

UPI transactions hit record high of Rs 230 lakh crore in 2025-26 till Dec: Govt

NEW DELHI: The government on Tuesday informed the Rajya Sabha that transactions through the popular Unified Payments Interface (UPI) touched a record value of Rs 230 lakh crore in the current financial year till December. Replying to supplementaries during question hour, the Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said the value of transactions through UPI was expanding at a fast pace. "As far as domestic transactions are concerned, transactions worth a total value of Rs 230 lakh crore have been made till December in the year 2025-26. This is against total transaction value of Rs 139 lakh crore in the year 2022-23," the minister informed the House. The minister also informed



the House that the UPI was now expanding outside India and is being used in eight countries after currency conversion while following their domestic laws. In a written reply to the question in Parliament, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, "Unified Payment Interface (UPI) is currently working in eight countries i.e.

Bhutan, France, Mauritius, Nepal, Qatar, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and UAE." "The government, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and NPCI International Payments Ltd (NIPL) have been taking up various steps for international expansion of Unified Payment Interface (UPI). "These inter-alia, include operationalisation of UPI

linkages with comparable fast payment systems of partner countries to facilitate cross-border person-to-person (P2P) remittance flows, as well as the establishment of travel-based corridors to enable cross-border person-to-merchant (P2M) payments," the finance minister said in her written reply. She said the International Monetary Fund (IMF) report on 'Growing Retail Digital Payments (The Value of Interoperability)' dated June 2025 has recognised UPI as the world's largest retail fast-payment system by transaction volume. "Further, as per ACI Worldwide report 2024, UPI accounts for around 49 per cent of transaction volume of the global real-time retail payments," the minister said.

Is Cong with India's interest or against it: BJP asks after Rahul's attacks PM over India-US deal

NEW DELHI: Slamming Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi over his allegation that Prime Minister Narendra Modi buckled under the US pressure to finalise a trade deal, BJP MP Anurag Thakur on Tuesday asked whether the Congress and others in the opposition are with India's interest or against it. Speaking to reporters in the Parliament House complex, the former Union minister alleged that many in the opposition were celebrating after the imposition of US tariffs on India. They had also raised questions even after India signed free trade agreements with the UK and the European Union (EU), he charged. "The question arises here



whether the opposition and the Congress are with India's interest or against it," Thakur said. "This anti-India mindset is clearly visible in Rahul Gandhi, the Congress and other opposition leaders, as they are not even allowing Parliament to function,"

the BJP leader added. Gandhi on Tuesday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has buckled under US pressure to finalise a trade deal and has "sold out" the hard work of Indian farmers through the agreement. Addressing reporters in the

Parliament House complex after he was not allowed to speak in the Lok Sabha as he insisted on quoting from an article that cited former Army chief M M Naravane's unpublished "memoir", Gandhi said it is for the first time in history that the leader of opposition has not been allowed to speak on the president's address. "We need to understand why a trade deal stuck for about four months was suddenly finalised last evening," Gandhi said, adding that "there was huge pressure on Prime Minister Modi". Asked what kind of pressure he was referring to, Gandhi alleged there is a case against industrialist Gautam Adani in the US and a lot more is to come in the Epstein files.

7,400 Naxals arrested since 2019, LWE violence down 88 pc from 2010: Govt tells LS

NEW DELHI: More than 7,400 Naxals have been arrested, and 5,880 have surrendered since 2019, with incidents of Left Wing Extremism-perpetrated violence coming down by 88 per cent from 1,936 in 2010 to 234 in 2025, the Lok Sabha was informed on Tuesday. Replying to a query, Minister of State for Home Affairs, Nityanand Rai, said that in 2025, the security forces neutralised 364 Naxals, arrested 1,022 and facilitated 2,337 surrenders. Left Wing Extremism (LWE), which has been a serious challenge to internal security, has been significantly curbed in recent times and restricted to only a few pockets, Rai said. "The number of LWE-affected districts reduced from 126 in 2018 to only eight in December 2025, with only three districts now remaining the

most affected...The number of police stations reporting LWE-related violence has significantly reduced from 465 in 2010 to 119 in 2025," Rai said. The minister also said a special focus has been laid on the financial choking of LWE activities and the unearthing of the nexus between CPI (Maoists) and its financial supporters. "For effective action towards choking of funds and other resources to LWE, coordinated actions are being taken by the state police in coordination with the Central agencies by various means," Rai said. On the development front, apart from the flagship schemes of the government, several specific initiatives have been taken in the LWE-affected areas, with special thrust on expanding the road network, improving telecommunication connec-

tivity, education, skill development, and financial inclusion, he said. The minister said that to improve telecom connectivity in the LWE-affected areas, 9,233 towers have been commissioned and 15,016 km of roads have been constructed under two specific schemes - the Road Requirement Plan (RRP) and the Road Connectivity Project for LWE Affected Areas (RCPLWEA). Citing other development schemes in the affected areas, Rai said 46 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and 49 Skill Development Centres (SDCs) have been opened. In addition, 179 Eklayva Model Residential Schools (EMRS) for quality education in the tribal areas have been made functional, 6,025 post offices, 1,804 bank branches and 1,321 ATMs have been opened in most LWE-affected districts.

Underground rail link along 'Chicken's Neck' will ensure secure route to NE: Himanta

GUWAHATI: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said the proposed underground rail link along the strategic 'Chicken's Neck' corridor in West Bengal will ensure a secure transportation route, connecting the Northeast. He said the "strategic vulnerability" of the narrow strip of land should have been addressed in the aftermath of 1971. "This is BIG. For decades, the 'Chicken's Neck' has been used as an intimidation tactic by anti-national forces, both within and beyond our borders," Sarma said in a post on X. "The proposed underground rail link marks a major strategic breakthrough, creating a secure and foolproof transportation corridor between the North East and the rest of the country," he added. Railway Minister Ashwini



Vaishnaw had on Monday said plans are afoot to lay underground railway tracks along the 40-km strategic corridor and also make the existing tracks four-line. The strategic corridor, called the 'Chicken's Neck' for its shape, is a strip of land located in northern West Bengal's Siliguri area, having a width of over 20 km. The strip is sandwiched between Nepal and Bangladesh, with Bhutan

and China a few hundred kilometres away. Thanking Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Vaishnaw for the decision, Sarma said, "...We are taking a giant step towards mitigating this long-standing strategic vulnerability - one that, in hindsight, should have been addressed much earlier, perhaps even in the aftermath of 1971." Sarma had earlier said that then PM Indira Gandhi

"could have asked to expand the Chicken's Neck corridor" after the 1971 war. "She could have redrawn the map for NE's straight access to the rest of the country and not remain dependent on the 'Chicken's Neck' corridor," he had said. The CM had also held that if India's first PM Jawaharlal Nehru had not "bartered Chittagong port" with a portion of Punjab with Pakistan during Partition, the Northeast would not have been dependent on the 'Chicken's Neck'. The proposed underground lines will be between Tin Mile Haat and Rangapani railway stations in West Bengal, Northeast Frontier Railway officials said. One of the lines will go towards Bagdogra in West Bengal, vital for the air defence mechanism of the country, they said.

SAD leader Majithia walks out of Nabha jail after bail in DA case

PATIALA: Shiromani Akali Dal leader Bikram Singh Majithia on Tuesday walked out of the New Nabha jail here, a day after the Supreme Court granted him bail in a disproportionate assets case. He was released after spending seven months in jail. The Punjab Vigilance Bureau arrested Majithia from his Amritsar residence on June 25 last year in the disproportionate assets case allegedly involving the laundering of Rs 540 crore of drug money. His supporters gathered outside the jail to welcome him and raised slogans in favour of the SAD. After he came out of the jail at around 2.15 pm, Majithia twirled his moustache in his signature style, which led to sloganeering by his supporters in his favour. His supporters showered flower petals over him and honoured him with 'Sirpoas' (robe of honour). Sitting atop a car, he thanked the Almighty. He also thanked his



supporters with folded hands. "I came out because of your prayers and blessings," said Majithia while speaking to the media. Earlier, the Akali leader's wife, Ganieve Kaur Majithia, thanked God and the Supreme Court. "This is the victory of truth. The government had forgotten that there is God above," she told reporters. Tight security arrange-

ments were made outside the jail. Majithia's supporters could be seen bringing sweet boxes. Outside his residence in Amritsar, Majithia's supporters gathered, distributed sweets and danced to the beats of a 'dhol'. Majithia is the brother-in-law of Shiromani Akali Dal chief Sukhbir Singh Badal and brother of former Union minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal. A top court bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta on Monday passed the order granting bail to Majithia, while hearing his plea challenging a Punjab and Haryana High Court order of December 4, which denied him bail in the case. The bench noted that Majithia was earlier granted bail in a separate case registered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985. It also noted that Majithia was in custody in connection with the disproportionate assets case for the last seven months.

"Why do you want to keep him inside jail?" the bench had asked the counsel appearing for the state. On August 22 last year, the Bureau filed a chargesheet in a Mohali court, which ran into more than 40,000 pages. In its FIR registered against Majithia, the state vigilance body claimed that preliminary investigations revealed that more than Rs 540 crore of "drug money" had been laundered through several channels, allegedly facilitated by Majithia. The FIR stemmed from an ongoing investigation by a Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Punjab Police into a 2021 drug case. In 2021, Majithia was booked under the NDPS Act, based on a 2018 report of the anti-drug SIT. The Akali leader spent more than five months in a Patiala jail before walking out in August 2022 after the Punjab and Haryana High Court granted him bail.

MHA, Panchayati Raj Ministry plan to jointly strengthen local self-governance in Naxal-hit areas

NEW DELHI: The Union ministries of Home Affairs and Panchayati Raj are undertaking joint planning to strengthen local self-governance in Left Wing Extremism (LWE)-affected areas, the Lok Sabha was informed on Tuesday. In a written reply, Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai said, "To further strengthen local self-governance in LWE-affected areas, the Ministry of Home Affairs is carrying out a joint planning with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj." Responding to a question on whether the government had conducted any independent evaluation of the implementation of individual and community rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) and the Panchayats

(Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), Rai said the Ministry of Home Affairs had carried out a survey in seven LWE-affected districts of Chhattisgarh through an independent agency. "The survey has collated details of education levels, health indicators, and the availability of basic services such as primary schools, anganwadi centres, and secondary health facilities," he said, adding that the exercise was helping the Centre and the state government in "bridging the developmental gaps and ensuring livelihood." The minister said the government's broader approach to tackling LWE envisages not only security measures but also development interventions and ensuring the rights

and entitlements of local communities. Under these efforts, "21,29,753 title deeds have been distributed to beneficiaries", including "20,24,975 individual titles and 1,04,778 community titles", he said. Rai noted that these measures reflect the government's commitment towards "strengthening community rights and enhancing participatory governance" in areas affected by Left Wing Extremism, in line with the National Policy and Action Plan approved in 2015. The minister also informed that the number of LWE-affected districts has reduced from 126 in 2018 to only eight in December 2025, with only three districts now remaining the most LWE-affected.

Delayed delivery of judgment is identified ailment, must be eradicated: SC

NEW DELHI: The practice of reserving judgments for months by high courts without making them public is an "identifiable ailment" that must be eradicated, the Supreme Court said on Tuesday while highlighting the need to ensure timely delivery of justice. A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi was hearing a plea that said the Jharkhand High Court orally pronounced a judgment dismissing a petition on December 4 last year and the verdict has not yet been uploaded. The bench said a complete judgment be provided to the counsel by the end of next week. Referring to the delay, senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, who was appearing for the litigant, said, "It seems some kind of lip service is going on... Some message has to go. This amounts to playing with the majesty of law."

There are broadly two kinds of judges, the CJ said. "One is a hard working judge who will hear everybody and reserve (judgment) in 10-15 matters even. There are some judges who after this don't deliver the judgments. We are not on anyone individually. This is a challenge before the judiciary and this is an identifiable ailment. It has to be treated and eradicated and it cannot be allowed to spread," he added. The CJ referred to another prevalent trend -- in some cases arguments are heard and are again posted for further directions. He said he will raise this issue in his upcoming meeting with chief justices of high courts. "We will discuss this among other agendas. We will try to find a solution so that such avoidable litigation ends," he said. "In my 15 years as a high court judge, I never ever reserved a judgement and did not deliver judgment within

three months," the CJ said. The bench, in its order, referred to the facts of the case and said, "The Jharkhand High Court pronounced the judgment on December 4, 2025, where the writ petition was dismissed. The judgment has not been uploaded yet. We have impressed upon the counsel appearing for the high court that there is no rhyme or reason for such delay. Let a complete judgment be provided to the counsel by the end of next week." The matter has now been directed to be listed in the week commencing on February 16. In November 2025, the top court directed all high courts to submit detailed reports on timelines for reserved judgments, including dates of reservation, pronouncement and uploading. It has been monitoring compliance of its direction mandating that all certified copies of judgments clearly record these three dates.

Govt's drug policy robust with focus on making available medicines at affordable rate: Nadda

NEW DELHI: Union Chemicals and Fertilisers Minister J P Nadda on Tuesday said the government is working to make essential medicines available at affordable rates while ensuring the growth of the pharma industry. Replying to supplementaries during Question Hour in Rajya Sabha, the minister asserted the need to create a balance between industry growth and the pricing policy of essential drugs. "Our drug policy and pricing policy are robust and constant," Nadda said. On the regulation of prices, the minister said it is a continuous process. "Our aim through the pricing policy is to ensure that medicines are accessible and affordable. Secondly, there should be growth of the industry. There should be innovation and scope for employment creation," he said. "There is a balance which we have to undertake," the minister said, adding that the government strives to create that balance. Nadda said the consultations on policy issues are an ongoing and transparent activity which is undertaken by the Department to



assess the relevance, impact and efficiency of the existing policy reform required, if any, keeping in view the interest of all stakeholders. In 2024, he said the Department and the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) held consultations with various stakeholders on matters concerning the National Pharmaceuticals Pricing Policy, 2012 (NPPP, 2012) and Drug (Prices Control) Order, 2013 (DPCO, 2013). Feedback was received from

stakeholders on the operation of the existing policy framework. These suggestions/feedback received during such consultations provide stakeholders with inputs on issues requiring redressal in the existing policy, if any. "The Department and NPPA remain engaged with stakeholders with a view to understanding issues and resolving them either under the extant mechanism or by making appropriate provision," he said. The review of DPCO, 2013 is a continuous process which is done periodically by the Department or as and when required to ensure that the provisions are enforced effectively so that the essential drugs are made accessible and available to the public at an affordable price. Through the National Health Mission, the minister said the Centre is providing free drugs and diagnostic facilities. Generic medicines are being provided through Jan Jan Aushadhi Kendra. "Out of pocket expenditure in the last 10 years has reduced from 62.6 per cent to 39.4 per cent," Nadda informed the House.

Premature to assess if US tariff cut in India's interest: Mayawati

LUCKNOW: Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati on Tuesday said it would be premature to determine if the United States' decision to set an 18 per cent tariff on Indian goods is in the interest of the country, noting that complete details of the agreement are not yet available. Her remarks came after an announcement by US President Donald Trump, who confirmed the deal after a telephonic conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday. Under the new agreement, will bring down the reciprocal tariff on Indian goods to 18 per cent from a total 50 per cent. Reacting to the development, Mayawati said any immediate evaluation without adequate details would be hasty. She maintained that the actual impact can only be understood after the decision is implemented on the ground. "After mutual agreements between India and the United States with several conditions, news of the US imposing an 18 per cent tariff -- whether it is in the interest of the nation and the public -- cannot be assessed in haste in the absence of complete information.