‘Last local recruit’ of LeT gunned down in Kulgam

22-year-old Lateef Bhat, accused of the terror attack on CRPF personnel last week, was hiding in a mosque and turned down an offer to surrender, security forces say; Shah praises synergy of forces

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

Lateef Bhat, whom top police officials described as a Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorist who was “the last local recruit” in Kashmir, was killed on Wednesday outside a mosque in Kulgam that he had been using for shelter.

Security forces found Bhat, 22, after an eight-day operation led them to a mosque in Zangalpora in the south Kashmir district. Officials said that contact was established with the terrorist, who was hiding inside the mosque, around 3 a.m. Security forces made him an offer of surrender, which he turned down, stating that “he was happy to meet Allah”. Bhat was later shot dead around 50 metres from the mosque, as he made a bid to escape the cordon of the security forces.



On point: Security personnel keep watch after gunning down Lateef Bhat in Kulgam, Jammu and Kashmir, on Wednesday. IMRAN NISSAR

‘Restrained operation’

An Army spokesperson said the security forces had displayed “exemplary restraint during conduct of operations, ensuring the sanctity of the religious place, and neutralised the terrorist with precision by forcing him to move out of the mosque premises”.

“We had a long conversation with him on the phone. We asked him to surrender but he refused. We exercised maximum restraint given he was hiding inside a mosque,” Senior Superintendent of Police Anayat Ali Choudhary said. The police said a weapon was recovered from the site of the operation.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah praised the security agencies for their joint action. “With the coordinated efforts of JKP [Jammu and Kashmir police], Indian Army, CRPF [Central Reserve Police Force], and intelligence agencies, Lashkar’s last known active local terrorist in the Valley, Lateef Bhat, was neutralised,” he said. “One of his terrorist associates, Umar Nisar, was also neutralised in Kulgam, the day before. The entire operation was marked by a very high level of synergy,” he added.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10

SHAURYA GOEL (8368104532)



Power centre: Donald Trump, Xi Jinping, and Vladimir Putin in Shenzhen on the eve of the U.S.-China-Russia summit. AP

Ahead of meet with Trump and Putin, Xi hails ties with Russia

SHAURYA SSBERG (8368104529)

Ananth Krishnan
BEIJING

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday hailed relations with Russia "as a source of stability" in a "turbulent" world, even as he welcomed U.S. President Donald Trump with a rare airport reception a day ahead of a trilateral summit in Shenzhen.

Mr. Xi also opened the two-day APEC gathering with an address to a CEO Summit, where he made a pitch for openness and stable supply chains. On Thursday, leaders of the three countries will hold a summit, which Beijing has described as having "groundbreaking significance". U.S. officials said the three leaders will likely discuss, among other issues, the war in Ukraine, the situation in Iran, global energy stability, and nuclear arms control.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10

Xi hails Russia ties ahead of meeting Trump, Putin

Officials have described the rare trilateral leaders' summit as more of an exploratory and symbolic meeting, playing down the likelihood of substantive outcomes, either with regard to a possible Russia-Ukraine deal or on the West Asian crisis. Whether they can see eye-to-eye on nuclear disarmament also remains to be seen.

At the same time, Beijing has highlighted the symbolism of the summit happening on its soil, describing it as a landmark moment for what China calls "major country diplomacy".

In talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Mr. Xi described China-Russia relations "as a source of stability and certainty in a turbulent world and as a model of a new type of major-power relationship characterised by equality, mutual respect, trust, and win-win cooperation."

Mr. Trump landed in Shenzhen on Wednesday, and Mr. Xi welcomed him at the airport with a hug – a rare greeting from the Chinese President.

"The world is facing mounting instability, insufficient momentum for economic growth, and a resurgence of unilateralism and protectionism. At the same time, global trade is still growing despite headwinds and emerging technologies are advancing rapidly, reshaping global development," Mr. Xi said in his opening address at the APEC gathering, adding that "the key questions of the age were whether the world would choose openness or closure, cooperation or division, reform or stagnation." He called for barriers to trade and investment to be reduced and proposed establishing a World Bay Area Economic Cooperation Alliance. Beijing has been developing the Greater Bay Area, including Shenzhen, Hong Kong, and Macau, as an innovation hub.

His remarks came amid continuing China-U.S. trade tensions over a number of issues, including semiconductors and rare earths.

India, Canada eye defence pact during Modi's visit

Varghese K. George
OTTAWA

Both countries had earlier expelled each other's High Commissioners following the murder of Khalistani activist in June 2023

India and Canada could be announcing a defence agreement during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's official visit in December, according to the country's High Commissioner to Ottawa, Dinesh K. Patnaik.

Both countries are also in the final stages of negotiations of a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. "We are on the cusp of finalising it," Mr. Patnaik said.

Addressing a gathering in the Canadian capital organised by the Centre for Strategic Statecraft and the Canadian International Council, he said that both countries cannot afford to let fringe issues derail their extensive mutual interests.

Mr. Patnaik took over as India's High Commissioner to Ottawa in September 2025. Both countries had earlier expelled each other's High Commissioners and reduced their diplomatic presence following the murder of Sikh Khalistani activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in June 2023. Then Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accused India of orchestrating the murder, throwing bilateral relations into a tailspin. Subsequent reports by Canadian agencies also listed India, alongside China and Russia, as an interferer in domestic politics. The turnaround in ties, which began with the mutual reinstatement of High Commissioners, is set to reach a milestone with Mr. Modi's visit on December 11 and 12.

Mr. Patnaik said India and Canada are no longer talking about a reset of their derailed relations, but rather an overarching boost in ties spanning defence, space, nuclear energy, deep tech, trade, and the mobility of people. The two nations have moved from a complete lack of trust over a year ago to an unprecedented degree of mutual trust, he added.

"The fact is that in the core strategic concerns of Canada and India, there is no conflict. Still, all it took for the entire bilateral relationship to be derailed was the fringe diaspora issue," he said, referring to the murder of Nijjar.

"The reason was the lack of trust. India believed that Canada was actively promoting separatism in India, and Canada believed India was organising violence in Canada. We had a series of meetings between senior Ministers, NSAs of both countries, and agencies at all levels as we set about rebuilding trust. Today, we have reached the highest levels of trust, where the most sensitive areas of cooperation, such as deep tech, defence, and space, are subjects of mutual cooperation," Mr. Patnaik said.

Cooperation between Canadian and Indian agencies remains at a high level, the High Commissioner added.

SHAURYA SSB TRG (8,56,04,529)

Oct. crude import bill soars 87.5% to $19.5 bn

Elevated international benchmark prices fuelled by renewed tensions in West Asia; increase comes alongside an 11% rise in import volumes; while higher petroleum product exports offer a partial natural hedge, sustained increases in crude, gas prices could intensify pressure on import bill

Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

India's crude oil import bill surged 87.5% year-on-year (YoY) to $19.5 billion in October, as elevated international benchmark prices, fuelled by renewed tensions in West Asia, sharply increased procurement costs. The increase came alongside an 11% rise in import volumes.

The net import bill for oil and gas, calculated as imports of crude oil, petroleum products and natural gas less exports of petroleum products, rose 60% to $16 billion during the month, compared with $10 billion in October last year.

Higher export realisations from petroleum products, however, provided some cushion against the escalating import burden.

According to provisional data released by the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC), India imported 23.3 million metric tonnes (MMT) of crude oil in October, against 21 MMT in the corresponding month last year.

The expenditure on crude imports, meanwhile, climbed to $19.5 billion from $10.4 billion, reflecting disproportionate impact of higher international prices on the country's energy import bill.



Tanked up: India imported 23.3 MMT of crude oil in October, against 21 MMT in the corresponding month last year. REUTERS

The Indian crude oil basket averaged $119.91 per barrel in October, compared with benchmark Brent crude which averaged $124.77 per barrel. In September, the Indian basket had averaged $116.09 per barrel, while Brent stood at $116.77 per barrel.

The sustained increase in benchmark prices, amid continuing geopolitical uncertainties in West Asia, has left India exposed to higher energy procurement costs, given its dependence on crude oil imports to meet 88.7% of its requirements.

The impact of the rising crude import bill was partly offset by stronger earnings from petroleum product exports.

India's petroleum product exports increased 5.9% in volume terms to 5.4 MMT in October. However, export revenues surged approximately 91% to $6.3 billion.

The increase in export earnings provided an important buffer against the higher cost of crude procurement.

Meanwhile, India's liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports declined approximately 7% to 3,014 million standard cubic metres (MMSCM) during October. Despite the decline in volumes, the import bill increased 8.33%, pointing to the persistence of price pressures in the international gas market.

Iran widens Gulf attacks, targeting U.S. airbase in Kuwait, Bahrain sites

The escalation follows a U.S. strike on Qeshm Island, where U.S. fighter jets hit a Revolutionary Guard missile launch site; the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry condemns the repeated Iranian attacks as 'criminal', saying they threatened the country's security

Associated Press
CAIRO

Iran widened its attacks on its Gulf neighbours on Wednesday, targeting a U.S. airbase in Kuwait and launching several attacks on Bahrain in what appeared to be retaliation for American strikes the day before.

After about two months without such attacks, Iran has repeatedly targeted U.S. facilities in Bahrain in recent days. The small Persian Gulf island kingdom hosts the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet.

The early morning attacks came after a U.S. fighter jet struck a Revolutionary Guard missile launch site on Tuesday on Qeshm Island in the Strait of Hormuz. The U.S. strike was in retaliation for an Iranian attack on an American radar installation in Bahrain earlier Tuesday.

Iran said that its recent attacks – including those on other U.S. facilities in Bahrain on Sunday and Friday – were in response to U.S. drone surveillance operations and an attack on Iranian communications towers.

The uptick in fighting with the tit-for-tat attacks raises the risk of further escalation toward the resumption of all-out conflict nearly nine months into the war, and complicates negotiations for a diplomatic solution, which have stagnated despite intensified mediation efforts from Qatar.



The satellite image of Ali Al Salem Air Base shows that months of strikes have destroyed numerous facilities across the base. AP

United Arab Emirates state-owned oil company ADNOC said Wednesday that one of its tanker crew members was missing after an attack in the strait on Tuesday, while 11 others were injured and were receiving medical care.

In the attack early Wednesday on the Ali Al Salem airbase in Kuwait, the Iranian military fired at air defence systems and drone and missile launch platforms, according to a report on Iran's state broadcaster.

Kuwait's military said that its air defences had intercepted drone attacks and didn't immediately report any damage. The Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry condemned the repeated Iranian attacks as "criminal," saying that they threatened the country's security and stability.

SHUBHAM SSB TRG (8368104599)

‘Get used to it’: CEA on smaller difference in India, US bond yields



CEA V Anantha Nageswaran speaks during the curtain raiser of the FICCI Annual General Meeting and Annual Convention 2026. EXPRESS

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, November 18

THE REDUCED difference in the rates of interest offered by Indian and US government bonds is something the markets should “get used to”, Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran said on Wednesday, noting that India’s fundamentals had improved and therefore, its risk premium had declined.

The government’s top economist also said that two key headwinds faced by the economy in 2025 and 2026 — energy prices and the lack of an AI play — may be on the cusp of turning in India’s favour. As such, “who knows, our problem next year may be one of managing rupee strength not the rupee weakness in FY28”

Speaking at a curtain raiser event ahead of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry’s (FICCI) Annual General Meeting and Annual Convention on Thursday, Nageswaran said not only will higher interest rates in developed countries force India to “raise our game” to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), it is also a factor which is here to stay as these countries need capital themselves and already have high public debt-to-GDP ratios.

“Everybody says that India, at the moment, doesn’t have a higher risk premium compared to the US 10-year Treasury: 7.3% in India, 5.14% in the US. It only offers a 2.16% pick-up whereas 10-12 years ago it was 500-600 basis points. My answer to that is: get used to it.”

“India will not offer that kind of pick-up because our fundamentals have improved... The risk premium that has come down (is) because the risk has come down and the risk, if anything, is now on the other foot, on their side... But financial market investors will take their own sweet time to factor that in.” While US debt has surged past $40 trillion and is now around 121% of GDP, India is looking to lower its debt-to-GDP ratio – at least at the central government level – to 49-51% of GDP by March 2031.

Higher global interest rates have been a key obstacle to India attracting foreign money, which is crucial to financing its trade deficit. While gross FDI inflows into India have been robust — in the first five months of 2026-27, gross inflows were $55 billion, up 21% on year — net inflows have been weak for a couple of years due to Indian companies investing more abroad and foreign investors booking profits on money put in previous years.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

SHAURYA SSB TRG (8368104529)

Muslims projected to outnumber Christians by 2035: Pew research

Associated Press
New York, November 18

ISLAM IS expected to surpass Christianity as the world's largest religion by 2035, according to detailed projections released Wednesday by the Pew Research Center.

Pew, which has been issuing authoritative reports on religious demography for 25 years, said both Islam and Christianity are growing, but Islam is growing much faster. A key reason, Pew said, is that Muslims tend to have more children than other major religious groups.

"It's the babies," said Pew senior demographer Conrad Hackett, explaining that conversion and other ways of changing religious identity are much smaller factors than fertility rates.

During 2020-2025, the fertility rate for Muslims was 3.1 children per woman, followed by the rate for Christians at 2.5, according to Pew. The average fertility rate for all other women was 1.6, below the level of 2.1 that's considered necessary for each generation to replace itself.

According to Pew's latest estimates, there were 2.27 billion Christians and 2.02 billion Muslims worldwide in 2020.

Pew's new projections forecast that there will be 2.57 billion Muslims and 2.52 billion Christians by 2035. By 2070, if recent trends continue, there will be over 3.6 billion Muslims and just under 3 billion Christians worldwide.

The projections are part of a broader Pew study examining changes in religious populations between 2020 and 2070, factoring in age profiles, fertility rates, religious conversion and migration.

Pew also projects that the US will lose its Christian majority by 2065. Christians currently account for 62% of the country's population, a share expected to fall below 50%.

Bangladesh deploys paramilitary amid protests over Hasina return

Police say 71 Awami League-linked members arrested

Reuters
Dhaka, November 18



Former PM Sheikh Hasina

BANGLADESH STEPPED up security and deployed hundreds of paramilitary troops nationwide on Wednesday as the planned return of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has sparked clashes, bomb blasts and arson attacks blamed on supporters of her banned party.

Hasina, who has lived in exile in neighbouring India since she fled Dhaka following violent protests demanding her resignation in August 2024, has requested a new passport and identity card, saying she plans to return in December.

But the government has so far rejected her request, leading to members and supporters of her Awami League party taking to the streets in protest.

Last week, the party announced a week-long programme of protests and rallies to mobilise support for Hasina's return, culminating in a nationwide lockdown on November 19.

Police have recorded dozens of crude bomb blasts and incidents of vehicles being torched in at least 28 districts over the last 10 days, with several police personnel and civilians injured, local media has reported.

Late Tuesday, an activist of ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) was allegedly killed by unidentified people during a protest near Hasina's home district of Gopalganj, police said.

On the same night, a crude bomb exploded outside the Dhaka residence of Cultural Affairs Minister Nitai Roy Chowdhury, and the house of a BNP lawmaker and shops belonging to BNP supporters in Gopalganj were set on fire, police added.

On Wednesday morning, a bus company helper was burnt to death in the southern district of Pirojpur after two buses were set on fire, authorities said.

Tuesday marked the day on which Hasina was sentenced to death a year ago by a local court that found her guilty of ordering the crackdown on the student-led uprising against her in 2024.

At least 37 Grameen Bank branches and offices have been targeted in arson attacks or attempted fires since November 10, with 14 more attacked since midnight on Tuesday.

Police have arrested at least 71 members of banned organisations, including the Awami League and its affiliated outfits, in the last 24 hours, police said.

SHAREYE 5S3 JPG (83x1045x529)

• THE ROBOTIC PROBE, LAUNCHED IN 1977, WAS CALCULATED BY NASA TO HAVE REACHED A LIGHT-DAY FROM EARTH —26 BILLION KILOMETRES

Nearly 50 years after launch, Voyager 1 reaches a light-day from Earth

Will Dunham
Washington, November 18

NASA'S VOYAGER 1 probe is believed to have now hit a distance milestone accomplished by no other spacecraft from Earth, based on advance computations by the US space agency, as the probe ventures through near-emptiness of interstellar space.

The robotic probe, launched in 1977, was calculated by NASA to have reached a light-day from Earth, the distance that light travels in 24 hours —26 billion kilometers — on Wednesday.

Officials at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California will have to wait about a day to get a signal from the probe, confirming it has reached this distance. They have scheduled an event for Thursday to discuss the milestone.

"Reaching one light-day is an astounding feat, one that I never expected to see," Voyager project manager Suzanne Dodd said.

Voyager 1, the most distant human-made object, is flying at almost 38,000 miles per hour (61,000 kph). It crossed the outer edge of the heliosphere, a protective bubble of particles and magnetic fields produced by the sun, to enter interstellar space in 2012. Its twin, Voyager 2, was also launched in 1977 and entered interstellar space in 2018.

A Jet Propulsion Laboratory representative said recent power-saving measures could give the two Voyager spacecraft enough power to stay in communication with Earth for three to four more years.



Voyager 1 journeyed past Jupiter and Saturn, the solar system's two largest planets, earlier in its mission. REUTERS

"But the goal of the mission is to do science, and there is enough power to keep the current suite of instruments going through the 50th launch anniversary next year. Beyond that is hard to predict, and of course these are nearly 50-year-old spacecraft, and there are always things the team cannot anticipate that might happen," the JPL representative said.

Voyager 1 journeyed past Jupiter and Saturn, the solar system's two largest planets, earlier in its mission. It continues to gather scientific data. For instance, its instruments have detected the faint monotonous hum caused by the constant vibrations of the small amounts of gas present in interstellar space.

"Voyager is sending back continuous measurements of magnetic fields, cosmic rays and of plasma waves that we receive on Earth whenever the Deep Space Network points its antenna at Voyager," Dodd said.

The Deep Space Network is NASA's international array of giant radio antennas supporting interplanetary spacecraft missions. "We also are still observing effects from our sun, including strong solar storms like coronal mass ejections, that generate shocks and pressure fronts that reach as far away as Voyager 1 and beyond," Dodd said.

"Where does the sun's influence end and pristine interstellar space begin? Perhaps Voyager may last long enough to answer that question." REUTERS