditwah that triggered intense rainfall in Chennai and neighbouring districts during the northeast monsoon, officials said.

"The water levels reached the maximum level due to cyclone Ditwah that triggered intense rainfall in Chennai and neighbouring districts during the northeast monsoon," officials said.

Cholavaram dam (65.50 feet height), Kannankottai Thervoy Kandigai (115.35 feet), and Veeranam (47.50 feet) have water up to 59.22 feet, 114.33 feet, and 46.10 feet, respectively.

In 2015, when the city and suburbs reeled under massive floods, the water level at Poondi dam stood at 139.26 feet, which was 98.91 per cent of the storage (i.e. 2,905 mcft), Puzhal stood at 48.60 feet - 88.5 per cent (2,932 mcft), and Chembarambakkam stood at 83.05 feet with 83.07 per cent storage (3,028 mcft).

(3,300 mcft storage), respectively. The Chembarambakkam with a full tank level of 85.31 feet (3,645 mcft storage), currently has 3,622 mcft of water. All three reservoirs continue to receive inflows from the catchment areas.

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India in talks with Mexico on high tariffs; reserves right to act to protect exporters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

India is engaged with Mexico over the South American nation's decision to unilaterally raise tariffs on a number of products to find mutually beneficial solutions, even as New Delhi reserves the right to take appropriate measures to safeguard the interests of its exporters, an official said on Saturday.

These duties are announced against countries that do not have free trade agreements with Mexico, including India, China, South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia. The official said that India, in fact, was engaged with Mexico during the initial tabling of a bill in this regard. The Embassy of India in Mexico raised the issue with the Ministry of Economy on September 30, 2025, itself, seeking special concessions to shield Indian exports from the new tariffs.

"India values its partnership with Mexico and stands ready to work collaboratively toward a stable and balanced trade environment that benefits businesses and consumers in both countries,"

the official added. Further, both the countries are looking to start negotiations for a free trade agreement, and terms of reference (ToR) to initiate the talks formally are expected to be finalised soon. Experts said that the trade agreement will help insulate Indian companies from these tariffs, which were imposed under pressure from the US to align with America on increasing tariffs against China and prevent transhipment to America.

Mexico's Senate has approved a new tariff measure on December 11, 2025, and it has since been cleared by both chambers of Congress. It is aimed at boosting manufacturing and reducing trade imbalances.

Under the decision, Mexico will impose steep import tariffs—ranging from about 5 per cent to as high as 50 per cent on a wide range of goods (about 1,463 tariff lines) from countries that do not have free trade agreements with Mexico, including India, China, South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia.

However, the list of items covered is yet to be officially notified. The higher duties

will take effect on January 1, 2026. "The Department of Commerce is engaged with Mexico's Ministry of Economy to explore mutually beneficial solutions which align with global trade rules," the official said. A high-level meeting in this regard between Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal and Mexico's Vice Minister of Economy Luis Rosendo has already taken place and follow on technical meetings are expected soon.

"India reserves the right to take appropriate measures to safeguard the interests of Indian exporters, while continuing to pursue a solution through constructive dialogue," the official added.

The Government official further said that the actual impact on Indian exports will depend on the criticality of Indian exports to domestic supply chains in Mexico and ability of Indian companies to secure exemptions or pass on the tariff cost to the Mexican consumers.

India believes that unilateral increases in MFN (most favoured nation) tariffs, without prior consultations, do not align with the spirit of our cooperative economic

engagement or with the principles of predictability and transparency underpinning the multilateral trading system.

The official also said that the Government is currently examining the details and implications of Mexico's tariff revisions and remains engaged with all stakeholders to monitor the evolving situation. Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) Director General Ajay Sahai said that Mexico's decision is a matter of concern, particularly for sectors like automobiles and auto components, machinery, electrical and electronics, organic chemicals, pharmaceuticals, textiles and plastics. Such steep duties will erode our competitiveness and risk disrupting supply chains that have taken years to develop," Sahai said, adding that this development also underlines the little urgency for India and Mexico to fast-track a comprehensive trade agreement.

India believes that unilateral increases in MFN (most favoured nation) tariffs, without prior consultations, do not align with the spirit of our cooperative economic

UNESCO meet at Delhi's Red Fort concludes; 67 new elements added to ICH lists

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi

A key UNESCO meet on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH) being held at Delhi's Red Fort ends on Saturday, with the panel adding 67 new living heritage elements from various countries during the nearly week-long session.

The next session of the Inter-Governmental Committee (IGC) for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage will be hosted in December 2026 in China's Xiamen city, a senior official of UNESCO said on Friday.

The closing ceremony was

hosted in the evening by India at the temporary pavilion, Plenary Hall, at the fort complex, as delegates will head out for sightseeing on Saturday after days of intense discussion.

The session was held for the first time in India with the Red Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as its venue. Fumiko Ohn



19 US States challenge Trump's \$100,000 H-1B fee

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New York/Washington

Nineteen US states have sued the Trump administration over its "unlawful" decision to impose a \$100,000 fee on new H-1B visa petitions, warning that the move will worsen labour shortages in key sectors such as health care, education and technology. New York Attorney General Letitia James, along with 18 other attorneys general, on Friday filed the lawsuit in the US District Court for the District of Massachusetts, challenging what they termed a "massive" increase in H-1B fees without legal authority or due process.

The H-1B visa programme allows highly skilled foreign professionals to work temporarily in the US and is widely used by Indian nationals. The coalition argued that the new fee would make the programme effectively inaccessible for Government and non-profit employers that depend on H-1B workers to provide essential services in health care, education, technology, and other fields.

"H-1B visas allow talented doctors, nurses, teachers, and other workers to serve communities in need across our country. The administration's illegal attempt to ruin this programme will make it harder for New Yorkers to get health care, disrupt our children's education, and hurt our economy. I will keep fighting to stop this chaos



and cruelty targeting immigrant communities," James said in a statement.

In September, US President Donald Trump announced that his administration would levy a one-time USD 100,000 fee on all new H-1B applications, which the attorneys general described as a "sudden" and "massive" increase over existing charges. The attorneys general contended that the imposition of the new fee is "unlawful" and the move violates the Administrative Procedure Act as well as the Immigration and Nationality Act, as it was imposed

without congressional approval or the required rule-making process.

Joining James in the lawsuit are the attorneys general of Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin. The coalition said the new fee on H-1B visas will severely restrict states' ability to hire new workers under the programme to address labour shortages, disrupting access to education,

health care, and other critical services. This shortage of workers would be devastating for rural and underserved communities already facing shrinking workforces, it warned. In New York alone, more than a third of health care workers are immigrants, while public universities and hospitals rely heavily on H-1B professionals, according to the lawsuit. In New York's 16 rural counties, there are currently four primary care physicians for every 10,000 people. New York's hospitals already face a pervasive nursing shortage estimated to reach 40,000 nurses by

2030. A reduction in H-1B visa holders would only exacerbate this shortage, it said. Nationwide, the American Medical Association estimates the US will face a shortage of 86,000 physicians by 2036, a shortage that H-1B workers will be critical in filling, the lawsuit said. Across the US, at least 930 colleges and universities employ staff on H-1B visas. More than half of these institutions are public four-year universities, and more than 10 per cent are medical schools. In New York, the State University of New York (SUNY) employs 693 employ-

ees on H-1B visas, including many who serve students in rural and suburban areas of New York State.

The coalition argues that limiting access to H-1B visas will lead to more crowded classrooms for students and disrupt critical research at leading universities.

Other critical industries in New York, such as technology, finance, and the arts, also rely on H-1B visa holders to fill essential roles. Across the state, more than 13,000 people on H-1B visas work in these sectors.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta said Trump's \$100,000 H-1B visa fee creates "unnecessary" and "illegal" financial burdens on California public employers and other providers of vital services, exacerbating labour shortages in key sectors.

"The Trump administration thinks it can raise costs on a whim, but the law says otherwise. We are going to court to defend California's residents and their access to the world-class universities, schools, and hospitals that make Californians proud to call this state home," Bonta said. Since the 1950s, the US has had a visa programme that allows skilled workers to temporarily live in America and work in specialised fields. The current version of the H-1B programme was created in the 1990s and allows employers to hire workers in a "specialty occupation" for a maximum of six years.

UK honors Naoroji's 200th birth anniversary



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ London

of Dadabhai Naoroji, who came initially for business to the UK," said Bilmioria, founder of Cobra Beer. "He was also an academic as a professor at Elphinstone College and, of course, he was a politician – the first Indian, first ethnic minority ever to be elected to this Parliament," he noted. Bilmioria revealed that the bicentenary commemoration was initially planned for September, to coincide with the month of Dadabhai Naoroji's birth 200 years ago, but had to be postponed due to strike action. "But we were adamant in making sure that this event would take place during the year of his 200th birth anniversary, and here we are," he added. The Indian High Commissioner to the UK, Vikram Doraiswami, reflected upon the legacy of Naoroji and the impact of the Parsi community in the political and social life of India.

Bulgaria's president will start talks on new cabinet



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Sofia

until a new election is held in two months. Analysts expect another election – the eighth since 2021 – would likely produce a deeply fragmented parliament and more political instability as Bulgaria readies to join the common European Union in 2027. In a last-minute effort to block the country's path to the euro, the pro-Russian Vazrazhdane party submitted in parliament a draft resolution requesting a one-year postponement of Bulgaria's entry into the eurozone, citing the absence of a new budget and political instability.

Bulgaria's president will start consultations with parliamentary groups next week on forming a new cabinet following the collapse of the Government in nationwide anti-corruption protests.

Rosen Zhelyazkov's minority Government had survived six no-confidence votes since it was appointed in January, only to be toppled in the street protests on Thursday by tens of thousands. President Rumen Radev is set to invite the biggest group in parliament for talks on forming a Government. If that fails, the second-largest grouping will get its chance before the president chooses a candidate. If all attempts fail – which is likely – he will appoint a caretaker cabinet

Three US lawmakers introduce resolution to end 50% tariffs imposed by Trump on India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New York/Washington



FILE PHOTO

Three influential US lawmakers have introduced a resolution in Congress aimed at ending the tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump on India, saying the "irresponsible tariff strategy" toward Delhi is a counterproductive approach that "weakens a critical partnership".

Representatives Deborah Ross of North Carolina, Marc Veasey of Texas and Raja Krishnamoorthi of Illinois introduced the resolution on Friday in the House of Representatives to terminate Trump's national emergency authorising tariffs of up to 50 per cent on imports from India, helping to restore Congress' constitutional authority over trade.

Trump has imposed a 50 per cent tariff on India, the highest in the world, including 25 per cent for Delhi's purchases of Russian oil. The resolution would terminate

the national emergency that Trump invoked to impose sweeping tariffs on Indian goods under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) and rescind the additional 25 per cent "secondary" duties that took effect on August 27 on top of earlier reciprocal tariffs. Together, these measures raised duties on many

American workers, and drive up costs for consumers. Ending these damaging tariffs will allow the United States to engage with India to advance our shared economic and security needs," the Indian-American lawmaker said. The resolution follows a bipartisan Senate-passed measure to end Trump's Brazil tariffs and rein in his abuse of emergency powers to raise duties on imports, the statement said. "North Carolina's economy is deeply connected to India through trade, investment, and a vibrant Indian American community," Ross added.

She said that Indian companies have invested over a billion dollars and created thousands of good-paying jobs in our state – especially in the Research Triangle's life sciences and technology sectors. North Carolina manufacturers export hundreds of millions of dollars in goods to India each year.

Bangladesh Govt orders security clampdown

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Dhaka

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus-led interim Government on Saturday ordered a nationwide security clampdown as fresh unrest gripped Bangladesh following the shooting of a youth leader of a right-wing cultural group, also a candidate in the February 12 general elections.

"The Government is going to start the second phase of Operation Devil Hunt to help ensure public safety and combat the growing threat of illegal arms," Home Affairs Adviser

Alam Chowdhury told a press conference. The announcement came after three assailants shot Inquilab Mancha leader Sharif Osmann Hadi on Friday, as he initiated his election campaign at central Dhaka's Bijoynagar area – from where he is contesting as an independent candidate. According to doctors, his condition is very critical. Chowdhury announced a

reward of Taka 50 lakh for information leading to the arrest of one of the suspects who shot Hadi, while police issued his picture, identifying him as Faisal Karim Masud.

The interim Government

first launched the Operation Devil hunt in February this year, following protests over an attack on the private house of a former minister in the northern suburb of the capital.

Oners, the Belta State news agency reported.

A close ally of Russia, Minsk has faced Western isolation and sanctions for years.

Lukashenko has ruled the nation of 9.5 million with an iron fist for more than three decades, and the country has been repeatedly sanctioned by Western countries both for its crackdown on human rights and for allowing Moscow to use its territory in the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Belarus has released hundreds of prisoners since July 2024.

Earlier Saturday, the United States said it was lifting sanctions on Belarusian potash in

the latest sign of a thaw between Washington and the isolated autocracy.

John Coale, the US special envoy for Belarus, made the announcement after meeting Lukashenko in Minsk on Friday and Saturday.

Speaking with journalists, Coale described the two-day talks as "very productive," Belarus' state news agency Belta reported Saturday.

The US envoy said that normalising relations between Washington and Minsk was "our goal."

"We're lifting sanctions, releasing prisoners. We're constantly talking to each other,"

he said, according to Belta. He also said that the relationship between the countries was moving from "baby steps to more confident steps" as they increased dialogue.

The last time US officials met with Lukashenko in September 2025, Washington announced easing some of the sanctions against Belarus while Minsk released more than 50 political prisoners into Lithuania.

Overall, Belarus released more than 430 political prisoners since July 2024, in what was widely seen as an effort at a rapprochement with the West. Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya –

Bialatski's wife – told The Associated Press on Saturday that sanctions relief was part of a deal between Minsk and Washington, in which another large group of political prisoners in Belarus were expected to be released.

The freeing of political prisoners means that Lukashenko understands the pain of Western sanctions and is seeking to ease them,"

Tsikhanouskaya said. She added: "But let's not be naive: Lukashenko hasn't changed his policies, his crackdown continues, and he keeps on supporting Russia's war against Ukraine."

Iran raises gasoline prices after deadly 2019 protests

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Tehran



Iran introduced a new pricing tier on Saturday for its nationally subsidised gasoline, attempting to rein in spiralling costs for the first time since a price hike in 2019 that sparked nationwide protests and a crackdown that reportedly killed over 300 people. Cheap gasoline has been viewed for generations as a birthright in Iran, sparking mass demonstrations as far back as 1964 when a price increase forced the shah to put military vehicles on the streets to replace those of striking taxi drivers. But Iran's theocracy faces a growing squeeze from the country's rapidly depreciating rial currency and economic sanctions imposed due to Tehran's nuclear program. That has made the cost of having some of the world's cheapest gasoline at a few pennies per gallon that much more expensive.



US removes Brazilian SC justice from sanctions list

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Washington

The US removed Brazilian Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes from its sanctions list after initially adding him over his role in leading the trial against former President Jair Bolsonaro De Moraes' wife and the Lex Institute, which she leads, were also taken off the list, according to documents from the Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control. The Treasury Department did not immediately return a message seeking comment on why de Moraes had been taken off the list. The Trump administration had sanctioned the judge in July, accusing him of using his position to authorize arbitrary pretrial detentions and suppress freedom of expression in Brazil. Bolsonaro was accused of masterminding a plot to stay in power despite his 2022 election defeat to current President Luiz Inácio Lula.



Gill to face three-game Test to secure T20I future

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dharamsala

The countdown to save his place in the playing XI begins for a beleaguered Shubman Gill, who is likely to get three matches against South Africa to prove his worth before the Indian team management switches to a 'Plan B' ahead of the T20 World Cup, starting in six weeks.

As India gear up to play the third T20I against the Proteas on Sunday in sub-10-degree temperatures in the lap of the ice-clad Dhauladhar range, things are suddenly heating up in the Indian dressing room, with the prolonged poor form of skipper Suryakumar Yadav coming under the scanner.

Worse, his deputy Shubman Gill, who was pushed into the XI at the expense of a settled Sanju Samson, is not inspiring much confidence.

The South African pace attack featuring Anrich Nortje, Marco Jansen, Lungi Ngidi, Otniel Baartman and Lutho Sipamla — has shown how to bowl on Indian tracks, and the HPCA Stadium strip, offering extra bounce and some movement off the surface, will certainly keep them interested.

Among all T20 sides, South Africa, in terms of personnel, appears to have the requisite balance to win the trophy in the Indian subcontinent this time. Quinton de Kock's return, along with the likes of



India's Shubman Gill, Jitesh Sharma and Abhishek Sharma during a training session ahead of the third T20I cricket match between India and South Africa at HPCA Stadium in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh

PTI

Aiden Markram, Dewald Brevis, Donovan Ferreira, David Miller and all-rounder Jansen, gives their batting an intimidating look.

With only eight games, starting from the third T20I, left before the start of the T20 World Cup title defence, India's under-fire head coach Gautam Gambhir won't be able to afford, two out-of-form top-order batters in the starting line-up.

Being the skipper of the side, Surya will certainly have immunity going into the T20 World Cup despite being

completely out of form for the past one year but same can't be said about Gill, who wasn't the original choice as an opener.

Gill's entry into the T20 set-up was a classic case of trying to fix something that ain't broken and things haven't looked good so far. In this backdrop, Gill would

need to bat out of his skin to prove that Ajit Agarkar-led committee wasn't wrong in

throwing Samson under the bus for one bad series against England. The stylish Indian Test and

ODI skipper will have to find his T20 game and at least score in two of the three matches if he doesn't want Samson to get his rightful place back or for that matter, find Yashasvi Jaiswal, with a fabulous T20I strike-rate of 165, enter the fray during New Zealand series.

While head coach Gambhir is too proud a person to admit but sending Axar Patel as a one drop batter during the second T20I was a "tactical brain fade" from the team's think-tank.

The kind misstep that was taken with Axar's promotion is unlikely to be repeated in the third game where skipper is expected to go back to number 3 where he has got a lot of success in his first few years at the international level.

Similarly, Shivam Dube

being sent at number eight due to the shuffling of batting order was another poor call which would need course correction in the next game.

Kuldeep Yadav is one

bowler who has consistently troubled the Proteas batter

but in an Indian team where batting till number 8 is non-negotiable, the left-arm wrist spinner often finds himself getting the rough end of the stick.

At Dharamsala too, he might have to sit out as Kuldeep and Varun Chakravarthy, two non-batters can't be clubbed in the same T20 playing eleven as that would lead to compromise in batting depth.

While Arshdeep hasn't had a good series so far, it will be interesting to find if team management can find a place for Kuldeep in the playing eleven with Hardik Pandya sharing the new ball with Jasprit Bumrah.

The five-match series is currently tied 1-1.

Teams:

India: Suryakumar Yadav (captain), Shubman Gill, Abhishek Sharma, NT Tilak Verma, Axar Patel, Hardik Pandya, Shivam Dube, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Varun Chakravarthy, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Sanju Samson (wk), Harshit Rana, Kuldeep Yadav, Washington Sundar.

South Africa: Aiden Markram (captain), Quinton de Kock, Reeza Hendricks, Dewald Brevis, David Miller, Tristan Stubbs, Donovan Ferreira, Marco Jansen, Lutho Sipamla, Otniel Baartman, Anrich Nortje, Lungi Ngidi, Corbin Bosch, Keshav Maharaj, George Linde. Match Starts at 7 pm.

Uthappa calls out clarity issues in Indian batting



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Abhishek Sharma," Uthappa said on Jio Hotstar.

Instead, Uthappa felt Axar's cautious run-a-ball 21 failed to ease the pressure, forcing a shift in approach as wickets fell around him and slowing the chase further.

"At the international level, batters need clear roles and a clear idea of how they're going to construct an innings," he said.

"Flexibility with match-ups after the first six to eight overs is fine, but you still need a solid foundation before you can chase a big score — you can't build a skyscraper without a base."

"Asking players to prepare for multiple roles in the same game makes run-scoring more complicated, and that's where India are missing a trick. I don't agree with being overly flexible so early in the innings beyond the openers," said the key member of the 2007 T20 World Cup winning side.

Desert Vipers cruise to easy eight-wicket victory over Gulf Giants

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Dubai

Khuzaima Tanveer grabbed four wickets before Sam Curran and Max Holden stitched an unbeaten 123-run partnership as Desert Vipers registered an easy eight-wicket win over Gulf Giants for their fifth straight win in the DP World ILT20 Season 4.

Tanveer finished with 4/10 in the first innings, the best by a UAE bowler in DP World ILT20 history, and also became the first to claim four wickets in the powerplay. His early attack kept the Giants on the backfoot throughout, restricting them to 157/7 in 20 overs at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium on Friday.

Then, Curran's unbeaten 67 off 43 balls with five fours and three sixes complemented Max Holden's 64 runs off 41 balls, as they chased down the target with ease.

Fakhar Zaman (14 off 8) was the first Vipers batter to fall in the second over, courtesy a beautiful ball by Chris Wood.



Holden kept the runs flowing, and other than a run out of Hasan Nawaz (7 off 9) in the fourth over, the Vipers looked in control of the run-chase. They finished the powerplay at 53/2.

Curran joined the attack in the 11th over, smashing 19 runs off left-arm spinner Liam Dawson's bowling, including three sixes, considerably reducing the required run-rate.

His power-hitting continued off Kyle Mayers' bowling, completing his half century in just 32 balls with a lovely run-rate.

The likes of Chris Wood and Mark Adair were unable to keep them in check and they smashed an unbeaten 123-run partnership in just 77 balls to chase down the target in 16.5 overs.

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The likes of Chris Wood and Mark Adair



The Carnival of Cinema

TEAM VIVA

Cinema, at its core, is a collective experience. It draws strangers into a shared space, invites them to observe, reflect and respond together, and in doing so, shapes public imagination. For more than seven decades, the International Film Festival of India has functioned as a vital platform for this exchange, bringing global cinema into conversation with India's evolving cultural identity. Founded in 1952 as a modest showcase of international films, IFFI has grown into South Asia's most significant film festival, mirroring the country's changing relationship with storytelling, technology and creative ambition.

The 56th edition of IFFI, held in Goa from November 20 to 28, 2025, marked a deliberate shift in scale and intent. Anchored in the theme "Convergence of Creativity and Technology," the festival positioned cinema not only as an artistic practice but as a strategic driver of cultural influence and economic growth. Its timing alongside the Golden Jubilee year of the National Film Development Corporation further underscored this moment of transition, reinforcing NFDC's renewed role in preserving legacy while actively shaping the future of Indian cinema.

The history that underpins IFFI

To appreciate the festival's importance, one must first look at the foundations of Indian cinema. The nation's screen story began in 1913 with Dadasaheb Phalke's silent landmark, *Raja Harishchandra*, which used mythological narratives to establish a powerful, indigenous storytelling form. The coming of sound in 1931 with *Alam Ara* permanently embedded music and dialogue, forging the complex, multi-genre identity of Indian film. The artistic maturity of the 1950s and 60s saw the rise of visionaries like Satyajit Ray, whose profound humanism earned India enduring and respected status in the global artistic domain.

This dedication to cultural exchange led to the establishment of the IFFI in 1952. Inspired by the ancient philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam ("the world is one family"), its purpose was to build bridges across nations through film. IFFI achieved competitive status in 1965 and holds the distinction of being the sole South Asian film festival accredited by the International Federation of Film Producers' Associations (FIAPF). Since permanently moving to its tropical home in Goa in 2004, IFFI has become Asia's most crucial annual forum for artistic, commercial, and policy dialogue.

The Festival Chronicle

The 56th edition made a bold opening statement by commencing with a Historic Grand Parade in Panaji, rather than an exclusive indoor event. This unprecedented move instantly rendered the opening ceremony accessible and inclusive, dissolving the traditional boundary between an elite festival and the general public.

The procession was a powerful display of cultural federalism, featuring magnificent floats and vibrant state tableaus from Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, and Goa. The emotional peak was the "Bharat Ek Soor" collective-over a hundred folk artists from sixteen states whose combined rhythms and synchronized movement culminated in a breathtaking, living tribute to the national flag.

In his official address, Chief Minister Dr Pramod Sawant cemented the state's long-term vision, formally declaring Goa's ambition to become the "Creative Capital of India." The ceremony also paid profound respect to the industry's icons, honouring legendary actor Nandamuri Balakrishna for his fifty-year screen career.

The choice of films set an immediate standard



of artistic and intellectual engagement:

INTERNATIONAL OPENING FILM: THE BLUE TRAIL (O ÚLTIMO AZUL)

- The competitive section was led by this Brazilian dystopian drama, directed by Gabriel Mascaro. Having previously won the Silver Bear Grand Jury Prize at Berlinale 2025, the film, which follows an odyssey through the collapsing Amazon, compelled audiences to confront climate anxieties through a singular, human lens.

INDIAN PANORAMA:

- Feature Film: Rajkumar Periasamy's Tamil film, *Amaran*, was selected to showcase the sophisticated craft and storytelling depth emerging from India's regional powerhouses.
- Non-Feature Film: Kamlesh K Mishra's Hindi film, *Kakori*, reaffirmed the festival's dedication to powerful, non-fiction narratives dealing with crucial historical and social moments.

Incubation and economic strategy

The immediate transition from public ceremony to focused industry activity, solidifying IFFI's function as a talent incubator and nexus for global partnership.

- Masterclass Series Inauguration: The Union Minister of State for Information & Broadcasting, Dr L Murugan, inaugurated the Masterclass Series at Kala Academy. This session was strategically opened to the general public for the first time, democratizing access to expert knowledge and drawing international professionals from Australia, Japan, Germany, and Canada.
- The Launch of CMOT 2025: The fifth edition of the Creative Minds of Tomorrow (CMOT) commenced, challenging 125 emerging creators with an intensive 48-hour filmmaking competition. Dr Murugan highlighted that this high-pressure environment was intended to refine their craft, linking the programme directly to larger governmental support for creative industries, such as

the new Indian Institute of Creative Technologies.

- Ambassadors' Roundtable on Co-Production: The festival served as a crucial diplomatic and commercial hub. The Roundtable was held to facilitate international co-production agreements and technology partnerships. Secretary Shri Sanjay Jaju emphasised India's growing role as a global production centre. Dr Murugan underscored co-production as a vital pillar of growth, citing the projected expansion of India's Media and Entertainment sector to USD 31.6 billion in 2025, a growth driven by technological advancements in VFX and robust anti-piracy efforts.

- Red Carpet & Dialogue: The Red-Carpet segment continued to draw high-profile talent (Anupam Kher, Jackie Shroff, Manoj Bajpayee), providing vital exposure for various film premieres. A deeply insightful "In-Conversation" session, "Cinema and Culture: Reflections from Two Eras," featured filmmakers Muzaffar Ali and Shaad Ali, providing a critical lens on the evolution of artistic practice across generations.

The Engine Room. The WAVES Film Bazaar was operating at peak efficiency as South Asia's largest film market, creating a robust ecosystem for deal-making, co-productions, and project funding.

- The groundbreaking CinemAI Hackathon continued its focused work on applying Artificial Intelligence to cinematic innovation and critical areas like anti-

piracy solutions.

- The IFFiesta Cultural Showcase provided the evening's rich public engagement, seamlessly integrating the experience of global cinema with the celebratory, living traditions of Indian folk arts.

Resilience and Reflection

The Day became a day of intellectual and emotional climax, dedicated to the sheer tenacity required to sustain an artistic career.

- The Masterclass of Willpower: The most significant event was the Masterclass delivered by the veteran actor and speaker Anupam Kher, powerfully titled: "Giving Up is NOT a Choice!" Held at Kala Academy, the session transcended mere acting technique, offering a profound, motivational blueprint for sustaining a life in the arts through conviction and perseverance.

- Creative Minds Present: The intensive 48-hour Challenge of CMOT officially concluded, with the young filmmakers presenting their final works—a raw demonstration of their ability to execute a creative vision under rigorous pressure.

Global Press Narratives: The PIB Media Centre hosted a marathon of cross-cultural dialogue:

- International Voices were heard from the teams behind films like *De Tai Palo*, *Pike River*, *Karla* (Christina Theresa Tournatzés), and *Renoir* (Hayakawa Chie).

- Asian Cinema found a strong platform with the makers of *Seaside Serendipity* and *Tiger* (Anshul Chauhan), emphasizing regional artistic momentum.

- Indian filmmakers

representing diverse regional and documentary work, including *Sandesh Kadur* (Nilgiris — A Shared Wilderness), *Paresh Mokashi* (Mukkam Post Bombilwadi), and *Debangkar Borgohain* (Sikaar), engaged the media.

- A Sound Legacy: The day concluded with an intellectual tribute during the Lata Mangeshkar Memorial Talk, "The Rhythms of India: From the Himalayas to the Deccan," where composers Vishal Bhardwaj and B. Ajaneesh Loknath discussed the complex, emotional, and structural role of music in shaping the identity of Indian cinema.

Why does a festival like IFFI matter in today's world of cinema?

The 56th IFFI, through its radical public opening, focused diplomatic efforts, and masterclasses, showcased films while shaping the future ecosystem of film creation and distribution. In a fragmented, digital world saturated with content, IFFI emerged as an essential physical nexus—a place where deals are struck, co-production treaties are signed, and the human spark of a young creator is ignited through mentorship. It stood as a powerful international corrective, reaffirming that cinematic value lies in cultural depth, technological innovation, and artistic excellence, not commercial returns alone.

As technology grows capable of replicating spectacle with ease, the festival leaves behind a quieter, more urgent reflection: how will global cinema protect the human heart of storytelling in a future increasingly shaped by machines?

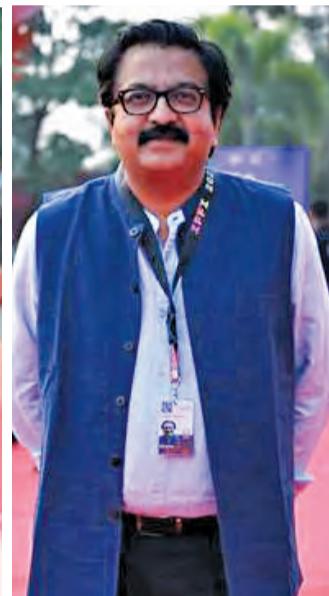




(L-R) Actor Kamal Haasan, filmmaker Shekhar Kapur, actor Ranveer Singh, actor Vineet Singh, actor Kishore Kadam from the film 'Gondhal,' German actress Katherina Schüttler, actress Tran Quán, and director Ash Mayfair of the film 'Skin of Youth' on the red carpet at IFFI 2025

Moments from IFFI 2025

For nine days, Goa lived cinema as filmmakers, audiences and stories from across the world came together, sharing screens, streets, conversations and memories



TEAM VIVA

Flashbulbs popped as Goa's evenings slipped into festival mode at the 56th International Film Festival of India, with the red carpet setting the pace each day. Cinema legends and emerging faces moved through the same space, turning it into the festival's most visible meeting point.

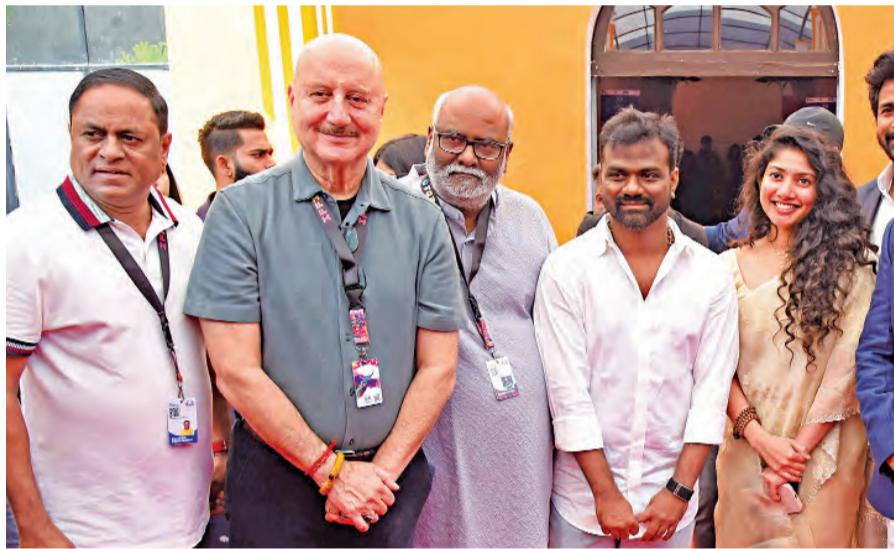
Across nine days, daily premieres reflected the breadth of Indian and global cinema. Rajinikanth, Ranveer Singh, Rishabh Shetty and Aamir Khan appeared alongside teams from *Gustaakh Ishq* and *Tere Ishq Mein*. Highlights included the world premiere of *The Family Man* (Season 3) with Manoj Bajpayee, Nimrat Kaur, Sharib Hashmi, Priyamani and Jaideep Ahlawat; a special showcase of *J20 Bahadur* featuring Farhan Akhtar, Raashi Khanna and Sparsh Walia; and the Marathi film *Asambhav* with Sachit Patil, Mukta Barve, Priya Bapat and Sandeep Kulkarni. Filmmaker Vidhu Vinod Chopra,

also attended the special screening of his restored classic 1942: *A Love Story*.

A defining feature of IFFI 2025 was its effort to place new cinema alongside traditions of craft, performance and exhibition. The Vintage Camera Exhibition offered a tactile glimpse into the tools that shaped early filmmaking, while the Handloom Sarees in Motion showcase linked cinematic presentation with India's textile heritage. Adding to this was a Photo Exhibition inaugurated by Indian actress Amree Baruah and Goa Chief Minister Dr Pramod Sawant at the Kala Academy, showcasing photographs from IFFI's 22-year journey in Goa. The exhibition also featured a collection of antique cameras, tracing the visual and technological evolution of the festival and cinema itself.

The intellectual core of IFFI remained strong through masterclasses and in-conversation sessions at the Kala Academy. Filmmakers such as Vidhu Vinod Chopra, Anupam Kher and Shekhar Kapur spoke about filmmaking as an emotional, ethical and technical practice. The festival also paid tribute to legendary actor Dharmendra, acknowledging his remarkable range and contribution to Indian cinema. A special celebration marked 50 years of *Sholay*, with director Ramesh Sippy's landmark film revisited as a defining moment in popular cinema and collective memory.

The penultimate evening belonged to Aamir Khan, who closed the festival's final Fireside Chat with candour and wit. Speaking to a packed hall, Khan described his instinct-driven approach to cinema, saying he liked to surprise both his audience and himself. Calling himself "a complete film personality, not an activist," he stressed that entertainment remained his primary objective, adding that the day he consciously chose to direct, he would likely stop acting. IFFI 2025 also advanced international collaboration through industry engagement. A Memorandum of



Understanding signed between IFFI, NFDC and the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne marked a step towards strengthening Indo-Australian screen relations. Tributes and restored classics provided continuity across generations, with films by Guru Dutt, Ritwik Ghatak and V Shantaram screened alongside contemporary works.

As the festival drew towards its conclusion, participation took on a personal dimension through India Post's 'My Stamp' initiative. Visitors converted their photographs into official, postage-valid stamps using an IFFI-themed template, taking home a tangible memory of the event.



Together, screenings, performances, learning sessions, industry initiatives and personal mementoes shaped an experience that extended beyond the screen. IFFI 2025 presented cinema as an art form shaped by history, refined by craft and sustained through collective experience, while remaining open to new voices and future possibilities.



IFFI 2025 Official Awards (Key Winners)

International Competition

- Golden Peacock - Best Feature Film: *Skin of Youth* (Vietnamese film by Ash Mayfair) – a bold romance featuring a transgender protagonist.
- Silver Peacock - Best Director: Santosh Davakahar for *Gondhal* (Indian Marathi thriller).
- Silver Peacock - Best Actor (Male): Ubeimar Rios for *A Poet*.
- Silver Peacock - Best Actor (Female): Jara Sofija Ostana for *Little Trouble Girls*.
- Special Jury Award: Akinola Davies Jr for *My Father's Shadow*.
- Best Web Series (OTT): *Bandish Bandits 2* – commended for making arts and music accessible through OTT.
- ICFT-UNESCO Gandhi Medal: *Safe House* - recognised for promoting peace, nonviolence and intercultural dialogue.
- Best Debut Director (International/Indian): *Kesari Chapter 2* (Hindi) - Karan Singh Tyagi.
- Lifetime Achievement / Special Recognition: Superstar Rajinikanth honored for 50 years in Indian cinema.

Select Top Films & Screenings at IFFI 2025

International Films (Competition & Gala)

- Skin of Youth* (Vietnam/Singapore/Japan) - Golden

Peacock winner.

- My Father's Shadow - Special Jury recognition.
- Safe House - Gandhi Medal winner (Norwegian/International).
- A Poet - Performance-winning film.
- Little Trouble Girls - Best Actress performance film.

Indian Competition & Panorama Highlights

IFFI's Indian Panorama section featured a rich selection of contemporary Indian cinema across languages (films chosen from hundreds of submissions).

Notable Indian films included:

- Gondhal (Marathi) - Best

Director award.

- Amaran (Tamil) - major Tamil film featured, also nominated for Golden Peacock.

Sarkeet (Malayalam) - Malayalam title in the selection.

Committee Kurrollu (Telugu) - in Best Debut Director nomination category.

Shape of Momo (Nepali) - noted Indian Panorama nominee.

ARM (Malayalam) - Best Debut Director nominee.

Binodiini Ekti Natir Upakhyan (Bengali) - featured nominee.

Special & World Premieres

- Oslo: A Tail of Promise - documentary world premiere presented by John Abraham, screened in Indian Panorama.

- The Blue Trail - opened the festival (international selection).

Emerging Voices

- IFFI 2025 screened 240+ films from around 81 countries with world, Asian and international premieres across multiple sections.

- The Indian Panorama featured around 25 feature films and 20 non-feature films selected from a large national pool.

- Creative Minds of Tomorrow (CMOT), a youth-focused program, concluded during the festival with emerging talent at center stage.



Key Themes and Initiatives

- Focus on AI and Technology: CinemAI Hackathon spotlighted AI-driven filmmaking and storytelling.
- Global Reach and Collaborations: The festival screened over 240 films from 81 countries, with Japan as Country of Focus and Spain and Australia featured as partner and spotlight countries.
- Inclusivity and Emerging Talent: Aligned with the theme 'Nari Shakti', over 50 films by women directors were showcased, alongside a strong focus on debut filmmakers and a dedicated Best Debut Indian Director award.
- WAVES Film Bazaar: The revamped film market boosted co-productions with a tech pavilion and cash grants.
- Accessibility: The festival incorporated various accessibility measures, including sign language interpreters and audio descriptions at venues, ensuring a more inclusive experience for all delegates.
- Cultural Engagement: The festival opened with a street carnival in Panaji, alongside the four-day cultural showcase IFFlesta.



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The Pioneer

AGENDA

New Delhi

December 14, 2025

War is an act of violence pushed to its utmost limits
— Carl von Clausewitz



The Lions of Longewala

Fought in the unforgiving sands of the Thar Desert, the Battle of Longewala remains one of the most extraordinary defensive stands in military history. From December 4-7, 1971, a small Indian Army company vastly outnumbered and facing overwhelming armour-held its ground against a major Pakistani offensive. Longewala is now regarded globally as a case study in battlefield strategy, leadership and grit. It is celebrated as Vijay Diwas in December every year

A Pivotal Engagement in the 1971 Indo-Pak War

The Battle of Longewala, immortalised in the film *Border*, was one of the most decisive engagements of the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War. Fought between December 4 and 7 in the Thar Desert of Rajasthan, it showcased the extraordinary courage, tactical brilliance, and resilience of the Indian Army. This defensive victory not only halted a major Pakistani armoured thrust but also reshaped the outcome of the war. Owing to its unique character, Longewala is now taught as a case study in leading military academies across the world. The 1971 war was triggered by the Bangladesh Liberation movement, as East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) fought for independence from West Pakistan. As Indian forces advanced rapidly in the East, Pakistan anticipated imminent defeat-planned a major offensive in the Western theatre. The strategy was to capture Indian territory and use it as leverage during post-war negotiations.

In Rajasthan, the Pakistani Army launched attacks along the border, with its main and most formidable thrust directed at the Longewala post. This post was defended by Alfa Company of the 23rd Battalion of the Punjab Regiment, commanded by Major Kuldip Singh Chandpuri. On December 4, 1971, Captain Dharam Vir of Alfa Company was on patrol along the International Border. Around 8:00 pm, he detected the unmistakable sound of tank movement across the border-indicating a large mechanized column approaching Longewala. He immediately relayed the information to Major Chandpuri, who at first found the scale hard to believe. But repeated confirmations from Capt Dharam Vir soon made it clear: an enemy infantry brigade supported by a tank regiment and an armoured squadron was advancing towards them.

This timely intelligence allowed the Indian defenders to quickly assume battle positions. Capt Dharam Vir was ordered to shadow the enemy column, provide continuous updates, and then withdraw to join the main defensive stand. Battalion Headquarters at Sadhewala rushed two recoilless guns to reinforce the post.

Defence Against Impossible Odds
As darkness descended, the Pakistani armour advanced towards Longewala. Outnumbered and outgunned, Alfa Company held its fire until the enemy came within striking distance. Major Chandpuri moved across the defences, encouraging his men and coordinating urgently requested reinforcements and air support. Throughout the night of December 4, Alfa Company withstood repeated enemy assaults, repelling them with fierce determination. Their

defensive stance prevented Pakistani forces from overrunning the post before dawn-a critical factor that would change the course of the battle.

The Turning Point

At first light on December 5, the Indian Air Force launched a devastating air campaign. Hawker Hunter and HF-24 Marut aircraft, guided by a Forward Air Controller, conducted precise bombing runs. Pakistani tanks, stranded in the dunes and unable to manoeuvre effectively, became easy targets.

By evening, the Pakistani advance had collapsed. They abandoned the battlefield, leaving behind 37 destroyed tanks and numerous vehicles. The Indian Army had secured a resounding victory.

Honours and Legacy

Major Kuldip Singh Chandpuri was awarded the Maha Vir Chakra for exceptional leadership. Many soldiers of Alfa Company received honours for their valour. The battle stands as a powerful reminder of the importance of defending sovereignty, adapting under pressure, and leveraging joint operations.

Strategic Significance

- Decisive Defensive Victory: Longewala demonstrated India's ability to repel a major armoured offensive with minimal resources.
- Protection of Rajasthan: The stand at Longewala prevented Pakistani forces from advancing towards Ramgarh and Jaisalmer.
- Impact on the Eastern Theatre: By failing in the West, Pakistan lost its only potential bargaining tool during the liberation of

Bangladesh.
■ Morale Booster: The victory significantly uplifted Indian Army morale.
■ Global Military Lessons: Longewala continues to be studied for its exemplary use of defensive tactics, intelligence, and airland coordination.

Key Factors Behind the Victory

Timely Intelligence: Capt Dharam Vir's early detection of Pakistani armour was critical in preparing the defences.

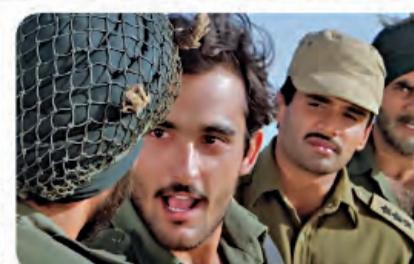
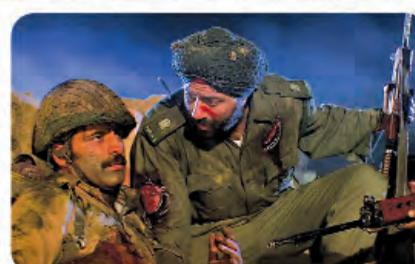
Effective Air Support: The Indian Air Force's relentless assaults played a decisive role in neutralising enemy armour.

Strong Defensive Positioning: The Indian Army's well-prepared positions and coordinated firepower proved superior despite being heavily outnumbered.

The Battle of Longewala remains one of the greatest examples of courage under fire. It is a testament to how determination, leadership, and strategic clarity can overcome overwhelming odds-and how a single night's stand can alter the destiny of a nation.



IN RAJASTHAN, THE PAKISTANI ARMY LAUNCHED ATTACKS ALONG THE BORDER, WITH ITS MAIN AND MOST FORMIDABLE THRUST DIRECTED AT THE LONGEWALA POST. THE POST WAS DEFENDED BY ALFA COMPANY OF THE 23RD BATTALION, THE PUNJAB REGIMENT



Behind the Scenes: The Making of *Border*

The 1997 war epic *Border*, directed by JP Dutta, remains one of Indian cinema's most iconic portrayals of patriotism. Based on the Battle of Longewala during the 1971 Indo-Pak War, the film's creation is filled with fascinating behind-the-scenes stories that shaped its authenticity and legacy.

INSPIRED BY A TRUE HERO

JP Dutta drew heavily from the real-life experiences of Major (later Brigadier) Kuldip Singh Chandpuri, who commanded the outnumbered Indian troops at Longewala. The film's character played by Sunny Deol is closely modelled on him, and the officer himself visited the sets during shooting.

SHOT IN REAL DESERT TERRAIN

To recreate the harsh conditions of the Thar desert, the crew

shot extensively in Bikaner and Jaisalmer. The temperatures soared above 45°C, posing challenges for actors and crew, but lending the visuals a raw, authentic feel.

AUTHENTIC MILITARY SUPPORT

The Indian Army offered extensive support to the film, providing tanks, artillery, vehicles, and access to border posts. Many soldiers even appeared as extras, adding remarkable realism to the battle sequences.

A TRIBUTE BORN FROM PERSONAL LOSS

Director J.P. Dutta dedicated *Border* to his brother, Squadron Leader Deepak Dutta, who lost his life in the 1971 war.

This personal connection infused the film with emotional depth and sincerity.

REAL TANKS, REAL EXPLOSIONS

Modern CGI-heavy battle films, *Border* used real explosives, controlled blasts, and actual military hardware. This practical approach gave the combat scenes their gritty impact.

THE ICONIC MUSIC WAS ALMOST DIFFERENT

The now-classic soundtrack by Anu Malik featuring "Sandese Aate Hain" and "Mere Dushman" was recorded with live orchestration. Interestingly, the producers initially considered a different composer, but Malik's patriotic melodies became immortal.

SUNNY DEOL'S POWERFUL DIALOGUE DELIVERY
It was one of the best performances by Sunny Deol who shined in his role, his powerful dialogues are still remembered and float on social media.

A MASSIVE ENSEMBLE CAST

Putting together the star-studded team-Sunny Deol, Jackie Shroff, Sunil Shetty, Akshay Khanna, Tabu, and others-was a logistical feat. Many actors agreed to reduced fees due to the film's patriotic subject.

ONE OF INDIA'S BIGGEST BLOCKBUSTERS

Despite being over three hours long, *Border* became one of the highest-grossing films of 1997 and remains a benchmark for Indian war cinema.

Partition of India A Human Catastrophe

In August 1947, India was partitioned into India and Pakistan. What was intended to be a political solution to terminate colonial control resulted in one of history's largest, most violent, and most inhumane partitions, fuelled by religion. Millions were uprooted; communal riots, massacres, abductions, forced conversions, and sexual assault ensued as people fled over hastily formed borders. The human toll—lives lost, families fractured, and communities torn apart—became the defining tragedy of the subcontinent's fall from empire.

A History of Cultural Integration

Long before 1947, the Indian subcontinent was a layered, composite civilisation. Over many centuries it assimilated migrants and conquerors. India developed as a cross-cultural civilisation; Greeks, Kushans, Huns, and Persians all contributed to the development of India's culture; Amir Khusrau shaped early Hindavi-Urdu; Akbar's Din-i-Illahi and Sulh-i-Kul promoted pluralism; Dara Shikoh connected Sufism and Vedanta; and Jayasi's Padmavat combined Islamic mythology with Indian ethos, creating a shared, composite civilisation that transcended strict boundaries.

The Tragic Anomaly

Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi opposed syncretism; Altaf Hussain Hali emphasised a distinct Muslim identity; Sir Syed Ahmad Khan advocated for separate Muslim sociopolitical interests; Muhammad Iqbal envisioned autonomous Muslim destiny; Muhammad Ali Jinnah turned this into political separatism; extremist sects later inflamed hostility—but some humane stories of partition emerged amidst the chaos.

Their swords were gleaming, icy, and ruthless

I was only 12 years old when Pakistan was formed, but those moments still live inside me as if they happened yesterday. My mother, Gyanvati; father, Anant Ram; uncle, Santaram; older brothers, Ramnath and Prannath; and my six-month-old baby sister all resided in Bahdemalli at the time. Before everything turned red one day, life was straightforward and tranquil.

I can recall the thudding footsteps of men hurrying into our home and the sound of angry voices. Their swords were gleaming, cold, and ruthless. They attacked and killed my father, my uncle, and my older brother Ramnath before I could comprehend anything. I saw firsthand how repeatedly they struck them. I can still hear their cries of "hai, hai!" They cried out, but nobody responded. As a small child witnessing her world being torn apart, I was frozen.

My brother Prannath grabbed my hand, crying and shouting. We ran. My mother carried my infant sister in her arms and ran. She looked for a well to jump into to save their honour. To her shock, the well was already filled with women's dead bodies. Unfortunately, my little sister died due to suffocation. My mother survived, along with around thirty-five other women. Hours later, the military arrived and pulled the 35 survivors out of the well. From there, they were taken to the refugee camp, where my mother and I were reunited—thanks to the jaws of the Gorkha Rifles.

Even now, when I try to talk about it, the words break on my tongue. My heart starts to shake. I survived, but I lost my father, uncle, brother, and my youngest sibling at home, whom I never saw again. That youngster inside me is still looking for them.

Name: Darshana Rani
Born: 1935 Baddomalli, Tehsil Shakargarh,
Now lives in: Ghuman, Punjab

Terror consume even the toughest men

I was around thirteen or fourteen when Partition tore through our lives. We lived near Shakargarh, in a community where Hindus and Muslims had coexisted for years. My father, Ram Lal; my mother, Chaman Dai; and all of our relatives were present. We never anticipated that one day we would be running for our lives.

I visited Gota Sarajwali with my maternal grandparents a few days before the actual violence began. I had no idea that I would be separated from my entire family. When the killings began, people in my community started fleeing on foot—afraid, unarmed, and trying to save their children. My family crossed the Rawi Bridge and arrived in Sarajwali. There, Muslims urged us, "If you want to save your life, convert," and we all converted to Islam. For nearly a month, this continued, and I witnessed terror consume even the toughest men. "Many who converted then used to go to the masjid for namaz, adopting a distinct identity."

One day, Indian military vehicles entered the village. Their voices broke through the dread like a miracle. They saved the surviving Hindus and led us to safety. I was reunited with my mother and brothers in a refugee camp, and it felt as though I had been given my life back.

Years later, we rebuilt our lives in Ghuman. I married there, my family expanded, and life progressed. Her son Rajakumar has narrated this account.

Name: Kamala Rani
Born: c. 1933-34 Kanjru area, Tehsil Shakargarh
Ghuman, Punjab

They gave the girls poison pills

My father, Sardar Gulab Singh, was an industrialist. He owned a cotton factory. We were four brothers and five sisters. The population of the Sillanwali mandi was about 10,000. More than half of them were Muslims. Inside the town there were Hindus, and around the outside were Muslim bastis. There were mostly bhatti (labourer) Muslims there. There was a municipality.

We had a very big haveli. The haveli's name was "Guru Arjun Building." There were many servants.

Nawab Allahbakhsh, who was the uncle of CM Malik Khizar Hayat Tiwana and happened to be my father's friend, told us that we need not worry as long as he was with us. My father told all of us brothers and sisters that if ever there was an attack on our haveli by the Muslims, how would we face it? What should we do in that situation? Above all, he worried about his three daughters, who were aged about 12 to 17. He gave them, one by one, small sachets of poison (zehar ki pudia) and told them that if such a situation arose and they fell into the hands of Muslims, then at that time they should take this poison.

Pakistan was formed, and conditions became worse and worse. Nawab Allahbakhsh said, "Sardar ji, now it is not right for you to remain

here. Now you must leave this place." Another friend from the bhatti also said, "Now you should leave and sell your kothi to me; I will give fifty thousand rupees for it." But my father said that he would give him the haveli without him purchasing it and come back later on when all this ended—little did he know that we would not be able to return.

So one day we decided to leave the place and went to the station in the dark. Others soon followed, saying, "If you leave, we will leave as well." Unfortunately, we could not leave because the train was full of dead bodies. By mid-August 1947, tensions in Punjab were rising, with allegations of looting and killings. Many Muslims' behaviour in Sillanwali had also changed, causing concerns.

We fled in a truck to Sargodha and from there to Amritsar, then spent a year in Rajasthan before settling in Ludhiana. There my father reopened our ration depot and rebuilt life from scratch. In 1963, I joined the Punjab Police, later serving in anti-terror operations and eventually becoming IGP. I also led the RAF and handled communal crises, retiring with Partition's memories still engraved in my soul.

Name: Charanjit Pal Singh
Born: 2 December 1936, Sillanwali Mandi, District Sargodha. Now lives in: Sector-40, Noida

THE 1947 PARTITION WAS A TRAGEDY ON A MASSIVE SCALE. SIR CYRIL RADCLIFFE, THE BRITISH LAWYER WHO DREW THE LINES, WAS UNFAMILIAR WITH INDIA'S GEOGRAPHY. HE DIVIDED THE PROVINCES OF PUNJAB AND BENGAL BASED ON MAPS AND RELIGIOUS/CASTE DATA, A TASK HE CARRIED OUT WITHOUT EVER VISITING INDIA. AROUND 15 MILLION PEOPLE WERE DISPLACED, AND AROUND 1-2 MILLION PEOPLE WERE KILLED.

Diljit Rai Wadhawan

I was born in Gujranwala, in my nanaka, in 1936. My Nana ji, Nand Lal Chopra, was always ill, and I mostly remember him lying on his bed. Nani ji, Goma Devi, was active in Congress—always going to meetings. I spent my first four years with them before returning to Muraliwala, our village in Gujranwala district. As 1947 approached, the atmosphere worsened. Muslims in nearby villages began turning

hostile. Even the local police were Muslim, so their "assurances" meant nothing.

One day, some friends came to warn my father: Muslims were planning a raat ka hamla, a midnight attack. My father refused to put Hindu guards outside; he did not want to provoke anyone. But the attack still came. Around midnight, hundreds surrounded our haveli. Cries of "maar do, kaat do!" echoed from all sides. Rain began pouring, making the chaos even darker. My father shouted, "Musalm?no? ne dhokha de diyal!" as we scrambled inside.

Father locked my mother, siblings, and me inside a small room, saying, "Main apne

saamne tumhe marta hua nahi dekh sakta." He and my elder brother hid elsewhere.

I was looking through the tiny ventilation hole, at the faces who were very well known to us from our neighbouring houses, assassinating my relatives and family members in wrath. We heard blows, screams, and the pounding of doors through the night.

Even today, that night feels like it never truly ended.

Name: Diljit Rai Wadhawan
Born: 20 May 1936, Khu Wali Gali, Abadi Hakimrai, Gujranwala
Now lives in: Sector-26, Noida

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the author, Krishnanand Sagar, who wrote the book titled *Witnesses of Partition-era India*, and who preserved these precious testimonies with such dedication and care. Because of your patient interviews, sensitive listening, and commitment to documenting lived memories, we were able to compile these stories with depth, authenticity, and respect. These voices—once scattered by violence and displacement—have found a place, a dignity, and a permanence through your work, ensuring that these experiences are not forgotten and giving future generations the chance to understand the courage, loss, and resilience of Partition survivors.

Mizoram: Where scenic splendour meets soulful cuisine

ANIL RAJPUT

Mizoram, a strikingly beautiful state of North-East India is known as much for its brave people as it is for its breathtaking landscape. As if defining this character, its name derives from two Mizo words, mi meaning people and ram meaning land, together meaning the land of the Mizo people. Situated in the eastern Himalayan region, Mizoram is bordered by Myanmar to the east and south, Bangladesh to the west, and the Indian states of Tripura, Assam and Manipur to the north, making it a strategic and cultural crossroad between South and Southeast Asia.

Much of Mizoram lies at elevations ranging from 2,000 to over 7,000 feet above sea level, giving the state a cool and welcoming climate for much of the year. Aizawl, the capital city, is situated along a ridge at an elevation of 3,714 feet, as if to keep watch upon the rest of the state, and is among the highest state capitals in India. The terrain is rugged and marked by narrow valleys and steep slopes and almost 85 per cent of the state is covered by emerald green forests making it one of the most forested states in the country. This geography has encouraged carefully planned systems of habitation and food production that respected the contours of the land. Rivers such as the Tlawn, Chhimtuipui also known as the Kaladan, and Tuivawl flow through the hills, supporting fishing, small-scale farming and are used effectively as transport routes to connect remote towns and regions.

The historical roots of Mizoram can be traced to the migratory movements of Tibeto-Burman people who travelled southward over centuries from, between approximately 1000 BCE and 500 CE. Oral traditions, clan genetics, and linguistic evidence suggest a gradual settlement process rather than a single migration. These early communities formed the foundations of what later came to be known collectively as the Mizo people. These clans shared similar languages, customs and agricultural practices while maintaining their own distinct identities. Settlements were built along hill ridges for protection and ease of defence while village life facilitated close and intimate social interaction. An enduring feature of this community was mutual support and a strong sense of collective identity that extended to sharing in the preparation and consumption of food making it an ideal community-based life.

These groups initially established settlements between the 4th and 7th centuries CE, across the Lushai Hills, and were governed by hereditary chiefs known as lal. Each village functioned as an independent political unit, with land allocated by the chief. This system governed patterns of agriculture, food sharing and rituals. Loyalty to the village and clan formed the backbone of social organisation and inter-village relations were defined by alliances, common celebrations and at times conflict, which were often settled by sharing food and reconciliation. Communal feasting also marked important occasions such as harvests, victories and funerals, reinforcing food as a social binding force long before formal state structures emerged.

The famed forests of Mizoram are rich with bamboo, wild greens, medicinal



herbs and edible roots. Bamboo forests in particular dominate much of the landscape and influence many aspects of Mizo life, from housing and tools to food and ritual practices. The state's high rainfall also nourishes this ecosystem, and determines its agricultural patterns and produce. This intimate connection between forests and hills shaped not only how people lived and moved, but also how they cooked, ate and preserved food, giving rise to a cuisine that is austere but nourishing and deeply connected to nature.

Agriculture in Mizoram historically relied on jhum or shifting cultivation, locally known as lo. Land in forests were cleared and cultivated for a few years at a time and then allowed to regenerate, ensuring fertility and sustainability. Traditional jhum cycles were carefully balanced with long fallow periods that allowed forests to recover fully and retain their natural nutrients. Rice, maize, millets, colocasia, legumes and chillies formed the backbone of crops, and were supplemented by forest foraging and hunting. The agricultural patterns were naturally determined by the seasons and the local festivals, songs and rituals revolved around them ensuring that cooking methods were adapted in harmony with seasonal availability.

Social life in traditional Mizo society was centered around the zawlbu, a youth center that transmitted traditional community led practices in decision-making, cooperation and culture over generations. This served well in perpetuating their distinctive lifestyle, customs, morality and rituals. Food played a vital role in this process, reinforcing traditional communal bonds. Meat obtained from hunting, vegetables gathered from forests and grains harvested from jhum fields were shared and celebrated among the people



and communities. This collective approach shaped a cuisine that valued simplicity, honesty of flavour and nourishment over complexity or excess.

The 19th century CE marked a period of profound political transformation. Following a series of expeditions, the British formally annexed the Lushai Hills in the 1890s, integrating the region into colonial administrative frameworks. The introduction of written records, census practices and new economic systems altered traditional structures, yet everyday life within villages remained largely rooted in customary practices, especially in food and traditions. Missionaries, however, introduced formal education and Christianity, bringing changes to social structure and belief systems. Over time, Christianity became the dominant faith (87.16% of the population as per the 2011 census) though traditional lifestyles endured and older values of community cooperation, respect for nature and disciplined living remained intact and continued to influence the lives of the people.

Christianity also reshaped festival calendars and dietary customs, even as traditional agricultural rhythms persisted. Sunday gatherings, church feasts and communal meals became new markers of social life. Meat consumption, especially pork, gained prominence during celebrations, even while everyday meals retained their characteristic simplicity. The Mizo ethos of moderation and humility found expression in the kitchen, where food remained functional, nutritional and rooted in local produce rather than indulgence.

The strategic position of Mizoram also connected it historically to trade routes linking present-day Myanmar and Bangladesh. Salt, dried fish, forest produce and textiles moved along these hill pathways, bringing subtle culinary influences without altering the core simplicity of Mizo cooking. Even today, the cuisine reflects a seamless blending of influences from neighbouring hill cultures and Southeast Asia, that filtered into local tastes.

In keeping with this adaptation but also the availability of local produce determined by its geography and weather, Mizo cuisine is deeply seasonal and unique to its people. It is defined by boiling, steaming and light smoking rather

than frying. Oil is used sparingly, spices are minimal and flavours rely on freshness and natural taste. Food is prepared to sustain, mindful of nutrition rather than flavours that overwhelm the senses. This culinary philosophy aligns closely with the Mizo lifestyle that values restraint, discipline and harmony with nature.

Rice is the staple and forms the basis of most meals. It is normally eaten plain, accompanied by an assortment of vegetables, meat or fish. One of the most iconic components of Mizo food is bai, a light stew that is prepared in many variations across households and regions. Bai is usually made by boiling seasonal vegetables

such as pumpkin leaves, jungle greens, beans or mustard leaves with herbs, bamboo shoots and sometimes fermented soybean paste. Pork fat or smoked meat is sometimes added for flavour, but the dish remains gentle and nourishing. Bai reflects the Mizo approach to cooking that allows ingredients to express themselves with minimal intervention.

Another important dish is sawchhiar, a rice porridge cooked with meat, usually pork or chicken, and seasoned lightly with ginger and local herbs. It is both a normal household meal but also a dish offered during community gatherings. Variants like sawchhiar chawhpaw, enriched with rice flour, are prepared during festivals or for those recovering from illness, underlining food's role as curative and sustenance. Meat occupies a prominent place in Mizo cuisine, particularly pork, which is a preferred option. Traditional Mizo households often preserved meat by smoking it over kitchen fires. Smoked pork, known for its firm texture and deep aroma, is used in stews, bai preparations or eaten simply with rice and boiled greens. Smoking not only ensured preservation in humid climate but also added complexity without the need for spices.

Forest produce plays an equally vital role. Bamboo shoots, known locally as mautak or rawtuai, are used fresh, fermented or dried. Fermented bamboo shoot preparations add depth and mild acidity to otherwise plain dishes. Bamboo shoot chutneys, stews and accompaniments are common during particular seasons, reinforcing the link between forest cycles and food.

Leafy greens gathered from hillsides and forests are also standard in Mizo meals. Leaves of mustard, colocasia, pumpkin and wild herbs are used by lightly boiling and sometimes mashing them into coarse pastes. These greens provide essential nutrients and are also valued for their medicinal properties. The emphasis on greens reflects an intuitive understanding of curative and nutritional diets long before formal nutritional science became popular knowledge. I believe these are lessons from our ancient traditions that we should make known with a view to preserving their memory and informing future generations of our wise ancestors.

Besides meat, fresh water fish is also an important culinary delicacy specially in areas closer to rivers such as the Chhimtuipui. Small river fish are boiled or smoked and added to vegetable stews while dried fish is also relished, lending intensity to mild dishes. Fish preparation remains simple, focusing on texture and natural taste rather than being overpowered by spices.

Chillies are often used in Mizo cooking but not

excessively. They are added fresh or roasted and mashed into simple accompaniments rather than elaborate curries. One common side dish is a crushed chilli and herb mix, sometimes combined with fermented bamboo shoot or dried fish, served in small quantities to add heat to bland staples. In the southern districts inhabited by the Lai and Mara communities, culinary practices show subtle variations. Rice remains central, but greater use of fermented ingredients and local herbs is preferred. Pork and chicken stews are slightly richer, though still restrained. Bamboo shoot fermentation techniques here are more pronounced, producing sharper flavours that complement plain rice.

In eastern regions near the Myanmar border, rice noodle preparations appear, reflecting cross-border cultural exchanges. These noodles are served in light broths with greens, herbs and bits of meat or fish. The cooking methods remain aligned with Mizo sensibilities, emphasising boiling and steaming rather than heavy seasoning, suggesting influence without cultural dilution.

Fermentation occupies an important place in Mizo gastronomy, though in a quieter form than in some neighbouring cuisines. Fermented bamboo shoots and soybean paste are used sparingly, also unlike neighbouring states, to add depth and preserve nutrients. Traditional fermentation methods rely on ambient temperatures and natural microbes, demonstrating empirical knowledge passed down through generations. These techniques ensured food security during lean periods and allowed forest abundance to be extended across seasons.

Traditional beverages brewed from rice and using local fermentation techniques have existed for long in the region. However, some anthropological studies show that rice-beer and traditional alcoholic beverages lost their social and ritual status in Christian households who preferred tea or other non-alcoholic drinks. Food rituals have also shifted towards church-centred gatherings, but even these occasions bring communities together in faith, bonding and goodwill. In contemporary times, Mizoram's cuisine is witnessing renewed interest and revival specially among the youth. Cafes and home kitchens are retaining traditional dishes with pride, adapting presentation without altering core practices. Smoked pork, bai, bamboo shoot preparations and sawchhiar are appearing in curated menus in contemporary cafes and restaurants seeking to highlight both heritage and health. Its low oil content, liberal use of greens and reliance on natural preservation has aligned well with mindful dietary habits. This is indeed a welcome development and must be encouraged.

It is my belief, therefore, that preserving Mizo cuisine in its simplicity and traditions is not about nostalgia but about recognising its relevance for future generations. They are a narrative of a people shaped by hills, rain and forests, who learned to live with what the land offered rather than in depleting it. Each bowl of bai, each serving of smoked pork or plain rice accompanied by forest greens reflects generations of practical wisdom, discipline and respect for balance.

To value this cuisine is to value the cultural intelligence of the Mizo people and their ability to adapt without excess. By safeguarding these food traditions, we honour a way of life that sees nourishment not only as sustenance for the body but as an expression of harmony between people, land and belief. Let us all play a role in ensuring that Mizoram's culinary heritage continues to nourish, instruct and inspire those who inherit its hills and forests and, indeed, even beyond.

(The writer is Secretary, Cuisine India Society)



A passage through ritual

MYTHRI TEWARY

When a soul crosses the river, a granddaughter's journey through the Vedic art of saying goodbye.

To everyone who loves quietly and loses suddenly.

In the quiet, early hours of 4 November, before the day could even break, my grandfather - as we fondly called him 'Baba' - exhaled for one final time. And in that silent moment, something arose within the walls of our Patna home: a language of grief older than our memories, older than the family he built and left behind.

Something far older than desolation, cries, and silence awakened. It was the Vedic language of leave-taking: a departure in honour of the one who not only lived but completed the cycle of life given, and guidance to the one leaving the physical world.

A pilgrimage, a process. A process of returning, cleansing, remembering, releasing, and finally transcending. In our part of existence, passing away is not an ending. It is a journey, undertaken not by the living but accompa-

nied by them — at every step, every ritual, every breath, until the soul proceeds on its journey to the next world. A set of traditions that do not rush sorrow, nor fear departure, and that do not let the soul take its leave unattended. A subtle way of being, a gentle whisper: 'You were not alone here, neither shall you walk ahead alone, even there.'

The thirteen days that followed my Baba's transcendence seemed like walking on a land unknown, following a map across an unseen terrain. It brought not just grief, loss, 'ifs' and 'buts' or a desperate 'one last time', but a philosophy of a sequence of customs, elaborate and unexpectedly tender.

The loss is personal yet felt civilisational. An entire community of people gathered together in mourning and support, reciting a story of how it is not one man's departure but a reminder that 'you do not walk through this alone'. Not only us, but the soul. It is eerie, but comforting.

This is the story of that journey: of petals and pyres, of pepper and jaggery, of hidden lamps and clay pots hung under ancient trees; every step, every tear, every symbol and the world it carries forward. Of how humanity helps the living walk along the gone, one step at a time.

Life to Light

The morning our Baba left this world, time shifted its rhythm. What happened behind the mocha-brown iron gates of our residence was not panic or haste but quiet. A soft glance of affirmation among each other to place him in the earth he belonged to. He was lifted from the cot, along with his pillow and comforter, and placed gently on the floor to make sure he had a departure of utmost comfort. The Vedas call it not floor or ground but

'prithvi', the primordial mother, who absorbs the turbulence of the 'prana' as it leaves. Holding true to its essence and meaning came to mind with an unusual clarity Longfellow's 'A Psalm of Life': "Dust thou art, to dust returnest." Drawing a sharp connection to the Vedas and literature, science agrees - though unknowingly — that ground is the most stabilising conductor that helps discharge the final residual electrical impulses of a human system, ultimately bringing it into equilibrium.

Maybe this is what alignment actually is. Every aspect of what comprises the earth, science, faith and literature, in their own ways, align in perfect symmetry for one last time.

South, the Soul, and the Lord of Time

The Indian Vedic belief is to lay the departed to rest in a specific direction: south. The belief, as it elucidates, is that south has been considered the direction of Yama, the deity who receives the soul once it leaves the physical world. Contrary to the widely known, south is not negative; it is simply the correct spiritual orientation for a soul that has begun its divine journey.

It is also said that the soul subtly remains connected for some time, and that placing the head towards the south is a gentle symbolisation of closure, of peaceful surrender, an acceptance of the greatest transition. South ensures the soul follows the correct cosmic pathway, preventing the soul from wandering back.

Southward movement is for those who have completed their earthly cycle and are now moving to the realm of ancestors, called Pitrloka. Every gesture in Hindu funerary rites is designed not only spiritually but also psychologically to help the living



release the departed. Facing south becomes a quiet act of letting go, a way of saying that we do not intend to pull you back energetically.

Science, yet again, remains in alignment with the cosmic order. The human body still holds some bioelectromagnetic charge for a few hours after it stops breathing. The earth's magnetic field runs from north to south; if placed towards the north, the remaining currents may cause disturbances leading to rigidity, while facing south makes it stable and electrically grounded.

The Touch of Ganga, the Sanctity of Tulsi

Born from the locks of Lord Shiva, the Ganga is said to represent piety, a transition, the eternal cycle of life and beyond. She is a goddess, the locus of Hindu mythology, whose waters are believed to sanctify everything they touch. It is a symbol of purification, spiritual merit, a pristine passage from the material world to the divine.

As Baba rested there, still, we were asked to put a few drops of this holy water — gangajal — in his mouth. Vedic literature calls it 'amrita' (the divine nectar of immortality). This symbolic final sip denotes that the soul has

begun its next journey with utmost purity. When one turns to science regarding this, it can be noted that Ganga water contains self-purifying bacteriophages, surprisingly. Thus, both realities — mystical and scientific — co-exist without conflict.

With 'amrita' in his mouth and Tulsi beside him, he slept. His sleep was deep, peaceful but most significantly heavenly. Tulsi is a sacred plant in Vedic Hindu households dating back to its origin. It is believed to guide the departing consciousness onto the state of being. Contemporary studies have shown that the fragrant oil of this plant slows down the initial process of decay for a brief and blessed interval. The faith of our ancestors is now chemistry for us, but what remains constant is the tenderness and intention behind following the system. Translucent grey spirals of lit incense sticks rose around him all through the day and the night.

Please read the complete article online at <https://www.dailypioneer.com>

(Mythri Tewary writes to reach anyone who carries their grief silently - grandchildren, children, parents, and all those who heal alone. Through her work, she hopes to offer companionship, gentleness, and a reminder that loss is a shared human truth)



The 15 second rule: A pause is powerful

If you look back at your own life, you will notice that all mistakes happen at the spur of the moment due to a lack of awareness. When you are in a great rush and under a lot of stress, you are bound to make mistakes

GURUDEV SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR

A long time ago, a CEO called me and said, "Gurudev, you saved my job. Once, I had written a nasty letter to my boss, and I was going to send it off. Then I remembered what you said: 'Give yourself a 15-second pause before you are about to do anything important.' I took a 15-second pause. And when I read through the letter again, I couldn't send it! I had written such a nasty letter that, if I had sent it out, I would have lost my job."

If you look back at your own life, you will notice that all mistakes happen at the spur of the moment due to a lack of awareness. When you are in a great rush and under a lot of stress, you are bound to make mistakes. Also, when you are in the midst of a storm of emotions, you are more likely to make mistakes. See, for example, when you are upset, what do you want to do? You just want to pick up the phone and yell at somebody! You want to get it off your chest. Before you do that, just give yourself 15 seconds. Freeze for those 15 seconds. What happens when you do that? Your emotions get time to settle; you regain your awareness and alertness. And your whole attitude changes. Everything changes around you. When you hold your breath, the mind stops too.

Let's do an exercise. Are you breathing? Continue to breathe. Now stop the breath for a few seconds. Breathe again. Stop. Hold your breath. Continue breathing. Did you observe what was happening within? Stillness dawns in you. Stillness is the precursor to infinity. In this moment of stillness, awareness blossoms inside you.

Taking that little time, that 15-second gap, can make a big difference. You can do this several times during the course of the day. As children, we used to play a game called 'Statue', where we would be running and someone would say 'Statue', and we had to stand still wherever we were. This game is a brilliant activity to help bring the mind to the present moment. Just a few seconds of pausing transports the mind from a state of impulsiveness to greater centredness.

How important are these momentary pauses? Everything emerges from silencing the mind. The purpose of speech is to create silence within you. If it doesn't, then the speech hasn't fulfilled its purpose. Whenever you say 'Yes!' or whenever you have a sense of wonder, your mind pauses. In such a state, you want to know about that object or person more closely. When you know something, it leaves you with a deeper sense of wonder. And wonder is the doorway to a mental pause. When you are amazed at the whole of creation - with all that you see, smell, or taste - each of these experiences that we derive from our senses leads us to a space of absolute tranquillity. And that is what meditation is.

When you start meditating regularly for a few minutes, when you are calm and collected, you become spontaneous and intuitive, which is quite different from being impulsive, which happens when you are emotional and



"WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU ARE SURPRISED OR SHOCKED? THE MIND DRIFTS INTO SILENCE. SOMETHING STUNNING TAKES YOU INTO SILENCE. WORDS DISAPPEAR"

— GURUDEV

restless. Once you calm your emotions, the decisions you take are spontaneous, intuitive, and correct.

No matter how busy you are, take a few moments and observe your breath. Using simple meditation techniques, calm down your mind. Bring it to this moment, relax each part of your body, relax your mind, your senses. You'll find such peace, so much love gushing from within. We are all born with this gift of love and peace. And somehow, we forget to look within. That is most important. Take a few moments to see what is happening inside.

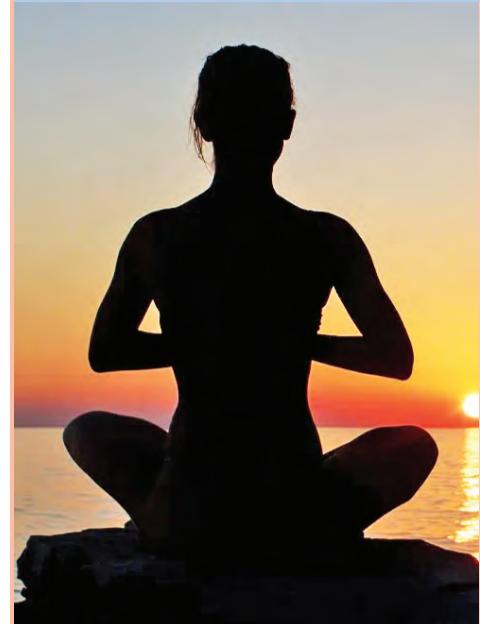
Very ambitious people cannot have deep sleep because the mind isn't free. The more anxious you are about doing or achieving something, the tougher it becomes to sleep. Before going to sleep, if you pause, surrender your worries and ambitions to some Higher

Power, and simply let go of everything, only then are you able to rest, isn't it? Why not apply the same thing to life as you live from one moment to another? When you want to sit for meditation, let go of everything.

The human mind is very complex; it has both delicate and tough aspects. If you have had a misunderstanding with a friend or colleague at work, you can become stiff inside, and this can distort your emotions, leading to negativity, which you carry wherever you go. In your day-to-day activities, the mind gathers many such impressions, anxieties, and tensions. They do not allow you to be happy; they block your intuition and your joy. These impressions strain and burden the mind, and eventually they can lead to many psychosomatic issues. But when you pause the mind with meditation, its tendency to hold on to negative emotions

simply disappears. You gain the ability to live happily in the present moment and let go of the past. Pausing the mind for a few minutes every day is how you move it from a state of chaos to a state of bliss and clarity, and from restlessness to deep restfulness. And it is only from this state of deep rest that something creative can emerge. Deep silence is the mother of creativity. No creativity can come from one who is too busy, worried, over-ambitious, or lethargic.

The mind vacillates between the past and the future. It is either occupied with what has happened or busy thinking, planning, or feeling uncertain and anxious about what is to come. Wisdom is being aware of this phenomenon of the mind - of what is happening right now in your mind as you are reading this column. Information can be acquired by reading books or browsing the internet. You can open a book on any subject - how to lose weight, how to prepare for an interview, success 101, and so on. There are innumerable volumes on countless topics, but awareness of your own mind cannot be learnt from a book. That can come



JOIN THE WORLD'S LARGEST MEDITATION EVENT WITH THE GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN AND SPIRITUAL MASTER, GURUDEV SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR, ON GURUDEV'S OFFICIAL YOUTUBE CHANNEL ON 21ST DECEMBER AT 8.30 PM IST.

only from meditation.

Total rest is meditation. Only when the mind settles down can total rest happen. Restlessness, agitation, desire, and ambition stir up the mind and keep it busy planning for the future or feeling regretful and angry about the past. A mind in the present moment is meditation. A mind without agitation is meditation.

Why have practices like meditation and silence been given so much importance in our spiritual traditions? Greater awareness alone can root out misery from our lives and break the patterns we live with. Nothing helps achieve this more than stepping into brief periods of meditative silence. This is not something alien to us; it is built into our nature. The human body is made that way. You'll notice that when you are faced with something too much for the mind to take, the mind goes into silence. What happens when you are surprised or shocked? The mind drifts into silence. Something stunning takes you into silence. Words disappear. At the helm of every emotion, at the peak of every event, there is silence. And by recognising it, practising it, and manifesting it in your life, you cross the ocean of 'samsara', the sea of misery.

The Indian paradox of power, participation, and exclusion

TEAM AGENDA

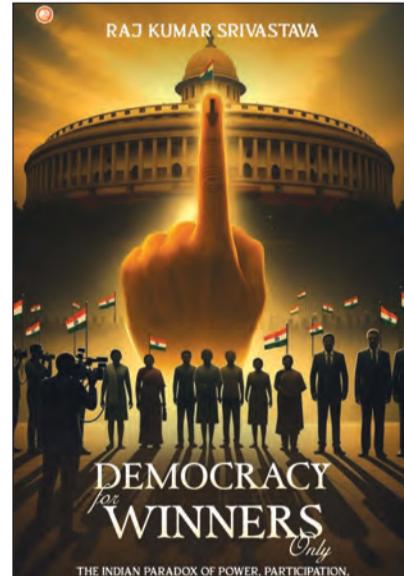
In *Democracy for Winners Only*, retired civil servant Raj Kumar Srivastava presents a deeply reflective and unsettling account of how India's democratic journey has drifted away from its founding ideals. Drawing on over thirty years in public service across India's forests, villages, and administrative corridors, Srivastava offers a powerful meditation on the widening gap between democratic participation and democratic power. The core argument is arresting: India's democracy increasingly privileges the victorious rather than the virtuous. Electoral triumphs, he argues, have evolved into tools that legitimise centralisation, weaken institutions, and reduce citizens to spectators. Participation remains high, yet its influence on decision-making diminishes. This is the paradox at the heart of what Srivastava terms a "winner's democracy".

Democracy from the Ground Up

What distinguishes this book from typical political commentaries is its grounded storytelling. Srivastava draws from village panchayat meetings, forest rights disputes, drought relief interventions, and encounters with marginalised communities. These vignettes reveal the asymmetry between those who govern and those who bear the weight of governance. They illustrate how structural inequities - caste, class, bureaucracy, and political patronage - continue to shape democratic outcomes at the grassroots level.

His training as both a forester and administrator allows him to see democracy not as an abstract theory but as a lived ecosystem. Forest clearances, land conflicts, and community rights become windows through which the reader glimpses the contradictions of democratic practice.

The Digital Illusion of Participation
Srivastava's exploration of the digital age is particularly compelling. He warns that India's expanding online participation - tweets, hashtags, and viral campaigns - may be creating the



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Author: Raj Kumar Srivastava
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Publisher: Orangebooks Publication

illusion of empowerment without the substance of influence. When narratives over-power nuance and algorithms amplify majoritarian sentiment, the democratic conversation becomes shallow, polarised, and easily manipulated.

Institutions Under Strain

From legislatures to the media, from civil services to citizen forums, the book traces how key institutions struggle under the pressure of populism and speed-driven politics. Srivastava argues that institutional resilience - not electoral arithmetic - is the true measure of a functioning democracy. When institutions bend too easily, power becomes personalised and accountability erodes.

A Blueprint for Reclaiming Democracy

Despite its sharp critique, the book is not despairing. Srivastava lays out a reform agenda grounded in constitutional values:



- revitalising local governance structures
- ensuring transparency in political finance
- strengthening the autonomy of regulatory and oversight bodies
- embedding community voice in development decisions
- rebuilding civic education and democratic culture

His message is clear: democracy must be continuously defended, renewed, and reclaimed.

A Timely and Courageous Work

Democracy for Winners Only stands out for its clarity of thought, graceful prose, and rare combination of practitioner insight and philosophical depth. It challenges readers without overwhelming them and urges introspection without cynicism. In a time of loud slogans and shrinking democratic space, Srivastava's voice is steady, principled, and necessary.

This book is essential reading for policymakers, administrators, scholars, and any citizen who cares about the future of India's democratic experiment. It raises a question that cannot be ignored: If democracy serves only those who win, what remains of its promise to the rest of us?

Why states act the way they do: A defence of rationality in global politics

KANISHK SHEKHAR

To comprehend global politics, it is essential to grasp the mind-set of states. A significant portion of international relations theory wants us to believe that states act rationally. However, numerous scholars contend that political leaders seldom behave rationally.

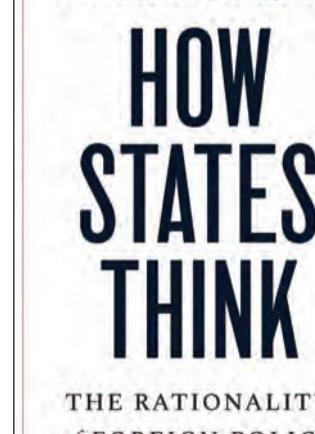
This question is vital for both the analysis and application of international politics, as only if states are rational can scholars and policymakers effectively understand and anticipate their actions. In contrast to individuals, states do not act impulsively; rather, policymakers evaluate threats in a strategic manner. Based on this reasoning, they argue that states typically place a higher value on survival and security than on any other considerations.

John J Mearsheimer and Sebastian Rosato assert that rational choices in international politics are based on credible theories regarding the functioning of the world and arise from thoughtful decision-making processes. By applying these standards, they conclude that the majority of states act rationally most of the time, even if they do not always achieve success.

Mearsheimer and Rosato support their argument by investigating whether historical and contemporary world leaders, such as George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin, have made rational decisions in the context of significant historical events, including both world wars, the Cold War, and the post-Cold War period. This book presents the concept of the decision-maker as homo theoreticus, an individual who is directed by coherent theories regarding the functioning of the world.

Mearsheimer is recognised for his ground-breaking contributions to the theory of offensive realism. With a notable career, he has written many influential works, including his magnum opus *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Rosato, an emerging talent in the field, contributes his expertise in international relations to this collaboration. Together, they delve

JOHN J. MEARSHEIMER
SEBASTIAN ROSATO



Title: How States Think: The Rationality of Foreign Policy
Author: John Mearsheimer & Sebastian Rosato
MRP: ₹1,257

Publisher: Yale University Press

into the intricacies of state decision-making, challenging established beliefs and offering fresh insights into the rationale behind foreign policy. Through thorough investigation and persuasive arguments, the authors illuminate the complex processes that shape state behaviour in the international sphere.

In the initial chapter, the authors contend that states typically act rationally in their pursuit of foreign policy objectives, rather than being irrational entities motivated solely by emotions or ideologies. The book evaluates alternative theories such as liberalism and constructivism, claiming that the fundamental driving force behind state actions is a rational reaction to security issues rather than ethical principles or cultural influences.

Although liberal theories - including democratic peace, interdependence, and

constructivist concepts - possess some validity, they ultimately fall short when compared to fundamental security concerns. Realism's emphasis on material factors serves as the most dependable framework for understanding state behaviour. States place a premium on survival over other aims, and failure to do so results in their classification as non-rational. Through a variety of examples, the authors illustrate that states adhere to the theory of expected utility maximisation, making calculated choices to enhance their security and interests.

In the subsequent chapter, the authors examine strategic rationality within the context of international relations, addressing the challenges faced by policymakers and states in a world filled with uncertainties. This is illustrated through historical instances such as American policy during the Second World War, strategies in East Asia, the post-Cold War era, Japanese decisions prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, and American actions during the Cuban Missile Crisis. They underscore the widespread uncertainty and lack of information that complicate decision-making processes. Whether in military strategy, diplomacy, or alliance formation, decision-makers encounter uncertainties that hinder risk assessment and rational choice. Mearsheimer and Rosato recognise the constraints of state rationality, investigating instances where external factors might affect decision-making. They contend that although states aim for rationality, internal dynamics and external pressures can occasionally result in irrational actions. The authors delve into the complexities of state decision-making processes, scrutinising the influence of leaders, bureaucracies, and other elements in determining foreign policy choices.

They emphasise the necessity of comprehending these processes to accurately evaluate state behaviour. Furthermore, the authors underscore the significance of goal rationality in the context of rational decision-making.

For the complete book review please see our website www.dailypioneer.com

(The writer is a columnist and an educator who trains aspirants for the Civil Services Examination)

FOLDED Corner

NOTE :-

[: राजस्थान पत्रिका , दैनिक जागरण delhi, नवभारत टाइम्स delhi, अमर उजाला delhi, हिन्दुस्तान delhi, Pioneer hindi delhi, जनसत्ता delhi,]

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