

Budget 2026 puts spotlight on Youth with 'Banglar Yuva -sathi' scheme

The West Bengal Budget 2026 on Saturday placed a strong focus on the state's youth, with the announcement of a new social assistance programme titled 'Banglar Yuva -sathi', aimed at providing financial support to unemployed young people during their job-seeking years. The scheme, unveiled as part of the state government's broader welfare roadmap, proposes a monthly allowance of up to ₹1,500, translating to a maximum annual benefit of ₹18,000 per beneficiary. According to the budget announcement, the primary objective of Banglar Yuva-Sathi is to offer minimum financial assistance to educated but unemployed youth while they prepare for employment or competitive examinations. Government sources indicated that the allowance would act as interim support, easing economic pressure during the transition from education to employment.

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Tourist interest in
J&K stays strong:
AMIT SHAH

MI News Service, New Delhi: Union home minister Amit Shah said Indian tourists' enthusiasm for Jammu and Kashmir remained strong, and that the Centre would support the development of new destinations in the region.

His comments came amid growing concern in the Valley over the continuing closure of several tourist spots since the Pahalgam attack last April. The home minister did not say when these might be reopened. Shah, on a two-day visit to Jammu and Kashmir, chaired a review meeting in Jammu on Saturday to assess the progress of development projects in the region. Lieutenant governor Manoj Sinha and chief minister Omar Abdullah participated in the meeting. "There is a need for aggressive marketing of

There is a need for aggressive marketing of Jammu and Kashmir's tourist destinations in other states of the country to explore the tourism potential available here

an official statement quoted Amit Shah

Jammu and Kashmir's tourist destinations in other states of the country to explore the tourism potential available here," an official statement quoted Shah as saying. The home minister added that the Centre would provide all possible assistance to "develop new tourist destinations in Jammu and Kashmir". Tourism players say they faced a difficult 2025 since the Pahalgam attack on April 22, with most hotels struggling to get tourists and thousands left jobless.

"For the first time since April (last year), we received tourists in good numbers in January. For all the preceding months, there were no tourists. It was an extremely tough year," a Srinagar hotelier said. Omar had on Thursday told the Assembly that several tourist spots remained closed even 10 months after the Pahalgam attack. "In this context, discussions are already under way with the Centre and I assure the House that the matter will be taken up with the Union home minister, who is visiting Jammu," he had said.

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Morning India

MODI for stronger Indo-Malaysia ties says no compromise on terrorism

MI News Service, Kuala Lumpur: India and Malaysia on Sunday vowed to expand their ties in the high-priority sectors of trade and investment, defence, energy, advanced manufacturing and semiconductors with Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserting that both sides are committed to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

Following his wide-ranging talks with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, Modi reiterated India's position on combating terrorism as he said: "Our message on terrorism is clear: no double standards, no compromise." The two sides inked a total of 11 agreements and documents to expand cooperation in a range of key areas, including a framework pact for deeper engagement in the semiconductor sector.

Both Modi, who arrived in Kuala Lumpur on Saturday, and Ibrahim appreciated efforts to promote the usage of local currencies - the Indian Rupee and Malaysian Ringgit -- for trade settlement. "We will pave the way for economic transformation through strategic trust," Modi said, describing the India-Malaysia relationship as "special". "We are maritime neighbours. For centuries, our peoples have had deep and cordial ties," he said in his media statement. Modi also announced India's decision to establish an Indian Consulate General in Malaysia. In his remarks, Ibrahim



Prime Minister Narendra Modi departs for New Delhi after concluding a two-day official visit to Malaysia, in Kuala Lumpur on Sunday.

noted India's economic growth and said his country would benefit immensely if it could secure more ways and opportunities to collaborate with New Delhi. "It (India's economic growth) is one spectacular rise in the international eco and trade scene," he said, describing the decision to use local currencies for bilateral trade as "remarkable".

In the talks, Malaysia extended its support for India's permanent membership in a reformed UN Security Council. Elaborating on en-

gagement in the security domain, Modi said cooperation in counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing, and maritime security will be strengthened, adding that both sides will further expand defence ties. "Along with AI and digital technologies, we will advance partnerships in semiconductors, health, and food security," he said, noting that the discussions at the CEO Forum opened new opportunities for trade and investment. The prime minister touched upon India's position on

The Indo-Pacific region is emerging as the world's growth engine. We, along with ASEAN, are committed to development, peace, and stability throughout the Indo-Pacific region

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Indo-Pacific and its steadfast views on the 10-nation grouping ASEAN's centrality in the region. "The Indo-Pacific region is emerging as the world's growth engine. We, along with ASEAN, are committed to development, peace, and stability throughout the Indo-Pacific region," he said. "With the support of friendly countries like Malaysia, India will further expand its relations with ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). We agree that the review of the ASEAN-India Trade Agreement, ITIGA, should be completed expeditiously," he added.

Modi said he and Ibrahim also had a "meaningful discussion" on regional and global issues. "In this environment of global instability, the growing friendship between India and Malaysia is of vital importance to both countries." "We share

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SHAH sets Mar 31 deadline to end Maoist insurgency

MI News Service, Raipur: Union home minister Amit Shah has reiterated the Centre's deadline to end Left-Wing Extremism, saying Maoist insurgency will be completely eradicated.

Today in Raipur, I held a review meeting with the Chhattisgarh government and officials on anti-Naxal operations. The security-centric strategy, infrastructure development, targeting of the Naxal financial network and the surrender policy have yielded positive results, and Naxalism will be completely eradicated before March 31," he wrote, sharing photographs from the meeting. The review was attended by Chhattisgarh chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai and deputy chief minister Vijay Sharma, along with the Union home secretary, the director of the



Union Home Minister Amit Shah, with Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai and others during a review meeting regarding anti-Naxal operations, in Raipur on Sunday.

Shah said the government's approach was showing results. "Today in Raipur, I held a review meeting with the Chhattisgarh government and officials on anti-Naxal operations. The security-centric strategy, infrastructure development, targeting of the Naxal financial network and the surrender policy have yielded positive results, and Naxalism will be completely eradicated before March 31," he wrote, sharing photographs from the meeting. The review was attended by Chhattisgarh chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai and deputy chief minister Vijay Sharma, along with the Union home secretary, the director of the

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intelligence Bureau and the special secretary (internal security) in the Ministry of Home Affairs. Directors general of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and the National Investigation Agency (NIA) were also present. Police chiefs and senior officers from Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Telangana joined the discussions. At the heart of the conversation was Bastar, a region that includes seven districts and shares

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Kerala farmers' body envisages contesting Kerala Polls

MI News Service, Kochi: A farmers' organisation in Kerala has decided to contest the upcoming Assembly elections, resorting to a hardball tactic to get the three major political fronts to resolve issues arising from man-animal conflicts. The Kerala Independent Farmers' Association (KIFA) plans to contest in 30 Assembly constituencies across 13 districts where man-animal conflicts are rampant, which is likely to make a significant dent in the vote banks of the LDF, UDF and the NDA.

Alappuzha district, which is devoid of forests, doesn't experience this problem. Kerala has lost 17 lives to man-animal conflicts in 2025-26 so far compared with 67 in 2024-25. The KIFA has, over the years, held several protests to highlight the plight of victims of man-animal conflicts and against the state's "anti-farmer policies". In July 2021, Kerala High Court passed an interim order in favour of KIFA, facilitating the shooting of wild boars that destroy crops. The court directive prompted the state

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8,505 officers ready for SIR exercise: BENGAL says to ECI



People wait in queues during hearings under the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, at Krishnanagar, in Nadia, West Bengal.

MI News Service, Kolkata:

The West Bengal government has informed the Election Commission that it is ready and willing to make available 8,505 Group B officers of the state or its instrumentalities for the ongoing Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in the state, sources said. This assumes significance as the counsel appearing for the poll panel had argued in the Supreme Court on February 4 that the West Bengal government provided the services of only 80 Grade 2 officers, such as SDMs, for overseeing the SIR process. Dwivedi also said that only low-ranked government employees, such as Anganwadi workers, were provided by the West Bengal government for the exercise. Banerjee had countered the ECI's charges and said the state had provided whatever was sought by the poll panel.

The chief minister had vehemently urged the top court to intervene in the SIR process in West Bengal to "save democracy", alleging that the state was being targeted and its people were being bulldozed. The top

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ODISHA rolls out mega economic region plan



Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi

MI News Service, Puri:

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi unveiled the economic development roadmap for the Bhubaneswar-Cuttack-Puri-Paradip Economic Region (BCPPER), projecting it as a key driver of growth for a "Viksit Odisha" aligned with the Centre's vision of a "Viksit Bharat".

The event, held in the presence of NITI Aayog member Rajiv Gauba and CEO B.V.R. Subrahmanyam, marked Odisha's formal entry into the Centre's city economic region (CER) programme. The BCPPER, spanning 11,892sqkm across Khurda, Cuttack, Puri and Jagatsinghpur districts, is the fifth such CER identified after Mumbai, Surat, Visakhapatnam and Varanasi. Launching the plan, Majhi said the region contributes around 19 per cent to Odisha's economy and currently has an economic size of \$22.4 billion. "Our target is to scale it up to \$50 billion by 2047," he said.

Under the roadmap, Bhubaneswar will be developed as a technology hub, Cuttack as a commercial centre leveraging its trading legacy, Puri as a cultural and religious hotspot and Paradip as a node for port-led industrial growth. To ensure coordinated development, the state will set up a dedicated economic region development authority to steer planning and implementation across the four districts. The blueprint outlines over 80 projects across sectors such as tourism, education, IT, ports and logistics, manufacturing, textiles and handicrafts. It also proposes 30 policy interventions to fast-track implementation and attract private investment.

Odisha will benefit significantly from the Centre's support of ₹5,000 crore under the CER scheme. This will accelerate growth and job creation. Religious and cultural circuits, cruise terminals, wellness zones, wedding destinations and a flagship museum. The state also aims to position BCPPER as East India's hub for higher education, skilling and deep-tech research. The plan identifies infrastructure development as the backbone of the region's future growth, with focus on ring roads, new city clusters, data centres, semiconductor hubs and other climate-resilient urban assets.

"Odisha will benefit significantly from the Centre's support of ₹5,000 crore under the CER scheme. This will accelerate growth and job creation," Majhi said. NITI Aayog CEO Subrahmanyam added: "By 2047, over half of India's population will reside in cities. Urban areas already contribute 70-80 per cent of India's GDP. The BCPPER plan not only benefits Odisha but also strengthens India's growth." However,

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Conversion, infiltration, & low birth rate are matters of grave concern: RSS CHIEF BHAGWAT

MI News Service, Nagpur: RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday identified religious conversion, infiltration, and a low birth rate as the three main factors behind population imbalance, saying scientific research suggests "we should have three children in a family," which, however, is a matter of choice. He condemned the use of force, inducement or deception to convert people and increase the number of a sect, noting that "ghar wapsi" was the answer for those wishing to return to their original faith.

He added that detection and deportation had begun slowly and would gather pace, citing the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise under which some individuals were identified as non-citizens and removed from electoral rolls. "RSS workers also identified suspected infiltrators through language and reported them to authorities," Bhagwat said, adding that while Indian citizens, including Muslims, would be employed, foreigners would not be. He said the third reason for population imbalance is low birth rate.

Responding to a question, the RSS chief said doctors have advised that marriages between the



RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat addresses a gathering during the 'New Horizons' lecture series marking the organization's centenary year, in Mumbai.

ages of 19 and 25 and having three children help keep both parents and children healthy, while psychologists believe that three children help siblings manage ego-related issues and ensure a stable family life in the long term. He said population scientists warn that a population is threatened when the fertility rate falls below

2.3 and that a country is considered to be in decline at that level.

"We are now going below 2.1 and are being saved only because of states like Bihar," Bhagwat said, adding that several countries had

author's personal account of raising 12 children in the US, he said the book argued that having more children could be economical, and a film had also been made based on it. He said marriage was not

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RSS workers also identified suspected infiltrators through language and reported them to authorities

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat

taken steps to reverse population decline. Referring to India's population policy, he said the prescribed fertility ratio of 2.1, when rounded off, effectively means three children. "All kinds of scientific research now indicate that we should have three children in a family," he said, stressing that it remained a matter of choice for men, women, and families, and should be considered as a broader social issue.

Citing the English book "Cheaper by the Dozen", the RSS chief said it showed that raising multiple children need not be a major concern. Referring to the

merely about a physical relationship between two individuals but an institution meant to create a family, which in turn formed part of society. "It should not be the case that one marries without taking responsibilities," he said, adding that while remaining unmarried was a personal choice for RSS volunteers, family life involved duties and relationships that must be maintained.

Speaking on infiltration, Bhagwat said RSS workers also identified suspected infiltrators through language and reported them to the

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Among the signature proposals are integrated re-

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State Government employees took part in a rally during their demand after the Supreme Court ordered the West Bengal government to pay 25% of pending Dearness Allowance (DA) arrears as soon as possible in Kolkata on Sunday.

Bengal SIR hearing ends, TMC flags 'sinister pattern' in Form 7 filings against Muslims

MI News Service, Kolkata : When Asif Ali received the Election Commission's summons for a hearing, he felt "insulted".

The 32-year-old was at Mutty Lall Seal's Free College in Central Avenue on Saturday — the last day of SIR hearings — to prove he was Indian. Someone had submitted a Form 7 alleging Ali is not a citizen. "From birth certificate to passport, I have all the documents. I'm not worried about losing my electoral rights. But I feel insulted that I have to prove my Indian-ness," Ali told The Telegraph at the hearing centre.

Generations of his family, who are in the business of garments and footwear, have lived in Chitpore and his ancestors are buried "in this land", Ali said.

Scenes of other voters from Ward 43, too, had received hearing notices relating to Form 7, which allows any voter from the same Assembly constituency to apply to the Election Commission seeking the deletion of a name from the rolls, or objecting to its inclusion.

Trinamool sources said Form 7s had been submitted mainly against Muslims. The local councillor alleged a "sinister pattern" to target minorities.

"There are 19 Parts in Ward 43.



In every part, eight to 10 voters have had a Form 7 filed against them. Each form alleges that a certain person is not an Indian citizen," councilor Ayesha Kaniz said.

Ward 43, made up of parts of Burrabazar and Kolutola, has a sizeable population of Muslims.

Kaniz found it "strange" that there was a single complainant for each Part. "There's a clear pattern here," she said.

On Saturday, this newspaper saw a booth-level officer — for Part 235

of Ward 43 — sorting Form 7s at the Mutty Lall Seal's Free College hearing centre, opposite Mohammad Ali Park.

"I have 10 Form 7s relating to my Part, all submitted by the same applicant," the BLO, Md Naimuddin, said.

"The reason for the objections is the same, too — 'not Indian citizen'. All 10 voters have been called for hearings."

This newspaper tried calling the two "common complainants" for two Parts. Calls to one produced a long silence followed by a drop; that to the other was followed by a recorded voice saying the number could not be reached.

Apart from "not an Indian citizen", there are multiple grounds on the basis of which a deletion can be sought, such as death, a permanent shift of residence or multiple enrolments.

A person against whom an objection has been raised is called for a hearing, where they have to submit documents to prove their eligibility for inclusion in the rolls.

Chief minister Mamata Banerjee has accused the BJP of using the Form 7 to try and have the names of genuine voters deleted from the rolls, or prevent them from getting enrolled.

'CM tried to hijack case', CPM worker filed petition in Supreme Court on SIR: Salim

MI News Service, Darjeeling: CPM state secretary Md Salim on Friday accused chief minister Mamata Banerjee of trying to "hijack" a petition filed by a party worker in the Supreme Court over the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) of the electoral roll. "The chief minister resorted to theatrics by donning a black shawl.... She had also done it earlier. She tried to hijack the petition, which we have filed on the SIR," said Salim.

He was talking to newsmen on the sidelines of the Darjeeling district committee meeting of the CPM held here on Friday.

"Our party worker, Mostari Banu, who is the wife of Kamal Hossain, who works for migrants on behalf of the CPM, was the first to file the petition. The Supreme Court heard that petition on Wednesday and will again hear it on February 9," said the CPM leader.

He accused the BJP of "imposing" the SIR on the people of Bengal and alleged

that the party was playing the polarisation card.

"Earlier, the BJP played the communal card through the CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) and said that they would drive away the minorities from India to win the elections. This time, they have put everyone in crisis, including Matuas, adivasis, minorities, refugees and many other communities," said Salim. "In the name of logical discrepancy, illogical acts are being done. Also, rules are being grossly violated during the process," he added.

With the Assembly elections in Bengal to be held in a few months, Salim said the CPM was holding talks with some like-minded parties for "adjustment of seats". "We are working for the adjustment of seats and not for an alliance. Our alliance is the Left Front. So far as the Congress is concerned, its leaders have said that they want to contest from all 294 Assembly seats. We are also making similar preparations," said the CPM leader.

TMC is sponsoring infiltration to secure votes : Kabir Shankar

Md Shabib Alam, Hooghly, 8 Feb.26 : Barrister Kabir Shankar Bose, BJI West Bengal Legal Cell Co-Convenor and a prominent Hooghly leader, strongly criticized the TMC government during a press conference in Serampore and Jagatballavpur. While releasing a chargesheet against the state government, he alleged that the TMC is sponsoring infiltration to secure votes.

Referring to a PIL filed by former Deputy Army Chief Subrata Saha, Bose stated that the Calcutta High Court had directed the state to transfer land to the Centre and the BSF.



However, he claimed that the TMC government is resisting the move to protect infiltrators and is challenging the NIA's probe in Murshidabad.

Responding to Rahul Gandhi's remarks that the Indo-US trade deal compromises national interests, Bose dismissed the statement as an attempt at

political survival. Highlighting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's global recognition, he said Modi's leadership has elevated India's international standing. On the CBI's arrest warrant against RG Kar Hospital whistleblower Akhtar Ali, Bose asserted that the agency would act impartially if any wrongdoing is found.

Regarding BJP MLA Agnimitra Paul's Assembly remark labeling all Muslims as terrorists, Bose expressed respect for former President APJ Abdul Kalam and refrained from further comment, citing unknown circumstances.

10 minor girls trapped in social media love trap recovered, major police action in 25 days

Manish Ramtake (Kharagpur, West Midnapore) : In Anandpur police station area of West Medinipur district, the police has achieved great success by recovering 10 minor girls

who ran away from home due to love affairs through social media within just 25 days. All the recovered minors have been sent to the government shelter home through the Child Welfare Committee. According to police sources, these minor girls were identified on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Online friendship gradually turned into a love affair and due to this 'love', the girls left their homes and went to different places. Anandpur police station took prompt action and recovered all of them safely in the last 25 days. The recovered girls also include a secondary (10th) student, who had run away from home with her lover a few days before the examination. In the case, the police detained a relative of the accused and interrogated him, after which the girl was recovered near Keshpur bus stand. A victim's father

told that he had sent his daughter from home to study, but she had fallen prey to the love trap of social media. I got trapped and left the house. He feared that if the police did not take action in time, his daughter could have become a victim of some big trouble or a crime like human trafficking. At the same time, the district administration believes that the incidents of child marriage and minors leaving home in West Medinipur still remain a matter of concern. According to officials, in every case there is no coercion of parents, but sometimes minors themselves leave home and get married. On behalf of the administration, schools are Awareness programs like 'Kanyashree Club' and 'Bandhu Mahal' are being run, but officials say that these efforts are not proving sufficient in the face of the increasing influence of social media. Police and administration have appealed to parents to keep an eye on the online activities of children and maintain communication, so that such incidents can be prevented.



On Sunday, lost mobile phones were returned to their owners at several police stations under the rural police station of Howrah district. It is reported that a total of 18 lost mobile phones were handed over to their rightful owners at Udaynarayanpur police station under the supervision of Amta CI Dipankar Bhowmik.

BJP poster 'alarm' with UP link in Malda ahead of polls, three arrested in Sheikhpura

MI News Service, Malda: Three persons, including two youths from Uttar Pradesh, were caught by residents while allegedly pasting BJP posters in Sheikhpura village of Malda's Manikchak police station on Friday night.

Trinamool leaders in the Manikchak block alleged that the incident was a deliberate attempt to foment tension in the area ahead of the Assembly polls.

"The BJP has intentionally targeted minority areas to provoke unrest. Moreover, the BJP posters were pasted over our party's posters. Also, as the BJP lacks local support, it is bringing people from Uttar Pradesh to carry out the activity," said Tafazul Hosain, the block Trinamool secretary.

As the news spread, police reached the spot and intercepted the trio. Later, based on the complaints from villagers, all three were arrested.

The trio are Vipin Kumar and Yogesh Kumar from Mainpuri in Uttar Pradesh, and Amar Sahani, an auto-rickshaw driver from Malda.

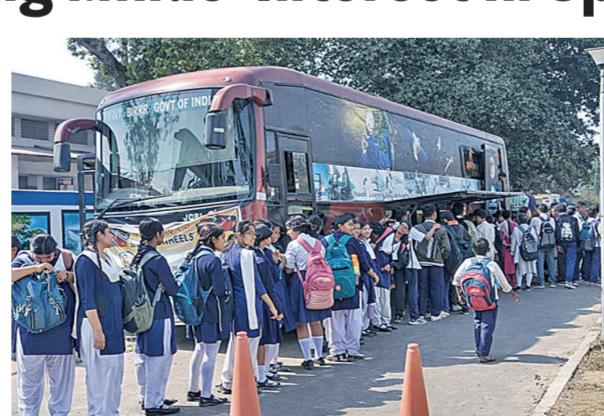
Following the arrests, the BJP staged a protest outside Manikchak police station for nearly an hour on Saturday, accusing Trinamool workers of assaulting the trio and framing them in false cases. Later, the BJP also filed a complaint against Trinamool with the police.

ISRO's 'Space on Wheels' Reaches Nadia, Sparks Young Minds' Interest in Space Science

Dipankar Edbar, Kalyani (Nadia) : A unique mobile space science exhibition titled "Space on Wheels", jointly organised by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and Vigyan Bharati, arrived at Gayeshpur in Nadia district on Friday, creating excitement among students and local residents alike. The initiative aims to promote awareness and interest in space science and technology among school students across the state, Nareshji, the National Coordinator said.

The specially designed exhibition bus was welcomed with a colourful procession from Gayeshpur to Netaji Vidyalayam. Students from various schools and colleges, teachers and members of the public took part in the rally, while many lined the streets to witness the event, Nadia coordinator program of ISRO science exhibition bus.

The exhibition showcases models and proto-



types of several landmark Indian space missions and technologies, including satellites, rocket engines, Chandrayaan-1, Chandrayaan-2, lander Vikram, and Mangalyaan. Students from primary to Class XII were seen enthusiastically exploring the displays and interacting with experts to understand the basics of space research.

The procession was inaugurated by noted scientist and Padma Shri awardee Dr Narayan Chakrabarty. Among those

present were Dr Arindam Guha, Head of Applications, ISRO Kolkata; Dr Saptarshi Biswas, Executive Member, Vigyan Bharati; ISRO scientist Dr Prabir Das; scientists from IISER Kolkata; VVM National Coordinator Nareshji; Dr Supriya Mitra, Dr Amlan Kumar Ray, and Dr Jayanta Chakrabarty, Director of CLART, Physician Atin Mandal along with several other scientists and educationists.

Students from Don Bosco English Medium School and other nearby in-

stitutions participated in the exhibition. Prithish Dutta, a Class II student, said he was thrilled to see models of spacecraft and dreams of working with ISRO in the future. Father V. T. Joshi, Principal of Don Bosco said such initiatives play a crucial role in nurturing scientific curiosity and technological awareness among students.

According to organisers, "Space on Wheels" is designed not just as an exhibition but as an interactive learning platform to inspire the next generation of scientists and innovators. This is the first time such a mobile space science exhibition has been held in the Kalyani subdivision, drawing strong participation from students, teachers and parents.

The exhibition was open to visitors at Netaji Vidyalayam from 10:30 am and included science lectures, interactive sessions, model demonstrations, poster presentations and quiz programmes.

The men reportedly replied in Hindi that they were residents of Uttar Pradesh. This alarmed the locals, especially as no local BJP leader or worker was present.

As under whose instructions the posters were being pasted, the men allegedly failed to give a satisfactory answer. The villagers stopped them from continuing to paste the posters and informed the police.

"BJP posters have never been put up in the village before, and the manner in

JU student ranks first in UGC-NET JRF exam

MI News Service, Kolkata: In a moment of rare academic distinction Lopamudra Jana, a student Jadavpur University has secured what is believed to be the first rank in the entire country in the UGC NET -Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) examination, one of India's most competitive national -level tests for research aptitude. Scoring an exceptional 232 out 300, Lopamudra has emerged as then top performer in Bengal, bringing both Jadavpur University and West Bengal into the national academic spotlight once again.

Hailing from Kotra village in Shyampur, Howrah, Lopamudra's journey is a compelling narrative of perseverance, discipline, and intellectual rigour. She completed her Higher Secondary education from Radhapur High School before enrolling at St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, where she graduated in Bengali and was awarded the Gold Medal for academic excellence. Her academic pursuit then led her to Jadavpur University, where she completed her Master's degree. However, her path to national recognition was not without setbacks. During her postgraduate years, Lopamudra qualified the State Eligibility Test (SET) and appeared for the NET (Lectureship) twice. Despite clearing the examination, she fell short of securing the coveted JRF on both occasions. Rather than succumbing to disappointment, she chose introspection and recalibration. Lopamudra candidly reflected on her earlier attempts. "In my first two attempts, I realised I had not studied the textbooks thoroughly enough. I depended too much on notes and skipped sections that felt difficult. Even when I read the books, revision was not rigorous. When I failed to get JRF twice, I identified my own weaknesses and completely changed my approach."

Tourist interest in J&K stays strong: AMIT SHAH

From PG 1

Dozens of destinations were closed to tourists in Kashmir following the terror attack that killed 25 tourists and a local pony operator at the Baisaran meadow near Pahalgam. Officials say the closures reinforced the notion that the Valley was unsafe for visitors. Some of these places were gradually reopened, although hotspots such as Dodhpathri and Yusmarg are still out of bounds for tourists, as is Baisaran. Shah reviewed key sectors such as road infrastructure, power, industry, tourism, and 4G and optical fibre connectivity at the meeting, officials said. An official spokesperson said Shah's visit had underlined the Centre's resolve to make development, peace and security in Jammu and Kashmir a national priority.



A vintage car can be seen participating in a Vintage Car Rally in Kolkata on Sunday.

Budget 2026 puts spotlight on Youth with 'Banglar Yuva -sathi' scheme

MI News Service, Kolkata: The West Bengal Budget 2026 on Saturday placed a strong focus on the state's youth, with the announcement of a new social assistance programme titled 'Banglar Yuva-Sathi', aimed at providing financial support to unemployed young people during their job-seeking years. The scheme, unveiled as part of the state government's broader welfare roadmap, proposes a monthly allowance of up to ₹1,500, translating to a maximum annual benefit of ₹18,000 per beneficiary.

According to the budget announcement, the primary objective of Banglar Yuva-Sathi is to offer minimum financial assistance to educated but unemployed youth while they prepare for employment or competitive examinations. Government sources indicated that the allowance would act as interim support, easing economic pressure during the transition from education



to employment. While detailed guidelines are yet to be formally notified, initial indications suggest that applicants would need to meet certain eligibility conditions. These include being between 21 and 40 years of age, having passed at least the secondary examination, being currently unemployed, and being a permanent resident of West Bengal. Officials said the final eligibility norms and operational framework would be clarified once the scheme's notification is issued. The proposed duration

of assistance, as outlined in the budget framework, could extend until the beneficiary secures employment or for a maximum period of five years, whichever is earlier. However, this aspect too will be subject to confirmation in the final rules. The state government is expected to roll out the scheme in the next financial year, with indications that it could be launched around August 15, 2026. Administrative preparations are set to begin following the passage of the budget and subsequent departmental approvals. The application process is likely to be conducted online, in line with other state welfare schemes. Applicants may be required to register on a designated government portal, submit personal and educational details, upload relevant documents and complete verification formalities. The allowance is expected to be disbursed directly into beneficiaries' bank accounts through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system.

DA: Govt employees back to protest path

MI News Service, Kolkata: A section of West Bengal government employee returned to the streets of the city on Monday, renewing their agitation for the immediate payment of 25 Dearness Allowance (DA) in the wake of recent Supreme Court directive. The protest march, organized under the banner of teh Sangrami Joint Manch, began from Subodh Mallik Square and proceeded toward Rani Rashmoni Road, with demonstrators asserting that the issue of DA must now be resolved without further delay. The protester started that they were intensifying their movement to ensure timely compliance with apex court's timely compliance with apex court's order. Member of the Manch said they had earlier taken their demands of Nabanna and had announcement on DA disbursement has yet been made.

BJP MP Soumitra Khan joined the march, leading

political presence of the demonstration. The Sangrami Joint Manch maintained that the Supreme Court had clearly outlined the course of action on DA payments and that government employees were now seeking clarity on implementation. The protesters reiterated that the demand was not merely an employee-centric issue but one with wider economic implications.

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CPIM in a fix over alliance politics

MI News Service, Kolkata: With Assembly elections on the horizon, alliance politics in West Bengal has entered a phase of heightened uncertainty, placing the CPI(M) at the centre of intense political scrutiny. A series of developments over the past few weeks has exposed growing complexities within the Opposition space, prompting rival parties to question whether the Left is gradually getting entangled in an increasingly difficult web of alliances.

Speculation gained momentum after CPI(M) state secretary Mohammad Selim was seen meeting suspended legislator Humayun Kabir, triggering widespread debate over possible political realignments. The meeting drew criticism from within the party as well as from Left allies, after which the CPI(M) leadership sought to downplay its significance. Political observers, however, view the episode as indicative of the broader churn within the Left camp as it explores options ahead of the 2026 Assem-

sembly elections. The uncertainty has been compounded by the Congress announcing its intention to contest the next Assembly polls independently, effectively distancing itself from the Left. The announcement has triggered a fresh round of political exchanges. Selim remarked that the appointment of the new Pradesh Congress president suggested an inclination towards a different political alignment, while Congress leader Subhankar Sarkar responded by stating that decisions on alliances are taken collectively by the party and reflect its current assessment. Amid this backdrop, the Indian Secular Front (ISF) has emerged as another significant variable. After stepping away from its earlier understanding with the Congress, the ISF has reportedly intensified negotiations with the CPI(M), seeking a larger share of seats. Sources indicate that the party is keen on contesting around 50 seats, up from the 32 seats it contested in 2021.

AI takes centre stage at RMB connect 2026 in Kolkata

MI News Service, Kolkata: The Kolkata chapter of the Rotary Means Business Fellowship (RMBF), in association with Rotary International District 3291, on Saturday hosted the eighth edition of its flagship business conclave, RMB Connect 2026, at a city hotel, positioning the event as a significant convergence of enterprise, policy and emerging technology. The conclave drew entrepreneurs, senior business leaders, policymakers and Rotarians from across the country, with more than 50 entrepreneurs from Kolkata participating in deliberations focused on innovation-led growth and future-ready business practices.

The centrepiece of the day-long programme was a three-hour intensive AI Business Masterclass conducted by Amit Jadhav, entrepreneur, author and founder of multiple ventures, best known for his Amazon-listed book AI Unzipped. The session moved beyond theoretical discussions on artificial intelligence and concentrated on practical, real-world applications of



AI for business acceleration. Jadhav demonstrated how non-technical founders and business owners can deploy AI tools to automate lead generation, content creation, follow-ups and reporting without the need for coding. Through live demonstrations, he illustrated how a single business idea can be scaled into a comprehensive digital funnel using AI-driven workflows encompassing social media outreach, blogs, email campaigns and web-

site architecture. The masterclass also highlighted how integrated AI systems can support the entire customer journey—from discovery to conversion—significantly reducing manual intervention while improving efficiency and engagement. The conclave was attended by an eminent group of Guests of Honour, reflecting the national and international stature of the event. Among those present were Rtn. Sekhar Mehta, Past President of CII, Chennai-based artist Koteswari M. Kannan.

Golpark violence probe deepens, arrest count raise to 23

MI News Service, Kolkata: The crackdown in connection with the Golpark violence has intensified, with police arresting three more accused, taking the total number of arrested to 23. However, Biswajit Podder alias "Sona Pappu", repeatedly named by local residents as the key figure behind the unrest, continues to evade arrest, triggering sharp questions from the affected neighbourhood.

The fresh arrests were made on Sunday evening by Rabindra Sarobar police station. The accused have been identified as Saugaur Basu, Mintu Bhanj, and Prabir Pramanik. According to police sources, Saugaur Basu and Mintu Bhanj are residents of the Kasba police station area, while Prabir Pramanik is local resident under Rabindra Sarobar Police station. Investigators claim the trio were actively involved on the violent clash that erupted on the night of February 1 on Kankulia Road in Golpark. The violence reportedly broke out following a confrontation between two rival groups in the area. From the very first night, local residents have consistently alleged the involvement of Sona Pappu's gang, claiming that outsiders were brought into the locality to unleash terror. Multiple FIRs were registered at Rabindra Sarobar police station on Sunday night, including a suo motu case for the attack on a police vehicle.

ODISHA rolls out mega economic region plan

From PG 1
The Opposition Biju Janata Dal (BJD) dismissed the state government's vision as "unrealistic" in the absence of concrete infrastructure groundwork. Senior BJD leader and former minister Pratap Keshari Deb said: "How can you promise economic transformation without supporting key infrastructure projects? The same ministers who oppose the Bhubaneswar metro and the Puri airport are now selling rosy dreams."

Kerala farmers' body envisages contesting Kerala Polls

From PG 1
government to issue orders authorising local self-government heads to hire licensed shooters to cull wild boars. At a media conference at Thiruvambady in Kozhikode district on Saturday, KIFA released a poll manifesto and announced plans to field candidates in 30 Assembly constituencies out of the total 140 seats. KIFA chairman Alex Ozhukayil told The Telegraph that they had decided to contest mostly in Wayanad, Kannur, Kozhikode, Palakkad, Thrissur, Idukki and Pathanamthitta districts. "We have identified 30 constituencies across the state where man-animal conflict has been detrimental to the farmers' livelihood. If the three political fronts meet our demands to curb man-animal conflicts and to resurrect the beleaguered agricultural sector, then we may not contest in the election," Alex said. Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee chief Sunny Joseph, an MLA from Peravoor Assembly constituency in Kannur district, had taken up KIFA's issues and suggested ways to mitigate man-animal conflicts in the Assembly on multiple occasions. "Despite the Congress-led UDF being in the Opposition, we have raised issues before the state and also the Centre. I had raised at least 10 adjournment motions in the Assembly during the second Pinarayi Vijayan-led LDF government. I've held several rounds of meetings with KIFA. The Congress will take a call on whether more meetings with KIFA are needed," Joseph said. Ozhukayil plans to contest against Joseph, who has been a sitting Peravoor MLA since 2011.

Ananda Marga Pracharak Sangha organized a three day Seminar

MI News Service, Kolkata:

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8,505 officers ready for SIR exercise: BENGAL says to ECI

From PG 1

court took note of Banerjee's petition against the SIR exercise and said that genuine persons must remain on the electoral rolls. It issued notices and sought replies to the petition by February 9 from the Election Commission and the chief electoral officer of West Bengal. The bench also asked the poll panel to

SHAH sets Mar 31 deadline to end Maoist insurgency

From PG 1

expansion and measures aimed at cutting off financial channels used by Maoist groups. The numbers underline the shift. Since January 2024, more than 500 Naxalites have been killed in encounters in Chhattisgarh, according to police. Those killed include top cadres such as CPI (Maoist) general secretary Nambala Keshava Rao alias Basavaraju. During the same period, around 1,900 Naxalites were arrested and over 2,500 surrendered in the state.

Conversion, infiltration, & low birth rate are matters of grave concern: RSS CHIEF BHAGWAT

From PG 1

a large population and needed technologies that created more jobs. While not opposing artificial intelligence, he said it should be used in ways that generate employment. Bhagwat called for "production by the masses", instead of mass production. The RSS chief further stressed the need for employment to prevent social unrest, saying an idle mind could lead to Naxalism, urban violence, and atrocities against women. According to him, gross domestic product (GDP) was an imperfect indicator of economic health as it measured only tangible and measurable activities.

MODI for stronger Indo-Malaysia ties says no compromise on terrorism

From PG 1

the view that reform of global institutions is essential to address today's challenges. We will continue to support all efforts for peace. And our message on terrorism is clear: No double standards; no compromise," he added. "We appreciate your commitment to India-Malaysia relations. Let us together realise your dream of a prosperous Malaysia and our resolve for a developed India," he said. The two prime ministers also "unequivocally and strongly condemned" terrorism in all its forms, including cross-border terrorism and called for "zero tolerance" of terrorism, according to a joint statement. The two leaders also called for concerted global efforts to combat terrorism in a comprehensive and sustained manner and agreed to work towards countering radicalisation and violent extremism. They also resolved to work towards combating financing of terrorism, prevent use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes. The two leaders reaffirmed commitment to strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation in countering terrorism, including in the UN and FATF (Financial Action Task Force), the statement said. Modi and Ibrahim also agreed to strengthen cooperation in multilateral fora, including at the UN, and support reforms of international institutions. "They pledged to work together to enhance multilateralism, reflective of contemporary realities so as to make international organisations, including the UN Security Council (UNSC), more representative," the joint statement said. "Reflecting the strong spirit of mutual support in multilateral forums, the two Leaders discussed mutual support for various international candidatures. India deeply appreciated Malaysia's support for India's permanent membership in a reformed UNSC," it said.

Steel Cities United: Ashwini Vaishnaw Flags Off Asansol-Bokaro MEMU Lifeline

• New Rail Corridor Connects Industrial Hubs of West Bengal and Jharkhand
MI News Service, Kolkata, 8 Feb.26 : Today marked a historic shift in the industrial landscape of Eastern India as the much-anticipated Asansol-Bokaro Steel City MEMU service was officially inaugurated. In a ceremony that blended digital connectivity with grassroots celebration, Ashwini Vaishnaw, Hon'ble Union Minister for Railways, flagged off the inaugural train via Video Conferencing in the august present of Suvedu Adhikari, Leader of the Opposition, West Bengal Legislative Assembly, today (08.02.2026).

The launch of this dedicated Mainline Electric Multiple Unit (MEMU) service signals the end of decades of commuting hardships for thousands of workers, students, and small-scale traders who previously relied on expensive buses and delayed express trains.

A Game-Changer for the Industrial Heartland

The new service creates a high-speed, affordable "Steel Corridor" that bridges the gap between Paschim Bardhaman, Purulia, and Bokaro. Key highlights from today's launch include:

• Empowering the Workforce: Technical staff and workers from SAIL establishments in both cities now have a direct, reliable link for daily movement, fostering better coordination between these industrial giants.

• Rural Economic Boost:



Unlike long-distance trains, the MEMU serves smaller intermediate halt stations. This provides rural populations in Purulia and surrounding areas with affordable access to the massive urban markets of both steel cities.

• Education Without Borders: Hundreds of students can now commute daily to premier coaching centers and colleges across the state border, eliminating the need for expensive hostel stays or rented accommodations.

• Affordable Mobility: With the introduction of low-cost monthly season tickets, the service has immediately made long-distance commuting viable for daily wage earners.

A Revolutionary Upgrade in Travel Standards

The transition from the old transit model to this new MEMU service represents a complete overhaul of regional mobility. While commuters previously grappled with high travel costs due to multiple bus transfers and expensive fuel, the new service introduces subsidized monthly season tickets that make

daily travel remarkably affordable. In terms of reliability, the shift moves away from a system prone to highway traffic and monsoon-related mud-slips toward a high-speed, all-weather electric rail corridor that ensures punctuality regardless of the season. Furthermore, the MEMU corrects a long-standing gap in accessibility; whereas previous express trains bypassed smaller rural villages, this service includes stops at local halts, providing vital connectivity to the heart of rural Purulia and ensuring a safer, smoother journey compared to the high risks of the region's congested narrow roads.

Impact on Local Life

Beyond transit, the service is expected to trigger a surge in economic activity at small intermediate stations, as the influx of regular passengers encourages the growth of new local shops and services. Furthermore, the train's reliability during the monsoon ensures that the region's economy remains uninterrupted by weather-related road closures.

Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw Unveils Major Rail Infrastructure Boost For Bengal, Expands Regional Rail Network

MI News Service, Kolkata, 8 Feb.26 : Ashwini Vaishnaw, Union Minister for Railways, Information & Broadcasting and Electronics & Information Technology, inaugurated the Siuri Road Over Bridge, dedicated the Kumarpur Road Over Bridge to the Nation and flagged off the new Asansol-Bokaro train service through Video Conferencing, along with Suvedu Adhikari, Leader of the Opposition, West Bengal Legislative Assembly, today (08.02.2026).

Anup Kumar Saha, Hon'ble MLA, Jagannath Chattopadhyay and other dignitaries were also present at Siuri on this occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, Ashwini Vaishnaw stated that these projects mark a significant step towards strengthening rail infrastructure, enhancing safety and improving regional connectivity in West Bengal and adjoining areas.

Hon'ble Railway Minister Vaishnaw mentioned that this year a record budget allocation of Rs. 14,205 crores has been allocated for Railway in West Bengal which is more than 3 times than the average allocation during previous regime. He also mentioned that Railway Projects worth about Rs. 92,000 crore is continuing in West Bengal which will facilitate infrastructural transformation in this State.

Ashwini Vaishnaw, Railway Minister also mentioned that recently Hon'ble Prime Minister has initiated more than a dozen of new trains to facilitate enhancement in rail connectivity for the people of West Bengal. It is mentioned worthy that the first Vande Bharat Sleeper train started running from West Bengal and similarly first Amrit Bharat train was also

started from West Bengal. This indicated the visionary initiative of 'Purvoday' taken by Hon'ble Prime Minister towards development of this region.

Ashwini Vaishnaw, Railway Minister also mentioned that the first Bullet Train for West Bengal has been announced in this year's Rail Budget and this Bullet Train will start from Siliguri. At the same time, Hon'ble Prime Minister has approved for an East-West freight corridor connecting West Bengal with Gujarat. Another initiative is being taken for construction of an underground rail corridor at the Chicken-Neck part of North Bengal as a strategic step for safe and secured transportation.

Ashwini Vaishnaw, Railway Minister said that though Union Government is taking all round initiatives for development of West Bengal but the lack of support and apathy of West Bengal Government is foiling those initiatives. He mentioned that Union Government has taken initiatives for completion of 17 Railway Projects in West Bengal for improving connectivity but the State Government should come forward to cooperate in completion of these projects. Vaishnaw urged for cooperation from State Government for completion of Railway Projects for the betterment of the people of West Bengal.

Speaking on the occasion at Siuri, Suvedu Adhikari remarked that the inauguration of these projects represents a major milestone in strengthening rail infrastructure, enhancing public safety and improving regional connectivity across West Bengal and its adjoining areas. He observed that the people of Siuri and the surrounding regions will be immensely ben-



Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw(Union Minister)

efited, as the new facilities will substantially ease daily commuting, minimize long-standing traffic bottlenecks and reduce travel delays.

The newly constructed Road Over Bridge in lieu of Level Crossing No. 22B/T near Siuri Railway Station has been completed at a project cost of Rs 42 crore. The bridge will remove long waiting time at the level crossing and ensure faster, safer and smoother daily travel for residents of Siuri and adjoining areas.

Ashwini Vaishnaw, Railway Minister said that though Union Government is taking all round initiatives for development of West Bengal but the lack of support and apathy of West Bengal Government is foiling those initiatives. He mentioned that Union Government has taken initiatives for completion of 17 Railway Projects in West Bengal for improving connectivity but the State Government should come forward to cooperate in completion of these projects. Vaishnaw urged for cooperation from State Government for completion of Railway Projects for the betterment of the people of West Bengal.

Another major infrastructure addition is the Road Over Bridge at Kumarpur in lieu of Level Crossing No. 1Sp1/E between Barachak & Hirapur Yard Line, constructed at a cost of Rs 55 crore. Located on the important GT Road corridor, it serves as a key link between Asansol city, large parts of Paschim Bardhaman district and Jharkhand. The bridge will facilitate faster and smoother movement of trade and traffic within the state and with neighbouring states, enhance safety on a heavily used route and

reduce congestion around Asansol, improving daily commuting for local residents.

On the same occasion, the new train service between Asansol & Bokaro Steel City was flagged off, strengthening connectivity between two major steel hubs of the country. The service will benefit industrial workers, daily commuters and local residents. Running via Paschim Bardhaman and Purulia districts of West Bengal and Bokaro district of Jharkhand, the train will enhance both intra-state and inter-state mobility and support regional economic and social connectivity. In the inaugural run Asansol - Bokaro Steel City MEMU Inaugural Special was scheduled to leave Asansol at 17:00 hrs on 08.02.2026 to reach Bokaro Steel City at 21:45 hrs on the same day.

The regular run of 63592/63591 Asansol - Bokaro Steel City - Asansol MEMU passenger will commence from 10th February 2026. The train is composed of 08 coach MEMU rake and will run 06 days a week (except Sunday). 63592 Asansol - Bokaro Steel City MEMU during its regular run will leave Asansol at 17:00 hrs to reach Bokaro Steel City at 21:45 hrs. In the opposite direction, 63591 Bokaro Steel City - Asansol MEMU train will leave Bokaro Steel City at 15:40 hrs. to reach Asansol at 19:30 hrs. This train will stop at Burnpur, Damodar, Madhukunda, Muradib, Ramkanali, Bero, Joychandi Pahar, Gardhruweswar, Anara, Bagalia, Kustaur, Chharr, Purulia, Gourinathdham, Chass Road, Garjapur, Damrughutu, Pundag, Radhagaon stations enroute in both the directions.

Kolkata hosts National Seminar on Buddhism

MI News Service, Kolkata: Kolkata recently hosted a National Seminar on "Socio-Cultural Practices among The Buddhist Communities of Himalayan Region and Nearby Areas". The programme was held at ICCR and was organized by Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS), India.

Eminent personalities and social scientists like Arindam Mukherjee(Director-ISCS), Prof Vinay Kr Rao(JNU), Dr. Puja Dabral(Nalanda University), Prof Projit Kr Palit(Assam University), Dr. Jhumpa Mukherjee(HOD-Pol Sc-St Xaviers College), Dr. Avenaash EP, Dr. Swarup Prasad Ghosh(Director-MAKAIAS), Raj Basu(Advisor-Rural Tourism & Home stays-Govt of Arunachal Pradesh), Prof Ujjal Kumar(Dept of Buddhist Studies-Kolkata University), Dr. Ajanta Das(Research Associate-ISCS-ICSSR), Prof Alok Kumar Ghosh and many other dignitaries were present at the auspicious occasion.

The seminar laid emphasis on varied topics encompassing 'Buddhism', its history and contemporary challenges. It also discussed matters related to 'Buddhism' and its importance in socio-cultural trends towards sustainable living.

GARBHETA COLLEGE RE E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tender for supply of books has been published in <https://wbtenders.gov.in/nicgepp/app>.

Closing date: 16-Feb-2026 05:00

Tender Reference Number:

GC/e-Tend/2025/01_2nd_Call

Tender ID: 2026_GC_1000331_1

Principal

Garbheta College

India's services sector growth touches 2-month high in Jan: PMI

MI News Service, New Delhi: India's services sector growth rose to a two-month high of 58.5 in January, on faster expansion in new business intake and output, prompting service providers to hire additional staff, a monthly survey said. The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index rose to a two-month high of 58.5 in January, from December's recent low of 58.0, mainly driven by demand buoyancy, new business gains and tech investment.

In the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction. India's services PMI rose to 58.5 in January, up from 58.0 in December, signalling sustained momentum in the sector. Robust output growth was driven by a steady influx of new orders, including increased international demand from South and Southeast Asia," said Pranjal Bhandari, Chief India Econ-

omist at HSBC.

Service providers in India noted faster growth in new business intake and output. They were also more upbeat towards the outlook and hired additional staff, the survey noted.

According to the survey, new orders rose at the quickest pace in two months. The main source of new business gains was the domestic market, but international orders nevertheless rose solidly.

Survey participants remarked on new business gains from clients in Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

Service providers in India were more upbeat towards the outlook. "Business confidence climbed to a three-month high, supported by efficiency gains, effective marketing, and the acquisition of new clients. While input and output prices are rising, they remain fairly mild by historical standards," Bhandari added.

Coal India opens online auctions from B'Desh, Bhutan & Nepal

MI News Service, Kolkata: State-owned Coal India Ltd (CIL) announced that buyers from neighbouring countries

through domestic traders, who were permitted to buy and sell coal without any end-use restrictions.

"In a first, effective January 1, 2026, CIL has permitted coal consumers located in the neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, who wish to import coal from India, to directly participate in the Single Window Mode Agnostic (SWMA) auctions conducted by the company," CIL said in a statement.

The SWMA auction is a unified and simplified e-auction platform introduced in 2022 to replace multiple auction windows such as Spot, Special Spot and Forward auctions, with the objective of making coal procurement easier, more transparent and market-driven.

To enable this change, the CIL board recently approved modifications to the SWMA auction mechanism.

"Opening SWMA e-auctions to foreign buyers reflects CIL's calibrated approach to market expansion while fully safeguarding domestic coal requirements. This step enhances transparency, competition and global market integration," said a senior company official. Under the revised framework, foreign buyers will be able to participate in SWMA auctions alongside domestic buyers.

The updated scheme incorporates all operational and procedural modalities, including provisions for one-time registration, digital bidding, advance electronic payments and exports through notified logistics channels for foreign buyers.

Notice

It is hereby notified to all that Suman Manna, Son of Sharan Manna, purchased a piece of land Measuring 4.12 Shatak as per Registered Deed No 2998 in the year 2015 under Bisnupur ADRS. Sri Sanjit Mondal was appointed the Power of Attorney to file the Application to Discharge on 18/2/2025 Shatak Under Muzum karaman kismat, J.L. No.92, P.s. khaton No.159 & L.R. khaton No. 329 as per power of Attorney Vide Deed No. 171 in the year 2012 There after out of that 18.25 Shatak property 4.12 Shatak property was sold by Suman Manna as per power of Attorney to Discharge on 18/2/2025 Shatak Under Muzum karaman kismat, J.L. No.92, P.s. khaton No.159 & L.R. khaton No. 329 as per power of Attorney Vide Deed No. 171 in the year 2012 There after out of that 18.25 Shatak property 4.12 Shatak property was sold by Suman Manna as per power of Attorney to Discharge on 18/2/2025 Shatak Under Muzum karaman kismat, J.L. 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UP: EC extends voter list revision deadline till Mar 6

MI News Service, Ayodhya: The Election Commission extended the SIR deadline in Uttar Pradesh by a month till March 6. State chief electoral officer Navdeep Rinwa said: "While the last date of claims and objections was February 6, we had requested the Election Commission to extend it by a month because of some disparities in the new list. Our proposal has been approved. We appeal to the people to visit their respective booths between 10am and 12am and submit their claims and objections before booth-level officers by March 6."

The poll panel has extended the date for the third time in the state. Rinwa said this would be the last chance for voters to ensure their names are there on the electoral roll. He said the hearing on objections would be held till March 27 and the final list published on April 11. "In case of objections, the complainant and the person against whom the complaint is filed are supposed to appear before the designated officer and submit documents in their support. Then only will a final decision be taken to remove a name," he said.

Rinwa said while they had listed 12.55 crore voters in the state, the department had received objections against 48 lakh.

Cong launches 'get out' campaign against VIJAYAN

MI News Service, Kochi: All India Congress Committee poll strategist Sunil Kanugolu and his team have come up with a catchy name for their digital campaign website, kadakkupurathu.com—meaning get out—targeting Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan ahead of the Assembly election campaign.

People can voice their concerns against the ruling Left government through this interactive website.

According to the KGMU website, Raja Sir Tassaduq Rasul Khan, a taluqdar of Jahangirabad in Bar-

anki district, conceived the medical college in 1905. Its foundation stone was laid by Prince George (later King George V) on December 26, 1905, and it became functional in 1911. Khalid Rasheed the Firangimahli, the shahi imam of the Lucknow Eidgah and member of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, said: "It is beyond doubt that these mazars are many centuries older than the medical college. The land was provided by a Muslim taluqdar (Tassaduq Rasul Khan) and the British government decided to let those structures exist. Currently, they are registered waqf properties. There had been no controversy surrounding them all these years. All of a sudden, this government wants to remove them," Firangimahli said there was no such department centuries ago to permit the construction of such structures. "The KGMU is making itself a laughing stock by issuing such notices," Firangimahli added. Mahmood Madani, president of the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, ex-

pressed concern over the attack on the shrine of Hazrat Haji Harmain Shah, located adjacent to the university, and the issuance of demolition notices against "centuries-old shrines situated in the precincts of Hazrat Makhdoom Shah Meena". "We warn the university administration against violating the laws of the land governing waqf properties under the cover of misleading propaganda and demand the immediate withdrawal of all such notices," he added. Shah Meena was a 15th-century Sufi saint of the Chishti-Nizami order based in Lucknow. Some of the mazars bear no specific name.

Madani said the shrines were more than 700 years old, adding that couple of them had already been "damaged by the university administration at the behest of the BJP leaders". K.K. Singh, a professor of KGMU, who has been tasked with taking action against the mazars, said: "The unnecessary gathering of people (to pray at the mazars) creates problems in the

day-to-day functioning of the university. We had pasted demolition notices on their walls." "There were eight mazars and three of them have already been demolished in the last one-and-a-half years. Notices have been served to the remaining five located near the microbiology, orthopaedics and respiratory medicine departments and trauma centre," Singh said, adding that they made it difficult for ambulances to reach the departments.

Maulana Yasub Abbas, a Shia cleric, denied the allegation that the mausoleums were obstructing the movement of ambulances. "The college was established on the land of the Muslim community, and now they want to remove us from there," he said. Mohammad Shakeel, member of the management committee of a mazar, said: "The government must ask the KGMU to withdraw its illegal notices to us. People occasionally gather here to pray at the mazars, but that has been going on for centuries."



Prime Minister Narendra Modi waves as he departs for New Delhi after concluding a two-day official visit to Malaysia, in Kuala Lumpur on Sunday.

5 mazars on KGMU campus face demolition

MI News Service, Lucknow:

Five mazars located on the King George Medical University (KGMU) campus here are staring at demolition as their management committees have failed to furnish legal proof of ownership or land rights within the deadline that expired on Friday. The university administration had served notices to the committees 15 days ago, threatening demolition of the structures in the absence of a satisfactory response. Local BJP leader Abhijit Mishra had claimed in a complaint to the KGMU administration that the mausoleums were built illegally and should be razed. The management committees of the mazars have, in their reply to the notices, said the structures predate the medical college by over six to seven centuries. The KGMU was originally established as a medical college and later upgraded to a university.

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anki district, conceived the medical college in 1905. Its foundation stone was laid by Prince George (later King George V) on December 26, 1905, and it became functional in 1911. Khalid Rasheed the Firangimahli, the shahi imam of the Lucknow Eidgah and member of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, said: "It is beyond doubt that these mazars are many centuries older than the medical college. The land was provided by a Muslim taluqdar (Tassaduq Rasul Khan) and the British government decided to let those structures exist. Currently, they are registered waqf properties. There had been no controversy surrounding them all these years. All of a sudden, this government wants to remove them," Firangimahli said there was no such department centuries ago to permit the construction of such structures. "The KGMU is making itself a laughing stock by issuing such notices," Firangimahli added. Mahmood Madani, president of the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, ex-

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JNU rusticates 4 union leaders

MI News Service, New Delhi:

The Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) administration has "rusticated" the top four students' union leaders and a former president for a year for vandalising the facial recognition system installed in the central library last November. The identical notices from chief proctor N. Janardhana Raju to the union leaders — all from the Left — say they have been "found guilty of destroying the Facial Recognition Technology (FRT) based Access Gates (FRT) installed at the cost of about ₹20 lakh in the Dr B.R. Ambedkar Central Library. JNU on 21/11/2025... Two female security guards were injured, leading to blood loss".

Those rusticated include JNUSU president Aditi Mishra (CPIML-Liberation-backed Aisa), vice-president K. Gopika Babu (CPM-backed SFI), general secretary Sunil Yadav (Democratic Students' Federation), joint secretary Danish Ali (Aisa), and former president Nitish Kumar (Aisa). They have also been fined ₹20,000 each and barred from entering the campus. If they fail to pay the fine, they would not be allowed to return after a year.

The JNUSU said in a statement: "It is a well-known fact that JNU students have been protesting against the magnetic gates and face-recognition cameras in the B.R. Ambedkar Central Library of JNU. The administration, on multiple occasions, had offered verbal assurances that they would not install these surveillance arrangements after the previous JNUSU

had staged a long sit-in in front of the library gate. However, surreptitiously, this administration reinstated them once again, right in the middle of the JNUSU elections in November 2025, violating their commitments. Therefore, it is the JNU administration alone that is solely responsible for this stalemate.

In the disciplinary order, the administration has alleged that the student representatives damaged public property. This is a complete lie. There are numerous examples where ABVP has not been punished for committing wanton violence and damaging public property in JNU, causing life-threatening situations for students, teachers and officials, on the other hand, students and JNUSU office-bearers are being punished for resisting surveillance."

The union cited examples of mild or no punishments for vandalism by the RSS-backed ABVP in the past. The JNU Teachers' Association said in a statement titled "JNU must be out of bounds for the VC, not the JNUSU office-bearers": "This is not an action against a few individual students but a direct assault on the collective democratic rights of the university's student body. It is part of a continuing process of criminalising protests, which themselves are a response to an autocratic and lawless mode of functioning that has increasingly come to characterise the JNU administration under the leadership of vice-chancellor Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit...."



Cancer survivors, doctors, volunteers and others take part in the 19th annual 'Walk For Life – Stride Against Cancer' walkathon organised by CanSupport at the JLN Stadium, in New Delhi on Sunday.

5 TEJAS MK-1A jets ready for delivery: HAL

MI News Service, Bengaluru:

State-run aerospace major Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) has said that five Tejas light combat aircraft are fully ready for delivery to the Indian Air Force, even as delays continue in the broader induction schedule due to issues in engine supply. The announcement comes more than four years after the defence ministry, in February 2021, signed a Rs 48,000 crore contract with HAL for the procurement of 83 Tejas Mk-1A fighter jets for the IAF. The aircraft are key part of the Air Force's plan to arrest the decline in its fighter squadron strength, which has fallen to 30 against an officially sanctioned level of 42.

Deliveries of the jets have faced repeated delays, largely due to GE Aerospace missing multiple timelines for the supply of aero engines required to power the aircraft. "The HAL confirms that five aircraft are fully



ready for delivery, incorporating major contracted capabilities in accordance with the agreed specifications," a spokesperson for the aerospace major said.

According to HAL, more aircraft are already in an advanced stage of production. "An additional nine aircraft have already been built and flown. Upon receipt of engines from GE, these aircraft will be made ready for delivery," the official said, adding that all

design and development issues identified are being addressed in an "expedited manner". Tejas is a single-engine multi-role fighter aircraft developed for operations in high-threat air environments. The platform has been designed to perform air defence, maritime reconnaissance and strike roles. HAL said it remains in discussions with the Indian Air Force to ensure the earliest possible delivery of the aircraft.

ZSI discovers two new worm species in Bengal's coastal waters

MI News Service, Kolkata:

A research team from the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), in collaboration with international experts, has announced the discovery of two new species of worms (polychaetes) from the coastal waters of West Bengal. The findings, centered in Digha and Bankipore regions of Purba Medinipur district, highlight the rich yet vulnerable marine biodiversity of the northern Bay of Bengal, a ZSI statement said. The study, titled 'Description of two new species of nereididae (Annelida: Nereididae) from West Bengal, India, Bay of Bengal,' details the unique characteristics and habitats of these newly identified marine annelids. The discovery includes two distinct species, each named for their unique biological traits or in honour of scientific leadership.

"Nereidids are vital to coastal health, playing a critical role in nutrient cycling and sediment aeration. Interestingly, the researchers, including Jyosha Pradhan, Anil Mohapatra (ZSI), and Julio F. Villalobos-Guerrero (CICESE, Mexico), noted that these species were found in areas significantly impacted by human activity and pollution," the statement said. "The presence of these species in specialised, highly exposed, and even polluted habitats underscores the resilience of polychaetes," the team stated. "These worms may serve as vital bioindicators for monitoring coastal health, though further studies are required to fully understand their potential for conservation," it added.

AI opens new lounge at Delhi airport



MI News Service, New Delhi:

It is an exciting time for Air India and the changes will manifest in the air as well as on the ground this year, the airline's chief Campbell Wilson said as the Tata Group-owned carrier opened its new lounge at the Delhi airport. The airline will also be opening lounges in San Francisco, New York and other cities. Spread across 16,000 square feet, the Maharaja Lounge at the Delhi airport can accommodate around 300 guests in 'Business' and 'First Class' sections. In a brief interaction after the opening of the lounge on Thursday evening, Wilson said it is an "exciting time" for Air India and 2026 is the year when the changes will "really manifest in the air" and on the ground as he mentioned about retrofit of wide-body planes. "By the

end of this year we'll have about half, a little bit more than half of our wide-body aircraft upgraded to a new standard. It will take another 18-24 months beyond that to complete the rest of the fleet (upgrade)... but increasingly we will have a very much more consistent world-class experience on Air India.

"It is an exciting time and I think the new Air India is starting to become visible," he said. In a statement on Friday, Wilson said the new lounge at the Delhi airport is a significant milestone in the airline's transformation journey and that its strategic expansion plans include substantial investments to build more such platforms across countries that it flies to. Air India Group -- Air India and Air India Express -- has over 300 planes.

HP bans mobile phones in schools from Mar 1

MI News Service, Shimla:

Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu announced a complete ban on the use of mobile phones by students in all government and private schools across Himachal Pradesh, effective from March 1, 2026. The announcement was made during the closing ceremony of the 69th National School Games Under-19 Girls Handball Tournament held at Ghumarwin, in Bilaspur district. Speaking on the occasion, the chief minister said that the state government is committed to providing world-class education that would enable students to compete on a global stage.

Sukhu detailed strict enforcement measures, stating that any student found in possession of a phone would face a fine of Rs 500 and the confiscation of the device. "Additionally, parents will be required to attend mandatory counselling sessions at the school. To ensure long-term compliance, the Edu-

cation Department has been tasked with drafting a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to address repeated violations," the chief minister said. "It has been observed that mobile phone usage during lunch breaks and school hours distracts students from their studies and personal growth," remarked Sukhu. Drawing on his own background as a product of the government school system, he reaffirmed his dedication to prioritising the quality of education. Sukhu also highlighted the state's aggressive push to promote sports and sports tourism. He announced that the state government would provide employment opportunities to female athletes from Himachal Pradesh who have recently competed in the Asian Games. To celebrate the victory of the Himachal team in the National Handball Championship, he announced a cash prize of Rs 20 lakh.

Study finds how bacterial vaccine demonstrates potential as treatment for cancer immunotherapy

NEW YORK [US] : Columbia researchers developed probiotic bacteria that train the immune system to eliminate cancer cells, paving the way for a new class of cancer vaccinations that take advantage of bacteria's innate tumour-targeting abilities. These microbial cancer vaccines can be tailored to each person's specific original tumour and metastases, perhaps preventing future recurrences.

The bacterial vaccine is personalized for each tumor. "Every cancer is unique - tumor cells harbor distinct genetic mutations that distinguish them from normal healthy cells. By programming bacteria that direct the immune system to target these cancer-specific mutations, we can engineer more effective therapies that stimulate a patient's own immune system to detect and kill their cancer cells," says Nicholas Arpaia, PhD, Associate Professor of Microbiology & Immunology in the Columbia University's Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons who directed the research with Tal Danino, PhD, Associate Professor of Biomedical Engineering at Columbia's School of Engineering.

"The important advantage of our system is its unique ability to coordinate restructure and activate all arms of the immune system to induce a productive antitumor immune response. We believe this is why the system works so well in advanced solid tumor models which have been particularly difficult to treat with other immunotherapies," says Andrew Redenti, an MD/PhD student at Columbia University's Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons who helped lead the study.

"The net effect is that the bacterial vaccine is able to control or eliminate the growth of advanced primary or metastatic tumors and extend survival in mouse models," says Jongwon Im, a PhD student at Columbia University who helped lead bacterial engineering aspects of the study.

The findings were published in *Nature*.

The bacterial vaccine proved to be particularly more efficacious than peptide-based therapeutic cancer vaccines that have been used in numerous previous cancer clinical trials.

"As we continue to integrate additional safety optimizations through further genetic programming, we are getting closer to the point of testing this therapy in patients," he added. Bacteria have been utilized in the treatment of cancer since the late 19th century, when Dr. William Coley, who was a surgeon at New York Hospital, observed tumor regression in a subset of patients with inoperable tumors injected with bacteria. Bacteria are still employed as a therapeutic today in patients with early-stage bladder cancer.

Researchers now know that some bacteria can naturally migrate to and colonize tumors, where they can thrive in the often oxygen-deprived environment and locally provoke an immune response.

But used this way, bacteria do not usually precisely control or direct the immune response to attack the cancer. "These qualities alone don't typically give bacteria enough power to stimulate immune responses capable of destroying a tumor, but they're a

good starting point for building a new domain of cancer therapeutics," said Nicholas Arpaia, PhD.

The new system starts with a probiotic strain of *E. coli* bacteria.

The researchers then made multiple genetic modifications to precisely control the way in which the bacteria interact with and educate the immune system to induce tumor killing. The engineered bacteria encode protein targets - called neoantigens - that are specific to the cancer being treated.

These bacterially-delivered neoantigens train the immune system to target and attack cancer cells that express the same proteins.

Neoantigens are used as tumor targets so that normal cells, which lack these cancer-marking proteins, are left alone. Due to the nature of the bacterial system and additional genetic modifications engineered by the scientists, these bacterial cancer therapies also simultaneously overcome immunosuppressive mechanisms

tumors use to block the immune system.

These genetic modifications are also designed to block the bacteria's innate ability to evade immune attacks against themselves. As a safety measure, this means the engineered bacteria can be easily recognized and eliminated by the immune system and are quickly cleared from the body if they do not find the tumor.

When tested in mice, the researchers found that these intricately programmed bacterial cancer vaccines recruit a wide array of immune cells that attack tumor cells, all the while preventing responses that would normally suppress tumor-directed immune attacks. The bacterial vaccine also reduced the growth of cancer when administered to mice before they developed tumors, and prevented regrowth of the same tumors in mice that had been cured, suggesting the vaccine may have the ability to prevent cancer from returning in patients who've experienced remission.

In people, the first step in creating these microbial vaccines would be to sequence a patient's cancer and identify its unique neoantigens using bioinformatics. Next, the bacteria would be engineered to produce large quantities of the identified neoantigens, as well as other immunomodulatory factors. When infused into the patient whose tumors are to be treated, the bacteria would head to the tumors, make themselves at home, and steadily produce and deliver their payload of engineered "medicines." Once activated,

the bacterial vaccine, the immune system would be prompted to eliminate cancer cells that have spread throughout the body and prevent further metastatic development.

Since each tumor has its own set of neoantigens, the immunotherapy will be customized for each patient. "The time to treatment will first depend on how long it takes to sequence the tumor. Then we just need to make the bacterial strains, which can be quite fast. Bacteria can be simpler to manufacture than some other vaccine platforms," Danino says.

The bacteria are also designed to counteract cancer's ability to rapidly mutate and evade treatment. "Because our platform allows us to deliver so many different neoantigens, it theoretically becomes difficult for tumor cells to lose all those targets at once and avoid the immune response," says Arpaia.

The researchers think their approach may succeed where earlier cancer vaccines have not. In the latter, while immune responses against tumor neoantigens may be induced, direct modulation of the immunosuppressive tumor environment is not accomplished to such a degree.

Arpaia adds, "Bacteria allow delivery of a higher concentration of drugs than can be tolerated when these compounds are delivered systemically throughout the entire body. Here, we can confine delivery directly to the tumor and locally modulate how we're stimulating the immune system."

Study gives insights into quality of life for adults with congenital heart disease



WASHINGTON : Adults with congenital heart disease (CHD) can now gain vital insights into their long-term quality of life according to data from the Congenital Heart Initiative (CHI). CHI is the nation's first and largest patient-focused registry for people with CHD, and it recently launched its inaugural research, which included over 4,500 participants from all 50 states. This study, published in *JAMA Network Open*, represents a big step forward in providing better information to the 1.5 million adults in the United States who were born with CHD.

"Studies like this that leverage actual patient voices and experiences help us get a better sense of how to advise, support and treat people with CHD as they age," says Anitha John, M.D., Ph.D., director of the Washington Adult Congenital Heart program at Children's National Hospital and senior author of the study. "Also, researchers get a clearer picture

of the questions that need to be answered to make sure they have the best quality of life possible."

Treatments for children born with congenital heart disease have improved so significantly in the last two decades that life expectancy continues to increase as well. "There are now more adults living with congenital heart disease than there are children with CHD," says Scott Leezer, patient co-principal investigator for the Congenital Heart Initiative and co-author of the study. "However, a significant gap remains in what we know about the adult CHD population. As an adult CHD patient, I was excited to contribute to creating this registry, bringing more answers to people like me who want to know how our unique hearts impact our bodies and quality of life over time." The authors note that the study's findings and the registry data currently have a few limitations. First, the registry only con-

cerns patient-reported outcomes and no clinical data. The first sub-study of the CHI, the CHI-RON study, addresses this challenge by incorporating additional data sources for a subset of consenting CHI participants.

Additionally, recall bias, underlying neurocognitive challenges and survey fatigue, may have limited participation in the CHI to a smaller subset of adults with CHD. Efforts are underway to develop methods for people with congenital heart disease who have neurodevelopmental deficits or other disabilities to engage in the registry. The CHI is temporarily closed to new registrants as the study team redesigns the study to better align with the needs of the community.

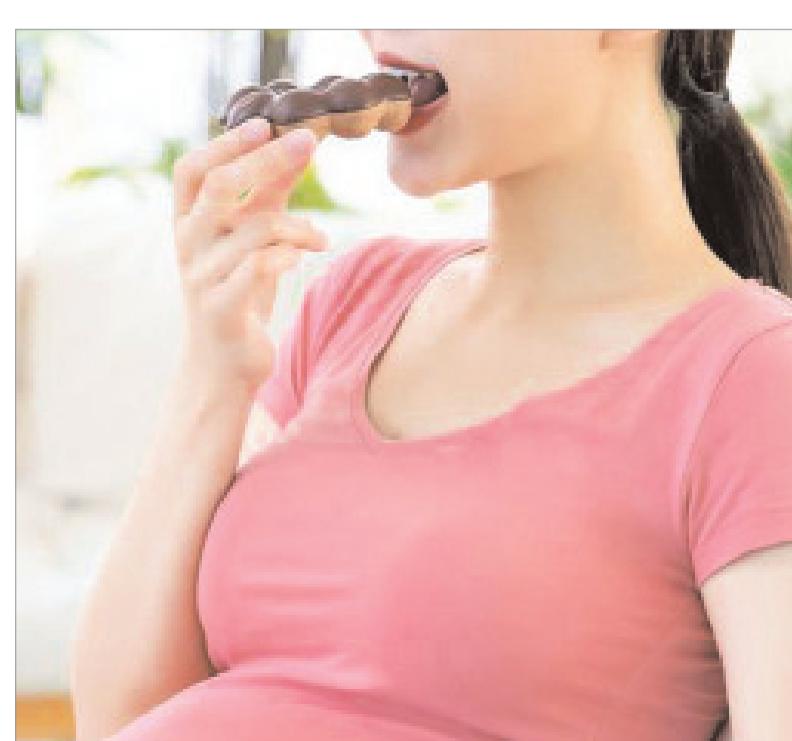
"We are grateful for everyone who joined this registry, answered survey questions and shared their experiences," says Thomas Carton, Ph.D., chief data officer at Louisiana Public Health Institute and study co-author. "The CHI registry is a big step forward for adults with CHD, but also can serve as a model for how to bring together physicians, researchers and patients as active participants in care, research and advocacy."

As the registry grows in the future, it will focus on increasing diversity of participants, developing additional partnerships with other organizations, continued innovation in data usage and improved community engagement, all with the goal of guiding future research that will ultimately improve quality of life for all adults with CHD.

ultraprocessed foods are linked to greater phthalate exposures, the authors wrote.

"When moms are exposed to this chemical, it can cross the placenta and go into fetal circulation," said senior author Dr. Sheela Sathyarayana, a UW Medicine pediatrician and researcher at the Seattle Children's Research Institute. This analysis involved data in the Conditions Affecting Neurocognitive Development and Learning in Early Childhood (CANDLE) research cohort, which comprised 1,031 pregnant individuals in Memphis, Tenn., who were enrolled between 2006 and 2011. Phthalate levels were measured in urine samples collected from during the second trimester of pregnancy. The researchers found that ultraprocessed food composed 10% to 60% of participants' diets, or 38.6%, on average. Each

"We don't blame the pregnant person here," said Baker. "We need to call out manufacturers and legislators to offer replacements, and ones that may not be even more harmful."



10% higher dietary proportion of ultraprocessed food was associated with 13% higher concentration of di(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate, one of the most common and harmful phthalates. The phthalate amounts were derived through urine samples taken from the women in the study.

Ultraprocessed foods, according to the researchers, are made mostly from substances extracted from foods such as oils, sugar and starch, but have been so changed from processing and the addition of chemicals and preservatives to enhance their appearance or shelf life that they are hard to recognize from their original form, researchers noted. These include packaged cake mixes, for example, or packaged french fries, hamburger buns and soft drinks. When it comes to fast food, gloves worn by the employees and the storage, preparation, serving equipment or tools may be the main sources of exposure. Both frozen and fresh ingredients would be subject to these sources, said lead author Brennan Baker, a postdoctoral researcher in Sathyarayana's lab.

This is the first study, researchers say, to identify ultraprocessed foods as a link between exposure to phthalates

and the socio-economics issues facing the mothers. The mothers' vulnerability might stem from experiencing financial hardships and from living in "food deserts" where healthier, fresh foods are harder to obtain and transportation to distant markets is unrealistic.

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More legislation is needed, the authors said, to prevent phthalate contamination in foods by regulating the composition of food wrapping or even the gloves that food handlers may use. What should pregnant women do now? Sathyarayana said that pregnant women should try to avoid ultraprocessed food as much as they can, and seek out fruits, vegetables and lean meats. Reading labels can come into play here, she added.

"Look for the lower number of ingredients and make sure you can understand the ingredients," she said. This applies even to "healthy foods" such as breakfast bars. See if it's sweetened with dates or has a litany of fats and sugars in it, she said.

Pregnant women should avoid ultraprocessed, fast foods: Study

WASHINGTON DC [US] : According to a study published in the journal Environmental International, if you're pregnant, you should think twice before running out to get a cheeseburger or grabbing for a packaged pastry.

Oddly enough it's not the food that the report targets -- not the fries, burgers or even the shakes and cakes -- but what touches the food before you eat it.

Research shows that phthalates, a class of chemicals associated with plastics, can shed from the wrapping, packaging and even from plastic gloves worn by food handlers into food. Once consumed during pregnancy, the chemicals can get into the bloodstream, through the placenta and then into the fetal bloodstream.

The chemical can cause oxidative stress and an inflammatory cascade within the fetus, researchers noted. Previous literature has indicated that exposure to phthalates during pregnancy can increase the risk of low birth weight, preterm birth and child mental health disorders such as autism and ADHD.

This is the first study in pregnant women to show that diets higher in

Everyone living in India is Hindu, says RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat

MI News Service, Mumbai: RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat declared that "everyone living in India is Hindu," describing "Hindu" not as a religious noun but as an adjective embodying the nation's inherent civilizational character.

Speaking at the event '100 Years of the Sangh Journey' in Mumbai, he asserted that this nature is intrinsic to all Indians, including Muslims and Christians, who fully belong to the country.

Bhagwat said India's rise as a global leader would come through exemplary conduct rather than mere speeches. He classified Indians into four types of "Hindus": those



proud to proclaim it openly; those indifferent ("We are Hindus, so what?"); those discreet about it; and those who have forgotten or been made to forget their Hindu

identity, with ongoing efforts to deepen such amnesia.

Reflecting on history, he attributed India's Partition to the forgetting of "Hindu bhav" (Hindu sen-

timent). While Hindus respect all religions, the lapse in this sentiment led to division, yet India remains united despite occasional skirmishes, he noted.

Emphasising inclusivity, Bhagwat clarified that embracing Hindutva requires no one to abandon their faith, language, customs, or practices. "Hindutva is a guarantee of your safety," he said, adding that diverse food habits, beliefs, and languages coexist within one society, culture, and nation—all it Hindutva or Bharatiyata. He rejected the term "Hindu-Muslim unity," arguing that true unity already exists as peo-

ple are inherently one.

Bhagwat urged direct engagement with the RSS to understand it, rather than relying on perceptions or propaganda, promising improvement on any factual criticism. He advocated dialogue, peaceful coexistence, and family conversations to instil self-pride and self-awareness in youth, protecting them from issues like drug abuse and suicide.

The address, part of the RSS centenary outreach series '100 Years of Sangh Journey: New Horizons' at Nehru Centre, Worli, featured attendees including Salman Khan, Subhash Ghai, and Prafull Joshi.

Gaza's Rafah Crossing reopens, but movement remains minimal

MI News Service, Khan Younis: When the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt finally reopened this week, Palestinian officials heralded it as a "window of hope" after two years of war as a fragile ceasefire deal moves forward.

But that hope has been sidetracked by disagreements over who should be allowed through, hourslong delays and Palestinian travellers' reports of being handcuffed and interrogated by Israeli soldiers.

Far fewer people than expected have crossed in both directions. Restrictions negotiated by Israeli, Egyptian, Palestinian and international officials meant that only 50 people would be allowed to return to Gaza each day and 50 medical patients—along with two companions for each—would be allowed to leave.

But over the first four days of operations, just 36 Palestinians requiring medical care were allowed to leave for Egypt, plus 62 companions, according to United Nations data.

Palestinian officials say nearly 20,000 people in Gaza are seeking to leave for medical care that they say is not available in the war-shattered territory.

Amid confusion around the reopening, the Rafah crossing was reportedly closed Friday and Saturday.

The Rafah crossing is a lifeline for Gaza, providing the only link to the outside world not controlled by Israel. Israel seized it in May 2024, though traffic through the crossing was heavily restricted even before that.

Several women who managed to return to Gaza after its reopening recounted to The Associated Press harsh treatment by Israeli authorities and an Israeli-backed Palestinian armed group, Abu Shabab. A European Union mission and Palestinian officials run the border crossing, and Israel has its screening facility some distance away.

Rana al-Louh, anxious to return two years after fleeing to Egypt with her wounded sister, said Israeli screeners asked multiple times why she wanted to go back to Gaza during questioning that lasted more than six hours. She said she was blindfolded and handcuffed, an allegation made by others.

"I told them I returned to Palestine because my husband and kids are there," al-Louh said. Interrogators told her Gaza belonged to Israel and that "the war would return, that Hamas won't give up its weapons. I told him I didn't care, I wanted to return."

Asked about such reports, Israel's military replied that "no incidents of inappropriate conduct, mistreatment, apprehensions or confiscation of property by the Israeli security establishment are known."

Over 70 schoolchildren fall ill after mid-day meal in Bihar; lizard suspected in food

MI News Service, Patna: More than 70 students at Upgraded Middle School in Karu Tola, Sahugarh village under Madhepura Sadar block, Bihar, fell ill after consuming the government-provided mid-day meal on Saturday, causing widespread panic among teachers, parents, and the local community.

According to eyewitness accounts, children began showing symptoms shortly after eating the meal. They complained of severe vomiting, acute stomach pain, dizziness, restlessness, and nervousness, leading to chaotic scenes on the school premises as one child after another became unwell.

Alarmed parents rushed to the school upon hearing the news. All affected students were promptly shifted to Madhepura Sadar Hospital, some in ambulances and others in private vehicles arranged by families and locals.

Medical staff at the hospital reported that the majority of the children are now stable and out of danger after receiving treatment. However, one girl student remains in serious condition and is under intensive observation.



The Shin Bet intelligence agency and COGAT, the Israeli military body that handles Palestinian civilian affairs and coordinates the crossings, did not respond to questions about the allegations.

The long questioning Wednesday delayed the return to Gaza of al-Louh and others until nearly 2 am Thursday.

Later that day, UN human rights officials noted a "consistent pattern of ill-treatment, abuse and humiliation by Israeli military forces."

"After two years of utter devastation, being able to return to their families and what remains of their homes in safety and dignity is the bare minimum," Ajith Sungay, the agency's human rights chief for the occupied Palestinian territories, said in a statement.

Officials who negotiated the Rafah reopening were clear that the early days of operation would be a pilot. If successful, the number of people crossing could increase.

Challenges quickly emerged. On the first day, Monday, Israeli officials said 71 patients and companions were approved to leave Gaza, with 46 Palestinians approved to enter.

Inside Gaza, however, organisers with the World Health Organisation were able to arrange transportation for only 12 people that day, so other patients stayed behind, according to a person briefed on the operations who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the media.

Israeli officials insisted that no Palestinians would be allowed to enter Gaza until all the departures were complete. Then they said that since only 12 people had left Gaza, only 12 could enter, leaving the rest to wait on the Egyptian side of the border overnight, according to the person briefed on the operations.

The problems continued Wednesday and Thursday, with the numbers allowed to cross declining. The bus carrying Wednesday's returnees from the crossing did not reach its drop-off location in Gaza until 1:40 am Thursday.

Still, some Palestinians said they were grateful to have made the journey.



Frustrated parents staged a protest outside the hospital, demanding a detailed probe into the incident and accountability from those responsible for the meal preparation and distribution.

Investigation has been launched.

"If any negligence or irregularity is found at any level, strict action will be taken against the concerned NGO and individuals responsible," the DEO stated.

The episode has ignited strong public outrage, with parents and locals accusing authorities of inadequate monitoring, poor hygiene practices, and lax quality control in the mid-day meal programme. It has also raised serious concerns about the overall safety mechanisms and oversight of school nutrition initiatives across the state.

The district administration has promised a thorough inquiry and vowed to implement corrective steps to ensure such incidents do not recur.

Trump aims to hold first meeting of new Board of Peace in Washington this month

MI News Service, Washington: President Donald Trump plans to convene the first meeting of his Board of Peace this month in Washington to raise money for the reconstruction of Gaza.

The meeting, proposed for February 19, would include both world leaders who accepted Trump's invitation in January to join the board as well as members of an executive committee for Gaza that will oversee the specifics of the territory's governance, security and redevelopment, two Trump administration officials said Saturday.

It was not immediately clear how many leaders would accept the Republican president's invitation, according to the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the meeting has not yet been formally announced and details of its agenda were still being determined.

One official said the administration expected "robust" participation.

A copy of the invitation that was sent late Friday to invited participants and obtained by The Associated Press says the meeting will be held at the US Institute of Peace, now known as the Donald J Trump US Institute of Peace, pending an ongoing legal battle with the former leadership of the nonprofit think tank.

The administration seized the facility last year and fired almost all the institute's staff.

Trump's new board was first seen as a mechanism focused on ending the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. But it has taken shape with his ambition for a far broader mandate of resolving global crises and appears to be the latest US effort to sidestep the United Nations as Trump aims to reset the post-World War II international order.

Many of America's top allies in Europe and elsewhere have declined to join what they suspect may be an attempt to rival the Security Council.

End of the "Closed Gate" Era: Ashwini Vaishnaw Unlocked Birbhum & Asansol with Two Landmark Railway Overbridge

MI News Service, Kolkata, 8 Feb.26 : The "stop-and-go" era for the residents of Birbhum and Paschim Bardhaman officially ended.

Ashwini Vaishnaw, Union Minister for Railways, Information & Broadcasting, and Electronics & Information Technology, inaugurated the Siuri Road Over Bridge (ROB) and dedicated the Kumarpur Road Over Bridge to the Nation via Video Conferencing. Joining the ceremony was Sudhendu Adhikari, Leader of the Opposition, West Bengal Legislative Assembly, to mark this milestone in the region's journey toward rapid modernization.

On this momentous occasion, the region expressed its profound gratitude to Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose vision of "Gati Shakti" and commitment to transforming Indian Railways made these world-class infrastructure projects a reality for the people of West Bengal.

Siuri ROB: Birbhum's New ₹42 Crore Lifeline

For decades, the "22B/T" level crossing was a symbol of frustration, forcing commuters into 30-minute waits as trains passed.

Today, that wait becomes history.

The Siuri ROB is more than just a bridge; it is a permanent solution for a district on the move.

• Seconds Save Lives: Patients being rushed from Siuri District Hospital to Bolpur or Kolkata will no longer face life-threatening delays. The "Golden Hour" is finally protected from train schedules.

• A Bridge to Education & Culture: Students heading to Visva-Bharati University can now commute with clockwork precision. The bridge also turns Bolpur's amenities into a "quick commute" for Siuri residents, making weekend visits to Sonajhuri Haat or the Kankalitala Temple effortless.

• Sweetening the Economy: Siuri's world-famous Murabba

and Achar now have a high-speed path to the tourist-heavy markets of Shantiniketan, boosting local small businesses and vendors.

• Real Estate & Relief: Beyond the psychological relief of seeing an open road, property values in the Siuri-Bolpur corridor are set to soar as connectivity reaches international standards.

Kumarpur ROB: The High-Speed Heart of GT Road

While Siuri celebrates its new lifeline, the Kumarpur ROB in Paschim Bardhaman is set to revolutionize the industrial flow of the Grand Trunk Road. By removing the primary "choke point" of the city, this bridge ensures that the wheels of industry never stop turning.

• Fuelling the Industrial En-

gine: Heavy vehicles carrying coal and steel can now bypass the paralyzing traffic tailbacks of the past, streamlining the supply chain between West Bengal and the Jharkhand border.

• Bypass the Stress: Thousands of commuters will save significantly on fuel costs by eliminating engine idling. The bridge permanently removes the risk of accidents at what was once a high-danger railway intersection.

• Integrating the City: Suburban areas like Barachak are now seamlessly linked to the Asansol city center, ensuring that daily-wage earners, office goers, and students are never late for their commitments.

Engineering Progress for a New Bengal

These two projects represent a combined vision of all-weather accessibility and industrial strength. By replacing risky level crossings with state-of-the-art engineering, the Ministry of Railways is ensuring that the spirit of Birbhum and the industrial grit of Paschim Bardhaman are no longer held back by a "closed gate."

Zionist Blackmail And The Making of Israel

MI News Service, Washington: In late 1947 the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States reported:

"A decision to partition Palestine, if the decision were supported by the United States, would prejudice United States strategic interests in the Near and Middle East" to the point that "United States influence in the area would be curtailed to that which could be maintained by military force."

The Joint Chiefs issued at least sixteen papers on the Palestine issue following World War II. They were particularly concerned that the duplicitous Zionist goal was to involve the US.

One 1948 document predicted that "the Zionist strategy will seek to involve the United States in a continuously widening and deepening series of operations intended to secure maximum Jewish objectives."

Even the newly formed CIA stated that Zionist leadership was pursuing objectives that would endanger both Jews and "the strategic interests of Western powers in the Near and Middle East."

The episode has ignited strong public outrage, with parents and locals accusing authorities of inadequate monitoring, poor hygiene practices, and lax quality control in the mid-day meal programme. It has also raised serious concerns about the overall safety mechanisms and oversight of school nutrition initiatives across the state.

The district administration has promised a thorough inquiry and vowed to implement corrective steps to ensure such incidents do not recur.

Palestine as a solution to the problem of controlling Arab oil can be justified only on the basis of Arab and Jewish consent. Otherwise we would violate the principle of self-determination which has been written into the Atlantic Charter, the declaration of the United Nations, and the United Nations Charter, a principle that is deeply embedded in our foreign policy.

Even a United Nations determination in favor of partition would be, in the absence of such consent, a stultification and violation of the UN's own charter.

Merriam added that without consent, "bloodshed and chaos" would follow, a tragically accurate prediction.

An internal State Department memorandum precisely predicted how Israel would be born; through armed aggression masked as defense.

"...the Jews will be the actual aggressors against the Arabs. However, the Jews will claim that they are merely defending the boundaries of a state which were traced by the UN.... In the event of such Arab outside aid the Jews will come running to the Security Council with the claim that their state is the object of armed aggression and will use every means to obscure the fact that it is their

After Oman talks, Iran sees opening for diplomacy with U.S. but rejects nuclear, missile curbs

negotiations were indirect, an opportunity arose to shake hands with the American delegation," he said, disputing U.S. reports that the two sides had held a short direct exchange during the discussions in Muscat.

After concluding the talks with Steve Witkoff, U.S. President Trump's special envoy, Araghchi traveled to Doha, where he met with Sheikh Mohammed bin Jassim Al-Thani, Qatar's prime minister and foreign minister, Qatar media reported.

Iran's military chief of staff, Abdolrahim Mousavi, struck a more confrontational tone, warning that any attempt to impose war on Iran would spread conflict across the Middle East. Iran would not initiate a war, he said, but would respond "decisively" to defend its sovereignty.

Trump, speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One en route to his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, described the Oman talks as "very good," saying Iran "looks like it wants to make a deal very badly." He said the sides would meet again early next week.

No More Waiting At The Gate: New Subway Opens Between Rejinagar & Beldanga

MI News Service, Kolkata, 8 Feb.26 : In a significant step towards enhancing safety and improving rail-road mobility, Level Crossing No. 105/E between Rejinagar and Beldanga in Krishnanagar - Lalgola section of Sealdah Division has been permanently closed for road traffic on 07.02.2026 with the simultaneous commissioning of Limited Height Subway (LHS) No. 105.



The LHS has been constructed as a safe and efficient alternative to the manned level crossing, ensuring uninterrupted train operations while facilitating controlled road movement. The subway box had been successfully inserted in March 2025. However,

the project encountered major engineering challenges, particularly due to a high water table in the area, which delayed the construction of the sump and associated civil works. Despite these constraints, Railway engineers executed the work with careful planning and technical precision to complete the project.

Closure of the level crossing and opening of the subway will substantially enhance safety by eliminating the risk of accidents at the crossing and reducing congestion in the section. The commissioning reflects Eastern Railway's continued focus on modernizing infrastructure and prioritizing passenger and public safety.

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T20 WC: STATISTICAL REVIEW FROM INDIA VS USA CLASH

NEW DELHI : India began their ICC Men's T20 World Cup campaign with a 29-run victory over the USA at the Wankhede Stadium on Saturday, but not without moments of genuine concern. Skipper Suryakumar Yadav's majestic unbeaten 84 and a timely 3/29 from Mohammed Siraj, drafted in as a last-minute replacement, helped the defending champions avoid early embarrassment in their home tournament.

India entered the opener under pressure after losing all-rounder Harshit Rana to injury, and with pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah ruled out due to illness. The nerves showed as India, asked to bat first on a tricky surface offering movement and grip, slumped to 77/6. Shadley van Schalkwyk led the USA's charge with incisive bowling, leaving India staring at a sub-par total.

Suryakumar, however, led from the front in his first T20 World Cup match as captain. Displaying trademark 360-degree strokeplay, he struck 10 fours and four sixes in a 49-ball knock, stabilising the innings alongside Axar Patel and propelling India to a defendable 161/1.

Siraj then lifted a depleted



bowling attack with an early two-wicket burst, supported well by Arshdeep Singh and Axar Patel, who claimed two wickets apiece. The USA were reduced to 13/3, but a fighting 58-run stand between Sanjay Krishnamurthi and Milind Kumar briefly threatened to revive the chase.

Krishnamurthi (37) and Shubham Ranjane (37) showed

resistance, yet India's experience and discipline prevailed. Siraj and Arshdeep struck again in the death overs as USA were restricted to 132/9, giving India a hard-earned but crucial win in their campaign opener. Here's a look at all the key stats from the India vs USA match - 4 - Abhishek Sharma was unable to open his account, marking his fourth duck in his

39th match.

3 - It was Abhishek's 3rd golden duck in the last five matches.

4 - Suryakumar Yadav became the fourth Indian player to score 1000-plus runs as a captain in T20 Internationals. Rohit Sharma (1905), Virat Kohli (1570) and MS Dhoni (1112) are the others.

84* - This is Surya Kumar Yadav's highest score as a captain. His previous best was 68 runs against South Africa in Perth in 2022.

2 - Surya Kumar Yadav's unbeaten 84 is the second-highest score by a captain on T20 World Cup debut, after Chris Gayle's 88 for WI against Australia at The Oval in 2009.

9 - India achieved their ninth consecutive win in the T20 World Cup, setting a new world record. Previously, with eight wins, they shared this record with Australia and South Africa.

52.17% - Suryakumar's contribution to India's total is the fourth highest by an Indian batter in a completed innings.

17 - Suryakumar Yadav has now won the Man of the Match award more times than anyone else. Before, he was tied with Virat Kohli for the most MOM awards, each with 16.

T20 WC: FROM VADODARA TO TORONTO - CANADA'S ANSH PATEL CRICKETING JOURNEY COMES FULL CIRCLE

NEW DELHI : On Monday, left-arm wrist-spinner Ansh Patel could walk out at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad - a city 110 kilometres away from Vadodara, where he spent a good 12 years of his life playing and honing his cricketing skills. But instead of India's blue shirt, Ansh will be wearing Canada's red jersey when they open their Group D campaign against a mighty South Africa.

Ansh's path of playing for Canada in the Men's T20 World Cup is anything but conventional. Born in Vadodara, raised in Toronto before coming back to the city of his birth, Ansh was nurtured in India's domestic system and was even a part of the Punjab Kings side in IPL 2022.

But a regulatory shift - holding an Indian passport being made mandatory for playing domestic cricket - sent Ansh back to Canada, where he now finds himself in their T20 World Cup squad.

"For me, life's changed a lot. Five years ago, I was in Baroda and playing for the state side in the T20 format. I also got picked for the Punjab Kings squad in IPL 2022. But unfortunately, a rule change from BCCI made me move back to Canada since I have a Canadian passport."

"I've had the support from my family, friends, and the board as well. As a new player in this country, I got welcomed very well, did the hard yards in the games, performed and eventually made my international debut after moving back to Canada in June 2024."

"Then my first series for Canada was in September 2024 against Oman and Nepal and that was a very proud moment for me and my family. I can speak on behalf of any sports person, it's always a special moment to play for your country," recalled Ansh in an exclusive conversation with IANS.

Lumsden, with 16 wickets was the leading wicket-taker in the tournament, while Mayes topped the run-scoring charts with 444 runs (including 191 against Scotland) made the final selection along with Rew.

Mayes fell short of one run from equaling the all-time record for the highest individual score at an ICC U19 Men's Cricket World Cup, which had been set four days earlier by Sri Lanka's Viran Chamuditha - who is also selected.

Both Faisal Khan Shinozada and Nooristani Omarzai represented Afghanistan and played instrumental roles in Afghanistan making it to the semi-finals of the tournament. Faisal scored two centuries in the tournament (playing against Ireland and India) and Nooristani took 14 wickets in the tournament, with a best of five wickets for nine runs against Tanzania.

Oliver Peake (captain of Australia) scored two centuries in the tournament (including one against West Indies and another against England in the semi-finals); along with Ali Raza (Pakistan) and Vitel Lawes (West Indies) made up the final selection for the tournament.

Raza took 13 wickets going at just over four an over, while Jamaican left-arm spinner Lawes took 10 scalps in his five matches.

ICC U19 Men's Cricket World Cup 2026 Team of the Tournament

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi (India), Viran Chamuditha (Sri Lanka), Faisal Khan Shinozada (Afghanistan), Thomas Rew (UK, capt), Oliver Peake (Australia), Ben Mayes (England), Kanishk Chouhan (India), Nooristani Omarzai (Afghanistan), Vitel Lawes (West Indies), Ali Raza (Pakistan), Manny Lumsden (England), Henil Patel (India)



ly quit his career for me and moved to India instantly. For me, I will say a very, very big thanks to him because it's not easy for any parent to just give up whatever you had in Canada. He was well settled, but he gave it up instantly and we moved to India because he wanted me to play for India, and that was his practice at Reliance Ground.

More would then send his bowling videos to Mumbai Indians, who called him for trials and then roped him in as a net bowler for Mumbai Indians for their IPL 2020 and 2021 campaigns. Apart from being in the same camp alongside Rohit Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah, the Pandya brothers, and Kieron Pollard, Ansh even met the legendary Sachin Tendulkar, something which was a dream come true for him.

"Any cricketer who grows up in India, it's always special for him or her to meet the great cricketer - he's the God of cricket, as simple as that and I was very happy to meet him too. Learnings in MI helped me, like just to see how professional cricket is, and what it takes to be a professional player. I was really thankful for that opportunity, and that in turn helped me to make it into the Punjab Kings IPL team."

Ansh's selection to Punjab Kings in 2022 came after then head coach Anil Kumble spotted him, leaving Pradip teary-eyed. "He saw my bowling and said, 'I'm going to pick you.' I was like, 'really?' He was like, 'Yes.' On the 2022 IPL mega auction day, I told my dad about this and he didn't believe me. He was like, 'No, you're lying.' I'm like, 'He said this.' He was like, 'Okay, let's see.'

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi headlines ICC U19 team of the tournament



NEW DELHI : Vaibhav Sooryavanshi headlines ICC U19 Team of the Tournament as three of the Indian players feature in the 12-player list. Sooryavanshi scored an impressive 175 off 80 balls in the final against England and was named Player of the Tournament. He is joined by fellow players Kanishk Chouhan and Henil Patel in the 12-member squad.

The selection panel was made up of Ian Bishop (Convenor), Lydia Greenway, Andy Flower, Telford Vice.

Chouhan made important contributions with both bat and ball. Patel took 11 wickets, including a fantastic spell of five for 16 against the USA. Runners-up England also have three players in the squad, with Thomas Rew serving as captain and wicket-keeper.

Rew finished the tournament with 330 runs, at a batting average of 66, with one of

his outstanding performances being in the semi-finals where he scored 100 (not out) against Australia, contributing significantly to his team's victory.

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Mumbai Open 125K: High-stakes final awaits as Lilli Tagger and Mananchaya Sawangkaew battle for singles title

MUMBAI : After a week of non-stop tennis action, the stage is set for a thrilling finale at the Mumbai Open WTA 125K Series as Thailand's Mananchaya Sawangkaew and Austria's teenage prodigy Lilli Tagger lock horns in the women's singles final at the Centre Court of Maharashtra State Lawn Tennis Association (MSLTA) on Sunday.

The action-packed day will also see Elena Pridanika and Polina Iatcenko take on the formidable duo of Mananchaya Sawangkaew and Spain's Nicole Fossa Huergo in the women's doubles final.

Runner-up at last year's edition, Mananchaya will be eager to go one step further this time and clinch the title in Mumbai.

The Thai star has once again showcased her grit and consistency throughout the week and enters the final having dropped just one set in the tournament - during a hard-fought semi-final win against her compatriot Lillana Tararudee.

Speaking ahead of the final, Mananchaya said, "Reaching the final again in Mumbai feels really special for me. I've had some tough matches this week but my goal in the tournament was to stay calm and enjoy my tennis. Lilli is an amazing talent and I am looking forward to play her in the Final."

Standing in her way is 17-year-old Lilli Tagger, who has been one of the standout performers of the tournament. The



Austrian teenager stole the spotlight by defeating the 2024 champion Darja Semenistaja en route to the final and has dropped just one set across her campaign. Her strong presence on the court and lethal cross-court shots have made her a fan favourite.

Ahead of the big match, Lilli Tagger said, "I am really thrilled to play the final. Mananchaya is an incredible player and definitely not an easy opponent so it will be a tough and exciting match. I love playing in front of the Indian crowd, the energy here is amazing,

and I'm looking forward to giving my best to fight for the title."

Later in the day, fans will also witness the women's doubles final, where last season's Doubles champion Elena Pridanika alongwith her partner Polina Iatcenko return to defend her title.

The pair will face the duo of Mananchaya Sawangkaew and Argentina's Nicole Fossa Huergo, setting up a demanding double-header for the Thai star, who will contest for both the Singles and Doubles finals.

Shikhar Dhawan announced brand ambassador of Delhi Khel Mahakumbh

NEW DELHI : Former India cricketer and Arjuna awardee Shikhar Dhawan has been appointed as the brand ambassador of the inaugural Delhi Khel Mahakumbh, an initiative of the Directorate of Education and Sports, Government of NCT of Delhi.

The visionary event is aimed at strengthening grassroots sports participation and talent identification across the capital.

The inaugural edition of the Delhi Khel Mahakumbh will be held from February 13 across 16 venues in the capital, with participation from thousands of young athletes competing in basketball, football, athletics, kabaddi, wrestling, squash, and volleyball, with representation from all 12 districts of Delhi.

The Delhi Khel Mahakumbh has been conceived as a large-scale multi-sport platform that brings together school and community-level athletes, offering them structured opportunities to compete, gain exposure, and take the first steps towards professional sporting pathways.

The initiative underscores the Government of Delhi's commitment in promoting sport as an integral pillar of youth development and education.

Ashish Sood, Minister of Education and Sports, Government of Delhi said, "The Delhi Khel Mahakumbh is envisioned as a transformative platform for talent and sports development. Shikhar Dhawan's association as Brand Ambassador brings immense credibility and inspiration to the initiative, and integrates perfectly with our objective of grassroots development, encouraging widespread participation and identifying future sporting talent."

Shikhar Dhawan said, "I feel extremely grateful and would like to thank the Government of Delhi and the Directorate of Education and Sports for this honour. The



Delhi Khel Mahakumbh is a commendable step towards the growth of the sport in the region which is brimming with talent and seeking the right opportunity and exposure. As a professional athlete myself, I understand the importance of getting a platform to showcase your talent and through my venture Da One Sports, I have been strongly committed towards creating a pathway and ecosystem for youngsters to achieve their dreams. Delhi has a rich legacy in Indian sports and I hope that through this association I am able to inspire budding talent to believe in themselves and participate, contributing towards our vision of making Delhi sports capital of the country."

