

Govt report flags digital divide in schools—25% in Bihar, Bengal have computer facilities, 65% nationally

**NEW DELHI:** Even as facilities in schools have improved over the years, digital gaps in classrooms remain a concern, with Bihar and West Bengal faring poorly in 2024-25, according to the latest Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) report released Thursday. Only 25.2 percent schools in Bihar and 25.1 percent schools in West Bengal—including both government and private—have computer facilities respectively, as against the nationwide 64.7 percent in the 2024-25 academic year. Both states have large populations and are in the eastern part of the country. They are also headed to the polls, with Bihar set for elections in November and Bengal voting in the first half of the next year. It is pertinent to note that Meghalaya is at the bottom with barely 19.7 percent of schools having computer facilities. Overall, the national average showed an improvement as it crossed the 60-percent mark, up from 57.2 percent in 2023-24. The UDISE+ report, which the Ministry of Education released Thursday, provides information on enrollment and dropout rates of school students, number of teachers in schools, and information on infrastructural facilities like toilets, electricity, water, availability of computers among others. Giving further breakdown, the report shows the fragile state of infrastructure in Bihar government schools. While 72 percent of private schools in the state have computer facilities, the percentage drops to just 16.5 percent in the government sector.



The scenario is flipped in Bengal as the 21.3 percent government schools have access to computer facilities, whereas it is 53.3 percent for private schools. When it comes to internet connectivity, which goes in tandem with computer facilities, West Bengal comes at the bottom with only 18.6 percent of schools having such access. In contrast, Chandigarh, Delhi and Lakshadweep boast 100 percent access to internet in their schools. Overall, 63.5 percent of schools in India have access to internet facilities, an improvement of nearly 10 percentage points from the previous year. **Improvement in water, toilet access** While Indian schools may be lacking in terms of access to digital learning, there has been a gradual improvement in facilities like access to drinking water and toilets.

The annual report highlights that 99.3 percent of schools across India now have access to drinking water facilities within school premises, a slightly higher than 95.9 percent in 2023-24. Overall, 12 states and Union Territories have achieved 100 percent success in this parameter. Similarly, functional toilet facilities are now available across 95.8 percent of schools across India. In 2023-24, it was 95.4 percent. Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh have some catching up to do as they are at the lower end with 75.6 percent and 79.7 percent, respectively. Some of this success can be attributed to the Swachh Vidyalaya, a subset of the Swachh Bharat Mission, under which every school in India must have functioning and well-maintained water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities including separate toilets for boys and girls.

CBI books Airports Authority of India manager for Rs 232 cr embezzlement at Dehradun airport

**NEW DELHI:** The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has booked a senior manager of the Airports Authority of India (AAI) for allegedly embezzling funds of the Dehradun airport to the tune of Rs 232 crore. Rahul Vijay, the accused, headed the finance and accounts vertical at AAI's Dehradun airport from 2019 to 2023. Currently, he is posted at the Jaipur airport in the same capacity. An FIR was filed Tuesday based on a complaint by another AAI senior manager (finance) at Dehradun airport, alleging misuse of position as an authorised signatory to the AAI bank account and transferring an amount to his personal account disguised as funds utilised for asset creation. In the complaint, the AAI senior manager alleged that upon observing some abnormal recordings of assets on the balance sheet during the period when Vijay was the authorised signatory, a committee was constituted to investigate the details of those assets. "During verification, it was found that Rahul Vijay, SM (F&A), while posted at Dehradun airport, passed some fictitious entries and fraudulently transferred an amount of Rs 232 crore approx. (as detected till date) to his personal bank account during the period from February 2019 to August 2022," the complaint reads. In its findings, a committee found that the accused misused his position and had three user IDs created for the AAI's bank account, which



was maintained with the State Bank of India. After this, he began transferring money from AAI's bank account to his own, initially with a smaller amount, allegedly to avoid detection. Vijay orchestrated the majority of the embezzlement in September 2021 when he transferred Rs 189 crore into his account by inflating the figure a day after creating tangible assets worth Rs 67.81 crore in the form of the first phase of electrical work for the airport's new terminal building, according to the AAI. The next day, he allegedly created 17 additional fictitious assets of Rs 189 crore and got the money transferred into his personal account. Of the Rs 232 crore allegedly si-

phoned off by Vijay, the AAI alleged that funds worth Rs 43 crore were disbursed under different revenue expenditure heads during his tenure at the Doon airport. Based on the complaint and information of sanction from the competent authority, the CBI booked Vijay along with unknown public servants and private persons under Section 120B (criminal conspiracy), 409 (criminal breach of trust by public servants), 467 (forgery of valuable security), 468 (forgery for the purpose of cheating), 471 (using as genuine a forged document), 477 A (falsification of accounts) of the Indian Penal Code and relevant provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Defence Production dept steps up state outreach, holds talks with Karnataka officials

**BENGALURU:** The Department of Defence Production, Ministry of Defence, on Friday said it is actively engaging with states as part of its outreach to strengthen the country's defence manufacturing ecosystem. In this context, Rolley M Varma, IOFS, Deputy Director General (DDG), DDP, interacted with officials from the Department of Industries and Commerce, Government of Karnataka, the Karnataka Industrial Area Development Board (KIADB), and the Karnataka Aerospace Technology Centre (KATC), the ministry said in a statement. Varma underlined the importance of strong Centre-state partnerships in building a robust defence production ecosystem. She highlighted several Central government initiatives to accelerate the 'Make in India' vision in defence—including increased budget allocations for domestic industry, streamlining of the

Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP), preference for indigenous content, and the promulgation of Positive Indigenisation Lists (PILs). Other measures highlighted were the launch of the Srijan Defence Portal, facilitation of defence exports, the Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) scheme, liberalised FDI policy, simplified industrial licensing, and the strengthening of defence testing facilities. The statement said Karnataka's pivotal role in advancing the sector was also underscored. Discussions focused on the state's initiatives to promote design, R&D, and innovation in defence manufacturing; the establishment of the Defence and Aerospace Park at Devanahalli as a hub for advanced manufacturing; state-level policy reforms to ease doing business and attract investment; and the implementation of the Aerospace & Defence Policy to boost industrial growth.

Easy loans, uneasy 'debt traps'. Women harassed by private lenders ask 'who will restore lost dignity?'

**NEW DELHI:** In her 30s and from a low-income background, Pooja Verma, along with her husband, travelled over 473 km from Jhansi to Delhi, carrying her eight-month-old baby. In the heart of the Capital, a short distance from Parliament, she joined hundreds of women for a public meeting on the alleged exploitation of women by microfinance companies (MFIs), non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), and private banks who they accused of luring them with easy loans, at incredibly high interest.

In the 23-24 August public hearing organised by the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) at ITO's Harkishan Singh Surjeet Bhawan, women from across the country blamed private sector institutions for their rising indebtedness. They also accused the governments and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) of failing to regulate the private banking sector, curbing malpractices and shielding them from ex-



na Fatima | ThePrint "The NBFCs-MFIs and private banks are responsible for the verbal and physical abuse and increasing instances of suicides," added Dhawale. ThePrint reached Bharat Financial Inclusion Limited, formerly known as SKS Microfinance, and IIFL Samasta Finance Limited—two private institutions that the women accused of exploiting them—via phone calls and emails but had not received any response. This report will be updated if and when a response is received. In a brown and black striped

saree, a hesitant Pooja Verma stood on the dais, microphone in hand, and began narrating her story to a hall packed with women and activists. A few years ago, Pooja's husband started driving an e-rickshaw, and after some time, she took a Rs 40,000 loan from IIFL Samasta Finance Limited to repair it. During the loan repayment, of the 24 instalments she needed to cover, she paid 11. The private lender, however, recorded only nine, Pooja rued. One morning, recovery agents allegedly turned up at her house when she was

alone at home with her children and mother-in-law and pressured Pooja into repaying that month's repayment until noon. When Pooja said she did not know where her husband was, the agents allegedly started harassing her mother-in-law. When her husband returned, the agents told the couple to visit the local branch along with them to resolve the matter, she said. Adding, "We went and they held us hostage in the bank for five hours and told my husband on a call, 'Get the money and take your wife'." Firmly grasping the microphone in the hall, Pooja continued her story, saying that despite their promise to repay as soon as possible, the company officials did not let the couple leave. "Maine unse kaha ki humein jane diya jaye lekin unhone kaha ki hum tumhe rassi de dete hain, samne wale kamare mein ja kar phansi laga lo, hum tumhare beema ke paison se apna paisa le lenge (I asked them to let us go, but

they said, 'We'll give you a rope, go to the next room and hang yourself, we will take the money from your insurance'." Pooja's story stunned everyone in the hall. Women murmured, with their sighs of distress audible across the room, and shook their heads in sorrow. "These microfinance institutions create a lot of pressure to deposit the loan amount. I suffered a lot of mental and physical torture," Pooja concluded. the harassment by the police and their alleged collusion with the private lender, she added that her husband, thinking the police could do something, called them for help. The police arrived soon but took them to Jhansi's Moth police station. There, according to Pooja, the police and company agents got together and allegedly forced the couple to sign a blank paper, which they used to file claims that the couple lied to defame the private lender and visited its premises voluntarily, as instructed by the police.

BJP workers storm Bihar Cong HQ over abusive language targeting PM

**PATNA:** The issue of abuse hurled at Prime Minister Narendra Modi during Rahul Gandhi's 'Voter Adhikar Yatra' in Bihar spilled out on the streets on Friday when BJP workers stormed the state Congress headquarters, prompting the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha to declare "truth always triumphs". While the person who had allegedly screamed expletives into the mic at Darbhanga two days ago was arrested, BJP workers in the state capital staged a march to the Sadaqat Ashram, the BPPC headquarters, and clashed with their counterparts in the opposition party. "We will not tolerate the insult to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Rahul Gandhi, his party and alliance partners will have to apologise," said state minister Nitin Nabin who had led the procession from the BJP office, situated a couple of kilometres from Sadaqat Ashram. Gandhi, who was in Gopalganj, about 120 kms away, and is likely to be in Patna on Monday when the Yatra will conclude, came out with an X post in Hindi, indirectly referring to the clash. "Violence and falsehood stand no chance before truth and non-violence. Indulge in assault and vandalism to your heart's content. We will continue our fight to protect truth and the Constitution. Truth always triumphs!



(Satyamev Jayate)", wrote Gandhi. Congress general secretary Sachin Pilot, who is accompanying Gandhi, was more blunt. "Whoever used abusive language deserves condemnation. But it is wrong to associate the Congress and the INDIA bloc with the episode. And the attack on our party's state headquarters was abominable. We hope the Bihar government takes appropriate action against the accused. It is clear that the BJP is rattled by the success of Voter Adhikar Yatra", said Pilot. Addressing the same press conference, RJD national spokesman Manoj Jha said, "We took no time in condemning the incident. But has the BJP ever apologised for many foul remarks made, over the years, by its top

leaders, including the Prime Minister himself? They are the followers of Nathuram Godse who assassinated Mahatma Gandhi." Today, they could not have fired bullets, so they wielded sticks, Jha said and claiming that it was an attempt by the saffron party to make headlines. "The BJP, which rules the Centre, may get so-called mood of the nation surveys published in its favour, but it knows that if elections are held today, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be left looking for options for himself," he said. Congress general secretary (organisation) K C Venugopal wrote on X: "Baffled by the soaring popularity of the Voter Adhikar Yatra, the BJP has once again unleashed its hooligans to intimidate and scare us. The attack on our Bihar PCC office Sadaqat Ashram

in Patna, led by a cabinet minister and other BJP leaders, is an act of cowardice." The Bihar police must take strict and exemplary action against perpetrators of this crime, he said. Diksha, Superintendent of Police, Patna Central, said, "Injuries have been sustained by people from both sides. The situation has been brought under control. Further action may be taken after investigation." Notably, abusive language was used in Jale assembly segment of Darbhanga on Wednesday when Gandhi, his sister and Congress general secretary Priyanka Vadra and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav had passed through the district on motorcycles. On Thursday, local Congress leader Mohd Naushad, who has been named in a case lodged at Simri police station by Darbhanga BJP president Adityan Narayan "Manna", admitted that the video was of a podium he had got erected, but claimed that profane language was used by people not known to him in his absence. On Friday, Darbhanga police identified the culprit as Mohd Rizvi alias Raja, a 20-year-old resident of Singhwara, and arrested him. Meanwhile, senior Congress leader Pawan Khera, who heads the party's media and publicity department, claimed that he suspected the "BJP toolkit" at work.

BSF DG flags BGB's 'delay, denial' in taking 'illegal' Bangladesh immigrants sent back from India

**NEW DELHI:** At a Director General-level conference between the border guarding forces of India and Bangladesh this week, the chief of India's Border Security Force highlighted the delay and denial by Border Guard Bangladesh in taking over Bangladesh nationals apprehended by Indian law enforcement authorities for illegally entering India. Representing BSF, deployed across the eastern border with Bangladesh, Director General Daljit Singh Chawdhary also flagged a series of assaults, including stone pelting and abuse by criminals based across the border. The latest DG-level conference was held from Tuesday to Thursday in Dhaka, marking the second such meeting this year, and the first in Dhaka since the interim government took over in Dhaka, following the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government in August last year amid student-led protests. The issue of BGB "delaying and denying" entry to Bangladesh nationals holds particular importance as police forces across the country are in the middle of a drive to weed out illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Chawdhary also high-



lighted issues such as the "misinterpretation of border issues by Bangladeshi media", and the establishment of an Effluent Treatment Plant (ETP) for all four canals carrying wastewater from Agartala to Akhaura. BGB was represented by its chief, Major General Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman Siddiqui, who spoke about "intrusion into Bangladesh territory by BSF/Indian police/ Indian nationals", as well as the establishment of the ETP, among other things. The DGs of the BSF and BGB mutually agreed to resolve all issues to maintain a cordial relationship. "Both sides appreciated each other's concerns and agreed to undertake joint efforts to curb trans-border crime by adopting extra precautionary measures such as increasing Coordinated Patrols, enhancing vigilance and sin-

cere commitments. Both sides also agreed to undertake joint efforts to bring down the number of incidents of assault/border crime by intensifying public awareness programmes, undertaking appropriate socio-economic developmental programmes in vulnerable areas, educating border population about the sanctity of IB and preventing criminals/inhabitants from crossing the IB," a BSF spokesperson said. "Both sides agreed to take effective steps to continue to sensitise the border populace to refrain from Violation of IB/Illegal crossing/Intrusion, smuggling, human trafficking, uprooting Border Pillars and other trans-border crimes." The conference concluded with both chiefs agreeing to hold the next round of the conference in March 2026 in New Delhi.

Two held with Rs 24 crore worth of hydroponic weed at Lucknow airport

**LUCKNOW:** Two passengers have been arrested for allegedly smuggling hydroponic weed worth around Rs 24 crore at Chaudhary Charan Singh International Airport in Lucknow, an official said on Friday. He said the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), based on specific intelligence, intercepted the passengers who had arrived from Bangkok on Air India Express flight IX 105 on August 26. "During interrogation, both the passengers admitted to carrying a large quantity of hydroponic weed (ganja) in their checked-in baggage," a senior DRI official said. A thorough search of their baggage led to the recovery of 23.935 kilograms of hydroponic weed, which was seized under provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, the official said. The passengers were arrested on Wednesday and remanded to judicial custody, he added. Hydroponic weed refers to cannabis cultivated using a soil-less, water-based growing system enriched with nutrients. This method allows for greater control over growth conditions, resulting in higher potency and quality compared to conventionally grown cannabis.