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BRIEF NEWS

Five Dead as Truck Hits Pick-Up Van in Jharkhand's Hazaribag

Ranchi: At least five people died, and 14 were injured after a truck rammed a stationary pick-up van in Jharkhand's Hazaribag district on Monday, police said. The pick-up van was carrying 19 people from Giridih to Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, an official said. According to police, the vehicle had made a pit-stop at Mahanetand near Danua valley around 10.30 am when a truck hit it from behind, killing five people on the spot. Chouparan police station in-charge Pankaj Kumar said the 14 injured people have been admitted to Hazaribag and Barhi hospitals, and three of them were in a critical state.

19 Indian Seafarers Stranded In Yemen Evacuated

New Delhi: Nineteen Indian seafarers stranded in Yemen's Hodeidah and Sana'a for the past two weeks have been evacuated, with all of them safe and on their way back to their country, the Indian Embassy in Yemen said late Sunday. "All seafarers are safe, in good health, and on their way back to India. The Embassy sincerely thanks all concerned for their valuable cooperation and continued support in facilitating the safe evacuation of our Indian nationals," the mission said in a post on X. The evacuation comes days after India said 14 Indian nationals aboard a yacht involved in an incident off the Yemeni coast were safe. It is not immediately clear whether the 14 are among the 19 seafarers evacuated. On October 23, the Indian mission had said all 14 Indian nationals aboard a yacht near Hodeidah were safe and that it was in contact with relevant parties to establish the circumstances surrounding the incident. Some Arab media outlets had earlier quoted spokesperson Yahya Saree of the Yemen-based Houthi group as claiming that Saudi forces targeted the Indian yacht near Yuqar Island in the Red Sea, close to the Yemeni coast. Saree had said the yacht was carrying 14 Indian nationals and that Houthi forces were rescuing them.

Pak TV Anchor Rabia Ahsan Shot Dead at Home

Rawalpindi: Pakistani television anchor and programme host Rabia Ahsan was found shot dead at her residence in Rawalpindi's Gulshanabad area on Sunday. Her husband, Ahsan Tahir Khan, has confessed to the killing during initial police questioning, according to a report by Pakistan-based media outlet Samaa. Khan was taken into custody after the incident came to light. Senior police officers visited the couple's residence along with forensic experts to inspect the crime scene. Teams from the Punjab Forensic Science Agency (PFSA) collected evidence, while Ahsan's body was shifted to a hospital for a post-mortem examination.

CM Defends Raiganj Encounter, Warns Rapists and Criminals of Similar Action



AGENCY

Kolkata: West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari on Monday defended the police encounter in which a rape and murder accused, Dilip Roy, was killed in Raiganj. The Chief Minister asserted that law enforcement agencies have been given a free hand to deal with those involved in heinous crimes against women.

Dilip Roy was accused of raping and killing a 12-year-old girl on the intervening night of Sunday and Monday at Raiganj in North Dinajpur district of West Bengal.

CM Adhikari also cautioned that in the future too, criminals involved in such heinous crimes against women will meet a similar fate.

"The cops are provided with firearms not just to keep them as a showpiece or to keep them in their pockets. Drug mafias, rapists, and infiltrators have no place in this state," the Chief Minister said while interacting with the media persons on Monday afternoon at the sidelines of a programme at Digha in his native district of East Midnapore.

He also indirectly attacked those who are raising their voices against such encounters.

"Some people are continuing with such activities. Among them are 'Dimagi Naxals', 'Jamaatis' and 'Communists'. There are cockroaches and bedbugs. Our nationalists have to be careful about them. The police have been given free hand to tackle rapists & murderers, drug smugglers and infiltrators. We are maintaining a zero-tolerance approach in such cases," the Chief Minister said.

Meanwhile, the North Dinajpur District Police claimed that the accused killed in the encounter have a history of crime against women. "Earlier, he was accused twice of sexual offenses. However, he managed to escape arrest and punishment on both occasions for some reasons," said a district police officer.

According to him, three years back, Roy was accused of sexual harassment at Kamtabari-2 Gram Panchayat area in the North Dinajpur district. A couple of years ago, there were similar allegations against him in the Sialmani area in the same district.

"On both these occasions, the matter was settled at a local Kangaroo Court, and the complaint did not reach the police level," the district police officer said.

This is the fourth encounter killing in West Bengal since July this year, three of which are related to minors' rape & murder cases.

First, in July, Prabhas Mondal, accused of raping and murdering a six-year-old girl in Baruipur in South 24 Parganas, was shot dead by the police in an encounter. The police claimed that he was taken to the crime scene to reconstruct the crime. From there, he snatched the police gun and opened fire. The police resorted to counter-firing in self-defence, killing the accused.

After that, in October, Prahlad Das, accused in the rape & murder of a 17-year-old girl at Gaighata in South 24 Parganas district, was killed in a similar encounter following retaliatory firing by the police. In this case too, it was alleged that the accused tried to escape while reenacting the incident.

On the same day, Samiul Sheikh, who was arrested for murdering a BJP worker in Samserganj in Murshidabad district, was killed in an encounter. The Raiganj incident is the fourth on the list of encounters since July.

China Calls Spying Allegations Smear as NVIDIA CEO's Affair Scandal Escalates



AGENCY

New Delhi: China on Monday rejected allegations that a woman linked to Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang was working for Chinese intelligence, dismissing claims of an attempt to ensnare the billionaire tech executive as "completely groundless" and a smear campaign against Beijing.The denial came after Huang acknowledged to Nvidia's board that he had been intimate with a business executive whom US intelligence agencies determined was gathering information for Beijing, according to a report by The New York Times. "The so-called Chinese spy allegation is unsubstantiated. It is nothing but smears against China," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said on Monday.

The controversy comes as Huang faces scrutiny over his relationship with the woman and Nvidia's business dealings with China, particularly the sale of advanced artificial intelligence chips despite US restrictions aimed at limiting Beijing's access to cutting-edge technology.

- **China Denies Spying Allegations-** Beijing had previously rejected a New York Times report alleging that Huang had developed a close relationship with a Chinese citizen named Alice Huang. According to the report, Alice Huang ran a company that faced allegations of smuggling advanced computer chips into China and was suspected of working as a spy for Beijing. The report raised questions about whether the Nvidia chief executive's personal relationship could have exposed sensitive information to Chinese intelligence. However, George Chen, a partner and chair of digital practice at Washington-based consultancy The Asia Group, cautioned against drawing conclusions without evidence. "The key questions are whether he was aware of any espionage activities and whether any confidential or strategically sensitive information was compromised," Chen said in a text message to reporters. "Those questions require evidence rather than speculation," he added.
- **NVIDIA's China Chip Sales Under Scrutiny-** The controversy has also brought renewed attention to Huang's efforts to secure greater access to the Chinese market for Nvidia's advanced chips, despite restrictions imposed by Washington. Huang had lobbied US President Donald Trump in recent years to ease restrictions on chip sales to China. His efforts resulted in Trump allowing Nvidia to sell its H200 chips to China this year. However, it remains uncertain whether Beijing will permit Chinese companies to purchase the chips in large quantities. Nvidia said earlier this year, in a filing in August, that it had sold only a small number of chips to China, as sales were restricted by the Chinese government. Although the H200 chips are not Nvidia's most advanced models, they remain powerful computing processors. Before this, Huang had also pushed for permission to sell the less-advanced H20 chips, which were specifically designed for the Chinese market to comply with US export restrictions. Nvidia's business in China has remained a sensitive issue amid Washington's efforts to restrict Beijing's access to advanced semiconductor technology and artificial intelligence capabilities.



Punjab Fields Set Ablaze on Diwali: Delhi Govt Alleges Conspiracy in AQI Disaster

SP BUREAU

New Delhi: Delhi minister Kapil Mishra on Monday alleged that Punjab's fields were being deliberately set on fire as part of a conspiracy against Delhi, hours after AAP leader Saurabh Bhardwaj accused the BJP-led government of manipulating air quality data on Diwali night.

Bhardwaj claimed that AQI readings had crossed 3,000 in several parts of Delhi on Diwali night and that official figures understated the pollution.

Mishra countered with allegations that people associated with Arvind Kejriwal had set fields ablaze and demanded an investigation into AAP leaders' alleged role.

Mishra said farmers in Punjab had called him and other Delhi government representatives to complain that fields were being set on fire at night.

He claimed satellite data showed 125 farm-fire incidents on November 7, with the number rising to 1,200 on Diwali night.

"This is a conspiracy against farmers and the people of Delhi," he alleged.

Mishra urged the Punjab Chief Minister to investigate. He claimed fires were occurring in areas visited by AAP leaders from Delhi and demanded that their phone records be examined.

"A campaign to malign Diwali began two days earlier," he said.

Punjab Records Season's Biggest Daily Farm-Fire Count

Punjab recorded 1,152 farm fires on November 8, its highest single-day count this season, taking the cumulative tally to 4,459. The figures do not establish Mishra's allegation that the fires were deliberately set by people linked to AAP. The spike came despite around 91 per cent of the state's paddy area having been harvested. According to data compiled under the Indian Space Research Organisation protocol, 2,998 fields linked to reported incidents had been inspected, with stubble burning physically verified at 1,317 sites. Tarn Taran accounted for 684 reported incidents, of which 306 were verified as stubble-burning cases. It also recorded the highest number of FIRs and the highest environmental compensation recovery.

AAP Questions Delhi's Pollution Readings

While Mishra blamed farm fires in Punjab, Bhardwaj questioned whether Delhi's official pollution readings reflected conditions on the ground. Citing independent monitoring platforms, he claimed AQI had crossed 3,000 in several locations. "AQI 3000 paar. Full credit to these brothers who raised pollution beyond 3000," he wrote on X. In two videos, Bhardwaj alleged that around 20 new monitoring stations had been installed in distant, relatively green areas. He also claimed water was being sprayed near existing stations in more polluted locations to lower their readings. India's official AQI scale runs from 0 to 500. Pollutant concentrations displayed by monitors are different from AQI values and cannot be used interchangeably. The basis for Bhardwaj's claim of readings above 3,000 was not clear.

Hasina Seeks New Passport, Takes First Step Towards Bangladesh Return

AGENCY

New Delhi: Ousted Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has sought a fresh passport and national identity card, taking a significant step towards her planned return from India in December. The development comes even as Bangladesh's State Minister for Foreign Affairs Humaiun Kobir insisted that Hasina should be extradited rather than issued travel documents."We want Hasina to be handed over. She will be handed over. She is a terrorist. She is a fugitive. There is an active extradition treaty between Bangladesh and India," Kobir told reporters, according to Bangladeshi news website The Daily Star. Dismissing the need for a passport, he said her return should be pursued through the existing extradition mechanism.



Reuters reported on Monday that Hasina's lawyers had written to Bangladesh's embassy in New Delhi seeking fresh travel and identity documents. The news agency accessed the letter, which marks Hasina's first such communication since she fled Bangladesh in August 2024 following a deadly student-led uprising that ended her 20-year rule. The letter, sent by her lawyers at London-based Matrix Chambers to Preeti Rahman, acting high commissioner at Bangladesh's embassy in Delhi, requested that fresh documents be issued on the basis of Hasina's Bangladeshi nationality.

"In view of the reported revocation of her existing Bangladeshi passport and National Identity Card (NID) by the Interim Government and other authorities, I respectfully request that you take the necessary steps to issue a new Bangladeshi passport and National Identity Card for our client," the letter said.

Why Does Hasina Wants to Return to Bangladesh?

Hasina fled to India in August 2024 after weeks of student-led protests against her government escalated into a nationwide uprising, eventually bringing her more than 20-year rule to an end.

Her proposed return comes amid serious legal challenges. Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal sentenced her to death in November 2025 in absentia for crimes against humanity over her government's deadly crackdown on protesters during the uprising.

Hasina has denied the charges from exile. She has said she plans to surrender before a court upon returning to Bangladesh.

Her Awami League, which was the country's largest political party during her rule, has also been banned following her ouster. Several of its leaders and supporters have been arrested, while others have gone into exile in India and elsewhere.

Bangladesh Wants Hasina Extradited

Dhaka has maintained that Hasina should be returned through the extradition mechanism rather than being issued fresh travel documents. New Delhi has earlier said it is examining Dhaka's request to extradite Hasina. Minister Kobir questioned why a passport would be necessary for someone sought by Bangladesh under an existing extradition arrangement. "Is she coming to visit her in-laws' home in Rangpur that we need to give her a passport? You do not need a passport to arrest terrorists and criminals. This is a matter of handover, and a judicial process is in place," he said, according to The Daily Star. He added that Bangladesh would continue pursuing her return through established legal and diplomatic channels.

India-Bangladesh Ties in Focus

Hasina's presence in India has been a major source of friction between New Delhi and Dhaka since her government was toppled in 2024. Bangladesh's repeated requests for her extradition have added to tensions between the two neighbours. A possible return could deepen political divisions within Bangladesh, where sections of the population continue to support Hasina, while her opponents demand accountability for the crackdown on protesters. At the same time, resolving the issue could potentially ease tensions between New Delhi and Dhaka, whose ties deteriorated sharply after India provided Hasina refuge. For now, Hasina's passport application has added a fresh dimension to the diplomatic standoff, with her lawyers seeking to facilitate her return while Dhaka continues to press for her extradition.

Joint Public Grievance Hearing Held in Lakhanpur; 36 Complaints Registered, Rs 25,000 Assistance Provided from Red Cross Fund



RAJ KUMAR SHARMA ■ Jharsuguda

A joint public grievance hearing camp was organised by the district administration at the Lakhanpur Block headquarters on Monday. Jharsuguda Collector Kunal Chavan and Superintendent of Police Sonali Singh Parmar attended the camp and heard various grievances and complaints raised by the public.

The Collector issued strict instructions to the concerned departmental officials to resolve people's basic problems promptly and within stipulated timelines.

A total of 36 grievances were registered during the camp, including 27 individual complaints and nine collective petitions. The complaints mainly pertained to road construction, land disputes, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, correction of Record of Rights (RoR) or land records, street lighting facilities and local employment-related issues.

Additionally, three applicants seeking medical assistance were provided immediate financial assistance amounting to Rs 25,000 in total from the Red Cross Fund.

Chief Development Officer-cum-Executive Officer of the Zilla Parishad Biswaranjan Nayak, Sub-Collector Sabyasachi Panda, Lakhanpur Block Development Officer Binay Patel, the Lakhanpur Tehsildar and other district and block-level officials were present at the camp. They listened to people's grievances and took necessary steps towards their resolution.

Shakyamuni Buddha's relics enshrined at Arunachal monastery for public darshan

■ AGENCY

Itanagar : The Sacred Relics of Shakyamuni Buddha arrived at Thubchog Gatsel Ling (TGL) Monastery (Lower Gompa), Bomdila, Arunachal Pradesh, and were enshrined at the monastery for public darshan, said an official of the Ministry of Culture on Monday.

The Sacred Relics, which arrived on Sunday, will be available for public darshan till November 13, said the official.

The exposition is being organised by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, in collaboration with the National Museum New Delhi, Government of Arunachal Pradesh and the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC), New Delhi, the official said in a statement.

The first day of the public exposition on Sunday witnessed an encouraging response, with around 4,000 devotees visiting the monastery to have darshan of the Sacred Relics, it said.

Buddhist monks, dignitaries, senior citizens and persons with



disabilities also offered prayers and paid their respects. From Monday to November 13, devotees from Bomdila constituency and neighbouring constituencies are scheduled to visit the monastery to offer prayers and seek blessings, the statement said.

The Sacred Relics were transported from Tawang to Bomdila aboard an Indian Air Force Chinook helicopter, accompanied by Bhikkhu Khemachara, Deputy Secretary General (DSG), IBC and officials from the Ministry of Culture, National Museum, New Delhi, and IBC, it said.

At the Army Helipad, Rupa, the Sacred Relics were received with due protocol by Pasang Dorjee Sona, Minister for Education, Tourism, Rural Works Department (RWD) and Public Libraries, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, it said.

A Guard of Honour was presented at the helipad. Thereafter, the Sacred Relics proceeded towards Bomdila, with a brief ceremonial halt at Upper Gompa before being taken to Thubchog Gatsel Ling Monastery (Lower Gompa) for enshrinement, said the statement.

Following the enshrinement, two special exhibitions were inaugurated at the monastery by Chief Guest Pasang Dorjee Sona, Minister for Education, Tourism and Rural Works Department, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, in the presence of Padma Shri the 12th Guru Trulku Rinpoche, the statement said.

The exhibitions, organised by the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC) and the National Museum, New Delhi, showcase the historical, spiritual and cultural heritage associated with Buddhism and the Sacred Relics, it said.

Srinagar ED attaches 11 properties worth Rs 10 crore in central job scheme fraud

■ AGENCY

Srinagar : The ED attached 11 properties, including buildings and plots, worth Rs 10.63 crore in Srinagar and Bandipora districts of Kashmir in connection with a case of alleged wrongdoings in a Central-government funded employment generation programme, an official said on Monday.

The Directorate of Enforcement (ED), Srinagar Zonal Office, has provisionally attached immovable properties under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in the case linked to the misuse of the Prime Minister Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), the official said in the statement.

The assets attached by the ED were in the possession of suppliers-cum-brokers and officials of J&K Bank allegedly involved in misusing PMEGP, a central-sector credit-linked subsidy scheme, said the statement.



The ED investigation was initiated on the basis of two FIRs of ACB, CBI, Srinagar alleging misappropriation of PMEGP Scheme's loans in criminal conspiracy with borrowers, bank officials of Sumbal Branch and Gamud Gadkhud Branch of J&K Bank and other unknown persons.

The FIRs said the accused cheated the bank and misappropriated funds and caused wrongful loss to the bank and corresponding wrongful gain to themselves, said the statement.

Investigation revealed PMEGP loans were availed by projecting dummy borrowers, using fake invoices of non-exist firm/companies and in criminal conspiracy with bank officials, branches Sumbal and Gamud Gadkhud of J&K Bank by private persons-cum-brokers. The CBI, ACB also registered a fresh FIR in the matter in June 2026.

During investigation under PMLA, a survey conducted at the Sumbal and Gamud Gadkhud Branches of J&K Bank, under section 16 of the PMLA, revealed 270 term loan accounts along with 270 working capital accounts pertaining to the two branches of the bank in respect of the PMEGP scheme had turned NPA.



Seven-year-old boy killed in house fire in Kataka, grandfather critical

■ AGENCY

Bhubaneswar :A seven-year-old boy died while his elderly grandfather sustained critical injuries in a fire mishap in a three-storey building in the Dargha Bazar police station area of Kataka city on Monday, officials said.

The minor deceased was identified as Biraj Bajuria, a resident of Hathipokhari, near the Netaji Subash Bose birthplace, under Dargha Bazar police limits.

"All the family members were sleeping, while I was alone engaged in sweeping the rooftop when the incident took place early this morning (Monday) due to a short circuit. My grandson is no more," a bereaved family member told the media. On being informed about the fire on the second floor of a three-storeyed building, Fire Services personnel rushed to the spot with fire tenders and brought the blaze under control.

"A total of three persons were successfully rescued from the fire and shifted to SCB Medical College and Hospital for treatment. Three teams from the Kataka, Chouliaganj and Bidanasi Fire Stations jointly carried out the firefighting operation. And extinguished the blaze completely," the fire services department said in a statement.

The minor was declared dead at the SCB medical facility, while his grandfather is said to be in critical condition. The minor boy reportedly died due to suffocation. Although the exact cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained, a short circuit in the decorative lights installed for Diwali is suspected to have triggered the blaze.

The fire escalated further after three cooking gas cylinders kept inside the house exploded due to the blaze. Fire incidents were also reported from various other parts of the state, with minor to serious injuries during Diwali celebrations across Odisha on Sunday.



94 fire incidents reported in Pune during Diwali Laxmi pujan; Mumbai records 142 blazes, 137 linked to firecrackers

■ AGENCY

Mumbai : Fire services in Pune and Mumbai were stretched during Diwali celebrations, with the two cities reporting a large number of fire incidents. Pune recorded 94 fires during Laxmipujan, while Mumbai reported 142 blazes during Diwali, of which 137 were attributed to firecrackers, according to the respective fire department figures.

In Pune, fires were reported from several areas, including Satara Road, Mangalwar Peth and Range Hills, keeping fire brigade teams occupied during the festive period. A major fire broke out at a printing shop on Satara Road, while a godown caught fire in Mangalwar Peth. In Range Hills, a fire was reported in a residential flat, prompting a response from fire tenders and police personnel.

Residents suspected that firecrackers used during Diwali celebrations may have triggered several of the incidents. However, the causes of individual fires have not been officially established. Fire brigade personnel brought all the reported fires under control, and no major casualties were reported.

The number of fire incidents reported in Pune has fluctuated over the past six years. According to the fire department's data, the city recorded 21 incidents in 2021, 19 in 2022, 35 in 2023, 60 in 2024 and 43 in 2025. The figure rose sharply to 94 in 2026.

Meanwhile, Mumbai recorded 142 fire incidents across different parts of the city during Diwali. According to the Mumbai Fire Brigade, 137 of these incidents were caused by firecrackers. No injuries were reported in any of the incidents, providing some relief amid the large number of fire calls received during the celebrations.

High-Level Probe Ordered into Theft of Railway Track Fittings

● 157 Pandrol Clips and Fish Plates Stolen Between Dhutra and Bagdihi Railway Station

RAJ KUMAR SHARMA ■ Jharsuguda

A major theft has been reported on the Howrah–Mumbai railway route between Dhutra and Bagdihi railway stations ahead of Diwali. Miscreants allegedly removed Pandrol clips and fish plates from more than one kilometre of railway track on Friday night, raising serious concerns over railway security.

The incident has posed a major challenge for the Railway Protection Force (RPF). As the Chakradharpur RPF Commandant was on leave, the Senior Commandant stationed at Ranchi visited the spot and initiated an investigation. A high-level probe has been launched into the theft.

According to sources, the theft took place near railway kilometre 497/2–8 between Bagdihi and Dhutra, where miscreants allegedly removed 157 Pandrol clips and fish plates from the third railway line over a stretch of nearly one kilometre. These fittings play a crucial role in holding railway tracks firmly in position and ensuring the safe movement of trains. Their theft has raised serious questions about the effectiveness of railway security arrangements in the section.

The incident has also brought the functioning of Jharsuguda RPF in-charge Yogendra Kumar under scrutiny. The audacity of the miscreants in removing essential railway fittings on such a large scale has raised concerns over security surveillance in the area. Following the incident, a team of RPF officials, including the Senior Commandant from Ranchi, visited the site on Saturday and began an investigation. Meanwhile, suspicions are being raised in various quarters about the possible involvement of a scrap mafia in the theft.

Power purchase without tender raises questions: Kerala BJP MLA Muraleedharan

■ AGENCY

Thiruvananthapuram : BJP MLA V. Muraleedharan on Monday questioned the V.D. Satheesan government's decision to purchase electricity through a private power platform without inviting tenders.

He alleged that the move raised serious doubts about the government's intentions and demanded a public explanation from Satheesan. He questioned how the government could decide to purchase electricity from a private company without inviting tenders.

He also wanted to know whether other companies had approached the government with offers to supply power and what criteria were adopted to select a particular company.

Muraleedharan said media reports suggested that Electricity Minister Sunny Joseph and former KSEB chairman Rajamanickam favoured purchasing electricity from the Congress-ruled Himachal Pradesh government rather than through a private company.

"If the state had the option of purchasing power from Himachal Pradesh, why was an agreement with that state government not pursued? What is the interest behind choosing a private company?" he asked.



He demanded that Satheesan disclose details of his discussions with the Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister and explain why the proposed arrangement with the state was not taken forward.

The BJP leader also pointed out that the power supply arrangement through GNA would cover only the period from November 2026 to March 2027.

The private company would not supply electricity during April and May 2027, when the state's power demand could remain high. "If Himachal Pradesh was willing to supply electricity until May, why was that option dropped? The government must explain this," he said.

Muraleedharan said a comparison of the overall costs indicated that purchasing electricity from Himachal Pradesh would be more economical than the arrangement with a private company.

He wanted the government to disclose the financial implications of both options and explain the basis on which the private platform was selected.

He also questioned the silence of Sunny Joseph over the controversy. The Minister's silence was equally suspicious, he alleged.

"How can a minister continue in office when he has no role in decisions taken by his own department?" Muraleedharan asked.

Kali Puja Fireworks Push Kolkata's Air Quality to Hazardous Levels

■ SPNN

Kolkata : Heavy fireworks during Kali Puja, in violation of government restrictions and guidelines, pushed air pollution levels in Kolkata to hazardous levels, with the Air Quality Index (AQI) crossing 600 in several localities. Shortly after midnight, a thick blanket of smog covered large parts of the city, raising concerns over the health risks posed by the deteriorating air quality. However, despite the alarming pollution levels, Kolkata did not figure among the country's ten most polluted cities.

According to data from the West Bengal Pollution Control Board, Kolkata recorded an average AQI of 437 at 2 am, placing the city in the hazardous category. The concentration of fine particulate matter, particularly harmful PM2.5, stood at 293 micrograms per cubic metre, while PM10 levels reached 354 micrograms per cubic metre.



North Kolkata witnessed some of the worst pollution levels following the fireworks. In Kankurgachi, the AQI climbed to an alarming 610. Other localities also recorded severely deteriorated air quality, with Maniktala registering 538, Beniapukur 528, Lebutala 491, Cossipore 490 and Taltala 469.

The situation was equally concerning in the neighbouring Bidhannagar area, including Salt Lake. The EE Block in Salt Lake recorded an AQI of 662, while the DJ Block registered 557. The overall Bidhannagar Municipal Corporation area recorded an index of 490, indicating the widespread impact of the celebrations on air quality.

Several central Kolkata locations also reported high pollution levels. The AQI near the Fort William complex stood at 484, while Elgin Road and Hastings recorded 462 each. The Maidan area registered an index of 461, reflecting the deteriorating conditions across the city.

South Kolkata was also affected by the pollution surge. Chakraberia recorded an AQI of 478, followed by Ballygunge at 474 and Lake Terrace at 446. Bhawanipur registered 432, Chetla 425, Dhakuria 397 and South City 362. The figures indicated that the impact of fireworks was not confined to a particular part of the metropolis but extended across several residential and commercial neighbourhoods. The situation was also serious in adjoining districts. In Howrah, the maximum PM2.5 level in Ghusuri reached 500, while Belur recorded 453. In North 24 Parganas, the area around Rabindra Bharati University registered an AQI of 474.

Environmental experts have expressed concern over the recurring deterioration in air quality during festive celebrations and called for long-term measures to address the problem. Prominent environmentalist and green technologist Somendra Mohan Ghosh stressed that stricter action was needed to reduce emissions from vehicles and roadside activities.

Ghosh called for a complete ban on petrol and diesel vehicles that are more than 15 years old, arguing that such vehicles are major sources of PM2.5, PM10 and black carbon emissions.

From Kuber Puja Stage, Minister Bhaskar Bhattacharya Sends Strong Political Message: "Old Era Is Over



Manashi Ghosh ■

Hooghly: What was meant to be a religious ceremony turned into a stage for a sharp political message.

Addressing a gathering at Eclat Swimming Club in Sreerampore, Minister of State for Labour and Sreerampore MLA Bhaskar Bhattacharya said — "Let the old and decayed wash away, we are moving forward in our own way with new governments. We have left behind all the talk of the old government and have moved ahead."

The remark instantly turned the devotional event into a topic of heated political discussion.

First Permanent Idol of Lord Kuber in Bengal:

For the first time in West Bengal, a permanent idol of Lord Kuber — the god of wealth and prosperity — was installed by the Eclat Swimming Club. The third year of the Puja was marked with special prayers and rituals.

The initiative was made possible due to the efforts of the club's joint secretaries, Kaushik Chattopadhyay and Sukhen Karmakar.

In his address, the minister said instead of praying for personal wealth, he prayed for collective development and progress of society.

But it was his comment about leaving the old regime behind that stole the limelight. Political observers believe the statement from a religious stage was no coincidence.

Driver Found Dead Inside Container Truck in Rajbandh

■ SPNN

Durgapur : A truck driver was found dead inside a container parked along the national highway at Rajbandh in Kanksa, Paschim Bardhaman district, on Monday afternoon. The discovery triggered concern in the area, prompting police and traffic personnel to rush to the spot.



According to sources, the container had remained parked at the same location for a considerable period, raising suspicion among local residents. They subsequently informed Kanksa police station about the stationary vehicle.

Acting on the information, a police team led by Kanksa police station Inspector-in-Charge Sandeep Das and Kanksa Traffic Guard Officer-in-Charge MD Ashraful Islam reached the spot along with other police and traffic personnel. The officers opened the cabin of the container and found the driver sitting unconscious in his seat.

He was immediately taken to a nearby hospital for medical attention. However, doctors declared him dead on arrival. The body was subsequently sent for post-mortem examination to determine the circumstances surrounding his death.

According to police sources, the container was travelling from Haryana towards Kolkata. It had reportedly been parked along the national highway since Monday morning. The reason for the vehicle remaining stationary for several hours has not yet been established.

The identity of the deceased driver is yet to be confirmed. Police, however, used the contact number written on the container to get in touch with the vehicle owner and inform him about the incident. The container has been taken into police custody as part of the investigation.

Police are trying to establish how and when the driver died. At present, the circumstances leading to his death remain unclear. The post-mortem examination is expected to provide further information, while investigators are also gathering details about the vehicle's journey and its movements before it was found parked at Rajbandh.

Fire Destroys Goods Worth Lakhs at Decorators' Warehouse

■ SPNN

Durgapur: A major fire broke out at a decorators' warehouse in the Gurudwara area of Benachity in Durgapur, Paschim Bardhaman district, on Monday morning, destroying decorative materials worth lakhs of rupees. No casualties have been reported in the incident.



According to local sources, the fire was noticed on Monday morning when towering flames and thick clouds of smoke began rising from the warehouse. The sight triggered panic in the neighbourhood, with residents rushing to alert the fire department.

Two fire engines were dispatched to the spot after the department received information about the blaze. Firefighters launched an operation to bring the flames under control and worked hard to prevent the fire from spreading further. The firefighting operation continued for some time before efforts were made to contain the blaze.

The warehouse stored a large quantity of decorative materials used for weddings and other social functions. These included items commonly used for venue decoration during ceremonies and celebrations. The presence of such materials is believed to have contributed to the rapid spread of the fire, resulting in extensive damage to the stock kept inside the premises.

The incident has caused concern among those associated with the decorators' business, as a substantial quantity of materials was reportedly destroyed. However, the exact extent of the financial loss has not yet been officially assessed.

The cause of the fire remains unknown. A short circuit is among the possible reasons being examined, although no definite conclusion has been reached. The relevant authorities are looking into the circumstances that led to the outbreak.

No injuries or deaths have been reported so far. An official assessment of the damage is awaited, while further details about the cause of the fire are expected after the investigation.

Firing at Municipal Officer's House in Rishra

Debasis Ghos ■

Hooghly: On Diwali night, miscreants allegedly fired at the house of municipal nodal officer Asitabh Ganguly in Nabin Pally, Ward No. 22.

Ganguly alleged that youths came to his house late at night, abused and vandalised it. When he came out to the balcony, they fired a shot targeting him. He escaped unhurt.

He suspects the attack was over suspicion that he had tipped off police about a liquor and gambling den raided before Kali Puja. Ganguly denies having any knowledge of the raid.

Police detained Babai Aich of Padmapukur Para and Sanjiv Sikdar of Subhash Nagar on Monday morning for questioning. Both are alleged to run a betting den. Police are investigating.

Ganguly, who is unwell, will lodge a written complaint at Rishra police station after recovering. He has informed the CM, local MLA-minister and police administration.

He said the municipality's campaign against food adulteration, banned plastic and anti-social activities will continue.

Bandhna Festival Celebrated With Traditional Fervour Across Jangalmahal

■ SPNN

Jhargram : The traditional Bandhna festival, celebrating folk culture, agricultural heritage and gratitude towards nature, is being observed with enthusiasm across Jangalmahal in West Bengal, as well as in parts of Jharkhand and Odisha. Rural areas of Purulia, Bankura, Paschim Medinipur and Jhargram districts are witnessing special celebrations. On the occasion, West Bengal Chief Minister Shubhendu Adhikari extended greetings to tribal and indigenous communities through a message on X, wishing them joy and prosperity.

In his message, the Chief Minister said, "Johar to all my tribal and indigenous brothers and sisters on the occasion of Bandna Parab." The traditional greeting reflected the cultural significance of the festival among communities that have preserved its customs and rituals over generations.

Bandhna is regarded as an important celebration of the centuries-old folk heritage of Jangalmahal and its agriculture-based rural life. Apart from West Bengal and Jharkhand, communities in the adjoining regions of Odisha also celebrate the festival with traditional enthusiasm. It holds a special cultural place among several communities, including Kurmi, Bauri, Rajwar, Santhal, Napit, Kuiry, Bagal, Kumhar, Goala, Bhumij, Lodha, Bagdi and Munda.

Fire Destroys Banskatia Community Hall in Salanpur

■ SPNN

Asansol : A major fire broke out at the Banskatia Community Hall in Salanpur block on Monday morning, severely damaging the building and destroying several items stored inside. The incident occurred amid the festive atmosphere of Kali Puja, leaving local residents concerned over the loss of an important public facility that served as a centre for social programmes, meetings and community gatherings. According to local sources, residents noticed flames and thick smoke coming from inside the community hall early on Monday. They immediately informed Shankarshankar Ruj, a local youth, who joined other residents in attempting to extinguish the fire. However, the flames spread rapidly, making it difficult for them to bring the situation under control. The fire brigade was subsequently alerted. A fire engine from Asansol reached the spot nearly an hour after receiving the information. Firefighters struggled for some time before managing to bring the blaze under control. Another fire engine was also dispatched from the Chittaranjan Locomotive Works (CLW) to assist in the firefighting operation. The fire caused extensive damage to the community hall, which had been an important venue for various social and public activities in the area. Local residents said the facility was not merely a place for organising gatherings but had also contributed to the social and economic development of the locality. The hall regularly hosted training programmes aimed at helping women become financially independent. These initiatives were organised with the support of Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) and included beautician courses and other skill-development activities. The programmes provided opportunities for women in the area to acquire practical skills and improve their prospects of earning a livelihood.

Several essential items kept inside the building, including tarpaulins, were reduced to ashes in the fire. The intense heat also caused considerable damage to the permanent roof of the hall's verandah.

The extent of the destruction has raised concerns among residents, who fear that the loss of the facility could disrupt community activities and training programmes that depended on the venue.

The incident has triggered concern and anger among local people, who regard the community hall as an important shared asset.

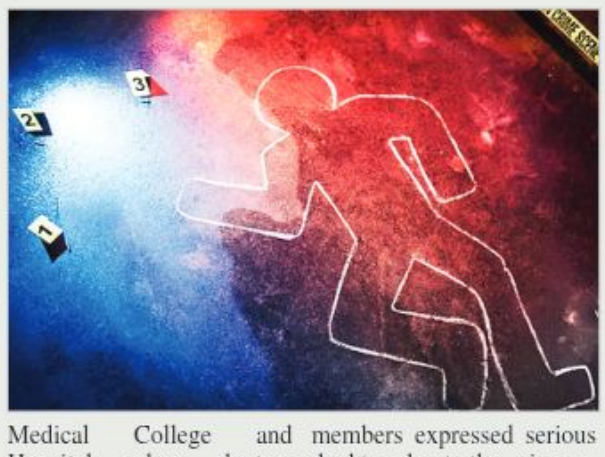
Junior Doctor Found Hanging in Kolkata Hostel, Family Alleges Murder

■ SPNN

Kolkata : The body of a 28-year-old junior doctor was found hanging inside a hostel room in Nagerbazar, a northern suburb of Kolkata, prompting police to launch an investigation. The deceased, identified as Abhijit Sarkar, was working as a house staff member at the state-run Nil Ratan Sircar (NRS) Medical College and Hospital in Sealdah, central Kolkata. His family has rejected the suspected suicide theory and alleged that he was either murdered or forced to take his own life.

According to information available, Sarkar hailed from Sapjhala in Majhergram, Nadia district, West Bengal. He completed his MBBS from NRS Medical College in 2018 and was staying at a hostel in the Nagerbazar area in connection with his professional work.

The incident came to light on Sunday evening when the hostel authorities reportedly contacted his family at around 4 pm and informed them that he had died by suicide. They were told that his body had been found hanging inside his room. He was subsequently rushed to the nearby state-run RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.



Speaking to the media on Monday morning, family members expressed serious doubts about the circumstances surrounding his death. They claimed that Sarkar had shared several cryptic posts on social media over the past few days. The nature of these posts had made the family suspect that he was experiencing considerable mental distress and a sense of insecurity.

However, they said they were unaware of the exact reason behind his apparent anxiety or what might have been troubling him. The family maintained that Sarkar would not have taken such an extreme step and questioned the initial suspicion of suicide.

His relatives have alleged that the young doctor may have been killed or that someone might have pressured or instigated him into taking his own life. They have demanded a thorough investigation to establish what happened inside the hostel room and whether anyone was responsible for his death.

The family members have approached Nagerbazar police station to lodge a formal complaint. Following their allegations, police have begun examining the case from both the murder and abetment-to-suicide angles. Investigators are looking into the circumstances leading up to the incident and are expected to examine evidence that could help establish the sequence of events.

Police officials have said that the actual cause of death will become clearer after the preliminary post-mortem findings are received. The medical examination is expected to provide important clues regarding the circumstances in which Sarkar died. Until then, investigators have not reached any definitive conclusion about whether the death was a suicide or involved any criminal act.

As part of the probe, police are also examining Sarkar's mobile phone and social media activity. Investigators are scrutinising his recent posts and other digital communications to determine whether they contain any indications of distress, threats, personal difficulties or possible external pressure. The cryptic social media posts mentioned by the family have become an important aspect of the investigation. Police are expected to assess their content and timing, alongside other available evidence, to understand the young doctor's state of mind in the days preceding his death.

On Cyclone Arnab, its Landfall

Cyclone Arnab, the first named storm of the North Indian Ocean cyclone season this year, intensified rapidly before making landfall as a 'very severe cyclonic storm' on October 28. This particular rapidity is a challenge for forecasters and some models did fail to anticipate how strong Arnab would become. It also moved faster than expected towards the coast, before stalling for a time and beginning the landfall process several hours before the India Meteorological Department (IMD) had predicted it would, in the middle of the night, leaving many district authorities with a potentially narrower window to evacuate high-risk settlements. With core wind speeds of 125-135 kilometres per hour, it delivered more than 100 mm of rain over parts of Anakapalli, Visakhapatnam, Kalingapatnam, Kakinada and Machilipatnam, in Andhra Pradesh. But even though it has completed landfall, southern Odisha likely faces a greater threat only hence. Early reports claimed no loss of life in Andhra Pradesh or Odisha, which has been attributed to the disaster management operations in both States; the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, said there were five deaths in Andhra Pradesh. Regrettably, the suspension of transport services, including road connectivity and flights, closure of schools and offices, and power cuts to minimise risks posed by loose wires remains an essential part of saving lives, entailing other social and economic disruptions that the States must account for, and address, in their post-storm assessments. Odisha may have to brace for rainfall and waters due to moisture in the storm's outer circulation, which will arrive over land that has recovered in patches from the fourth wettest monsoon in the State's history. Extreme rainfall after repeated flooding may face soil that has not drained fully, raising the risk of more flooding following even lower levels of rainfall, and slope failures in hilly terrain. Farmers in Ganjam and Puri have already voiced worries about the risk of prolonged inundation destroying paddy crops, compounding the already considerable financial consequences of the southwest monsoon; Ganjam alone had lost 33% of crops by October. In Sundargarh, however, farmers hope that Arnab will relieve moisture stress in standing crops after a dry month. The IMD has already issued alerts in the Ganjam, Gajapati, Rayagada, Koraput, Malkangiri, Nabarangpur, and Kalahandi districts, before the rainbelt extends further north. The relatively low figure of deaths will be a testament to proactive governance. However, it is past time that States adopted a zero-disruption approach, especially since property and infrastructure were damaged, and the risk of people being pushed into poverty over lost possessions and livelihoods persists.

The US-China Tech Cold War Is Moving Undersea

RUTH POLLARD

When Australia's Defence Minister Richard Marles described the seabed as a battlefield at a regional defense gathering in Singapore earlier this year, he was preaching to the converted. The security of undersea cables - which carry more than 95% of data flows and trillions of dollars of daily financial transactions - was already top of mind for the senior military brass, geopolitical analysts and government ministers in the room.

A new project by Australia, the UK and the US was quickly announced to develop underwater drone technology to protect cables by 2027, while Singapore launched a 17-country framework covering Southeast Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Oceania to explore defense cooperation on critical infrastructure.

But while nations are racing to defend existing networks, the companies building Southeast Asia's digital architecture face a different challenge: avoiding maritime bottlenecks and the risk posed by China's expanding sea presence. The Strait of Malacca, the narrow passage between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, is particularly vulnerable due to the sheer concentration of cables traversing the corridor.

Already considered the Indo-Pacific's most critical chokepoint - it handles about 21% of global maritime trade by value - the Strait is increasingly being bypassed by major private subsea cable projects. Google's TalayLink, for instance, will connect Australia and Thailand via the Indian Ocean following a route west of the Sunda Strait that avoids the congested corridor.

But concentration isn't the only risk. Nowhere is the geopolitical contest over cable routes more evident than in the South China Sea, where China is using regulation and maritime enforcement to control who can build and repair cable infrastructure across the contested waters. Beijing is effectively trying to redraw the undersea cable map, while the US and its partners are finding new ways to push back.

Google and Meta Platforms Inc.'s Echo cable - which links the US to Singapore via Guam and Indonesia - shows how tech companies are redesigning Asia-Pacific networks to reduce their exposure to China. These giants have decided that avoiding Beijing is worth the added costs and the risk of laying cables in less suitable terrain.

Of course, it's tempting to dismiss this as yet more collateral damage from the US-China competition. But it will have long-lasting consequences. The routes chosen for this eye-wateringly expensive critical infrastructure will impact the region for decades to come, cementing ties between nations and increasingly isolating others. Samuel Bashfield, a research fellow at Melbourne-based La Trobe University and the author of two recent books including one on submarine cables, has written that installers are increasingly wary of working in the South China Sea, with many avoiding the area altogether.

Beyond deploying Chinese Coast Guard ships to harass repair crews or prevent them from accessing the cable grounds, Beijing has effectively locked out non-Chinese subsea fiber projects through onerous permitting requirements, he said. These delays have forced some new projects to reroute entirely, hugging coastlines and plowing cables into shallow seabeds, a less-than-ideal solution for network resilience, Bashfield told me.

The $700 million Asia Connect Cable System, led by startup Inligo Networks, for example, will skirt the South China Sea by running through Indonesia and the Philippines. The Pacific Light Cable Network, linking the US to Taiwan and the Philippines, underwent a similar transformation after its planned Hong Kong connection was abandoned following American intervention.

The US has devoted considerable effort to convince Southeast Asian and Pacific nations to shun Chinese vendors in favor of American, Japanese or European alternatives. Both superpowers fear that foreign involvement in cable infrastructure could enable intelligence gathering or sabotage. Washington regards Chinese technology as a security risk, while Beijing has raised similar concerns about American and Japanese equipment.

Is America Staring At A 'Blue Wave' Again? Why Trump Feels Threatened

TARA KARTHA



There has rarely been an election, that too a mid-term, that has caused such interest the world over. But then, not often has there been a President who has caused so much damage to not just his own country, but to almost everyone he has dealt with - neighbours, allies, and friends alike. And the worst of it, even in the unlikely contingency that he is removed, the America that he crafted is not expected to change very much in the near future. It is not really about Trump. It is about an America that elected him to power, knowing full well that he escaped impeachment twice earlier. And it is about an America that has turned almost irrevocably to the right, becoming a flag-bearer of the dictum that might is right.

Luckily, it is not all Americans. Therein lies hope.

First, the mid-term electoral system is one that will see every seat in Congress going up for grabs, all 435 of them. In the Senate, just a third retire, which means that a total shift may be unlikely from the present Republican domination. Among the 35 states that go to vote for the Senate, about ten are heavily Republican-dominated, while another 10 lean towards Republicans. But those trends are usually for federal elections. US states, much like India's, tend to vote quite differently when it comes to Senatorial or Congressional seats. Overall, the latest poll puts the House solidly in Democrat hands, with top election prognosticator Cooks noting, "Republicans' path to keeping control of the House has all but evaporated. The outstanding question is how large Democrats' majority will be in 2027".

Wonder of wonders, the so-called 'red-neck' states - like Texas - are leaning democrat, and Vivek Ramaswamy is probably going to lose in Ohio. But the point is this: while Democrats may inch into the Senate, there is no likelihood of getting a majority there, much less the two-thirds majority needed to impeach the President. The numbers just don't add up. So, Trump is going to continue. The point is whether his legislation will.

The top issues in the race are not very different from those roiling Europe. Rising costs - oddly from the very tariffs that Trump has thrown recklessly around - are key. An earlier report from the New York Federal Reserve found that Trump's 2025-2026 tariffs caused a 2.9 percentage point increase in inflation on 67 categories of everyday consumer goods. That's rather a lot, and it is public information.

Apart from costs alone, the state of the economy seems to be the top issue among all voters, according to the Pew Research Centre. A second vital issue is 'the future of democracy, though what that means may differ individually. Most see this through the lens of democratic backsliding, executive power concentration, and challenges to electoral outcomes - such as President Donald Trump's actions surrounding the 2020 election, rhetoric regarding political opponents, and concerns over authoritarian tendencies. In this, Trump's cavalier treatment of the press and the complete violation of basic 'American values' and media freedoms is hardly likely to be ignored. Even as media organisations united to take the issue of barring White House access to court, The Washington Post reported that the military is secretly hiring conservative influencers who appear to be pushing Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's culture wars. Now that's the stuff of journalism. It is also what this government is all about. It is not a single extreme lobby. Trump & Co won by playing to an audience, and those folks are still out there.

Which brings us to the question of immigration, visas, and, thereafter, a punchy, no-holds-barred "America first' foreign policy. On immigration, Pew worryingly notes that it has become an issue even with Democratic voters, who are more concerned today than they were four years ago (+17 percentage points). So, no, don't expect much change on that. Vice-President JD Vance's remarks about corporations profiting from paying immigrants less - which is true only in certain segments and professions - and the insult of calling them "foreign indentured servants", is the stuff of urban legends and seems to be gaining traction at a time of economic distress.

The reality is not quite that simple. Major Indian IT firms and global corporations have already begun to rely on expanded local hiring within the US, rather than imported visa holders. In addition, the H-1B visa programme addresses short-term skill gaps according to NASSCOM. But these are details. The point is that the whole thing plays into the immigration debate and fosters an image of the 'other'. Meanwhile, business houses have adjusted by building 'Global Capability Centres' - the in-country arms of multinational companies that run engineering, finance, and product work for the parent organisation in India - employing some 2.36 million professionals, according to industry reports in May 2026. Revenue from these centres reached $98.4 billion in FY26, up 32% since FY21. That's all very well, but expect that this 'stay here and work' model will continue. It pays both sides. And that's the way it is going to continue, midterms notwithstanding.

Here's another interesting statistic. Pew Research reports also note that separate voters across the political spectrum dislike political leaders who support building data centres in areas near them: 61% say this, as against 8% in favour. This sentiment is particularly widespread among Democratic voters. A report by over 800 former employees of the Environmental Protection Agency warns that surging fossil-fuel demand (gas, coal, diesel) to power data centres could add $11.7 billion to $20.9 billion in annual public health costs, and huge premature deaths. Such centres are often sources of nitrogen oxide, which helps form ozone, carbon monoxide, and heavy metals, among other pollutants.

India's Bond Market Is Bleeding, And The 'Savers' Are Losing

DEEPANSHU MOHAN

Oil, war, and a hawkish central bank have made Indian government bonds cheaper than at any point since early 2023. The damage to existing holders is real. So is the opportunity for new ones. The 10-year yield, which ended 2025 below 6.6%, touched about 7.46% on October 23. The Reserve Bank of India raised the repo rate to 5.50% on October 7, its first increase since February 2023, and moved its stance from neutral to "calibrated tightening". Minutes of that meeting hinted at more to come. Retail inflation reached 5.54% in September, while wholesale inflation hit 11.39%, the highest in the current series. Several gilt funds recorded their worst twelve-month returns since at least 2014 in the year to May. In the United States, where the 10-year Treasury yield reached 5.3% this month for the first time since 2007, a growing view holds that rising yields lay the groundwork for better returns. The argument applies to India too, though local conditions shape who benefits. Start with the arithmetic. A bond's yield acts as a buffer against price losses. The benchmark 10-year paper has a modified duration of close to seven years, so a one percentage point rise in yields cuts its price by about 7%. At today's yield, rates would have to rise by about 1.2 percentage points in the next twelve months before a buyer ended the year with a loss. For a five-year government bond yielding above 7%, the buffer is closer to 1.7 points. In 2021, when the 10-year hovered around 6.2%, it was nearer to 0.9 point. Bank deposits tell a different story. Bond prices adjust within minutes of a policy surprise, while deposit rates lag by months. SBI's highest fixed deposit rate is 6.40%. The five-year government bond yields more than 7%, and 10-year AAA corporate bonds were near 7.8% at the end of September. SBI's chairman said this month that banks may not raise deposit rates for two to three months, citing ample liquidity. Banks park much of their deposits in government securities that now yield above what they pay savers. Through RBI Retail Direct, gilt funds or target maturity funds, a household can earn that difference for itself. The cost falls hardest on rural India, where September inflation was 6.08% against 4.88% in cities, and households rely on bank deposits.

Middle Power Myths, And Why The West Needs To Stop Putting India In A 'Box'

KANWAL SIBAL

Canada has faced insults and contempt from US President Donald Trump as well as economic pressure. This has goaded Prime Minister Mark Carney to widen his country's geopolitical and economic options. At the Davis Economic Forum, he spoke of "middle powers" joining together to carve out a more autonomous role for themselves at the international level.

This has triggered discussions on many platforms on the international role of "middle powers" in the light of huge geopolitical, economic, technology and security disruptions caused by the Trump administration.

There is no agreed definition of the attributes of "middle powers". It would seem that major European countries, such as the UK, Germany and France, are now seen as "middle powers". Former UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in a panel discussion at the recent Munich Security Conference in Delhi on "middle powers" was comfortable with the idea of the UK being a "middle power". Japan, Brazil, Turkey and Indonesia are also classified as such in the current discourse.

The genesis of this "middle powers" concept is essentially the disarray in the western world because of the manner in which the Trump administration is bullying Europe and its other allies. Trump has discomposed the



NATO alliance at a time when the alliance is deeply involved in a proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. Trump, Vance and others are openly interfering in the internal political affairs of Europe, attacking personally some European leaders, supporting right wing parties, lambasting European policies on uncontrolled migration to the point of wondering whether the European allies can remain dependable when political power slips eventually into the hands of Muslim migrants.

With Trump's hectoring of Europe and a growing recognition that Europe faces a structural change in its relations with the US, Europe sees the necessity of re-ordering its ties with the non-western world. Drawing closer to India is an option, which explains the FTA with India as well as an intensive engagement of India by major European countries. This, of course, is in India's interests too as the Trump administration has delivered serious blows to bilateral ties on a number of issues. Once again the issue of trust has arisen in India-US ties, which in the last couple of decades had begun to dissipate.

Is India a "middle power" is a question now being discussed in think tank and other circles. The question got attention when at the Munich Security Conference organised in New Delhi, a "middle powers" panel was organised in which India participated.

India is obviously not a "great power" yet. It is not a permanent member of the UN Security Council. It is, however, a nuclear and missile power as well as a space power. It possesses large and strong military although its domestic defence manufacturing base is still deficient. India exercises strategic autonomy but it still has many vulnerabilities and external dependencies.

But India is not a "middle power". Its status is sui generis. It is the biggest country in the world population-wise. It has a young population. Its economy is growing, with a general international consensus that it will be the third largest economy in the world in a few years. In PPP terms, India is already the third largest. It has very considerable human talent, which in scale is a big national and even an international asset.

The big European countries are still powerful but they are not rising powers. They are declining powers, with a declining population, and the issue before them is to manage their decline and preserve their prosperity.

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Pakistan: Not many legal options left for Christian man after death sentence in blasphemy case

■ AGENCY

Islamabad: The Supreme Court of Pakistan has rejected the appeal of a Christian man named Qaiser Ayub and confirmed the death sentence announced against him for blasphemy, leaving him with very few legal options. The same bench had acquitted his younger brother, Amoon Ayub after they found the evidence weak. He was released after spending almost 12 years in prison, a report has detailed.

The story started in 2011 with allegations that blasphemous material appeared on a website related to Qaiser Ayub. He has repeatedly contended that he had shut down the website in 2009 and someone else had reactivated it, leaving his name in the copyright notice. According to him, the offending content was posted by a third party exploiting an abandoned site, A Sahara Alexander wrote in 'Bitter Winter'.

Qaiser Ayub and Amoon Ayub were arrested in 2014 and a trial court sentenced them both to death in 2018. In 2022, the Lahore High Court confirmed the convictions. During the court proceedings, the prosecution has largely built its case on electronic evidence.

Human rights activists have raised questions on how this material was authenticated and whether an investigation was conducted on who actually controlled the website



when the contest was posted. Pakistan's Supreme Court found the evidence insufficient to sustain Amoon Ayub's conviction, yet strong enough to declare the death sentence for Qaiser Ayub. Observers may think how the same evidence could lead to different conclusions.

The Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS), a UK-based organisation that has supported the two brothers during the court proceedings, voiced concern about the decision announced by the supreme court and called for using every legal means on Qaiser Ayub's behalf.

Meanwhile, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) said that Pakistan's religious minorities continue to face systematic persecution, discrimination and denial of equal rights, with the abduction and forced marriages of Hindu and Christian girls, blasphemy cases and extremist attacks highlighting persistent failures to protect vulnerable communities.

In its latest report titled 'Sanctuary Denied: Freedom of religion or belief in 2025/26', the HRCP said that girls from Christian and Hindu communities continued to face abduction and forced marriage, compounded by poverty and inadequate police responses.

"Girls from minority communities continued to disappear and be coerced into wedlock by older Muslim men. An underage Christian girl's ordeal is included in the report alongside that of Hindu girls. Weak police response and poverty worsened the struggles of the victims and their families. Alarmingly, a Hindu human rights activist posted on a social platform about alleged threats from a right-wing party for his activism against forced marriages of Hindu girls in Sindh," the rights body stated.

The report highlighted persistent misuse of blasphemy laws in Pakistan.

Dhaka Commuters Face Hardship Amid Auto-Rickshaw Strike



■ AGENCY

Dhaka: Normal life in Bangladesh's capital Dhaka was disrupted on Monday as battery-operated auto-rickshaw drivers staged a strike over a series of demands, leaving commuters facing difficulties in travelling across the city, local media reported.

Auto-rickshaw drivers stopped operations in Dholai Khal, Rampura, Banasree, Badda, Dayaganj, Jatrabari, Mirpur, Dholai Para and nearby areas on Monday. Several auto-rickshaw drivers who continued operations were reportedly vandalised by protesting drivers who took positions at various intersections in Dhaka, Bangladesh-based daily Dhaka Tribune reported.

The drivers said they were holding strike to protest high license fees imposed under the government's new police and a rule which restricted each driver from operating more than five auto-rickshaws.

Auto-rickshaw drivers gathered in a procession at South Jatrabari intersection and shouted slogans over their demands. Commuters, including students and office-goers, were left stranded due to the disruption of auto-rickshaw services. Many of the commuters waited on the road for other means of transport while some were forced to walk long distances to reach their destinations.

In October, battery-operated auto-rickshaw drivers blocked roads in Dhaka's Mohammadpur and Hazaribagh areas yesterday, demanding an end to eviction drives and permission to operate on main roads, Bangladesh daily The Daily Star reported.

Severe traffic congestion on the road was reported due to the protests by battery-run auto-rickshaw drivers. People struggled to reach their destinations due to strike of auto-rickshaws in Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur, Basila and nearby areas.

The protesters called for an end to alleged police harassment, claiming that their vehicles were being damaged or seized. They also demanded permission to operate on Dhaka roads.

Speaking to The Daily Star, the inspector of the traffic police's Mohammadpur-Basila zone said that drivers blocked Tin Rastar Mor, a key intersection linking Gabtoli Road with Mohammadpur and Basila.

INS Surat reaches Muscat for India Oman joint naval exercise

■ AGENCY

Muscat: In a significant step towards deepening maritime cooperation between India and Oman, Indian Naval Ship (INS) Surat arrived in Muscat to participate in the 15th edition of the bilateral naval exercise Naseem Al Bahr 2026, the Indian Navy said on Monday.

The four-day exercise, which commenced on Sunday, will continue until November 11, focusing on strengthening operational coordination and interoperability between the two navies.

"INS Surat arrived at Muscat, Oman, on 08 Nov 26 to participate in the 15th edition of Naseem Al Bahr 2026, scheduled from 08-11 Nov 26. Building upon the momentum of the 13th edition of the Joint Military



Cooperation Committee, the exercise aims to enhance operational synergy and interoperability between the Indian Navy and the Royal Navy of Oman," the Indian Navy posted on X.

Last month, India and Oman held the 8th edition of their Navy Staff Talks in New Delhi, with a focus on deepening bilateral naval cooperation and enhancing coordination to address shared maritime security challenges.

The talks, held from October 27 to 28, were co-chaired by Commodore Kartik Srimal, Commodore (Foreign Cooperation), Indian Navy, and Commodore Ahmed Juma Salim Al Khatri, Director General of Operations and Plans, Royal Navy of Oman.

The discussions also explored avenues to strengthen operational engagements, training, information exchange and hydrographic cooperation.

"Indian Navy and Royal Navy of Oman held the 8th edition of Staff Talks at New Delhi from 27-28 Oct 26. Co-chaired by Cmde Kartik Srimal, Cmde (FC), and Cmde Ahmed Juma Salim Al Khatri, DG Ops & Plan, the talks focused on enhancing operational engagements, training, information sharing and hydrographic cooperation, with an emphasis on strengthening interoperability and addressing shared maritime security challenges," the Indian Navy posted on X

Earlier, the Indian Navy's three-masted sail training ship INS Sudarshini departed Salalah in Oman after a four-day port call, as part of its historic transoceanic deployment Lokayan-2026, the Ministry of Defence said.

Rubio says little progress in diplomacy with Iran

■ AGENCY

Washington: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Sunday (local time) that diplomatic efforts to end the US-Iran conflict have made little progress, calling Iran's demands "unacceptable."

"Right now, it hasn't been very productive because the Iranian demands are simply not just unacceptable, but in some cases ... really not realistic," Rubio told reporters in Florida before departing for France to attend a Group of Seven (G7) Foreign Ministers' meeting, Xinhua News Agency reported.

"I wouldn't say we're at the verge of a breakthrough," said Rubio, reiterating that the Trump administration preferred a diplomatic solution to the conflict. In an interview earlier on Sunday, US President Donald Trump told CNN that it is "highly unlikely" for the United States to resume large-scale military strikes against Iran as long as negotiations make progress. He did not rule out the possibility of further military action. The US Central Command announced on Saturday the formation of Task Force Iron Gate, a unit of about 20 military and civilian personnel tasked with coordinating efforts across US government agencies to disrupt the movement of advanced weapons and other materials across Iran's land borders and other routes. Trump said on social media on Sunday that the task force was "in full force and effect" in Iran, and that, combined with the U.S. naval blockade, "very little gets into, or out of, Iran." Trump said that renewed military strikes on Iran were "highly unlikely" as long as negotiations made progress, but did not rule out further military actions.

One Dead, One Injured in Australian Clinic Crash



■ AGENCY

Sydney: A man has died and a woman has been hospitalised with serious injuries after being struck by a car that crashed into a medical center in the Australian state of Queensland on Monday.

Queensland Police Service Chief Inspector Grant Marcus told reporters that a vehicle crashed into a medical centre in the city of Bundaberg, about 300 km north of Brisbane, shortly after 10 am (local time) on Monday, striking several people inside. A 63-year-old man, who was in the waiting room when the vehicle crashed, sustained critical injuries and was declared dead a short time later, Xinhua News Agency reported. His partner, a 63-year-old woman, was transported to hospital with life-threatening injuries. Marcus said investigators were working to determine whether speed or a mechanical fault played a role in the crash.

Baloch armed group claims killing five Pakistani soldiers in Balochistan

■ AGENCY

Quetta: The Baloch Republican Guards (BRG) claimed responsibility for killing five Pakistani security personnel and injuring several others in a drone attack and an ambush on a military convoy in Balochistan's Kachhi district, local media reported.

In a statement, the BRG spokesperson Dostain Baloch said that the group's drone unit 'Aamir Aero Guardians' attacked a joint Pakistani military and police camp in the Bagh area of Kachhi district on Sunday, killing one security personnel and leaving another seriously injured.

The spokesperson claimed that approximately two hours later, the BRG



launched an ambush on a military convoy in the Bolan area of Kachhi with rockets and other heavy weapons. He added that the attack killed four personnel and injured several others, while military vehicles sustained severe damage, The Balochistan Post reported.

The BRG announced the establishment of its drone warfare unit, Aamir Aero Guardians, on October 30, claiming that it carried out a strike on a Pakistani military installation in Kachhi district, causing casualties and material losses.

These latest attacks come amid a series of drone strikes targeting Pakistani security forces in recent days, with both the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and BRG claiming operations carried out by their respective dedicated drone units.

On Saturday, the BLA claimed that it had executed seven men accused of working for Pakistani forces, including one allegedly linked to the killing of Baloch academician Ghamkhwar Hayat.

According to BLA spokesperson Jeeyand Baloch, the seven men were arrested during operations across different parts of Balochistan and subsequently handed death sentences by what he described as a "Baloch National Court" for alleged espionage.

French President Emmanuel Macron to visit Cambodia on November 14-16

■ AGENCY

Paris: French President Emmanuel Macron will pay a state visit to Cambodia from November 14 to 16, following an invitation from Cambodian King Norodom Sihamoni, Cambodia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation announced on Monday.

The visit will coincide with Macron's participation in the 20th Francophonie Summit in Phnom Penh.

During his stay, Macron will have an audience with King Sihamoni at the Royal Palace. He is also scheduled to hold bilateral meetings with Senate President Samdech Techo Hun Sen and Prime Minister Hun Manet, Xinhua News Agency reported.

"Several agreements and cooperation documents spanning economy, investment, culture, and defense will be signed during the visit," the ministry said in a press release. "These pacts will inject fresh impetus into our traditional bonds of friendship, opening a new chapter in Cambodia-France relations and mutually beneficial cooperation."

Additionally, Macron will join King Sihamoni in Siem Reap province to preside over the closing ceremony of the renovation project at the ancient Western Mebon Temple, located within the Angkor Archaeological Park. Macron's upcoming visit will be the first state visit by a French president to Cambodia since Francois Mitterrand in 1993, the press release said. France and Cambodia have a special relationship due to their shared history, Francophonie and France's role in furthering development in Cambodia following the 1991 Paris agreements.

India, Solomon Islands Strengthen Bilateral Ties

■ AGENCY

Honiara (Solomon Islands): India's High Commissioner to Solomon Islands, Rajeev Kumar, met Solomon Islands Prime Minister Matthew Cooper Wale, with both sides reaffirming their commitment to further strengthening bilateral relations and expanding cooperation across various sectors.

Following the meeting, High Commission of India in Papua New Guinea stated, "High Commissioner-designate of India to Solomon Islands, Mr. Rajeev Kumar, met today with the Honourable Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, Matthew Cooper Wale. The meeting reaffirmed the commitment to strengthening India-Solomon Islands bilateral relations and cooperation."

In September, India and the Pacific Islands discussed further cooperation in renewable energy, climate action, disaster resilience, education, healthcare and capacity building sectors during a meeting of the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) Foreign Ministers, chaired by External Affairs Minister (EAM) S Jaishankar, on the sidelines of the 81st United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) stated.

The meeting witnessed participation from the Pacific Island Countries (PIC), including the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance of Samoa; the



Foreign Ministers of Fiji, Marshall Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu; Tonga's Finance Minister; the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Attorney General of Micronesia; the Health Minister of Vanuatu; the Deputy Foreign Minister of Naoero; and the Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), the MEA stated.

During the meeting, participants reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthen the FIPIC partnership and cooperation in regional and multilateral fora.

"The leaders reviewed the outcomes of the FIPIC Summits and welcomed progress in India-PIC cooperation, including under the 12-Point Action Plan announced in 2023 by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi," the MEA mentioned in a statement.

"They discussed further cooperation in renewable energy, climate action, disaster resilience, education, healthcare and capacity building. The Meeting reaffirmed the commitment to strengthen the FIPIC partnership and cooperation in regional and multilateral fora," it added.

During the meeting, EAM Jaishankar said that India's approach to the Pacific has consistently been demand-driven, development-oriented and people-centric. He underscored that India fully respects and supports the priorities articulated in the Pacific Island Forum's 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. EAM Jaishankar stated that India's development projects in Pacific Island countries reflect their shared focus on strengthening livelihoods, building capacity and promoting sustainable development. He noted that significant progress has been achieved with regard to the Action Plan announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi spanning healthcare, renewables, connectivity, technology and capacity building.

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Labour Ministry warns jobseekers against fake 'National Career Service' job offers

■ SP BUREAU

New Delhi : The Ministry of Labour and Employment on Monday cautioned jobseekers against fraudulent calls, emails and fake job offers claiming an association with the National Career Service (NCS), reiterating that all its services are completely free.

In a post on X, the ministry urged candidates to remain alert to individuals and organisations demanding money in exchange for employment opportunities.

"Beware of job scams! All NCS services are completely free. Do not pay anyone for registration, applications, interviews, or employment-related services. For more information, visit: https://ncs.gov.in," the ministry wrote.

It clarified that jobseekers are not required to pay any fee for registration on the NCS portal, submitting job applications, interview processing or any other employment-related services.



The ministry also warned against misleading communications from websites, employers and individuals falsely claiming to be associated with the NCS or the Labour Ministry.

According to a warning on the official NCS website, some websites, employers and individuals are allegedly misusing the name and logo of the government employment service to mislead jobseekers.

The ministry advised candidates to avoid paying employers or intermediaries for securing employment, adding that the NCS does not endorse or take responsibility for such practices.

Jobseekers have been advised to verify employment-related information only through the official NCS website -- www.ncs.gov.in -- before sharing personal information or responding to suspicious offers.

Those who come across suspicious employment-related communications or fall victim to job fraud can contact the NCS helpline at 1514 or the cybercrime helpline at 1930 to report financial fraud.

However, candidates can also seek assistance through the official NCS email address -- support.ncs@gov.in.

The ministry reiterated that jobseekers should remain cautious of fake job offers, fraudulent calls and emails, and demands for money in exchange for employment.

Large caps outperform broader market in October as IT lead gains

■ AGENCY

New Delhi : India's benchmark index Nifty was the only major market-cap index on NSE that posted positive returns in October, gaining 1.91 per cent, while broader market segments ended lower, led by sharp declines in microcap and smallcap stocks, a report said on Monday.



The report from Motilal Oswal Mutual Fund said the Nifty Next 50 fell 2.92 per cent during the month, while the Nifty Midcap 150 dropped 3.75 per cent. The Nifty Smallcap 250 fell 5.81 per cent and the Nifty Microcap 250 lost 8.95 per cent witnessing sharper falls than midcaps. The broader Nifty 500 declined 0.80 per cent over the one-month period ended October 31, 2026. Information Technology emerged as the strongest-performing sector, gaining 17.69 per cent during October. Healthcare also recorded a gain of 1.93 per cent, while Bank rose 0.10 per cent.

In contrast, metal recorded the steepest fall among sectors, down 7.65 per cent, followed by defence at 6.17 per cent. Consumer durables declined 5.74 per cent, while energy, realty, auto and FMCG fell 4.58 per cent, 3.95 per cent, 3.31 per cent and 2.02 per cent, respectively.

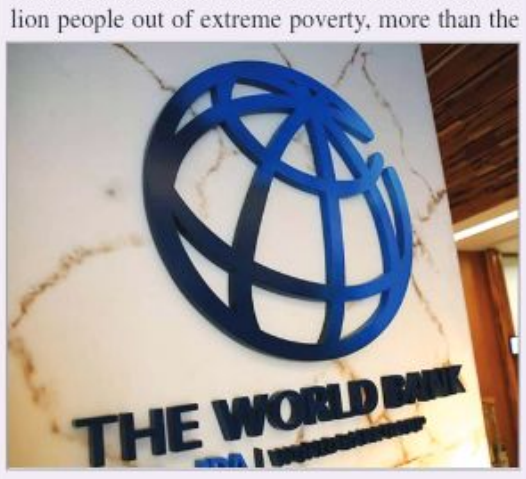
Among factor indices, Low Volatility recorded the smallest decline in October, falling 0.79 per cent over the month. Momentum declined 2.41 per cent, while Quality fell 2.73 per cent. Nifty 500 declined 0.80 per cent, with industrials down 0.54 per cent, commodities down 0.54 per cent and consumer discretionary down 0.42 per cent-- the largest drags on return contribution.

World Bank hails India's poverty reduction offering lessons for developing countries

■ SPNN

New Delhi : India's sharp reduction in poverty over the past decade driven by sustained economic growth, rising consumption, expanding employment and social protection, offers important lessons for developing countries, a new report has said after World Bank said that Indians living in extreme poverty fell to 2.6 per cent in 2023 from 27.1 per cent in 2011.

The report from Bangladesh-based 'The Business Standard' said India lifted around 496 million people out of extreme poverty, more than the



population of the US and Russia combined, marking "fastest poverty declines in the world."

The recent World Bank Brief also indicated that using the lower middle-income poverty line of $4.2 per day, could indicate that the poverty rate declined to 16.1 per cent from 57.7 per cent over the same period. The World Bank however, has cautioned that some recent gains could reflect improvements in measurement alongside genuine welfare improvements. "But those improvements have not been uniform across regions - in fact, 57 per cent of India's poor population is concentrated in a contiguous belt stretching from Uttar Pradesh to West Bengal," the report said. Sustained high economic growth was a key driver of poverty reduction along with three other major factors. India maintained resilient growth between 2010 and 2025, with economic expansion averaging over 7 per cent annually during 2022-2025 after recovering from the pandemic-induced contraction. Household spending nearly doubled to $2.24 trillion in 2025 from $1.24 trillion in 2015, supported by rising discretionary spending, premiumisation trends which also improved economic condition of the country, creating business opportunities.

Govt extends deepsea oil, gas block bidding deadline to Dec 10

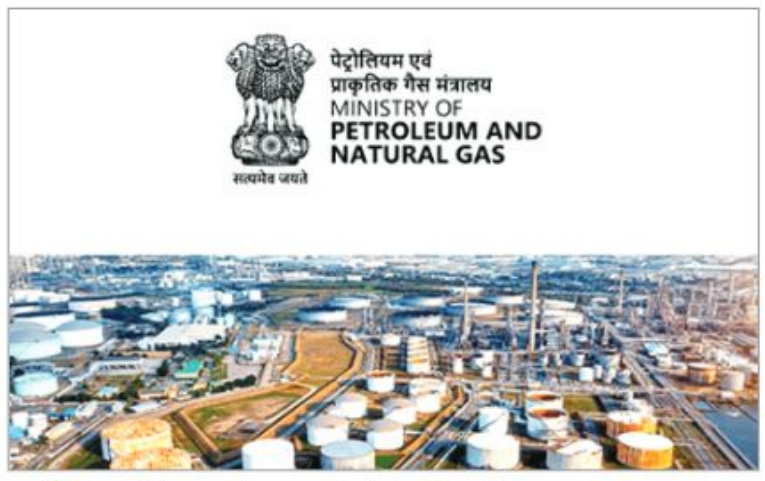
■ AGENCY

New Delhi : The government has extended the deadline for submitting bids for deepwater and ultra-deepwater oil and gas exploration blocks under its 10th and 11th Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP) rounds to December 10, marking the seventh postponement for OALP-X and the third for OALP-XI.

The latest extension gives prospective investors nearly a month more to assess the offshore acreage on offer amid efforts to attract investment into India's technically challenging deepwater exploration sector.

The Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH), under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, has revised the bidding deadline for deepwater and ultra-deepwater blocks in OALP-X and OALP-XI to December 10.

While the government did not specify the reason for the extension,



multiple media reports suggested that it could be linked to the government's Rs 84,084-crore Samudra Manthan National Offshore Exploration Scheme, whose operating guidelines were released on October 22.

The scheme provides government support of up to 50 per cent of eligible deepwater exploration drilling costs, subject to a ceiling of Rs 675 crore per well.

The extension would give companies more time to evaluate the financial support framework and the economics of the blocks.

OALP-X was launched in 2025 with 25 blocks covering around 1.83 lakh sq km across 13 sedimentary basins.

The round includes six onshore, six shallow-water, one deepwater and 12 ultra-deepwater blocks.

Of the total acreage, 19 blocks are offshore, including 13 deepwater and ultra-deepwater blocks covering about 1.24 lakh sq km.

Bidding for onshore and shallow-water blocks closed in June, while the deadline for deepwater and ultra-deepwater acreage was extended several times from July 2025.

It was earlier set for November 15 before being pushed to December 10.

OALP-XI was launched in March this year with 21 blocks covering 80,234.49 sq km across 11 sedimentary basins. It comprises 12 onshore, four shallow-water, one deepwater and four ultra-deepwater blocks.

Nine blocks are offshore, covering around 45,296 sq km.

Bidding for onshore and shallow-water blocks also closed in June, while the deadline for the remaining deepwater and ultra-deepwater blocks has now been extended to December 10 from November 15.

The scheme was approved by the Union Cabinet in Julywith an outlay of Rs 84,084 crore through FY31 and aims to unlock more than 600 million tonnes of additional oil-equivalent hydrocarbon resources.

Indian markets offer growth, diversification amid AI-led market concentration: Report

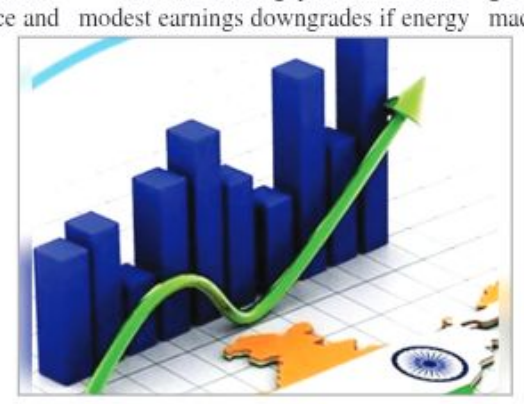
■ SP BUREAU

New Delhi : India offers a combination of growth, earnings resilience and diversification amid Asian markets increasingly dominated by artificial intelligence (AI) stocks, according to a report released on Monday.

A report by HSBC Global Investment Research -- which has upgraded Indian equities to overweight from neutral -- said that the country's strong credit growth, resilient earnings and measures supporting economic growth and the currency strengthened its outlook for the market.

The upgrade follows a multi-year valuation reset and significant underperformance by Indian equities compared with emerging markets (EM), it added.

While the coming quarters could see modest earnings downgrades if energy



prices remain elevated, HSBC does not expect these to be significant enough to materially affect overall market sentiment. Moreover, global crude oil prices have eased somewhat to around $99 per barrel. HSBC said India's economic growth has remained resilient despite macroeconomic shocks, including higher interest rates and oil prices. Earnings momentum has also improved, with the pace of downgrades becoming considerably more modest.

Valuations have turned more reasonable, particularly among large-cap stocks, while only 22 per cent of global emerging market (GEM) funds are overweight India, indicating scope for further investor interest.

Among sectors, HSBC favours banks, supported by an improved growth outlook as well as industrials, particularly capital goods, cement, ports and electronic manufacturing services.

Temple device row turns bigger amid regulatory review calls

■ SPNN

New Delhi : Clinical scientists have raised further alarm over Eternal founder Deepinder Goyal's wearable device called 'Temple', calling for regulators to scrutinise claims surrounding the device.

They accused Goyal of allegedly misrepresenting the science behind Temple, the Rs 85,000 wearable device.

Clinical scientists reviewed the scientific material published on Temple's website but found "zero evidence" demonstrating that the device measures what it claims.



The wearable can capture only heart rate and blood flow to the scalp through the temporal artery, they argued.

Meanwhile, Goyal thanked the social media community and doctors for their criticism, saying it gives him "much needed clarity on what we need to explain better".

He stressed that social media is not the regulator for Temple. "Wherever we need regulatory clearances, we will have them before we make any claim needing them," he said. "?Temple is not made for India. It's made for the world. Please check the pricing. We don't expect any more than 1 per cent of Temples being sold in India. ?We didn't make any medical claim. Doctors primarily see things from a medical lens, so they see every claim as a medical claim," Goyal posted.

"I repeat - Temple is strictly a fitness + AI device, and we've made no medical claims. Temple is not proven to diagnose or prevent any disease. It doesn't do anything which replaces the need for you to see a doctor. ?The main point of Temple is NOT Brain Flow. That's what we just started Temple for, and studies on Brain Flow are the first ones getting out," he argued.

Temple is a head-worn wearable positioned on the side of the forehead and promotes two key metrics: BrainFlow, which tracks relative changes in brain circulation, and Entropy, a score ranging from 1 to 250 meant to indicate how hard the body is working.

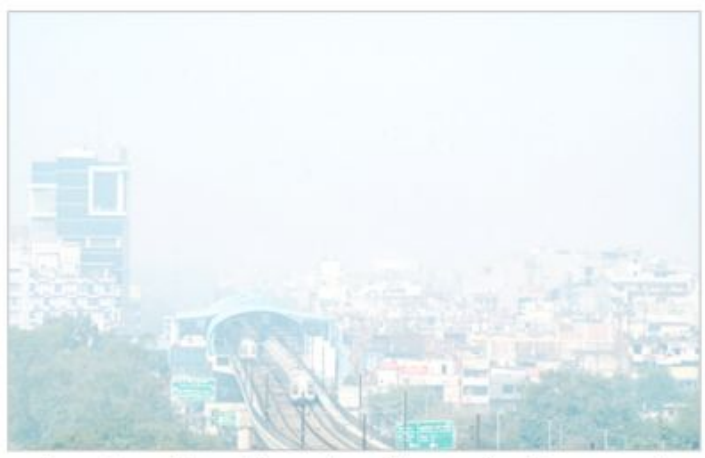
Pre-orders for the device opened on November 1, with deliveries expected in about three months. Goyal led a $54 million funding round for the startup.

L&T bags Rs 2,500 crore deal to extend Noida Metro Aqua Line

■ AGENCY

New Delhi : Construction and engineering giant Larsen & Toubro (L&T) announced on Monday that its Heavy Civil Infrastructure business has secured a "significant" order worth up to Rs 2,500 crore from Noida Metro Rail Corporation Limited for the Noida Metro Aqua Line extension project.

The project involves the partial design and construction of a 15.1-km elevated viaduct across two stretches, from Botanical Garden to Noida Sector-142 and from Depot Station to Boraki. The scope of work also includes the construction of 10 elevated metro



stations, along with architectural finishes, L&T stated in an exchange filing.

The project is expected to improve regional connectivity and commuter accessibility across Noida's expanding urban landscape. It is scheduled to be completed within 36 months, the company said.

L&T is engaged in engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) projects, hi-tech manufacturing, products and services across multiple sectors.

The company's revenue rose 16 per cent to Rs 78,750 crore in Q2FY27 as compared to Rs 67,984 crore in the year-ago period, "driven by accelerated progress in the various businesses in the Projects, Products & Manufacturing (PPM) portfolio."

The company secured orders worth Rs 1,47,665 crore, registering a year-on-year growth of 28 per cent for the quarter ended September 30, 2026. During the quarter, the company secured several high-value orders led by hydrocarbon - offshore & onshore, carbonLite solutions, public spaces, airports, and power transmission & distribution businesses. The company's international orders stood at Rs 92,375 crore, contributing 63 per cent to the total order inflow.

S N Subrahmanyan, Chairman and Managing Director, said: "The company has delivered a strong quarter in an ever changing geopolitical landscape.

3,000-Year-Old Silk Traces Found on Ancient Chinese Ritual Treasures



■ AGENCY

Scientists examining 3,000-year-old objects recovered from the Sanxingdui archaeological site in China's Sichuan Province have found traces of silk on 101 artefacts, including bronze masks, gold, jade and ivory objects. According to a study published in the journal Antiquity on Sunday, researchers used microscopic and chemical tests to examine the remains and found evidence that the ancient Shu people may have used silk to wrap or cover valuable objects during religious ceremonies. The tests also revealed traces of red colouring on some of the fabric.One of the objects examined was a large bronze mask with small patches of silk still attached near its right eye and eyebrow. Scientists identified three separate areas where the fabric had survived. Interestingly, the pieces did not all have the same weaving pattern or condition. This led researchers to consider whether different pieces of silk had been placed on the mask for decoration or as part of a ritual. The mask was among several objects recovered from Sanxingdui, a site associated with the ancient Shu culture. The objects belong to the Late Shang period, between 1300 and 1046 BC.

Archaeologists have been studying the site for decades, particularly because of the large number of bronze objects discovered there.

The first major collection of bronze artefacts was recovered in 1986, when excavations of two sacrificial pits produced more than 780 objects. Further excavations between 2019 and 2022 uncovered six additional pits. During investigations of these finds, researchers identified silk attached to several different materials. The latest study examined selected samples to find out what kind of fabric had survived and what its presence could reveal about the ceremonies performed at the site.

What the tiny fibres revealed-Most of the silk remains were too small or damaged to be examined like ordinary pieces of cloth. Scientists therefore studied them under powerful microscopes and carried out chemical tests.

Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) allowed researchers to examine the surfaces and shapes of the fibres. They found that the threads were generally smooth, with an average diameter of approximately 10 micrometres. Their shape closely resembled natural mulberry silk.The team then used Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) to study the chemical structure of the material. The results showed that the fibres contained proteins. By comparing these findings with the physical appearance of the threads, researchers were able to distinguish silk from animal hair.

Ancient Egyptian Kohl May Have Helped Boost Immune Defences, Study Suggests



■ AGENCY

Make-up as an art never began simply to enhance the appearance but to draw courage from what was not mere beauty, but power and protection. Mistaken for mere garb, its long expanse across myriad empires and dynasties has symbolized unyielding power, stretched in strokes of black kohl and rosy rouge, painting a face not just to appease eyes, but to amass attention. However, National Geographic brings attention to something even more fascinating about the beauty rituals of the ancient world, especially when we discover that what people applied extended into what was believed to be medicinal. Ancient Egypt, a civilisation remembered for its elaborate jewellery, striking silhouettes and distinctive eye makeup, offers a fascinating example of how medicine and beliefs about protection could exist alongside one another. The dark, elongated eyes associated with Cleopatra, last ruling queen and pharaoh of the Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt, has till date caught our attention. With researchers in the last few decades suggesting that certain compounds used in ancient Egyptian eye makeup could have stimulated the body's immune defenses, a curious conversation between archaeology and modern science has now opened up.

The ancient Egyptian practice of wearing kohl-Eye makeup was not an exclusive privilege of Egypt's queens or ruling elite. Men and women across different levels of Egyptian society wore cosmetics around their eyes, with black and green powders being among the familiar choices.

3,700-Year-Old Burial in Spain May Reveal Ancient Magical Ritual

■ AGENCY

A man buried beneath a hearth in southeastern Spain nearly 3,700 years ago may have been subjected to a ritual intended to suppress supernatural forces rather than simply punish or humiliate him, according to a new archaeological study. The man's face was positioned just one centimetre below the floor of a large hall, while a stone had been forced into his mouth and the lower part of his body lay beneath a hearth. Researchers believe the unusual arrangement may have been designed to symbolically overpower an enemy and prevent the return of forces associated with chaos.



The interpretation was proposed by Marco Mazón Gomariz of the Complutense University of Madrid in a study titled 'Trampling the Enemy: A Possible Magical Ritual of Annihilation in El Argar', published in the journal 'Ilu. Revista de Ciencias de las Religiones' on October 5, 2026. The research examines the remains of an individual identified as AY5, discovered at the Bronze Age archaeological site of La Almoloya in Murcia, Spain. The author stresses that the magical-ritual explanation remains a hypothesis because the people who buried the man left no written account explaining their actions.

A body hidden beneath a room's floor-The burial dates to Phase 3 of the El Argar culture, between approximately 1750 and 1550 BCE.

La Almoloya was an important settlement associated with the Bronze Age society that occupied southeastern Iberia for centuries. According to the study and accompanying archaeological reports, AY5 was a man approximately 40 years old and around 1.63 metres tall. His remains were discovered in Room H9, within the settlement's first residential complex, where the body had been placed between two floor levels.

The lower floor had been modified to accommodate the corpse. His lower body lay beneath a hearth, while his face was positioned at ground level, approximately one centimetre below the surface people would have walked on. A large stone had also been placed inside his mouth.The arrangement meant that people crossing the room could repeatedly step over the area covering his face. The burial contained no grave goods, unlike some other interments associated with the El Argar culture.

Australian Stingless Bee Honey Shows Promise Against Drug-Resistant Bacteria

■ AGENCY

For generations, Australia's tiny native stingless honey bees have been part of Indigenous medicine. Scientists now believe they may hold clues to tackling one of modern medicine's biggest challenges: antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Researchers at the University of Sydney examined the potential medicinal benefits of honey and propolis (a mixture of plant resin and beeswax that bees use to build their nests) produced by Australia's stingless bees, and the early results are hard to ignore. They found that the honey stopped the growth of every bacterium tested, including two hard-to-treat pathogens. These sugarbag bees hold valuable clues to tackling the growing threat of antimicrobial resistance. The findings are published in the journal PLOS One.



Australia's stingless bees could combat antibiotic resistance-Stingless bees, also known as sugarbag bees, are native to Australia. Their honey has long been used in Indigenous medicine. However, almost all research on medicinal honey has focused on the European honey bee. These Australian species have been largely left out of the conversation. A new study led by PhD candidate Jasmin Li aimed to close that gap. Li's team tested honey and propolis from Tetragonula carbonaria, a native Australian stingless bee, against 16 bacterial and fungal pathogens. The new study builds on earlier research from the same university. Both studies add to what scientists know about these bees, which have been overlooked for far too long. What Li and the team found was striking. The honey stopped the growth of every bacterium they tested. That list included two hospital pathogens, Pseudomonas aeruginosa and Klebsiella pneumoniae, both of which are difficult to treat.

The sugarbag honey was comparable in strength to medical-grade Manuka and Jarrah honeys. That matters because those honeys are already well studied, giving the native honey a benchmark against which to be measured. That's not all.

The researchers found that the honey also worked against fungi. It was active against the fungi that cause ringworm and athlete's foot, two common infections that affect millions of people.

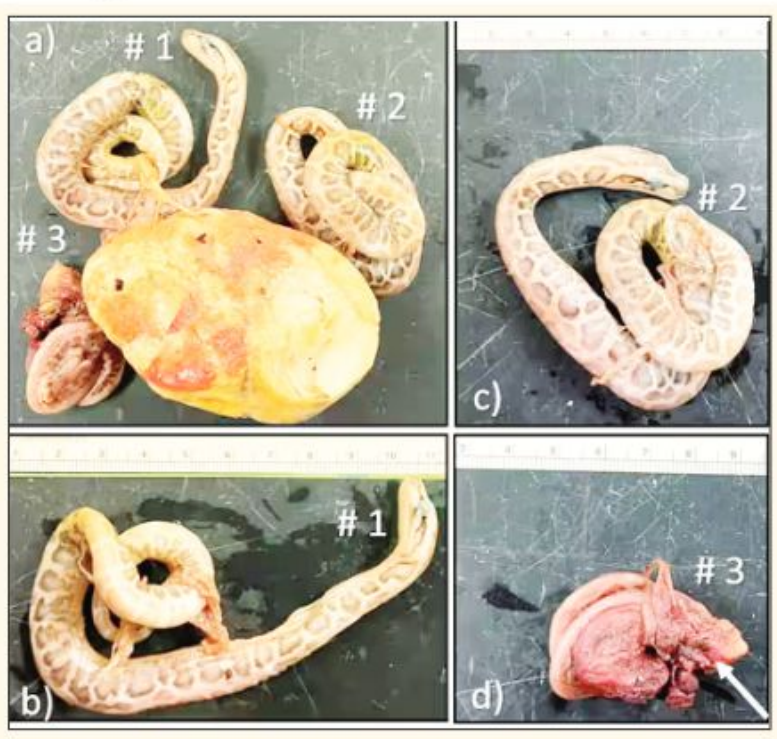
Rare Twin and Triplet Embryos Discovered in Wild Python Eggs in Florida

■ AGENCY

Scientists have discovered twin and triplet embryos inside two eggs laid by a single wild Burmese python in southern Florida, marking the first recorded instance of triplet embryos in a snake. The unusual finding emerged from a clutch of 37 eggs laid on 17 May 2024 by a radio-tagged female python in Big Cypress National Preserve. While 32 eggs hatched normally, researchers found two non-viable eggs containing five embryos in total, all of which had died before hatching. According to the study published in Ecology and Evolution titled 'First Record of Twin and Triplet Embryos Found in the Clutch of a Wild Burmese Python in Southern Florida ', the discovery raises questions about how multiple embryos develop within a single snake egg and how often such occurrences happen in the wild.

What did scientists discover inside the Burmese python eggs-The unusual clutch was laid on 17 May 2024 by a female Burmese python measuring 313.7 centimetres in snout-to-vent length. The eggs were deposited within a hardwood hammock in Big Cypress National Preserve, where researchers were already monitoring python reproduction and survival as part of a long-term study. The clutch was monitored in its natural location, allowing scientists to observe the development and eventual hatching of the eggs.

On 14 July 2024, researchers removed the female from the clutch before the expected hatching period to install an enclosure designed to prevent hatchlings from escaping. The enclosure consisted of a polyvinyl chloride frame covered with two nested mesh laundry bags. Non-viable eggs were removed during the process, while trail cameras were used to monitor the remaining eggs remotely. Hatching began on 17 July, and researchers collected, weighed and measured the emerging hatchlings over five days; the process completed on 22 July 2024.



How were the twin embryos inside Egg A different in their development-The first unusual egg, identified as Egg A, contained two female embryos. When researchers examined it on 22 July, they found a two-centimetre slit in its shell, indicating that the hatching process, known as pipping, had begun. Both embryos were attached to the same yolk and had died. Their development, however, was not identical. One embryo had developed more extensive pigmentation but showed significant skeletal and developmental abnormalities, while the other had a more normally developed body and intact organs.

The second egg, identified as Egg B, contained three embryos at different developmental stages. Unlike Egg A, this egg remained intact, with no signs that hatching had begun. Two of the embryos were similar in size and weight, while the third was considerably smaller and less developed. The researchers recorded that the smallest embryo weighed just 5.6 grams and had a compressed body, particularly around the head and neck. The sexes of all three embryos could not be determined. All were connected to the same yolk, much of which remained unabsorbed. What is monozygotic twinning, and how does it occur in reptiles The study also examined how multiple embryos might develop inside a single reptile egg. Researchers explained that twinning can occur when one fertilised egg divides into two independent embryos, a process known as monozygotic twinning. Another possibility is dizygotic twinning, in which two separately fertilised eggs, each with its own yolk sac, become enclosed within the same eggshell. Scientists have previously proposed that differences in embryo size and egg dimensions could help distinguish between these processes. In the Burmese python clutch, however, both unusual eggs were similar in size to the other eggs, and all embryos were connected to a single yolk. The two embryos in Egg A also had similar body masses, observations that suggested a possible monozygotic origin. However, the researchers cautioned that physical characteristics alone could not establish how the embryos originated. They noted that yolk sacs may fuse to form a common yolk sac, meaning further genetic testing would be necessary to determine the embryos' origins conclusively.



'India is ready for football'

John Abraham backs Indian Super League's growing digital reach

■ SP BUREAU

New Delhi: Bollywood actor and NorthEast United FC owner John Abraham has expressed confidence in the growth of Indian football, pointing to the strong digital viewership figures of the ongoing 2026-27 Indian Super League (ISL) season as evidence of the sport's expanding audience in the country. Abraham believes the rise in online engagement will eventually translate into bigger crowds at stadiums, with the league currently in its fifth week of matches.

'Family really, really happy'

India's history-maker Tirthank Pegu after Youth Olympics medal

■ SP BUREAU

New Delhi: Indian youth swimmer Tirthank Pegu reflected on all the love he has been receiving after winning a historic medal at the Youth Olympics 2026 in Dakar.

Pegu, 17, became the first Indian male swimmer to win a Youth Olympics medal as he clinched a bronze in the men's 200m butterfly final with a time of 2:01.25, bringing a slice of history for the nation.

Speaking on his historic outing in Dakar, the swimmer from Assam opened up about his family's initial reactions to the medal and the love he has been receiving from the ministers, including state Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. "I had a video call with my family yesterday. So, they were really, really happy. They were enjoying, and they were having a party actually without me," Pegu told reporters during a virtual interaction on Monday.

"And they were like, everyone was congratulating me, and they were blessing me for a great future ahead and for the upcoming competitions," he added.

Pegu highlighted that it was his dream to win a medal at the Youth Olympics and that he had worked hard for the medal for a whole year along with coach Sandeep Sejwal. "It's like, it was my dream to win a medal in the Youth Olympics. And me and my coach, we voted for this particular competition whole year. So I'm really feeling good right now," he said.

He stated that the medal feeling has not sunk in yet, as the ministers have also been really happy with his achievement too. "Yeah, the feeling has not sunk in yet. And like in Assam, my whole family is really happy that they believed in me a lot. And like the other people, the ministers are also really happy," he said.

Pegu missed out on a medal in the 100m butterfly event after finishing fourth. He admitted he was nervous before the 200m butterfly final. "To be honest, I was really nervous, and I was really underconfident. Like before the finals, I missed the medal in the 100 metres. So I was really focusing mainly on the medal.



3rd Unofficial Test: Rain-hit Day 3 leaves India A's bowling plans frustrated

■ AGENCY

Lincoln: India A's preparations for the upcoming Test series against New Zealand suffered a setback as persistent rain wiped out the entire Day 3 play in the third four-day fixture against New Zealand 'A' here on Monday, leaving little opportunity for the visitors to get valuable match practice before the senior team's red-ball assignment begins on November 19.

The washout has pushed the final match of the three-game series towards a draw, with India's management also missing out on an important opportunity to assess the readiness of several first-choice bowling options, particularly Jasprit Bumrah, Ravindra Jadeja and Prasidh Krishna.

Bumrah's return to competitive cricket was among the major talking points of the fixture. The fast bowler had not featured since the Asian Games in early October and was subsequently rested for the white-ball assignments against West Indies and New Zealand. He had spent time preparing in Ahmedabad before completing the prescribed return-to-play programme at the BCCI Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru.

The second day's proceedings offered a glimpse of his progress, with Bumrah bowling six overs and conceding just 11 runs, including a maiden. Although he did not pick up a wicket, his economical spell provided an encouraging start to his comeback campaign. The abandoned third day, however, denied him another opportunity to build on that outing.

Jadeja was another key member of India's Test plans, hoping to benefit from the four-day contest. The all-rounder arrived in New Zealand after featuring in two Ranji Trophy matches for Saurashtra but remained unused with the ball on the second day. With the weather intervening on Monday, he will now have to make the most of whatever opportunity remains on the final day to get some bowling practice.

Prasidh Krishna, meanwhile, made an immediate impression during his first competitive appearance since sustaining a hamstring injury in the second ODI against West Indies on September 30. The right-arm pacer claimed both New Zealand A wickets to fall on the second day, finishing with two wickets from five overs.

Prasidh had originally been included in India's squad for the ongoing ODI series against New Zealand but was subsequently withdrawn to feature in the red-ball preparatory fixture instead. His performance in Lincoln is particularly relevant, as he remains among the candidates being considered for India's pace attack in the opening Test.

With the senior Indian side scheduled to begin its two-match Test series against New Zealand on November 19, the remaining hours of the final day could prove important for the visitors. After losing an entire day's cricket to rain, India A will be keen to squeeze in as much time on the field as possible, especially for the bowlers returning from injury or extended breaks.

However, with Monday's washout severely limiting the available playing time, the three-match series now appears destined to conclude without a decisive result.

Brief Scores: India A 464/5 dec (Yashasvi Jaiswal 102, Sai Sudharsan 88, Tilak Varma 81 not out, Dhruv Jurel 71, Washington Sundar 50 not out, Zak Gibson 2-73) lead New Zealand A 36/2 (Curtis Heaphy 19, Dean Foxcroft 10; Prasidh Krishna 2-12) by 428 runs.





Zimbabwe name Nkomo-led 14-member squad for first-ever Emerging Nations Trophy campaign



■ AGENCY

Harare: Zimbabwe has announced a 14-member women's squad for the ICC Women's Emerging Nations Trophy, with Josephine Nkomo set to captain the side in its first-ever appearance at the tournament in Ajman, UAE.

Josephine will be backed by a group of experienced players, including Nomvelo Sibanda, Sharne Mayers, Modester Munachikwa and Chipo Mugeri-Tiripano. The squad also features Beloved Biza, Olinder Chare, Chiyedza Dhururu, Nyasha Gwanzura, Tendai Makusha, Michelle Mavunga, Christina Mutasa, Kelis Ndhlovu and Loryn Phiri.

From the squad which made the trip to India, Francisca Chipare and bowler Kudzai Chigora miss out on the Emerging Nations Trophy selection, while Christina Mutasa enters the side as the sole new addition in the team for the upcoming tournament.

Zimbabwe made it into the tournament, which runs from November 12 to 25, after the ICC enlarged the field from eight to 10 teams. This edition is also the first to feature Full Member nations, with five of them in the draw.

Bangladesh, Ireland, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are the other Full Members making their debut at the event. Associate sides like the Netherlands, Papua New Guinea, Scotland, Thailand and hosts UAE make up the rest of the participating teams. The expanded tournament is a part of the ICC's efforts to strengthen the women's cricket pathway and give teams more regular international cricket playing exposure by facing off against a wider range of opponents.

Mushfiqur Rahim becomes Bangladesh's first player to score 7000 Test runs



■ AGENCY

Sylhet: Veteran wicketkeeper-batter Mushfiqur Rahm etched his name into the history books as he became the first cricketer from Bangladesh to complete 7000 runs in Test cricket during the 2nd match against the West Indies at Sylhet International Cricket Stadium here on Monday.

Mushfiqur, who missed the first Test of the two-match series, achieved the milestone during the second innings of the second match when he took a single off Roston Chase on Day 5 to get to nine during the second session.

The 39-year-old was already the first batter from his country to have completed 5000 and 6000 Test runs and now added another feather to his illustrious career.

He is 1747 runs ahead of Bangladesh's second-highest run-getter Mominul Haque (5293 runs) and 1906 runs clear of the now-retired Tamim Iqbal, who has 5134 runs in the format.

Coming into the match, he had 6957 runs to his name and needed 43 more to get to the milestone.

'We should be ready': Kotak backs India's readiness for NZ Tests after challenging ODI conditions

■ AGENCY

Hamilton: India batting coach Sitanshu Kotak believes the challenging conditions encountered during the ongoing ODI series against New Zealand have offered valuable preparation for the upcoming two-Test assignment, with the visitors getting an early understanding of the movement and bounce they could encounter in red-ball cricket.

Speaking ahead of the third ODI in Hamilton on Tuesday, Kotak highlighted how the conditions in the first two matches, combined with the India A team's ongoing red-ball fixtures and a scheduled training camp have helped India's Test-bound players prepare for the longer format.



Although the coaching staff are not looking to alter their approach during the white-ball series, Kotak felt the nature of the pitches had provided useful insights into what could await India when the Test series begins on November 19.

"No one will make Test adjustments during a white-ball (series), but at the same time, the way the wickets were in both ODIs, there was swing, and after five-six overs, when the swing stopped, there was seam movement too, and you could say a little bit of awkward bounce too," Kotak said ahead of the third ODI. "In hindsight, it's a good thing, because we might get the same things in the Test matches, only the ball will be red.

"You will still have a one-day intent and mindset in one-day (matches), but the wickets here.