

Long-Pending Kishau Dam Project Deal Inked; Centre, Six States Sign MoU

New Delhi, Sept 15 (GNS): A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the long-pending Kishau Project was signed on Tuesday between the Centre and six states — Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, bringing an end to a prolonged dispute over the sharing of the project's financial burden and distribution of its benefits.

The agreement was reached at a meeting chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, which was attended by the Chief Ministers of all six participating states — Uttarakhand's Pushkar Singh Dhami, Himachal Pradesh's Sukhvin-



der Singh Sukhu, Haryana's Nayab Singh Saini, Rajasthan's Bhajanlal Sharma, Uttar Pradesh's Yogi Adityanath and Delhi's Rekha Gupta.

Union Minister for Jal Shakti C.R. Patil, Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan, Secretary of the Department of Water Resources,

River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, along with the Chief Secretaries of the participating states, were also present during the meeting. Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma expressed his gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership for

facilitating what he described as a historic agreement. "The people of Rajasthan are very fortunate, because as you know, water scarcity has been a major challenge in Rajasthan. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, continuous agreements are being finalised — whether it is our ERCR,

the Chambal-Kalisindh-Parbati link, the Yamuna water agreement with Haryana, the Narmada agreement among Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan, or today's Kishau Dam agreement between Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Delhi," CM Sharma said.

The Kishau Project had remained stuck for years due to differences over the financial responsibilities of the participating states, particularly Himachal Pradesh's share in the cost of electricity generation. Under an earlier agreement, Himachal Pradesh was expected to share the cost of power generation

from the project with Uttarakhand, while the downstream states were to benefit from the water supplied through the project. The previous BJP government in Himachal Pradesh had agreed to contribute Rs 800 crore as the state's share towards the project. However, the present Congress

government opposed the arrangement, citing the state's limited financial resources and its inability to take on the additional financial burden. The prolonged deadlock was eventually resolved in June this year following a high-level meeting chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi.

New Wave Of Start-Ups Shaping Up India's Defence Landscape: Rajnath Singh



New Delhi, Sept 15 (GNS): Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday made a strong pitch for supporting innovation and technological advancement in all sectors, including defence, cyber security, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and others, to strengthen India's defence prospects and secure strategic advantage over global peers. Terming technology as one of most powerful tools of 21st century, the Defence Minister said that it has the power to shape country's future and make it self-reliant.

Rajnath Singh made these remarks while addressing the DRDO-Industry Synergy Meet VIMARSH 2026 in the national capital, themed 'Varta Se Vikas'. Highlighting that a new wave of defence startups is rising in India, the Defence Minister said, "These startups are giving a fresh direction to the modern defence landscape in areas like drone technology, artificial intelligence, and cyber security. Today's innovation is tomorrow's military capability." "Whoever leads technology today will gain a strategic advantage in future warfare," he added.

Rajnath Singh also urged the nation and its youth to inculcate a habit of self-confidence and self-reliance, saying that a country

having its own technology will always have the power to shape its own future. "India's Startups and MSMEs have emerged as new flag-bearers of innovation. From deep tech to futuristic technologies, these enterprises are scripting a new story of self-reliance in the defence sector. From research to manufacturing, the role of MSMEs and Startups is extremely crucial in building Aatmanirbhar Bharat," he said.

The Defence Minister also called for increased collaboration between the research institutions like DRDO, the industry and also the Armed Forces, for accelerating technology development and achieving self-reliance in defence sector. "The defence sector plays a decisive role in achieving the goal of 'Developed India 2047'. When DRDO's technology, the industrial world's manufacturing capability, the innovation of startups, and the aspirations of the youth unite in one direction, India's military capability will reach new heights.

This is the 'Collective Strength' of the 'New India'." Rajnath Singh said in a post on social media platform X.

SC notice to education secretary over religious, secular education order

New Delhi, Sept 15 (GNS): The Supreme Court on Tuesday issued notice in contempt proceedings against the Secretary of the Union Education Ministry over alleged non-compliance with its direction to take a decision on a representation seeking registration, recognition, regulation, and monitoring of institutions imparting secular or religious education to children below the age of 14 years.

A Bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Sheel Nagu sought a response from the official, T.K. Anil Kumar of the IAS, on the contempt petition filed by advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay, alleging that the Centre failed to comply with the apex court's direction within the stipulated period. The apex court's proceedings arise from its May 11 order in which



it had disposed of Upadhyay's writ petition after taking note of his representation dated February 10, 2026, before the Union Education Ministry. The top court had directed the Centre to take a decision on the representation within the stipulated period, after declining to entertain the writ petition at that stage and asking the petitioner to await the outcome of the representation.

In the contempt petition, Upadhyay alleged that despite the specific direction

of the Supreme Court, the contemnor did not take any decision on his representation.

The petitioner had sought directions to the Centre and state governments to register, recognise, supervise and monitor all institutions imparting secular education and/or religious instruction to children up to the age of 14 years. He has also sought declarations concerning the scope of Article 30(1) of the Constitution, including that it is a specific reiteration of Article 19(1)(g), and that institutions imparting religious instruction fall under Article 26.

In his contempt petition, Upadhyay claimed that he had visited several bordering districts of Uttar Pradesh in January and found a number of non-registered and non-recognised institutions.

All you need to know about new UPI framework

New Delhi, Sept 15 (GNS): The new UPI framework introduced has no impact on any person-to-person transactions as UPI will continue to remain completely free for these, irrespective of the amount transferred, according to an explainer issued by the Finance Ministry on Tuesday. Payments to merchants up to Rs 2,000, along with transactions covered under the zero-MDR framework for small merchants, will also remain free. Consequently, approximately 96 per cent of all P2M transactions will remain unaffected.

MDR will apply only to specified merchant transactions above Rs 2,000. The Finance Ministry clarified that MDR is neither a tax nor a charge collected by the government or the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI). It is distributed among payment ecosystem participants, including banks and payment



application providers, to support the operation and continued expansion of the UPI ecosystem. A nominal MDR of 0.4 per cent will apply only to P2M transactions above Rs 2,000. The MDR will be shared among payment ecosystem participants, including banks, payment service providers and UPI application providers. For transactions of Rs 75,000 and above, the MDR will be capped at Rs 300 per transaction.

Transactions above Rs 2,000 in essential and thin-margin sectors, including railways, telecommunications, insurance, fuel and agricultural inputs, will attract a flat MDR of Rs 5 per transaction.

India, Myanmar reaffirm commitment to promote peace and stability through bilateral army exercise

New Delhi, Sept 15 (GNS): The 5th edition of the India-Myanmar bilateral army exercise IMBAX commenced today at the Joint Training Node in Meghalaya on Tuesday, reaffirming the commitment of both nations towards promoting peace, stability and security in the region.

"The 5th edition of the India-Myanmar Bilateral Army Exercise IMBAX commenced today at the Joint Training Node, Umroi, Meghalaya. The 14-day exercise is being conducted from 15 to 28 September 2026," the Additional Directorate General of Public Information of the Indian Army stated on X. According to it, the exercise aims to enhance interoperability and synergy for the conduct of operations under the United Nations mandate through joint training between both armies.



"It will also provide an opportunity to exchange operational experiences and best practices, while strengthening mutual understanding, camaraderie and military-to-military cooperation. Exercise IMBAX also provides an opportunity for the participating contingent to witness a variety of indigenous weapons and equipment in use by the Indian Army, aligned with the vision of JAI se VI-JAY. The exercise reaffirms the commitment of both nations towards promoting

peace, stability and security in the region," the Indian Army stated. Last week, Minister of State (MoS) for External Affairs, Pabitra Margherita, interacted with the visiting Myanmar Parliament delegation led by Chairman of the International Relations Committee, Pwint San, in New Delhi, with discussions focused on strengthening bilateral ties. During the meeting, the MoS reaffirmed New Delhi's commitment to advancing the multifaceted

partnership with Myanmar, guided by key Indian foreign policy priorities of Neighbourhood First, Act East and MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions). The delegation was in New Delhi for capacity-building training at the Parliamentary Research and Training Institute for Democracies (PRIDE), the training and research wing of the Lok Sabha Secretariat. Following the meeting, Margherita took to X and posted.

India Remains on High Alert Against Terror

MANOJ JOSHI

THE year 2025 was not the best one for India's security. The country suffered ghastly terror attacks in Pahalgam on April 24 and New Delhi on November 10. The former led to a short war with Pakistan. Fortunately, hostilities ended soon, but as Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared, they have only been suspended. Terrorism clearly remains a challenge, as does the fact that normalcy in Kashmir is a far cry even six years after the abrogation of Article 370. However, a plus point was the elimination of key Maoist leaders in central India. Despite the setbacks in the security arena this year, India did well geopolitically. New Delhi's rift with the US led to the 'rediscovery' of the virtues of strategic autonomy. By standing up to the US, maintaining stable relations with the European Union and strengthening ties with Japan and Russia, India was an island of stability in an otherwise turbulent world.

Fortunately, relations with China regained an even keel after the two sides worked in accordance with the border patrolling agreement they had reached in October 2024. In the Indian Ocean Region, too, there was relief as New Delhi's ties with Sri Lanka and Maldives witnessed an upswing. What does 2026 have in store? Unfortunately, India-Bangladesh ties have not yet bottomed out. The situation in the neighbouring country has



deteriorated sharply following the recent assassination of student leader Sharif Osman Hadi. The return of Bangladesh National Party (BNP) leader Tarique Rehman is a positive development, but the potential for further worsening of ties remains, given the forces at work to block Bangladesh's recovery as a stable, democratic entity.

Bangladesh borders four northeastern states of India. In the past, it has served as a platform to support separatist movements in Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur and Assam. It was also used to send Pakistani terrorists into India. Not many know that Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar first entered India in 1994 through Bangladesh on a forged Portuguese passport. The downfall of Sheikh Hasina has been used by Pakistan to re-establish itself in Bangladesh both through

official and Islamist channels. More than half a dozen Pakistani military delegations have visited the country in the year since Hasina's exile. These include clandestine visits by the ISI top brass. In addition, there have been visits by Lashkar-e-Taiba leaders like Ibtisam Elahi Zaeher. The Islamists led by the Jamaat-e-Islami have a substantial institutional network; they have expanded their street presence and are bidding fair to win the next election, taking on their erstwhile ally, the BNP. They have no love lost for India and the single item on their agenda is to declare Sharia as the law of the country.

Pakistan remains a challenge. It seems to have convinced itself that the four-day conflict with India was some kind of a victory, if not a draw. The truth is that it exposed Pakistan's vulnerability. India lost a

few aircraft in the opening hours of the war, but it quickly turned around the situation to the point where no target in Pakistan was safe from Indian strikes. In contrast, the Indian integrated air defence system prevented any significant damage to India.

But, having befriended the US, the Pakistani military believes that it is in a position to challenge India. Generating an external threat would be the easy way out for Field Marshal Asim Munir to consolidate his control. After all, it was Op Sindoor that helped his elevation in the first place. But the Generals know the true outcome of the four-day war, so they are not likely to challenge India militarily. They will focus on using terrorist proxies as they have done in the recent past. Pakistani polity remains extremely fragile and while Munir may be

the de facto ruler, this is because its most popular politician (Imran Khan) is in jail. As for China, there seems to be no immediate threat since India continues to match the Chinese build-up along the LAC. However, in 2026, India needs to work on the second leg of its eastern Ladhak policy by pushing for de-escalation. There are aspects of disengagement that need to be completed, such as the dissolution of the no-patrol zones created during 2020-22 in four areas where the Chinese had blocked Indian patrols. De-escalation would target the additional forces that both sides have brought near the LAC in the region.

India also confronts another kind of a challenge from its rift with the US. For more than 20 years, the US formed an important geopolitical pillar of India's global security outlook. But the developments of 2025 have undermined the trust on which this was based. The US has a new National Security Strategy which has little to say about India except as an economic partner. America's ties with Pakistan and China suggest abundant caution not to rely on the US too much.

Indeed, 2026 should be the year in which India must work out a new geopolitical orientation to replace the one lost with the US. Besides emphasising multi-polarity, it also needs to take steps to boost the country's defence expenditure in keeping with trends around the world.

AAP on top in rural polls, but no room for complacency

THE ruling party's sweeping victory in the rural body elections has been a foregone conclusion since long, particularly after the 73rd Amendment (1992) gave constitutional status to Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) in India. In Punjab, the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) was the runaway winner in the recent block samiti and zila parishad polls. Opposition parties such as the Congress and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) made their presence felt in areas where local leaders wielded influence.

The AAP claimed that the mandate was an endorsement of the good work done by the Bhagwant Mann government since 2022 in rural Punjab and it would help the party retain power in the 2027 Assembly elections. However, the Congress and the SAD accused the AAP of indulging in high-handedness and misusing state machinery to win the elections.

The aim of establishing the three-tier Panchayati Raj system was to strengthen the democratic process at the grassroots level. Though the system was implemented in 1959, it did not have full constitutional validity before the 73rd Amendment in 1992.

Subsequently, it became a permanent, mandatory part of India's democratic structure and incorporated in Part IX of the Constitution. However, devolution of powers to rural bodies has been mostly conspicuous by its absence, thus making them political tools in the hands of the ruling party.

The first block samiti and zila parishad elections in Punjab were held during the rule of the Beant Singh-led Congress government in 1994. Riding high after having rooted out decade-long terrorism in the state, the ruling party swept the elections. It was the first normal election in Punjab in the post-terrorism period.

The 1992 Assembly and parliamentary elections witnessed a very low turnout (23.50 per cent) due to the boycott by major Akali Dal factions and threats from terrorist organisations against people's participation. The SAD, having a rural base, had contested the block samiti and zila parishad elections but failed to make a major impact. Rather, the party had levelled allegations of large-scale malpractices and accused the Congress of throwing all democratic norms to the wind to win those elections. The end result was the Congress' rout in the 1997 Assembly elections — it could win only 14 seats against 87 in 1992. In the Lok Sabha elections in Punjab, the Congress' tally dropped from 12 seats (out of 13) in 1992 to two in 1996; it drew a blank in the 1998 parliamentary elections.

The AAP performed below par in the 2024 parliamentary elections, winning only three seats despite being in power. Its performance in the urban elections was also dismal as it failed to get a clear-cut majority in the majority of the civic bodies. The party was desperate to reassert its dominance. No wonder it went all out to win the rural elections.

The party relied on brazen messaging during campaigning in rural areas, with slogans such as "AAP di Sarkar, AAP di Zila Parishad, AAP di Block Samiti — tanki sidha kam AAP de hath". It was a message for the rural masses: vote for us or struggle to get your work done.

The ruling party made its intentions clear; in some cases, it was throwback to the SAD-BJP rule (2007-17) when halqa incharges were made extra-constitutional centres of power. The SAD had given them a free hand, which ultimately resulted in the political marginalisation of the party.

The outcome only reflects an assertion of power, not the eagerness of the people to endorse the work done by the government. The highhandedness will breed deep resentment among the rural masses. The ruling party may consider this victory as significantly pro-incumbency, but this is no guarantee of success in the Assembly elections.

A close look at these elections lays bare fault lines in state politics, particularly at the grassroots level. The allegations and counter-allegations have become an integral part of Punjab politics, ignoring the core issues and problems faced by the people of the state.

The entry of gangsters and candidates backed by gangsters and their success in some cases have raised disturbing questions about politics in Punjab.

Notably, the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB G-RAM-G) Act, which has replaced the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) as the flagship Central scheme for wage employment for rural workers, has been opposed by AAP, SAD and the Congress.

With a little over a year left for the Assembly elections, the AAP continues to grapple with several issues: deteriorating law and order situation, dissatisfaction among various sections of society, inaccessibility of some elected representatives, the financial crisis and the failure to meet the expectations of the people who had voted wholeheartedly for the party in the 2022 elections.

The influence of an unconstitutional power centre based in Delhi is also a matter of concern for the electorate. The unfortunate part of Punjab's story in the post-Green Revolution era is 'growth without development', which is the result of dominance of the rural elite in politics. Political leaders and their parties are largely not keen on strengthening the democratic structure at the grassroots.

Factional politics without ideological commitment has also contributed to the degeneration of the political process in the state. The big question is: Whether or when will Punjab move towards a participatory political process?

The recent rural body election results in Punjab should therefore be viewed in the broader context of democratic decentralisation. The constitutional recognition of Panchayati Raj institutions was intended to ensure greater participation of ordinary citizens in governance. However, the excessive influence of political parties and local power brokers has weakened the spirit of this arrangement.

For rural democracy to become meaningful, elected representatives must be given adequate financial resources, administrative powers and greater independence. Gram sabhas should be strengthened, and people must have a greater say in deciding development priorities. Transparency in the functioning of panchayats and rural bodies is essential to restore public confidence.

The role of the State Election Commission also assumes significance in ensuring free and fair elections. Allegations of intimidation, misuse of official machinery and undue political influence must be investigated impartially. A level playing field for all political parties is necessary to ensure that rural elections reflect the genuine choice of voters.

Punjab's political parties must also shift their focus from electoral calculations to the pressing concerns of rural communities. Unemployment, drug abuse, agricultural distress, inadequate healthcare, poor infrastructure and the migration of youth require sustained attention. Rural development cannot be achieved through political slogans or the distribution of short-term benefits alone.

Ultimately, the strength of Punjab's democracy will depend on whether political parties are willing to empower people at the grassroots. Rural elections should serve as an instrument of accountability and inclusive development rather than merely a test of the ruling party's organisational strength. The state's future democratic progress will be determined by its ability to move from centralised political control towards genuine participatory governance.

Hobson's Choice Shadows Indian Elections

MANOJ JHA

INDIAN elections are routinely celebrated as a festival of democracy, characterised by reasonably robust voter turnout and peaceful polling in most regions. The sheer logistical scale of conducting elections for nearly a billion people is invoked as proof that India remains a vibrant democracy.

The tagline of the Election Commission of India (ECI) — free and fair elections — is repeated with ritualistic pride. However, beneath this procedural success lies a deeper unease and discomfiture. For an increasing number of citizens, elections are becoming increasingly reminiscent of a Hobson's choice: the freedom to choose, but with no meaningful alternative to choose from, and a gradual erosion of their agency. Hobson's coice is not the absence of choice; it is the compulsion to accept what is offered or opt out altogether. This metaphor captures the contemporary Indian electoral experience with unsettling accuracy. Voters are not denied the vote — at least not yet — but they are often denied genuine political alternatives that challenge dominant economic models or question the concentration of power. The same applies to rising income inequality and the anxieties of the most marginalised.

At a formal level, Indian elections continue to meet constitutional criteria. Multiple parties contest, campaigns are held, polling is



conducted, and at times, governments change. However, democracy is not sustained solely by procedures. Its vitality depends on the range, depth and credibility of choices available to the electorate.

If elections are reduced to binary contests between highly centralised parties with similar policy frameworks and identical electoral strategies, the democratic choice ultimately shrinks.

One of the most visible contributors to this narrowing is the growing asymmetry of power between ruling parties and the Opposition. Access to financial resources has become wildly uneven. Electoral bonds, before being struck down by the Supreme Court for being patently unconstitutional, created a system of opaque political funding that overwhelmingly favoured the party in power. Even after their abolition, the structural advantage

enjoyed by the ruling dispensation remains intact through state power, corporate patronage, quid pro quo arrangements and informal channels of influence. According to a recently published report, 82 per cent of the total donations went into the pocket of the BJP, while other political outfits shared the rest. In such a scenario, Opposition parties may exist, but they compete on an uneven playing field where survival itself becomes the primary objective, not the articulation of alternative visions.

This imbalance is reinforced by the increasing use of investigative agencies, such as the Enforcement Directorate, the Central Bureau of Investigation and the Income Tax Department, as political instruments. It is no one's case that corruption must not be addressed, but the selective deployment of these agencies, often coinciding with

elections or defections, creates a climate of coercion. Again, if the Opposition leaders are preoccupied with legal and financial survival, democratic debate is bound to be impoverished. Elections then become contests of endurance rather than ideas.

The media landscape compounds this problem. Large sections of the mainstream media no longer function as neutral platforms for scrutiny or debate. Instead, they amplify dominant narratives, marginalise dissenting voices and reduce complex political questions to emotive and polarising spectacles.

When electoral discourse is shaped less by policy failures, such as unemployment, income inequality, a deteriorating environment, public health issues, and more, by manufactured outrage, hyper-nationalism or identity-based polarisation, voters are deprived of

the information necessary to make informed choices.

Grassroots leadership, ideological training and collective decision-making have given way to a politics driven by charisma. Voters often find themselves choosing between individuals imposed from above rather than representatives organically rooted in their constituencies.

Besides, Hobson's choice of Indian elections is also produced through the careful orchestration of religious polarisation.

Even as elections are conducted under the banner of being "free and fair," the moral and ideological terrain on which voters are asked to choose is systematically narrowed. Most political parties, while publicly professing secular commitment, struggle to maintain a principled distance from this polarising logic.

Let us now consider unemployment, one of the most pressing concerns for Indian youth today, more so than ever before in our history. Despite repeated promises of job creation, data from official and independent sources reveal persistent underemployment, the informalisation of labour and a consistent decline in wages.

Yet this issue rarely dominates electoral campaigns with the seriousness it deserves. Similarly, agrarian distress, evident in farmer protests, stagnant incomes and rising indebtedness, is often reduced to episodic attention.

Union Minister Scindia Leads High-Level Q3 Review on India Post Growth

New Delhi, Sept 15 (GNS): The Department of Posts convened its Quarterly Business Review Meeting for Quarter 3 (Q3) of FY 2025–26 under the chairmanship of the Union Minister for Communications and Development of North Eastern Region in New Delhi today. Senior officers and Heads of Circles from across the country participated in the meeting to review performance across key business verticals and to identify corrective measures for accelerating growth.

At the outset, the Union Minister stated that India Post has set an ambitious revenue target of 17,546 crore for FY 2025–26, significantly higher than the previous year. He noted that India Post is on a strong trajectory towards achieving this target, having already realised 10,155 crore during the first three quarters of the current financial year. He emphasised that this progress reflects India Post's strategic transition towards becoming a parcel- and logistics-driven organisation, aligned with the growing demands of e-commerce, integrated supply chains and citizen-centric service delivery.

Reviewing Q3 performance, the Union Minister observed that while overall growth trends remain positive, core verticals—particularly Parcels, Mail and International Mail—have underperformed. Emphasising that the future growth

of India Post depends critically on the strength of its core logistics engine, the Union Minister stressed that parcels and mail must begin “firing on all cylinders.” He directed major circles such as Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Delhi—which together account for nearly 60 percent of India Post's potential business volume—to urgently replicate best practices.

Circle-wise performance was reviewed in detail. Rajasthan emerged as the best-performing circle overall, achieving 82 percent of Q3 targets. In the Post Office Savings Bank segment, Karnataka achieved 112 percent of its Q3 target. Citizen Centric Services (CCS) recorded exceptional performance in Delhi (240 percent), followed by Maharashtra (166 percent) and Rajasthan (165 percent). In Postal Life Insurance, Uttar Pradesh emerged as the top performer with 129 percent achievement. In mail operations, Rajasthan achieved 153 percent.

Evaluating the performance of the six verticals, the Union Minister of Communications commended the exceptional performance of Citizen Centric Services vertical which has shown exceptional growth of 95% over Q3 2024-25. Parcel with 12 % growth, Postal Life Insurance vertical with 11% growth and Post Office Savings Bank

AI Leaders Encouraged to Actively Participate in the India AI Impact Summit

New Delhi, Sept 15 (GNS): Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology, Railways and Information & Broadcasting, Ashwini Vaishnaw, underscored growing global confidence in Bharat and India's emergence as a trusted value-chain partner during his engagements at the World Economic Forum (WEF), Davos. The Minister said that engagements at WEF, Davos reinforce Bharat's growth story, with sustained interest from global leaders in partnering with India across infrastructure, technology, logistics, manufacturing and emerging sectors.

During discussions, Mr. Teo Chee Hean, Chairman, Temasek, expressed interest in expanding Temasek's presence in India, reaffirming Singapore's commitment to invest in India's physical and digital infrastructure as well as deep-tech startups. Interactions with leaders in artificial intelligence, robotics and cybersecurity further reflected India's growing stature as a trusted value-chain partner.

The Minister noted that global confidence in Bharat was evident across engagements. Maersk is actively engaging with India to strengthen logistics infrastructure across shipping, ports and railways, and is also working with India on semiconductor materials.

Honeywell is partnering with India in railway modernisation and has expressed interest in expanding its manufacturing operations in the country. Vaishnaw also met Mr. Demis Hassabis, CEO & Co-founder, Google DeepMind and Mr. Chris Lehane, Chief Global Affairs Officer, OpenAI, at WEF Davos. The Minister discussed India's growing role in shaping AI for global good. He encouraged the AI leaders to actively participate in the AI Impact Summit, to be held in New Delhi in February, 2026.

Speaking on the sidelines of his engagements in Davos, Shri Vaishnaw observed that at a time of global turbulence, with old rules and al-

liances undergoing change, India is increasingly seen as a reliable partner - a vibrant democracy that delivers and provides leadership focused on inclusive growth. He said that across discussions and meetings, there is consistent trust in India as a country with which global partners can comfortably work, co-create and co-develop new technologies.

On critical minerals, the Minister said that the value chain is complex and requires coordinated participation across multiple stages, particularly in refining and processing.

He emphasised that meaningful international collaborations are essential to secur-

ing resilient critical mineral value chains. He noted that India already has collaborations with Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Australia, Europe and the United States, and these partnerships can play a significant role in strengthening critical mineral ecosystems

On artificial intelligence, Shri Vaishnaw outlined India's approach across the AI stack, from applications and models to chips, infrastructure and energy. He noted that India's IT industry has pivoted towards delivering AI-based solutions that drive productivity and value.

Referring to the forthcoming AI Impact Summit, the Minister said the Summit will

CAQM revokes Stage III restrictions across Delhi-NCR as AQI improves

New Delhi, Sept 15 (GNS): The Sub-Committee on the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) of the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) revoked all Stage III actions across Delhi-NCR with immediate effect on 16.01.2026, following a deterioration in Delhi's average AQI. Subsequently, Delhi's air quality showed a downward trend. As per the daily AQI Bulletin provided by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the average AQI improved from 378 on 20.01.2026 to 330 on 21.01.2026 and 322 on 21.01.2026. In view of this improving trend and based on air quality and meteorological forecasts from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), the CAQM Sub-Committee met today to review the situation.

The Sub-Committee observed that the AQI of Delhi has been improving owing to favourable meteorological conditions and recorded as 322 today i.e. 22.01.2026. Forecast by IMD/ IITM indicates that AQI.

Trucks-on-Trains: A Strategic Modal Shift Led by Indian Railways' Dedicated Freight Corridor

New Delhi, Sept 15 (GNS): As India's economy grows and consumption diversifies, freight movement has increased sharply, straining roads, fuel use, and air quality. To address this, Indian Railways, through its visionary Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) initiative, has introduced the innovative Trucks-on-Trains (ToT) service. Conceived as part of Indian Railways' long-term freight transformation strategy, the DFC network provides the backbone that enables new-generation multimodal logistics.

ToT integrates the flexibility of road transport with the efficiency and environmental benefits of electrified rail infrastructure developed under Indian Railways' Dedicated Freight Corridor program. The service allows loaded trucks to be carried on specially modified flat wagons along the dedicated freight corridor. Trucks avoid long, congested highway journeys and travel by rail for the main haul. They then complete only short first- and last-mile road movements.

At present, the ToT service operates between New Rewari and New Palanpur on the Western DFC network. It will be extended to additional sections as infrastructure development progresses. On the New Palanpur–New Rewari corridor, the service spans approximately 636 kilometres, cutting end-to-end transit time from nearly 30

hours by road to around 12 hours via the ToT service. This integrated road–rail solution enhances transit reliability, shortens turnaround times, and reduces overall logistics costs, while shielding long-haul freight movement from many of the uncertainties inherent in highway transport.

A key strength of the ToT lies in its simple and competitive pricing structure. Freight is charged on transparent weight slabs, 25,543 per wagon for trucks up to 25 tonnes, 29,191 for 25-45 tonnes, and 32,000 for 45-58 tonnes, while empty trucks are carried at only 21,894 per wagon. To further support the dairy sector, no GST is levied on milk tankers, making the service especially attractive for time-sensitive and perishable cargo. Enhancing operational flexibility, Open Indent booking has been available since January 2024, allowing customers to plan movements in line with their dynamic logistics requirements.

Operational data from the current financial year clearly reflects the growing traction of the service. During FY 2025 (April–December), the Trucks-on-Trains service handled a total of 545 rakes, moving more than 3 lakh tonnes of freight and generating revenue of 36.95 crore. This volume underscores ToT's emergence as a commercially viable and scalable logistics

product rather than a pilot-stage innovation.

A closer look at origin-wise performance further highlights its strength. New Palanpur alone accounted for 273 rakes, handling about more than 2 lakh tonnes and generating revenue of 20.18 crore, demonstrating strong adoption from western India's freight clusters, particularly in dairy and FMCG segments. New Rewari contributed almost equally in operational terms, with 272 rakes, moving around 0.1004 million tonnes and generating 16.76 crore in revenue. Together, these terminals illustrate how strategically located nodes on the DFC can anchor sustained multimodal freight flows and drive corridor-based logistics efficiency. The service has witnessed strong patronage from western India's freight clusters, particularly from major customers such as the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (Amul) for milk and dairy products, along with other logistics service providers. The relaunch of the Trucks-on-Trains service through a Memorandum of Understanding with GCMMF in June 2023 significantly reinforced industry confidence and helped anchor regular volumes from the dairy sector. One of the most significant strategic outcomes of Western Dedicated Freight Corridor Trucks-on-Trains service is the modal shift.

NIFT International Conference 2026 on “Design for Inclusive Futures” Opens at NIFT Mumbai

New Delhi, Sept 15 (GNS): The two-day NIFT International Conference 2026, titled “Design for Inclusive Futures”, successfully concluded on 22 January 2026 at the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), Mumbai campus. The two-day international conference marks a significant milestone as it coincides with the completion of four decades of NIFT's contributions to fashion education, design innovation, sustainability and industry engagement in the country. The day witnessed a plenary session addressed by Shri. Giriraj Singh, Union Minister of Textiles.

Addressing the gathering, the Union Minister stated that NIFT has emerged as a key economic driver for India's textile and craft sectors, with each graduate supporting an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 jobs over their lifetime. He noted that India is moving away from reliance on foreign benchmarks and is developing its own standards through indigenous initiatives such as IndiaSize and VisionNxt, in line with the vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat by strengthening India-specific design forecasting and identity.

Highlighting the Government's continued support to the sector, the Minister referred to measures such as the reduction of GST on affordable clothing from 18 per cent to 5 per cent and the removal of trade barriers,

including cotton import duties, which have contributed to industry growth. He further observed that NIFT's design expertise has expanded beyond fashion to sectors such as automobiles and logistics, underscoring the institute's growing relevance. Emphasising the role of NIFT alumni in realising Vision 2047, he encouraged them to build strong global networks and represent the “I AM NIFT” identity with pride at the global level.

The inaugural session was graced by Neelam Shami Rao, Secretary, Ministry of Textiles, Tanu Kashyap, Director General, NIFT, Prof. (Dr.) Noopur Anand, Dean, NIFT, Prof. (Dr.) Ajit Kumar Khare, Director, NIFT Mumbai; Prof. (Dr.) Sudha Dhingra, NIFT and Director, Centre of Excellence for Khadi; and Prof. (Dr.) Rupa Agarwal, Conference Chair.

Addressing the gathering, the Secretary, Ministry of Textiles highlighted the role of design in national development and appreciated NIFT's initiatives such as VisionNxt, IndiaSize, and curriculum restructuring. She underlined NIFT's contribution to the Prime Minister's 5F Vision—Farm to Fibre, Fibre to Factory, Factory to Fashion and Fashion to Foreign—and emphasised respect for artisans, ethical design practices, and the need for standardisation and documentation.

The conference brought together academicians, de-

signers, industry professionals, researchers and students to deliberate on emerging trends in fashion and design. Discussions focused on inclusive design practices, technological advancements, sustainability and the need to create solutions that address the diverse requirements of society.

Speakers highlighted the importance of integrating traditional crafts and indigenous knowledge with modern design techniques. The conference also provided a platform for exchanging ideas on strengthening collaborations between educational institutions, industry and artisan communities to promote innovation and sustainable growth.

Tradition to Technology: Ayush Republic Day Tableau Set to Showcase India's Holistic Health Vision

New Delhi, Sept 15 (GNS): The Ayush tableau at the Republic Day Parade 2026 is set to present a compelling narrative of India's timeless health knowledge seamlessly integrated with contemporary public healthcare, under the theme “Ayush ka Tantra, Swasthya ka Mantra.” Rooted in the vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat, the tableau highlights the National Ayush Mission's (NAM) role in strengthening traditional systems of medicine and embedding them within the national health framework.

At the heart of the presentation will be a symbolic confluence of traditional knowledge and nature, depicted through a tri-sculptural representation of Acharya Charak, Acharya



rya Patanjali and Acharya Agastya, seated around a verdant mound of medicinal plants. This powerful imagery aims to reflect the foundational philosophy of Ayush emerging from harmony between human life and the natural world.

The tableau conceptualised by the Ministry of Ayush symbolises India's journey of nation-building through

“The tableau also celebrates India’s diverse therapeutic traditions with three-dimensional murals of Marma, Shirodhara and Cupping, alongside tributes to pioneers of major Ayush systems across the world. Enhancing citizen engagement, interactive mascot elements represent key Ayush digital applications—Y-Break Pro, WHO mYoga, Namaste Yoga and Prakriti Parikshan—highlighting the growing role of technology in promoting preventive, participatory and accessible healthcare.”

pillar of national strength, celebrating India's enduring commitment to nurturing a resilient, inclusive, and self-reliant society rooted in its heritage while addressing modern healthcare needs.

Highlighting Ayush's growing role in nation-building and global health, Shri Prataprao Jadhav, Union Minister of State (IC), Ministry of Ayush, underscored, “Ayush represents India's holistic approach to health—one

that nurtures balance, prevention and well-being. The Republic Day tableau showcases how our traditional systems, guided by the vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat, are empowering communities, strengthening public healthcare and offering credible solutions to modern lifestyle challenges. Ayush today stands as a symbol of India's confidence in its heritage and its leadership in shaping a health-

ier future for the world. The tableau symbolises India's commitment to evidence-based, people-centric and preventive healthcare, positioning Ayush as a vital pillar of national wellness.”

Reflecting on the policy and institutional foundations of the tableau, Vaidya Rajesh Kotecha, Secretary, Ministry of Ayush, remarked, “The Republic Day tableau reflects how Ayush has moved from vision

to implementation, with traditional systems being systematically integrated into India's public health framework. Through the National Ayush Mission, quality assurance, education, research and digital platforms are strengthening accessibility and credibility.”

Highlighting the broader vision behind the tableau and its alignment with India's public health priori-

ties, Dr. Kavita Jain, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Ayush, emphasised that “The Ministry of Ayush tableau at the Republic Day Parade 2026 reflects India's holistic health journey—where traditional knowledge, nature and modern technology converge to serve public well-being. Guided by the National Ayush Mission and the vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat, Ayush is strengthening preventive, promotive, curative and community-based healthcare through credible institutions and digital innovation. This tableau is a tribute to India's living health traditions and their growing role in building a healthier, self-reliant and wellness-oriented nation.”

CM Revanth Seeks AKDN Support for Development Initiatives



Hyderabad, Sept 15 (GNS) Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on Tuesday sought the cooperation of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) in various development initiatives being undertaken by the state government. The Chief Minister's request came as he met Prince Rahim Aga Khan V, the 50th hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims and Chairman of the AKDN, who is currently on a visit to India.

According to the Chief Minister's Office (CMO), it was a courtesy call at Taj Falaknuma Palace here. During the meeting, they discussed various development and heritage conservation initiatives being undertaken in Telangana with the support of the Aga Khan Foundation. Recalling the AKDN's contributions to the state, the Chief Minister said that the Telangana government holds the Aga Khan Foundation in high regard for its significant role in preserving and restoring the state's rich heritage.

He also recalled the long-standing historical association between Hyderabad and the Aga Khan family. He specifically highlighted the restoration of the Legislative Council building and the Qutub Shahi Tombs in Hyderabad with the Foundation's support.

The Chief Minister briefed Prince Rahim Aga Khan V on the plans being prepared for the rejuvenation of the Musi River as part of the comprehensive redevelopment of Hyderabad. He said the government is also working towards developing a vibrant

Telangana Police actively working for Congress party, says KTR

Hyderabad, Sept 15 (GNS) BRS Working President K.T. Rama Rao on Tuesday alleged that the police department in Telangana was working more actively for the Congress party than even its own workers.

He condemned the attack on his PRO, Mahesh Mudiraj, and PA Mahender Reddy inside the police station in Hyderabad on Monday.

Speaking to media persons in Delhi, he alleged that the Congress party was resorting to the attacks out of frustration.

"The government is in a state of frustration and desperation. That is why it was resorting to attention diversion every single day. Unable to answer the questions we have been raising



after 1,000 days, the government is resorting to these attacks," he said.

The BRS leader said earlier that an attack was carried out on the residence of KCR, a senior leader who was elected by the people of Telangana twice as Chief Minister and who fought relentlessly for the achievement of Telangana.

"An attack was carried out

night-time economy along the Musi River corridor. The Chief Minister sought the Foundation's cooperation in the restoration and conservation of the historic City College and the Osmania General Hospital buildings located along the Musi riverfront.

CM Revanth Reddy said that a new building for Osmania General Hospital is being constructed at Goshamahal and that the existing hospital building is proposed to be conserved and developed as a heritage asset. The Chief Minister invited Prince Rahim Aga Khan V to attend the three-day Invest Telangana global summit to be held at Bharat Future City from December 7 to 9. He said that representatives from more than 100 countries are expected to participate in the summit.

Hyderabad groundwater study flags high nitrate, fluoride levels

Hyderabad, Sept 15 (GNS) A recent study has flagged elevated levels of nitrate and fluoride in Hyderabad's groundwater, potentially posing non-carcinogenic health risks to children, like blood disorders, birth defects, and poor bone quality.

A total of 44 groundwater samples from the pre-monsoon and post-monsoon seasons of 2023 were analysed, revealing nitrate exceeding the permissible drinking-water limit of 45 mg/L in 36 per cent of samples taken before the monsoon and 40 per cent of samples taken after the monsoon. The samples were found to have 3 to 230 mg/L of nitrate before



the monsoon and 5 to 797 mg/L afterwards. Higher concentrations were observed mainly in southwestern and central areas.

The contamination was largely linked to fertiliser use, sewage infiltration, septic-tank leakage and urban wastewater. Monsoon rains can further carry ni-

trogen compounds from soil into groundwater. On the other hand, Fluoride was found to exceed the acceptable limit of 1 mg/L in 64 per cent of pre-monsoon and 59 per cent of post-monsoon samples.

Levels ranged from 0.21 to 3.03 mg/L before the monsoon and 0.28 to 5.94 mg/L afterwards, with higher concentrations in northern, southern and southwestern areas.

The fluoride enrichment has been attributed to the weathering of granitic rocks and prolonged interaction between groundwater and aquifer materials. Under US Environmental Protection Agency guidelines, a hazard quotient (HQ) above 1 indicates a potential non-carcinogenic health risk.

The study puts the mean fluoride hazard quotient for children at 1.04 before the monsoon and at 1.11 afterwards. Nitrate increased from 1.81 to 3.78. The combined total hazard index (THI) for children rose from 3.07 to 3.78, compared with 2.27 to 2.79 for adults. Children are considered more vulnerable than adults because they have a greater exposure relative to body mass. Researchers have called for closer groundwater monitoring and stronger measures against nitrate contamination through sewage and agricultural sources.

The study was conducted by Achiraju Pallavi and Al-lam Edukondal of Osmania University, Laxman Kumar Duvva of Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University and Ratnakar Dhakate of the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR)-National Geophysical Research Institute.

Robotic joint-replacement service launched at Germanten Hospital



Hyderabad, Sept 15 (GNS) Telangana IT Minister D Sridharbabu on Sunday, September 13, launched a robotic joint replacement service at Hyderabad's Germanten Hospital. Following the inauguration of the service at the hospital in Attapur, the minister said, "Growing use of technology in healthcare can help expand access to modern treatment. Robotic joint replacement can benefit patients with joint problems. These include conditions affecting the knees and hips."

Sridhar Babu also urged that such technologies must be introduced in

Telangana HC: Muslim Man's Second Marriage Not Automatically Bigamy

Hyderabad, Sept 15 (GNS) The Telangana High Court has ruled that a Muslim man's second marriage cannot be treated as void under Section 494 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) just because his first marriage was still in existence. Justice N Tukaramji passed the order and quashed bigamy proceedings against the man. The court found that the required conditions to attract Section 494 of the IPC were not established in the case. As per the High Court, Section 494 IPC requires certain conditions to be met. These include the existence of a living spouse, a valid and continuing first marriage, a second marriage and the second marriage being legally void because the first marriage was still in force. The court noted that under the Muslim Personal Law, the continued existence of a first marriage does not by itself make a subsequent marriage by a man void.

After rains, HYDRAA inspects waterlogged areas in Sec'bad



Hyderabad, Sept 15 (GNS) A day after heavy rains, Hyderabad Disaster Response and Assets Protection Agency (HYDRAA) officials inspected waterlogged areas in Secunderabad on Monday, September 14. The agency cleared drains and pumped out floodwater to prevent water stagnation. The inspection was carried out in areas including Begumpet, Chikoti Gardens, Bible House, Oliphanta Bridge, Alugadda Bavi Bridge and Alagadda.

In Prakash Nagar Chikoti Gardens, flood-

Salar Jung Museum posts wrong map of erstwhile Hyderabad state

Hyderabad, Sept 15 (GNS) In what seems to be a glaring Artificial Intelligence (AI) slop, the Instagram handle of the Salar Jung Museum (SJM) here posted a photo of the erstwhile Hyderabad state under the Nizams with a wrong border. Two images were posted by the SJM's handle, one of which also

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