

Comprehensive New Year Security Plan In Place At Vaishno Devi Shrine For Successful Yatra: IGP Jammu

LT NEWS SERVICE

Katra/Jammu, Dec 28: A robust security plan has been put in place at the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district to handle the heavy influx of devotees during the New Year, Inspector General of Police, Jammu, Bhim Sen Tuti, has said. He said more than 550 CCTV cameras are keeping a vigil on the yatra track and surrounding areas, with live feeds being monitored round-the-clock from a centralised control room. "The control room is jointly manned by the officials of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board, J-K Police and central armed paramilitary forces. Alerts generated through the system are responded to immediately," the Jammu police chief told reporters in Katra, the base camp for the pilgrims visiting the shrine. The IGP visited Police Station Katra on Saturday and conducted a comprehensive review of the functioning of the Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC). He inspected-- **Contd. on P2**

J&K Police Officer Calls For Stronger Intelligence To Counter Terror Networks In Poonch

LT NEWS SERVICE

Jammu, Dec 28: A senior police officer in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district on Sunday laid emphasis on human intelligence (HUMINT) collection to counter cross-border narcotic smuggling and terror networks. The Deputy Inspector General of Police, Rajouri-Poonch Range, Tajinder Singh, while addressing a comprehensive intelligence, security and crime review meeting in Poonch, urged officers to augment operations through innovative intelligence collection and analysis techniques, a police spokesman said. While reviewing efforts against narco-smuggling and terror networks, the DIG directed officers to strengthen human intelligence-- **Contd. on P2**

Ladakh moving towards Global Sustainable Tourism Destination: LG Kavinder

Responsible tourism vital for Ladakh's economy & ecology

Vows to promote Sangam Point as a major hub for adventure tourism

Says coordinated approach needed to develop Ladakh as a year-round tourism destination

Urges people of the country to come & explore natural beauty of Ladakh



LT NEWS SERVICE

Leh, Dec 28: The Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh, Shri Kavinder

Gupta, emphasised that tourism is a key pillar of Ladakh's economic growth, significantly contributing to livelihood generation for local

communities while strengthening allied sectors such as hospitality, transport, handicrafts, and eco-tourism. He underscored the need to promote sustainable and responsible tourism practices to protect Ladakh's fragile ecosystem and ensure inclusive, long-term benefits for the region and its people.

The Lt Governor was speaking during his visit to the iconic Sangam Point, one of Ladakh's most prominent tourist destinations, located about 35 kilometres from Leh on the Srinagar-Leh National Highway. The site marks the spectacular confluence of the Indus and Zaskar rivers and is globally renowned for the striking visual contrast of the blue waters of the Indus merging with the muddy green-brown-- **Contd. on P2**

Mann Ki Baat: PM Modi Says 2025 Year Of Proud Milestones For India



LT NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec 28: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said 2025 was a year of proud milestones for India as he highlighted Operation Sindoor, saying it became a symbol of pride for every Indian and showed the world that the country does not compromise on its security. Addressing his monthly 'Mann Ki Baat' address, the last in 2025, Modi said the country's impact was visible everywhere in the outgoing year. "2025 was a year of proud milestones for India. Whether in national security, sports, scientific innovation or on the world's biggest platforms, India's impact was visible everywhere," he said. The prime minister said during Operation

Sindoor, images of love and devotion toward 'Maa Bharti' (Mother India) emerged from every corner of the nation and people expressed their emotions and gratitude in their own unique ways.

"Operation Sindoor" became a symbol of pride for every Indian. The world witnessed clearly that today's India does not compromise on its security," he said.

India carried out precision strikes under Operation Sindoor on terror infrastructure in Pakistan on May 7 in response to the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack that killed 26 people. India and Pakistan reached an understanding on May 10 to end the military confrontation. Modi said the same spirit was witnessed when national song 'Vande Mataram' completed 150 years. "I had urged you to share your messages and suggestions using the hashtag '#VandeMataram150'-- **Contd. on P2**

Mehbooba Mufti, Ruhullah Mehdi Among Leaders Under House Arrest Ahead Of Students' Quota Protest

LT NEWS SERVICE

Srinagar, Dec 28: Authorities on Sunday placed several leaders, including PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti and National Conference MP Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi, under house arrest to prevent them from joining the students' protest against the existing reservation policy in Jammu and Kashmir. Officials said Mehbooba Mufti, her daughter Iltija Mufti, Srinagar MP Ruhullah Mehdi, PDP leader Waheed Para, and former Srinagar mayor Junaid Mattoo have been placed under house arrest. The move came after these leaders expressed solidarity with students who planned to sit on a peaceful protest at Gupkar Road on Sunday and had announced their intention to join the agitation against the delay in rationalising the quota policy, a year after Chief Minister Omar Abdullah formed a committee to address the issue.

Reacting to the development, Para said it was unfortunate that the leaders had been placed under house arrest to prevent them from showing solidarity with the protesting students.

In a post on X, National Conference MP Ruhullah Mehdi posted on X on Saturday night that armed police have been deployed outside his residence. "Is this a pre-emptive crackdown to silence a peaceful, pro-student demonstration?" he posed.



Para, on the other hand, accused the Omar Abdullah government in Jammu and Kashmir of showing zero intent to resolve the reservation issue, saying the existing quota policy has become an existential matter.

In a post on X on Saturday night, he said the reservation policy has become an existential issue that strikes at the very foundation of the future of our younger generations. It has been over a year since we, along with students, assembled outside the CM Omar Abdullah's residence."

"Unfortunately, during this entire period, there has been absolutely zero intent on the part of the government towards resolving this issue, which has only compounded the uncertainty and anxiety shadowing our youth," Para said in the X post.

At the very least, the reservation report must be placed in the public domain, the Pulwama MLA said. There was no justification to withhold the report of the Cabinet-- **Contd. on P2**

Terror Struck Tourists In Deadly Pahalgam Attack In 2025; Govt Made Efforts To Minimise Dent, Recover Footfall

LT NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 28: The dastardly Pahalgam attack in Jammu and Kashmir on April 22 not only pierced through the heart of humanity but also cast a grim shadow on tourism in the Valley and impacted the sector at large.

The attack in Baisaran meadows, a prime tourist location, in its immediate aftermath, had dealt a big blow to the tourism and hospitality sector in the Union territory, and hit the psyche of many potential tourists, domestic and foreign, who were planning to visit Kashmir -- a popular destination.

Over a month after the terror attack in which 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed, tourism in Kashmir did begin its long journey towards normalcy, but hesitation remained in the minds of travellers.

In early June, however, tourists, though in smaller numbers, had started returning to the Valley, infusing hopes of a gradual turnaround in the sector, and in the following months since then, arrivals gradually grew.



Groups of tourists, especially from states like Maharashtra and Gujarat, were reaching the famous tourist resorts of Gulmarg and Pahalgam. In October, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah had said that his government's efforts to bring back tourists to the Union territory can work only after the tourist spots closed in the wake of the Pahalgam attack were reopened.

"First, we have to reopen those places which have been shut. We did not shut these places in 35 years. When the militancy was at its peak, Drang or Doodhpathri were not closed, the upper areas of Gulmarg were not shut, Aru valley was not closed," he said.

Abdullah said some courage was needed to be shown and open tourist spots and -- **Contd. on P2**

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Ladakh Moving

waters of the Zaskar, forming a single majestic river. Describing Sangam Point as a natural marvel and a flagship attraction of Ladakh tourism, Shri Kavinder Gupta noted that such destinations significantly enhance the region’s appeal among domestic and international tourists. He said the breathtaking landscape, surrounded by rugged mountains and river valleys, offers visitors unforgettable visual experiences and makes Ladakh a preferred destination for nature lovers, photographers, and adventure enthusiasts. The Lieutenant Governor highlighted that Sangam Point has emerged as a major hub for adventure tourism, offering activities such as river rafting, trekking, and sightseeing, while also serving as an important stopover for travellers journeying along the Srinagar-Leh corridor. Its easy accessibility from Leh further strengthens its importance in the overall tourism circuit of the Union Territory, he added. He also emphasised the need to establish dedicated view points and cafeterias at Sangam to provide visitors with a comfortable and memorable experience. He further underscored the importance of maintaining cleanliness and environmental sustainability at the site, ensuring that Ladakh’s pristine beauty remains intact for generations to come.

Shri Kavinder Gupta said that since Ladakh was accorded the status of a Union Territory, focused and accelerated development has taken place across key sectors, with tourism emerging as a major priority area. He stated that the UT Administration is giving special emphasis to the holistic development of all prominent and potential tourist destinations across the Union Territory, ensuring improved infrastructure, better connectivity, and enhanced visitor facilities.

The Lieutenant Governor further said that the Zoji La Tunnel, expected to be completed in the next two years, will also be a game changer by providing year round all-weather road connectivity between Ladakh and the rest of the country. The tunnel will play a vital role in boosting tourism by ensuring uninterrupted access, reducing travel time, and making Ladakh more accessible during winter months.

Emphasising the importance of winter tourism, Shri Kavinder Gupta said that focused efforts are being made to promote winter sports, cultural events, and experiential tourism so that tourists visit Ladakh throughout the year, thereby strengthening the local economy and generating sustained employment opportunities.

Emphasising the broader vision for Ladakh tourism, Shri Kavinder Gupta stated that the UT Administration is committed to developing world-class tourism infrastructure while ensuring ecological balance. He stressed the need for coordinated efforts to promote Ladakh as a sustainable, safe, and year-round tourism destination, showcasing its unique natural landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and adventure potential.

The Lieutenant Governor also interacted with officials and stakeholders, urging them to focus on responsible tourism initiatives that empower local communities, encourage eco-friendly practices, and preserve Ladakh’s pristine environment for future generations.

Later, he also interacted with tourists who had come from different parts of the country and received first-hand feedback on their travel experiences. He welcomed them to Ladakh and highlighted the UT Administration’s commitment to providing safe, comfortable, and memorable experiences for visitors, while promoting Ladakh as a hospitable and world-class tourism destination.

The Lieutenant Governor also appealed to the people of the country to come and explore the breathtaking natural beauty of Ladakh, while reaffirming that the Union Territory is steadily moving towards becoming a globally recognised sustainable tourism destination that offers unique experiences rooted in nature, culture, and responsible travel.

The creation of new five districts in the Union Territory of Ladakh will mark a historic step towards decentralised governance, equitable development and administrative justice for the people living in far-flung and border areas of the region. The long-awaited creation of new five districts is expected to bring governance closer to the people, improve access to essential services, and address long-standing developmental imbalances in Ladakh’s unique and challenging terrain.

This was stated by the Hon’ble Lieutenant ,Governor of Ladakh, Shri Kavinder Gupta, while interacting with a delegation led by Councillor Cha, Shri Stanzin Lakpa, which called on him here at the Lieutenant Governor’s Secretariat.

During the meeting, the delegation expressed its gratitude to the Union Territory Administration for announcing the creation of five new districts—Changthang, Zaskar, Nubra, Sham and Drass. At the same time, the delegation strongly urged the administration to ensure the formal notification and early operationalisation of these districts in a time-bound manner so that the people may start receiving tangible administrative and developmental benefits.

The delegation highlighted that the people of these regions face severe hardships due to vast distances, harsh climatic conditions and limited administrative outreach. They emphasized that the establishment of full-fledged districts would strengthen grassroots governance, improve delivery of public services, enhance disaster response mechanisms, and promote inclusive growth while safeguarding Ladakh’s unique cultural and ecological identity.

New Year

the overall implementation, operational efficiency and real-time monitoring mechanisms of the ICCC, with a focus on its role in strengthening surveillance, coordination and response systems. He said the police are focusing on the convergence of technology for effective crowd and security management. “Whether it is CCTV feeds, RFID systems or wireless connectivity, all inputs are integrated at one place for better management of the yatra,” Tuti said. Referring to New Year arrangements, he said enhanced measures have been put in place compared to routine days, with several new initiatives introduced this year. The IGP said technology-based crowd management, including advanced CCTV data analytics to detect overcrowding and enable timely intervention, which was introduced last year, has been further strengthened. Chairing the security review meeting, a police spokesman said the IGP Jammu underscored the importance of continuous capacity building and directed the officers to organise regular and structured training programmes for ICCC staff. He emphasised that optimal utilisation of technology and skilled manpower is essential to enhance operational effectiveness, improve response time and ensure seamless monitoring and coordination. During the visit, the IGP also interacted with probationer Sub-Inspectors, guiding them on contemporary and technology-enabled policing practices. He laid strong emphasis on the effective use of modern technological tools in investigation to ensure timely, transparent and professional handling of cases, in line with evolving policing requirements, the spokesman said. (Agencies)

Terror

promote them effectively. While the sector at large showed further recovery from its impact, the Ministry of Tourism hosted a range of events in the past several months, at several places in the country, ranging from International Tourism Mart (ITM) for the North Eastern Region in Gangtok to a special culinary event held during the fourth edition of World Food India in Delhi. The 13th edition of the ITM for the North Eastern Region was inaugurated by Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu. This was the second time Sikkim hosted the mega event since its inception in 2013. “The Northeast is very rich in nature and cultural diversity,” he had said. Khandu said the ministry is now focusing on the potential of the Northeast.

“I see that local economies in the Northeast are flourishing day by day as per their carrying capacities, and if we compare only 10 years earlier, our region did not have this luxury,” he had said.

The ministry organised ‘World Food India – Reviving the Culinary Treasures of India’ from September 25-28 at Bharat Mandapam.

The event showcased India’s rich culinary heritage and positioned Indian cuisine on the global stage. The initiative focussed on reviving forgotten food traditions, highlighting ancient cooking techniques, and exploring the export potential of indigenous ingredients. As the year draws to a close, starting 2026, the government plans to establish autonomous ‘city-level convention promotion bureaus’ in partnership with other stakeholders in the tourism sectors to elevate several Indian cities into globally competitive ‘MICE’ destinations. ‘MICE’ (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions) tourism refers to tourism-related activities linked with business meetings, conventions and exhibitions.

While an official roadmap is yet to be drawn, the initial plan is to open such centres on a public-private-partnership (PPP) mode in state capitals and one other city in a state, a senior official said.

The idea is to bolster capacities and capabilities of smaller cities too to host big, international events, as well as decentralise the coordination work, he said. The announcement that the ministry has planned to set up city-level convention promotion bureaus as independent bodies, was made by a top official of the ministry on December 19. The move seeks to “significantly boost India’s Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism ecosystem.” However, 2025 was a year not many tourists, especially those who were in Kashmir when the Pahalgam attack took place, would like to look back on. On that fateful day of April 22, besides those killed, several others were injured, and the terror strike had triggered an exodus of sorts from the site and the Valley, as fear replaced leisure in the minds of tourists there. The very next day, Union Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, in New Delhi, had said some people with nefarious intentions had tried to again “incite separatism and terrorism” in the Valley and asserted that his ministry would do the best to “minimise the dent” on tourism in Jammu and Kashmir in the wake of the Pahalgam attack. Interacting with reporters on the sidelines of the 38th meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Archaeology (CABA) here, he had also said that he and his office were in “continuous touch” with the chief secretary and the tourism secretary of the Union territory and keeping an eye on the situation. Before the commencement of the meeting, chaired by the minister, a minute of silence was observed by the attendees. “The entire country is pained, and also filled with a sense of anger,” Shekhawat had said in his opening remarks at the meeting held at the Bharat Mandapam here. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in its newsletter – ‘Human Rights’ – in June, had said that the barbaric Pahalgam attack stands as yet another grim reminder of how terrorism continues to “stain humanity”. (Agencies)Geographic Reference

Mehbooba

sub-committee formed by Omar Abdullah, even if the recommendations were still pending the lieutenant governor’s approval, Para added. Besides National Conference president Farooq Abdullah on Sunday defended the house arrest of its party MP Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi and other leaders, saying they want to create “turmoil”, which will not be allowed. Talking to reporters at Pahalgam in south Kashmir, Abdullah said the leaders were probably not happy that Jammu and Kashmir was on the path of progress. “You should ask those leaders what they wanted to do. We are doing as much as we can. Perhaps, they do not like that the state is progressing. They want turmoil, which we will not allow to happen,” Abdullah said. Authorities on Sunday placed several leaders including Mehdi, PDP MLA Waheed Para, former Srinagar mayor Junaid Mattoo and PDP leader Iltija Mufti under house arrest to prevent them from taking part in protests against the existing reservation policy. On the situation in Bangladesh, the former chief minister expressed hope peaceful elections are held in the neighbouring country so that a new government is formed. We hope they (the new government) will tread the path of friendship (with India),” he added. The leaders were put under house arrest after they expressed solidarity with students who planned to sit on a peaceful protest at Gupkar Road on Sunday and had announced their intention to join the agitation against the delay in rationalising the quota policy, a year after Chief Minister Omar Abdullah formed a committee to address the issue. Para said it was unfortunate that the leaders had been placed under house arrest to prevent them from showing solidarity with the protesting students. In a post on X, National Conference MP Ruhullah Mehdi posted on X on Saturday night that armed police have been deployed outside his residence. “Is this a pre-emptive crackdown to silence a peaceful, pro-student demonstration?” he posted. (Agencies)

Helipads At Katra, Shiv Khori Near Completion, Services Likely From Next Year: LG Sinha

ammu, Dec 27: The construction of helipads at Katra and Shiv Khori in Jammu and Kashmir’s Reasi district is in its final phase, and devotees are likely to avail heli-services between the two religious centres during the Maha Shivratri next year, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha said on Saturday. Sinha also expressed hope that the proposed heli-connectivity from Katra, the base camp for the Vaishno Devi shrine atop the Trikuta hills, to the Shiv Khori shrine would ease travel for the pilgrims. Speaking at the 11th convocation ceremony of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University, the L-G lauded the varsity for its distinguished contributions to India’s educational landscape and its steadfast commitment to public welfare. He also entrusted the university to provide scientific solutions for the challenges faced by the Union territory. In light of the recent devastating natural calamities, the L-G urged the university to prioritise research into advanced



early-warning systems for cloud-bursts, landslides and floods. He also emphasised the importance of sustainable infrastructure and called for dedicated research on the recycling and reuse of road and construction materials. “The construction of

helipads at Katra and Shiv Khori is entering its final phase. I am hopeful that the devotees will be able to avail heli-services from Katra to the Shiv Khori Shrine during the upcoming Maha Shivratri (February 15, 2026),” Sinha said.

Mann ki Baat

, and our fellow citizens participated in this campaign with immense enthusiasm,” he said.

The prime minister noted that 2025 has truly been a memorable year for sports, with the men’s cricket team clinching the ICC Champions Trophy and the women’s cricket team winning the World Cup for the first time.

Besides, India’s daughters scripted history by winning the Women’s Blind T20 World Cup.

The tricolour flew high with pride after a dominant victory in the Asia Cup T20 and para-athletes brought home a haul of medals at the World Championships, he said. Modi also said that India has taken a giant leap in the field of science and space, and Shubhanshu Shukla became the first Indian to reach the International Space Station.

Today, he said, the world looks toward India with great hope and the biggest reason for this expectation is the country’s Youth Power.

“Nations across the globe are deeply impressed by our achievements in science, constant innovations, and the expansion of technology,” he said.

The prime minister said the number of cheetahs in India has increased to more than 30 in 2025.

Taking note of various events held during the year, he said in 2025, faith, culture, and India’s unique heritage all came together.

“The Prayagraj Mahakumbh organised at the beginning of the year astonished the entire world. At the end of the year, the ‘Dhwajaroohan’ ceremony at the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya filled every Indian with pride,” he said.

Modi said the excitement towards ‘swadeshi’ was also evident among one and all and people are purchasing only those goods that bear the sweat of an Indian and the fragrance of Indian soil.

“Today, we can proudly say that 2025 has given India even greater confidence. It is also true that this year we had to face natural disasters at very many places. Now, the country is ready to move forward in 2026 with new hopes and new resolutions,” he added.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday chaired a national conference of chief secretaries where he had insightful discussions on various issues relating to governance and reforms, officials said.

The conference marked another important milestone in strengthening the Centre-state partnership through structured and sustained dialogue on national development priorities, they said.

Had insightful discussions on various issues relating to governance and reforms during the National Conference of Chief Secretaries being held in Delhi,” Modi wrote on X.

The event was attended by P K Mishra and Shaktikanta Das, principal secretaries to the prime minister, Cabinet Secretary T V Somanathan, members of the NITI Aayog, and chief secretaries of all the states and Union territories.

Based on the extensive deliberations between the Central ministries, departments, NITI Aayog, states and UTs and domain experts, the conference will deliberate on the theme ‘Human Capital for Viksit Bharat’, covering the best practices and strategies for the states and UTs to follow, over the weekend. Special emphasis is being placed on five key areas: early childhood education, schooling, skilling, higher education, sports and extracurricular activities.

According to the schedule of the conference, six special sessions will be held over the weekend on deregulation in states; technology in governance: opportunities, risks and mitigation; agristack for smart supply chain and market linkages; one state, one world class tourist destination; Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Swadeshi and plans for a Left Wing Extremism future.

Besides, focused deliberations would be held on heritage and manuscript preservation and digitisation and ‘Ayush for All – Integrating Knowledge in Primary Healthcare Delivery’. Anchored in the prime minister’s vision of cooperative federalism, the conference serves as the forum where the Centre and the states collaborate, designing a unified roadmap to maximise India’s human capital potential and accelerate inclusive, future-ready growth. The national conference of chief secretaries is being organised annually since the past four years.

The first edition was held in Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, in June 2022, followed by conferences in New Delhi in January 2023, December 2023 and December 2024. Besides Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said an old, blurry photograph of three Buddhist stupas of Baramulla found in France has revealed Kashmir’s glorious past dating back nearly two thousand years. In his monthly Mann Ki Baat radio address, Modi said large human-made structures were discovered in Jammu and Kashmir, a development which “will fill you up with pride” regarding its cultural and historical heritage. For years, people had been seeing some tall mounds in Baramullah’s Zehanpora, he said. These were ordinary mounds, and no one knew what they were and one day, an archaeologist noticed them, he said. The prime minister said the archaeologist began to observe the area carefully and these mounds appeared somewhat unusual. Following this, he said, a scientific study of these mounds began and drones were used to take photographs from above, and the land was mapped.

“And then some surprising things started to emerge. It turned out that these mounds weren’t natural. They were the remains of a large human-made structure,” he said. Meanwhile, Modi said, another interesting connection emerged. “Thousands of kilometres away from Kashmir, an old, blurry photograph was found in the archives of a museum in France. “Three Buddhist stupas were visible in that photograph of Baramulla. From here, time took a turn, and Kashmir’s glorious past was revealed to us. This history dates back nearly two thousand years,” he said. Modi said the Buddhist complex in Zehanpora reminds us of Kashmir’s past and its rich identity.

networks, he said.

He held deliberations on rejuvenating the intelligence grid and emphasised strengthening grassroots-level intelligence generation to ensure timely inputs and proactive policing, the spokesperson said.

Singh issued instructions for effective implementation of the beat system, with a prime focus on identification and sustained surveillance of the terror ecosystem, narco-support structures, absconders, and other persons of tainted repute, he said. The officers were directed to ensure regular beat checks, community interaction, and documentation of unit-level intelligence inputs, the spokesperson said.

Earlier, Senior Superintendent of Police, Poonch, Shafqat Hussain briefed the meeting on the prevailing security and intelligence scenario of the district, the spokesman said.

Officers present in the meeting provided a detailed account of their field intelligence networks, existing security arrangements, he said.

They also presented initiatives being undertaken at the level of police stations, police posts, and Special Operation Group (SOG) camps to maintain peace and thwart anti-national and criminal activities, he said.

The DIG, along with SSP Poonch, conducted a visit to Kirni and Qasba villages near the Line of Control (LoC) to strengthen police–public relations and address the issues of border residents on priority.

During the visit, the officers held a public meeting across the border fence and listened to the grievances and concerns of the local residents, the spokesman said.

The issues faced by residents living in forward areas, such as civic amenities, security, border-specific hardships, and movement restrictions, were brought to the notice of the officers, he said. The DIG assured the public of time-bound redressal and necessary follow-ups, while the SSP assured the prompt addressing of grievances falling within the police domain.

The Poonch District Police remains accessible and responsive to the needs of the people, especially those residing in vulnerable and border areas, the SSP said.

The officers also appealed to the public to extend cooperation to the police and other security agencies in maintaining peace, law and order, and overall security in the border belt. Besides A traffic police sub-inspector has been placed under suspension pending an inquiry for allegedly misusing his official vehicle to shoot a reel on the snow-laden Mughal Road in Jammu and Kashmir’s Poonch district, officials said.

In a viral video, sub-inspector Gul Sheraz, posted as sector officer (traffic) on Mughal Road, was purportedly seen protruding out of the open front door of the moving vehicle near the snow-covered Peer Ki Gali, triggering safety concerns amid hazardous road conditions, traffic officials said.

The incident drew widespread criticism and raised serious concerns regarding safety and professional conduct, particularly given the hazardous road and weather conditions prevailing in the area, they said.

ASI Anil Kumar has been deployed as the new sector officer (traffic) on Mughal Road, while Sheraz has been directed to report to the Traffic Police Lines, Rural Jammu, with immediate effect, the officials said.

Uttar Pradesh Police have detained two suspected Kashmiri men, allegedly after villagers complained about their suspicious activities in Bareilly district, officials said on Sunday.

The incident came to light on Saturday morning when villagers complained, on the police’s X handle, about two Kashmiri men who allegedly were found begging at houses in Dhimri village in the Ahladpur area, police said.

Izzatnagar police launched a search after suspecting their language and manner of speaking, they said.

The suspects attempted to evade police by mingling with the crowd and offering namaz. However, after villagers spotted them again, police apprehended them, Izzatnagar Station House Officer (SHO) Bijendra Singh said.

During questioning, the men identified themselves as Shaukat Ali and Sajjad, both residents of Poonch district in Jammu and Kashmir, he said.

The duo told interrogators that they had been staying in a local mosque and had arrived in the city on December 10 and had been staying in the Dhimri village since then, police said.

The detainee also claimed that they were poor and survived by begging, police said, adding that no significant information has emerged so far.

Intelligence agencies are also interrogating them, police said, adding that, prima facie, their activities appeared suspicious.

Soon after their detention, the Local Intelligence Unit (LIU) also joined the probe, the SHO said.

The photographs and Aadhaar details of the two men have been sent to Jammu and Kashmir Police for verification, the SHO said.

Further questioning is underway, officials said.

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Administrative Secretary, School Education Reviews Schools in Kargil; Launches Winter Classes

Kargil: Administrative Secretary, School Education, UT Ladakh, Ms. Bhanu Prabha, IAS, visited several schools in Kargil district today to assess infrastructure and initiate winter academic activities. In the morning, she inspected PM SHRI High School Tacha, accompanied by Hon'ble EC Education, LAHDC Kargil, Sh. Zakir Hussain, EC Tourism Sh. Kacho Feroz, Deputy Commissioner Kargil Sh. Rakesh Kumar, IAS, Chief Education Officer Sh. Sonam Wangchuk, and other dignitaries. During the visit, she announced the merger of Primary Schools Saitechey and Primary School Gongsto Tacha with High School Tacha, declaring it a PM SHRI Model High School, and formally launched winter classes for students. Later, at Council Model Middle School Gramthang Minjee, Ms. Prabha assured Village Education Committees (VECs) that their genuine demands would be addressed, including sanctioning additional classrooms in the upcoming financial year. She urged VECs to mobilize the community to boost enrollment in the next academic session and inaugurated winter coaching classes at the school. At Conference Hall Baroo, the Secretary chaired a review meeting attended by Director School Education Department, UT Ladakh Sh. Tsering Paldan, Chief



Education Officer Kargil Sh Sonam Wangchuk, Principal DIET Kargil Sh. S.D. Namgail and the officers of Education Department Kargil, Principals, Zonal Education Officers and Headmasters of Higher Secondary Schools and High Schools of the district. The meeting focused on the recent Pre-Board 2nd Examination, progress under SAMAGRA and PM SHRI schemes, and strategies to improve CBSE board results. She emphasized timely utilization of funds and outlined departmental work plans. In the evening, Ms. Bhanu Prabha inaugurated the New Council Model Middle School Tharumsa Pashkum, assuring full departmental support and expressing hope that the school would serve as an inspiring model in the region. Winter coaching classes were also launched at the school. The visit highlights the administration's focus on strengthening school infrastructure, enhancing academic outcomes, and ensuring uninterrupted learning during winter months in Kargil district. The Government Council Model Middle School, Gramthang Minjee today organised a Community Mobilisation Programme aimed at promoting educational awareness and sensitisation among the general public.

Nagaland Statehood Day celebrated at Lok Niwas Leh

Leh: Nagaland Statehood Day was celebrated at Lok Niwas, Leh, as part of the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat initiative, which promotes unity, brotherhood, and celebrates India's Unity in Diversity through cultural exchanges between paired states. Nagaland, situated in India's culturally rich and diverse Northeast, attained statehood on December 1, 1963, following the enactment of the State of Nagaland Act, 1962, becoming the 16th state of the Indian Union. The state is renowned for its vibrant tapestry of cultures, festivals, and unique customary practices, and is especially celebrated for the iconic Hornbill Festival and the Mithun, a semi-domesticated bovine integral to Naga traditions and livelihoods. The event underscores the Government of India's commitment to strengthening inter-state bonds, celebrating regional diversity, and fostering national integration through shared cultural experiences. Such Foundation Day events are organised across states and UTs at Lok Bhavan and Lok Niwas to reinforce the vision of an inclusive India under the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat initiative. Speaking at the event, Bisa John from Nagaland, serving in the armed forces in Ladakh, shared insights about the state's rich cultural heritage, its multiple languages and tribes, and its wide array of festivals. The event also featured a video message from the



Hon'ble Governor of Nagaland, Shri Ajay Kumar Bhalla. Staff and officials of the Lieutenant Governor's Secretariat, Lok Niwas, Leh, participated in the celebration, highlighting the spirit of unity and cultural exchange. The event commenced with a welcome address by Shri Ghulam Mohd, Flock Inspector, who greeted all participants and highlighted the significance of such awareness camps in improving livestock management and strengthening rural livelihoods.

Watershed Mahotsav Celebrated at Basgo Micro Watershed, WDC-05, Leh Nimmo Project

Leh: The Watershed Mahotsav was celebrated today at the Basgo Micro Watershed under the Leh Nimmo Project, WDC-05, with great enthusiasm and active community participation. Shri A.G. Zargar, ACD RDD & PRI, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. The event was also attended by Naib Tehsildar Nimmo, Shri Mushtaq Ahmed, the Nambardar, Chairpersons/Secretaries of various Micro Watersheds, SHGs, UGs, teachers and students of Govt. High School Nimmo, farmers, and local community members. Community representatives—including the Nambardar, local leaders, and MWS functionaries—expressed gratitude to IWMP Leh (Watershed Department) for implementing impactful Soil & Water Conservation measures. These include water reservoir-cum-percolation tanks, multiple I-khuls, snow check dams, land development/surface dressing, water reservoirs, solar-lifting pumps, and chain-link fencing of cultivable wasteland. They appreciated how these interventions have transformed barren land into cultivable areas, supporting plantation and fodder intercropping through drip irrigation under the NRM component. Under the Production Component, initiatives such as crop diversification, distribution of high-yielding certified seeds (including fodder and pea varieties) free of cost, plantation of improved apple varieties, and remodelling of



traditional water mills were highlighted. Under the Livelihood Component, the establishment of handloom weaving and processing units for SHGs received special recognition for empowering local women. Smt. Shenaz, Project Officer/Nodal Officer, presented an overview of the completed works and upcoming interventions planned for the next working season. She urged the community to ensure the care, maintenance, and janbhagidari of the assets created under the

NRM component. Addressing the gathering, Chief Guest Shri A.G. Zargar applauded the impactful works executed under the watershed programme and assured that RDD & PRI will continue to work with dedication towards community development. Naib Tehsildar Shri Mushtaq Ahmed also assured timely redressal of local grievances. Students of Govt. High School Nimmo added vibrancy to the programme by organising a quiz competition highlighting the message.

Watershed Mahotsav Celebrated at Micro Watershed Chemday (WDC-03 Kharu Project) and Micro Watershed Saspol (WDC-06)



Leh: In resonance with the Pan-India celebration of the Watershed Mahotsav, vibrant events were organised at Micro Watershed Chemday under the Kharu Project WDC-03 and Micro Watershed Saspol under Project WDC-06, marked by great enthusiasm and active community participation. The Mahotsav at Saspol was graced by SDM Saspol, Shri Gurmet, as the Chief Guest, accompanied by the Tehsildar Saspol, officials of the Watershed Department, Chairmen/Secretaries of the Micro Watershed Committees, Nambardar, religious head, SHG and UG members, teachers, students of the Higher Secondary School, and local community members. Similarly, at Kharu, officers, the Nambardar, SHGs, UGs, and local participants were present in good numbers, reflecting widespread community involvement. During the programme, the Nambardar and Chairmen/Secretaries expressed heartfelt appreciation to the Watershed Department for implement-

ing a range of transformative interventions. They highlighted the significant NRM and livelihood works executed under both projects, including: • Construction of water harvesting tanks • Compound walling • L-bench terracing to convert wasteland into cultivable land through plantation • Spring rejuvenation works • Construction of I-khuls, the primary irrigation channels • Establishment of polycarbonate greenhouses • Food processing unit for SHGs at Saspol • Handloom weaving and food processing unit at Chemday • Free distribution of high-yielding vegetable (pea) seeds and fodder seeds for crop diversification • Free distribution of agriculture tool kits to all households under the Micro Watersheds of both Saspol and Kharu projects The SDM Saspol and Tehsildar Saspol commended the Watershed Department for the visible develop-

mental progress in Saspol. Likewise, officers and the Nambardar at Kharu appreciated the department's efforts and extended gratitude to the Government of India for supporting the watershed initiatives in Ladakh. A quiz competition on the theme "Khet ka paani khet mein, gaon ka paani gaon mein" was presented by students of the Higher Secondary School, spreading awareness on local water conservation and responsible resource use. The Project Officer/Nodal Officer, Watershed Department IWMP Leh, Smt. Shenaz, shared a concise overview of the works completed under the NRM, Production, and Livelihood components, emphasising the importance of Janbhagidari for the upkeep and sustainability of the assets created. Community members expressed their satisfaction with the ongoing interventions and conveyed hope for continued developmental activities in the future. Prizes and refreshments were also distributed to the participating students.

Watershed Mahotsav Celebrated at Stok Micro Watershed Under PMKSY WDC 2.0

Leh: The Stok Micro Watershed came alive with vibrant community participation as the Watershed Mahotsav was celebrated under the WDC-4 Chuchot-Thiksey project of PMKSY WDC 2.0, showcasing key achievements in natural resource management and livelihood enhancement in Leh district. The event marked the Lokarpan of several completed watershed development works benefiting every household in Stok village. These included reservoir-cum-percolation tanks and improved irrigation khuls, aimed at boosting water availability and supporting the region's agricultural requirements. The community also witnessed the Bhumi Puja for new interventions, performed by the village's religious head, Lamaji, for the Springshed Rejuvenation Project, signalling the start of activities focused on water conservation, afforestation, and soil-stabilisation. A strong sense of community ownership defined the celebrations, which were attended by BDO Chuchot Shri Ghulam Mohammed Mir, the Nambardar of Stok, chairpersons and secretaries of micro-watershed committees, WDT members, SHG representatives, teachers, officials, and students from Government Middle School Stok. As part of livelihood promotion, handloom weaving machines were distributed to women from Self Help Groups, providing a boost to the village's handloom-based income generation. Cultural performances by schoolchildren—including dances, songs, and a quiz competition—highlighted the significance of water conservation, echoing the message: "Khet ka paani khet mein, gaon ka paani gaon mein." Project Officer and Nodal Officer for IWMP, Ms. Shenaz, briefed attendees on ongoing works under the production, livelihood, and Springshed rejuvenation components. She underscored the vital role of community participation and inter-



departmental coordination in accelerating natural resource development. Addressing the gathering as Chief Guest, BDO Chuchot commended the watershed development team and the proactive involvement of villagers, stressing that such collaborative efforts are essential for sustainable development in water-stressed regions. The Nambardar of Stok expressed gratitude for the progress achieved under the NRM, livelihood, and production components and hoped for continued support in advancing the village's development. The Mahotsav concluded with a renewed commitment to strengthen water security, safeguard natural resources, and empower local communities through the ongoing PMKSY WDC 2.0 programme, reaffirming Stok's position as a model of participatory watershed development in Ladakh. The Ladakh Subordinate Services Staff Selection Board (LSSSB) today conducted a comprehensive training session for Centre Supervisors, Invigilators, and other examination functionaries engaged for the upcoming Matriculation Level Examination,

scheduled for Sunday, 7th December 2025. The training was held at the Panchayat Resource Centre, Agling. The session was briefed by Dr. Zahida Bano, JKAS, Secretary, LSSSB, and conducted by Sh. Jigmet Angchuk, JKAS, Under Secretary, LSSSB, who delivered a detailed orientation on the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to be followed on the day of the examination. The training covered essential instructions relating to the examination timeline, centre-level coordination, the opening and distribution of question booklets, proper handling and sealing of OMR sheets, and the completion of all mandatory documentation, including attendance records, invigilators' certificates, and required undertakings. The officers also explained various troubleshooting measures, addressed queries raised by the participants, and clarified centre-level responsibilities to ensure a clear understanding of the protocols. Emphasis was laid on strict adherence to fairness, transparency, and confidentiality to ensure the smooth and incident-free conduct of the examination.

Heavy Metals are Still a Problem in Baby Food



A concerning amount of heavy metals like arsenic, cadmium, and lead can still be found in many baby foods including rice and rice products, sweet potatoes, and carrots, according to latest testing from Consumer Reports. This report is a follow-up from 2018 testing that found 33 of the 50 foods were associated with potential health risks for children due to combined exposures from those three heavy metals. The latest test included 14 products including a mix of fruits and vegetables, meals, and snacks such as bars, puffs, and teething wafers. While some baby foods and products now show lower levels of heavy metals, others are showing higher levels. Overall, the risk of heavy metal exposure has stayed fairly consistent over the

years, according to the report. This new finding comes despite ongoing pressure on food manufacturers to reduce heavy metals in food crops and make "safer" products or food products with lower levels of heavy metals. What experts have to say Eric Boring, PhD, a Consumer Reports chemist who oversaw the testing explains in the report that because heavy metals are so pervasive in foods, and because they tend to accumulate in the body, small exposures from multiple foods can add up. "And feeding your child amounts close to the daily serving limits leaves little room for exposure to heavy metals from other foods," he adds. Maya Deyssenroth, DrPH, an assistant professor of environmental health sciences at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public

Health says in the report that the health risks associated with long-term heavy metal exposure include increased risk of a variety of health and developmental problems in young children, including a lower IQ and behavioral issues, as well as ADHD, autism, and other issues. The risk, though, should not be a cause for panic, according to Boring. Practical tips for parents Ganjian tells Healthline that some ways to reduce risk of exposure to heavy metals in baby foods include: Choosing foods with lower levels of heavy metals Changing the consumption quantity or frequency of certain products (less often or limited amounts) Providing a wide variety of foods daily What this looks like in everyday life will vary from household to household. In any case, Ganjian suggests avoiding rice and rice products as much as possible. Rice tends to absorb more arsenic than other grains, according to Trusted Source to the FDA, but can still be considered a part of a healthy diet. "Rice or rice products once a week is fine," says Ganjian. Cinthia Scott, RD, IBCLC, is a pediatric dietitian, lactation counselor, and owner of the Baby Dietitian. Scott tells Healthline she encourages parents to avoid rice-based snacks if they want to decrease the risk of heavy metal exposure. "Organic snacks from Little Bellies are non-rice based and great for babies 7 months and older," she says. Other options exist, too. Brown basmati from California, India, or Pakistan has about a third less inorganic arsenic than other brown rice, Scott pointed out. For households where rice is a staple food, the FDA suggests Trusted Source cooking the rice like pasta. This means boiling the rice in a large amount of water (6 to 10 parts water to 1 part rice) and then draining the excess water.

Can Ozempic Side Effects Send You to The ER?



If you've recently been trying to lose weight and have thought about medications, such as Ozempic and Wegovy have likely crossed your mind. However, while losing weight may be one side effect of this diabetes medication, there are a few other effects that people are experiencing – and some that are taking them to the emergency department. Recently some news outlets have run headlines with reports claiming that these drugs are sending people to the hospital. A local news outlet in Ohio found that the Cleveland Clinic had a few patients needing to be admitted due to persistent vomiting while on Ozempic and Wegovy. However, the American College of Emergency Physicians said they currently aren't tracking any numbers of emergency department visits directly related to these drugs. Side effects from semaglutide What is clear is that these drugs are now very

popular as a way to lose weight, but they can have serious side effects. The most common side effects of this medication include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain, and in some situations, constipation. Both Ozempic and Wegovy are brand names of the drug semaglutide. They are GLP-1 agonist drugs meaning they mimic the hormone glucagon-like peptide 1, which can regulate hunger. Ozempic was indicated to treat diabetes, while Wegovy is approved as a weight loss treatment in addition to a diabetes treatment by the FDA. According to official Ozempic disclosures, the medication can cause inflammation of the pancreas or pancreatitis, change in vision, low blood sugar, kidney failure, allergic reactions, and even gallbladder issues.

MS Symptoms Progress More Quickly in Certain People, Researchers Think They Know Why



Researchers from the University of California, San Francisco have identified a genetic variant that may cause some patients with multiple sclerosis (MS) to develop more severe symptoms compared to others with the disabling neurological disease. The study, published in Nature on June 28, found that a specific genetic variant, located between genes responsible for cell repair and infection control, may speed up the progression of the disease, and result in a patient needing a walking aid more quickly, by as much as four years. This is the first report to suggest that certain genes may influence disease

severity in those with MS. Past research has shown that MS is rooted in dysfunction of the immune system, but it's been unclear why some patients are unable to walk a decade after being diagnosed with MS whereas others continue to have normal mobility for years. "We see this clinically all the time, and it is very exciting that researchers are beginning to unravel this. These findings will open up new targets and pathways for future drug development, although this is likely some way off," Christopher Lock, MD, a clinical associate professor of neurology and neurological sciences at Stanford

Medicine, told Healthline. Lock was not part of the study. Specific genes may influence the severity of MS. The researchers evaluated the health data of over 22,000 people with MS to conduct a genome-wide association study, which is a research technique that links genetic variants to specific traits. The team investigated which genetic variants were linked to disease severity, along with the speed of disease progression, or how much time it took for a person to advance from diagnosis to various levels of disability. Over 7 million genetic variants were analyzed and the team identified one variant, labeled rs10191329, that was linked to quicker disease progression. "Individuals that carry two copies of this variant had increased brain damage, as seen on autopsies," says Adil Harroudi, MD, the lead author of the study and a neurologist specializing in multiple sclerosis research at McGill University. It sits between two genes, DYSF and ZNF638, that haven't previously been connected to MS. DYSF helps repair damaged cells and ZNF638 helps manage viral infections. The researchers suspect the variant's close location to these genes — and its effect on cell repair and viral infections —

Why the CDC is Warning Parents About Measles

This month the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued a Health Alert Network (HAN) Health Advisory Message, providing guidance on measles prevention for those traveling abroad this summer. The message comes as measles cases rise not only in the US, but also in regions popular with American tourists, particularly Europe. Measles is a highly contagious viral infection that can lead to death. According to Trusted Source the World Health Organization (WHO), most measles-related fatalities occur in children under five. CDC recommends vaccination before traveling abroad. The CDC issues several messages through HAN, with Health Advisories being the most serious. This new message encourages people to ensure they're fully vaccinated against the disease, particularly if they plan on traveling internationally. Clinicians and public health officials are also urged to make people aware of the risk of measles contraction and potential outcomes. It comes at a time when measles cases are rising at the fastest rate in several decades. In 2000, measles was declared Trusted Source as being eliminated from the US. However, in 2019, nearly 1,300 cases were reported across 31 states — all of which occurred from traveling abroad. So far, 16 measles cases have been reported in the US this year, with 14 of these linked



to international visits. The CDC estimates that twice as many Americans are planning on international travel this year compared to last. Measles has been increasing in popular tourist destinations in recent years. India has by far the greatest number of cases, with 73,536 reported Trusted Source between November 2022 and June 2023. Meanwhile, WHO stated Trusted Source that, in January and February of this year, the number of cases in Europe had already exceeded those in 2022. Turkey was noted as having particularly high incidence, while the UK, Austria, and Serbia have also seen an increase in infections. Engaging in activities where

there are large crowds, such as visiting museums, tourist attractions, and restaurants, increases a person's chances of coming into contact with an infected individual. However, traveling to, from, and within regions with high infection numbers also poses a risk, said Dr. David Berger, a board-certified pediatrician and founder of health education company Dr. David, MD and private family practice Wholistic Pediatrics & Family Care in Tampa, Florida. "As a result of travel, [people are] on planes and buses for longer periods where a contagious person could be with them in a closed space," Berger told Healthline.

Locally Transmitted Malaria Detected in U.S. For First Time in 20 Years

The US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) announced this week that they had identified locally-transmitted malaria cases in the U.S. The five cases were identified in Florida and Texas. This is the first time in 20 years these types of cases have been identified in the U.S. Usually if malaria cases are detected in the U.S. they are from people who picked up the disease while traveling from areas of the world where malaria is more common, like parts of Africa and Asia. What is malaria? Malaria is a parasitic disease that is spread via mosquitoes. There are four types of malaria parasites that can infect humans according to the CDC Trusted Source. These are Plasmodium falciparum, P. vivax, P. ovale, and P. malariae. Dr. Daniel Parker (PhD), an assistant professor of public health at the University of California-Irvine whose research focuses on mapping out infectious diseases like malaria, says that it's not time for alarm at this stage in the U.S. "We have a tendency towards panic, and that's never really good. It's not really fruitful in general, I think it's worth keeping an eye on and being vigilant, but not panic." The CDC estimates that around 2,000 cases per year come from travelers. Malaria is spread by a particular type of mosquito, named the anopheles. However, globally the disease is much more common. About 247 million cases of malaria occurred in 2020 and approximately 619,000 deaths were linked to the disease, according to the World Health Organization Trusted Source. Dr. Christopher Lourenço (PhD), who is the acting director of malaria with international NGO Population Services International, says that it's important to remember that while this local transmission is new, these mosquitoes and their presence in the US is not. "It's a vector-borne disease. So this isn't something that someone's going to breathe on you and you're going to get it. The risk of getting onward transmission is rare," Lourenço said. "Yes, those mosquitoes exist, those anopheles mosquitoes exist that can transmit malaria, but they've



always been there too. So it's just that reminder that this is really a rarity." The CDC says that the reason for the health advisory was to make both the public and practitioners aware of these cases. They can also raise awareness surrounding the risk of international travel, and mobilize healthcare providers so that first-line treatments are more readily available for anyone who becomes ill. Malaria has been found in the U.S. before

The US has had a lengthy history with malaria. In fact, one of the reasons the CDC was founded and located in Atlanta Trusted Source was because of the frequency of malaria transmission. "Historically, in the past, malaria we pretty well eliminated in the US back in the 1950s," Parker said. "But we still have the mosquitoes, still have people moving around, and the ranges of those mosquitoes is likely shifting and will continue to shift due to weather patterns."

Parker says that now, partially due to a changing climate, the risk of transmission has heightened, even if it is still very low. Lourenço said that these cases are a good reminder that public health groups need sustained funding in order to keep tabs on infectious diseases. "I kind of tell people, maybe that'll help with our continued bipartisan support for malaria funding is, you know, reminding people to keep the investment in public health surveillance systems running because things like this can happen and if we can catch it early and detect it early, then it shouldn't be shouldn't be a problem," Lourenço said. The signs of malaria But what if you live in Florida and Texas and are concerned about your risk? Dr. Alan Bulbin (MD), the director of the Department of infectious disease at New York's St. Francis Hospital, says that if you are concerned there are certain symptoms you can look out for. "It can be kind of nonspecific and look like a lot of other sorts of nonspecific illness, including fever, chills, body aches, headaches, you can even have diarrhea," Bulbin said. "If any of those symptoms go beyond the usual, 'Oh, it's just going to be a simple viral event that lasts one or two days,' but if it's dragging on you need to get checked out." A simple blood test can help identify if you have been infected with malaria, and taking precautions like wearing long clothing and applying repellent that contains DEET can help, but Bulbin says that these new cases could also be pointing to a larger trend in infectious disease. "It's just another example of potentially where we might be headed in terms of being faced with what's called zoonoses, vector-borne illnesses, diseases that you can pick up from animals or nonhuman species, and how humans in the environment, how that interaction is evolving. How, as the planet changes, as population density increases, travel, international travel, the global connectivity, all these things are kind of coming together."

President Murmu Embarks On Submarine Sortie At Karwar Naval Base

NEW DELHI, Dec 28: President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday undertook a sortie onboard Indian Navy's frontline submarine INS Vaghsheer on the Western seaboard. Murmu became the second President to undertake a submarine sortie. In February, 2006, APJ Abdul Kalam became the first president to experience a submarine sortie. Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi accompanied President Murmu during the sortie in the Kalvari class submarine from the Karwar naval base in Karnataka, officials said. The President is also the Supreme Commander of the armed forces. "President Droupadi Murmu embarked the Indian Navy's indigenous Kalvari class submarine INS Vaghsheer at Karwar Naval Base," the President's secretariat posted on social media. The President, donning a naval uniform, waved at naval personnel before entering the submarine. INS Vaghsheer, the sixth and final submarine of the P75 Scorpene project, was commissioned into the Navy in January. It is one of the most silent and versatile diesel-electric submarines in the world, according to Navy officials. It is designed to undertake a wide range of missions, including anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare, intelligence gathering, area surveillance, and special operations. Armed with wire-guided torpedoes, anti-ship missiles, and advanced sonar systems, the submarine also features modular construction, allowing for future upgrades such as the integration of Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) technology. The Indian Navy is developing Karwar base considering India's long-term security interests in the Indian Ocean region. The President of India, Smt Droupadi Murmu, conferred the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar on



children for their exceptional achievements in the fields of Bravery, Social Service, Environment, Sports, Art & Culture and Science & Technology at a ceremony held in

New Delhi today (December 26, 2025). Speaking on the occasion, the President congratulated the recipients of the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar.

She said that the award winning children have brought pride to their families, their communities, and the entire country. She expressed confidence that these awards will inspire all children across the country. She stated that this award has been presented to them for their encouragement. She expressed confidence that these awards will inspire all the children of the country. The President said that about 320 years ago, Guru Gobind Singh Ji—the tenth Guru of the Sikh faith and revered by all Indians—and his four sons made supreme sacrifices while fighting in support of truth and justice. She said that the bravery of the two youngest Sahibzadas, is honoured and respected both in India and abroad. She remembered with reverence the great child heroes who laid down their lives with pride for truth and justice. The President said that the greatness of a country is certain when its children are filled with patriotism and high ideals. She was happy to note that the children have showcased their exceptional talent in various fields such as bravery, art and culture, environment, innovation, science and technology, social service, and sports. She said that it is because of talented children such as the seven-year-old Vaka Lakshmi Pragnika that India is considered a chess powerhouse on the world stage. Ajay Raj and Mohammed Sidan P, who saved the lives of others with their bravery and intelligence, deserve all the praise they receive. Nine-year-old daughter Vyoma Priya and eleven-year-old brave son Kamlesh Kumar lost their lives while saving the lives of others with their courage. Ten-year-old Shrivann Singh, amidst the risks associated with war during Operation Sindoor, regularly delivered water, milk, and lassi to the Indian soldiers stationed at the

CRIMES RECORDED IN HYDERABAD DIP BY 15% IN 2025: OFFICIAL



The number of crimes recorded in Hyderabad dipped by 15 per cent during 2025 when compared to the last year, a top police official said on Saturday. The cases registered during 2025 are 30,690 as against 35,944 cases in 2024, Hyderabad Police Commissioner VC Sajjanar told reporters. Sajjanar attributed the decrease in the number of crimes to measures taken, including enforcement and visible policing. However, the overall cases of crime against women increased by six per cent in 2025. Similarly, the POCOS cases increased by 27 per cent. The cybercrime cases also declined by eight per cent, with 3,735 cases registered in 2025 as against 4,042 cases booked last year. All bodily offences like murder, attempt to murder, kidnapping, grave bodily offences, non-grave bodily offences, besides all property offences, saw a reduction. With regard to NDPS, as many as 368 cases were registered in 2025, up from 322 booked in the previous year. Going forward in 2026, the Hyderabad Police will enhance usage of technology for better policing, the Commissioner said, adding that they will scale up AI for crime prediction, hotspot mapping, facial recognition safeguards, and data-led deployment to move from reactive to anticipatory policing.

ALLU ARJUN AMONG 23 CHARGESHEETED IN THEATRE STAMPEDE CASE

Hyderabad

The city police have filed a charge sheet in a court against 23 persons, including top Telugu actor Allu Arjun, in connection with the death of a woman in a stampede during the premiere of 'Pushpa-2' film at Sandhya theatre here last year. The theatre's owner, partners, manager and lower balcony in-charge and gatekeeper were named as accused number 1 to 10 in the charge sheet filed on December 24, while Arjun has been named as accused number 11. Hyderabad Police Commissioner VC Sajjanar on Saturday stated that the investigation into the Sandhya theatre stampede case has been completed. The investigation established lapses in planning, crowd management, security arrangements, and coordination among the theatre management, event organisers, private security personnel, and others involved during the incident, the Commissioner said. "Following a comprehensive and detailed probe, a chargesheet was filed before the court on December 24. A total of 23 accused have been charge-sheeted in the case. Of these, 14 accused were arrested, while nine accused, who obtained anticipatory bail, were served notices," he said in a release.

Aaditya targets BJP over tree-cutting plan for Kumbh, says it wants to bring Raavan Raj

Nashik

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray on Saturday attacked the BJP over the proposed plan to cut trees in Nashik as part of the Kumbh Mela 2027 preparations, saying the ruling party wants to bring *Raavan Raj* in the city. Addressing party workers ahead of the January 15 polls to the Nashik Municipal Corporation, Thackeray said an alliance of the Sena (UBT), the MNS, Congress and the NCP (SP) in the city will be finalised by the day's end. The former Maharashtra minister said he envisages a medical college in Nashik under its civic body, just like the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation. He also promised better transportation services in the city and lower taxes. "If



the BJP had Ram in their mind, they would not have chopped the Tapovan. It wants to give that land to builders," he alleged, claiming that the party's Hindutva is more political. "It wants to bring *Raavan Raj*," he further claimed. The Nashik civic body had proposed to cut trees in the Tapovan area of the city to make way for a 'Sadhu Gram' colony. The

move was bitterly opposed by locals, green activists and the Opposition. Earlier this month, the National Green Tribunal halted the civic body's plan until January 15. Thackeray said the BJP is hungry to "swallow Maharashtra and gift it to developers". This "hunger" is to finish Maharashtra, cities and take the country backwards, he said. "There is no employment for the youth and women. Forests are not secure anymore, and there is no improvement in the condition of the cities," Thackeray said. Polls to 29 municipal corporations across Maharashtra, including the Nashik civic body, will be held on January 15, while votes will be counted the next day. The process to file nominations commenced on December 23 and will end on December 30.

Togadia demands reservation of Hindus at Vaishno Devi medical college

Jammu

Former Vishva Hindu Parishad leader Praveen Togadia on Saturday demanded that all 50 seats at the Vaishno Devi medical college in Jammu and Kashmir should be reserved for Hindus, and warned of an intensified agitation if it was not done. Togadia, who is the Jammu-based Rashtriya Bajrang Dal's national president, said India will not tolerate the "use of donations made by Hindus for the education of Muslim doctors".

Talking to reporters on the sidelines of a Rashtriya Bajrang Dal programme in Shakti Nagar here, he said, "I would like the lieutenant governor to address this issue otherwise I will myself find a way." The right-wing Hindu leader said he will not tolerate "any injustice" with the Jammu region. Togadia added that the prime minister may not be aware of this "injustice". Togadia, a former VHP leader, is currently on a six-day tour of Jammu region, beginning with Kathua on Wednesday. Admissions for the inaugural MBBS batch of 50 students at the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Institute of Medical Excellence in Reasi district were completed as per the NEET last month. The batch includes 42 Muslim candidates, mostly from Kashmir, seven Hindu students from Jammu and one Sikh candidate. Officials have maintained that admissions are carried out strictly in accordance with prevailing laws and reservation norms. Speaking to reporters on Saturday, Togadia urged the J-K LG to resolve the admission row at the Shri Mata



Vaishno Devi Government Medical College at the earliest. "Lt Governor Manoj Sinha, who is like my elder brother, should cancel the admission list immediately. Otherwise, I will go to every village and urge devotees not to make donations at the Vaishno Devi shrine and instead offer rice. "We will earn and give our own money, but there will be Muslim doctors from Kashmir. The Hindus of this country will not tolerate this," Togadia said. Asked about alleged atrocities against Hindus in Bangladesh, Togadia suggested the central Government stop supply of salt, rice and water to the neighbouring country.

Modi Govt s decisive action against terrorism restored normalcy in J&K: Jitendra Kumar

Jammu

Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Saturday said the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Government's decisive action against terrorism has restored normalcy in Jammu and Kashmir. He said the Kashmiri Pandit legacy is central to Kashmir's composite culture and the Modi Government is committed to addressing the demands of the Community. "The Modi Government has taken decisive and sustained action against terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir over the past 11 years, resulting in a significant decline in terror incidents, stone-pelting and targeted killings," Singh said.

"This reflects strong political will, and marks a clear departure from earlier approaches that lacked firmness in dealing with terrorism," the Union minister said while addressing a gathering. The programme was organised to mark the death anniversary of Pandit Prem Nath Bhat, a noted lawyer and journalist who was killed by terrorists in Kashmir on this day in 1989, before the mass migration of the community from the valley. Paying tributes to Bhat, the Minister said his sacrifice symbolises the suffering endured by the Kashmiri Pandit community due to terrorism and targeted violence. Expressing concern over the continuing dilution of the community's cultural and linguistic ethos, Singh stressed the need for sustained efforts to preserve the Kashmiri Pandit legacy. "Preserving the community's cultural, linguistic and civilizational ethos is essential for sustaining Kashmir's composite culture, which remains incomplete without the Kashmiri Pandits", Singh said. "Terrorism inflicted grave human suffering and severely disrupted the social harmony of Kashmir. For several years, the human rights of victims of terrorism, particularly Kashmiri Pandits, were overlooked due to a selective and inconsistent definition of terrorism," he said. This, he said, aggravated the injustice faced by those who were forced to leave their homes and abandon their ancestral roots. He said the Kashmiri Pandit community has demonstrated extraordinary resilience and an inherent capacity to survive and thrive despite decades of displacement and adversity. Highlighting Kashmir's centuries-old composite and pluralistic culture, the minister said Kashmiri Pandits have been an inseparable part of the Valley's civilizational fabric. Their contributions to education, literature, administration and social values provided a stabilising and rational influence that benefitted the entire society, he said.



EDITORIAL

Invoked When Needed,
Ignored When Not: How A
New US Doctrine Sees India

The 2025 US National Security Strategy (NSS) was released just as Russian President Vladimir Putin concluded his first visit to India since the war in Ukraine began. While Delhi and Moscow were seeking to expand their strategic canvas, Washington was unveiling its own strategic calculus. It involves narrowing the US's own global map, elevating geopolitics as the main tool of statecraft, hardening its economic rivalry with China, and viewing partnerships as instruments to preserve American primacy in that contest. This is not just an update. It is a redrawing, and India should take notice.

The 33-page document declares that the United States will no longer pretend to be equally responsible for every problem, everywhere. It puts the Western Hemisphere first and sketches a "Trump corollary", a 21st-century extension of the Monroe Doctrine: a hemisphere that Washington intends to secure, while it manages only select risks beyond.

The 2022 NSS welded values and interests into its strategic story, emphasising democracy, climate, and public health as part of the global agenda. The new version disdains that framing. Instead, it speaks the transactional language of leverage: reciprocal tariffs, technology standards, supply chain control, critical mineral alliances and migration enforcement.

'India-Pakistan', Again India features only selectively, and differently from the 2022 version. It appears first in the introduction, alongside Pakistan, as part of President Trump's self-described peacemaking efforts. Then, as a functional node in a system designed to outcompete China: a Quad security contributor, a partner in critical-minerals and infrastructure coalitions, including in Africa, and a sea-lane partner from the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea.

On China, at first glance there is convergence. The NSS describes it as a coercive, revisionist power that distorts markets, steals intellectual property and uses control over minerals and manufacturing for leverage. These concerns mirror India's own de-risking and diversification strategies. On maritime security and sea-lane resilience, interests clearly align.

Alignment, however, is not

equivalence. The NSS is focused on Taiwan and the First Island Chain. India's China challenge remains primarily continental, from the unresolved Line of Actual Control (LAC) and salami slicing in the Himalayas to growing Chinese influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Delhi has no interest in being drawn into Taiwan-related contingencies or entangled in East Asian war-gaming scenarios.

Another shift is cartographic. South Asia barely registers as a distinct theatre. Unlike the 2017 NSS, which discussed Pakistan-based militancy and the Indo-Pak nuclear risk, the 2025 document recasts India as purely an Indo-Pacific actor. US activity in the subcontinent or the Indian Ocean will be driven by its competition with China, not by a broader concern for regional balance.

The Recalibration With Europe Across other regions, the pattern is similar. Europe is cast as a standards and supply-chain partner. Russia is effectively regionalised and treated as a danger in Europe to be managed through sanctions and strategic stability talks, with Europe expected to bear the main burden, including the long grind over Ukraine.

Africa is viewed as a source of critical minerals, the Middle East as an energy corridor to be stabilised at minimum cost, and Latin America through the lens of migration and narcotics control. The old global policeman is being replaced by a hemispheric custodian with carefully chosen external commitments. For India, this American minimalism offers both opportunity and risk. It creates space to shape outcomes in its own neighbourhood in South Asia, the Gulf, ASEAN, and parts of Africa. These rising, resource-rich and strategically fluid regions are areas where India's partnerships can grow. But it also signals a world where Washington engages selectively, uses partners instrumentally and may expect alignment without offering proportional political capital. India could become a convenience partner, invoked when useful and ignored when inconvenient.

The India-US partnership could become a negotiation over deliverables: maritime presence, standards alignment, export-control coordination and defence interoperability. The risk is that US expectations may rise faster than Washington's willingness to respect Indian red lines on China.

The Little-Known Story Of How Russia Gave Sonia Gandhi Her Name - And Changed Her Family's Fate

Rasheed Kidwai

The inability of the Gandhis to meet Russian president Vladimir Putin during his recent visit to New Delhi would likely have upset Sonia Gandhi, too, though for reasons non-political as well. For she, in particular, shares special ties with a country that her husband's family befriended and where her father was once a prisoner of war.

Sonia, who turns 79 today, received a special birthday message fourteen years ago from the then Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev (currently Deputy Chairperson of the Security Council of Russia and Putin's foremost champion). "You [Sonia] carry on the Gandhi family's legacy, working consistently to strengthen democracy, further India's social and economic development, and improve the international security system and global order, and these efforts have won you great confidence from your people and much respect and influence around the world," Medvedev wrote in the letter, adding, "Russia values highly your contribution to preserving and building on the longstanding traditions of friendship between our countries and your efforts in taking us to a new level in our relations - that of a privileged strategic partnership."

The goodwill went both ways. In 2017, in an unusual gesture, Sonia, as the longest serving president of the Indian National Congress, penned a personal condolence letter grieving the death of ambassador Alexander Kadakin. Describing it as a "personal loss", she wrote, "For me and my family, the passing away of Alexander Kadakin's death is a personal loss. Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi held him in high esteem and valued his friendship." The letter was addressed to the then Russian minister-counsellor Anatoly V Kargapolov at the New Delhi-based Russian embassy.

Both diplomatic and political sources in the national capital noticed this unusual gesture by a political party in opposition. "It shows her high personal regard for ambassador Kadakin, who was a personal friend of Rajiv Gandhi," recalled an old-timer in the Congress. Sonia said she remembered Kadakin for his "large-hearted personality, his deep love for India" and "his ability to strike up a real rapport with a wide cross-section of Indians [which] won him countless friends in our country". "He embodied all the warmth, generosity and steadfastness of the Russian soul," she said, adding, "For him India, where he breathed his last, was truly a second home."

The War Years Sonia's love for Russia, however, was forged in childhood itself. Her father, Stephano Maino, had been a young man when, during World War II, he slung a rifle on his shoulder and marched into Russia with the invading Italian forces. He was detained in the towns of Vladimir and Suzdal for several years, until three Russian women helped him escape. A grateful Stephano named his daughters after the



three benefactors: Sonia, Nadia and Anushka. In his book, diplomat-turned-politician Natwar Singh recounted a trip to Russia he undertook with Sonia in 2005. According to Singh, who was the External Affairs Minister then, they went to a town called Vladimir by helicopter after official meetings concluded. He was amused by the decision to visit this little-known town. "We [Sonia and Natwar] left for Vladimir town in the afternoon by helicopter. I was at a loss why Sonia Gandhi was visiting an obscure medieval town. Soon, we arrived at an unkempt courtyard, the main building had been a church, now converted into a museum. Inside, we came to an octagonal room. One of the walls were stuck with paper slips. Sonia was much interested in these. She reads Russian and obviously was looking for something. 'Natwar, my father was a prisoner of war here during the World War II. He [Stefano Maino] escaped, walking all the way to Italy'. She was deeply moved. This was for her a very special moment. I listened. Any comment would have been banal and inappropriate," Singh wrote in *Walking With Lions - Tales From A Diplomatic Past*, which came out in early 2013.

The 'Cenerentola' Born on December 9, 1946, in Orbassano in northern Italy, Sonia, as the second daughter in her family, was their little princess, their 'Cenerentola', or Cinderella. The nickname was not entirely fortuitous. Unlike her sisters, Nadia and

Anushka, Sonia wanted to be different. She was ambitious, even if she spoke little about her dreams. As a young girl, she was never comfortable in the dusty industrial town on the outskirts of Turin where she grew up. When Sonia lived in Orbassano, the town was a muddle of apartment blocks and houses that had come up in the early 1950s as a result of the post-war boom in northern Italy. It was too undemanding and modest for a Cenerentola. She was a good student but not an exceptional one, except in her gift for languages. She could converse easily in Spanish and Russian, and today is proficient not just in these languages but also in Italian, Hindi and English.

The credit for teaching Sonia the Russian language goes to her father, who had fought in the country with the Germans. He was deeply influenced by Russia's language, culture and food, and loved the country. He was hard-working and disciplined, a quality that he passed on to his family, especially Sonia. As a self-made man who had been through some tough times, he took pride in providing for his family. He had come to Orbassano from Asiago in the Veneto region as a poor mason and made good in a small construction business through his dedication. Stephano brought up his daughters in the traditional Catholic way and was wary of foreigners. Naturally, was not particularly charmed when Sonia informed him about tying the knot with the Indian Prime Minister's son.

Stop Monopoly From Holding Indian Skies, Economy As Hostage

CR Sukumar

IndiGo's December 2025 chaos is not just a "technical problem" but a warning that India has allowed one private airline to become so big that when it stumbles, the whole country suffers. This should push the government to redesign rules so that no company can play with passengers' time, money and safety in a nation aiming to be the world's third-largest economy.

Earlier this Month, IndiGo cancelled and delayed a huge number of flights in just a few days, leaving lakhs of passengers stranded at airports, missing family functions, medical appointments, business meetings and even exams. The main reason was a clash between new pilot rest rules, IndiGo's tight schedules with very little spare capacity, and ongoing software work on some aircraft.

Passengers gather near an IndiGo airlines counter amid flight disruptions, at Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport, in Varanasi, Saturday, Dec. 6, 2025 (PTI)

Because IndiGo carries well over half of all domestic flyers in India, other airlines were simply too small to absorb the rush when its flights were cancelled. Airfares on many routes shot up sharply, and ordinary travellers realised that they did not have a real alternative if IndiGo failed to fly.

What This Crisis Really Shows For years, India's aviation story has swung between big dreams and sudden collapses: several airlines have shut down or gone bankrupt, leaving fewer players and giving IndiGo more and more market power. IndiGo grew by running a simple, low-cost, high-efficiency model. Same type of planes, very high daily use, tight crew planning. But this left almost no safety cushion when rules changed or things went wrong.

At the same time, the country has not invested enough in training pilots, building robust airport systems and planning for bad days such as fog, technical problems or new safety regulations. The result is a fragile system where one company's mistake or misjudgment can throw the entire network into disorder.

Government's First Reaction: Helpful, But Also Worrying To calm the situation, the government quickly relaxed some parts of the new pilot duty and rest rules for a temporary period and promised strict action against the airline for poor planning. It also tried to control the sudden fare jump and reminded airlines about their duty to refund and help passengers affected by cancellations. But rolling back or weakening pilot rest rules under pressure from airlines sends the wrong message — that safety rules can be bent when big companies are in trouble. Pilot bodies have already warned that long duty hours and less rest increase the risk of fatigue, which directly affects passenger safety in the air.

What Must Be Done Right Now In the immediate term, the focus must be on protecting passengers, not rescuing one airline's business model. Three steps are urgent:

Clear, automatic refund and compensation: When flights are cancelled or badly delayed due to the airline's fault, passengers should automatically get full refunds plus fixed compensation, without having to fight or beg at



counters or call centres.

Crisis playbook for mass disruptions: Whenever cancellations cross a certain level in a day, a standard "emergency code" should kick in—temporary fare caps on key routes, quicker approvals for other airlines to add flights, and compulsory cooperation among airlines to rebook affected passengers.

Do not dilute safety for convenience: Any relaxation in pilot rest and duty norms should be minimal, narrowly defined and strictly time-bound, and always reviewed by an independent expert group that looks only at safety, not profits.

In the next 2-5 years, the government must reduce the risk of any single airline becoming "too big to fail".

Check route-wise dominance: For busy routes and big airports, regulators should monitor how much capacity one airline controls, and prevent it from cornering most of the prime time slots. This will give smaller and new airlines a fair chance.

Extra rules for 'systemically important' airlines: Once an airline crosses a certain national or route-wise share, it should follow stricter rules: more spare pilots and aircraft, stronger stress tests for new schedules, and regular checks on whether it can handle changes in rules or sudden shocks.

Strong passenger rights law: India needs a clear, simple passenger rights code in law, not just guidelines, so that

travellers know what they are entitled to and can get quick remedies online when airlines fail to deliver.

Long-term Agenda: Build Resilience, Not Just Low Cost Over the long term, aviation policy must match India's economic ambition and geographical size.

National capacity plan: Airport expansion, air traffic control upgrades, airline fleet growth and pilot training must be planned together, with realistic estimates of future demand, instead of each part working in isolation.

Invest in people: The country needs many more trained pilots, engineers and ground staff. This requires more training institutes, easier education loans and strict quality standards so that safety is never compromised.

Independent safety and resilience body: A separate institution should continuously study fatigue, schedules, near-miss incidents and big disruptions, and regularly update rules before a tragedy forces change.

India's current air passenger rules, mainly under the 1934 Aircraft Act and DGCA guidelines, require airlines to offer refunds, alternate flights, or compensation like up to 20,000 for delays and cancellations. But these are weak guidelines without strong legal backing, so airlines often ignore them—as seen in the recent IndiGo crisis, where over 1,000 flights were cancelled due to crew shortages, stranding thousands without quick refunds or help while ticket prices shot up. We need stricter laws with heavy mandatory fines, fast online complaint fixes, and a

special Passenger Authority to protect common travellers from such repeated failures.

If this crisis is treated only as a bad week for one airline, India will learn nothing and repeat the mistake when the next shock comes. If it is treated as a turning point, the country can build an aviation system where passengers are respected, safety is non-negotiable, and no single private company can hold the skies—and the economy—hostage.

An economy that seeks to be the planet's third largest cannot run its skies on the logic of jugaad, last-minute relaxations and private monopolies treated as indispensable saviours. The IndiGo fiasco should be treated as a constitutional moment in infrastructure governance: a reminder that essential network industries must be designed for resilience, redundancy and fairness, not just cost efficiency and short-term growth metrics.

If the government uses this crisis to build a safety-first, passenger-centric and competition-friendly aviation ecosystem, India can emerge with an air transport system worthy of its economic ambitions; if it merely patches over the cracks to protect one dominant player, the next sneeze will be louder—and far more costly for the millions who today have no alternative but to fly on IndiGo's terms.

Bangladesh’s ex-PM Khaleda Zia in ‘extremely critical’ condition, says doctor

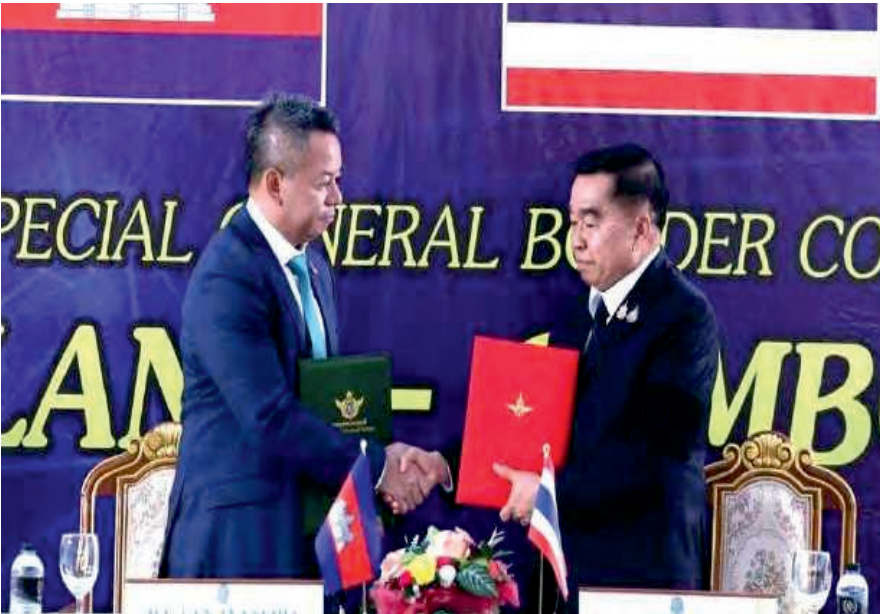
DHAKA, Dec 28: Bangladesh’s former prime minister Khaleda Zia is in an “extremely critical” condition, her personal physician has said. Zia, the 80-year-old chairperson of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), has been undergoing treatment at Dhaka’s Evercare Hospital since November 23 for multiple health complications. On December 11, she was placed on “ventilator support to give rest to her lungs and other vital organs.” “It cannot be said that her condition has improved. She is passing through an extremely critical phase,” Dr AZM Zahid said during a briefing held shortly after midnight on Saturday outside Evercare Hospital, without prior notice. He also urged the nation to pray for Zia’s recovery, news portal bdnews24.com reported. “If, by Allah’s mercy, she can get through this critical period, we may hear something positive,” Zahid said. Her son and BNP acting chairperson Tarique Rahman spent more than two hours at the hospital before leaving shortly before midnight, party members said. Both local and foreign physicians are involved in Zia’s care, with her daughter-in-law, Dr Zubaida Rahman, also actively participating in the treatment process. The BNP has previously indicated that it would prefer Zia to be taken abroad for advanced medical treatment. However, her current physical condition does not allow for



air travel, so her treatment continues in the country. Prime Minister Sushila Karki today called on the top leaders of major political parties in Nepal to ensure the success of the upcoming general election by taking part in it. Politics Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba, UML Chair KP Sharma Oli and Nepali Communist Party coordinator Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’, who were present in the discussion, were assured by the prime minister that the government is committed to conducting the March 5 general election as per schedule, and urged them to participate in the upcoming election. “Let’s make this election successful at any cost. Everyone should participate in it. The government believes that you are ready for the election and is working to develop an environment for it,” remarked the Prime Minister in a meeting held at her official residence Baluwatar, according to the Prime Minister’s secretariat. Prime Minister Karki called for ensuring a stable and sustainable democracy by considering the election as the future of the nation. She further clarified that the necessary resources have been provided to the Election Commission and the security agencies, adding that the morale of the security personnel has increased of late.

Thailand, Cambodia sign new ceasefire agreement to end border fighting

Bangkok Thailand and Cambodia signed a ceasefire agreement on Saturday to end weeks of fighting along their border over competing territorial claims. The agreement took effect at noon (0500 GMT) and calls for a halt in military movements and airspace violations for military purposes. Only Thailand has carried out airstrikes, hitting sites in Cambodia as recently as Saturday morning, according to the Cambodian Defence Ministry. The deal also calls for Thailand, after the ceasefire has held for 72 hours, to repatriate 18 Cambodian soldiers it has held as prisoners since earlier fighting in July. Their release has been a major demand of the Cambodian side. Within hours of the signing, Thailand’s Foreign Ministry protested to Cambodia that a Thai soldier sustained a permanent disability when he stepped on an anti-personnel land mine, which it charged had been laid by Cambodian forces. The agreement was signed by the countries’ defence ministers, Cambodia’s Tea Seiha and Thailand’s



Nattaphon Narkphanit, at a border checkpoint. It followed three-day lower-level talks by military officials. It declares that the sides are committed to an earlier ceasefire that ended five days of fighting in July and follow-up agreements. The original July ceasefire was brokered by Malaysia and pushed through by pressure from US President Donald Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges unless Thailand and Cambodia agreed. It was formalised in more detail in October at a regional meeting in Malaysia that Trump attended. Despite those deals, the countries carried on a bitter propaganda war, and minor cross-border violence continued, escalating in early December to widespread heavy fighting. Thailand has lost 26 soldiers and one civilian as a direct result of the combat since December 7, according to

officials. Thailand has also reported 44 civilian deaths. Cambodia hasn’t issued an official figure on military casualties, but says that 30 civilians have been killed and 90 injured. Hundreds of thousands of people have been evacuated on both sides of the border. “Today’s ceasefire also paves the way for the displaced people who are living in the border areas to be able to return to their homes, work in the fields, and even allow their children to be able to return to schools and resume their studies,” Cambodia’s Defence Minister Tea Seiha told reporters after the signing. Each side blamed the other for initiating the fighting and claimed to be acting in self-defence. The agreement also calls on both sides to adhere to international agreements against deploying land mines, a major concern of Thailand. Thai soldiers along the border have been wounded in at least 10 incidents this year by what Thailand says were newly planted Cambodian mines. Cambodia says the mines were left over from decades of civil war that ended in the late 1990s. Following the latest injury on Saturday, Thailand’s Foreign Ministry noted that the new agreement “includes key provisions on joint humanitarian demining operations to ensure the safety of military personnel and civilians in the border areas as soon as possible.” Another clause says the two sides “agree to refrain from disseminating false information or fake news.” The agreement calls for a resumption of previous measures to demarcate the border. The sides also

agreed to cooperate in suppressing transnational crimes. That’s primarily a reference to online scams perpetrated by organised crime that have bilked victims around the world of billions of dollars each year. Cambodia is a centre for such criminal enterprises. Malaysia’s Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who was instrumental in putting together the original ceasefire, said the new agreement “reflects a shared recognition that restraint is required, above all in the interest of civilians.” Many clauses similar to those in Saturday’s agreement were included in October’s ceasefire document, and were open to various interpretations and generally honoured only in part. These included provisions concerning land mines and the Cambodian prisoners. The fragility of the new agreement was underlined by Thailand’s Defence Ministry spokesperson Surasant Kongsiri in a news briefing after Saturday’s signing. He said that the safe return of civilians to their homes would indicate the situation had stabilised enough to allow the repatriation of the captured Cambodian soldiers.

Indian mission establishes one-stop help centre for distressed women in Canada

Toronto The Consulate General of India in Toronto has established a ‘One Stop Centre for Women,’ a dedicated support centre exclusively to assist women Indian nationals in distress. The Consulate has also set up a 24x7 helpline and said, the new Centre aims to provide critical and timely support to Indian passport holder women who could be facing domestic violence, abuse, family conflict, abandonment, exploitation and legal challenges, among others. The One Stop Centre for Women (OSCW) will provide coordinated, beneficiary-centred assistance by connecting aggrieved women to timely and appropriate pathways of support, including immediate counselling, facilitation of psycho-social support, and coordination of legal assistance and advice, the Indian mission said in a post on X on Friday. This would be done while helping women access relevant community and social-

service resources in Canada, it said, adding, “Entire intervention by the OSCW will be within the purview of Local Laws in Canada.” The Centre would be run by a woman Centre Administrator, who will ensure the “delivery of safe, dignified, and comprehensive assistance” to women in need (on means tested basis) through prompt handling of distress calls via 24x7 helpline. “This, inter-alia, would include Counselling and emotional support through empanelled NGOs. All the financial assistance will be on means tested basis as per Government of India’s Rules,” the statement said. The Centre would function from the Consulate General of India, Toronto and the Centre Administrator can be reached on +1 (437) 552 3309 andosc.Toronto@mea.Gov.I , the statement said. The Indian mission’s website also carries a FAQ mentioning how the Indian officials can or cannot help the Indian passport holder women who are cheated / abandoned / abused by Overseas Indian Spouses.

Afghans face humanitarian crisis

Kabul For 10 hours a day, Rahimullah sells socks from his cart in eastern Kabul, earning about \$4.5 to \$6 per day. It’s a pittance, but it’s all he has to feed his family of five. Rahimullah, who like many Afghans goes by only one name, is one of millions of Afghans who rely on humanitarian aid, both from the Afghan authorities and from international charity organisations, for survival. An estimated 22.9 million people — nearly half the population — required aid in 2025, the International Committee for the Red Cross said in an article on its website Monday. But severe cuts in international aid — including the halting of US aid to programmes such as food distribution run by the United Nations’ World Food Programme — have severed

this lifeline. More than 17 million people in Afghanistan now face crisis levels of hunger in the winter, the World Food Programme warned last week, 3 million more than were at risk more than a year ago. The slashing in aid has come as Afghanistan is battered by a struggling economy, recurrent droughts, two deadly earthquakes and the mass influx of Afghan refugees expelled from countries such as Iran and Pakistan. The resulting multiple shocks have severely pressured resources, including of housing and food. Tom Fletcher, the UN humanitarian chief, told the Security Council in mid-December that the situation was compounded by “overlapping shocks,” including the recent earthquakes and increasing restrictions on humanitarian aid access and staff. While Fletcher said nearly 22 million Afghans will

African regional governance bodies reject recognition of Somaliland by Israel

Nairobi Africa’s regional governance bodies on Saturday rejected the recognition of Somalia’s breakaway region of Somaliland as an independent nation by Israel a day earlier, the first by any country in more than 30 years. Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in 1991 amid a descent into conflict and, despite having its own government and currency, had never been recognised by any nation in the world until Friday. The African Union Chairperson, Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, said any attempt to undermine Somalia’s sovereignty risks peace and stability on the continent. He said that the commission “firmly rejects any initiative or action aimed at recognising Somaliland as an independent entity, recalling that Somaliland remains an integral part of the Federal Republic of Somalia.” Somalia’s federal government on



Friday strongly rejected what it described as an unlawful move by Israel to recognise Somaliland, reaffirming that the northern region remains an integral part of Somalia’s sovereign territory. It was not known why Israel made the declaration at this time or whether it was expecting something in return. Earlier this year, US and Israeli officials told The Associated Press that Israel had approached Somaliland about taking in Palestinians from

Gaza as part of US President Donald Trump’s plan at the time to resettle the territory’s population. The United States has since abandoned that plan. Netanyahu’s office said on Friday that he, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar, and Somaliland’s president, Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi, signed a joint declaration “in the spirit of the Abraham Accords.” That initiative, which started in 2020, established commercial and diplomatic ties between Israel and several Arab and Muslim-majority countries. Trump sees it as key to his plan for bringing long-term stability to the Middle East. The foreign ministry of Egypt — a major mediator in the Israel-Hamas war — said on social media that it rejects Israel’s recognition of Somaliland and stressed full support for Somalia’s sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. East African governing body IGAD, in a statement on Saturday, said Somalia’s sovereignty was recognised under international law.

Pakistani forces kill 13 terrorists in Balochistan

Karachi Pakistani security forces have killed at least 13 terrorists belonging to outlawed insurgent groups in different intelligence-based operations in the troubled Balochistan province, the ISPR said on Saturday. According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the military’s media wing, these terrorists were killed in two operations conducted on December 24 and 25 in the Kohlu and Kalat areas of the province. In two statements, the ISPR said the intelligence-based operations (IBOs) were conducted on the reported presence of terrorists in the respective areas. In the IBO in Kohlu on Thursday, the ISPR said it killed five terrorists after a heavy exchange of fire with them. In another operation on Wednesday, security forces effectively engaged the terrorists’ location and, after an intense exchange of fire, killed 8 of them in Kalat.



Massive crash on highway in Japan kills 2 people

A massive crash involving 67 vehicles in snowy weather has killed two people and injured 26 on an expressway in Japan as the country kicked off its end-of-year holiday season. The Gunma prefectural highway police said on Saturday that the pileup on the Kan-etsu Expressway late on Friday started with a collision between two trucks in the town of Minakami, about 160 km northwest of Tokyo. The initial crash blocked parts of the expressway, and cars coming from behind them were unable to brake on the snowy surface. A fire erupted at the far end of the pileup, spreading to 20 vehicles, some of which were completely burned. A 77-year-old woman from Tokyo died in a passenger car, and a charred body was later recovered from the driver’s seat of a burned-out truck, police said.



Turkiye held funeral for Libyan crash victims

Turkiye held a military funeral ceremony on Saturday morning for five Libyan officers, including western Libya’s military chief, who died in a plane crash earlier this week. The private jet with General Muhammad Ali Ahmad al-Haddad, four other military officers and three crew members crashed on Tuesday after taking off from Ankara, Türkiye’s capital, killing everyone on board. Libyan officials said the cause of the crash was a technical malfunction on the plane. Al-Hadad was the top military commander in western Libya and played a crucial role in the ongoing, UN-brokered efforts to unify Libya’s military. The high-level Libyan delegation was on its way back to Tripoli, Libya’s capital, after holding defence talks in Ankara aimed at boosting military cooperation between the two countries.

Mandhana becomes fourth woman to 10,000 international runs

Mumbai: Smriti Mandhana has become the fourth player to go past 10,000 runs in women's internationals. She is the second India player to the mark after Mithali Raj, who leads the charts with 10,868 runs. New Zealand's Suzie Bates (10,652) and England's Charlotte Edwards (10,273) are the others ahead of Mandhana.

Mandhana became the quickest to the mark, having got there in her 281st innings across formats. Raj got there in 291 innings while Edwards and Bates took 308 and 314 innings respectively.

Mandhana was 27 runs adrift from the mark before the fourth T20I against Sri Lanka on Sunday, and got there when she drove left-arm spinner Nimasha Meepage down to long-on for a single. She finished with 80 off 48 balls and was involved in a 162-run opening partnership with Shafali Verma, the highest for India for any wicket in T20Is. Mandhana hit three sixes in her knock, going past Harmanpreet Kaur to become India's leading six-hitter in T20Is.

The milestone caps what has been an outstanding year for India's vice-captain. During their victorious Women's World Cup campaign that ended early last month, Mandhana became the first woman to score 1000 ODI runs in a calendar year and she finished the year as the leading run-scorer in the format with 1362; the next best - Laura Wolvaardt - had 1174. Mandhana also scored five ODI centuries this year, a feat that was equalled by South Africa's pair of Tazmin Brits and Wolvaardt.

Earlier in the series, Mandhana became only the second to go past 4,000 runs in women's T20Is. Only Bates, with 4716 runs, is ahead among the leading run-scorers in women's T20Is.



All the three games in this series have followed a similar patten so far. India have won three tosses - yup, you read that right - elected to bowl, and then used dew to their advantage to chase down modest totals unchallenged. With a T20 World Cup around the corner, and an unassail-

able 3-0 lead in their pocket, it would be prudent for India to start challenging themselves and look to set totals if their luck with the toss continues. They'd also want to perhaps find a way to expand their squad depth a bit more - the lower-order firepower seemed

lacking in the 2024 tournament. G Kamalini brings with her the same big-hitting promise Richa Ghosh did as a teenager in 2020. Maybe it's time to unleash her?

For Sri Lanka, simply being able to challenge India for long enough has been quite a task. They continue to be heavily reliant on Chamari Athapaththu - it's a bit like how Mithali Raj carried India's batting for nearly a decade before Smriti Mandhana and Harmanpreet Kaur took centre stage.

Sri Lanka continue to mix and match to find their own versions of Mandhana and Harmanpreet and, while there has been promise here and there, consistent performers have been hard to find.

After Radha Yadav, Tanuja Kanwar, Saika Ishaque and N Shree Charani, 20-year-old Vaishnavi Sharma is the latest to break into India's left-arm spin club. But, she's the only one among the five to do so without the WPL giving her a leg up. Vaishnavi finished as the leading wicket-taker in the Senior Women's T20 Trophy with 21 wickets in 11 matches at an economy rate of 6.47. She backed it up in the inter-zonal tournament and again in these three games against Sri Lanka. Her composure has been striking. So too the courage to keep tossing the ball up.

When Sri Lanka stunned India to win last year's Asia Cup final, top-scorer Harshitha Samarawickrama seemed a player of immense promise. But in the 17 months since, such moments have been rare. Coach Rumesh Ratnayake continues to back her and believes a turnaround is imminent, and she'll be keen to repay the faith. Since the start of the T20 World Cup in the UAE last year, she is yet to score a half-century in nine innings.

PCB sets 1.3 billion reserve price for two new PSL franchises

Karachi

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is seeking to sell each of its two new teams for the next phase of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) at an annual franchise fee of 1.3 billion Pakistani rupees, according to sources. The PCB is scheduled to hold the final auction on January 8.

Interestingly, the former owners of the Multan Sultans, who relinquished ownership a few weeks ago following differences with the PCB, have submitted initial bid documents to participate in the final auction for the two new teams.

However, there is no clarity yet on new owners for the



Multan franchise, amid strong speculation that the PCB intends to manage the team itself for at least the 11th edition of the PSL, scheduled to begin on March 26 next year.

The PCB claims around 12 parties, including five from overseas, have submitted initial bid documents for the

two new teams, though it is yet to release the final list of eligible bidders after conducting financial and technical due diligence.

Earlier this month, the PCB held PSL roadshows in London and New York to attract foreign investors for the two new teams. In an effort to boost investor confidence, the PCB has guaranteed a minimum distribution of 850 million Pakistani rupees to each franchise from the central revenue pool for the next five editions of the league, starting with the 11th edition. The board has said that if a franchise's share from the central pool in any season falls below the guaranteed amount, the PCB will cover the shortfall.

Holden, Naseem carry Vipers to win in ILT20

Sharjah

Desert Vipers faced a late resistance but pulled through to secure a five-wicket win over the Sharjah Warriorz to knock them out of the ILT20 play-offs race.

Post this result, either Abu Dhabi Knight Riders or the Gulf Giants will complete the playoff line-up alongside Desert Vipers, MI Emirates and Dubai Capitals.

Meanwhile, the winner of Saturday's clash between MI Emirates and Dubai Capitals will secure a top-two finish.

Pacer Naseem Shah's three wickets restricted the Warriorz to 140/7, before Max Holden's unbeaten 66 runs in 46 balls, took the Vipers all the way.

Harmeet Singh's three wickets in the middle overs briefly piled some pressure but Holden was ably supported by Sam Curran's 25 runs in 28 balls, and Hasan Nawaz's 25 runs in 14 balls.

For the Warriorz, Johnson Charles' 43 runs in 37 balls was the highest score.

Earlier, David Payne and Khuzaima Tanveer gave the Warriorz an early jolt, reducing them to 6/2 after two overs. Payne trapped Monank Patel (4 off 2) LBW in the first over, while Tom Abell (0 off 2) fell in the second to Tanveer.

Tom Kohler-Cadmore (20 off 22) counter-attacked to hit Naseem Shah for 19 runs in the fifth over, taking the Warriorz to 45/2 inside the powerplay.

SA20: Rickelton's ton in vain as Durban Super Giants beat MI Cape Town

Cape Town

Ryan Rickelton's maiden SA20 century was not enough to save MI Cape Town from a 15-run defeat against Durban Super Giants in a cracking Season 4 opener.

On a run-filled opening day, when a cumulative total of 449 runs were struck, which included 25 sixes and 40 boundaries, Rickelton's 113 off 65 balls took MI Cape Town to the brink. But ultimately, Durban's Super Giants' record 232/5 was too much for the MI Cape Town.

DSG's all-New Zealand opening pair of Devon Conway and Kane Williamson laid the platform as they dominated the Powerplay, racing to 96 in just 8.3 overs.

The momentum was maintained by Englishman Jos Buttler (20 off 12 balls) and Heinrich Klaasen (22 off 14 balls) after Conway (64 off 33 balls, 7x4, 2x6) had been picked up by fellow Kiwi Trent Boult.



There was no relief for the defending champions with Aiden Markram and Evan Jones keeping the boundaries flowing.

Markram blitzed 35 off 17 balls (5x4, 1x6), while Jones struck an undefeated 33 off 14 balls (4x4, 2x6).

The MI Cape Town chase revolved around Rickelton. The League's leading run-scorer cut, drove and pulled powerfully despite Rassie van der Dussen (2) and Reeza Hendricks falling by the wayside. The introduction of Jason Smith, however, changed the momentum with the MI Cape Town debutant smashing an exhilarating 41 off just 14 balls (4x4, 3x6).

Did BCCI informally look at Gambhir's red ball replacement after SA whitewash?

Jaipur

Gautam Gambhir's record as India's white ball coach has been pretty impressive with an ICC and ACC trophy in each of the two formats but with 10 Test defeats against SENA countries, the same cannot be said when it comes to Test cricket.

It is understood that right after India's abject surrender against South Africa in the two-Test series at home last month, someone who matters in the cricket board had once again informally approached VVS Laxman to check if he would be interested in coaching the red ball team.

While Gambhir's contract with BCCI runs until the end of the 2027 ODI World Cup, there is every possibility that it could be revisited, depending upon India's performance in the T20 World Cup which begins in five weeks' time.

It is understood that in the BCCI corridors, the jury is still out on whether Gambhir is the right person to remain at helm of the red ball team for remaining nine Tests of the World Test Championship 2025-27 cycle.

Having drawn 2-2 in a five-Test away series in England, India have a couple of overseas assignments comprising two Tests each against Sri Lanka in August 2026 and a tour of New Zealand in October, and before hosting Australia for a five-Test affair in January-February 2027. (PTI)

Dominant India eye 4th successive win over Sri Lanka in T20I series



Thiruvananthapuram

Formidable India will be eager to register a dominance-extending fourth victory on the bounce in the fourth Women's T20I against Sri Lanka on Sunday.

The Harmanpreet Kaur-led team has not even given a chance to its Lankan counterparts to compete in this five-match series, which currently stands 3-0 in favour of the hosts.

It is evident in the fact that India, who chased in all three preceding matches, have not batted more than 14.4 overs, have not lost more than three wickets, and have never faced a target in excess of 129.

The primary credit-holders for that overwhelming success are Indian bowlers. Seasoned spinner Deepti Sharma took four wickets across two matches, and Renuka Singh equalled that feat in a single match at the Greenfield Stadium on Friday.

The toss also might have played a small part as

Harmanpreet called it right on all three occasions and elected to field, giving her bowlers a chance to operate in conditions with lesser dew.

But the bowlers have maximised that opportunity spectacularly, not allowing any of the Sri Lankan batters to cross an individual 40 so far.

In this series, India also have tried various combinations as well. Arundhati Reddy played the first two matches, while Renuka came in for her pace colleague in the next contest.

"We have been trying different combinations with the (T20) World Cup (2026) in mind. We want to keep our standards high after winning the (ODI) World Cup recently,"

"And we want our standard and performance to remain high," said Renuka in the post-match press conference.

The Indian batters too have backed the bowlers with a crushing show with Shafali Verma and Jemimah Rodrigues leading the

parade with a fifty each.

Mandhana eyes big outing

However, star batter Smriti Mandhana is yet to hit the overdrive, making 40 runs in three games at an average of 13.33 at a sub-100 strike rate.

The graceful left-hander will be looking for a big outing that can bring more smiles her way.

It also remains to be seen whether India will blood young batter Gunalan Kamalini and experienced Harleen Deol in this match.

India have given a chance to all other 13 members of the squad, and the management might just want to have a look at the pair too.

SL look for redemption

Led by veteran Chamari Athapaththu, the Lankan batters have failed miserably in the series. Besides the skipper, the tourists have talents in the side like Hasini Perera, Kavisha Dilhari and Harshitha Samarawickrama.

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