

# THE FREE PRESS JOURNAL

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## NATION

**Removal notice: Speaker Birla can defend himself and vote in LS, but has to sit as ordinary MP**



## GAMES

**Finn Allen lavishes praise on NZ bowlers for terrific performance against S Africa**



**Cinema Mahesh Manjrekar opens up about his upcoming play Animal**



**Edit Selective morality will not ensure durability of peace**

## Modi calls for 'swift end' to conflicts in Ukraine, West Asia

Agencies  
NEW DELHI

PM Narendra Modi on Thursday called for a "swift end" to the conflicts in West Asia and Ukraine, warning that no issue can be resolved through military confrontation, as the Israel-Iran hostilities escalated.

Modi's remarks, following his wide-ranging talks with Finnish President Alexander Stubb, came as the US and Israel's war with Iran entered the sixth day, with both sides launching fresh strikes that significantly heightened tensions across the region. The crisis in West Asia figured prominently in the Modi-Stubb talks.

"India and Finland both believe in the rule of law, dialogue, and diplomacy. We are in agreement that no issue can be resolved through military conflict alone," the PM said. "Be it Ukraine or West Asia, we will continue to support the swift end of conflicts and every effort towards peace."

The Finnish President said both sides deliberated on the conflict in West Asia and Russia's "war of aggression" against Ukraine. "We agreed that ending the war is in everyone's interests. A lasting peace can only be one that respects the principles of the UN."

Stubb strongly backed India's bid for a permanent



**Modi said both India and Finland believe in rule of law and that no issue can be resolved through military conflict**

seat at the UN Security Council, arguing it is of "utmost importance", along with broader reform of the global multilateral system, to reflect current geopolitical realities. Modi also mentioned the upswing in India-Europe relations.

"The world is going through a period of instability and uncertainty. Conflict persists in many parts of the world, from Ukraine to West Asia. In such a global environment, India and Europe, two of the world's major diplomatic powers, are entering a golden period in their relations," he said.

▶ Contd on | nation  
▶ See also | world

## Lanka extends help to 2nd Iran ship

FPJ News Service  
MUMBAI

Sri Lanka has denied docking permission to a second Iranian vessel reported near its coast, even as authorities said they are prepared to extend humanitarian assistance to the crew if required, according to international media reports.

The development comes a day after the Iranian naval frigate IRIS Dena sank off Sri Lanka following a US torpedo strike during the escalating regional conflict involving Iran, the US and Israel.

According to The Wall Street Journal, Sri Lankan officials confirmed that the vessel was sighted roughly 20 miles off Colombo. Cabinet spokesman Nalinda Jayatissa said the ship was in international waters and had not entered Sri Lanka's territorial zone.

Late at night, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said Sri Lanka evacuated 208 crew members from the naval vessel. The Sri Lankan Navy will also take control of it and escort it to Trincomalee port for safekeeping, he said, amid concerns that it could become a potential target.

"We are not taking sides in this conflict, but while maintaining our neutrality we are acting to save lives," Dissanayake said. "No one should have to die in a war like this. Every life is equally precious."

▶ Contd on | nation



Although Lankan minister Nalinda Jayatissa gave no details of the Iranian ship, official sources identified it as IRIS Bushehr, which was carrying nearly 300 crew

### 'DENA GUEST OF INDIAN NAVY'

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has said the Iranian warship sunk off Sri Lanka had recently been a "guest of India's Navy," a remark that draws attention to the protocols foreign naval ships observe when participating in multinational exercises such as MILAN naval exercise. On Thursday, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held a phone conversation with his Iranian counterpart Seyed Abbas Araghchi but it is not immediately known what transpired in the talks. Araghchi said the United States had committed "an atrocity at sea" by striking a vessel that had been sailing in international waters after taking part in naval engagements in India. In his statement, he emphasised that the frigate had recently been "a guest of India's Navy," carrying dozens of sailors while returning from the region. In naval diplomacy warships attending multinational exercises hosted by the Indian Navy follow strict non-combat protocols during their participation. These rules are designed to ensure that visiting vessels are engaged in cooperative activities rather than operational deployments. **CONTD NATION**



▶ Contd on | nation

## INDIA REFUTES SLUR ON ATTACK

Ashwin Ahmad  
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of External Affairs went on social media to strongly refute a claim made that India was allowing the US Navy to use its ports to launch attacks. In a post on X, the MEA Fact Check wrote, "Claims being made on One America News Network, a US-based channel, that Indian ports are being used by the US Navy are fake and false. We caution you against such baseless and fabricated comments."

The claim was made during an interview with US defence expert and former Colonel Douglas MacGregor on his thoughts on the Iran war. In the interview, Col. MacGregor

commented, "All of our bases have been destroyed. Our harbour installations are destroyed. We are actually having to fall back on India and Indian ports, which is less than ideal; that is what the navy says."

Colonel MacGregor also believes the US Navy may have used an Indian port to strike the IRIS Dena, an Iranian frigate that was believed to have been sailing in international waters before it was struck through a torpedo strike by a US submarine in the Bay of Bengal, where over 80 Iranian sailors were believed to have been killed.

▶ Contd on | nation  
▶ See also | nation

## INDIA SENT 2 SHIPS TO RESCUE

The Indian Navy on Thursday said it joined search and rescue operations after learning about a distress call from the Iranian warship IRIS Dena, which went down off the coast of Sri Lanka after being hit by a US torpedo fired by a US submarine. In a statement, the Indian Navy said it promptly launched its search and rescue (SAR) efforts with a long-range maritime patrol aircraft at 10 am on Wednesday to augment rescue operations led by Sri Lanka. "Another aircraft with air-droppable life rafts was also kept on standby for immediate deployment. **CONTD NATION**

## 39°C: Mumbai sizzles early

Devashri Bhujbal  
MUMBAI

Mumbai and its metropolitan region endured the season's first heatwave on Thursday as temperatures climbed to 39°C — the highest recorded in the city this year and the second-highest across Maharashtra.

The India Meteorological Department had initially issued a Yellow Alert for "hot and humid conditions" across Mumbai, Thane and Palghar districts. By late morning, conditions had intensified enough for the IMD to upgrade the alert to a heatwave warning. The Yellow Alert for hot and humid conditions remains in force for Friday.

▶ Contd on | nation

## Maha set to grow @ 7.9%

Kalpesh Mhamunkar  
MUMBAI

Maharashtra is on course to clock a 7.9% economic growth rate in 2025-26, reinforcing its stature as India's most powerful state economy, according to the Maharashtra Economic Survey 2025-26 tabled in the state legislature on Wednesday.

The state's nominal Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) is projected at ₹51 lakh crore, while per capita income is estimated at ₹3,47,903 — nearly 60% higher than the national average of ₹2,19,575. The state accounts for roughly 14% of

### Cabinet nod to draft anti-conversion law

The Cabinet approved a draft legislation aimed at regulating religious conversions in the state, making prior permission from a designated authority mandatory for individuals seeking to change their religion. The proposed bill requires any person intending to convert to another religion to submit a 60-day prior notice. **SEE CITY**

India's nominal GDP, maintaining its position as the country's single largest contributor.

The services sector leads growth at a projected 9%, followed by industry at 5.7% and agriculture at 3.4%. A robust monsoon — recording 109.1% of average rainfall — boosted kharif sowing across 157.27 lakh hectares, lifting output of cereals, sugarcane and cotton, though pulses and oilseeds are expected to dip. The state approved ₹9,022 crore in compensation for over 1.16 crore farmers hit by unseasonal rains.

▶ Contd on | nation

### On top gear

- State leads India in FDI, startups, tourist arrivals
- Per capita income rises to ₹3.47 lakh, 60% above national average
- Services sector powers ahead at 9%; agriculture buoyed by record 109% monsoon rainfall
- Mumbai Metro Line-3, Samruddhi Mahamarg now fully operational; Navi Mumbai Airport takes off

## With Shah by his side, Nitish files RS papers

Dheeraj Kumar  
PATNA

Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday heaped praise on Bihar CM Nitish Kumar and his governance, crediting him with freeing the state from the "clutches of jungle raj".

As Nitish filed nomination papers for Rajya Sabha polls, Shah called the JD(U) leader

"messiah of the poor". He said: "For the past two decades, the Nitish government's commitment and dedicated leadership for the welfare of the people of Bihar has freed the state from jungle raj and propelled it forward in the direction of development and good governance."

▶ Contd on | nation  
▶ See also | nation

## Bengal drama: Bose quits as Guv, Ravi in

Aritra Singha  
KOLKATA

In a dramatic development just days before the schedule for the West Bengal Assembly elections is expected to be announced, Governor CV Ananda Bose resigned from his post in New Delhi on Thursday evening, triggering a political storm in the state.

Confirming his decision, Bose said he had stepped down after serving in the Raj Bhavan for more than three years. "Yes, I have resigned. I have been the Governor of Bengal for three-and-a-half years; it's enough for me," he said, offering no further explanation for the sudden move.

▶ Contd on | nation

## 'Won'khede: India storm into final

Haridev Pushparaj  
MUMBAI

Sanju Samson took his game into another stratosphere on the grandest of occasions with a flamboyant 89 that built the foundation on which India carved out a T20 World Cup semifinal classic victory by a nervy seven runs at the cavernous Wankhede Stadium, here on Thursday.

The defending champions were made to sweat by a su-



premiely resilient England team and chasing 254 for a place in the final, England were always going to be up against it.

They mustered a mighty effort led by Jacob Bethell's stupendous 105 and Will Jacks' 35. However, the Indian bowlers

led by Jasprit Bumrah chipped in with wickets at regular intervals to restrict them to 246/7 in 20 overs to hand India a seven-run win and a place in the final in Ahmedabad on Sunday.

Jacob Bethell's lion-hearted effort of an incredible 105 off 48 balls and Will Jacks' 35 were the highlights for England, who were under tremendous pressure of chasing 254.

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## Plane crash: CID questions VSR owner

Varad Bhatkhande  
PUNE

The Maharashtra Crime Investigation Department (CID) on Thursday questioned VK Singh, owner of VSR Ventures, which operated the aircraft involved in the Baramati crash that killed Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, a CID officer said.

"The statement of VK Singh is being recorded," the officer said, without disclosing further details as the questioning was still underway.

Singh had earlier dismissed claims that there was any technical fault in the aircraft operated by his company. After making a brief statement to the media, he did not comment further as the controversy surrounding the crash intensified.

Reacting to the development, NCP(SP) MLA Rohit Pawar said that since VSR allegedly has high-level influence and is suspected of tampering with documents, the CID should immediately take custody of all its records.

## State govt pays ₹3.60 cr SHRC compensation

**Mumbai:** The Maharashtra government has deposited ₹3.60 crore in the registry of Bombay High Court towards compensation awarded by the Maharashtra State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) in human rights violation cases. The deposit was made following the High Court's February 17, 2026 order. An affidavit filed by Umesh Narayan Chandiwade, deputy secretary in the Home Department, stated that the amount was deposited on Feb 27.

# POLITICAL FIRST | Nine candidates file nominations; however, the papers of two independents may be rejected on technical grounds RS election unlikely as all candidates go unopposed

Ravikiran Deshmukh  
MUMBAI

In a rare development in Maharashtra politics, two members of the Pawar family, Sharad Pawar and his grandnephew Parth Pawar, are set to serve together in the Rajya Sabha.

They are among seven candidates, including Ramdas Athawale and Vinod Tawde, fielded by major political parties who are likely to be elected unopposed to the Upper House from Maharashtra on March 9.

Although nine candidates have filed nomination papers for the seven seats, the nominations of two independent candidates may be rejected on technical grounds, sources said.

Sharad Pawar, grandnephew Parth set to be Rajya Sabha MPs

Shinde-led Sena announces an RS berth for Dr Jyoti Waghmare

Parth Pawar will become the fourth member of the Pawar family to serve in Parliament

On the final day of filing nominations, four candidates from the BJP, one each from the Shiv Sena and the NCP and one from the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) submitted their papers. Athawale, Tawde, Maya Ivate and Ramrao Wadkute filed nominations as BJP candidates. Parth Pawar filed his nomination as the NCP candidate, while Dr Jyoti Waghmare filed as the Shiv Sena candi-

date.

Sharad Pawar filed his nomination by proxy after completing the required formalities under Section 84(A) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951. Citing ill health for his absence during the filing process, senior NCP leader Jayant Patil and Pawar's daughter Supriya Sule completed the formalities. Patil signed the papers as the proposer, while Dr Sanjay Suraje, medical superintendent at Sir JJ Hospital, signed Pawar's affidavit as mandated under the Act.

Two other candidates, Umesh Mhetre from Mumbai and Kante Sayanna from Telangana, also filed nominations, but their papers reportedly lack the mandatory signatures of MLAs as

proposers.

For Parth Pawar, the Rajya Sabha nomination ends a seven-year wait to enter Parliament after his defeat in the Maval Lok Sabha constituency against Shiv Sena candidate Shrirang Barne.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena named Dr Waghmare as its Rajya Sabha nominee. Currently the party spokesperson, she joined the Shiv Sena in 2023. Her nomination dashed the hopes of former Lok Sabha MPs Rahul Shewale and Gajanan Kirtikar.

According to political insiders, Shinde preferred a firebrand woman activist from the Scheduled Caste community with a semi-urban background.

# Maha sees investment gap, sector imbalance

## ECONOMIC SURVEY

Kalpesh Mhamunkar  
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra Economic Survey 2025-26 has highlighted a significant gap between proposed investments and projects that actually begin operations, even as the state economy continues to record strong growth.

According to the survey, intended investments registered under the Industrial Entrepreneur Memorandum (IEM) Part A during 2024, up to August, stood at ₹1,16,217 crore, while projects that actually commenced business under IEM Part B were worth only ₹27,357 crore, indicating a large implementation gap.

The survey projected Maharashtra's real Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) to grow at 7.9% in 2025-26, slightly



Intended investments under IEM Part A during 2024 (up to Aug) ₹1,16,217 cr

Projects actually commenced business under IEM Part B ₹27,357 cr

Contributions to economy

Services sector 63.1%

Industry 25.7%

Agriculture 11.2%

higher than the estimated national GDP growth of 7.4%. The state's nominal GSDP is expected to reach ₹51 lakh crore, while real GSDP at 2011-12 constant prices is projected at ₹28.82 lakh crore. Maharashtra continues to remain the largest contributor to India's economy, accounting for about 14% of the country's nominal GDP.

However, the report pointed

to structural imbalances, with the services sector contributing 63.1% to the state's economy, compared with 25.7% for industry and 11.2% for agriculture. While services are expected to grow by 9%, agriculture growth may slow to 3.4%. The survey also noted regional disparities in investment, with most high-value projects and IT infrastructure concentrated in Mumbai, Thane and Pune.



## Match rush

Heavy traffic snarls on Marine Drive as fans head towards Wankhede Stadium for the India vs England semi-final match -Vijay Gohil

## Kandivali resident killed in Muscat drone attack

Megha Kuchik  
MUMBAI

A Kandivali resident was killed in a missile-armed drone attack off the coast of Muscat on March 1. The deceased has been identified as Dixit Amritlal Solanki, 32, who was working as a crew member on a merchant vessel carrying 59,000 metric tonne of gasoline.

## Dixit Solanki had recently resumed duty on the ship after the death of his mother

The Indian Embassy in Muscat confirmed Solanki's death to the Kandivali police.

While a few crew members were rescued on March 2, Solanki died in the attack.

Solanki was a resident of MHB Colony in Mahavir Nagar, Kandivali West. He had recently resumed duty on the ship after the death of his mother. He is survived by his father and elder sister.

He had joined the MT MKD Vyom tanker last year and had been on board for nearly two months when the vessel was struck by a missile drone, leading to his death.

When contacted by The Free Press Journal, his father said he was unwell and not in a condition to speak.

## State records slight increase in schools, enrolment of girls



Kalpesh Mhamunkar  
MUMBAI

Maharashtra has more than 1.04 lakh primary schools with an enrolment of around 1.45 crore students, while 29,641 secondary and higher secondary schools cater to about 63.6 lakh students, according to the Economic Survey 2025-26.

The survey recorded a marginal rise in schools imparting primary and upper primary education, from 1,04,499 in 2023-24 to 1,04,526 in 2024-25. However, the proportion of schools located in rural areas dipped slightly from 75.2% to 75.1% during the same period.

The number of primary schools per 1,000 children in the relevant age group also declined marginally from 10.1 in 2023-24 to 10 in 2024-25.

Girls' enrolment rose slightly from 47.7% in 2023-24 to 47.8% in 2024-25. The pupil-teacher ratio improved,

## The number of primary schools per 1000 children declined marginally from 10.1 in 2023-24 to 10 in 2024-25

declining from 31.1 in 2023-24 to 30.1 in 2024-25.

The government is implementing several child welfare and nutrition programmes, including the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme, which operates through 1,10,664 anganwadis across 553 child development projects.

The survey also said the child budget's share in the state's total budget increased from 12.9% in 2024-25 (revised estimates) to 13.3% in 2025-26 (budget estimates).

According to the report, 50,350 crimes against women were reported in 2025, compared with 46,320 in 2024 and 47,029 in 2023.

## Motor vehicles rise by 40 lakh

FPJ News Service  
MUMBAI

The number of motor vehicles on roads in Maharashtra increased by 40 lakh, or 8.2%, in 2025, according to the Economic Survey 2025-26 tabled in the State Legislative Assembly.

The survey stated that the total number of registered motor vehicles in the state stood at 5.28 crore as of Jan 1, 2026, up from 4.88 crore at the beginning of 2025.

As of Jan 1, the state had around 41,000 vehicles per one lakh population.

Two-wheelers accounted for the largest share of registered vehicles, with 3.78 crore motorcycles, scooters and mopeds across the state.

The number of light motor vehicles, including cars, jeeps, station wagons and taxis, stood at 77.10 lakh.

Other categories of vehicles recorded in the survey include 12.96 lakh autorickshaws, 15.93 lakh tractors, 5.20 lakh trailers, 2.01 lakh buses and 26,002 ambulances as of January 2026.

The report further stated that vehicle density in the state stood at 153 vehicles per kilometre of road length, while vehicle density per one lakh population was 41,000.

The survey highlighted the continued growth in vehicle numbers in Maharashtra, reflecting rising mobility needs and expanding economic activity across the state.

## Prayers at any spot not religious right: HC

HC says namaz will not be allowed near Mumbai airport, cites security

Urvi Mahajani  
MUMBAI

Refusing relief to taxi and auto-rickshaw drivers seeking to offer namaz at a temporary shed within the city airport during the Ramadan period, the Bombay High Court said security overrides religion.

The court noted that Ramadan is an integral part of the Muslim religion but added that people cannot claim a religious right to offer namaz at any place, especially in the vicinity of an airport where security concerns are high.

"There is no question of getting a structure near the air-

shed where drivers earlier offered prayers was demolished last year. The plea urged the court to direct authorities to allot a place in the same area to offer namaz. Pursuant to the court's direction, the state submitted a report stating that no suitable site was found to allot to the petitioners to offer prayers due to congestion, security concerns and airport development plan constraints.

The bench remarked that it cannot grant relief as the issue pertains to airport security. It said the petitioners would have to find another place and noted that there was a madrasa within one kilometre where

they could offer prayers. Emphasising that there cannot be any compromise on security, the judges said, "We have never seen anything like this anywhere in the world. You cannot have something like this near the airport."

The court added that the petitioners cannot claim the right to offer prayers at the same spot. "Tomorrow you will say you want to stand in the middle of Oval Maidan and offer prayers. That is not possible," it said. Asking the petitioners to consider the larger good, the bench said, "We will not throw caution to the wind when it comes to security."

Religion or otherwise... security comes first. Everybody travel through this airport irrespective of their religion

— HC bench

## Cabinet approves draft bill to regulate religious conversions

Kalpesh Mhamunkar  
MUMBAI

The state Cabinet on Thursday approved a draft legislation aimed at regulating religious conversions in the state, making prior permission from a designated authority mandatory for individuals seeking to change their religion. According to officials, the proposed Prohibition of Conversion Bill requires any

person intending to convert to another religion to submit a 60-day prior notice and obtain approval from the competent authority before the conversion takes place.

The draft law also states that once a conversion takes place, it must be formally registered with the authority within 25 days. Failure to complete the registration process within the stipulated period would render the conversion

invalid, officials said. The bill further provides that if a blood relative of the individual alleges that the conversion has been carried out unlawfully, the police will be required to register an FIR and initiate an investigation.

The proposed legislation emphasises that while individuals have the right to religious freedom, this does not extend to conversions carried out through force, fraud or inducement.

## Electric water taxis arrive, services likely from Mar 10

Sweetie Bhagwat  
MUMBAI

Mumbai's much-awaited electric water taxi service has moved a step closer to launch with the arrival of the first set of vessels in the city. The air-conditioned electric boats are expected to begin operations around March 10, connecting the domestic cruise terminal in south Mumbai to the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA). Ticket prices are expected to be around ₹100

per passenger, as fixed by the authority.

The launch had been delayed earlier due to technical issues with the supplier of motors required for the vessels. Authorities said the problem has now been resolved. Trial runs will be conducted for the next few days before commercial operations begin.

The project is being implemented by Bharat Freight Group (BFG). The boats have been built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd in partner-



Seating capacity of 20

Air conditioned

Sofa-style seating

Toilets and advanced navigation systems

ship with the private operator. In the first phase, two vessels

will enter service: one hybrid boat powered by solar energy, electric batteries and a diesel backup system, and another that runs entirely on electric power. Each boat has a seating capacity of 20 passengers and is equipped with air conditioning, sofa-style seating, toilets and advanced navigation systems designed to offer a comfortable commute. The vessels are built using fibre and glass materials and follow a European design.

Electric water taxis are

expected to cut travel time between south Mumbai and Navi Mumbai from more than one hour to under 40 minutes, cruising at around 10 nautical miles per hour.

The boats are powered by twin 25kW motors and a 60kWh power pack, enabling them to operate for about four hours on a single charge.

According to the operator, the service is part of a broader plan to introduce cleaner and more efficient water transport options in Mumbai's harbour.

## Shia Brigade approaches police over Khamenei posts

FPJ News Service  
MUMBAI

Members of the Shia community have submitted a legal complaint to the Maharashtra State Police and the Mumbai Police, seeking the registration of a First Information Report (FIR) against individuals accused of circulating "deliberate and malicious" content on social media maligning Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Khamenei, the Iranian cleric and Supreme Leader who was killed in a missile attack last week.

The complaint from the

Mumbai Shia Youth Brigade, addressed to the Director General of Police (DGP) and the Commissioner of Police, alleges that the content is designed to insult the religious sentiments of the Shia Muslim community. The complainants stated that such acts are not merely digital mischief but a targeted effort to provoke communal tension and hurt the faith of millions who hold the leader in high religious regard.

The memorandum was submitted to several high-ranking departments, including the Cyber Crime

## Complainants state that such acts are not merely digital mischief but a targeted effort to provoke communal tension

Investigation Cell, the Joint Commissioner of Police (Law and Order) and the senior police inspector of the cyber police station.

The Mumbai Shia Youth Brigade has urged the Cyber Cell to track the origin of the

posts and take immediate legal action under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Information Technology Act.

"These acts are deliberate attempts to disturb the peace and outrage our religious feelings," a spokesperson for the group said. "We expect the authorities to act swiftly to prevent the further spread of this inflammatory material."

Police officials have acknowledged receipt of the complaint, and the matter is currently under review by the Registration Branch and the Law and Order wing.



## Fugitive tag: Notice to Nirav's brothers

**Mumbai:** A special court hearing cases related to fugitive diamondaire Nirav Modi has issued notices to his brothers, Neeshal Modi and Nehal Modi, and senior executives Aditya Nanavati, Mihir Bhanusali and Sandeep Mistry on a plea filed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) seeking to declare them fugitive economic offenders.

The agency last month moved separate applications before the special court to declare the five individuals fugitive economic offenders under the Fugitive Economic

Offenders Act, stating that they remain wanted in the ₹23,780 crore Punjab National Bank fraud case.

Nirav Modi was declared a fugitive economic offender on Dec 5, 2019. Five years later, the ED approached the court seeking similar declarations against his brothers and the senior executives. If allowed, it would enable the agency to confiscate their properties in India and abroad.

In separate orders, the court issued notices to the five individuals seeking their replies by May 7. -Charul Shah Joshi

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## Bed-ridden man hit by caretaker; CCTV evidence

Megha Kuchik  
MUMBAI

A 34-year-old caretaker has been booked for allegedly assaulting a bed-ridden septuagenarian, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease, resulting in a fracture to his right thumb. The incident, which is said to have occurred in February, surfaced after the victim's son checked the CCTV footage.

According to the FIR lodged by the Charkop police, Naveen Rajput, 39, the complainant, lives in Charkop sector 5, Kandivali West, while his father and victim Anandilal, 77, lives in sector 8, with his two daughters. Naveen said that he had installed a CCTV camera in his father's room.

The Alzheimer's patient has been bedridden for the last two years. The family had hired the accused, Bishu Anil Soni, as a caretaker two months ago. On February 28, when Naveen visited his father, the latter showed injury marks on his ribs. Naveen said that he then checked the CCTV footage, which allegedly showed that on February 24, Soni assaulted Anandilal between 3pm and 9.30pm. A doctor confirmed the injury.

## ASSEMBLY UPROAR | Inquiry for new E-ward office bldg delay and tender for Worli parking

# Robotic parking, BMC office plans under lens

Kalpesh Mhamunkar  
MUMBAI

The state government on Thursday ordered an inquiry into the delay in the construction of the BMC's E-ward office and the controversial tender issued for a multi-storey robotic parking in Worli. Minister of state for urban development (UD) Madhuri Misal informed the assembly that the probe will be conducted by the additional chief secretary of the UD department.

The issues were raised through a starred question by MLA Rais Shaikh, who alleged irregularities in the robotic parking tender. He told the House that the tender had been floated at a rate of Rs10,000 per sq ft, which would have cost the civic body nearly Rs27 lakh for a single parking slot.

The parking tender was cancelled after complaints, but Shaikh questioned what would happen to the expenditure already incurred on the tender process. He demanded that a white paper be pub-

### IN BRIEF

1 **Issues raised in the assembly through a starred question by MLA Rais Shaikh**

2 **He demanded a white paper on "inflated tenders" issued by the BMC over the past four years**

3 **BJP's Ameet Satam demanded that a white paper be released for the past 25 years rather than limiting the review to four years**

lished on "inflated tenders" issued by the BMC administration over the past four years. The legislator also highlighted the condition of the BMC's E-ward office, which was declared dangerous more than a year ago. Since then, the ward office has been operating from multiple temporary locations.

Shaikh said this has caused considerable inconvenience to citizens as they often

struggle to locate the relevant officials and departments. He alleged that the delay in constructing the new building was linked to a proposal by a contractor to develop an "iconic" structure at the site.

In a similar vein, legislator Yogesh Sagar demanded that a special investigation team be appointed to probe the functioning of the BMC administration over the past four years. He said that "five IAS officers" are currently handling the civic body's affairs, stressing the need for greater accountability in their work. Sagar also questioned why the proposal to implement the parking project through a public-private partnership model was considered only after objections were raised.

BJP's Ameet Satam demanded that a white paper be released on the functioning of the BMC administration for the past 25 years rather than limiting the review to four years. Satam further alleged that several irregularities had taken place during this period and cited the Mithi river's desilting as an example.

## Transporters defer strike after CM's call

S Balakrishnan  
MUMBAI

The state transport fraternity has put on hold its plan to go on an indefinite strike from the midnight of Thursday, truckers' spokesperson Malkit Singh Bal said. The agitation was primarily to oppose the e-challan system, which the protesters said, resulted in the "extortion" of unjustified penalties.

Bal said CM Devendra Fadnis and transport minister Pratap Sarnaik had appealed to rethink the agitation plan. Hence, the planned strike was deferred, he added. Bal further said Sarnaik assured that after the state legislature's budget session ends on March 25, the government will try to address the issues.

Citing the war in the Middle East, Bal said it was not advisable to observe a strike in such circumstances since it would disrupt the supply chain, he added. Deputy CM Eknath Shinde also appealed to the truckers not to go on strike, particularly during the present difficult period, he added. Bal said that the e-challan issue concerned both the transport and home ministries and therefore required a joint effort to resolve it.



### A close call

Trucks were already parked in Sewri in the run-up to the proposed indefinite strike, which has now been deferred - Vijay Gohil

## Signature drive for nat'l monument tag for Savarkar Sadan

Devashri Bhujbal  
MUMBAI

Dnyanada Prabhodhan, a Mahim-based non-profit organisation, has gathered support from more than one lakh people in less than a week for a signature campaign demanding national monument status for Savarkar Sadan, the residence of Swatantraveer Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, located in Shivaji Park, Dadar West.

The organisation has also written to CM Devendra Fadnis on behalf of Savarkar's followers, seeking the status, citing the residence's association with the freedom fighter's life and legacy. The campaign comes amid an ongoing PIL in the Bombay High Court, where the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) recently filed an affidavit recommending that Savarkar Sadan be granted heritage protection to "prevent its demolition and ensure its preservation". The ASI said the building is "suitable for inclusion either in the state's protected monument list or the BMC's heritage list."

However, the ASI clarified that it cannot declare the structure a monument of national importance as it has not been notified as a protected monument under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958. For such a declaration, a structure must be more than 100 years old.

Prashant Pal, president of Dnyanada Prabhodhan, said,

### Mahim's non-profit Dnyanada Prabhodhan aims to garner up to 10 lakh signatures from across the globe

"Savarkar Sadan is not only a structure where the freedom fighter stayed for 28 years, but also the place where he undertook atmaarpan (self-sacrifice) after a 21-day fast. The place holds special national, cultural and historical significance. It is a constitutional responsibility to protect such sites."

"The ASI has refused to grant the status just because Savarkar Sadan is not 100 years old. There are several other structures, like Mohammed Ali Jinnah's bungalow at Malabar Hill, that have been granted heritage status. Under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958, the Centre has the statutory power to give the status," Pal said.

According to the ASI, Savarkar Sadan was originally a two-storey bungalow constructed in 1938, where Savarkar lived until his death in 1966. The ASI's affidavit noted that the Swatantraveer Savarkar Rashtriya Smarak Trust owns only one room, which currently functions as a mini-museum. Savarkar's daughter-in-law, Sunanda, 92, continues to reside in the building, while the remaining flats are vacant.

## F-S/F-N: UBT loses to Shinde Sena by 1 vote

Shefali Parab-Pandit  
MUMBAI

In Thursday's chairperson elections for six BMC ward committees, the BJP strengthened its hold by winning three posts unopposed, while the Congress won in two wards.

In a high-stakes F-South/F-North contest, Manasi Satamkar of Shinde Sena defeated ex-mayor Shradha Jadhav of Sena (UBT) just by a single vote as the Congress and SP corporators remained absent.

BJP corporators Raj Purohit (C and D wards), Prakash Darekar (R-Central) and Leena Patel-Deherkar (R-South) were elected unopposed. In the A-B-E ward committee, former opposition leader and senior Congress leader Dnyanraj Nikam defeated BJP's Rohidas Lokhande by securing seven votes against the latter's five.

In the F-North and F-South ward elections, it was a keen contest. The Mahayuti (BJP's five corporators + Shinde Sena's three) and the opposition (Uddhav Sena six with one each of the Congress and MNS) had eight votes each. Hence, the SP's say was considered decisive.

At the last moment, the absence of Congress and SP corporators drove Satamkar to victory by one vote. Congress group leader Ashraf Azmi said the party would seek an explanation from corporator Ayesha Vanu for her absence. SP corporator Iram Siddique was also absent, swaying the battle.

## HC asks air pollution panel to cover MMR

Urvi Mahajani  
MUMBAI

Observing that Mumbai's deteriorating air quality cannot be attributed to sources within the metropolis alone, the Bombay High Court on Thursday asked the high-powered committee monitoring air pollution to also suggest measures to address pollution originating from adjoining cities.

The direction came during the hearing of the court's suo motu (on its own) public interest litigation on air pollution in the Mumbai and Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR). A bench of Chief Justice Shree Chandrashekhar and Justice Gautam Ankhad noted that pollution affecting Mumbai may also be drifting in from neighbouring urban centres and directed the committee to consider this aspect while preparing its recommendations.

"Air pollution is not just from the city. It is also coming from adjoining cities. So suggest measures for it as well," the court observed during the hearing. The observation came after counsel appearing for environmental group Vanashakti submitted that pollution from surrounding areas was clearly visible while

### AIR OF CONCERN

**Air pollution is not just from Mumbai, the high court tells high powered committee**

**Court says pollution factors also linked to adjoining cities, so suggest measures accordingly**

**It cites the instance of Delhi, where pollution is often linked to activities in neighbouring states such as Haryana**

crossing the Atal Setu, indicating that neighbouring cities were also contributing to the deteriorating air quality in Mumbai.

The bench remarked that similar regional factors were seen in Delhi, where pollution is often linked to activities in neighbouring states such as Haryana. The court has now posted the matter for further hearing after one month.

Earlier, on February 9, the high court had expressed concern over persistently high pollution levels and the "lackadaisical approach" by the civic authorities in addressing the problem.

## Case against driver for trying to murder CEO

Megha Kuchik  
MUMBAI

A man has been booked for allegedly trying to kill his company's CEO with the shard of a broken beer bottle, leaving him seriously injured. It was alleged that the accused held past grudges and a tiff during a party triggered him.

According to the FIR, the victim, Simon Salave, is the CEO of Shree Air Cargo Company, which exports medicines. The accused, Shashi Thakur, had been working as a driver with the company for the past three years. On March 3, the company organised a party during which Thakur allegedly picked up a fight with others over food and beer.

As per the FIR, Salave tried to intervene, but ended up abusing Thakur in a fit of rage, which directed the latter's ire towards him. Meanwhile, another CEO arrived at the scene and attempted to pacify them, after which Salave left the room.

However, Thakur allegedly followed him with a beer bottle and confronted him. Despite an apology, he broke the bottle and attacked Salave with the glass shard, said the FIR.

## ED arrests Archana Kute in ₹2kcr 'fraud'

Ashish Singh  
MUMBAI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested Archana Kute in a ₹2,467-crore money-laundering case linked to the alleged diversion of funds from the Dnyanradha Multistate Co-operative Credit Society Ltd (DMCCSL) to companies of the Kute Group. Investigators say the companies are owned or controlled by her and her husband, Suresh Kute.

Kute was arrested on March 2 by the ED's Mumbai zonal office under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). She was produced before a special court on March 3, which remanded her in ED custody till March 7. Earlier, the ED arrested Suresh and filed a prosecution complaint before the special court, which has taken cognisance of the offence.

The money-laundering probe is based on multiple FIRs filed between May and July 2024 by various police stations over alleged fraud on investors by Suresh Kute and others through DMCCSL.

The ED investigation alleged that the credit society launched high-yield deposit schemes promising 12-14%

### The credit society is accused of cheating thousands of investors through high-return deposit schemes

returns. However, many depositors allegedly suffered financial losses after the society failed to repay deposits or made only partial payments.

ED investigators said the probe revealed that funds worth around ₹2,467 crore from the credit society were diverted as purported loans to a cluster of companies belonging to the Kute Group. Officials said the disbursements were made without proper documentation, collateral security or end-use certification. Instead of being utilised for legitimate business activities, the funds were allegedly siphoned off for personal gain or invested in unrelated business ventures.

So far, the ED has conducted multiple searches in the case and issued several provisional attachment orders, leading to the attachment and seizure of movable and immovable assets worth approximately ₹1,621.89 crore.

## CET's e-facility allows tweaks till March 18

FPJ News Service  
MUMBAI

The state common entrance test (CET) Cell has opened an online correction facility, which will be available till March 18. A total of 1,16,013 students have registered to appear for the entrance examinations for the academic year 2026-27. It will cater to the candidates who have applied for the entrance examinations for BEd (general and special), BEd (ELCT), master of physical education (MPEd), and Master of Education (MED) courses. According to the Cell, the registration process for these courses concluded on February 27 after multiple deadline extensions.

Candidates, who have completed their registration and paid the examination fee, can log in to their accounts on the official CET portal to make necessary corrections in their application forms. The correction facility allows applicants to update details such as name, date of birth, photograph, signature and gender. For BEd applicants, an additional option has been provided to modify their course preference.

## Relief for 1999 blaze victims


**Mumbai:** The state government on Thursday decided to allot land in Deonar to 436 slum dwellers affected by a fire in Dharavi, offering them relief 27 years later. The decision was taken at a cabinet meeting chaired by the CM. A proposal by the revenue minister to allot 11,659 sq mt of government land in Deonar was approved. The land will be provided to 436 slum dwellers associated with the Rajiv Gandhi SRA CHS in Dharavi, whose homes were affected by the blaze in 1999. **PTI**

## IndiGo expands NMIA operation

**Mumbai:** IndiGo announced daily flights connecting Jamnagar and Navi Mumbai from April 23, adding Jamnagar as its sixth destination in Gujarat and increasing the number of operations from Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA). The flight no 6E-2053 from NMIA will depart at 4pm everyday and reach Jamnagar at 5.30pm. The return flight no 6E-2034 will depart at 6.10pm and reach Navi Mumbai at 7.35pm.

FPJ News Service

JAY SHRI KRISHNA



With profound grief and sorrow, we inform you of the peaceful passing of Tulsidas Ashar (Father of Manish Ashar, Nina Ashar, and Minal Ashar, Father in law of Dipika Ashar, Bhavesh Jesrani and Grandfather of Juhi Ashar, Pusti Jesrani, Jash Jesrani) on 3rd March 2026

Prayer Meet  
Date: Mar 7, 2026  
Time: 5:00 PM - 6:30 PM  
Location: Shree Halai Lohana Balashram  
Banquet Hall, Mathuradas extension Road, near Atul Tower, Hemu Bhagat Colony, Kandivali West, Mumbai - 400067

An Initiative of ALFACOMMUNICATIONS

## WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT Conclave 2026

**Date: 7th March 2026**  
**Time: 3:15 PM - Registration & Open Networking**  
**Venue: Walchand Hirachand Hall,**  
Indian Merchants' Chamber of Commerce & Industry,  
Opposite Churchgate, Mumbai - 400020

**CHIEF GUESTS**

  
**MS. SHUBHA RAUL**  
Ex Mayor,  
Bombay Municipal Corporation

  
**DR. RAJENDRA GAWAI**  
Chairman,  
Alfacommunications

  
**DR. VIVEK MENDONSA**  
Director,  
Lawrence & Mayo

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER**

  
**MS. DEEPA SOMAN**  
Lumiere Business  
Solutions

**OTHER SPEAKERS**

  
**DR. KARISHMA VIJAN**  
Dental Surgeon, Author,  
Founder,  
Quintessence Smiles

  
**SWAPNIL HASBE**  
CEO & Co-Founder,  
Urbanet Insurance  
Broking Pvt Ltd

  
**MR. GOPAL THATTE**  
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## Contractor gets bail in Mithi desilting scam

Charul Shah Joshi  
MUMBAI

A sessions court has granted bail to contractor Shersingh Rathod, proprietor of M/s Maindeep Enterprises, who was arrested for his alleged role in the Mithi River desilting scam. The court observed that he was not part of the conspiracy with alleged key suspect Ketan Kadam and officials of the BMC.

Rathod was arrested on allegations that he conspired with Kadam and BMC officials in connection with the desilting work. Investigators alleged that he signed a MoU and an agreement to hire machines from M/s Virgo Specialties Pvt Ltd in January 2021 despite knowing that the firm did not possess the required machinery.

The prosecution also claimed that Rathod forged the signatures of landowners on MoUs to show land parcels where silt removed from the river would be dumped.

The defence submitted email correspondence between M/s Matprop Technical Services Pvt Ltd, Rathod and officials of the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) to show that contractors were compelled to produce undertakings or agreements from machinery suppliers before their tenders could be considered.

Rathod's counsel argued that MoUs with landowners for dumping debris and silt were obtained through agents who were paid for the work. The defence maintained that Rathod had removed silt and debris from the river and transported the material to different dumping sites.

## FUGITIVE ASSET-GRAB | The agency said three of the properties are located in Worli, while the remaining 15 are located in Dubai

# Properties worth ₹700cr linked to Mirchi on ED target

Charul Shah Joshi  
MUMBAI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has sought confiscation of 18 properties linked to gangster Iqbal Memon alias Iqbal Mirchi and his family members under the Fugitive Economic Offenders (FEO) Act. Three of the properties are located in Worli, while the remaining 15 are in Dubai.

Mirchi, who had moved to London, has died. However, beneficiaries of his properties, including his wife Hajra Memon and sons Asif Memon and Junaid Memon, were declared fugitive economic offenders by a special court in February 2021. The process to confiscate their properties began thereafter.

In January this year, the ED approached the special court with an additional list of 18 properties linked to Memon that it seeks to confiscate under the FEO Act.

The agency has listed three Worli properties for confiscation: Sea View, Marium Lodge and Rabia Mansion. These properties are valued at ₹497 crore.

Under provisions of the FEO Act, the agency can seek confiscation of properties of a fugitive person located out-



### IN BRIEF

1 **3 Worli properties have been listed for confiscation: Sea View, Marium Lodge and Rabia Mansion**

2 **15 properties in Dubai worth AED10.15 crore (₹203.27 crore)**

3 **Mirchi's wife and sons declared fugitive economic offenders in Feb 2021**

side the country. Accordingly, the ED has also sought confiscation of 15 properties in Dubai valued at AED10.15 crore (₹203.27 crore).

These include Hotel Midwest apartment owned by the trio and valued at AED9.30 crore, along with several units in Business Bay, Dubai, and three properties at Marsa Dubai.

While seeking confiscation, the ED said trust entities in India and individual or cor-

porate holdings in Dubai were used to conceal the true beneficial ownership of these properties and project tainted assets as untainted. According to the agency, the properties were acquired, controlled and enjoyed by the Mirchi family through systematic concealment, misrepresentation and laundering of illicit funds.

The ED said Mirchi acquired three properties in Worli through proceeds of crime in September 1986 for ₹6.50 lakh. These include Sea View, Marium Lodge and Rabia Mansion, which together measure 4,970.41sq m. In 2019, Mirchi decided to develop these properties.

According to the ED, its investigation revealed that the Wadhawans of DHFL paid ₹154 crore to Mirchi abroad for acquisition of the Worli properties Sea View, Marium Lodge and Rabia Mansion.

The agency also said Kapil Wadhawan transferred 14 units to Asif Memon at a price of AED4.5 million against the prevailing market value of AED13 million. The transfer was made through Dheeraj & East Coast LLC, a company owned and controlled by the Wadhawans, to settle issues related to finalisation of the deal.

## Water tanker hits e-bike, Zomato rider on duty killed

Megha Kuchik  
MUMBAI

A 20-year-old Zomato delivery executive died in a road accident in Kandivali West on Wednesday after a water tanker allegedly hit his electric bike. The deceased was identified as Mohammad Arafat Arif Ansari. The Charkop police issued a notice to tanker driver Mahendra Yadav, 28.

According to the police, the complaint was filed by Ansari's cousin, with whom he had been living in Malvani, Malad West, for the past three years. Ansari was originally from Bijnor district in Uttar Pradesh and had been working as a delivery executive for the past two years.

The incident occurred around 1.00pm on March 4. Ansari was riding a Yulu company electric bike (No. 5092944) to deliver a parcel when the accident occurred on the road opposite Billabong High International School near Bhumi Mart, along the stretch leading to Chhatrapati Shivaji Raj Complex in Kandivali West.

According to the complaint, the water tanker, allegedly driven by Yadav, a resident of Borivali West, hit Ansari's bike, causing him to suffer severe injuries. The police took him to Shatabdi Hospital in Kandivali West, where doctors declared him dead before admission.

Following the complaint, police registered a case against the tanker driver under Section 106 (causing death by negligence) and Section 281 (rash driving) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita on Thursday.

## Senior citizen duped of ₹14 cr in stock scam

The trading account displayed fake earnings exceeding ₹39 crore

Somendra Sharma  
MUMBAI

A 68-year-old man fell prey to scammers and lost ₹14 crore in an online share investment fraud. The victim was befriended by an unknown woman who claimed to work for an online stock trading company that allegedly provided 300% returns on investment. She induced the complainant to transfer money to different beneficiary bank accounts over a period of two months.

According to police, the complainant is a resident of Pune. In October last year, he received a phone call from a woman who claimed to represent an online stock trading company based in Mumbai. She promised returns of 300% on investments and shared a link with the complainant, asking him to fill in details such as his name, address and PAN details, and to create an account on a trading app.

From November 3 to December 31, the scammers induced the complainant to transfer money to various beneficiary bank accounts through more than 80 online transactions. On checking his trading account statement, the complainant realised that his earnings had allegedly reached over ₹39 crore.

However, when he asked the scammer to release his

### THE CASE

The victim was befriended by an unknown woman who claimed to work for an online stock trading company that allegedly provided 300% returns on investment

She promised returns of 300% on investments and shared a link with the complainant, asking him to fill in personal details

From Nov 3 to Dec 31, the scammers induced the complainant to transfer money to various bank accounts

payment, he was told to deposit additional money under various pretexts, including commission charges, taxes and security deposits.

Despite complying with all the demands, the complainant did not receive any money. After realising he had been duped, he contacted the cyber crime helpline. The police then registered a case under Sections 318 (cheating) and 319 (cheating by personation) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Section 66D (cheating by personation using computer resources) of the Information Technology Act.

## 59 projects worth ₹2,800cr before BMC committee

Shefali Parab-Pandit  
MUMBAI

Nearly four years after the BMC came under administrative rule, the newly elected civic body will convene its first standing committee meeting on Friday to decide on several development projects.

Around 59 proposals related to civic work worth ₹2,800 crore will be presented to the statutory committee for financial approval. The standing committee will review multiple proposals covering bridge repairs, drainage upgrades, waste management and healthcare infrastructure, outlining the new administration's priorities for urban development.

Among the key proposals is the construction of Mumbai's first gymkhana opposite the BMC headquarters in South Mumbai, estimated at ₹44 crore. Another proposal concerns the Sion bridge project linking South Mumbai with the suburbs. The project cost has risen from ₹26.28 crore to ₹31.62 crore due to the addition of steel girders and approach roads. If approved, the BMC aims to open the bridge by July 15. Structural repairs to the Borivali Hill water reservoir, estimated at ₹23 crore, will also be placed before the panel.

Members will additionally consider a proposal worth ₹10.44 crore to procure 25 water supply vehicles with a capacity of 10,000 litres each to address emergency shortages during pipeline bursts.

## 1 held for black marketing of T20 tickets

Mumbai: Police arrested a 51-year-old man for allegedly black marketing tickets during the India-England T20 World Cup semi-final at Wankhede Stadium on Thursday. The Crime Branch's Property Cell, assisted by the Anti-Extortion Cell, arrested Zaheer Kamaluddin Bamne after laying a trap near Dockyard Road. The Police said Bamne was selling tickets with a face value of ₹1,000 for ₹25,000. Acting on a complaint by Dongri resident Jayesh Ramesh Iyer, the police seized 10 original tickets and a mobile phone. Bamne allegedly confessed to selling eight tickets earlier. The police are probing the source of the tickets.



### Sweet relief in summer sun

Women having ice lollies on a hot afternoon - Salman Ansari

## TCS employee gets ₹25L aid in minor-driven truck accident case

Pranali Lotlikar  
MUMBAI

The Mumbai Motor Accident Claims Tribunal (MACT) has awarded ₹25 lakh compensation to a 26-year-old Andheri resident who suffered permanent disability after being hit by an unattended vehicle accidentally driven by a juvenile.

The claimant, Nitin Gidaye, a Tata Consultancy Services employee working as a senior process associate, had travelled to his hometown Devrukh in Ratnagiri district when the accident occurred on February 12, 2018. According to case records, Gidaye and his brother had gone to a local market for

### The compensation came 8 years after the accident

shopping when he was struck by a Mahindra Bolero Max truck.

The tribunal noted that the vehicle had been left parked with its keys in the ignition. A juvenile seated inside started the vehicle without knowing how to drive and moved it in a rash and negligent manner. Gidaye, who was walking between two vehicles, suffered severe injuries to his right leg after it got trapped between them. He underwent treatment at City Hospital, Kolhapur, from February 12 to

March 14, 2018.

The tribunal observed that Gidaye later developed muscular dystrophy as a result of the injuries, leading to 50% permanent disability of the affected limb. Considering the extent of the disability and its impact on his life, the tribunal awarded ₹10 lakh towards pain and suffering and ₹10 lakh towards a loss of amenities and disability, with the remaining amount under other heads.

The insurance company argued that the accident occurred due to contributory negligence by the driver of another vehicle parked behind the offending vehicle and sought dismissal of the claim petition.

## Preity sells Bandra house for ₹18.5cr

Mumbai: Actor Preity Zinta has sold her apartment in Mumbai's upscale Pali Hill locality for ₹18.5 crore, according to property registration documents reviewed by real estate data analytics firm CRE Matrix. The transaction involves Flat No. 1101 on the 11th floor of Parishram on Nargis Dutt Road. The apartment has a built-up area of 197.5 sq m and a carpet area of 164.52 sq m, along with three car parking spaces. The buyers are Priya Rajeev Nagar, also known as Priya Nagar, and Rajeev Yogesh Nagar, US citizens of Indian origin.

## Strict action to curb female foeticide

Mumbai: The Maharashtra government plans to strengthen enforcement of the Pre-Conception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act to curb female foeticide across the state. The decision was taken at a high-level meeting chaired by the Health Minister at Mantralaya. Officials were directed to ensure strict implementation of the PCPNDT Act, 1994, amended in 2003, and intensify action against illegal sex determination and sex-selective abortions. The Law and Judiciary Department will examine the feasibility of invoking the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) against repeat offenders.

## Church calls for prayers for Middle East

MUMBAI: As the war in the Middle East escalates, the Roman Catholic Church has asked members across the country to pray for peace. In a message on Thursday, Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrao, President of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India, suggested devotional services from March 8 to March 14. Ferrao urged Catholics to observe March 8 as a Day of Prayer for Peace for the Middle East and March 13 as a Day of Fasting and Prayer.

## Live-in relationships on rise in urban India



For decades, Bollywood introduced live-in relationships to mainstream storytelling, though wrapped in controversy. Years later, Luka Chuppi portrayed a couple pretending to be married to justify living together, highlighting the social discomfort that still surrounds the idea.

Between these cinematic moments and the lived realities of urban India lies a quiet but significant cultural shift. Qualitative discussions with young professionals in cities such as Mumbai, Bengaluru and New Delhi reveal that live-in relationships are no longer seen as rebellion but as a rational progression. A 29-year-old consultant described it as "seeing

the everyday person, not the dating version". Respondents repeatedly emphasised understanding financial habits, emotional triggers, domestic expectations and long-term compatibility before formalising a lifelong commitment.

Unlike earlier generations, who entered marriage as the starting point of discovery, many urban couples today prefer discovery first. As one respondent said, "It's not anti-marriage. It's anti-assumption."

Marriage itself remains aspirational. Most respondents still imagine it in their future, often as a large celebration or destination wedding. What has changed is the

sequence. Live-in arrangements are viewed as a pre-marital audit, a period that reduces uncertainty and offers clarity about long-term compatibility. Women's narratives add another dimension. Financial independence has expanded the spectrum of choices. A 27-year-old marketing professional said, "Marriage feels permanent in a social way, whereas live-in feels chosen every day."

From a qualitative lens, commitment is not disappearing. It is being redefined.

The writer is Senior Vice-President and Head of Qualitative Research, Hansa Research



## Lecture & Discussion on Ethics In AI

by

**Dr Sanjay Pradhan**  
President

World Forum for Ethics in Business

On Saturday  
7th March 2026, 6 pm

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**REDVPT ROW** | City civil court holds the agreement valid; says members failed to show pact with DEM Homes LLP was invalid

## Society-developer dispute referred for arbitration

**Charul Shah Joshi**  
MUMBAI

Holding the redevelopment agreement between members of Andheri-based Taruvel Cooperative Housing Society and the developer as valid, the city civil court, Dindoshi, refused to adjudicate the dispute but instead referred the case for arbitration.

The society, located in Chakala, Andheri (East), has 84 members owning 118 flats and had undertaken redevelopment. Members signed a redevelopment agreement with developer DEM Homes LLP in September 2023. The dispute arose when some members refused to vacate the premises, stalling the project.

The developer had earlier sought intervention of the high court. Meanwhile, the dissent-

ing members approached the city civil court, Dindoshi, in February 2024, challenging the redevelopment agreement.

In July 2024, the high court directed the members to vacate the premises and hand over possession of the property to the developer for redevelopment. Subsequently, the developer, through lawyer Jay Vakil, urged the court to refer the dispute to arbitration.

The plaintiffs opposing the redevelopment claimed they were not party to the agreement and argued that its clauses were not binding on them. They also sought a permanent restraint on the society and developer from implementing the agreement.

It was argued that the decision of the managing committee is binding on all members

### OBSERVATIONS

**Plaintiffs failed to prima facie prove that the development agreement was invalid or non-existent**

**The development agreement contains a valid arbitration clause**

**Dispute between members and developer falls within the scope of arbitration**

**Court declined to adjudicate the matter on merits**

**Parties directed to resolve their disputes through arbitration**

of the society. However, a few members objected to the redevelopment and approached the court seeking termination of the agreement. The developer contended that the building had already been demolished and therefore the plea to terminate the agreement had become infructuous.

After hearing both sides, the court observed that the plaintiffs had prima facie failed to show that the development agreement was invalid or non-existent. Referring to the arbitration clause in the agreement, the court held that the dispute falls within a valid arbitration agreement and must be referred to an arbitrator.

Accordingly, the court referred the dispute between the society members and the developer to arbitration for resolution of their differences.



### GMLR tunnel breakthrough

Launching shaft completed at Dadasaheb Phalke Chitranganari for Goregaon-Mulund Link Road twin tunnels; TBMs scheduled for lowering on March 10

## Pending dues: 400 health staff on strike

**Danish Azmi**  
KALYAN

Public health services across Kalyan and Dombivli have been disrupted after nearly 400 contractual healthcare workers attached to the Kalyan-Dombivli Municipal Corporation (KDMC) launched an indefinite strike over non-payment of salaries for four months. The agitation has affected operations at Arogya Vardhini centres, urban primary health centres and Aapla Dawakhana clinics. The protesters gathered outside the KDMC headquarters include medical officers, staff nurses, multi-purpose workers, auxiliary nurse midwives and pharmacists. Dr Pooja Rathod-Jadhav, a medical officer participating in the strike, said, "Despite repeated representations to the authorities, no concrete decision has been taken. We are left with no option but to resort to agitation." Chief medical health officer Dr Deepa Shukla said the delay was due to non-receipt of funds from the state government. "We are in constant touch with government officials over the phone. We hope the issue will be resolved at the earliest," she said.

## Biker robbed after accident

**Dombivli:** The Vishnunagar police have arrested a man who allegedly posed as a good samaritan and robbed an injured biker of his gold chain after a road accident on the Mankoli-Mothagaon Bridge in Dombivli. The victim, Tushar Shinde, a resident of Gopi Chowk and an old-age home operator, met with an accident a few days ago. Satish Kore, who approached the injured Shinde and offered help. Kore stopped an auto-rickshaw and assured the victim he would take him to hospital. However, inside the auto, Kore removed a costly gold chain from Shinde's neck and left him near the hospital gate.

## Safety absent: Action on 21 school buses

**Fariyal Sayyed**  
THANE

The Thane Regional Transport Office (RTO) has launched a major crackdown on illegal passenger transport and negligent school bus operators through a special inspection drive conducted across the district during the first five days of March. Officials inspected 100 school buses across the region. Of these, 21 buses were found violating mandatory safety regulations. Action was also taken against four private buses operating as passenger vehicles without valid permits. The campaign, which started on March 1 and will run till March 31, will target school buses and illegal private passenger transport services. Acting on directives from transport minister Pratap Sarmaik and transport commissioner Rajesh Narvekar, RTO teams began surprise inspections across key areas, including Wagle Estate, Ghodbunder Road, Kopri, Kalwa, Bhiwandi (urban and rural) and Shahapur.

## Robotic surgery ends yrs of bleeding illness

Condition had turned the patient's life into a cycle of emergencies

**Raina Assainar**  
NAVI MUMBAI

A 37-year-old woman suffering from a rare genetic bleeding disorder that caused severe menstrual bleeding for years has been successfully treated through a robotic hysterectomy, bringing an end to her repeated hospitalisations and blood transfusions. Doctors at Apollo Hospitals Navi Mumbai performed the high-precision minimally invasive procedure on patient Neelam Yadav, who had been living with Glanzmann's Thrombasthenia – an extremely rare genetic condition seen in roughly one in millions of people.

The disorder is caused by platelet dysfunction. While patients may have a normal platelet count, the platelets fail to function properly, preventing the blood from clotting effectively and leading to repeated or prolonged bleeding episodes.

For Yadav, the condition had turned her life into a cycle

of medical emergencies. She said the problem began when she first started menstruating, with every cycle causing unusually heavy bleeding that continued for years.

The condition meant frequent hospital visits and blood transfusions to manage excessive blood loss. During a recent episode, Yadav was admitted with her haemoglobin dropping to a critically low 4 g/dL, requiring urgent stabilisation and multiple blood transfusions.

Following this episode, she opted for a hysterectomy as a permanent solution to prevent further life-threatening bleeding. Doctors said Yadav had previously delivered one child through a Caesarean section and required multiple blood and platelet transfusions because of the disorder.

A multidisciplinary team led by Dr Tripti Dubey performed a robotic hysterectomy with near-zero intraoperative blood loss and no transfusion required.

## Builder-producer booked for ₹47 lakh 'high returns' fraud

Actresses Mrinalini Jambhale, Varsha Usgaonkar among 4 investors cheated; complainant threatened by accused

**Avadhut Kharade**  
MUMBAI

The Shivaji Park police have registered a case against builder, developer and film producer Avinash Ganesh Jadhav for allegedly cheating actress Mrinalini Subhash Jambhale, veteran actress Varsha Usgaonkar and two others of a total of ₹47 lakh by luring them with promises of high returns on business investments.

According to the FIR, the complainant, Mrinalini Jambhale, 45, a resident of Dadar West, had earlier worked as an artist in Jadhav's film Aai Mala Maru Nako. In August 2019, Jadhav reportedly visited her residence and claimed that he owned land worth ₹2.5 crore in Panvel and was planning a plotting project at Poyaje in Pali Budruk village. He also said he needed financial assistance to quickly com-

### INVESTMENTS MADE

**Mrinalini Jambhale**

₹23L

**Mandar Jambhale**

₹11L

**Varsha Usgaonkar**

₹11L

plete the fourth floor of a construction project at Uran Bazaar in Raigad.

Jadhav allegedly assured Jambhale that if she invested money in the project, she would receive attractive profits and the principal amount would be returned within a year. Trusting his assurances, Jambhale informed her brother Mandar Jambhale about the proposal. Later, in

October 2019, she also shared the investment opportunity with her friend, actress Varsha Usgaonkar, and Usgaonkar's associate Zeenat Sultan Sayyed. Jambhale invested ₹23 lakh in cash and through cheques at her residence. Jadhav subsequently executed an MOU agreement in Dombivli East and issued five cheques worth Rs23 lakh to her.

Mandar Jambhale, Varsha Usgaonkar and Zeenat Sayyed also expressed interest in investing in the project. In December 2019, Jambhale arranged a meeting between them and Jadhav at a restaurant in Santacruz. During this meeting, Mandar Jambhale and Varsha Usgaonkar each invested ₹11 lakh, while Zeenat Sayyed invested ₹2 lakh. In total, the four investors collectively invested ₹47 lakh but got anything in return.

## Smart tech for safe & secure Samruddhi

**Ravikiran Deshmukh**  
MUMBAI

An Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) equipped with advanced technology on the Samruddhi Highway will become partially operational next month, the state assembly was informed on Thursday. The multi-modal corridor connecting Nagpur and Mumbai has recorded 233 deaths in the last two years, the state government confirmed.

In a written reply, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, who heads the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC), said the government has engaged police and Regional Transport Office (RTO) officials to counsel drivers. Mandatory checks of fire-fighting equipment in vehicles and driving licences are also being conducted. MLA Sai Dahake raised the question.

According to Shinde, the highway recorded 233 accident-related deaths in the past two years. Of these, 126 people lost their lives in 2024, while 107 deaths were reported in the first nine months of 2025.

Shinde said construction of 15 Highway Police Centres along the expressway is underway. Interceptor vehicles are also being deployed to monitor vehicles exceeding speed limits. A drive to install signage, instruction boards, speed-limit markers, lane markers, cat's eyes and rumble strips has been completed. The MSRDC has also deputed 192 security guards and 15 vehicles for patrols.

## Lyricist's car set on fire; two vehicles gutted

**Danish Azmi**  
BHIWANDI

The Scorpio car belonging to Marathi lyricist Ashish Shinde was allegedly set on fire by an unidentified person late at night in the Kasheli area of Bhiwandi. Another vehicle parked nearby was also destroyed in the blaze. According to preliminary information, Shinde's driver, Pratik Kamble, had parked the SUV along the roadside in the evening. At night, an unidentified person allegedly set the vehicle on fire. The flames spread rapidly and the car was completely gutted. The fire also spread to a second vehicle parked adjacent to the Scorpio, which was also destroyed. Officials from Narpoli police station reached the spot and conducted a panchama. The police have begun an investigation to determine whether the fire was caused by a technical fault such as a short circuit or if it was an intentional act. They are scanning CCTV footage from the surrounding area to identify the suspect involved.

## Charas seizure: Probe reveals B'wood link

**Poonam Apraj**  
MUMBAI

More than a week after the Mumbai Police's Anti Narcotics Cell (ANC) busted an international charas supply network operating between Nepal and Mumbai, fresh details have emerged during the ongoing investigation.

Investigations have revealed that a significant portion of the charas was allegedly consumed within Bollywood circles. According to sources, the substance was mixed with shredded tobacco, filled into cigarettes, wrapped in silver foil and smoked as 'hash', a costly product typically consumed by high-profile clients. The identities of those who received these supplies are still being verified.

During the initial operation, ANC officers arrested two accused and seized 1.715kg of charas along with Rs52,000 in cash.

Investigators say the alleged mastermind, Atamuddin alias Abid, adopted a calculated modus operandi to evade detection. He used three separate locations in Mumbai to store consignments of charas

brought from Nepal — his own residence, his brother's house and a friend's flat.

Abid deliberately avoided staying at the premises where the contraband was kept. Instead, he stayed at other locations so that in the event of a police raid, investigators would not easily establish a direct link to the stash.

A senior ANC officer said Abid and his wife Farah lived in Vile Parle, while the distribution network primarily operated in upscale areas such as Juhu and Bandra. The couple allegedly ran the racket through peddlers who delivered the contraband late at night and rested during the day to avoid suspicion.

Financial probes have indicated that Farah transferred crores of rupees to multiple bank accounts in Nepal in exchange for the consignments. The ANC is coordinating with agencies to obtain detailed transaction records.

Investigators also found that carriers arriving from Nepal's Chitwan region brought around 3-4kg of charas to Mumbai during each trip. After handing over the consignment to Abid, they returned to Nepal.

## College hosts event on space

**Bhiwandi:** BNN College in Bhiwandi will host a one-day international conference on the theme "Space" on March 7, focusing on the ancient Indian concept of Panchamahabhuta – the five fundamental elements – and its relevance to modern science and interdisciplinary studies. The conference will be conducted in both online and offline formats, bringing together researchers, academicians and students from India as well as abroad. Scholars and experts will examine the concept of space.

## MHADA launches its single digi platform

The Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA) has launched its mobile application 'DigiMHADA' to bring a range of housing and administrative services onto a single digital platform.

### FEATURES

Provide a single digital platform for MHADA housing and administrative services

Allow citizens to access information on housing lottery schemes conducted by regional boards

Enable online lottery registration, document uploads and application status tracking

Provide verified updates on housing schemes and official announcements

Allow users to file Right to Information (RTI) applications online



Enable e-billing and access to services under the Right to Service Act

Provide official notifications, project updates and grievance redressal services

Facilitate e-auctions, contractor registration and Auto DCR permission services

Include a 'Near Me' feature to locate nearby services and facilities

Integrate a WhatsApp communication channel for queries and downloading application forms

**Text: Sweety Bhagwat**

## Nair Dental hostel filth raised in assembly

**Amit Srivastava**  
MUMBAI

Unhygienic and inhumane living conditions at the hostel of Nair Dental College have sparked serious concern, with the issue now raised in the Maharashtra Assembly. Borivali MLA Sunil Rane Upadhyay brought the matter before the House, seeking urgent government intervention.

In its February 5 edition, The Free Press Journal had reported on the deteriorating sanitary conditions faced by students residing at the hostel.

Raising the issue as a starred question for oral response and discussion, Upadhyay sought a clear stand from the state gov-

ernment. He alleged that nearly 200 to 300 students, including intern doctors, are living in extremely poor conditions due to irregular cleaning, heaps of garbage accumulating on floors, poorly maintained toilets and a pervasive foul smell across the premises.

Preliminary information suggests that sanitation work has come to a halt owing to non-payment of wages to contract cleaning staff. However, the MLA alleged that administrative negligence has worsened the situation and held the college administration responsible for the hostels' condition. He called for an immediate inquiry and strict action against those found accountable.

## 'Attempt to rape' ruling sparks fresh legal outcry

**Urvi Mahajani**  
MUMBAI

A recent judgment by the Chhattisgarh High Court (HC), which downgraded a rape conviction to an "attempt to rape" because the act involved ejaculation without full penetration, has ignited a fierce debate among legal experts and women's rights advocates. The ruling, delivered by Justice Narendra Kumar Vyas, has been labeled as a "patriarchal" and "hyper-technical" interpretation of sexual violence.

The Chhattisgarh HC modified a 2005 conviction for rape to attempt to commit rape, observing that penetration is essential to constitute the offence under

Section 375 of the IPC as it stood before the 2013 amendments.

As per prosecution, the accused dragged a woman into his house in May 2004, stripped her and forced sexual intercourse. While the victim initially claimed penetration, she later stated that the accused kept his private part over her vagina for about 10 minutes without penetrating.

Citing these inconsistencies and a medical report showing an intact hymen, the court held the act amounted to attempt under Section 376/511 of the IPC and reduced the sentence to three years and six months.

The judgment has met with sharp resistance from lawyers who argue that the

### THE CASE

**Case relates to a 2004 sexual assault incident**

**Trial court had convicted the accused in 2005**

**HC ruled ejaculation without penetration amounts to attempt, not rape**

**Appellant's sentence was subsequently reduced to three years and six months**

**Lawyers argue medical evidence indicated possibility of partial penetration**

court prioritised clinical definitions over the reality of sexual trauma.

Criminal advocate Sayaji Nangre pointed out that the HC appeared to overlook Supreme Court precedents which establish that the depth of penetration is immaterial. Nangre said that the medical evidence – including the presence of sperm on the victim's undergarments and the doctor's testimony regarding partial penetration – should have been sufficient to sustain the original rape conviction.

Echoing the criticism, advocate Siddh Vidya emphasised that even the slightest entry within the labia suffices under law and warned that hyper-technical

interpretations risk reducing grave sexual assault to technicalities, undermining the protective purpose of criminal law.

The critique extended to the systemic handling of gender-based violence. Audrey Dmello, Director of Majlis, characterized the High Court's view as "patriarchal and misogynist." While acknowledging that the court could not apply the stricter 2013 IPC amendments or the new Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) retroactively to a 2004 case, Dmello argued the court failed to uphold the spirit of the law regarding the violation of dignity.

Advocate Prakash Salsingkar, who handles pro bono cases, suggested that

the discrepancy in the victim's wording between the initial FIR and the trial deposition – likely caused by the humiliation of reliving the incident – might have been exploited. "As the matter goes to the higher court, the court often takes a liberal view and goes by the strict definition," Salsingkar observed. He stressed that trials and appeals must be conducted speedily to prevent the "liberal" interpretation of technicalities from overshadowing the victim's lived experience.

Advocate Siddh Vidya said that even the slightest entry within the labia suffices under law and warned that hyper-technical interpretations risk reducing grave sexual assault to technicalities.

## Cop brutally attacked during traffic check; youth arrested

**Kirti Kesarkar**

VASAI

A police officer on duty was brutally attacked by a youth during a crackdown on triple-riding in the Range Naka area of Vasai. On March 3, the complainant officer, along with colleague Vinod Mane, was conducting a check for traffic violations near a mobile shop at Range Naka.

During the operation, they intercepted a motorcycle. The rider, Abhishek Jaiswar, 21, allegedly began obstructing the officers' work and got into a heated argument.

The confrontation turned violent when Jaiswar allegedly picked up a stone and struck the officer on the back of the head with the intent to kill. Even after the officer collapsed, Jaiswar allegedly continued to strike him repeatedly on the head with the stone, causing severe injuries. The Wai police have booked Jaiswar for attempt to murder and obstructing a public servant in the discharge of official duty. Jaiswar has been taken into custody and further investigation is underway.

Environmentalists from Navi Mumbai say their hills are the heart of the satellite city and need protection

## Activists seek forest dept shield for hills

**Sameera Kapoor Munshi**

NAVI MUMBAI

Environmental groups have urged the Maharashtra government to transfer ownership and protection of key hill ranges in Navi Mumbai to the forest department, alleging environmental damage from development activities.

The demand has gained urgency after a massive blaze swept across Belapur Hills from Wednesday night to early Thursday, drawing the attention of the Chief Minister's Office (CMO). Taking cognisance of the incident, the CMO alerted the urban development, forest and environment departments and sought action.

Kapil Kulkarni of the Save Belapur Hills Forum said, "These fires appear to be triggered by vested interests attempting to clear vegetation and grab land."

In a representation to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, activists from Save Belapur Hills and Sajag Nagrik Manch demanded that the ecosystems



of Parsik hills, Belapur hills and Kharghar hills be transferred from the City and Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO) and the Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation to the Maharashtra forest department for long-term protection.

Activists said the hills play a role in maintaining ecological balance and are among the reasons the city remains environmentally liveable.

Environmental activist and NatConnect foundation director BN Kumar said, "These hills are the lungs of Navi Mumbai and must be protected before irreversible damage is done."

The representation states that while most land in the city

was acquired by CIDCO for planned development, surrounding hills were originally handed over by the forest department with the expectation that they would be preserved. However, activists allege that recent development activities have led to environmental degradation.

They cited alleged mangrove damage during plot development in Sector 52A of Nerul, tree cutting near municipal areas and hill cutting during development in Belapur Sector 30.

Activist Krishnan Potti said, "Hill slopes are being levelled for projects. If this continues, wetlands and mangrove ecosystems could face similar threats."

## Palm Beach tree felling petition gets 270 signatures

**Sameera Kapoor Munshi**

MUMBAI

Citizens have launched an online petition urging authorities to reconsider large-scale tree removal along Palm Beach Road, warning it could damage one of Navi Mumbai's last green corridors. The petition on Change.org has drawn 270 signatures. Signatories say the mature tree belt regulates temperature, filters pollution and supports the microclimate shaped by mangroves.

It cites global data showing 400 trees per person worldwide compared with 28 in India and one tree per resident in Navi Mumbai, below the recommended three.

Petitioners warn relocating mature trees has survival rates below 30% and compensatory plantation cannot replace the cooling and air-quality benefits of a canopy.

The petition states, "This is not opposition to development but a request to reconsider the plan and explore responsible alternatives so that infrastructure development and environmental protection can coexist."

## 14-yr-old student killed as slab collapses during tuition class

**Raina Assainar**

NAVI MUMBAI

A 14-year-old student died and four others were injured after a first-floor slab collapsed while a home tuition class was underway at Vidya Bhavan Society in Sector 2, Koparkhairane on Thursday evening.

The incident occurred around 5.20pm when the slab from the first floor suddenly gave way and fell onto the ground floor where the class was being conducted. Fire brigade teams from Vashi, Koparkhairane and Airoli rushed to the spot and launched rescue operations. At the time of the incident, there was no one in the first floor flat.

A total of 13 people – 12 students and one teacher – were trapped at the site when the slab collapsed. Fire personnel rescued all of them from the debris. Of these, five students sustained injuries and were rushed to hospital, while five others escaped without any injuries. One of the injured students, Manish Mase, later succumbed to his injuries at the Vashi Municipal Hospital, officials confirmed.

The students rescued from



Farooq Sayed

the site were identified as Siddhant Gupta (8), Prince Soni (11), Aisha, Kusum (15), Nishka Dhanwade (14), Manish Mase (14), Aradhya Bodse (14), Tanvi Srivastava (7), Devansh Pujari (12), Rajdeep Wankhede (10), Parth Khairnar (14) and Rudra Yelurkar (5). The class was being conducted by teacher Shamali Chaudhary (53).

"The building is a ground-plus-four structure comprising 16 flats and received its Occupation Certificate (OC) in 1998. The building was not declared dilapidated and is a legally constructed structure through private building by developing the plot," Navi Mumbai Municipal Commissioner Kailash

Shinde said.

Deputy Commissioner (Encroachment) Dr Kailash Gaikwad said the building had not yet crossed the age threshold that mandates a structural audit. "Structural audits of buildings are generally carried out after they complete 30 years. However, it appears that regular maintenance of the structure may not have been carried out," Gaikwad said.

He further appealed to residents to ensure periodic upkeep of their buildings. "Even if a building has not completed 30 years, residents should make sure that timely repairs and maintenance work are undertaken to prevent such incidents," he added.

## EOW books builders for ₹12.44 cr fraud over loan on mortgaged flats

**Poonam Apraj**

MUMBAI

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Mumbai police has registered an FIR for an alleged financial fraud of more than ₹12.44 crore against builders Hemendra Bosmiya, Yogesh Bosmiya and others.

According to the Cuffe Parade police, an FIR was registered on March 4, 2026, under the Bharatiya Nyaya

### The accused allegedly sold flats without clearing the loan, thereby cheating the complainant

Sanhita based on a complaint filed by Shlok Vivek Agarwal on behalf of applicant Renu Agarwal.

As per the complaint, the accused allegedly took a loan

of ₹5 crore in 2015 from the complainant's grandfather by mortgaging 16 flats in 'Rashmi Signature' project. However, without the lender's consent, the accused allegedly re-mortgaged the same flats to another financial entity and later sold them to third parties without repaying the loan.

The complaint further states that in 2017, the accused issued post-dated cheques worth ₹12.44 crore to the

complainant and mortgaged 14 flats in the 'Rashmi Heights' project as security. The cheques later bounced, and it was allegedly discovered that the same flats had already been mortgaged earlier.

Police said the accused subsequently sold those flats as well without clearing the loan amount, thereby allegedly cheating the complainant of ₹12.44 crore. Further investigation into the case is underway.

## Fake MHADA papers, forged docus: EOW files chargesheet in housing fraud

**Poonam Apraj**

MUMBAI

In a real estate fraud case involving forged government documents, fake MHADA allotment papers and a man posing as an Intelligence Bureau (IB) officer, the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Mumbai police has filed a 500-page chargesheet.

The accused, Prabhakar Shetty, 70, was arrested in December 2025 from Karkala

in Udipi district. The police have named him in the chargesheet along with 14 witnesses. Investigators alleged that Shetty collected about ₹20 lakh from the complainant and nearly ₹2 crore from other investors as part of the fraud.

According to the EOW, Shetty allegedly assisted the prime accused Rupesh Chaudhary, who is now deceased, in duping investors by promising low-cost flats

under housing schemes under MHADA.

Investigators said Shetty played a key role in introducing prospective investors to Chaudhary and convincing them that they would receive MHADA flats at nominal prices. During the investigation, the EOW also found several transactions of fraud money in Shetty's bank accounts, confirming his alleged financial involvement in the racket.

The case was initially registered at Dindoshi police station on the complaint of Mohammad Qureshi, 45, a businessman who alleged that he and several other investors were cheated of ₹17.74 crore. According to the complaint, Chaudhary and his associates – including his wife Nikki Chaudhary, Prabhakar Shetty and Roland Karkada – allegedly duped multiple investors between January 2023 and July 2025.

## TOXIC FLOW | Old pipelines left under ₹2,800 crore water scheme raise serious health concerns

# Contaminated water hits 70 spots

Indu Bhagat

PUNE

Serious flaws have surfaced in the Pune Municipal Corporation's (PMC) Equal Water Supply scheme, raising public health concerns in several parts of the city. The project, being implemented at an estimated cost of about Rs2,800 crore, has reportedly left several areas without new water pipelines, resulting in the supply of contaminated drinking water through old pipelines.

According to information received, at least 70 locations across the city are facing contaminated water supply. Areas such as Kondhwa, Hadapsar, Katraj, Yerawada, Pashan and Dhankawadi are among the affected. In these locations, new pipelines were not installed under the scheme, forcing authorities to continue using old water lines that run parallel to sewage channels. Leakage in these pipelines has reportedly led to sewage mixing with drinking water, creating a serious health hazard for residents.

The issue was raised by cor-



To address the issue, a tender worth ₹20 crore has been floated for the relocation and repair of damaged water and sewage pipelines.

— Nandkishore Jagtap  
Head, Water Supply Department, PMC

porators in a municipal council meeting after citizens from several areas complained about yellowish, reddish and foul-smelling water being supplied to their homes. So far, the civic body has received complaints of contaminated water from nearly 470 locations.

The Equal Water Supply Scheme was launched in 2017 with an initial estimated cost of Rs2,800 crore to provide a uniform water supply across Pune. The project included

plans to lay nearly 1,700km of new water pipelines across the city, divided into five zones. However, to reduce

costs, the pipeline length was reduced to about 1,355km, leaving some areas dependent on the existing old pipeline network.

Of the total project cost, tenders worth about Rs2,400 crore were issued, and approximately Rs1,600 crore has been spent so far. Civic officials claim that nearly 80% of the work has been completed, but about 20% of the project remains pending as of March 2026.

Meanwhile, PMC officials

have acknowledged the problem and said corrective steps are being planned.

Nandkishore Jagtap, Head of the Water Supply Department of PMC, said, "The contamination issue has arisen mainly in areas where new pipelines have not been laid, and old water mains are located next to sewage lines. To address the issue, a tender worth Rs20 crore has been floated for the relocation and repair of damaged water and sewage pipelines."

The main pipeline work under the scheme is being carried out by L&T, with about 90% of the work reportedly completed, while Jain Irrigation has completed about 65% of its assigned work.

Residents in the affected areas have raised concerns over the quality of drinking water and urged the civic body to take immediate action to prevent health risks. Civic activists have also demanded that the remaining work under the scheme be completed without further delay to ensure a safe and clean water supply across the city.

# Sena flags engineering college irregularities

Indu Bhagat

PUNE

The functioning of Mukunddas Lohia Engineering College on the campus of Abasaheb Garware College in Pune has sparked controversy after Yuva Sena alleged that the engineering college was started without adequate infrastructure and before completion of its building, risking the future of students. The Maharashtra Education Society (MES), however, has rejected the allegations and termed them defamatory.

Yuva Sena joint secretary Kalpesh Yadav said, "The construction of the engineering college building has not yet been completed, and several essential infrastructure facilities are currently unavailable. Despite this, the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Technological University (DBATU) allegedly completed the affiliation process. The Pune Divisional Department of Technical Education (DTE) also allowed admissions through the Common Entrance Test (CET), even though the required infrastructure was not fully developed."

"Professional colleges are required to follow AICTE norms and obtain approval from DBATU before admissions are permitted. Institutions must also ensure the availability of basic facilities such as laboratories and classrooms necessary for engineering education. However, Mukunddas Lohia Engineering College was started without meeting these requirements, and the authorities are playing with the future of students for profit," Yadav said.

He also raised questions regarding the role of regulatory authorities in granting approvals. He asked, "Who permitted admissions when the college building was incomplete and which inspection committee from DBATU visited the campus before granting affiliation?" He also



Yuva Sena alleges college started without full infrastructure; MES rejects charges as defamatory

questioned the role of officials from the Department of Technical Education and alleged that a misleading report had been submitted to approve admissions for the first-year engineering course.

Yadav further pointed out that the Fee Regulatory Authority (FRA) fixed the college's fees based on infrastructure and facilities. "However, the college lacks those facilities, but we want to know how the fee structure was approved," he added.

Yadav said boards have been displayed across the city stating "Find the Lost College" and offering a reward to anyone who can locate it, symbolically questioning the existence of the college's infrastructure. He warned that if immediate action is not taken against the officials responsible for grant-

ing approvals, Yuva Sena will launch a strong agitation.

Meanwhile, MES strongly denied the allegations. In a statement, the organisation said Mukunddas Lohia Engineering College is functioning strictly in accordance with legal procedures and has started operations only after obtaining all necessary approvals from AICTE and DBATU. It also said a building already exists at the address where the college is operating and that all facilities required for first-year engineering education are available there.

The institution added that classes for first-year students are currently underway and that construction of an additional building is in progress to accommodate increasing student numbers.

The organisation also alleged that the "Finding the Lost College" boards have been put up in public places without verifying facts from the institution, calling it an attempt to defame the college. MES said it condemns the misinformation and has initiated legal action against those responsible.

## IU official thanks Shinde

ANI

PIMPRI CHINCHWAD

After the safe return of 84 Indira University students who were stranded in West Asia due to the Iran-US conflict, the university's dean, Shikha Sindhu, on Thursday expressed relief and gratitude, saying the university's foremost concern was bringing the students back as quickly as possible.

She stated that the entire team was focused only on ensuring their safe return and described Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde as a "saviour" during the crisis. While there were no major logistical challenges, she noted that the situation was emotionally difficult, adding that constant communication with the students was maintained throughout.

"The only thought running through our heads was how soon we could get them back... Deputy CM Eknath Shinde became a god for us in that moment... There were no challenges, but an emotional struggle... One thing that was very important was that the communication with them was never broken," the dean told ANI. A returning student shared that they had travelled for an immersion programme and were scheduled to return safely when they suddenly learned their flights had been cancelled. The university management promptly extended their hotel stay and ensured that all necessary arrangements were provided on time.

"We were sent there for an immersion programme... We were going to come back safely, and on that day, we got to know that our flights had been cancelled... Our management has extended the stay at the hotel, and everything was provided to us on time," the student told ANI.

# Shirole flags toll check harassment

Staff Reporter

PUNE

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA from Pune's Shivajinagar constituency Siddharth Shirole raised the issue of unnecessary vehicle checks conducted by traffic police at highway toll plazas and said digital documents must be accepted if drivers do not have physical copies.

"In the Legislative Assembly, I raised the issue of unnecessary vehicle checks being conducted by traffic police at highway toll plazas and other points. Several citizens have reported that vehicles are being stopped for document verification even when all required documents are available on official platforms such as DigiLocker or M-Parivahan.

Despite these valid digital records, they are often not accepted, and commuters are made to wait on minor or technical grounds, leading to avoidable delays and inconvenience," Shirole said.

"In some cases, travellers are held up for extended periods over minor issues such as seat belt compliance, vehicle colour discrepancies,

## MLA highlights RTO inspection delay

Siddharth Shirole has also raised concerns in the Assembly over the suspension of manual vehicle inspection and licensing processes at the RTO.

He said the delay in making the automated vehicle testing centre operational has put the livelihoods of thousands of transport workers, including auto-rickshaw, taxi and truck operators, at risk.

"I raised in the Legislative Assembly the serious difficulties being faced by drivers and operators associated with the transport sector due to the suspension of manual

vehicle inspection and licensing processes at the Pune Regional Transport Office (RTO). Since inspections have been halted until the automated vehicle testing centre becomes operational, many auto-rickshaw, taxi, and truck operators are unable to obtain or renew necessary permits. This has created significant hardship for those whose livelihoods depend entirely on these vehicles," Shirole said.

"I urged the government to allow the vehicle inspection and licensing process to continue through the earlier manual inspection system

or other technicalities. Such actions particularly inconvenience senior citizens, patients, and women travelling long distances.

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has clearly stated that vehicles should not be stopped solely for document verification unless there is a visible violation. However, complaints suggest that these guidelines are not always being fol-

lowed," he added. Shirole said such practices inconvenience citizens and also affect the state's image and tourism.

"I have therefore urged the government to issue clear instructions for strict adherence to these guidelines and to consider establishing a dedicated helpline or digital grievance mechanism for travellers facing such issues," he said.

Shirole said thousands of families depend on the transport sector for their daily livelihood and that administrative delays should not put their survival at risk.

Shirole said such practices inconvenience citizens and also affect the state's image and tourism. "I have therefore urged the government to issue clear instructions for strict adherence to these guidelines and to consider establishing a dedicated helpline or digital grievance mechanism for travellers facing such issues," he said.

# Container rams cars near tunnel, injures 7

Indu Bhagat

PUNE

Seven to eight people were injured in a major accident on the Pune-Bengaluru Highway near Jambhulwadi, close to the new Katraj Tunnel, on Thursday. The crash involved a container truck and three to four cars, several of which were badly damaged.

According to information, the container was travelling towards Satara when it



rammed into multiple vehicles one after another on the valley bridge near the tunnel. The impact of the collision was severe, with some cars crushed and others suffering heavy damage. Windows of a few vehicles were shattered, while parts of others were broken due to the force of the crash.

Following the accident, traffic on the highway came to a standstill, leading to a long queue of vehicles. After receiving information about the inci-

dent, the traffic police rushed to the spot and began rescue and relief operations.

With the help of locals, police shifted the injured victims to a nearby hospital for treatment. Fortunately, no fatalities were reported in the incident, though several vehicles were extensively damaged. The accident caused heavy traffic congestion on the highway for some time. Police later removed the damaged vehicles from the road.

# AIU seizes weed worth ₹75L on flight

Staff Reporter

PUNE

Officials at Pune International Airport seized 745 grams of hydroponic weed worth Rs75 lakh from the lavatory of a Bangkok-Pune flight on Mar 3. However, no arrests have been made so far.

"Officers from the Air Intelligence Unit (AIU) at Pune International Airport recovered two yellow-coloured packets from the tissue cabinet of the lavatory of the

aircraft of Air India Express Flight IX-241 (Bangkok to Pune)," the statement read.

"The two food packets were found to contain eight vacuum-sealed packets of hydroponic weed (marijuana). The contraband was seized under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985," it added.

An investigation is underway to determine who hid the hydroponic weed inside the aircraft and how it was placed there.

AIU officials have also appealed to citizens to report suspicious activity related to such smuggling to the relevant authorities.

Last month, the AIU arrested a 32-year-old passenger arriving from Bangkok after recovering hydroponic weed worth Rs5.42 crore from his possession.

Officers found five toy cartons stuffed with hydroponic weed in his luggage. The drugs had been meticulously wrapped in carbon paper,

allegedly to bypass airport scanning equipment. In total, about 5.5kg of the banned substance were recovered.

Additional Commissioner of Customs Rahul Gawande said the department had received a tip-off earlier regarding the smuggling attempt. According to him, the team had been tracking the suspect's movements. Gawande said strict action would continue against individuals attempting to establish narcotics networks in Pune.



# PCMC Mayor faces caste certificate challenge

Varad Bhatkhande

PIMPRI-CHINCHWAD

Social activist Mrunal Dhole-Patil has objected to the 'Kunbi' (Other Backward Class — OBC) caste certificate of Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation (PCMC) Mayor Ravi Landge. Following this, the District Caste Certificate Verification Committee has summoned Dhole-Patil for a hearing today, Mar 6.

According to available details, Landge was elected unopposed from Ward No. 6 (Dhawade Wasti-Sadguru Nagar). He contested the election from a seat reserved for the OBC candidates, which was open to both men and women. For the second consecutive time, Landge was elected unopposed.

Dhole-Patil, who is based in Pune, has filed a formal complaint with the District Caste Certificate Verification Committee challenging the validity of the mayor's certificate.

Apart from Landge, Dhole-Patil has also challenged the caste certificates of several other corporators elected from OBC-reserved seats. This includes six corporators of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), two corporators from the Ajit Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and one corporator from the Eknath Shinde-led



Activist challenges Kunbi certificate of PCMC mayor; verification panel to hear case today

Shiv Sena.

Speaking to the press, Dhole-Patil said, "70 to 75% of OBC reservations have been usurped by the Maratha community. Because the state government supports such individuals, injustice is being meted out to the OBC community. The District Caste Certificate Verification Committee must conduct the hearing properly. I will fight firmly for the rights of the OBC community."

Landge said, "My caste certificate mentions 'Hindu-Kunbi'. I have all the necessary evidence to support this. Therefore, there is no issue at all."

The dispute over caste certificates in Maharashtra is linked to the wider debate

over OBC reservations and the relationship between the Maratha and Kunbi communities. The Kunbi community is classified under the OBC and is eligible for reservation benefits in education, government jobs and political representation.

However, the social and historical boundaries between Marathas and Kunbis have often overlapped. Some historical records describe them as part of a broader "Maratha-Kunbi" agrarian grouping. This overlap has led to recurring controversies, especially when individuals claim Kunbi status to contest elections from OBC-reserved seats or to access reservation benefits.

In recent years, the issue intensified due to the Maratha reservation movement led by Maratha activist Manoj Jarange Patil. Demands were made that Marathas be recognised as Kunbis if historical records prove such ancestry. The Maharashtra government has allowed eligible Marathas to apply for Kunbi certificates based on historical documents. This move has triggered protests from some OBC groups who fear dilution of their quota.

As a result, caste certificate verification and legal challenges have become increasingly common in electoral politics across the state.

**CAUGHT** | Beed police nab senior officer in GST officer suicide case after 40-day search

# Police arrest officer for abetting suicide

**FPJ News Network**  
BEED

In a breakthrough in the suicide case of Goods and Services Tax (GST) officer Sachin Narayan Jadhavar, the Local Crime Branch (LCB) of Beed Police on Tuesday arrested the prime accused, senior officer Pradeep Phate, from Lonikand in Haveli taluka of Pune district. Phate had been absconding for more than 40 days.

Jadhavar had left his home for office on Jan 16 but did not return. His body was found the next day under suspicious circumstances inside his car near Kapiladharwadi cross road in Beed tehsil, about 16 km from the city, on the Dhule-Solapur National Highway (NH-52). The incident had sent shockwaves across the district and the state's administrative circles.

Initially, the case was treated as a suicide. However, the investigation gathered momentum after the victim's wife, Mayuri Jadhavar, lodged a complaint alleging systematic workplace harassment.

According to the FIR, Pradeep Phate, who was holding an additional charge, allegedly misused his position to mentally harass Jadhavar.

The complaint stated that Phate frequently humiliated Jadhavar in the presence of colleagues and pressured him to clear illegal files or perform favours for specific

private companies. Unable to cope with the pressure and coercion into unethical practices, Jadhavar allegedly took the extreme step.

After the case was registered on Jan 23, Phate went underground. His anticipatory bail plea was later rejected by the court, considering the seriousness of the allegations.

The delay in the arrest triggered public outrage. On Feb 25, Mayuri Jadhavar, the widow of Sachin Jadhavar, along with family members, staged a hunger strike outside the office of the Superintendent of Police (SP), demanding immediate action.

"Based on technical analysis and human intelligence, our team tracked the accused to Pune. A trap was laid in Lonikand, leading to his successful apprehension," a senior police official said.

The operation was conducted under the guidance of Superintendent of Police Navneet Kanwat, Additional Superintendent of Police Sachin Pandkar and Police Inspector of the Local Crime Branch Shivaji Bantewad. A team led by Police Sub-Inspector Mahesh Vighne went to Lonikand in Pune district and arrested Pradeep Phate from the residence of his relatives, where he was hiding.

Phate is expected to be produced before the court for police custody as the investigation now focuses on the alleged corruption and harassment within the department.



## Staff strike

**FPJ News Network**  
BEED

Revenue services across Beed district have been disrupted after employees of the Land Records Department launched an indefinite strike from Mar 2, 2026, pressing for several long-pending demands.

The agitation has affected key technical services such as land measurement, boundary demarcation and mutation entries, causing inconvenience to farmers and the general public.

Employees of the department, which performs entirely technical functions, alleged prolonged neglect by the state government on issues related to technical pay scales, travel allowances, revised staffing patterns and administrative decisions. They said they were compelled to intensify their agitation after repeated representations failed to yield concrete action.

The protest was carried out in phases. On Feb 18 and Feb 20, employees deposited their survey equipment in offices and completely stopped measurement work. Routine office duties continued with staff wearing black badges as a symbolic protest.

## Police close Akashwani Chowk as accidents rise

**FPJ News Network**  
CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

The police administration has once again closed Akashwani Chowk with barricades following a rise in accidents and frequent traffic congestion at the junction.

During the recent municipal corporation elections, the administration had opened the chowk for traffic on Jalna Road at Akashwani Chowk. The decision was taken following political pressure.

The administration had invited objections and suggestions regarding the decision on Jan 21. However, after four major accidents, several minor mishaps and daily traffic jams, the authorities decided to close the chowk again.

Earlier, when Akashwani Chowk was closed, vehicles coming from Kranti Chowk and heading towards Jawahar Colony had to travel further up to the Seven Hills Flyover, take a U-turn and return from the opposite side. Similarly, commuters travelling from Cidco towards Maheshnagar had to proceed up to Mondha Naka



and then take a U-turn.

The administration has now decided to keep the chowk closed every day between 9am and 9pm, as was the practice earlier. Residents of Jawahar Colony and Maheshnagar had objected to the earlier decision and had staged agitations demanding that the chowk remain open. However, the administration did not with-

draw the decision.

During the recent municipal corporation elections, the chowk was opened to traffic due to political pressure.

However, after reopening the junction, accidents and traffic congestion increased. The administration has therefore again decided to close the chowk during peak hours from 9am to 9pm.

## Bank lays building foundation

**FPJ News Network**  
CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

The foundation stone of the new building of Deogiri Urban Co-operative Bank Ltd was laid by Rajasthan Governor Haribhau Bagade, founder chairman of the bank, on Wednesday.

State OBC Welfare Minister Atul Save, RSS Prant Sanghchalak Anil Bhalerao, Mayor Sameer Rajurkar, Vice President Umesh Dashrathi, Technical Director Ashok Patil and Babanrao Jagade were present on the occasion.



Bagade has played a key role in expanding the bank's network to 34 branches across the Marathwada region. He was felicitated during the programme.

"The bank has succeeded in gaining the trust of the customers and maintaining their confidence," Bagade said.

He said the bank had started in a small room and had now

attained the status of a scheduled bank due to the efforts of customers, founder members, directors and employees.

Trustees of the board, CEOs, deputy CEOs, employees and citizens were present at the event.

**QUALITY CHECK** | Divisional Commissioner reviews third-party audit of Nashik-Trimbakeshwar Kumbh works; third party appointed to conduct quality audit with support from IIT-Bombay

# Dr Gedam reviews Kumbh audit



**FPJ News Network**  
NASHIK

A review meeting on the third-party audit of works being carried out under the Nashik-Trimbakeshwar Kumbh Mela Authority was held under the chairmanship of Divisional Commissioner and Authority Chairman Dr Praveen Gedam.

Dr Gedam directed officials to complete all works within the stipulated time and strictly according to prescribed standards, without compromising on quality.

The meeting was attended

by Joint Director of the Planning Department Babul Patil, Yogendra Chaudhary, Additional Municipal Commissioner Pradeep Chaudhary and Superintendent Engineer of the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation Baravkar, along with officials from various departments.

To verify the quality of works undertaken by different departments for the Kumbh Mela, including measurement records, agreements, payment documents and related papers, a third-party quality

control agency, TÜV SÜD South Asia Pvt Ltd, has been appointed. The agency will also receive support from IIT Bombay and other expert institutions.

All implementing departments and agencies have been instructed to submit the required documents to the auditing agency within the stipulated time. Gedam clarified that payments for completed works will not be released until the quality verification report is received.

A detailed review of the progress of work was con-

ducted during the meeting. Officials were also instructed to rectify any deficiencies pointed out during the third-party audit and submit reports accordingly.

Senior officials from various departments, executive engineers and representatives of the concerned agencies were present at the meeting.

Dr Gedam also appealed to all departments to maintain coordination and ensure transparent and high-quality implementation of works in preparation for the Kumbh Mela.

## Krushki Kumbh to showcase agrotech

**FPJ News Network**  
NASHIK

"Krushki Kumbh 2026 - Nashik District Agricultural Festival and Exhibition" will be organised from Mar 12 to Mar 16, 2026, to promote the adoption of modern technology in agriculture and strengthen the district's farming sector.

The five-day event will be held at the Youth Festival Ground near Bali Mandir Chowk in Parkside, Nashik.

The festival is being jointly organised by the District Administration, the Agriculture Department, the Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) and the Maharashtra State Rural Livelihood Mission (MAVIM). District Collector Ayush Prasad has appealed to farmers, women farmers, progressive farmers and Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) to participate in large numbers.

While sharing details about the event, Prasad highlighted the various activities planned during the five-day exhibition. The official logo of "Krushki Kumbh 2026" was also unveiled.

More than 400 stalls will be set up at the exhibition. Along with traditional themes such as seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and farm mechanisation, several innovative pavilions will also be featured.

A special section will showcase innovative tools and equipment developed by farmers themselves. Farmers have been invited to present their inventions and participate in the competition and exhibition.

The exhibition will also feature a food processing pavilion that will include processing entrepreneurs, machinery manufacturers and banks. Facilities to apply for government schemes will also be available at the venue.



**5-day agricultural festival in Nashik to feature 400 stalls and technology demonstrations**

Special demonstrations will highlight eco-friendly farming practices, including bio-char, 10-drum theory models and natural farming techniques.

Demonstrations and training sessions will also be organised on hydroponic farming and fish farming in farm ponds to enable higher production in limited space.

Visitors will also be able to see solar dryers, watershed models, water management models, beekeeping models, grape cover and fruit cover models, modern onion storage structures, mushroom cultivation, sericulture, mobile soil testing laboratories, weather stations, silage preparation and honey parks. Various tractors and innovative tractor-operated agricultural machines will also be displayed.

The exhibition will remain open to the public from 10am to 9pm during the event. District Collector Ayush Prasad has urged farmers and citizens from across the district to visit the exhibition and take advantage of the knowledge and opportunities available.

## Rooftop solar costs ₹45,000

**FPJ News Network**  
NASHIK

The Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (MSEDCL) has finalised a tender fixing the cost of a 1kW rooftop solar power project at around Rs45,000 under a state government scheme aimed at providing free electricity to economically weaker domestic consumers.

The scheme targets below poverty line (BPL) and other economically weaker households that consume up to 100 units of electricity per month.

The newly finalised rate is around Rs15,000 lower than the prevailing market price of about Rs60,000 charged by solar suppliers. Officials said the reduced rate is expected to benefit nearly 5 lakh small consumers under the scheme.

## BJP sees around 500 claimants for 6 seats



**FPJ News Network**  
NASHIK

After the election to the Standing Committee, attention has now shifted to the selection of nominated corporators in the Nashik Municipal Corporation (NMC).

Around 500 aspirants have staked their claim for nominated corporator posts from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and party office registers are reportedly filled with their names. Party office-bearers, defeated candidates and activists working in social organisations have also entered the race.

A total of 10 nominated members will be selected in the NMC, of which six seats are

likely to go to the BJP.

Although there are expectations that experts and knowledgeable individuals from different fields should be given an opportunity for these posts, in practice, political workers often get nominated by their parties.

Experience of working with social organisations is considered an important criterion for the nominated corporator post. Hence, many aspirants have submitted documents highlighting their experience through Ganesh mandals or social organisations.

To strengthen their claims, applicants have also submitted three years of audit reports and other required documents with their applications.

## Bhagare seeks DBT reforms

**FPJ News Network**  
NASHIK

Member of Parliament (MP) from the Dindori Lok Sabha constituency, Bhaskar Bhagare, has raised concerns over difficulties faced by farmers due to the current direct benefit transfer (DBT) system for fertiliser subsidies. He has written to Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Shivraj Singh Chouhan, demanding immediate reforms in the system.

In his letter, the MP has stated that the fertiliser subsidy amount is currently transferred to fertiliser companies instead of being credited directly to farmers' bank accounts. As a result, farmers are required to pay the full market price while purchasing fertilisers.

He said the situation places an additional financial burden on farmers, particularly small and marginal farmers, forcing many of them to rely on loans during the sowing season. Bhagare also pointed out



**Dindori MP writes to Union Agriculture Minister over difficulties faced by farmers in DBT system**

that farmers in rural areas face several technical hurdles in the DBT process, including Aadhaar authentication issues, biometric failures, lack of internet connectivity and malfunctioning POS machines at fertiliser outlets.

Additionally, in many cases, land records are not updated, and tenant farmers or those actually cultivating the land are not listed in official rec-

ords, preventing them from receiving subsidy benefits.

In this context, Bhagare suggested several measures such as depositing the fertiliser subsidy amount in advance directly into farmers' bank accounts, including tenant and actual cultivator farmers within the subsidy framework, providing estimated seasonal subsidy funds before the sowing period, strengthening digital infrastructure in rural areas and launching a special campaign to update land records.

He emphasised that the agricultural sector is the backbone of the country's economy and that the fertiliser subsidy policy is not merely a matter of financial management but is directly linked to the livelihood of millions of farmers.

Bhagare urged the central government to make the DBT system more transparent, accessible and farmer-friendly, and expressed hope that the government will take a positive decision in the interest of farmers.



## Briefs

## Global gold ETF inflows at \$5.3 bn in Feb

Investors allocated a net \$5.3 billion into global gold exchange-traded funds (ETFs) in February amid high geopolitical risks and shifting macroeconomic conditions, the World Gold Council (WGC) said in a report. February was the ninth consecutive month of inflows, with North American investors remaining the top contributors. Total assets under management in global gold ETFs rose to a record \$701 billion, while holdings increased to an all-time high of 4,171 tonnes.

## IKEA aims to be profitable by FY'28

Swedish furniture retailer IKEA, which is expanding in India through an omnichannel approach, expects its operation in the country to be profitable by the end of FY'28 and plans to add 25 new small and medium format stores in the next four to five years, a top company official said. This will be done by growing topline, opening more stores, reducing the size of fixed costs, and operating more efficiently, in addition to increasing local sourcing, IKEA India CEO Patrik Antoni told PTI.

## Cheerio AI bags ₹8 crore in seed funding

Cheerio AI has raised ₹8 crore in a seed funding round led by Artha Venture Fund II (AVF II), with participation from Hyderabad Angels, TIE Angels, LetsVenture and Invention Engine, along with angel investors Arjun Vaidya, Anand Shahni, Vivek Mathur, Ajeet Khurana and Nitin Verma. The Bengaluru-based firm plans to use the capital to build multimodal artificial intelligence capabilities, including a proprietary small-model large language model (LLM) for advertisement generation, scale Cheerio AI from messaging into voice and video, expand AI-driven automation and strengthen enterprise-grade capabilities, according to a company statement. The Bengaluru-based company intends to deploy the raised capital to develop multi-modal AI capabilities.

## Steel Exchange India to raise ₹350 crore

IMR Group (IMR), an international metals and mining conglomerate, on Thursday announced a strategic investment of ₹300 crore in Steel Exchange India Limited (SEIL) through the subscription of share warrants. The investment will be made through IMR's Indian entities, India Coke and Power Private Limited (ICPPL) and IMR Steel Private Limited (ISPL).

## Adani-Total Gas triples industrial gas price as war disrupts supplies

PTI NEW DELHI

Adani Total Gas Ltd, the city gas joint venture of Adani Group and France's TotalEnergies, has nearly tripled gas prices for large industrial consumers after disruptions to LNG supplies triggered by the West Asia conflict halted shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, sources said. The company raised industrial gas prices to about ₹119 per standard cubic metre from ₹40, according to a company memo cited by sources, as it tapped costlier alternative supplies following curbs in contracted LNG availability. Shipping through the Strait

of Hormuz, the narrow sea lane that carries about one-fifth of the world's oil and large volumes of liquefied natural gas (LNG), has slowed to a near halt following US and Israeli attacks on Iran and Tehran's retaliatory strikes.

Qatar shut down an LNG plant after it came under drone and missile attack. Indian buyers could not send ships to Qatar because shipping through the Strait of Hormuz remains effectively shut.

With LNG supplies from QatarEnergy, India's largest gas supplier, disrupted, supply cuts have been imposed on several industrial users and city gas distribution companies. Consumers affected by



the curbs have increasingly turned to alternative fuels that cost more than twice the normal rate. "Due to recent geopolitical developments impacting LNG supply routes, ATGL has received upstream gas curtailment, leading to operational constraints," the company said, explaining the steep price increase.

Countries in the Middle East account for roughly 30% of global crude oil and 20% of global LNG production. India imports about 88% of its crude oil and around half of its LNG, with 40-50% of crude oil and 50-60% of LNG shipments routed through the corridor, which is roughly 21 nautical miles wide at its narrowest

point, with the shipping lanes even narrower: two two-mile-wide channels separated by a two-mile buffer.

Energy prices have already surged amid the conflict. Brent crude has climbed to around \$84 per barrel from an average of \$66-67 in January-February 2026, while Asian spot LNG prices have jumped from about \$10 per million British thermal unit to \$24-25 per mmbtu. India, which relies on long-term LNG contracts with Qatar for a large share of its gas needs, has seen cargo deliveries temporarily suspended, forcing supply cuts of up to 40% for several industrial consumers and city gas distributors.

## Pharma industry staring at ₹5K cr loss

WEST ASIA CRISIS

PTI NEW DELHI

The domestic pharma industry is staring at a loss ranging between ₹2,500 crore and ₹5,000 crore due to supply and freight movement disruptions caused by the conflict in the Middle East, according to the Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India (Pharmexil).

Currently, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries account for 5.58% of total Indian pharma exports, it noted.

"Our recent data also show an upward trajectory in the total export value of Indian pharmaceutical exports to the Middle

East (WANA region) from \$1,320.44 million in FY 2020-21 to \$1,749.68 million in FY 2024-25," Pharmexil Chairman Namit Joshi stated. Key markets such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait and Yemen are highly dependent on India for affordable medicines and generic formulations, he noted.

Pharmexil data also indicates significant growth in emerging markets such as Jordan, Kuwait and Libya, as well as product categories such as vaccines, surgical products and AYUSH formulations, he stated. The ongoing challenges in the global freight market have the potential to significantly impact Indian pharmaceutical exports, particularly in regions such as GCC countries and WANA, Joshi said.

## GAIL warns of gas supply cuts as 30% of imports blocked

State-run GAIL (India) Ltd is planning to slash natural gas supplies to select customers after roughly 30% of India's imported LNG shipments were blocked due to the escalating military conflict in West Asia.

Following joint US and Israeli strikes on Iranian government, military and nuclear facilities, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps warned vessels against transiting the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow sea lane through which crude oil and natural gas from



Gulf producers move to global markets. This prompted major insurers to withdraw or sharply raise war-risk coverage and forced several shipping lines to suspend tanker movements through the route.

For India, a bulk of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies from Qatar and the UAE flows

through the Strait.

In a stock exchange filing, GAIL said its LNG supplier has served a force majeure notice "due to constraints faced by certain LNG vessels arising from maritime navigation restrictions related to the Strait of Hormuz during transit between India and Qatar."

Force majeure, the legal clause in a contract that refers to extraordinary events beyond the control of parties, was possibly invoked due to the reported shutdown of LNG facilities in Qatar. -PTI

## Auto retail sales jump 26% in Feb on all-round show: FADA

PTI NEW DELHI

Domestic automobile retail sales surged 26% year on year in February, extending the momentum seen after GST 2.0, with improved affordability and market confidence translating into broad-based growth across segments, dealers' body FADA said on Thursday.

Overall retail sales last month rose to 24,09,362 units compared with 19,17,934 units in February 2025, registering an increase of 25.62%.

"The growth was broad-



based across almost all segments. Five out of six categories, two-wheelers, three-wheelers, passenger vehicles, commercial vehicles and tractors, registered their highest-ever February retail volumes, clearly highlighting the strength of underlying demand in the market," FADA President CS Vigneshwar said

in a statement.

On a y-o-y basis, two-wheelers grew by 25%, three-wheelers by 24%, passenger vehicles by 26%, and commercial vehicles by 29%, reflecting healthy demand across both personal mobility and economic activity-driven segments, he added.

"The momentum remained broad-based with urban markets growing 21% year on year while rural markets surged 34% year on year, indicating strong continued demand beyond metros," Vigneshwar said.

## MRPL official says not shut unit, have crude oil to run ops for 10 more days

Informist NEW DELHI

Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) has crude oil stocks to run operations for about 10 days and has not shut any of its refinery units at the moment, a senior company official told Informist. "Exactly, we cannot say that it is 10 days, but with some crude reduction we can manage for about 10 days," the official said. However, if hostilities in West Asia continue, the company may have to shut all its units, the official said.

"We are analysing the situation. If it continues for long, the company needs to take a call to shut down," the official said. "All the units need to take a shutdown. If the primary unit shuts down, all the other secondary units would also..."

Without crude oil, the company would not be able to operate at all, the official said.

The official said the company sources 80% of its crude oil from West Asia. A ship in transit carrying crude oil for the company is currently unreachable and the company has received no confirmation from it for the past four days, the official said.

## Estee Lauder to acquire remaining stake in Forest Essentials

American beauty major Estee Lauder on Thursday announced the acquisition of its remaining stake in Ayurveda-based beauty brand Forest Essentials, without disclosing the transaction value.

After 18 years of making its initial investment, Estee Lauder Companies has now entered into an agreement "to acquire the remaining interests in Forest Essentials", said a joint statement by the US beauty major and the Maya Kulkarni-founded Indian brand.

"The transaction is expected to close in the second half of calendar year 2026 and follows The Estee Lauder Companies' minority investment in Forest Essentials, initially made in 2008 and increased to 49% in 2020," it said. -PTI

## BoB raises ₹10K cr via green infra bonds

PTI NEW DELHI

State-owned Bank of Baroda (BoB) on Thursday said it has raised ₹10,000 crore through the issuance of long-term green infrastructure bonds, becoming the first bank in India to issue such an instrument domestically.

The issue garnered strong investor demand, receiving bids aggregating ₹16,415 crore, more than three times the base issue size of ₹5,000 crore, BoB said in a statement.

The seven-year bond was placed on the Electronic Debt Bidding platform of NSE with a base issue of ₹5,000 crore and a green shoe option of ₹5,000 crore, it said.

## SEBI asks Force Motors to share earnings detail

IANS NEW DELHI

Force Motors Ltd on Thursday said it has received a communication from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) seeking detailed information related to a past financial announcement and the company's share price movement during February 2024.

In a regulatory filing, the company said the market regulator sent an email on Feb 4, 2026, seeking details regarding its unaudited standalone and consolidated financial results for the quarter and half year ended Sep 30, 2024.

These results were originally announced on Oct 29, 2024. SEBI has specifically sought the chronology of



events related to the announcement of the earnings results. The regulator has also asked the company to provide details about insiders, the management information system (MIS), designated persons and an extract from its structured digital database.

The Pune-headquartered automaker said it has not identified any irregularities or non-compliance in connection with the issues raised by the regulator. The company also said it does not expect any material impact on its financial operations due to the query. -IANS

## Morgan Stanley lays off 2,500 employees

US-based investment bank Morgan Stanley has reportedly laid off about 2,500 employees, or roughly 3% of its global workforce, starting in early March, reports said.

The job cuts are not linked to artificial intelligence-related changes but stem from shifting business priorities, a revised global location strategy and performance reviews of employees, according to a Wall Street Journal report citing sources. The reported layoffs span the bank's three major divisions: institutional securities, wealth management and investment management, affecting front-office roles, revenue-generating roles and back-office positions. Financial advisers are not impacted. -IANS

## Trump officially nominates Warsh as US Fed chair

Informist NEW DELHI

US President Donald Trump has formally nominated Kevin Warsh, a former governor of the US Federal Reserve, to serve as the next chair of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. Incumbent Jerome Powell's term as chair is scheduled to end in May.

Warsh's nomination was presented to the Senate, the White House said in a statement on Wednesday. This comes more than a month after Trump announced Warsh as his nominee through a post on his Truth Social platform.

The Federal Reserve chair is appointed for a period of four years. The President's nomi-

nee must be confirmed by the Senate. Powell is serving his second term, having been appointed by Trump during his first term as President in 2018 and again by Joseph R Biden in 2022. His term ends on May 22.

In recent months, Powell has been embroiled in controversy amid questions over the US central bank's independence. Trump has publicly and persistently demanded that the US Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC), which decides interest rates in the country, cut rates quickly to bolster the world's largest economy. The Federal Reserve's refusal to fall in line has resulted in Trump repeatedly criticising the chair, mocking him as Jerome "Too Late" Powell on social media.

## BEL, Bellatrix Aerospace signs MoU for satellite systems and payloads

Navratna Defence PSU BEL on Thursday said it has signed an MoU with Bellatrix Aerospace, a space tech company specialising in satellite propulsion systems and satellite subsystems, to collaborate on the design, development and manufacturing of satellite systems and payloads.

The collaboration brings together Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL's) decades of experience in developing advanced electronics and mission-critical payloads for defence and strategic applications with Bellatrix

Aerospace's innovative capabilities in satellite propulsion and satellite subsystems, the company said.

By combining their complementary strengths, the partnership aims to advance indigenous capabilities in satellite platforms designed for Very Low Earth Orbit (VLEO) operations, it said in a release.

This partnership is expected to be transformational in accelerating innovation and strengthening India's capabilities in building next-generation satellite systems for VLEO. -PTI

## Embassy REIT raises ₹1,400 cr

Realty firm Embassy Office Parks REIT has raised ₹1,400 crore through the issuance of debentures.

In a regulatory filing on Thursday, the company said it has raised ₹1,400 crore through the issue of non-convertible debentures (NCDs). The issuance was priced at a fixed coupon of 7.49% for a 10-year tenor and was fully subscribed by one of India's largest life insurance companies, it added.

Embassy REIT CEO Amit Shetty said, "This latest raise is part of our broader capital-raising strategy to increase the average duration of our debt stack while market conditions remain favourable. Flamingo has created strong

## MakeMyTrip to acquire majority stake in Flamingo Transworld

PTI NEW DELHI

Online travel services provider MakeMyTrip on Thursday said it will acquire a majority stake in regional tour operator Flamingo Transworld for an undisclosed sum.

The company has entered into an agreement to acquire a majority stake in Flamingo Transworld, one of India's leading regional tour operators, subject to the fulfilment of certain closing conditions, MakeMyTrip said in a statement.

Flamingo has created strong



affinity in regional markets of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, will complement MakeMyTrip's established Holiday Packages business and help the platform penetrate deeper into markets across India, the company said.

Commenting on the proposed deal, MakeMyTrip Co-Founder and Group CEO Rajesh Magow said, "Flamingo aligns closely with the growth strategy of our Holiday Packages business. It is a strong, growing business that has developed a unique moat in the group travel domain."

## Aditya Birla Sun Life AMC launches Apex Hybrid Long-Short Fund

FPJ News Service MUMBAI

Aditya Birla Sun Life Asset Management Company (ABSLAMC) has launched the Apex Hybrid Long-Short Fund, a specialised investment strategy designed to deliver stable returns with controlled volatility by combining arbitrage, equity, debt and derivatives strategies. The new fund offer (NFO) will remain open from March 6 to March 18, 2026.

The strategy falls under the Hybrid Long-Short category of specialised investment funds (SIF) and aims to generate long-term capital appreciation



through a diversified approach that includes equity, debt securities, derivatives, and selective exposure to REITs and InvITs. The fund may also take limited short positions through derivatives, enabling it to benefit from both rising and falling market conditions.

According to the presentation, the fund will follow a multi-asset allocation strategy,

investing 35-65% in equities and arbitrage opportunities and 35-65% in fixed income instruments, while allowing up to 20% exposure to InvIT units. The equity portion will deploy a mix of directional equity positions, derivatives strategies and arbitrage opportunities, while the debt portfolio will invest in high-quality bonds and money market instruments.

The strategy will utilise several tools such as cash-futures arbitrage, covered call options, and market-neutral derivative positions to generate stable returns while limiting downside risk.

## Zopper expects to exit FY26 with gross written premium of ₹1,000 crore

PTI NEW DELHI

Insurance technology firm Zopper on Thursday said it expects to close the ongoing financial year with gross written premium (GWP) exceeding ₹1,000 crore and aims to go public in 2028-29.

The company has sustained a compound annual growth rate of 35% over the past two years, driven by strong performance across its core verticals and disciplined operational execution, and is now accelerating towards its long-

term ambition of going public by 2028-29, Zopper said in a statement. The company expects an annual growth trajectory of 35-40% in the coming years. "Over the past three quarters, Zopper has recorded consistent margin expansion and cost stabilisation, reflecting improving unit economics and business maturity. Growth has been led by its device and appliance protection business, health and life insurance distribution, and its rapidly scaling bancassurance SaaS platform," it said.

## Mercedes-Benz R&amp;D centre joins hands with IIT Delhi

PTI NEW DELHI

Mercedes-Benz Research and Development India on Thursday said it has tied up with the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi for joint research programmes, creating shared pathways for knowledge development.

The organisations have formalised this through a five-year master research agreement, strengthening efforts to bring academia and industry closer through joint research.

## AJAY KAKAR TO CHAIR JURY FOR AD:TECH HONOURS 2026

Ajay Kakar, Head of Corporate Branding at Adani Group, will chair the jury for the ad:tech HONOURS Awards 2026, following a strong response to nominations from across the industry. Organised in partnership with the International Advertising Association (India Chapter), the awards recognise technology-led innovation transforming advertising and marketing. The ceremony will take place on March 17, 2026 at the Yashobhooni Convention Centre in New Delhi alongside

ad:tech New Delhi 2026. Kakar will lead a jury comprising senior leaders from across brands, agencies and platforms, including executives from Publicis Groupe, Volkswagen India, Rediffusion, Madison World and Amazon Ads India. This year's awards highlight innovation across artificial intelligence, data, content ecosystems, automation and martech-adtech integration, reflecting the growing influence of technology in delivering measurable marketing impact and scalable business outcomes.

## Briefs

## Copper futures slip 0.51%

Copper prices fell ₹6.25 to ₹1,224 per kg in futures trade on Thursday, weighed down by muted demand in the domestic spot market. On the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), copper for April delivery slipped ₹6.25, or 0.51%, to ₹1,224 per kg in a business turnover of 208 lots. Traders said subdued demand from domestic consuming industries weighed on copper prices in futures trade.

## Cottonseed oilcake futures decline

Cottonseed oil cake prices fell ₹5 to ₹3,363 per quintal in futures trade on Thursday as participants reduced their bets following weak trends in the spot market. On the National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX), cottonseed oil cake for April delivery traded lower by ₹5, or 0.15%, to ₹3,363 per quintal with an open interest of 19,790 lots. Analysts said a sell-off by participants at existing levels amid a subdued market trend weighed on cottonseed oil cake prices.

## India moves closer to \$2 green hydrogen goal

India has recorded its lowest-ever discovered price for green hydrogen, bringing the country closer to its goal of producing the clean fuel at \$2 per kilogram, according to Amitabh Kant, former G20 Sherpa and former CEO of NITI Aayog. In a social media post on Thursday, Kant said a recent tender discovered a price of ₹279 per kilogram (about \$3.08) for the supply of 10,000 tonnes per year of green hydrogen to Numaligarh Refinery in Assam. The development marks a significant milestone in India's push to build a competitive green hydrogen ecosystem. Kant attributed the progress to government incentives and falling renewable electricity costs, which have helped reduce production expenses and improve the sector's viability. India is implementing the National Green Hydrogen Mission to position itself as a global hub for production, use and export of green hydrogen and its derivatives.

## IBM opens first infra innovation centre in India

Global technology major IBM on Thursday announced the launch of its first Infrastructure Innovation Centre in India, marking a significant step in strengthening the country's role in advanced infrastructure engineering and artificial intelligence development. The new facility, called the Sangam Infrastructure Innovation Centre, has been established at IBM's India Systems Development Lab (ISDL) campus. The centre is designed as a collaborative engineering hub where experts will work closely with clients, software developers and technology partners to design and deploy next-generation enterprise solutions. According to IBM, the centre will bring together systems architects, infrastructure specialists and engineering teams to co-create advanced AI-driven solutions for both Indian and global markets. The initiative aims to accelerate innovation by combining hybrid cloud capabilities, advanced infrastructure technologies and artificial intelligence under one roof.

## Base metals decline on firm dollar; aluminium hits record

Business Desk  
MUMBAI

Most base metal futures on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) ended lower on Thursday, tracking weakness on the London Metal Exchange (LME) as a stronger US dollar weighed on investor sentiment. However, aluminium prices bucked the broader trend and surged to a fresh record high amid mounting concerns over supply disruptions from West Asia following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

The dollar index, which measures the greenback against a basket of six major currencies, was trading about 0.2% higher at 99.01 during the afternoon session.

A stronger dollar typically exerts downward pressure on commodity prices because it makes dollar-denominated metals more expensive for buyers holding other currencies, dampening global demand, Informist reported on Thursday.

Copper prices were among those that slipped on the



domestic bourse, mirroring the weakness seen on international exchanges. Market participants remained cautious as geopolitical tensions in West Asia continued to cloud the

outlook for global trade and commodity flows. Despite the decline, analysts believe copper prices could find support in the medium term due to persistent supply con-

straints. Global mine output growth remains limited, while disruptions at several major mining operations have tightened availability, potentially restricting the metal's downside. In contrast, aluminium futures rallied sharply and briefly touched a record high of ₹336.25 per kg in the March contract on the MCX. The surge followed force majeure declarations by key producers in the Gulf region after shipping disruptions triggered by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

Aluminium Bahrain (Alba), one of the world's largest aluminium producers, declared force majeure on supply contracts citing the disruption of transport routes for metal and raw materials. The company produced about 1.623 million tonnes of aluminium in 2025, making it a crucial supplier in the global market.

Concerns intensified after operations at the Qatalum aluminium smelter in Qatar were affected by Iranian drone strikes, which disrupted natural gas supplies to the facility.

## Fears mount: Conflict brews trouble for India's tea exports



Escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia are casting a deep shadow over India's tea industry, with exporters warning that any disruption in shipping through the Strait of Hormuz could severely affect shipments to key Gulf markets.

Industry leaders say the situation has become increasingly alarming after Iran indicated that vessels may face restrictions while passing through the strategic waterway, one of the world's busiest maritime routes for energy and cargo shipments. For India's tea exporters, the development raises serious concerns about delays, rising freight costs and potential supply disruptions, PTI reported on Thursday.

According to the Tea Association of India, nearly 41 per cent of India's tea exports depend on markets in the Persian Gulf region. Of the roughly 280 million kilograms of tea exported in 2025, about 115 million kilograms were shipped to the United Arab Emirates, Iran and Iraq alone, making the region one of the largest overseas buyers of

India's tea. Most of these consignments pass through the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow but crucial corridor connecting the Persian Gulf to global maritime trade routes. Any escalation in the ongoing conflict could choke this shipping artery, delay cargo movements and sharply raise insurance premiums for vessels transiting the region. "Any disruption or suspension of trade through the Strait of Hormuz due to the ongoing conflict will have a serious impact on Indian tea exports," said Tea Association of India President Shailja Mehta. The potential impact

could be particularly severe for Assam's orthodox tea segment, which has recently driven a strong surge in India's exports. Nearly half of Assam's orthodox tea shipments are destined for Iran, Iraq and the UAE, making the Gulf region indispensable for producers and exporters. Ironically, the uncertainty comes at a time when the Assam government has stepped up support for orthodox tea production, recently increasing subsidies from 10 per kilogram to ₹15 per kilogram to boost exports and strengthen the premium tea segment. — Business Desk

## Hormuz risks rise for India's energy supplies

Escalating geopolitical tensions involving Iran are raising fresh concerns over global energy supply chains, with particular focus on the strategic Strait of Hormuz, a vital maritime route for oil and liquefied natural gas shipments. According to a report by Goldman Sachs, any disruption in traffic through this narrow waterway could significantly affect major Asian energy importers, including India.

The Strait of Hormuz is considered one of the world's most critical energy chokepoints. Roughly one-fifth of global oil consumption—around 20 million barrels per day—normally passes through the route. In addition, nearly 19 per cent of global LNG trade also transits the strait, underlining its central role in maintaining stable global energy supplies.

Goldman Sachs said tanker traffic through the region has already shown signs of caution, with shipping companies, oil producers and insurers adopting a more guarded stance following reports of vessel damage and escalating

hostilities. The uncertainty has prompted some ships to alter routes or delay transit through the region.

The research note said oil markets have already begun factoring in geopolitical risk. Current crude prices include an estimated risk premium of about \$18 per barrel, reflecting the potential impact if flows through the strait were disrupted for roughly a month. Even after accounting for limited alternative pipeline routes that bypass the strait, about 16 million barrels per day of oil flows could remain exposed in the event of a complete closure.

The risks extend beyond crude oil. Nearly 80 million tonnes per year of LNG exports—largely from Qatar—pass through the same corridor. Although global oil inventories and spare production capacity could offer temporary relief, Goldman Sachs warned that sustained disruption to Gulf shipping routes could trigger significant volatility in global energy markets and push prices higher across oil, gas and refined products.

—ANI

## Gulf crisis stalls sugar exports, eases domestic supply pressure

Informist  
MUMBAI

India's sugar exports are likely to decline sharply in the current October–September season as escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia disrupt trade routes and dampen demand from key markets. The slowdown in overseas shipments, however, may provide relief to the domestic market where supply concerns had intensified due to lower-than-expected sugar production.

Market participants said exports to Afghanistan and several West Asian countries have effectively stalled following the attack on Iran by the United States and Israel, which has triggered widespread disruption across the region. The conflict has also affected shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a vital maritime corridor for commodity trade.

Shipments to Afghanistan and a few West Asian destinations had been averaging around 60,000–70,000 tonnes per month and were projected to reach nearly 500,000 tonnes by September. This would have accounted for roughly one-fifth of India's total sugar export quota for the season. However, the escalating crisis has halted these flows. Saudi Arabia, Dubai and Iraq are among the key markets in West Asia that regularly import Indian sugar, traders said.

According to G.K. Sood, chairman of MEIR Commodities, the export route to Afghanistan has effectively collapsed because shipments traditionally moved through Iran. Earlier, Indian sugar also moved via Pakistan, but that route was closed during Operation Sindoor, leaving Iran as the only viable corridor. India exports sugar to Afghanistan through Iran's Bandar Abbas port on the Strait of Hormuz. With Iran shutting the waterway amid the conflict, the route has become inaccessible, effectively cutting off exports to the landlocked country.

## Higher prices and freight costs hit exports

The geopolitical disruption has compounded existing challenges for Indian exporters. Even before the crisis, Indian



## West Asia conflict disrupts India's sugar exports, easing domestic supply concerns despite weaker production this season

sugar had been struggling to compete globally because domestic prices were higher than international benchmarks. Market participants estimate that Indian sugar is currently priced about \$20–\$25 per tonne above global reference prices such as the London futures contract. The benchmark raw sugar contract on the Intercontinental Exchange was trading around 13.73 cents per pound at the time of writing. As a result, overseas buyers had already been showing limited interest in Indian shipments.

Data from the All India Sugar Trade Association shows that Indian mills exported just 201,547 tonnes of sugar by January 31 in the 2025–26 marketing season. The government had initially permitted exports of 1.5 million tonnes of sugar during the season ending September. Later, on February 13, it allowed an additional 500,000 tonnes to help manage surplus stocks. However, traders now say it appears

unlikely that these export targets will be achieved. Shipping costs have also surged sharply since the crisis intensified. Freight rates from Jawaharlal Nehru Port have jumped from about \$150–\$250 per tonne earlier to nearly \$650–\$700 per tonne.

Exporters operating on a cost-insurance-freight basis must bear these costs, making exports uneconomical. As a result, many mills now prefer selling sugar in the domestic market instead of shipping it overseas.

## Domestic supply outlook improves

The halt in exports could help stabilise India's domestic sugar availability at a time when production estimates have been revised downward. The Indian Sugar & Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) now estimates net sugar output for the 2025–26 season at about 29.3 million tonnes, down from an earlier estimate of 30.95 million tonnes.

## Gold prices rise on escalating conflict



Gold prices moved higher on Thursday in both domestic and global markets as intensifying hostilities involving Iran, the US and Israel drove investors towards safe-haven assets. Analysts said bullion prices could remain volatile in the near term as geopolitical risks persist and markets await key US economic data.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), the most-active April gold contract was trading 0.2% higher at ₹161,908 per 10 grams at 1753 IST. In the international market, the most-active April contract on COMEX rose nearly 1% to \$5,175.8 an ounce. Silver also strengthened alongside gold as investors increased exposure to precious metals amid rising uncertainty. The most-active May silver contract on MCX was up 0.7% at ₹263,100 per kilogram, while the corresponding contract on COMEX gained nearly 2% to \$84.60 per ounce.

Bullion markets have remained sensitive to the rapidly evolving conflict involving Iran, the US and Israel. Continued air strikes on Tehran and other Iranian cities, including reports of attacks hitting civilian infrastructure and hospitals, have heightened fears of a wider military confrontation. Tensions escalated further after the US reportedly sank an Iranian warship in international waters as it returned

from a naval exercise held in India.

The conflict has also led to significant disruption across the region, with several countries shutting their airspace following Iran's retaliatory missile and drone strikes targeting US military and diplomatic installations, airports, hotels and energy facilities.

Market participants said such geopolitical uncertainty typically strengthens demand for gold and silver, which are widely viewed as safe-haven assets during times of global instability.

## Rising geopolitical tensions fuel safe-haven demand, pushing gold and silver higher amid uncertainty and volatile markets

"We expect gold and silver prices to remain volatile this week amid movements in the dollar index, the ongoing US-Iran conflict and ahead of the US jobs data," said Manoj Jain, director at Prithvi Fimmart. Analysts at Kotak Securities noted that escalating conflict risks and fears of rising energy prices have encouraged fresh buying interest in bullion. Higher energy costs could revive global inflation pressures, making precious metals attractive as a hedge.

## Iran crisis triggers shipping disruptions, rice exporters seek help

Business Desk  
MUMBAI

Rice exporters have sought urgent relief measures from the Government of India to address disruptions triggered by the ongoing Iran crisis following a joint attack by the US and Israel on the Islamic nation. According to the latest recorded last year, when investors accumulated substantial holdings through exchanges and exchange-traded funds.

Exporters have urged the government to waive port-related charges such as stor-

age, demurrage and other levies where cargo has been rolled due to vessel cancellations. They have also requested facilitation for cargo already in transit to be returned, redirected or diverted, along with support from customs authorities and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for documentation and payment adjustments.

In addition, exporters have called for an official advisory recognising the current disruption as a force majeure type event to protect them from unfair con-



tractual penalties. They have also sought temporary banking support through ad hoc working capital limits and credit extensions on lines

similar to relief measures extended during the Covid pandemic, PTI reported on Thursday. The Indian Rice Exporters Federation said

exporters are facing severe shipping and logistics disruptions due to the crisis and rising instability across key maritime routes linked to the Middle East.

According to the federation, exporters are reporting an acute shortage of containers, along with suspension or cancellation of vessel calls to several Middle East destinations. The disruption has also led to a sharp escalation in logistics costs.

International freight rates have risen by an estimated 15%–20%, while war-risk sur-



charges and insurance premiums for shipments transiting through the Gulf have increased steeply. "Bunker

fuel prices have also increased, with members reporting marine fuel oil rising from about \$520 to about \$700.

This has further affected contracted realisations," the federation said. In the domestic market, basmati rice prices have softened by about 7%–10% in the past 72 hours, adding to exporters' working capital stress.

"Our exporters cannot absorb abrupt freight, fuel and insurance shocks while shipments are delayed or rolled," the federation added.

DII / FPI trading activity			
	BUY VALUE	SELL VALUE	NET VALUE
DII	18,821.10	13,667.73	5,153.37
FII / FPI	14,914.99	18,667.51	-3,752.52

All figures in ₹ crores

Wide diversification is only required when investors do not understand what they are doing.

Warren Buffett



## Equities recover on easing supply concerns



### Motilal Oswal Wealth Management

**N**ifty index opened with a gap up of around 130 points and traded within a 150 point range for most of the session with volatile swings on both sides till the final hour. In the last hour, the index broke out of the range on the upside and surged towards the 24,850 zone although a part of the gains was trimmed towards the close. On the daily chart, Nifty formed a bullish candle with wicks on both sides and negated the recent lower-high structure of the past few sessions indicating an improvement in short term momentum. The index ended the session with gains of around 285 points. Now if it manages to cross and hold above 24,850 zones then buying could be seen towards 25,000 then 25,200 zones while a hold below the same could see weakness towards 24,500 then 24,300 zones.

On option front, Maximum Call OI is at 25,500 then 25,000 strike while Maximum Put OI is at 24,000 then 24,500 strike. Call writing is seen at 25,500 then 24,800 strike while Put writing is seen at 24,600 then 24,500 strike. Option data suggests a broader trading range in between 24,200 to 25,200 zones while an immediate range between 24,500 to 25,000 levels.

S&P BSE Sensex index opened on a positive note around 79,500 zone and traded within a 400 point range of from 79,200 to

79,600 for most of the session with wild swings on both sides repeatedly testing the upper and lower ends of the range. In the final hour, the index broke out of this range on the upside and witnessed a sharp surge towards the 80,300 zone. However, part of the gains was trimmed towards the close. On the daily chart, Sensex formed a bullish candle with wicks on both sides and ended the session with gains of around 900 points. The index has also negated the recent lower-high structure of the last few sessions indicating improving short term momentum. Now if it manages to cross and hold above 80,300 zones then buying could be seen towards 80,700 then 81,000 zones while a hold below the same could see weakness towards 79,500 then 79,000 zones. Bank Nifty index opened on a positive note near 59,000 zones but it failed to hold at higher levels and gradually drifted towards 58,500 zones in the first half of the session. However sharp recovery was seen from lower zones towards 59,300 levels in the last hour of the session.

It formed a Doji kind of pattern on daily scale with long upper and lower shadow as buying is visible at lower zones but momentum is missing at higher levels. Now it has to hold above 59,000 zones for a bounce towards 59,250 then 59,500 levels while a hold below the same could see some weakness towards 58,750 then 58,500 levels. Nifty future closed positive with gains of 1.01% at 24,832 levels.

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### Stock Ideas

#### BEL

Stock has formed a bullish "Pennant" pattern on the daily chart suggesting a continuation of the uptrend. The MACD line is confirming the positive momentum.

Buy BEL	
CMP	460
SL	448
TRGT	495



#### TORNTPOWER

Stock is retesting its breakout on the daily chart with higher than average traded volumes. The RSI indicator has given a bullish crossover to confirm the positive momentum.

Buy TORNTPOWER	
CMP	1504
SL	1465
TRGT	1585



#### MCX

Stock is in an overall uptrend and is respecting its 50 DEMA support zones with slight dips being bought into. The ADX line is rising which confirms the bullish trend.

Buy MCX	
CMP	2553
SL	2485
TRGT	2730



#### COALINDIA

The Stock is retesting its breakout from a consolidation zone with higher than average traded volumes to support the up move. It is respecting its 50 DEMA support zones and the RSI momentum indicator is positively placed which has bullish implications.

Buy COALINDIA	
CMP	449
SL	430
TRGT	485



### Hot stocks

Company Name	4/3/2026	7 DSMA	21 DSMA	50 DSMA	250 DSMA	BSE 1 Year High Price	PuISore
Anand Rathi Wea.	3132.95	3086.56	3018.14	3033.06	2559.55	3323.85	100
P I Industries	3056.20	3103.30	3123.49	3175.52	3589.23	4329.00	100
Thermax	3014.10	3127.82	3013.28	2982.05	3250.49	4088.00	100
Data Pattern	3123.00	3143.97	2902.21	2700.70	2583.26	3349.95	100
eClerx Services	3222.15	3275.25	3740.60	4244.14	3805.91	4985.95	100
Timken India	3234.75	3319.94	3226.81	3102.45	3017.16	3575.65	100
Siemens	3160.00	3324.41	3228.19	3109.64	3074.80	3440.70	100
L&T Technology	3314.45	3350.90	3570.64	3924.17	4248.67	4879.80	100
M & M	3263.95	3407.01	3502.89	3566.52	3301.26	3840.00	100
Muthoot Finance	3338.10	3439.41	3584.04	3738.20	2956.33	4149.00	100
Gujarat Fluoroch	3334.20	3442.90	3414.40	3401.51	3601.34	4097.60	100
Escorts Kubota	3267.40	3488.93	3575.47	3627.61	3482.53	4171.35	100
BASF India	3491.35	3527.62	3654.45	3708.92	4444.76	5418.20	100
CEAT	3284.45	3602.74	3811.84	3793.55	3540.48	4431.60	100
Netweb Technol.	3458.95	3637.56	3363.88	3272.18	2590.79	4480.00	100
GE Vernova T&D	3681.10	3776.16	3659.65	3254.34	2574.31	3939.95	100
AIA Engineering	3631.20	3818.90	3930.10	3931.68	3438.27	4200.00	100
Kaynes Tech	3696.45	3820.63	3866.64	3789.36	5461.36	7705.00	100
Avenue Super.	3758.50	3835.88	3879.61	3799.64	4102.44	4916.30	100
TVS Motor Co.	3746.80	3851.94	3821.06	3747.89	3184.61	3970.00	100
Trent	3755.35	3896.53	4058.25	4034.76	4889.59	6259.00	100
Hind.Aeronautics	3874.35	3958.61	4111.05	4298.39	4502.73	5166.00	100
Schaeffler India	3892.25	3969.51	3858.60	3626.12	3877.30	4740.00	100
Schaeffler India	4135.60	4207.15	3968.65	3840.48	3861.83	4438.65	100
Larsen & Toubro	3882.15	4212.91	4191.38	4060.60	3713.97	4440.00	100
Titan Company	4209.70	4291.70	4229.09	4132.81	3637.29	4379.95	100
Torrent Pharma.	4341.95	4368.69	4192.60	4042.65	3565.10	4469.35	100
CRISIL	4310.10	4448.22	4574.91	4561.49	4868.92	6329.95	100
LTIMindtree	4344.35	4515.80	5091.24	5649.72	5299.09	6430.00	100
Tata Elxsi	4355.00	4516.01	4915.87	5223.96	5880.40	6733.50	100
Fine Organic	4270.10	4651.83	4557.83	4323.34	4515.54	5490.00	100
Bayer Crop Sci.	4551.90	4669.71	4671.62	4543.28	5058.75	6539.95	100
Persistent Systems	4707.55	4752.66	5373.69	5903.20	5638.92	6597.00	100
Interglobe Aviat	4392.70	4761.99	4881.47	4888.95	5401.53	6225.05	100
Cummins India	4585.55	4854.56	4589.47	4348.98	3751.51	4987.00	100

### Top gainers (value)

Company Name	4/3/2026	5/3/2026	Chg in ₹	% Chg
MRF	134967.70	140195.30	5227.60	3.87
Hitachi Energy	24492.15	25307.10	814.95	3.33
Page Industries	30943.65	31623.85	680.20	2.20
Navin Fluor.Intl.	6073.80	6505.90	432.10	7.11
Apar Inds.	10021.65	10428.60	406.95	4.06
TVS Holdings	14062.90	14396.15	333.25	2.37
Force Motors	21466.10	21773.50	307.40	1.43
Polycab India	8283.95	8566.45	282.50	3.41
Maruti Suzuki	14152.45	14416.35	263.90	1.86
Mah. Scooters	12993.60	13237.90	244.30	1.88
Data Pattern	3123.00	3360.10	237.10	7.59
Cummins India	4585.55	4792.55	207.00	4.51
Gillette India	7992.35	8196.30	203.95	2.55
UltraTech Cem.	12105.35	12301.85	196.50	1.62
Neuland Labs.	12776.30	12969.90	193.60	1.52
Mazagon Dock	2166.35	2351.95	185.60	8.57
Amber Enterp.	7652.05	7834.00	181.95	2.38
Bajaj Auto	9640.85	9909.35	268.50	2.79
Craftsman Auto	7416.10	7579.80	163.70	2.21
Schaeffler India	4135.60	4289.25	153.65	3.72
Larsen & Toubro	3882.15	4032.95	150.80	3.88
GE Vernova T&D	3681.10	3827.95	146.85	3.99
Solar Industries	14530.70	14674.25	143.55	0.99
CEAT	3284.45	3410.30	125.85	3.83
Timken India	3234.75	3337.85	103.10	3.21
Eicher Motors	7629.45	7749.50	120.05	1.57
Kaynes Tech	3696.45	3814.70	118.25	3.20
Interglobe Aviat	4392.70	4504.85	112.15	2.55
Apollo Hospitals	7666.40	7775.85	109.45	1.43
Blue Star	1843.00	1948.30	105.30	5.71
A B B	5829.05	5928.40	99.35	1.70
Dixon Technolog.	10129.05	10227.90	98.85	0.98
Garden Reach Sh.	2313.30	2407.55	94.25	4.07
OneSource Speci.	1335.95	1422.15	86.20	6.45
Hero Motocorp	5499.70	5585.80	86.10	1.57
Linde India	6648.25	6732.90	84.65	1.27
M & M	3263.95	3347.35	83.40	2.56
Alkem Lab	5461.35	5544.30	82.95	1.52
Multi Comm. Exc.	2478.20	2559.75	81.55	3.29
Avenue Super.	3758.50	3836.40	77.90	2.07
Atul	6476.25	6553.15	76.90	1.19
TVS Motor Co.	3746.80	3820.05	73.25	1.96
Bharat Mark	2040.10	2110.20	70.10	3.44
Mastek	1564.25	1633.05	68.80	4.40
Anand Rathi Wea.	3132.95	3201.05	68.10	2.17
Titan Company	4209.70	4275.90	66.20	1.57

### Top losers (value)

Company Name	4/3/2026	5/3/2026	Chg in ₹	% Chg
Abbott India	27818.15	27595.20	-222.95	-0.80
Honeywell Auto	30165.90	29954.40	-211.50	-0.70
Netweb Technol.	3458.95	3250.60	-208.35	-6.02
Bosch	33422.00	33236.25	-185.75	-0.56
Shree Cement	25348.60	25198.95	-149.65	-0.59
eClerx Services	3222.15	3097.50	-124.65	-3.87
P & G Hygiene	11220.05	11096.20	-123.85	-1.10
Astrazeneca Phar	8699.60	8596.15	-103.45	-1.19
Siemens Ener.Ind	2941.75	2864.80	-76.95	-2.62
3M India	34324.95	34255.15	-69.80	-0.20
Persistent Systems	4707.55	4642.35	-65.20	-1.39
KEI Industries	4988.80	4926.35	-62.45	-1.25
Gujarat Fluoroch	3334.20	3275.85	-58.35	-1.75
Coromandel Inter	2124.95	2067.45	-57.50	-2.71
DOMS Industries	2201.00	2144.60	-56.40	-2.56
Metropolis Health	1846.80	1791.85	-54.95	-2.98
Akzo Nobel	2892.05	2837.50	-54.55	-1.89
Pfizer	4859.10	4810.30	-48.80	-1.00
Affle 3i	1403.90	1359.35	-44.55	-3.17
BASF India	3491.35	3449.90	-41.45	-1.19
LTIMindtree	4344.35	4306.70	-37.65	-0.87
Oracle Fin.Serv.	6821.00	6785.15	-35.85	-0.53
Home First Finan	1074.20	1038.80	-35.40	-3.30
Mphasis	2266.55	2231.30	-35.25	-1.56
Poly Medicure	1398.35	1363.75	-34.60	-2.47
Muthoot Finance	3338.10	3305.40	-32.70	-0.98
Inventurus Knowl	1333.00	1303.20	-29.80	-2.24
Bayer Crop Sci.	4551.90	4523.85	-28.05	-0.62
DCM Shriram	1013.95	989.30	-24.65	-2.43
Tata Comm	1483.05	1460.00	-23.05	-1.55
Gujarat Gas	418.60	397.20	-21.40	-5.11
Dr Lal Pathlabs	1359.05	1337.70	-21.35	-1.57
EID Parry	853.55	833.50	-20.05	-2.35
KPIT Technologi.	736.15	717.50	-18.65	-2.53
AIA Engineering	3631.20	3612.55	-18.65	-0.51
Ather Energy	700.85	682.85	-18.00	-2.57
Coforge	1169.80	1152.55	-17.25	-1.47
Tech Mahindra	1350.60	1333.65	-16.95	-1.25
Asahi India Glas	860.30	843.85	-16.45	-1.91
Emcure Pharma	1468.10	1451.85	-16.25	-1.11
CreditAcc. Gram.	1225.80	1210.05	-15.75	-1.28
K P R Mill Ltd	851.85	836.75	-15.10	-1.77
J K Cements	5529.85	5515.15	-14.70	-0.27
Cera Sanitary.	4777.00	4763.15	-13.85	-0.29
Oil India	492.15	478.55	-13.60	-2.76
L&T Technology	3314.45	3301.55	-12.90	-0.39

### Upwardly & Downwardly Cos

Company Name	25/2/2026	5/3/2026	Days	Gain/Loss %	Per Day Average
Aegis Vopak Term	235.75	189.2	5	-19.75	-9.31
Sapphire Foods	213.95	186.55	5	-12.81	-5.48
JK Lakshmi Cem.	731.95	648.65	5	-11.38	-16.66
R C F	128.75	114.2	5	-11.30	-2.91
Devyani Intl.	131.7	11			

## corporate gallery

## NBCC to Build Eco-Friendly Kendriya Vidyalaya at Khajuri Khas, Delhi



The bhoomi pujan ceremony for the permanent campus of Kendriya Vidyalaya at Khajuri Khas in Delhi was held on Mar 2, 2026.

The event was attended by Rekha Gupta, Chief Minister of Delhi; Ashish Sood, Education Minister of Delhi; Manoj Tiwari, Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) from North-East Delhi; Kapil Mishra, Minister of Law and Labour of Delhi; and Rajeev Kumar, Chief General Manager of NBCC. Senior officers of Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) and NBCC were also present.

Rekha Gupta had announced in October 2025 that a new Kendriya Vidyalaya would be opened in Khajuri Khas in north-east Delhi to provide quality education in the area. NBCC, a Government of India enterprise, has been entrusted with the construction of a two-section school building and development of other facilities for Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) at Khajuri Khas in Delhi at an approximate cost of ₹47.80 crore.

The project will focus on sustainability, incorporating solar power systems and energy-saving measures to achieve a four-star GRIHA rating for green buildings. The stipulated completion period for the project is 24 months.

The academic building will have a built-up area of 8,725 sqm on a 1.82-acre plot and will comprise ground plus four floors with a height of 17.5 metres. The building will provide capacity for 1,520 students.

The infrastructure will include 38 classrooms with a capacity of 40 students each, a double-height entrance lobby with a centrally placed statue of Goddess Saraswati, a multipurpose court for senior students, a dedicated play area for Bal Vatika, a lift for universal accessibility, and parking for four-wheelers and two-wheelers.

Provision has also been made for future expansion on the fourth floor to accommodate 10 additional classrooms. The academic block has been designed with a focus on safety, accessibility and natural light. Classrooms are arranged along a single-loaded corridor to maximise cross-ventilation and acoustic comfort.

The environmentally sustainable design includes solar power provision, LED fixtures and solar street lights to improve energy efficiency. It will also feature a sewage treatment plant, rainwater harvesting systems, EV charging points and about 25% green cover of the total area through landscaping and grass pavers.

The new Kendriya Vidyalaya campus is expected to strengthen educational infrastructure in the region while promoting environmentally sustainable development.

## NTPC Bongaigaon Observes 55th National Safety Day



NTPC Bongaigaon observed the 55th National Safety Day with a series of programmes aimed at reinforcing safety awareness and strengthening adherence to established safety norms across operations.

The observance began with the unfurling of the safety flag at the plant premises by Arnab Maitra, Head of Project, in the presence of employees, CISF personnel, associates and contract workers. Maitra later administered the safety pledge and highlighted the importance of safety in both professional and personal spheres.

In his address, Maitra stressed the need for strict adherence to safety protocols in all plant operations and urged every department and contract worker to ensure compliance with prescribed safety norms.



Anurag Gupta, General Manager (Operations and Maintenance), also addressed the gathering and spoke about key safety aspects and the collective responsibility of employees in maintaining a safe workplace.

The programme was organised and coordinated by Rajeev Ranjan, Assistant General Manager (Safety), along with his team. Ranjan outlined the objectives and significance of National Safety Day and reiterated NTPC Bongaigaon's continued focus on safety excellence.

As part of the observance, a knowledge-sharing forum was organised in which representatives from contractual agencies, associates and various site engagement teams shared safety practices adopted in their respective work areas. Discussions focused on proactive measures, hazard identification and safe work practices followed in day-to-day plant operations.

L N Meitei, Commandant, CISF (Fire), along with other senior officials of the station, attended the programme. Heads of departments also addressed the gathering and stressed the need for a safety-first approach and the shared responsibility of employees in maintaining a safe work environment. Various safety-related competitions were organised for employees and associates, and prizes were distributed during the event. Safety awards were also presented in recognition of exemplary performance and adherence to safety standards.

Additional safety awareness activities and competitions are planned for the workforce to encourage proactive safety practices and strengthen understanding of safety norms among employees.

The programme witnessed participation from more than 200 employees, CISF personnel, associates and representatives of unions and associations.

## WR Collects Over ₹191 Crore As Fine Through Intensive Ticket Checking Drives During The Period From April 2025 To February 2026



Western Railway continues its steadfast efforts to curb ticketless and irregular travel through extensive and sustained ticket checking drives across its network. In line with its commitment to revenue protection and passenger discipline, the Ticket Checking staff of Western Railway has shown exemplary performance during the current financial year.

According to a press release issued by Chief Public Relations Officer, Western Railway, Shri Vineet Abhishek, a highly motivated team of ticket checking staff, under the active supervision of Senior Commercial Officers, has undertaken rigorous checks in Mumbai Suburban locals, long-distance Mail/Express trains, passenger services, and holiday special trains. The objective has been to

minimize revenue leakage and enhance travel discipline.

During the period from April 2025 to February 2026, almost 30 lakh ticketless/irregular passengers, including unbooked luggage cases, were detected, resulting in the realization of an amount to the tune of more than ₹191 Crore, marking over 42% increase over the corresponding period last year. In the month of February, 2026, almost 3 lakh cases of ticketless travel/irregular passengers were detected and an amount of about ₹18.50 Crore was recovered, registering more than 10% increase over the previous year.

In the Mumbai Suburban section, intensive ticket checking drives have yielded significant results. During the month of February 2026, a total of 87 thousand cases of ticketless/irregular travel were detected, resulting in the realization of an amount to the tune of ₹4.28 Crore. Cumulatively, during the period from April 2025 to February 2026, more than 10 lakh cases were detected in Mumbai Suburban section with a total recovery of almost ₹50 Crore (including fines in AC locals) reflecting Western Railway's sustained focus on ensuring disciplined and authorised travel across its suburban network.

Western Railway has also maintained focused checking drives in AC suburban local trains. Frequent surprise checks were conducted to prevent unauthorized travel by general ticket holders. Between April 2025 and February 2026, over 1.16 lakh penalty cases were booked in AC local services, resulting in recovery of ₹3.76 Crore as fine, registering an increase of almost 99% over the corresponding period last year.

## whispersinthecorridors



Dr Suresh Mehrotra

## 64% Dip in Repeat-Offender Crime: How IPS Archit Chandak's Project Trinetra Is Reshaping Policing in Akola

Policing has traditionally focused on responding after a crime has occurred. However, this approach is changing in Akola through an initiative called Project Trinetra. The initiative is led by Archit Chandak, a 2018 batch IPS officer currently posted as Superintendent of Police in Akola, Maharashtra.



Project Trinetra is a data-driven preventive policing model that uses crime records to identify repeat offenders and categorise them into high, medium and low-risk levels to predict and prevent crimes before they occur. The system helps police act early through targeted monitoring and smarter patrolling instead of waiting for crimes to take place. According to police data, repeat crime reduced by 64% within three months of the project's implementation. Before the launch of Project Trinetra, 70 repeat offenders committed crimes during June, July and August. After the initiative was implemented, the number dropped to 25. The model is based on the premise that a small group of habitual offenders is responsible for a disproportionate share of crimes. Project Trinetra organises existing police data and converts it into actionable intelligence. The AI-based system analyses past crime records, offender histories, time patterns and locations to identify repeat offenders who are most likely to reoffend. Instead of random patrolling, police resources are deployed more precisely. High-risk individuals are identified early and police stations are alerted in advance, allowing officers to take preventive steps such as counselling, targeted monitoring, beat checks and community engagement. The system is designed as a decision-support tool rather than a replacement for human judgement. Alerts generated by the system are advisory, and final decisions remain with police officers to ensure accountability and adherence to constitutional safeguards. Officials also said the system avoids profiling based on caste, religion or socio-economic background and focuses only on behaviour and past criminal activity. The decline in repeat offences indicates that early identification and focused intervention can act as a strong deterrent. Police are now able to plan patrols more effectively, identify suspects faster and deploy manpower more efficiently.

## No Empanelment for Secretary from Andhra Pradesh Cadre

A 1995 batch IAS officer of the Andhra Pradesh cadre has not been empanelled for appointment to Secretary or Secretary-equivalent posts in the Government of India.



## Hero's Farewell: India's Last Serving Param Vir Chakra Recipient Retires

Subedar Major and Honorary Captain Sanjay Kumar, Param Vir Chakra (PVC), the Indian Army's last serving recipient of the Param Vir Chakra, has retired after four decades of service



with the 13 Jammu and Kashmir Rifles. Kumar earned the country's highest wartime gallantry award on July 4, 2000, during the Kargil War's Battle of Tololing. As a Havildar, he climbed a 30-foot cliff under heavy gunfire and neutralised a Pakistani machine gun position, enabling his unit to advance. He received the Param Vir Chakra at the age of 26 for the act of gallantry. Around 2010, Kumar was demoted to the rank of Lance Naik. The Army did not provide a public explanation for the move, which triggered debate in defence circles. He was later restored to his rank and progressed through seniority-based promotions, becoming Naib Subedar in 2014, Subedar Major in February 2022, Honorary Lieutenant in August 2025 and Honorary Captain on Republic Day 2026. With his retirement, no Param Vir Chakra recipient remains in active service among the 21 awards conferred since 1947.

## Will US Be Able to Install Reza Pahlavi as Leader of Iran?

Shahzadeh Reza Pahlavi, the exiled son of Iran's last Shah who lives in the United States, has been making efforts to return to Iran as leader. The Trump administration is reportedly willing to install him as the next leader by subjugating Iran and paving the way for a hassle-free supply of fuel to the US and European countries, similar to the arrangement during the reign of his father before the 1979 revolution in Iran.

## Bihar Likely to See First BJP Chief Minister

If Nitish Kumar moves to the Rajya Sabha, it is likely that the BJP will have its first Chief Minister in Bihar. Nitish Kumar's son Nishant is likely to get a ministerial berth in the BJP-led government. A final announcement is expected today.

## Defence Sector Reshuffle

A major reshuffle in the defence establishment is being discussed as part of Budget 2026 deliberations. The move could affect defence public sector undertakings such as HAL and BEL.

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## Railway connectivity continues to bring about transformative changes in Mizoram



With the introduction of passenger and freight train services, Mizoram has experienced a significant transformation in both passenger transportation and the movement of goods across the state. This development has not only improved connectivity but has also contributed to economic growth and further strengthened tourism in the region.

In a significant historic milestone, the first-ever Food Corporation of India (FCI) food grain cargo train arrived at Sairang Railway Station on 3rd March, 2026. The cargo train comprised 42 wagons carrying around 25,900 quintals of rice from Punjab. This marks an important step in strengthening rail-based freight connectivity in the state and improving the supply chain of essential commodities. The FCI rake was received at the station by B. Lalchhanzova, Minister for Food, Civil Supplies & Consumer Affairs, Government of Mizoram, along with Rajya Sabha MP K. Vanlalvena and other dignitaries. The successful unloading of the inward FCI food grain rake at Sairang signifies the growing operational capability of the station and highlights the expanding role of railway infrastructure in supporting Mizoram's logistics and food distribution network.

It may be mentioned that the inauguration of the 51.38 km Bairabi-Sairang railway line on 13th September, 2025 by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, marked a historic milestone for the people of Mizoram. This major infrastructure project has brought Aizawl onto India's railway map by directly linking the state to the national railway network. Beyond improving transportation, the new rail line is expected to create significant opportunities for economic growth and promote tourism development across the region.

**Tourism gains momentum in Mizoram:** The newly opened railway line in Mizoram has given a boost to tourism, with the state witnessing a steady increase in the number of visitors over the past six months. Railway services in Mizoram reached a new milestone with the arrival of the Bharat Gaurav Deluxe AC Tourist Train at Sairang Railway Station for the very first time on 12th February 2026 under the "North East Discovery" circuit. This premium tourist train, carrying 81 tourists from different parts of India as well as other nations such as the United States and Nepal, underscores Mizoram's growing visibility on the national and international tourism map. Improved accessibility has attracted both domestic and international visitors, which is contributing to employment generation in hospitality and allied sectors, promoting eco-tourism and cultural tourism, and positioning Mizoram as an emerging destination in the Northeast under the broader vision of inclusive growth and regional integration.

**Increasing Passenger Footfall:** Since the commencement of train services on the Bairabi – Sairang route in September 2025, public response has been overwhelming. The Sairang-Anand Vihar Rajdhani Express has recorded occupancy exceeding 150% in both directions. The Sairang-Guwahati Express and Sairang-Kolkata Express have similarly registered strong occupancy levels of over 100%, clearly reflecting robust demand and strong public acceptance of railway services from Sairang. During last month, on 9th February 2026, a new train service from Sairang to Silchar has been flagged off by the Hon'ble Railway Minister, further strengthening regional mobility, and connecting Mizoram with the important educational, medical and commercial hub of the Barak Valley in Assam.

## Briefs

BENGALURU

## Vijayendra for internal reservation in hiring

Karnataka BJP president BY Vijayendra on Mar 5 urged the Congress government to fill vacant posts by implementing internal reservation for marginalised communities. Speaking to media, he said the move would create employment opportunities for youth. Vijayendra warned the BJP would launch an agitation if the government failed to act. He said the BJP government had increased reservation to 56% to ensure justice for communities.

NEW DELHI

## 2 charred bodies found after fire

Two unidentified charred bodies were recovered from the fourth floor of a building after a fire broke out in a toy godown in central Delhi's Paharganj area, a Delhi Fire Service (DFS) official said on Thursday. The building has a ground floor and four upper floors, with a temporary structure on the fourth floor where the godown operated. "The fire was finally extinguished around 3.20 am on Thursday."

TELANGANA

## Tainted ghee unit busted

Hyderabad police on Thursday busted an adulterated dairy products unit in Banjara Hills and arrested one person for allegedly mixing palm oil, vanaspati and other low-quality substances in ghee, according to the Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police. A team from the Commissioner's Task Force raided "Pride Dairy" at Bholanagar and seized adulterated ghee, cream and equipment worth Rs 18.26 lakh, including 460kg ghee, 2,090kg cow cream and 1,170kg buffalo cream.

ALAPPUZHA

## Elephant runs amok, mahout hurt

One of three elephants brought for a temple festival near Nooranad in Kerala's Alappuzha district turned violent between 8.30 pm and 9 pm on Wednesday, injuring its mahout and damaging several roadside vehicles, police said. The elephant threw the mahout and ran around the area, creating panic among locals. It was later tranquilised by wildlife officials and removed. The mahout is undergoing treatment.

IMPHAL

## Narcotics seized in Manipur

Security Forces intercepted an SUV at a Naka check post under Tengnoupal Police Station and recovered 2.33 kg of WY tablets, 0.592 kg of brown sugar, a mobile phone, an Aadhaar card and the vehicle's registration certificate, Manipur Police said on X.

BARABANKI

## 11 injured in Holi clash

At least 11 people were injured after a dispute over playing with colours during Holi escalated into a violent clash between two groups in Tikaria village in Uttar Pradesh's Barabanki on Wednesday afternoon police said. According to police the argument turned violent and both groups attacked each other with sticks and iron rods. Villagers intervened before police arrived and pacified both sides.

## W ASIA TENSION | Conflict is in our backyard, says Rahul

## Cong slams PM on Iran ship attack

Gaurav Vivek Bhatnagar  
NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday raised the issue of the United States sinking an Iranian warship in the Indian Ocean, even as it was returning after participating in a joint exercise with the Indian Navy, and charged that while at moments such as these India needs a "steady hand at the wheel", it has a "compromised PM who has surrendered our strategic autonomy".

Gandhi, in a post on "X", made a reference to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and wrote that, "The world has entered a volatile phase. Stormy seas lie ahead. India's oil supplies are under threat, with more than 40% of our imports transiting the Strait of Hormuz. The

situation is even worse for LPG and LNG. The conflict has reached our backyard, with an Iranian warship sunk in the Indian Ocean."

## Are Indians safe, asks Kharage

New Delhi: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge asked how the Centre intended to secure the well-being of Indians stranded in the Gulf and Middle East and on evacuation plans, if any.

He also flagged the issue of some Indians also being killed in the conflict between Iran on one side and the United States and Israel on the other.

## Akhilesh says govt silence is 'deliberate inaction'

Biswajeet Banerjee  
LUCKNOW

Akhilesh Yadav on Thursday criticised the Central government for maintaining silence over the recent US-Israel attacks near India's strategic neighbourhood and said the situation was a matter of concern for the country.

Taking to X, the Samajwadi Party chief said the reach of the US-Israel strikes close to India's borders and up to the Indian Ocean had raised serious concerns among citizens. He questioned why the government had maintained what he described as an unprecedented silence on such a serious international issue.

Yadav asked whether the government's silence should be seen as deliberate inaction or the result of fear. He said people wanted to know why the government had not issued any clear statement on the matter.

Calling it an international issue, Yadav said it was the joint responsibility of the government, the foreign ministry and the defence ministry to clarify India's position.

## The Nitish endgame

Ashok Mishra  
PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has opted to move to the Rajya Sabha, paving the way for the installation of a chief minister from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) — a post the saffron party has coveted in the state for nearly two decades.

Though long anticipated, the sudden turn of events has taken political circles by surprise, coming barely four months after Nitish was sworn in for a record tenth term as chief minister. Nitish, who dominated Bihar's politics for over two decades, filed his nomination on Thursday, clearing the path for his son Nishant Kumar to enter politics and potentially assume the role of deputy chief minister under a BJP chief minister. However, the vacuum created by Nitish Kumar's departure to Delhi will be difficult for both the Janata Dal (United) and the BJP to fill.

His move has triggered protests among Janata Dal (U) leaders and supporters, many of whom have accused the BJP of sidelining Nitish Kumar despite his mass support

among non-Yadav backward castes, extremely backward castes (EBCs), Dalits and Pasmanda (backward) Muslims — social blocs that helped the NDA secure a landslide victory with 202 seats in the state assembly.

"It is nothing short of a coup in Bihar. The BJP leadership, along with a section of JDU leaders loyal to the saffron outfit, have ditched Nitish Kumar and conspired to remove him from the top post unceremoniously," said JDU leader and former minister Bikram Kunwar.

Seeking to calm ruffled party workers — many of whom had begun protesting outside the chief minister's residence and elsewhere in the state — Nitish tweeted that he wished to become a Rajya Sabha member so that he could fulfil his desire of having served in both Houses of the state legislature as well as both Houses of Parliament.

Notably, ahead of the 2025 state elections, the BJP had refrained from declaring Nitish as the chief ministerial candidate — unlike previous elections.

Full article on freepressjournal.in



## Planned bid to sideline Nitish: JD(U) MLA

Dheeraj Kumar/Patna: Jharkhand's lone JD (U) MLA Saryu Roy on Thursday claimed that Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's move to the Rajya Sabha was a "planned design" to sideline him from the CM's post.

Nitish filed his nomination papers for Rajya Sabha, thus bringing the curtains down on his 20-year tenure as the longest-serving CM of the state. "The manner in which a person like him was sidelined from the CM's post, looks as if he is being sent to a shelter," the MLA said.

## Nabin, 39 others file RS papers

New Delhi: Nitish Kumar, Nitin Nabin, and NCP-SP supremo Sharad Pawar were among the 40 candidates who filed their papers on the last day of nomination for 37 Rajya Sabha seats that are falling vacant in 10 states, leading to a keen contest for one seat each Bihar, Odisha and Haryana.

Seven seats are falling vacant in Maharashtra, six in Tamil Nadu, five each in Bihar and West Bengal, four in Odisha, three in Assam and two each in Haryana, Telangana and Chhattisgarh, besides one seat in Himachal Pradesh.

The scrutiny of papers will take place on Friday, and the nominations can be withdrawn till March 9. If needed, polling will be held on March 16.

In Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Assam, assembly elections are likely to be held in April.

## 3 ex-Congress MLAs join BJP in Assam

IANS  
GUWAHATI

Three suspended Congress MLAs joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Assam on Thursday, adding a fresh dimension to political developments in the state ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections.

The three legislators — Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha, Basant Das and Sashikanta Das — were formally inducted into the BJP at the party's state headquarters, 'Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan' in Guwahati, in the presence of state president Dilip Saikia and other senior leaders.

Speaking after joining the BJP, Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha said the decision was taken keeping in mind the larger interests of Assam and the country.

He said the three legislators were keen to work in line with the BJP's policies and contribute to the development and security of the state as well as the nation. Purkayastha also took a swipe at Congress, alleging that the party's politics of appeasement had weakened its organisational strength.

## Delhi nabs over 1,200 for Holi drunk driving

PTI  
NEW DELHI

Delhi Traffic Police booked more than 1,200 motorists for drunk driving during a special enforcement drive carried out across the city on Holi, with the highest number of such violations reported from the western range, an official said on Thursday.

According to data released by the traffic police, a total of 3,725 were penalised for other traffic violations.

## Another pit death for biker, in Kerala

PTI  
KOLLAM

A motorcycle rider died after falling into a pit dug as part of National Highway-66 project at Skylab Junction in Ochira.

Officials at the Ochira police station suspect that Kumar might have lost control of his vehicle and crashed.

Residents alleged that construction work was being carried out and deep pits were dug without barriers to ensure public safety.

## What will happen to Om Birla on Monday?

PTI  
NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha will witness a rare moment when Om Birla will not chair the proceedings but will be seated amongst the members as the House takes up a notice seeking his removal from office.

As Parliament meets for the second phase of the Budget session on March 9, the Lok Sabha is likely to take up the resolution moved by the opposition against Birla for allegedly acting in a "blatantly partisan" manner.

According to the rules and laid down procedure, Birla will have the right to defend himself when the resolution is discussed by the lower house. He will also have the right to vote against the resolution, Constitution expert P D T Achary explained.

The expert said that while Birla will not chair the proceedings when the resolution comes up before the House, he will be seated in the Treasury benches.

The day the notice was submitted, Birla had stopped chairing the House.

Achary, a former Lok Sabha secretary general, told PTI that the "allocation of the seat, which the Speaker occupies under such circumstances, is not mentioned in the Rules".

## RSS hastens grassroots mobilisation in UP

Biswajeet Banerjee  
LUCKNOW

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has intensified its organisational preparations as the political atmosphere ahead of upcoming elections begins to gather momentum.

The organisation has started working on a strategy aimed at activating its cadre at the grassroots level while expanding social outreach.

Sources said the RSS is planning to mobilise workers up to the booth level through its shakhas and affiliated

organisations. Under the plan, a contact in charge is expected to be identified for every booth. Workers will also carry out a detailed study of the voter list, with a focus on identifying missing names and ensuring they are added to the electoral rolls.

At the same time, preparations are being made to increase dialogue on ideological issues during the election period. Themes such as nationalism, cultural identity and the Uniform Civil Code are expected to feature in outreach efforts.

Former Indian ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu has been appointed the new Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, a Rashtrapati Bhavan communicate said.

In another key development, VK Saxena will take over as the lieutenant governor of Ladakh. Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain (retd) was appointed as Governor of Bihar and Himachal Pradesh Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla appointed Telangana Governor, it said.

## BJP's 2024-25 earning was 85% of all parties

PTI  
NEW DELHI

The ruling BJP declared an income of Rs 6769.14 crore in FY 2024-25, the highest among national parties, while the Congress was a distant second, declaring an income of around Rs 918.28 crore, said a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).

According to the report analysing the declarations made by political parties to the Election Commission, six national parties (BJP, INC, CPI(M), AAP, BSP and NPEP) declared a total income of Rs 7960.09 crore in 2024-25, and the BJP accounted for 85.03 per cent of it.

## Bihar, T'gana get new Guvs

Agencies  
NEW DELHI

Former Indian ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu has been appointed the new Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, a Rashtrapati Bhavan communicate said.

In another key development, VK Saxena will take over as the lieutenant governor of Ladakh. Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain (retd) was appointed as Governor of Bihar and Himachal Pradesh Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla appointed Telangana Governor, it said.

## America is not a charity organisation: US Dy Secy

Ashwin Ahmad  
NEW DELHI

US Deputy Secretary Christopher Landau made it clear that America was not a "charity organisation," and would do all it could to advance its national interests. Speaking at a curtain-raiser at the session of the Raisina Dialogue entitled "Power, Purpose, & Partnerships: American Foreign Policy in a New Era", the US official was asked just how he viewed the role and purpose of the US's foreign policy.

"The purpose of foreign policy of the United States is to advance our national interests. We are not a charity organisation. We are not the United

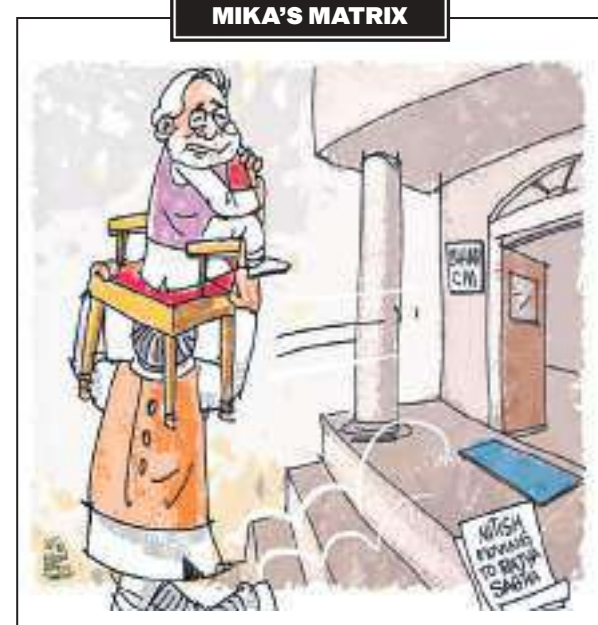


Nations...However, America first does not mean America alone. Just as President Trump wants to make America great again, he will expect that the PM of India and other countries want to make their countries great," he said.

Calling President Trump a "President of Peace" Landau also stated that this century will see the rise of India. He

did add a caveat. "It is in our interest, and we think it is also India's interest to be partnered with us," he said. Landau added that the US would not make the same mistake with India that it did with China "where we let you develop all these markets and then let you beat us with them."

Speaking on the Middle East, Landau said that the region had been unsettled for some time, and much of this could be attributed to Tehran. Stating that the US would not allow Tehran to get nuclear weapons, he called for the international community, including India, to play a positive role in supporting a change in Iran's political landscape.



## India seeks US cover for ME energy cargo

PTI  
NEW DELHI

India is tapping the United States to secure marine cover for vessels ferrying oil from the Middle East as it looks to ensure continuity in energy supplies beyond its current stockpile, a top Oil Ministry official said.

The country has stocks in tanks, pipelines and ships in transit to meet 25 days' requirement of crude oil, and a similar number of days' stock of finished fuel.

The widening war in West Asia has disrupted tanker movement through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow sea lane that carries about one-fifth of the world's oil and large volumes of liquefied natural gas (LNG).

India imports about 88% of its crude oil and around half of its LNG, with 40-50% of crude oil and 50-60% of LNG shipments routed through the corridor.

## Indian-origin social media influencer killed in Canada

PTI  
CHANDIGARH

A 45-year-old social media influencer of Punjabi origin, Nancy Grewal, was stabbed to death in Canada with her mother in Jalandhar on Thursday claiming that she had received death threats.

Nancy was murdered in LaSalle in Ontario on March 3.

On social media, Nancy used to express her opinions on different social and political issues in Punjab. She had

spoken against Khalistanis and even made remarks against pro-Khalistan leader Gurbatwint Singh Pannun.

LaSalle Police Service in a post on social media stated, "Shortly before 9:30 pm on March 3, 2026, emergency services responded to the 2400 block of Todd Lane for a

report of a stabbing. A 45-year-old female was located with injuries. She was transported by Essex-Windsor Emergency Medical Services to the hospital where she later succumbed to her injuries."

Later, LaSalle Police Service identified the victim as Nancy Grewal, adding that it continues to investigate a homicide that occurred on Todd Lane on March 3.

"To ease public concern, we are sharing that investigators are viewing this as an isolated incident," it further said, while urging people for any information and providing video surveillance.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday said the state government is considering a Rs 25,000 birth incentive for couples having a second child or more to boost the falling birth rate.

Addressing the Assembly, Naidu said the government aims to raise the state's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) to 2.1 from

## Separate tender for project expansion: Saini

PTI  
CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Thursday said the necessary expansion of ongoing projects in Haryana will be executed through separate tenders.

The move is aimed at effectively addressing issues related to cost enhancement and budget escalation.

Saini said that often, once a project is underway, its scope is expanded midway.

## Birth incentive for 2nd kid in Andhra

PTI  
AMARAVATI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday said the state government is considering a Rs 25,000 birth incentive for couples having a second child or more to boost the falling birth rate.

Addressing the Assembly, Naidu said the government aims to raise the state's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) to 2.1 from

the current 1.5, which is below the replacement level.

"We are looking at a novel method. We will give Rs 25,000 to parents having a second child or more at the time of delivery itself. This will be a big game-changer. If we can do it, it will be very useful," Naidu said.

Underscoring the importance of population management, the CM noted that several countries are facing challenges due to ageing populations.

## Briefs

JAIPUR  
Courts in Rajasthan get bomb threats

Courts in Jaipur, Bikaner, Jodhpur and Nagaur were evacuated on Thursday after receiving bomb threat emails. Police later said the threats were a hoax as nothing suspicious was found. Police said courts in Bikaner district, the Jodhpur Rural DJ Court, the Jaipur Civil Court, the Nagaur District Court and the Merta DJ Court received threatening emails in the morning. Sadar Police Station officer of Jaipur Brijmohan Kaviya said the email was received at the official address of the Sessions Court. Following the alerts, court premises were evacuated and searches conducted. —Manish Godha

MUMBAI  
DGCA, US FAA ink pact to boost ties

Aviation regulators of India and US, along with aerospace companies, signed a working pact under Bilateral Aviation Safety Agreement (BASA) on Thursday to strengthen cooperation. The pact was signed by India's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), aircraft manufacturer Boeing, and aircraft engine manufacturers GE and Pratt & Whitney. The pact is expected to provide a structured mechanism for resolving aircraft and engine type validation, recognition and acceptance matters in transparent and time-bound manner. —Dhairya Gajara

## MAINTENANCE CASE | Amount to be directly transferred to the woman's bank account

## SC: Employer to deduct man's salary, pay wife

FPJ News Service  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has directed the employer of a man to deduct Rs 25,000 every month from his salary and transfer the amount directly to the bank account of his estranged wife as maintenance for her and their minor daughter.

A bench of Justice JB Pardiwala and Justice KV Viswanathan passed the direction after noting that the husband had failed to comply with earlier court orders and had not paid any maintenance despite living separately from his wife since 2022, Live Law reported.

The Court recorded that the couple has a four-year-old daughter who is being taken care of solely by the mother. It also noted that the husband had neither contributed towards the child's upkeep nor



met the child in the past four years.

Earlier, the Court had referred the parties to mediation and asked them to explore the possibility of arriving at a lump sum settlement for dissolving the marriage. As an interim measure, the husband had been directed to deposit Rs 25,000 towards the travel expenses of the wife and the minor child for attending mediation proceedings.

However, the Court observed that the husband did not comply with that direction either.

The bench was also informed that a magistrate's court had passed an order of

interim maintenance in 2024 and that the husband had accumulated arrears of about Rs 1.38 lakh.

During the hearing, the Court examined the husband's affidavit of financial condition, in which he claimed that he was earning a monthly salary of Rs 50,000 and stated that he was facing financial constraints.

The judges asked the husband whether he was willing to deposit Rs 2.5 lakh, inclusive of the arrears of interim maintenance. The husband declined to make any payment.

"In such circumstances, we are left with no other option but to direct the employer of the respondent-husband that an amount of Rs 25,000 shall be deducted per month from the salary and the said amount shall be transferred by RTGS to the account of his wife," the Court ordered.

## Guarantor not liable if loan limit changed without consent: SC

FPJ News Service  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court recently held that a guarantor cannot be held liable for loan amounts withdrawn by the borrower beyond the sanctioned limit without the guarantor's consent. However, the guarantor would remain liable for the loan amount originally guaranteed.

A bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan set aside the Gujarat High Court's judgment which has ruled that variance in a loan agreement would discharge the surety of entire liability, reported Live Law.

The Court examined the provisions relating to guarantors under Chapter VIII of the Indian Contract Act, particularly Sections 133 and 139.

Section 133 provides that any variance in the terms of the contract between the principal debtor and creditor, made without the surety's consent, discharges the surety only with respect to transac-

tions subsequent to the variance.

In contrast, Section 139 applies when the creditor's act or omission impairs the surety's eventual remedy against the principal debtor.

The Court clarified that under Section 133 of the Indian Contract Act, a surety is not released from their entire obligation due to a contract modification. Instead, the guarantor is discharged only regarding transactions that occur after the unauthorized variance.

The dispute began on October 30, 1993, when M/s Darshak Trading Company obtained a cash-credit facility for Rs 4,00,000 from Appellant-Bhagyalakshmi Co-Operative Bank. Respondent Nos. 1 and 2 executed contracts of guarantee, standing as sureties specifically for this sanctioned loan.

However, the borrower allegedly connived with Appellant-bank officials to withdraw amounts far exceeding the original limit.

## CJI meets Bhutan king, offers to digitalise judicial processes

PTI

NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Thursday met the King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, in Thimphu and offered comprehensive support for technical assistance and development of best practices in the digitisation and digitalisation of judicial processes in the Himalayan nation.

The CJI also met Bhutan's Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay on Wednesday to discuss judicial cooperation,

legal education, technological challenges and bilateral ties between the two countries, officials said.

A Supreme Court press statement said CJI Kant received an audience with the king and both exchanged views to further enhance and strengthen bilateral ties between India and Bhutan.

"They discussed the deep and long-lasting relationship shared by the two countries and expressed a commitment to taking the cooperation forward in the shape of judicial partnerships," the statement said.

## Congress seeks white paper on Punjab finance

Rajesh Moudgil

CHANDIGARH

Punjab Congress on Thursday demanded a White Paper on the state of finances in the state in view of the mounting debt that has crossed the Rs 4 lakh crore "redline" and is projected to reach Rs 4.17 lakh crore by the end of this fiscal. Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring alleged that the current government has borrowed "with wanton greed without caring for the future of the state".



## celebrations

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren along with his family participated in the 'Baha Parv' organised in his ancestral village Nemra



## HC asks auditor for report on Global Ayyappa Sangamam

Kochi: The Kerala High Court on Thursday flagged discrepancies in the accounts related to Global Ayyappa Sangamam and directed the auditor to submit a detailed report in 10 days. The issue came up during the court's examination of alleged financial irregularities of the event. During the hearing, the auditor said that inconsistencies had been detected in the financial statements submitted in connection with the programme. The court asked what corrective steps could be taken and sought a detailed report from the auditor.

## 'Kerala Story 2' PIL: HC raps petitioners

Kochi: The Kerala High Court on Thursday strongly objected to remarks made by petitioners against a Division Bench that had earlier lifted the stay on the release of the film Kerala Story 2: Goes Beyond. A Bench comprising Chief Justice Soumen Sen and Justice Syam Kumar VM took serious exception to certain averments made in a fresh PIL challenging the movie's release. The Bench noted the plea contained submissions questioning the manner in which another Division Bench of Justices SA Dharmadhikari and PV Balakrishnan had earlier lifted the stay on the film's release. "This is inconsequential for deciding the matter. You are casting an aspersion against another coordinate bench. How can you make a statement like this?" Chief Justice Sen asked the petitioners. The court was hearing a PIL filed by KC Chandramohan, a retired social science teacher and activist, along with advocate Mehnaz P Mohammed.

## Justice Dharmadhikari is Chief Justice of Madras High Court

New Delhi: Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal on Thursday announced the appointment of Justice Sushrut Arvind Dharmadhikari as the Chief Justice of the Madras High Court. Meghwal in a post on social media said that the President of India, in exercise of powers under the Constitution and after consultation with the Chief Justice of India, has appointed Justice Dharmadhikari, who was serving as a judge of the Kerala High Court, to head the Madras High Court.

## HC bins PIL in Mamkootathil case

Kochi: The Kerala High Court on Thursday dismissed a PIL seeking directions to the state legislative assembly to consider a representation to drop further proceedings against expelled Congress MLA Rahul Mamkootathil by the ethics panel of the House on a complaint by CPI(M) MLA D K Murali. The bench held that the petition, by an advocate, was not maintainable as the court cannot direct the Speaker of the assembly on how to conduct proceedings in the House.

## From front page

## Modi calls for swift...

"Our growing cooperation is providing new strength to global stability, growth, and shared prosperity," he added.

In his media statement, Modi said the India-Finland relationship in digitalisation and sustainability is being shaped into a strategic partnership that will energise cooperation in many high-technology areas, including AI, 6G telecom, clean energy, and quantum computing.

The two sides also agreed to deepen cooperation in key sectors such as defence, space, semi-conductors, and critical minerals.

"This partnership will accelerate and energise our cooperation in many high-tech areas, from AI to 6G telecom, from clean energy to quantum computing," he said.

Modi said both sides will also deepen partnership in key sectors such as defence, space, semi-conductors, and critical minerals.

"This strategic partnership between democratic and responsible countries like India and Finland will contribute to ensuring trustworthy technology and supply chains for the entire world," he said.

In his remarks, Modi said the India-European Union free trade agreement will help deepen ties between New Delhi and Helsinki.

The Prime Minister also highlighted Finnish telecom giant Nokia's operations in India.

"Nokia's mobile phone and telecom networks have connected millions of Indians. In collaboration with Finnish architects, we built the world's tallest railway bridge over the Chenab river," he said.

"Inspired by such significant examples, we are transforming India-Finland relations into a strategic partnership in digitalisation and sustainability during President Stubb's visit," Modi said.

"Finland is an important partner of India in the Nordic region. Together with Finland, we are also increasing cooperation in Arctic and polar research," he said.

"A healthy planet is our shared priority. We are delighted that this year, together with Finland, we will host the World Circular Economy Forum in India. This will give new momentum and fresh ideas to our sustainability efforts," he said.

Additionally, PM Modi on Thursday spoke to French President Emmanuel Macron over the phone and discussed shared concerns over the evolving situation in West Asia and the need for a return to dialogue and diplomacy.

## Lanka denies docking...

A report by The Guardian said the Iranian vessel had sought permission to dock after the sinking of the frigate, possibly citing technical issues and the need for assistance. However, Sri Lanka appeared reluctant to allow entry into its ports amid the intensifying conflict and the sensitive geopolitical situation in the Indian Ocean.

The Guardian report added that Colombo was attempting to balance humanitarian concerns with diplomatic and security considerations as tensions between Iran and Western powers escalate. The presence of another Iranian vessel near Sri Lanka has added diplomatic sensitivity for the

island nation along a major Indian Ocean shipping route. By denying docking rights while offering humanitarian assistance, Sri Lanka appears to be maintaining a cautious stance aimed at avoiding direct involvement in the conflict while adhering to international maritime norms for aiding sailors in distress.

Meanwhile, Sri Lankan authorities continued recovery operations after the sinking of IRIS Dena, which went down about 40 nautical miles south of the port city of Galle. The frigate was carrying around 180 crew members when it was struck by torpedoes. Rescue teams recovered bodies while dozens of survivors were taken to hospitals in Galle.

## 'Dena guest of Indian...

During port calls or exercise-related events, missiles, torpedoes and other offensive systems remain secured and inactive. Live ammunition is not deployed, and combat-ready status is avoided while the vessel is in port or participating in ceremonial phases of the event. Radar and electronic warfare systems are also typically kept in safe or standby modes unless specifically required for coordinated exercise drills. These measures are meant to prevent accidents and reinforce the diplomatic nature of the gathering.

Once the exercise concludes, participating warships follow a structured departure protocol. Visiting ships normally leave the host country's territorial waters along designated routes agreed upon with the host navy. In many cases, the host navy escorts vessels for part of their outward transit to ensure safe navigation and coordination as the ships disperse toward their home ports or onward missions.

## India denies slur on...

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth confirmed the news in a press briefing, stating, "In the Indian Ocean, an American submarine sunk an Iranian warship that thought it was safe in international waters. Instead, it was sunk by a torpedo—Quiet Death."

Former foreign secretary Kanwal Sibal stated that while he believed India did not host US warships, India did have a moral responsibility to speak up.

"The Iranian ship will not be where it was if we had not invited it to take part in our Milan exercise. We were the hosts. I am told that as per protocol for this exercise ships cannot carry any ammunition. It was defenceless. The Iranian naval personnel had paraded before our president," he said and added, "The US has ignored India's sensitivities, as the ship was in these waters because of India's invitation. We are far from politically or militarily responsible for the US attack. Our 'responsibility' is at a moral and human plane."

Under UNCLOS, India's territorial waters are 12 nautical miles away, whereas the ship was fired at near Sri Lanka, thousands of miles from the Indian coast.

Strategic expert Brahma Chellaney says, "Under the military pacts COMCASA and LEMOA, India and the U.S. share sensitive maritime data. If a U.S. attack submarine used shared data to locate and sink an Iranian frigate that had just departed an Indian port after participating in a multilateral naval exercise, it would represent a foundational breach of the defence partnership." Apart from denying the fact that the US used Indian ports, the

India has not commented on the sinking of the ship, which according to some experts, can constitute a security threat as it brings the realities of the US-Iran war close to its doorstep.

## Misri condoles...

Delegating the Foreign Secretary—a top bureaucrat—for the 2026 signing suggests a more measured approach at a time when the geopolitical context is particularly sensitive.

In naval diplomacy warships attending multinational exercises hosted by the Indian Navy follow strict non-combat protocols during their participation. These rules are designed to ensure that visiting vessels are engaged in cooperative activities rather than operational deployments.

During port calls or exercise-related events, missiles, torpedoes and other offensive systems remain secured and inactive. Live ammunition is not deployed, and combat-ready status is avoided while the vessel is in port or participating in ceremonial phases of the event. Radar and electronic warfare systems are also typically kept in safe or standby modes unless specifically required for coordinated exercise drills. These measures are meant to prevent accidents and reinforce the diplomatic nature of the gathering.

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Naval exercises such as MILAN, held in Visakhapatnam, bring together dozens of navies for training, confidence-building and maritime cooperation.

## 39°C: Mumbai sizzles

At the Santacruz observatory, the maximum temperature touched 38.9°C — a sharp 5.9°C above normal. The minimum stood at 22°C, exceeding the seasonal average by 2.1°C. At Colaba, the maximum reached 36.2°C, or 3.4°C above normal, while the minimum was recorded at 24°C, about 2°C above normal.

The 48-hour forecast for Mumbai city and suburbs projects maximum temperatures around 36°C and minimums near 23°C. Skies are expected to remain largely clear, with hot and humid conditions persisting through the period.

IMD Mumbai scientist Sushma Nair explained the declaration criteria: "For coastal regions, a heatwave is declared when the maximum temperature exceeds 37°C for more than a day and the departure from normal is above 4.5°C. Those conditions were met by Thursday morning, so a heatwave was formally declared in the 11:30 am weather bulletin for Mumbai and the MMR."

Looking ahead, Nair said some relief is on the way. "A Yellow Alert for hot and humid conditions has been issued for Friday. By the weekend, the mercury should dip slightly compared with Thursday, though temperatures will remain above normal," she added.

## Maha set to grow...

On the investment front, Maharashtra continues to dominate, attracting 31% of India's total foreign

direct investment inflows. The state is also home to roughly 17% of all Indian startups and hosts 63.85 lakh registered MSMEs employing over 2.52 crore people.

Infrastructure milestones defined the year. The Mumbai-Nagpur Samruddhi Mahamarg became fully operational in June 2025, while Mumbai Metro Line-3 opened its complete corridor in October, now ferrying over 78,000 passengers daily. Flight operations began at Navi Mumbai International Airport in December 2025. Maharashtra's total road network reached 3.45 lakh kilometres, and the state ranked first nationally in foreign tourist arrivals in 2024.

The fiscal deficit is projected to be held at a prudent 2.7% of GDP, with total revenue receipts budgeted at Rs 5,60,964 crore for the year.

## With Shah by his side...

Shah also shared images of Nitish Kumar filing his Rajya Sabha nomination while he stood by his side on his X account.

The BJP leader said, "Your extensive experience in public service and deep understanding of policy-making will make the Rajya Sabha proceedings even more effective. Your esteemed presence will further strengthen the NDA's resolve of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas.'"

Nitish filed his Rajya Sabha nomination on Thursday along with BJP president Nitin Nabin, former Agiaon MLA and BJP leader Shivesh Kumar, Union Minister Ram Nath Thakur and RLM leader Upendra Kushwaha.

Nitish has served as chief minister for a record 10 terms since 2005, barring a few months when Jitan Ram Manjhi was appointed to the top post after JD(U)'s dismal performance in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections.

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav alleged that the BJP implemented a "Maharashtra model" in Bihar by sending Nitish to the Rajya Sabha. He claimed the BJP had "hijacked" Nitish Kumar and that the party never intended to let him remain chief minister after the election, despite promises made otherwise.

"The move is a betrayal of the people's mandate," he claimed, comparing it with the political shifts in Maharashtra where election alliances changed after the results.

"Nitish Kumar was made to mount the horse like a groom, but the wedding vows were taken with someone else," he added.

He also accused the BJP of weakening regional allies across states, saying similar actions were taken in Maharashtra.

## Bose out, Ravi in...

Bose, who assumed office on November 17, 2022, did not clarify whether any political pressure played a role in his decision, leaving room for speculation in political circles.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee reacted sharply to the development, saying she was "shocked and deeply concerned" by the abrupt resignation. She confirmed that Tamil Nadu Governor and former deputy National Security Advisor R.N. Ravi will hold additional charge of West Bengal following Bose's exit.

"I have learnt from Union Home Minister Amit Shah that R.N. Ravi will replace C.V. Ananda Bose as Bengal governor," Banerjee said in a post on social media.

The chief minister hinted that the resignation may not have been entirely voluntary and alleged that Bose could have been pressured to step down ahead of the elections.

"The reasons behind his resignation are not known to me at this moment. However, given the prevailing circumstances, I would not be surprised if the Governor has been subjected to some pressure from the Union Home Minister to serve certain political interests on the eve of the forthcoming state assembly elections," she said.

Banerjee also criticised the Centre for not consulting her on the appointment of Ravi, calling it a violation of established conventions and an erosion of India's federal structure.

## India sent 2 ships to...

INS Tarangini, which was operating in the vicinity, was deployed to aid the rescue efforts and arrived in the search area by 4 pm, it said. "By this time, search and rescue operations had been undertaken by the Sri Lankan Navy and other agencies," it said. The Indian Navy said a distress call from IRIS Dena was received at the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) Colombo in the early hours of Wednesday, as reported by the Sri Lankan Navy.

It said the Iranian ship was operating 20 nautical miles west of Galle in an area under Sri Lanka's responsibility.

"On receiving the information, the Indian Navy promptly launched its SAR efforts, commencing with a long-range maritime patrol aircraft at 1000 hours, to augment the search efforts led by Sri Lanka," the Navy said.

It said another Indian naval ship, INS Ikshak, also sailed from Kochi to augment the search efforts and remains in the area to search for missing personnel.

"Coordination with the Sri Lankan side on search and rescue efforts is ongoing," the Navy said.

## 'Won'khede: India...

The duo provided some resistance for England and Bethell especially gave them a sniff with his 48-ball 105 that was studded with eight fours and seven sixes, but the mountain was too steep to climb for the Harry Brook-led side as India booked their ticket to Ahmedabad for the summit clash against New Zealand.

However, the day truly belonged to the current sensation in Indian cricket, Samson.

The perennial also-ran of Indian cricket had turned his career on its head at the Eden Gardens last Sunday when he smashed a masterful 97 off 50 balls to consign the West Indies to defeat in their last Super Eight game but on Thursday when the stakes were even higher, he rose to the occasion like a man possessed holding the nation in his wake.

In the process of blasting 89 off 40 balls, Samson broke the back of England's bowling challenge and put India on their way to a herculean total of 253/7 in 20 overs.

The seven magnificent sixes that he struck took him past Wankhede's favourite man Rohit Sharma, who was in attendance, for the most number of sixes hit in a single T20 World Cup.

Samson's 16 sixes in this edition so far saw him go ahead of Rohit's 15 from the 2024 T20 World Cup.

IN SHORT >>

Lairai zatra: Crucial meet on March 15

PANAJI: The Lairai Devasthan Committee has summoned all dhond devotees to an important gathering on March 15 at 3:30 pm at the temple hall in Shirgao.

Candolim health centre on fast track

MAPUSA: The long-pending construction of the new Primary Health Centre at Candolim may finally get the push it has long awaited.

8 food units shut in FDA crackdown

MAPUSA: Eight food business establishments were asked to suspend operations over licence irregularities and unhygienic conditions.

All eyes on Assembly, CM to present budget today

OPPOSITION LIKELY TO TRAIN GUNS ON SECTION 39A

THE GOAN | NETWORK

PANAJI The budget session of the Goa Legislative Assembly opens Friday with Chief Minister Pramod Sawant slated to present the State budget for 2026-27.



But although the treasury benches dominate the House in numbers, the Opposition's aggressive campaign against Section 39A of the Town and Country Planning (TCP) Act is expected to set the narrative.

Recent street protests have already built momentum which could carry the fight into the House with section 39A having become the lightning rod.

The clause gives sweeping powers to the TCP to alter land use and building permissions. Opposition which had been building up across the State climaxed with the agitation launched by St Andre MLA Viresh Borkar swelling into a State-level crisis forcing the government to concede ground.

As damage-control, the government has now appointed a three-member committee

of bureaucrats led by Revenue Secretary, Sandip Jacques, IAS, to probe and submit a report on lapses which led to the escalation of the stir into a "unlawful protest" at the residence of TCP Minister Vishwajit Rane.

The Opposition had seized the issue holding rallies and giving legs to the in recent weeks, and the Assembly session is now its next battleground.

Inside the House, fireworks are expected with the Opposition benches expected to punch way above the weight of their seven-member strength to press for the withdrawal of Section 39A.

Leaders said, they plan to corner the government on transparency, accountability,

Oppn moves private Bills on land protection, rivers, jobs for locals

PANAJI: In a concerted legislative push ahead of the Assembly session commencing Friday, Opposition MLAs have moved a series of private member Bills in the Goa Legislative Assembly seeking stronger safeguards for agricultural lands, protection of rivers and reservation of jobs for locals, among other measures.

Leader of Opposition Yuri Alemao, GFP chief Vijai Sardesai and AAP MLA Venzy Viegas have independently moved the Goa Protection of Agricultural Lands Bill, 2026, which was handed over to them by retired Justice Ferdino Rebello, who has launched a movement titled "Enough is Enough".

and the alleged nexus with developers.

The ruling side is likely to defend the clause as reform, but the clash could overshadow the budget in an election year where routine allocations for infrastructure, health, education, and tourism may struggle to find space in the headlines.

For Sawant, the challenge is twofold: He must present a populist budget that also signals stability and growth

while at the same time, he must defend a law that has triggered an agitation which is gaining traction on Goa's streets.

For the Opposition, the strategy is clear: keep Section 39A at the centre, and make it the symbol of government excess.

The budget may be tabled on Friday but the battle over Section 39A is expected to decide the tone -- in the House and beyond.

Panel to study concerns of taximen on app policy

To submit report within eight days

THE GOAN | NETWORK

PANAJI As the Goa government began consultations with taxi operators on the proposed digital taxi policy, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Thursday directed constituting a committee to examine suggestions and concerns raised by stakeholders.

The decision followed a meeting chaired by Sawant at the Mantralaya and attended by representatives of 35 taxi associations along with ruling and Opposition MLAs. The proposed policy seeks to bring taxi operators onto a common digital platform with uniform fares while ensuring safety, transparency and convenience for tourists.

"We have requested a step-by-step approach over the next eight days regarding existing digital platforms and establishing proper uniform minimum rates along with safety, security, and transparency for tourists. A committee has been constituted to study the issues raised by taxi operators," the CM told reporters after the meeting.

Scrap existing app-based services before digital shift, say taximen

PANAJI: Taxi operators adopted a cautious stance, stating that the government should first scrap existing app-based services like Goa Miles and Goa Taxi App before expecting traditional taxi operators to participate in the new digital platform.

All Goa Taxi Association President Chetan Kamat said operators were not opposed to digitisation but wanted fares to be standardised and clearly displayed.

"The government suggested bringing all taxis onto a single platform, but we demand that apps like Goa Miles be scrapped first. We want one uniform taxi rate across Goa and destination-to-destination fares that are digitally available to passengers," he said.

Kamat added that taxi operators would submit their suggestions in writing to the committee once consultations begin.

The four-member panel, constituted under the Transport Department, will gather feedback from taxi associations, examine the concerns and submit a report before a follow-up meeting.

Tourism and IT Minister Rohan Khaunte, who was also present at the meeting, said the government had explained the need for technological integration in the taxi sector while assuring operators that their earlier concerns had been considered.

"The taxi meeting has taken place and we presented the details. We explained that adopting technology is a must. We understood the issues raised during the previous meeting and introduced a plan to bring in a digital platform," he said.

"Our effort is to bring tourism stakeholders and all taxis onto one platform with a uniform rate while providing them support. Their views have been taken into consideration," Khaunte said.

Cavelossim locals flag manpower crunch at Colva police station

Demand full-time PI and staff in jurisdiction

THE GOAN | NETWORK

MARGAO After the uproar at the police station over the police presence at the Colva Church a month ago, the Colva police station is back in the news -- this time for lack of dedicated officers and manpower for policing.

This time round, Cavellossim villagers led by Sarpanch Dixon Vaz has demanded that the government strengthen the Colva police station, having jurisdiction over Salcete's entire beach belt, with full-time police inspector and personnel.

They pointed out that the Colva police station is presently headed by a police officer, holding charge of two police stations. The Cavellossim Sarpanch wondered whether a police officer holding additional charge of Colva can do justice to the job when the police station is in need of a full-fledged officer.

Cunclom police station in-



Cavellossim villagers led by Sarpanch Dixon Vaz demanding manpower and vehicles for the Colva police station.

charge, PI Diego Gracias is presently holding additional charge of Colva police station after the then Colva PI Vikram Naik was transferred to the district police headquarter after last month's uproar. The Cavellossim Sarpanch, however, said the government cannot expect smooth running of a police station, especially a police station having jurisdiction over a tourist belt, with an officer holding additional charge," Dixon said.

He urged the government to strengthen the Mobar police

outpost with men and machinery for its smooth functioning. "On any given time, the Mobar outpost is manned by one or two police personnel. The outpost is grossly understaffed and has no machinery, including vehicles. Yesterday, when I called up the police outpost with a plea to initiate action against illegal parking on the Cavellossim-Assolna bridge, they replied back saying the outpost has no personnel and vehicle to take action on the traffic violators," Dixon added.

Vijai gathers public inputs for Budget session

THE GOAN | NETWORK

PANAJI On the eve of the Goa Legislative Assembly's budget session beginning Friday, Goa Forward Party chief and legislator Vijai Sardesai has said public participation has been overwhelming and claimed he had got 2,193 public suggestions and grievances.

Addressing a press conference in Panaji on Thursday, Sardesai declared that he is determined to raise these issues effectively in the House even as he pointed out that legislators have already submitted 42 starred questions and 210 unstarred questions.

In addition, 14 Zero Hour matters and 14 calling-attention notices have been tabled, he said, adding that four private member bills and three resolutions are also lined up.

Commenting on the current political and social climate, Sardesai launched a sharp attack on the government while dwelling on the wave of protests and public anger across Goa.

GF-backed Margao councillor faces disqualification over caste row

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE INVALIDATES OBC CERTIFICATE; DMA SAYS POOJA NAIK CEASES TO HOLD OFFICE; MOVE CHALLENGED IN COURT

THE GOAN | NETWORK

MARGAO In a significant development, the Scrutiny Committee for the verification of caste certificates has set aside the Other Backward Community (OBC) Caste certificate issued to Goa Forward party-backed Margao Municipal councillor Pooja Naik, holding her OBC caste certificate as invalid.

Based on the Scrutiny Committee's decision, the Director of Municipal Administration, Brijesh Manerker has written a letter to councillor Pooja Naik, saying that she ceases to be the Councillor of Ward No 4 of the Margao Municipal Council.

Pooja Naik, however, informed that the decision to disqualify her from the membership of the Margao Municipal Council has been challenged in the court of law.



File photo of Margao Municipal councillor Pooja Naik seen with Goa Forward chief Vijai Sardesai.

BJP Fatorda Mandal welcoming the decision to disqualify Pooja Naik from the membership of the Margao Municipal Council. Santosh Mirajkar

The DMA's decision has given an armament to the Fatorda BJP Mandal and party leaders to make capital out of the emerging situation and fire some shots at the rival Goa Forward Party.

Party leaders led by mandal President Shweta Lotlikar, general secretary Dilip Naik, and BJP-backed councillors, Sadanand Naik, Milagrina

Gomes, Camilo Barretto and others said the Goa Forward Party-backed councillor had done injustice to the OBCs by falsely claiming that she belonged to the OBC Bhandari caste.

While condemning the Goa Forward-backed councillor for contesting the election with an OBC certificate, the BJP leaders said they will take the issue not only across

Fatorda, but across the State to expose how injustice was done to the OBC community. "Reservation for the OBCs, STs and SCs have been provided by the Constitution by the Father of Indian Constitution Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. By producing a bogus caste certificate, they have insulted Dr Ambedkar and the OBC communities," asserted Dilip Naik.

Govt moves to shield 15 heritage sites

THE GOAN | NETWORK

PANAJI The Goa government has identified 15 ancient monuments, archaeological sites and remains across the State for protection under the Goa Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1978.

A notification issued by the Department of Archaeology has invited objections and suggestions from the public before the sites are declared protected monuments or protected areas. The notification grants citizens and stakeholders two months to submit their views on the proposal.

Among the sites proposed for protection are the Malar Cave in Malar village of Tiswadi taluka, Haat Katro Khambo in Old Goa, and a cave located at Sirdona. The list also includes

THE 15 SITES MARKED FOR PROTECTION

- Malar Cave (Malar, Tiswadi)
- Haat Katro Khambo (Old Goa)
- Sirdona Cave
- Convent of Our Lady of Mount Carmel ruins (Chimbel)
- Gopakpatnam Port remains (Goa Velha)
- Jacquem Cave (Neturlim, Sanguem)
- Bawlyache Mol (Pirla, Quepem)
- Pandurang Math & Mukhyapran (Maruti) Math (Balli)
- Temple remains (Sasore Khaddem, Cordem)
- Tamsuli Cave (Candola)
- Mardangad Fort (Queuela, Ponda)
- Surya Temple ruins (Kudnem)
- Thadgi memorials (Kudnem)
- Rock-cut tank (Dabolim)
- Shree Damodar Temple tank (Fatorda, Margao)

the ruins of the Convent of Our Lady of Mount Carmel at Chimbel, which is believed to hold historical importance.

Other sites identified for protection include the remains of the Gopakpatnam Port at Goa Velha, Jacquem Cave at Neturlim in Sanguem taluka, Bawlyache Mol at Pirla in Quepem, and Pandurang Math

and Mukhyapran (Maruti) Math at Balli.

The notification further proposes protection for the remains of a temple at Sasore Khaddem in Cordem, Tamsuli Cave in Candola, and the historic Mardangad Fort at Queuela in Ponda taluka.

In addition, the list includes the ruins of the Surya Temple

at Kudnem, Thadgi memorials at Kudnem, a rock-cut tank at Dabolim, and the Shree Damodar Temple tank at Fatorda in Margao. Officials said the monuments and archaeological sites fall under different ownership categories, including private lands, government lands and areas under the Forest Department.

3-member panel to probe protest outside TCP minister's house

THE GOAN | NETWORK

PANAJI The State government has constituted a three-member fact-finding committee to investigate the circumstances that led to the unlawful gathering outside the residence of TCP Minister Vishwajit Rane on February 24.

The committee will be headed by Revenue Secretary IAS Sandip Jacques and will include South Goa Collector IAS Eгна Cleetus as a member and IPS officer Tikam Singh Verma as Member Secretary.

The committee has been tasked with examining the causes and possible lapses that led to the gathering outside the minister's residence.

Govt to study social media impact on children under 16, forms panel

THE GOAN | NETWORK

PANAJI The State government has constituted a committee to examine the growing influence of social media on children under 16 and explore possible restrictions.

The first meeting was held today at the Directorate of Information Technology, with participation from government officials, industry representatives, and academic experts.

Speaking after the meeting, IT Minister Rohan Khaunte said that although social media regulation is a central subject, Goa needs to study the issue carefully, taking into account parental concerns, psychological risks, and social and cybersecurity

threats. "The focus is not on educational tools but on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, where complaints about harmful influence are rising," he said.

The minister explained that while children should be encouraged to embrace technology, it is crucial to ensure they are not exposed to content detrimental to their growth. "Children under 16 are just completing their 10th standard. Education up to this stage is important to strengthen their foundation.

While giving them access to AI and educational tools, we must also restrict usage of social media platforms like Instagram, reels, and other non-educational content," he said.

Khaunte said participants shared inputs on potential measures, which the committee will consolidate to create a comprehensive framework. A follow-up meeting is scheduled in a month to review progress and refine recommendations.

He added that once the process is complete, the final report will be submitted through Chief Minister Pramod Sawant to Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, who will then take it to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"The aim is a balanced approach," Khaunte said, adding, "We want children to embrace technology responsibly while addressing social, psychological, and security risks linked to unrestricted social media access."

Briefs

MAHESANA

**SMC seizes liquor worth ₹75.86 lakh in prohibition raid**

In a major prohibition raid, the State Monitoring Cell (SMC) seized Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) worth ₹75.86 lakh from a container on the Sanaand-Kadi road near Shedfa village in Kadi taluka of Mahesana district. Two persons have been arrested in connection with the case, while five others have been declared wanted. According to officials, the raid was carried out on March 5 under the Prohibition Act sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023. A total of IMFL bottles worth ₹75,86,800 were recovered during the operation.

GANDHINAGAR

**472 candidates selected in final results for Unarmed PSI recruitment**

The Gujarat Police Recruitment Board has announced the final results of the recruitment process for the post of Unarmed Police Sub-Inspector (PSI). The recruitment drive was conducted for a total of 472 vacancies under advertisement number GPRB/202324/1. According to the final result, 472 candidates have been selected, while 95 candidates have been placed on the waiting list. More than 4.6 lakh candidates participated in the first phase of the recruitment process for the Unarmed PSI posts. The written examination was held on April 13, 2025, in which 1,02,935 candidates appeared. Following the examination, the results of 49,269 qualified candidates were declared.

AHMEDABAD

**Maximum temperatures soars in Gujarat**

Gujarat is witnessing unusually high temperatures even in the first week of March, with several cities recording maximum temperatures close to 39°C, well above the seasonal average. According to the India Meteorological Department's weather report released at 8:30 am today, many parts of the state recorded temperatures 3°C to 5.6°C above normal on March 4, indicating an early rise in heat levels. Rajkot recorded the highest maximum temperature in the state at 39.2°C, which was 5.4°C above normal. It was followed by Deesa at 38.8°C (5.6°C above normal) and Ahmedabad at 38.6°C (4.8°C above normal). Other cities also reported high temperatures, including Amreli (38.3°C), Vadodara (38.0°C), Gandhinagar (38.0°C), Surat (37.9°C).

AHMEDABAD

**Eatery sealed after lizard found in food**

The Food Department of the Amdavad Municipal Corporation (AMC) has sealed a food outlet on C.G. Road in Navrangpura after a customer allegedly found a dead lizard in a food item served by the establishment to an official press note issued by the AMC, the action was taken after a complainant informed the civic body at around 12:30 pm today, stating that a dead lizard was found in a dish of chanapuri ordered from Wah Pizza & Bhel House, located at Municipal Market, C.G. Road, Navrangpura. Acting on the complaint, a Food Safety Officer (FSO) from the AMC's Health Department inspected the food unit under the provisions of the FSSAI and GPMC Acts.

**DHULETI TURNS TRAGIC | At least 31 people died in drowning incidents across Gujarat during Dhuleti celebrations, with cases reported from Surat, Vadodara, Ahmedabad and other districts**

31 dead in drowning incidents across state on Dhuleti festival

FPJ News Service AHMEDABAD

What began as a day of colour and celebration turned into a heartbreaking tragedy across Gujarat on Wednesday as at least 31 people lost their lives in drowning incidents during Dhuleti festivities. Several others were injured while three people remain missing as rescue teams continue search operations in rivers, canals and lakes across multiple districts.

Authorities said the accidents occurred when people went to bathe after playing with colours, often entering deep water bodies without realising the danger.

"Teams of fire brigade personnel and local swimmers were deployed immediately after receiving alerts. Unfortunately, many victims could not be saved," an official involved in rescue operations said.

In Surat, two youths died in separate drowning incidents in

the Tapi River while the search for another youth continues. One victim, identified as 19-year-old Jaideep, drowned near Sarthana Nature Park while bathing with friends. Another unidentified youth was found dead near the Mota Varachha area.

In Vadodara, three youths drowned in separate incidents linked to the Narmada Canal and the Mahisagar River. The body of Ashish Verma was recovered, while search operations for Ajay Sharma and another unidentified person continued late into the night.

Tragedy also struck several other districts. Five people died in Mahisagar district, including two brothers. Four deaths each were reported in Ahmedabad and Bardoli in Surat district, while three deaths each occurred in Mangrol and Mandal.

Two cousins studying in primary school drowned in a village pond in Malpur of Aravalli district after going to wash off colours. Similarly,



two youths died while bathing in the Mazum River in Dhansura.

In Mandal taluka of Ahmedabad district, three children aged around nine drowned in Jholasar lake after celebrating Dhuleti.

Other fatal incidents were reported in Mehsana district, where two youths drowned in the Sujalam Suflam canal near Motidau village. In Kadi, a 35-year-old man died after drowning in a minor canal during festivities.

Another youth drowned in the Shetrunji River in Amreli district, while four youths lost their lives in the Sabarmati River after entering

the water to bathe following celebrations.

For many families, the festival that began with joy ended in unimaginable grief.

"Children who were celebrating the festival in the morning were gone by evening. It is heartbreaking for the entire village," a local resident from one of the affected areas said.

Rescue teams continue search operations in multiple locations for the missing individuals as authorities review safety measures to prevent such tragedies in the future.

Vadodara woman constable dies by suicide while preparing for PSI exam

FPJ News Service VADODARA

A tragic incident has shaken the police fraternity in Vadodara after a 27-year-old woman constable allegedly died by suicide at her residence late Tuesday night. The deceased, identified as Priyanka Prajapati, was posted at Kapurai Police Station and had recently cleared the running test for the Police Sub-Inspector (PSI) recruitment exam.

According to police officials, Priyanka Prajapati was found hanging from a ceiling fan at her house near Ajwa Road in the Navjivan area on the night of March 4. The incident falls under the jurisdiction of Bapod Police Station. The exact reason behind the suicide remains



unclear, and police have begun an investigation.

Priyanka, originally from Banaskantha district, had been serving in the Gujarat Police for nearly two years. She was reportedly on leave for the past 10 days as she was intensively preparing for the written examination of the PSI recruitment process.

The shocking discovery was made when a colleague visited her residence around 11-11:30 pm to deliver study material for the upcoming PSI exam. After repeatedly knocking on the door and receiving no response, the colleague grew suspicious and

eventually forced entry into the house.

Inside, Priyanka was found hanging from the ceiling fan with the help of a scarf.

Police officials were immediately informed, and a team rushed to the spot to begin the initial investigation.

Inspector M.K. Gurjar of Bapod Police Station confirmed the details of the case. "The deceased has been identified as Priyankaben Rameshbhai Prajapati. She had been working as a constable at Kapurai Police Station for the last two years. She was living alone in the Navjivan area and had taken leave to prepare for the PSI examination," Gurjar said.

He further added that since the house was locked from inside, police had to access the room from the upper side before discovering her body.

Tribal youth from Naxal-affected areas visited SGCCI

FPJ News Service SURAT

More than 250 youth from Naxal-affected areas of Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh recently visited the Southern Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SGCCI) under the Youth Development Programme of the Government of India. With the guidance and support of the CRPF, Surat Police and officers associated with the programme, these youth came to Surat on a six-day study visit.

Many of these youth had experienced travelling in second class in a train for the first time in their lives. Most of the youth had never travelled in an airplane and some were sitting in a car for the first time. They had to walk for many kilometres during their school life to further their education, so



their experience of comforts in life has been very limited.

During their visit to the SGCCI, they were amazed to see the modern facilities of the Chamber, the air-conditioned arrangements available in the exhibition centre and the seminar hall. It was their first experience of what an 'exhibition' is and how such programmes are organized. They were also very impressed by the cleanliness, orderliness and development of Surat city.

In response to a question

about Naxalism, some youth said that their elders had had a direct experience of Naxalism and they also remember it to some extent. However, the situation is improving rapidly now and now they too are optimistic that they will be able to move forward in life through education and hard work.

The visit to Surat and the interaction with the people here instilled new hope and inspiration towards life in the minds of the youth.

Gujarat adds 150 medicines to free drug list, total now 1,479

FPJ News Service GANDHINAGAR

The Gujarat government has expanded its Essential Drug List (EDL) for 2025-26 by adding 150 new medicines to strengthen free treatment services across public hospitals and health centres in the state.

Announcing the update, Health Minister Praful Pansheriya said the revised list now includes 1,479 essential medicines, surgical items and diagnostic supplies that will be distributed free of cost through the state's public healthcare network. In comparison, the list contained 1,386 medicines in 2024-25.

The revision was carried out by Gujarat Medical Services Corporation Limited (GMSCL) after reviewing medicines currently used in government hospitals. As part of the exercise, 150 new medicines were added, while 57 medicines considered unnecessary were removed from the list.

According to the minister, medicines included in the Essential Drug List are supplied across all levels of government healthcare facilities — from primary health centres in rural and urban areas to district hospitals and medical college hospitals.

"Our priority is to ensure the best possible treatment and quality medicines for every patient in the state," Pansheriya said. He added that under the leadership of Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, the government is committed to ensuring quality healthcare services reach even the last person.

The updated list includes 378 medicines for primary healthcare and 628 medicines for secondary-level treatment, while a larger range of drugs is available at tertiary care hospitals where specialised treatment is provided.

Interstate burglar behind 100 thefts arrested

FPJ News Service SURAT

In a major breakthrough, the Surat Rural Police have arrested an interstate burglar who allegedly committed more than 100 thefts across four states. The accused, identified as Jimmy alias Deepak Sharma, was nabbed by the Local Crime Branch (LCB) after weeks of surveillance and investigation.

Police said the arrest has helped crack at least 24 burglary cases reported in the Surat rural region, bringing relief to residents who had been troubled by a surge in daytime housebreakings.

According to officials, the accused confessed during interrogation that he had carried out over 100 burglaries in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Haryana.

The crimes in Surat district were reported mainly from areas such as Bardoli, Mandvi, Olpad and Kosamba, where jewellery and cash worth lakhs were stolen from locked houses during the daytime.

To crack the case, Range IG Premveer Singh and Surat Rural SP Rajesh Gadhia formed six dedicated teams comprising officers from the LCB and the Parole Furlough Squad.



Investigators noticed a common pattern in CCTV footage from several crime scenes. A man wearing a helmet would ride through residential societies on a motorcycle, conducting reconnaissance before targeting locked houses.

Using technical surveillance and human intelligence, police identified the suspect as Jimmy alias Deepak Sharma, a known criminal from Nandurbar.

However, the accused frequently changed his location to evade arrest, making it difficult for police to track him.

The breakthrough came when the LCB received specific intelligence that Jimmy would be passing through the Joka-Vav road in Kamrej.

Police quickly set up a film-style blockade and intercepted the suspect while he was travelling on his motorcycle. Burglary tools and cash were recovered from his possession.

During the investigation, police seized stolen valuables worth ₹15.55 lakh, including gold bars, gold coins and ₹1.5 lakh in cash.

During interrogation, the accused admitted that he sold stolen jewellery in markets in Delhi and Goa.

Police said he used a sophisticated method to avoid suspicion. "He wore good clothes and a helmet while surveying areas so that residents would not suspect him. He also removed his bike's number plate before committing theft and reattached it afterward," an investigating officer said.

Authorities also revealed that the accused spent large portions of the stolen money gambling in Goa casinos.

Jewellery industry bodies oppose NGJCI voting reform, say small traders being sidelined

FPJ News Service AHMEDABAD

A major controversy has erupted in India's gems and jewellery sector after industry associations raised strong objections to the proposed membership and voting structure of the National Gem and Jewellery Council of India (NGJCI). Several groups representing small traders and artisans say the new system risks concentrating power in the hands of a few large businesses while sidelining thousands of small and medium players.

The council, established with the support of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to promote the domestic gems and jewellery sector, is now facing criticism from within the industry over what many de-



scribe as an "unfair and exclusionary" voting model.

According to the proposed framework, individual voting rights in the council will be granted only to retailers operating at least 15 outlets and manufacturers employing 75 or more workers in their own factories.

Industry bodies argue that such eligibility criteria effectively exclude the majority of small and medium-sized jewellers, who form the backbone of the country's jewellery trade.

"This system marginalises thousands of small traders who have been the foundation of the

Indian jewellery industry for decades," said representatives from the Bharatbhai Soni Hand Made Jewellery Goldsmiths Association.

They warned that the policy could weaken the representation of regional associations that traditionally voice the concerns of local jewellers.

Industry leaders fear that if large organisations are given direct voting rights while smaller players are excluded, decision-making authority within the council could become concentrated among a handful of major companies.

"This may lead to a situation where only a few big players control the policy direction of the council," a senior member of the association said. "The collective voice of regional and grassroots associations will become weaker."

Pravin Masalewale launches Suhana Noor range inspired by Mughal kitchens

FPJ News Service AHMEDABAD

Pravin Masalewale, one of India's fastest-growing spices and food solutions companies, has expanded its portfolio with the launch of Suhana Noor, a new range of blended spices developed to recreate the authentic flavors of traditional Mughlai cuisine for home cooking.

Indian cuisine is an eclectic mix influenced by various inspirations over its 8000+ years history. The country's culinary heritage stems from age old civilizations, influenced in latter years by Western Asian & Persian culture, followed by Mughal and British influences. Over years, Mughlai cuisine has become an integral part of Indian food — be it in the form



of Kormas & Curries, Tikkas & Kebabs, or the varied forms of the much-loved Biryani.

The core of the Mughlai cuisine lies in its processes involving slow cooking to bring out the flavors of the food and the layered gravies. Most important however are the mix of spices used that integral to bringing alive the authentic taste of the various dishes.

Suhana Noor endeavors to present to consumers a range of spices that help them make the most popular dishes of the Mughlai cuisine at home while

retaining the authentic taste experience of these dishes.

The range has been introduced to cater to consumers who enjoy preparing and eating Mughlai dishes but seek a more authentic taste experience than other spices currently available in the market. Suhana Noor offers a range of specialist offerings that recreate classic recipes from the Mughal kitchens.

The range includes dedicated blends for biryanis, gravies and starters, such as Shahi Biryani Masala, Bombay Biryani Masala, Sindhi Biryani Masala, Chicken Korma Masala, Mutton Korma Masala, Karahi Masala, Achar Gosht Masala, Dalcha/ Dal Gosht Masala, Nihari Masala, Shami Kebab Masala and Seekh Kebab Masala.

Gujarat CM launches Shalini Agrawal's book on climate-resilient cities

FPJ News Service GANDHINAGAR

In a significant step toward promoting sustainable urban development, Bhupendra Patel, Chief Minister of Gujarat, on Thursday unveiled a new book titled "Shaping Tomorrow's Cities - From Climate Risk to Green Opportunities" written by senior bureaucrat Shalini Agrawal in Gandhinagar.

Agrawal, who previously served as the Municipal Commissioner of Surat and currently holds the position of Managing Director at Gujarat Urja Vikas Nigam Limited (GUVNL), has drawn on her administrative experience to present a vision for future-ready cities capable of tackling climate challenges

while unlocking new development opportunities.

Speaking at the launch event, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel emphasised that India's rapidly growing urban population requires innovative and sustainable planning.

"Cities are the engines of economic growth, but they must also become leaders in climate resilience and sustainability. Books like this provide valuable insights into how urban centres can transform challenges into opportunities," Patel said.

The book explores how urbanisation, often perceived as a problem, can instead become a powerful driver of solutions when supported by proper planning, technology and policy frameworks.

In her book, Shalini Agrawal highlights the urgent need for proactive policies to manage the environmental and social pressures created by rapid urbanisation.

"Urbanisation is inevitable, but the way we manage it will define the future of our cities. If planned well, cities can become hubs of innovation, sustainability and inclusive growth," Agrawal said during the event.

The book examines how rising energy demand, increasing resource consumption and greenhouse gas emissions linked to urban expansion are contributing to climate risks. It also proposes practical strategies for developing climate-resilient infrastructure and greener urban ecosystems.



According to the book, urbanisation in India is expected to accelerate significantly by 2047, making cities central to economic growth and national development. However, this expansion will also put pressure on housing, water supply, infrastructure and basic civic services.

Agrawal argues that strengthening urban governance

and improving city planning will be essential to address these challenges effectively.

The publication also explores innovative financing mechanisms for sustainable development projects. These include green bonds, climate finance, public-private partnerships and carbon markets that can help cities invest in resilient infrastructure.

Free mountaineering training camp announced in Mount Abu

FPJ News Service GANDHINAGAR

The state government has organized a free mountaineering training camp for children, young entrepreneurs and youth who are fond of adventurous activities like climbing the peaks of various mountains in the state.

The government has organised a free mountaineering course under the Youth Services and Cultural Activities Department at the Swami Vivekananda Mountaineering Training Institute in Mount Abu. The selected candidates will not have to bear any expenses for accommodation, food and training. In addition, ST bus or railway second class fare will also be available for commuting from their hometown to the training institute.

In addition, the adventure course under the mountaineering training camp will be held from 09 to 15 May, 2026. In which boys and girls aged 8 to 13 years will be able to participate. In addition, the Advanced Rock Climbing Course will be held from 18th May to 01st June, 2026.

Candidates aged 15 to 45 years who wish to participate in this course should have passed the Basic Rock Climbing Course with A or B grade at the above institute and its sub-centres. In addition, candidates wishing to participate in the Coaching Rock Climbing Course will be held from 09th May to 07th June, 2026 should have passed the Advanced Course with A or B grade at the above institute.

**SEEKS DETAILED REPORT | On why project cost increased from Rs 33 cr**

# MiC questions, returns legacy waste disposal proposal worth Rs 55 crore

**Our Staff Reporter**  
 BHOPAL

The Mayor-in-Council (MiC) of the Bhopal Municipal Corporation (BMC) returned a proposal to award a legacy waste removal project worth Rs 55 crore, raising objections that the tender was originally estimated at Rs 33 crore.

The issue dominated the MiC meeting held at the ISBT office on Thursday afternoon, which concluded without passing any resolution.

During the nearly hour-long meeting, the MiC members questioned why the project cost had increased from Rs 33 crore to Rs 55 crore. They expressed concern over awarding the contract at a significantly higher rate and asked the officials to submit a detailed report before reconsidering the proposal.

MiC member Manoj Rathore said the Adampur garbage pit case was already pending before the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and the Supreme

## Previous contract terminated

Earlier, the municipal corporation had awarded a similar project to an Indore-based company. However, the contract was terminated about a year ago after the company failed to deliver the expected results.

## Reference to Bhanpur dump site

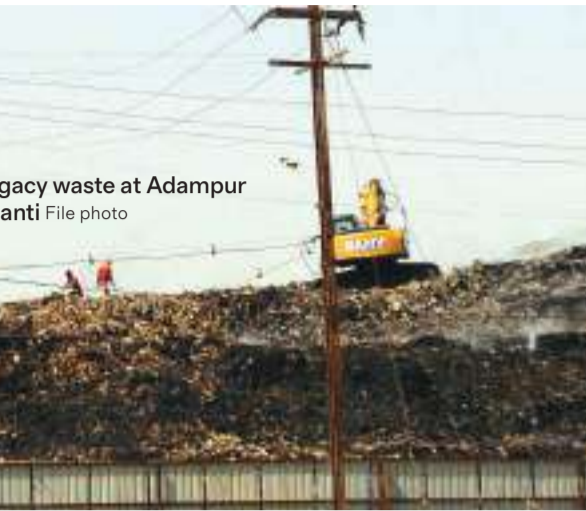
Officials also cited the remediation of the Bhanpur dump site, which was handled by the Saurashtra Company. The nearly 40-year-old dumping ground was scientifically treated, with about 7.23 lakh metric tonnes of waste processed. The project cost around Rs. 52 crore and led to the reclamation of 21 acres of land, out of which 16 acres was developed as green space.

Court, making it necessary for officials to present a comprehensive report.

Following the discussion, the council decided to re-

turn the proposal and seek clarification.

According to sources, another MiC meeting has been scheduled in four days,



Legacy waste at Adampur Khanti File photo

## 6.5L MT legacy waste

Around 6.5 lakh metric tonnes of legacy waste has accumulated at the Adampur Cantonment garbage pit. The municipal corporation had recently floated a tender for clearing the waste and Saurashtra Company quoted Rs. 55 crore for the project based on previous experience. According to officials, the company would be required to completely clear the quarry within one year. Corporation officials believe that if work begins on time, nearly 70-80% of the accumulated waste could be cleared within the given period.

in which the officials are expected to present a detailed

report on the Adampur legacy waste project.

# Holi sees 948 road accidents in MP, Sagar tops, Bhopal 8th

**Sachin Sharma**  
 INDORE

The festival of colours saw a surge in accidents and emergencies across Madhya Pradesh, with the 108 Ambulance Service responding to 948 accident cases on Holi, according to official data. After Sagar and Vidisha, Indore ranked third in the state with 46 road accidents reported on the day.

Among all districts, Sagar reported the highest number of accidents at 67, followed by Vidisha with 55 cases. Indore ranked third in the state with 46 accidents on the festival day. Jabalpur reported 45 accident cases, while Rewa and Satna registered 42 incidents each, placing them among the districts with the highest

number of emergencies during Holi celebrations.

The state capital Bhopal stood at eighth with 39 road accident cases reported on the day. Officials said festivals often see a rise in road mishaps due to rash driving, drunk driving and increased movement of people visiting relatives and friends. Emergency response teams remained active throughout the day to attend distress calls across districts.

Tarun Singh, manager of the 108 Ambulance Service, told The Free Press Journal that ambulances were deployed across the state during the Holi festival. He said emergency vehicles reached the spots on time in every case and helped save hundreds of lives by providing immediate

medical assistance.

Despite repeated appeals by authorities to celebrate responsibly and follow traffic rules, the numbers highlight the persistent risk on roads during major festivals.

Among the major cities, Indore's third position in accident cases reflects heavy vehicular movement and festive gatherings. Officials have urged citizens to avoid driving under the influence of alcohol and follow traffic regulations during celebrations.

A man was killed in a road accident in the Banganga area on Wednesday night. He was on his way to bring his children from their maternal grandparents' house when he lost control of his bike and rammmed into a road divider.

## Toxic legacy haunts: Contaminated water flows in houses behind UCC plant site

**Our Staff Reporter**  
 BHOPAL

The residents of Kalyan Nagar near Union Carbide Corporation (UCC) plant site have complained of contaminated water supply. Many families of Bhopal gas tragedy victims live in residential colonies in the vicinity of the plant site and have raised concerns over polluted drinking water.

Sarita, a resident of the area, said, "A sewage line has not been laid in Kalyan Nagar area in Ward 73. We have raised the issue many times at the ward office but nothing has been done to ensure proper water supply."

The Supreme Court (SC) has already sent its monitoring committee to gas relief colonies to assess the water supply situation. Rachna Dhingra of Bhopal Group for Information and Action (BGIA) said, "There must be proper sewage and drainage systems in all the 42 notified colonies. Otherwise, sewage will continue to contaminate piped water supply. Survivors have already filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court stating that broken pipelines and leakages are common in Blue-moon Colony, Phuta Makbara, Risaldar Colony, Shiv Nagar, Gareeb Nagar, Ayub Nagar and Arif Nagar, leading to filthy water flowing from taps."

# I-T dept to seize Saurabh Sharma's Rs 100 cr 'booty'

**Dept finds Gour as benamidar, Sharma beneficial owner**
**Our Staff Reporter**  
 BHOPAL

The Income-Tax department will seize 52 kg gold, Rs 11 crore in cash and the car from which the gold and cash were recovered.

The assets allegedly belong to former RTO constable Saurabh Sharma and his associate Chetan Singh Gour. The property will be deposited in the government treasury.

The I-Tax department's adjudicating authority has upheld the action taken by the Bhopal-based Benami Prohibition Unit (BPU).

The authority declared Saurabh Sharma the real owner of the gold. Saurabh came into limelight in December 2024 when the Lokayukta, the ED and the I-Tax department raided his premises. During the raid, Rs 11 crore in cash and 51.8 kg of gold were seized from an Innova car in Mendori, Bhopal, on the night of December 18 and 19. The seizure was also linked to Sharma. The ad-

## Opportunity to claim property

The I-T department will give an opportunity to Sharma and Gour to claim their rights over the seized property. If they do not make a claim, the property will be auctioned and the amount will be deposited in the Government of India treasury

judicating authority under the Prohibition of Benami Property Transactions Act (PBPT Act), Mumbai, confirmed the provisional attachment order passed by the Benami Prohibition Unit, Bhopal, under the PBPT Act, 1988. The attachment included 52 kg of gold, Rs 11.6 crore in cash and a vehicle, with a total value of Rs 52 crore at the time of attachment in August 2025. The assets are now estimated to be worth around Rs 100 crore.

The transaction has been adjudicated as a benami transaction under Section 2(9)(A) of the Act, with Chetan Singh Gour identified as the benamidar and Saurabh Sharma as the beneficial owner.

# MP sets up 24x7 help control room for stranded citizens

## MIDDLE EAST CRISIS

**Our Staff Reporter**  
 BHOPAL

The Government of Madhya Pradesh has established a 24x7 control room at Madhya Pradesh Bhawan in New Delhi and at Vallabh Bhawan in Bhopal to assist residents of the state currently stranded in Middle Eastern countries. Till Thursday evening, 50 families had contacted the government seeking help.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said the Madhya Pradesh government is fully sensitive and alert regarding the Middle East crisis and has made important arrangements to assist citizens of the state. A special control room has been established for this purpose, Yadav said.

Teams from the Home Department of the Government of Madhya Pradesh and the office of the Resident Commissioner at Madhya Pradesh Bhawan in New Delhi have been deployed. Information received from family

## Facilities established at Vallabh Bhawan in Bhopal and MP Bhawan in New Delhi; 50 families register seeking help

members through the CM Helpline (181) is being taken seriously. Registration of affected individuals is being carried out and proper records are being maintained.

In coordination with the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, arrangements have been made to safely bring back citizens to the country. During this period, necessary arrangements including food and other essential facilities are also being ensured for the affected citizens. Continuous communication has also been established with their family members.

Around 50 families have registered so far seeking help to bring back their family members stranded in the war zone in these countries.

# Only 15,228 TB patients get NKP nutrition fund in MP

**Our Staff Reporter**  
 BHOPAL

National Health Mission (NHM) has distributed nutritional support funds to only 15,228 tuberculosis (TB) patients in Madhya Pradesh, though state has around 1.76 lakh TB patients. Under Nikshay Poshan Yojana (NKP), every TB patient is entitled to receive Rs 1,000 per month for nutritional support during treatment.

Funds aim to combat malnutrition—a key barrier to recovery—by supporting a high-protein, energy-dense diet for patients undergoing TB treatment.

The central government, in its reply to Parliament in February this year, shared state-wise TB patient numbers. As per report, Madhya Pradesh has around 1.76 lakh TB patients.

According to NHM officials, all TB patients are eligible for nutritional support irrespective

## NHM distributes NKP fund @Rs 1,000/month

of their categories—Below Poverty Line (BPL) or Above Poverty Line (APL). Patients with comorbidities are also covered, provided there is TB infection. If TB infection exists along with other lung infections, financial support is given. However, there is no provision for financial assistance for patients suffering from other lung diseases such as silicosis without TB infection.

Under the scheme, Rs 1,000 per month is paid for entire duration of treatment and amount is transferred directly to patient's bank account through DBT.

NHM director Dr Saloni Sadana told Free Press, "NHM has distributed Rs 10.18 crore to 15,228 tuberculosis (TB) patients in Madhya Pradesh in last four months from October 2025 to January 2026. These are paid beneficiaries in state."

# Jal Ganga Abhiyan from March 19, river origins to be developed



Chief minister Mohan Yadav addresses a meeting of Jal Ganga Samvardhan Abhiyan at Mantralaya on Thursday

**Our Staff Reporter**  
 BHOPAL

The Jal Ganga Abhiyan would be launched across the state on March 19, said chief minister Mohan Yadav in a meeting at the Mantralaya on Thursday. He said that the sources of rivers originating in the state would be developed and intensive tree plantations would be undertaken around them.

The CM stressed the need to encourage community participation in setting up water-kiosks (pyau) in rural and urban areas and directed to discourage the use of plastic bottles.

Yadav instructed district in-charge ministers to lead the campaign in their districts.

Member of Parliaments, MLAs and urban bodies' representatives should ensure their participation, he said.

District collectors will play role of nodal officer and monitor the implementation of the Abhiyan.

The departments of revenue, water resources, horticulture, public health engineering, Narmada Valley Development, forests, Jan Abhiyan Parishad, Industries and MSME, environment, Sanskrit, women and child devel-

opment, school education and agriculture development and farmers welfare will also participate.

Under the campaign, an international water conference will be held in Bhopal from May 23 to May 24, Kshipra Parikrama Yatra from May 25 to May 26, Mahadev River Katha on the banks of the Kshipra in Ujjain on the occasion of Ganga Dussehra on May 26 and Sadanira

Sammelan from May 30 to June 7 at Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal. Satellite mapping of the state's agricultural land will be unveiled.

# Keep in touch with kin: CM to collectors

**Our Staff Reporter**  
 BHOPAL

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav instructed district collectors to remain in touch with families of students stuck in Gulf countries due to the US-Israel-Iran war. He said control rooms have been set up at Madhya Pradesh Bhawan in New Delhi and at Mantralaya in Bhopal to coordinate with such families.

Yadav was addressing a meeting with senior officials at Mantralaya on Thursday. He also instructed all district collectors through video conferencing. The Chief Minister

said employees should adhere to office timings. If there is no improvement, a six-day working week for officials will be implemented. He said that while employees have the right to facilities, they must ensure work accordingly. Supervision and inspections will continue. Collectors have also been instructed to ensure smooth procurement of wheat and to make sure farmers do not face problems at procurement centres.

Wheat procurement will take place from March 16 to May 5 in the Indore, Ujjain, Bhopal and Narmadapuram divisions.

# Double-decker bridge: 800-tonne bow-string girders to be launched

**Our Staff Reporter**  
 INDORE

The construction of the double-decker bridge at Lavkush Square is nearing completion, with authorities preparing for the launching of two massive bow-string girders weighing a total of 800 tonnes. The bridge, being built by the Indore Development Authority (IDA) at a cost of around Rs180 crore, will be one of the most unique infrastructure projects in the state.

According to officials, about 85% of the construction work has already been com-

pleted. The remaining major task is the launching of two heavy bow-string structures, each weighing around 400 tonnes. The first bow-string girder is expected to be launched around March 15, followed by the second shortly after.

The launching process is considered one of the most technically challenging phases of the project. Due to the massive weight and complex engineering involved, large cranes and specialised equipment will be used, and the operation will be carried out late at night when traffic movement at the square is

minimal. Once completed, the double-decker bridge will operate on two levels. The upper deck will run at a height of about 70 feet, while the lower level will handle regular traffic movement. The bridge will improve connectivity between Banganga and Aurobindo Hospital, helping ease congestion at one of the city's busiest intersections. Officials say the bridge will not only improve traffic flow but will also become one of the most distinctive engineering structures in Indore because of its advanced construction technology.

## offgrid

# MP goldsmith crafts smallest opium pod replica

**Kajal Kumari**  
 INDORE

A goldsmith from Jawad in Madhya Pradesh's Neemuch district has crafted what he claims to be the world's smallest replica of an opium pod using pure 24-carat gold.

The miniature artwork was created by Rajesh Soni, who is known for making micro gold sculptures.

Inspired by the flourishing opium crop currently seen in the Neemuch and Mandasaur districts, he decided to design a tiny replica of the opium pod, often referred to as black gold.

**A 50 mg replica**  
 The replica measures just 5 mm in length and 3 mm in width and weighs only 50 mg.



It has been made using 24-carat gold and is so small that it can be placed on the tip of a needle or among poppy seeds.

Soni said it took two days of continuous effort to complete the piece, and the design had to be remade five times before achieving the final result.

Due to the extremely small size, the work required very fine tools and careful welding with a low gas flame. Even a small mistake could damage the delicate structure.

**Earlier miniature creations**  
 This is not the first time the goldsmith has created such



miniature artworks. Earlier, he made a tiny model of the Taj Mahal that could fit on a thumbnail, as well as a miniature FIFA World Cup Trophy made of gold.

Through his latest creation, Soni hopes to get his work recognised in a world record and bring recognition to his district and town through art.

# Sharjah flight to remain cancelled today as well

**Our Staff Reporter**  
 INDORE

The ongoing tensions between Iran and the Israel-US alliance continue to impact the operation of the Indore-Sharjah-Indore flight. For the seventh consecutive day, the flight will remain cancelled on Friday. The Air India Express Sharjah-Indore flight has remained cancelled since February 28.

Devi Ahilyabai Holkar Airport informed on the microblogging platform X that the Air India

Express flight on the Indore-Sharjah-Indore route will remain cancelled on Friday as well, it remained cancelled on Thursday too.

The continuous cancellation of the flight has severely disrupted the travel plans of passengers. Airport sources said that due to escalating tensions in the region, flights are currently operating only to major metro cities. As a result, passengers are unable to avail themselves of direct connectivity between Indore and Sharjah, leaving many city-bound passengers stranded in Gulf countries.

**Quick Trail**

**TUMAKURU**  
**Murder plot revealed as wife remarries**

A suspected heart attack death in Tumakuru has turned into a sensational murder case after police discovered that the victim's wife and her alleged lover had plotted the killing.

The victim, Paramesh, a resident of Dasarahalli village in Hebbur hobli, was reported to have died on January 30. His wife initially told relatives that he had suffered a heart attack and passed away suddenly.

But the situation took a dramatic turn when Paramesh's wife, Asha, married another man within just 20 days of his death. Her sudden remarriage to Chandrappa raised suspicions among Paramesh's relatives.

The victim's sister later approached Hebbur Police Station and lodged a complaint demanding an investigation into the death.

Following the complaint, police intensified their probe and exhumed Paramesh's body on February 26 from a burial site near a farmhouse in Dasarahalli village to conduct further examination.

**KALABURAGI**  
**Youths play Holi with burqa clad man, draw ire**

A Holi celebration in Nimbarga village of Aland taluk in Kalaburagi district has triggered controversy after a group of youths allegedly made a person wear a burqa and play with colours, an act that was later circulated on social media and drew criticism for hurting communal sentiments.

According to police, the incident took place on Wednesday during Holi festivities when people across the district were celebrating the festival of colours. During the celebrations, a few youths reportedly forced or encouraged a man to wear a burqa and applied colours on him while dancing and posing for photographs.

Videos of the act were recorded and later shared on social media platforms, where they quickly went viral. The footage allegedly shows the burqa-clad person being made to dance in different poses.

**MANGALURU**  
**MRPL denies suspending fuel exports**



Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Limited (MRPL) on Thursday issued a clarification over reports claiming the company had suspended fuel exports due to disruptions in crude shipments from the Persian Gulf amid the widening conflict in West Asia.

Responding to reports, the company said, "MRPL has not declared any 'FORCE MAJEURE' and is unaware about the mentioned news item and its source."

News agency Bloomberg on Wednesday stated that Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd. has told customers it will suspend oil product exports, as a conflict in the Middle East disrupts crude shipments.

Meanwhile, according to a report by Reuters, Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals has shut a crude unit.

**BENGALURU**  
**Lokayukta raids govt officials**

The Lokayukta on Thursday conducted simultaneous raids at the premises of several government officials across different districts of Karnataka in connection with alleged possession of disproportionate assets, officials said.

The searches were carried out at multiple locations linked to officials working in various government departments in districts including Bengaluru, Mandya, Dharwad, Hassan, Mysuru, Vijayapura and Yadgir, among others, they said.

According to Lokayukta officials, the raids targeted officials holding posts such as Assistant Executive Engineer, Junior Engineer, Deputy Electrical Inspector and Taluk Backward Classes Welfare Officer.

Among those raided was Assistant Executive Engineer M C Satyanarayana.

**AHEAD OF BIG DAY**

**Criticism of PM, guarantees to be highlights of K'taka Budget: LoP**

**NT Correspondent**  
BENGALURU

Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Assembly R Ashoka on Thursday took a dig at CM Siddaramaiah ahead of the state Budget presentation, claiming that the government is expected to borrow Rs 1.15 lakh crore and is likely to impose fresh taxes on the people.

He said the Budget would have nothing new, adding that its highlights would be criticism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and repeated mentions of the five guarantee schemes ('Shakti', 'Gruha Lakshmi', 'Gruha Jyoti', 'Yuva Nidhi' and 'Anna Bhagya').

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who also holds the Finance portfolio, is scheduled to present the 2026-27 Budget on March 6. This will be his record 17th budget.

"Siddaramaiah-led Congress government's budget will be presented tomorrow.

While Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman reduced the tax burden in the Union Budget, Siddaramaiah is known for imposing taxes on people. He imposes about four taxes a month and has already introduced 36 taxes, and is now looking for ways to impose more," Ashoka said.

Speaking to reporters, he said the Congress had promised people before coming to power that the guarantee schemes would be implemented without imposing any burden on them.

"By the end of the chief minister's term, the state's total debt will probably exceed Rs 6 lakh crore. The government has already breached financial discipline. Siddaramaiah and his government are somehow managing the situation," Ashoka claimed, adding that his borrowings as CM equal those of 12 or 13 former chief ministers combined.



Stating that the Budget should create higher revenue sources, ensure that no burden is placed on people, and take the state away from debt, the opposition leader said this could be ensured only by a "clever and intelligent finance minister."

"Anyone can run a government by pushing the state into debt," he said, accusing Siddaramaiah of "increasing the state's debt and failing to meet the expectations of the people."

Highlighting that Siddaramaiah blames the previous BJP government for everything, Ashoka said Basavaraj Bommai, the chief minister during the previous BJP government, had presented a "surplus budget," without excessive

**CM to present 17th budget today**

borrowings. "Despite having the opportunity to borrow more while staying within the parameters of financial discipline, he (Bommai) did not do so, as it would burden the people," he said, accusing Siddaramaiah of borrowing crores of rupees every year.

"I feel that this time too, he will take a loan of Rs 1.15 lakh crore," he claimed.

The BJP leader said he had written to the CM requesting an allocation of Rs 15,000 crore annually for the development of backward taluks, as recommended by the High Power Committee on Redressal of Regional Imbalance (HPCRRI), chaired by economist Prof M Govinda Rao.

Claiming that the government appears "inactive" due to internal rifts, Ashoka pointed to an ongoing power struggle between factions

led by Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar over the CM's post.

"Amid all this, we cannot expect anything new. The CM will speak about the guarantee schemes and target the central government and PM Modi. Criticising Modi and mentions of the five guarantee schemes will be the highlight of this Budget. Other than that, there will be nothing new," he added.

He also dismissed the CM's claim that the government had achieved 90 per cent of the promises made in the previous Budget. "The fact is that not even 9 per cent has been achieved. I have evidence for it," he said.

Ashoka further alleged that the government had failed in tax collection, achieving only 48 per cent of the target, and had released less than 40 per cent of the allocated funds to some departments.

**MAHE sets up Quantum Hub at MIT Bengaluru**

**NT Correspondent**  
BENGALURU

Manipal Academy of Higher Education on Thursday announced the establishment of Quantum-Hub@MAHE at Manipal Institute of Technology here to develop an indigenous quantum hardware and open-architecture ecosystem.

The university said the hub will function as an integrated platform for quantum hardware experimentation, deep-tech startup incubation, component innovation, workforce development, testing infrastructure, and translational research within a unified academic framework. The initiative is structured to strengthen India's sovereign capability across the quantum value chain, it added. "As part of this multi-campus deep-tech strategy, Manipal Institute of Technology, Bengaluru, will serve as the operational anchor for advanced hardware experimentation, cryogenic and RF (radio frequency) infrastructure, and structured quantum engineering education and training," MAHE said in a statement.

The facility will commence operations with a 25-qubit dilution refrigeration (DR)



open-architecture system designed for advanced training and experimentation.

An open-architecture ecosystem refers to a system that researchers, developers, and institutions can easily use, modify, and collaborate on, instead of being restricted to a single organisation.

According to MAHE, this marks the first phase of a structured roadmap progressing from sub-50 qubit training systems to 50-150 qubit proof-of-concept platforms and ultimately toward 150-1,000+ qubit industrial-grade quantum product systems.

The initiative was formalised through Memorandums of Agreement with international and national organisations,

including QuantrolOx (Finland), in association with Bluefors (Finland), QBLOX (Netherlands), ConScience (Sweden), and the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, it said.

M D Venkatesh, Vice Chancellor of MAHE, said, "Q-Hub@MAHE reflects our commitment to building scientific capability aligned with the vision of the National Quantum Mission. By integrating research, hardware development, and workforce training within one ecosystem, we aim to contribute meaningfully to India's leadership in advanced quantum technologies."

**Sanatana Dharma can never be erased: V-P Radhakrishnan**

**NT Correspondent**  
BELAGAVI

Sanatana Dharma may be tested by time, but it can never be erased, Vice President C P Radhakrishnan said here on Thursday.

He said this while participating as the chief guest at the inauguration of the Rajagopuram at the Sri Veerabhadreshwar Temple in Yaduru in this district, according to a press release.

Describing the occasion as a moment of spiritual resurgence and civilizational reaffirmation, the vice president, while addressing the gathering, said that Bharat is not merely a nation but a living civilisation—a continuous flow of consciousness from the Indus Valley to Kanya-



kumari.

He noted that this is the sacred land where the eternal wisdom of the Vedas was first heard and where the profound message of the Bhagavad Gita continues to guide humanity to act with courage, live with righteous-

ness and surrender with faith. Stating that Hindu consciousness is not confined to rituals but is a way of life, he highlighted the timeless philosophy of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam"—the world is one family—and India's spiritual vision that sees divinity

in nature and in every human being.

Referring to the Veera-Shaiva Lingayat tradition, the vice president underlined its significant contribution to spiritual, educational, cultural, and social upliftment in Karnataka and neighbouring Maharashtra.

He noted that the Veera-Shaiva maths and temples have played a transformative role in nurturing the values of faith, seva and social harmony.

Radhakrishnan paid tribute to Shiva Yogi Shri Kadasiddheshwar Swamiji, a prominent Lingayat religious leader and social reformer from Karnataka. "Sanatana Dharma may be tested by time, but it can never be erased," he said.

**Auto drivers up in arms against heavy fines**



**NT Correspondent**  
BENGALURU

The Autrickshaw Drivers' Union (R), CITU staged a protest at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Tuesday, urging the State Government to reduce the high fitness certificate (FC) renewal fees for commercial vehicles.

Hundreds of drivers, including auto rickshaw operators, taxi and maxi cab drivers, light goods vehicle drivers, mini lorry and tipper drivers, private ambulance drivers, mechanics and other transport workers, participated in the demonstration.

The union leaders said that for over five to six decades, these workers have been the backbone of the State's transport sector, contributing significantly to public service and government revenue through fuel taxes, vehicle taxes, spare parts taxes, toll collections and various fines and fees.

Despite their contribution, the workers alleged that they are struggling to sustain their livelihoods due to stringent laws and rising financial burdens. They criticised the implementation of the central government regulations in the State,

Despite their contribution, the workers alleged that they are struggling to sustain their livelihoods

stating that heavy fines and fees have severely impacted small vehicle owners and drivers.

The union particularly opposed the fitness certificate renewal fee ranging between Rs 10,000 and Rs 30,000 for vehicles aged 10 to 25 years, calling it an unbearable burden.

They demanded that the State adopt the Kerala model to either reduce the fees or immediately withdraw the current order. Additionally, the union urged the government to file a review petition or appeal against the High Court's directive to frame rules for bike taxis.

**War woes stall ₹2500-crore areca leaf export sector in South India**

**NT Correspondent**  
SHIVAMOGGA

The ripple effects of the ongoing geopolitical conflict between Israel and Iran are now being felt in India's rural industrial belts. The eco-friendly areca leaf product industry, which has grown rapidly in parts of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, is facing severe disruption as global trade uncertainty halts export shipments.

Entrepreneurs in Shivamogga district say large quantities of areca leaf products prepared for international markets are now lying unsold in factories. With exports stalled and demand uncertain, the industry fears heavy financial losses and



potential job cuts. The manufacturing clusters spread across Shivamogga, Tumakuru, Uttara Kannada, Dakshina Kannada, Davanagere and Chitradurga produce a variety of biodegradable items from naturally fallen areca palm leaves. These include plates, bowls, cups and spoons, which are popular in foreign markets due to growing demand for eco-friendly alternatives to

plastic. The products are exported to several European countries such as the United Kingdom, Netherlands and Germany, as well as to Australia. Industry insiders say Shivamogga alone exports goods worth nearly ₹50 crore every month.

However, the ongoing conflict has slowed shipping routes and created uncertainty among international buyers. As a result, exporters have been forced to hold back consignments, leading to a buildup of inventory at production units.

The sector had already faced a major setback earlier when the U.S. Food and Drug Administration reportedly raised concerns over certain consignments.

**COP CAMPAIGN**

**Drug crackdown: B'luru police screen 1,200 students in campus**

**NT Correspondent**  
BENGALURU

As part of an intensified campaign against drug abuse among students, police conducted surprise inspections across educational institutions in the city's western division, screening nearly 1,200 students for narcotic substance consumption.

The inspections were carried out in six colleges and two hostels on Thursday where police teams collected biological samples from students after obtaining consent from the institutions' managements. Authorities said 585 samples were randomly selected for testing, and 31 students were found to have consumed narcotic substances.

Police officials stressed that the exercise was conducted as part of a preven-



tive awareness initiative aimed at identifying and addressing substance abuse at an early stage. Rather than taking immediate legal action, the authorities plan to rehabilitate the students through counseling and support programs.

Students who tested positive will be enrolled in the 'Sanmitra' de-addiction initiative, a program introduced by the Karnataka Police to

help individuals overcome drug dependency through counselling, family involvement and professional guidance.

Under the program, police will work closely with the parents of the affected students and organize counselling sessions to understand the root causes of addiction. Officials will also attempt to identify how drugs are reaching students and which

networks are responsible for supplying them.

Medical experts from Purna Hospital, Padmadevayya Hospital, Kade Hospital, Sharavathi Hospital, Sri Lakshmi Multi Specialty Hospital and Kangaroo Care Hospital assisted the police during the operation. Doctors and healthcare professionals helped in collecting and examining the samples and also provided guidance on treatment and rehabilitation.

During the inspections, police teams held discussions with college managements and hostel administrators about the growing concern of drug use among students. Authorities urged institutions to strengthen internal monitoring systems and cooperate with law enforcement agencies to curb the menace.

**Rebel BJP leader Hoodi Vijaykumar joins JD(S)**

**NT Correspondent**  
BENGALURU

In a significant political development in Karnataka's Kolar district, rebel BJP leader Hoodi Vijaykumar on Wednesday joined the Janata Dal (Secular). Vijaykumar, who had contested the 2023 Assembly election as a rebel candidate after being denied a BJP ticket, formally entered the party at the JD(S) headquarters in Bengaluru.

The induction ceremony was held at the party office, JP Bhavan, in the presence of former Prime Minister H. D. Deve Gowda, Union Minister and JD(S) state president H. D. Kumaraswamy, and youth wing state president Nikhil Kumaraswamy.

Speaking after welcoming Vijaykumar into the party fold, Nikhil Kumaraswamy said he had been in continu-

ous contact with the leader and had expected him to join the party sooner or later.

"Hard work should not go to waste in politics. We have joined hands with a positive intention to strengthen the party and work for the development of Malur," he said.

Nikhil added that although the next Assembly election is still some time away, the party will soon focus on upcoming local body elections. "Local body polls are important for party workers.

Several leaders had left the party earlier due to various reasons, but many of them are now returning. We welcome everyone back to the party," he said.

Vijaykumar had contest-

ed the 2023 Assembly election from the Malur constituency as a rebel candidate after the BJP denied him a ticket and instead fielded K.S. Manjunath Gowda. His independent candidature split the BJP votes, which ultimately helped Congress candidate Nanjgowda secure victory by a narrow margin.

However, Vijaykumar's entry into JD(S) has triggered discontent among local BJP leaders. BJP leader K.S. Manjunath Gowda has reportedly expressed strong objections, accusing JD(S) leaders of violating the alliance spirit.

The development has sparked speculation about tensions within the BJP-JD(S) alliance.



NEWS in SHORT

HYDERABAD  
Telangana Governor to inaugurate PanIIT Hyderabad Summit 2026

PanIIT Alumni India, the umbrella organization representing alumni of all 23 Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) will be hosting the "PanIIT Hyderabad Summit 2026" on 8th March 2026 at The Westin Hyderabad Mindspace, Madhapur. Jishnu Dev Varma, Governor of Telangana, will inaugurate the summit and deliver the inaugural address, setting a visionary tone for the deliberations. G. Kishan Reddy Union Minister of Coal & Mines will deliver a special address. He is expected to provide a national perspective on technology's role in achieving Viksit Bharat and highlight opportunities for the IIT community to contribute to key sectors like energy security and defense indigenization. A networking session throughout the day will facilitate collaboration among industry leaders, investors, and innovators fostering partnerships that extend beyond the event. The summit will conclude with a Valedictory Address by a Member of Parliament. Etela Rajender, MP, will grace the valedictory function.

LUXETTIPET  
DCP inspects pushkaram works

Mancherial Deputy Commissioner of Police Eggidi Bhaskar conducted an inspection of the preparations for the upcoming Godavari Pushkaralu festival, set to take place next year along the banks of the Godavari River. With millions anticipated to participate across Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, authorities are focusing on ensuring smooth arrangements. During the inspection, DCP Bhaskar emphasized the need for comprehensive facilities to prevent any inconvenience to pilgrims. He directed officials to make adequate provisions, including spacious parking areas near the riverbank and temples, along with all necessary amenities at worship sites. He stressed that there should be no lapses in essential arrangements and instructed all concerned departments to proactively verify and address any shortcomings well in advance. Highlighting traffic management, the DCP instructed that parking spaces be thoroughly cleaned and organized to accommodate vehicles efficiently.

IBRAHIMPARNAM  
Niti aayog satisfied with KPIs

Niti Aayog official Radhika Mule expressed satisfaction that the Mandal authorities are working hard to achieve the six Key Progress Indicators (KPIs) set under the Aspirational Blocks Program. She was in Ibrahimpatnam mandal on Thursday as part of the Aspirational Block Programme (ABP) - Sampoonnata Abhiyan 2.0 being implemented by NITI Aayog. She visited the Anganwadi Centers, Ayushman Arogya Mandir, Government School, Veterinary Department Office and Farmer Service Centers in the mandal and inspected the services available, the government schemes being implemented and the benefits to the people.

Kavitha to announce new political party in two months

METRO INDIA NEWS | TIRUPATI

Telangana Jagruthi president K Kavitha on Thursday said she will announce a new political party within two months. She made this announcement at Tirupati during her visit to Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple. Kavitha is the daughter of BRS president K Chandrasekhar Rao.

"In the next two months, we will be announcing a political party with Lord Balaji's blessings," Kavitha told reporters. On the Tirupati laddu row, she said rumours about adulteration had hurt the sentiments of devotees. She noted that Lord Balaji is worshipped not only across India but internationally, and urged the government to ensure that the laddu is prepared with the utmost reverence and devotion.

Recently, a Delhi court discharged former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, his deputy Manish Sisodia, Kavi-



th and 20 others in the politically charged liquor policy case, pulling up the CBI by saying it found no "overarching conspiracy or criminal intent" in the policy.

IPS officer Sunil Naik appears for questioning in custodial torture case

METRO INDIA NEWS | AMARAVATI

In a key development in the high-profile custodial torture case involving Andhra Pradesh Deputy Speaker Raghurama Krishnam Raju, Bihar-cadre IPS officer Sunil Naik, named as Accused No. 7 (A-7) in the case, has finally appeared before investigators for questioning.

Acting on directions from the Andhra Pradesh High Court, Naik presented himself before the investigation team at the CCS Police Station in Guntur on Thursday. The interrogation is being conducted by the investigation officer and Vizianagaram Superintendent of Police Damodar, who is leading the probe into the alleged custodial assault.

Police officials said Naik will be subjected to extensive questioning from March 5 to March 9 as part of the ongoing investigation into the events surrounding the alleged attempt on Raju's life while he was in custody.

The case dates back to May 2021, during the tenure of the



previous YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) government, when Raghurama Krishnam Raju was serving as the Member of Parliament from Narsapuram. He was arrested by the state's Crime Investigation Department (CID) from his residence in Hyderabad and subsequently shifted to the CID regional office in Guntur.

Raju later alleged that he was subjected to severe custodial torture during the night he was detained at the CID office, triggering widespread political controversy and legal battles that have continued for years.

The interrogation is being conducted by the investigation officer and Vizianagaram Superintendent of Police Damodar, who is leading the probe into the alleged custodial assault

Investigators probing the case reportedly found evidence suggesting that Sunil Naik, who was then serving as CID Deputy Inspector General (DIG), had visited the CID regional office multiple times on the night Raju was in custody. Based on these findings, Naik was included as Accused No. 7 in the case.

According to police sources, Naik had earlier been served multiple notices asking him to appear for questioning. However, he failed to comply with those summons. In a bid to secure his presence, Andhra Pradesh police teams had even

travelled to Patna, where Naik was reportedly stationed, to take him into custody. However, officials could not bring him back due to technical and legal hurdles.

Subsequently, Naik approached the Andhra Pradesh High Court seeking anticipatory bail. The court, however, declined to grant him relief and directed him to cooperate with the investigation by appearing before the police for questioning.

Following the court's directive, Naik appeared before the investigation team on Thursday. The questioning, which began earlier in the day, is expected to continue until 5 p.m. each day, with investigators focusing on reconstructing the events that unfolded at the CID office on the night of Raju's detention.

Officials said the ongoing interrogation is a crucial phase of the investigation, as it aims to establish the sequence of events and the roles played by officials present at the CID office during the alleged custodial assault.

AP Govt plans ZPTC elections based on newly formed districts

METRO INDIA NEWS | AMARAVATI

The Andhra Pradesh government is considering conducting Zilla Parishad Territorial Constituency (ZPTC) elections based on the newly reorganized districts, Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan informed the State Legislative Assembly on Thursday. He said the government has already begun preliminary groundwork to hold the elections in line with the administrative restructuring of districts.

Speaking in the Assembly, Pawan Kalyan stated that the coalition government is committed to strengthening local self-governance institutions and ensuring that Panchayati Raj bodies function more effectively. He added that there are no legal obstacles to the reorganization of panchayats, and the government is examining the necessary administrative measures ahead of the upcoming local body elections. The Deputy Chief Minister emphasized that empowering local institutions remains one of the government's core priorities. He noted that soon after assuming office, the government initiated steps aimed at improving the functioning and autonomy of rural local bodies. "Our government is committed to strengthening local institutions and ensuring they have the resources and administrative support necessary to serve people effectively," Pawan Kalyan said during the debate.

Addressing concerns over environmental impact during development activities such as road expansion, the Deputy Chief Minister said the gov-



ernment is examining alternative measures whenever trees are removed for infrastructure projects. "As an environmental enthusiast, I believe development and environmental protection must go hand in hand. Whenever trees are removed for development works, we will ensure suitable alternatives and take measures to preserve greenery," he said.

He also revealed that the government is exploring the possibility of bringing in a strong legal framework to protect trees and vegetation, stating that strict enforcement would be essential to safeguard the state's green cover.

Pawan Kalyan also responded to concerns raised by legislators regarding the survival of saplings planted under afforestation drives. He said the government is planning to introduce geo-tagging for every sapling planted under Forest Department initiatives.

According to him, a dedicated system will be created to track saplings from the nursery stage itself, ensuring better monitoring and maintenance. The government is studying advanced systems being implemented in Bengaluru nurseries as part of efforts to adopt modern tracking mechanisms.

CM to open Bam Rukn-ud-Daula Lake today

METRO INDIA NEWS | HYDERABAD

Bam Rukn-ud-Daula, a historic water body from the Nizam era, was revived after removal of encroachments in August 2024. Originally spread over 104 acres, the lake's extent had gradually reduced and was recorded at 17.05 acres by HMDA, with only 4.12 acres remaining before restoration. HYDRAA cleared illegal occupations and restored the lake to its officially recorded extent, the statement said.

The existing bund was strengthened and a walking track developed. An open gym, children's play areas, gazebos for senior citizens, internal fencing, and three access points were provided. Medicinal and shade-giving trees were planted, and CCTV



The lake has historic importance, as it was built in 1770 during the reign of the then Nizam Sikandar Jah, by his prime minister Nawab Rukn-Ud-Dowla

cameras installed with monitoring linked to the HYDRAA headquarters.

HYDRAA Commissioner, A.V. Ranganath, had directed officials during site visits to

widen inlets and outlets, enhance greenery, and channel rainwater from surrounding areas such as Rajendranagar and Aramgarh to mitigate flooding.

Azharuddin assures support to Catholic leaders

METRO INDIA NEWS | HYDERABAD

Minister for Minorities Welfare Mohammed Azharuddin attended the meeting of the Telugu Catholic Bishops' Council held at St. John's Regional Seminary, Ramanthapur, Hyderabad. The meeting brought together respected Bishops from both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, where various community matters and issues related to minority welfare and development were discussed. The Minister addressed the gathering and interacted with the bishops, highlighting the government of Telangana's commitment towards the welfare, development, and empowerment of minority communities. Corporation Chairman



The meeting brought together respected Bishops from both Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, where various community matters and issues related to minority welfare

Deepak John and several other church leaders were also present on the occasion.

AP SSC hall tickets released, can download on WhatsApp

METRO INDIA NEWS | AMARAVATI

The Government of Andhra Pradesh on Thursday released hall tickets for students appearing for the Class 10 (SSC) public examinations, scheduled to begin on March 16 across the state. The admit cards were made available online at 11 a.m. on March 5, according to K. V. Srinivasulu Reddy, Director of Government Examinations.

Students preparing for the examinations can now download their hall tickets through official digital platforms. The Board of Secondary Education has made the admit cards accessible through its official website, enabling students to obtain their examination credentials in

advance.

To further simplify access through digital services, authorities have also provided alternative options this year. Students can receive their hall tickets by sending a message to the 'Mana Mitra' WhatsApp number 95523 00009, or by using the LEAP (Learning Excellence in Andhra Pradesh) mobile application of the School Education Department. On the official website, students are required to enter details such as district, school name, student name, and date of birth to download and print their hall ticket.

The Board of Secondary Education clarified that it has not authorized any private agencies or third-party websites to issue



hall tickets. Students and parents have been advised to rely only on official channels and avoid clicking on unauthorized links or platforms that claim to provide hall tickets.

Authorities also urged stu-

dents to carefully verify the information printed on their hall tickets. In case of errors, discrepancies, or doubts, students and parents have been asked to immediately contact the concerned school headmaster for

Students can receive their hall tickets by sending a message to the 'Mana Mitra' WhatsApp number 95523 00009

corrections. With the SSC public examinations beginning on March 16, officials appealed to students to download their hall tickets well in advance and ensure they are fully prepared for the examinations. The examinations are expected to be conducted across hundreds of centres in the state under strict supervision by the School Education Department.

APNRTS coordinates with Centre for safe return of Telugus stranded in West Asia

METRO INDIA NEWS | AMARAVATI

The Andhra Pradesh Non-Resident Telugu Society on Thursday said the state government is working with the Centre to ensure the safe return of residents of the state stranded in conflict-hit West Asia.

APNRTS chief executive P Krishna Mohan noted that the government agency is working with Ministry of External Affairs to provide transit visas for those stuck in Bahrain. This will enable them to travel to Saudi Arabia and take return flights to India.

"... We are coordinating with MEA to provide transit visas from Bahrain," Mohan told PTI.

However, he said APNRTS is prioritising assisting pas-

Flights to Gulf nations cancelled

The tense situation in West Asia has affected the arrival and departure of flights to Hyderabad. On Thursday, 16 flights originating from Gulf

nations to Shamshabad airport were cancelled. Concurrently, 15 flights departing from Shamshabad to Gulf countries were also annulled.

sengers stranded at the airports.

According to the APNRTS chief executive, a 'bunch' of people are currently in Manama and they want to move to Saudi Arabia to catch a return flight.

Flights from Oman remain operational, with passengers returning home on a regular basis.

Despite tensions in the Gulf region, Mohan said civilian areas have not been targeted.

Further, he said most of the Andhra Pradesh natives working in the Gulf are employed in utilities, power and energy sectors, which are essential.

So, these workers are staying put.

Andhra Pradesh NRI Empowerment and Relations Minister K Srinivas highlighted that about 15,000 people from the state are currently stranded in the Gulf region.

SPICEJET OPERATES SPECIAL FLIGHTS FROM UAE TO INDIA

Flight Date	Flight No.	From	To	STD	ETA
05-Mar-26	69 9811	Dubai	Hydrabad	15:15	18:30
05-Mar-26	69 9750	Mumbai	Hydrabad	16:30	19:45
05-Mar-26	69 9808	Hydrabad	Dubai	17:15	20:30
05-Mar-26	69 9762	Hydrabad	Dubai	18:30	21:45
05-Mar-26	69 9788	Hydrabad	Dubai	19:45	23:00
05-Mar-26	69 9767	Hydrabad	Mumbai	20:30	23:45
05-Mar-26	69 9789	Hydrabad	Mumbai	21:45	00:00
05-Mar-26	69 9768	Hydrabad	Dubai	22:30	01:15
05-Mar-26	69 9769	Hydrabad	Dubai	23:15	02:00
05-Mar-26	69 9770	Hydrabad	Dubai	23:45	02:30
05-Mar-26	69 9771	Hydrabad	Dubai	00:15	03:00
05-Mar-26	69 9772	Hydrabad	Dubai	00:45	03:30
05-Mar-26	69 9773	Hydrabad	Dubai	01:15	04:00
05-Mar-26	69 9774	Hydrabad	Dubai	01:45	04:30
05-Mar-26	69 9775	Hydrabad	Dubai	02:15	05:00
05-Mar-26	69 9776	Hydrabad	Dubai	02:45	05:30
05-Mar-26	69 9777	Hydrabad	Dubai	03:15	06:00
05-Mar-26	69 9778	Hydrabad	Dubai	03:45	06:30
05-Mar-26	69 9779	Hydrabad	Dubai	04:15	07:00

Andhra mulls Rs 25,000 incentive for second child

METRO INDIA NEWS | AMARAVATI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday said the state government is considering a Rs 25,000 birth incentive for couples from their second child onwards to boost the falling birth rate.

Addressing the Assembly, Naidu said the government aims to raise Andhra Pradesh's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) to 2.1 from the current 1.5, which is below the replacement level.

"We are looking at a novel method. We will give Rs 25,000 to parents having a second child or more at the time of delivery itself. This will be a big game-changer. If we can do it, it will be very useful," Naidu said.

Underscoring the impor-



tance of population management, the CM noted that several countries are facing challenges due to ageing populations.

He said the government plans to bring out a policy on population management by the end of March and implement it from April.

## Bengal Governor Ananda Bose steps down citing ill-health

**HD Bureau  
NEW DELHI**

C. V. Ananda Bose has resigned as the Governor of West Bengal after serving for roughly three and a half years, stepping down months before the state heads toward its next Assembly election. The departure marks an

unexpected shift in the constitutional leadership of the state at a time when political parties are preparing for a closely watched electoral contest. Officials confirmed that Bose submitted his resignation to the President on Thursday, bringing his tenure at the Raj Bhavan in Kolkata to an early end. He later acknowledged the decision publicly,

saying he had "spent enough time at the governor's office," signalling a personal choice to step away from the post after completing a significant phase of his assignment. He is understood to have cited health reasons for his early resignation from an office which he has indicated in the past as highly satisfying. Bose, a retired Indian

Administrative Service officer from the 1977 batch, assumed office as the 22nd Governor of West Bengal in November 2022. His appointment followed a period when the state had been under an additional charge arrangement after Jagdeep Dhankhar moved to the office of Vice-President. During his tenure, Bose

functioned as the constitutional head of a state governed by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and the Trinamool Congress. The governor's role in such a federal structure involves overseeing legislative processes, giving assent to bills, and ensuring constitutional procedures are followed by the elected

His time in office unfolded against a politically charged backdrop, as relations between governors and state governments across several opposition-ruled states drew national attention. In West Bengal, however, observers often noted a more measured approach in dealings between Raj Bhavan and government.



**GOVERNOR ACT | Marching orders followed by temporary replacement**

## Kalady VC sacked for irregular PG admission

**HD Bureau  
KOCHI**

Governor Rajendra Arlekar has removed Dr K K Geethakumari from the post of Vice Chancellor of Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit in Kalady after an inquiry found that a postgraduate admission had been granted to a student who had not completed an undergraduate degree. Authorities stated that the action followed scrutiny of the admission of a candidate who had failed the Bachelor of Fine Arts examination but was allowed to enrol in the Master of Fine Arts programme at the university.

The Governor, who functions as Chancellor of state universities, issued orders relieving Geethakumari from office with immediate effect. Ciza Thomas, Vice Chancellor of APJ Abdul Kalam Technological University, has been given additional charge of the Sanskrit university until further arrangements are made. Officials indicated that the decision was taken after reviewing records and communications linked to the controversial admission.



Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, located in Kalady in Ernakulam district, was established to promote studies in Sanskrit and allied disciplines including fine arts, philosophy and linguistics. The institution operates multiple regional campuses across Kerala and offers

undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in humanities and arts subjects. The admission controversy emerged during administrative reviews that questioned the eligibility of a student admitted to the Master of Fine Arts course.

Documents examined during the review showed that the student had not cleared the B. F. A. examination, a basic qualification required for entry into the postgraduate programme. University regulations stipulate that candidates must hold a recognised undergraduate degree in the relevant discipline before seeking admission to postgraduate courses. Officials examining the case concluded that the admission violated these rules.

**HD Bureau  
KOCHI**

CPM on Thursday expelled prominent former district secretariat member and Centre of Indian Trade Unions leader P K Sasi after he took part in a rebel convention in Palakkad and publicly criticised the party's district leadership. Party authorities removed Sasi from primary membership shortly after he inaugurated the gathering, which was organised by dissident elements claiming dissatisfaction with the functioning of the district leadership. During his address at the convention, Sasi delivered a sharp critique of the local leadership of the CPM, accusing it of sidelining grassroots



**The swift action reflects the party's zero-tolerance stance toward internal dissent that challenges official structures**

weakening organisational discipline. The swift action reflects the party's zero-tolerance stance toward internal dissent that challenges official structures. Leaders within the organisation said

participation in a convention outside the party framework and criticism of the leadership on a public platform amounted to a breach of discipline. Sasi has been a prominent figure in labour and party politics in Palakkad.

## Kerala records sharp rise in chickenpox cases

**HD Bureau  
KOCHI**

Health authorities in Kerala are monitoring a surge in chickenpox infections across the State as thousands of cases are reported during the peak season for respiratory illnesses. Official figures indicate that more than 10,154 infections have been recorded since the start of the year, with 5,097 cases reported in February alone. Most infections have been detected among children, while three adult deaths linked to complications from the disease have also been confirmed. Public health officials say the increase coincides with a seasonal pattern historically observed during late winter and early summer months, when

viral infections circulate more widely in schools and densely populated communities. Even so, the sharp rise has triggered concern among parents and educators because the spread is unfolding during the examination period for school students, including those preparing for Board examinations and competitive entrance tests. Chickenpox, caused by the varicella-zoster virus, is widely regarded as a common childhood illness but can lead to serious complications in adults or individuals with weakened immune systems. Health experts note that the disease spreads easily through respiratory droplets.

## Audit flags irregularities in meal scheme

**HD Bureau  
CHENNAI**

Allegations of financial irregularities have surfaced around Samridhi@Kochi, a budget eatery initiative run under the Kochi Corporation, after a preliminary audit ordered by the United Democratic Front-led council indicated discrepancies in the project's accounts. Kochi Corporation Mayor V. K. Minimol confirmed that the initial examination had identified issues in the records, though she declined to disclose detailed findings, noting that the audit process remains underway. Samridhi@Kochi was launched as a subsidised meal programme aimed at providing affordable food.

## Daughter moves court over book on MT

**HD Bureau  
KOCHI**

Aswathy V Nair, daughter of acclaimed Malayalam writer MT Vasudevan Nair, filed a criminal defamation complaint against authors Deedi Damodaran and Echmukutty and publisher AV Sreekumar, alleging that a book written by the two authors contains defamatory references to her father. The complaint centres on



**Aswathy contends that portions of the book contain statements that damage MT's reputation**

the Malayalam book 'Viral', co-authored by Empty Space: Bashpeekruthayude Aaram and Deedi Damodaran and

writer-blogger Echmukutty. The work was published by AV Sreekumar. According to the complaint filed before a court in Kerala, Aswathy contends that portions of the book contain statements that damage the reputation of the late literary figure and therefore constitute criminal defamation under the law.

MT Vasudevan Nair, widely known by the initials MT, remains one of the most influential voices in Malayalam literature and cinema. His body of work spans novels, short stories and screenplays that reshaped narrative storytelling in Malayalam. Over several decades he received numerous honours including the Jnanpith

## Arrest delay in hit and run case infuriates family

**HD Bureau  
KOCHI**

Grief and anger have intensified in Ernakulam district as the family of 19-year-old Jasliya Johnson publicly criticised police for failing to arrest the driver accused of causing the fatal road accident in Angamaly that led the girl's brain death. Speaking at a press

conference, the victim's father Johnson questioned why the suspect had not been taken into custody even six days after the incident, arguing that modern investigative tools should have enabled faster action. Jasliya, a second-year BCom student at Morning Star College in Angamaly, sustained severe

head injuries after being struck by a speeding car while walking back to her hostel after work on the evening of February 28. The vehicle did not stop after the impact, leaving the student critically injured on the roadside. She was rushed to hospital but never regained consciousness and was later declared brain-dead.

Police have identified the driver as Dr Cyriac George, a house surgeon associated with a private medical college in Ernakulam. Investigators say the vehicle involved, a Mahindra XUV700 registered in the name of George Thomas of Athirampuzha, was traced and seized after a search operation.

Authorities also confirmed that another individual was in the car at the time of the crash and has already appeared before police to record a statement. Despite these developments, the accused has remained absconding, prompting criticism from the victim's relatives and the public.

offgrid

## Five snakes discovered inside bedroom air conditioner

**HD Bureau  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM**

Five snakes were found inside an air conditioner installed in the bedroom of a house in Sreekrayam, a residential locality near Thiruvananthapuram, after the homeowner noticed unusual movement beneath the cooling unit on returning from work. The startling discovery was made at the home of Technopark employee Madhav J Panicker, a native of Cheruvakkal, who raised the alarm after

spotting what appeared to be a snake's tail protruding from the lower section of the wall-mounted air conditioner. The incident unfolded during the evening when Panicker entered the bedroom and observed the unusual sight beneath the appliance, prompting immediate concern. Panicker initially suspected that a single snake might have entered the indoor unit through a gap or duct connected to the

exterior wall. However, inspection by snake rescuers revealed that the situation was more alarming than first assumed. When the appliance was partially dismantled, rescuers discovered five snakes hidden inside the unit, tightly coiled around internal components and within the narrow cavities of the cooling system. Local wildlife rescuers who responded to the call carefully removed the



reptiles one by one, ensuring that the appliance could be opened without injuring the animals or damaging the electrical components. Residents in the neighbourhood gathered outside the house

as the removal operation unfolded, reflecting both curiosity and concern about how the snakes managed to enter a sealed indoor appliance. According to rescuers, such incidents, while unusual, are not unheard of

in areas where residential neighbourhoods border vegetation, drainage channels, or undeveloped plots. Air-conditioning systems often include external piping, wall cavities and outdoor compressor connections

that may provide small openings through which reptiles and rodents can enter. These openings, if not properly sealed, can act as entry points for wildlife seeking shelter. Experts familiar with snake behaviour note that reptiles often seek cool, dark and undisturbed spaces, particularly in urban environments where natural habitats have been altered by construction. Appliances

can inadvertently offer such conditions. The internal chambers of these units remain relatively protected from disturbances and may attract animals looking for refuge from heat or predators. Wildlife handlers identified the snakes as non-venomous species commonly found in the region. They were safely removed and later released into suitable habitat.

# TVK claims it forced DMK, Cong deal

HD Bureau  
CHENNAI

Senior TVK leader K. A. Sengottaiyan has claimed that the party's emergence as an electoral force has influenced negotiations within the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance and indirectly strengthened several political formations. Sengottaiyan, serving as the administrative committee's chief coordinator of TVK, made the remarks while speaking to reporters at Chennai airport on Thursday. He argued that the presence of the party in the electoral arena has introduced a new factor in alliance discussions involving the Congress and other partners aligned with the ruling DMK.



**Sengottaiyan said the emergence of a new political actor has created competitive pressure that affects negotiations**

Political alignments in Tamil Nadu have long been shaped by coalition arrangements among regional parties and national formations.

Sengottaiyan suggested that the expansion of TVK's support base has compelled established players to reassess strategies and seat-sharing formulas ahead of upcoming electoral contests.

According to him, the emergence of a new political actor has created competitive pressure that affects negotiations within the Secular Progressive Alliance, a coalition led by the DMK that includes the Congress and several regional allies.

Sengottaiyan indicated

# Govt rejects cops' role in Vijay convoy crash

HD Bureau  
CHENNAI

State authorities have dismissed claims circulating on social media that a road accident linked to actor-politician Vijay's convoy occurred after a police vehicle abruptly reversed while escorting the procession, calling the allegations misleading and unsupported by official findings. Government officials said posts shared widely across social platforms suggested that a police escort vehicle suddenly moved backwards during

the movement of Vijay's convoy, causing vehicles behind it to collide. The claim gained traction among supporters and critics of the television and film star. Officials involved in the preliminary inquiry said the narrative presented online does not reflect the sequence of events established by traffic authorities.

According to police accounts, the crash occurred when vehicles travelling behind the convoy failed to maintain sufficient distance, leading to a chain collision during a moment of con-



gestion on the route used for the political programme.

State officials said escort vehicles assigned to the convoy were operating under standard traffic control protocols and there was no

indication that a police vehicle reversed suddenly or performed any manoeuvre that could have triggered the accident.

Police units deployed for the event had coordinated traffic management along the route and were guiding vehicles to maintain safe movement as the convoy passed through crowded areas.

Video clips circulating online appeared to show damaged vehicles and a portion of the convoy route, fuelling speculation that police actions had caused the

incident. Authorities said the footage was incomplete and did not capture the entire sequence of events leading to the crash.

Senior police officers said traffic investigators examined available recordings from surveillance cameras and bystanders to reconstruct the incident. Their assessment indicated that the collision occurred when vehicles following the convoy slowed abruptly and others behind them were unable to brake in time.

The government's response to the claims came after

online posts suggested negligence by police escort teams. Officials said spreading unverified information during such incidents can create unnecessary tension and mislead the public.

Authorities have urged social media users to rely on verified information rather than viral claims. Cybercrime units have also monitored the circulation of misleading posts and warned that sharing fabricated narratives about accidents could attract legal action under laws governing misinformation.

**SYMBOLIC GAIN | Though short of the demand, the 3-seat gain boosts Cong**

# DMK, Cong strike 28+1 deal

HD Bureau  
CHENNAI

DMK and the Congress have sealed a seat-sharing agreement for the Assembly elections after days of negotiations that reflected both alliance solidarity and intense bargaining.

The arrangement grants the Congress 28 constituencies to contest, three more than the party received in the 2021 election under the alliance led by Chief Minister M. K. Stalin. The agreement was formally signed by Stalin, who is also president of the DMK, and Tamil Nadu Congress Committee president K. Selvapuranthagai.

Alongside the expanded share of Assembly consti-

tuencies, the Congress has secured an additional concession: a Rajya Sabha seat to be backed by the ruling coalition. The pact stabilises the principal alliance opposing the BJP's efforts to expand influence in the southern state and signals a continuation of the political partnership that delivered a decisive victory for the DMK-led front in the previous Assembly election.

Negotiations had stretched for several days, with Congress leaders pressing for a larger share of seats while the DMK weighed competing claims from other partners in the coalition.

Granting 28 seats marks a modest but symbolic gain for the Congress. In 2021, the



**In 2021, the party contested 25 constituencies within the DMK-led alliance and won 18 of them**

party contested 25 constituencies within the DMK-led alliance and won 18 of them, a result that helped restore its

relevance in a state where it has long relied on regional allies. Party strategists argued during negotiations that

its performance justified a larger share of seats and a stronger role within the coalition.

## AAP keen on DMK alliance

HD Bureau  
CHENNAI

Aam Aadmi Party's Tamil Nadu unit signalled its intent to enter the state's electoral arena, with state convenor S. A. N. Vaseegaran confirming that the party plans to contest the upcoming election and intends to approach Chief Minister M. K. Stalin to explore a possible seat-sharing arrangement with the ruling DMK alliance. Vaseegaran said party leaders would initiate discussions with Stalin and other alliance partners as the election approaches, arguing that the party wants to expand its organisational presence in the state and present itself as a political alternative focused on governance and public services.

He indicated that the leadership in Tamil Nadu believes a strategic understanding with the DMK-led coalition could offer the party an opportunity to enter the Assembly.

# Iran blockade rattles coir exports

HD Bureau  
CHENNAI

Tension across West Asian waters has disrupted maritime logistics for exporters as the conflict involving Iran, Israel and the United States spreads into global shipping lanes, forcing several freight operators to halt services and leaving cargo stranded. Among the industries affected is the coir sector, where shipments of fibre, yarn and finished products have stalled after vessels stopped calling at key routes traditionally used for trade with Gulf markets.

Exporters say the suspension of shipping services followed reports that Iran had closed maritime boundaries in response to the escalating regional confrontation. The development has complicated vessel movements through critical sea corridors linking the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf, creating uncertainty for shipping companies already operating under heightened security alerts.

India's coir industry, concentrated largely in Kerala and parts of Tamil Nadu, depends heavily on maritime transport for global trade.

**The coir industry, concentrated largely in Kerala and parts of Tamil Nadu, depends heavily on maritime transport for global trade**

Manufacturers ship products such as coir mats, ropes, geotextiles and fibre to markets in West Asia, Europe and North America. Industry representatives

say consignments bound for Gulf destinations have been delayed or diverted, while exporters face rising freight costs and uncertain delivery schedules.

Coir exporters warn that the disruption could strain supply chains at a time when demand for eco-friendly materials is expanding. Coir fibre, extracted from coconut husks, is widely used in erosion control, agriculture, packaging and landscaping products. Gulf countries remain a steady destination for the material because of demand in infrastructure and horticulture projects.

Shipping companies began notifying exporters of service suspensions shortly after security risks intensified across strategic waterways. Some carriers have opted to avoid routes considered vulnerable to military escalation, while others are waiting for clearer guidance from naval authorities and insurers.

Exporters report containers already loaded at ports awaiting vessel availability, adding to storage costs and uncertainty for buyers overseas. Logistics operators are assessing alternative routes through safer waters.

## Twin bomb scares jolt banks

HD Bureau  
CHENNAI

Security agencies launched sweeping searches across two bank locations in Chennai after anonymous bomb threats targeted financial institutions within a span of about 24 hours, prompting evacuations, heightened surveillance and the deployment of specialised police teams.

Police units responded on Thursday after a warning was received regarding the Union Bank of India building on Rajaji Salai, a busy commercial corridor in the city's George Town area.

# State curbs politics in private schools

HD Bureau  
CHENNAI

The state government has amended regulations governing private schools to bar the conduct of programmes considered political, ideological, communal or divisive, a move that authorities say is aimed at safeguarding the neutrality of educational spaces and protecting students from external influence.

The change forms part of an amendment to the Tamil Nadu Private Schools Rules, 2023, with the state government inserting new provisions that restrict activities organised by outside individuals, associations or organisations within school campuses.

Officials said the revision clarifies the responsibilities of private institutions and reinforces earlier safeguards designed to prevent political mobilisation or ideological campaigns among students.

Education department authorities indicated that the amended rule directs private schools not to permit programmes that could promote political agendas or propagate views that may inflame

communal or social divisions. The provision applies to any event involving external participants, including seminars, awareness campaigns or cultural gatherings, if such activities are linked to ideological or political messaging.

The amendment also emphasises the duty of school managements to ensure

**The amended rule directs private schools not to permit programmes that could promote political agendas**

that campuses remain spaces dedicated to education and student welfare. Under the revised rules, school authorities must obtain appropriate permission and ensure that events hosted on campus align with academic or educational objectives. Any violation could attract administrative action under the regulatory framework governing private educational institutions in the state.

## More AC waiting rooms

HD Bureau  
CHENNAI

Southern Railway has initiated measures to open air-conditioned waiting rooms at about 30 railway stations across its network as temperatures rise across southern states, aiming to provide relief for passengers facing long travel waits during the peak summer season. The move forms part of a wider effort to improve passenger amenities and cope with growing footfall during summer months, when travel demand typically increases for school holidays, pilgrimages and seasonal migration.

# Railway name removed after row

HD Bureau  
CHENNAI

Authorities of the Tiruchi Railway Division removed the inscription "Kartavya Dwar" from the entrance arch of the Divisional Railway Manager's office near Tiruchi Junction on Wednesday evening after a political controversy erupted over the use of a Hindi term. The phrase, meaning "Gateway of Duty," had been displayed on the newly constructed arch in Hindi, Tamil and English scripts.

Railway officials said the words were taken down "respecting the sentiments of the people," bringing a swift

administrative response to criticism from political leaders and activists who argued that the naming reflected an attempt to promote Hindi in a state where linguistic identity is a sensitive political issue.

The arch stands at the entrance to the office complex of the Tiruchi Division of Southern Railway, located close to the main gateway of Tiruchi Railway Junction, one of the busiest rail hubs in the region.

The structure had been inaugurated earlier this week after redevelopment work that included the installation of a stone plaque and signage displaying the phrase "K-

artavya Dwar".

Political objections intensified soon after the name appeared on the arch. Leaders from several parties argued that the Hindi term had been transliterated into Tamil and English scripts rather than translated into those languages. Critics said this approach effectively reproduced the Hindi expression in three scripts rather than offering equivalent terms in Tamil and English.

Chief Minister M. K. Stalin criticised the naming of the entrance gate and accused the Union government of promoting Hindi through official nomenclature.



offgrid

# Nanguneri killings expose caste-driven reprisal plot

HD Bureau  
CHENNAI

The double murder in the Tirunelveli district town of Nanguneri has taken on a sharply different dimension after investigators concluded that the attack stemmed from a caste-motivated reprisal rather than a spontaneous assault by intoxicated youths. Police inquiries indicate that the killings were allegedly orchestrated by members of a dominant intermediate caste targeting young men from other communities, exposing tensions that had been

building quietly in the locality.

The victims, both young men from Indra Colony in the Perumpathu area near Nanguneri, were attacked by a group that initially appeared to be a gang of drunken assailants. Early reports described the violence as an unprovoked street attack. However, police investigation has since suggested that the incident was planned, with investigators pointing to a series of events linked to local caste rivalries that had escalated in the days preceding the killings.

Officers involved in the

probe say the conflict intensified after youths belonging to the Paraiyar community in Indra Colony displayed posters glorifying Manalmedu Shankar, a lorry driver from the Delta region who died during a police encounter in February 2007. Shankar had been named in multiple criminal cases involving murder, abduction and narcotics trafficking. Though the encounter took place nearly two decades ago, his image has occasionally been invoked in certain pockets of Tamil Nadu as a symbol of defiance among marginalised youth.



Police investigators believe the posters triggered anger among sections of a dominant caste community in the area. According to officials

familiar with the case, the posters were interpreted by some groups as an assertion of identity and power that challenged local social hier-

archies. That reaction, investigators say, appears to have contributed to the planning of the attack that ultimately led to the double murder.

Authorities have arrested several suspects and are continuing to question others in connection with the case. Police sources indicated that evidence gathered so far suggests the assault was coordinated rather than impulsive. Investigators are examining communications between suspects and attempting to determine whether the attackers acted on instructions from influential

individuals within their community.

District police officials have strengthened security in and around Nanguneri to prevent further tensions. Additional personnel were deployed in sensitive neighbourhoods, while patrols have been increased in Indra Colony and nearby settlements. Senior officers held discussions with community leaders and local representatives in an attempt to calm fears and discourage retaliatory violence.

The incident has drawn attention from political leaders and civil society org-

anisations, many of whom have expressed concern over the persistence of caste-based hostilities in rural and semi-urban pockets of the state. Human rights advocates say the episode reflects deeper structural tensions that can quickly erupt when symbolic acts are perceived as challenges to entrenched social dominance.

Caste violence in southern districts has periodically resurfaced despite decades of social reform movements that sought to dismantle rigid hierarchies. Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi and neighbouring districts have witnessed sporadic clashes.



**The Free Press Journal**  
Founder Editor: S Sadanand

## DMK's unity as strategy

In politics, the old dictum remains as relevant as ever: united we stand, divided we fall. The ruling alliance in Tamil Nadu seems to have rediscovered this wisdom just in time. For days, negotiations between the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the Congress over seat-sharing for the forthcoming Assembly elections appeared to have reached a dead end. The Congress was demanding 35 Assembly and two Rajya Sabha seats, while the DMK was unwilling to concede so much ground. The stalemate threatened to cast a shadow over a coalition that has otherwise prided itself on cohesion. Fortunately for both parties, realism prevailed. The DMK agreed to allot 28 Assembly and one Rajya Sabha seat to the Congress, and the latter accepted the compromise. What seemed like a looming breakdown was thus transformed into a workable arrangement. In political terms, it was a case of extracting success from the jaws of defeat.

The achievement should not be underestimated. The DMK-led alliance consists of 21 political parties—many of which oppose one another in other parts of the country. Keeping such a diverse coalition together is never easy. Doing so for a record stretch is a testament to the coalition management skills of Chief Minister MK Stalin. Yet, the challenge before the ruling alliance is formidable. The Bharatiya Janata Party is determined to make a serious bid for power in Tamil Nadu. For the party's national leadership, success in the state would serve as proof that the political terrain is no longer impenetrable for it. The BJP has been attempting to realign political forces in the state by amplifying relatively small religious disputes. Symbolism has also been deployed with care. The installation of the Sengol—a ceremonial sceptre symbolising righteous rule rooted in ancient Tamil tradition—in the new Parliament building was accompanied by much fanfare. Likewise, the replacement of Edwin Lutyns' statue at Rashtrapati Bhavan with that of C. Rajagopalachari carried unmistakable political messaging.

Stalin, for his part, has been quick to counter these moves by emphasising Tamil identity and linguistic pride. The state government recently commissioned a report on centre-state relations from a committee headed by Justice Kurien Joseph, particularly in the context of friction with the Governor over administrative matters. The findings are unlikely to find favour with the centre and may remain largely academic. Nevertheless, they reinforce the political narrative of state autonomy.

As the election approaches, the contours of the battle are becoming clearer. On one side stands a broad but fragile coalition determined to preserve the Dravidian political tradition. On the other is a national party eager to prove that Tamil Nadu is no longer beyond its reach. In such a contest, unity may well prove to be the ruling alliance's most valuable asset.

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## Quiet death that speaks volumes

The "quiet death" of the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena, dispatched by an American torpedo just about forty-four nautical miles off the coast of Sri Lanka on Wednesday, blows a submarine-sized hole into India's long-held aspirations for naval primacy in the Indian Ocean. For years, New Delhi has positioned itself as the "net security provider" for the region, yet the ability of an extra-regional power to execute a high-stakes kinetic strike within India's primary littoral zone—and immediately following the high-profile MILAN 2026 exercises—dents somewhat the illusion of Indian dominance. The conflict between the United States and Iran inadvertently exposes New Delhi to criticism regarding its regional stewardship and undermines the notion of strategic autonomy, as India finds itself a bystander to a clash between the United States and a former energy supplier. The Dena having been struck also compromises somewhat the perception of India's ability to guarantee the safety of regional waters, particularly as the vessel was a state guest in Visakhapatnam shortly before the attack. Furthermore, this act risks fostering a normalisation of external military activism, signalling to other global powers, specifically China, that the Indian Ocean is an open theatre for unilateral operations where Indian sovereignty and regional influence can be challenged with impunity.

To salvage its blue-water ambitions, the Indian Navy must quickly draw the correct inference from this sub-surface engagement by prioritising underwater domain awareness. The fact that a US submarine could manoeuvre and strike undetected could well point to a critical gap in India's current anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities. If India cannot secure its own backyard against "quiet" threats, its claim to be a credible "blue water" force floats in the realm of claim alone. True blue water capacity is not merely about carrier battle groups and port visits; it is about the sustained ability to detect, deter, and deny unauthorised kinetic actions by foreign actors within one's strategic sphere. The incident inadvertently exposes New Delhi to criticism for its reactive posture, necessitating a transition to active enforcement through heavy investment in long-range maritime patrol aircraft, advanced sonar networks, and autonomous underwater vehicles. Only by closing the gap between geopolitical rhetoric and technical ASW proficiency can India prevent its littoral waters from becoming a playground for foreign superpowers, ensuring that the next "quiet death" does not occur as a result of national incapacity.



*Mirror to Society*

SRINATH SRIDHARAN

There is a simple truth about the human body that physicians have understood for centuries. One cannot decide that a particular organ may suffer while the rest of the body will remain unaffected. If the heart weakens, the lungs begin to struggle. If the lungs falter, the brain soon feels the consequences. The human body is a single, integrated system in which distress in one part slowly becomes distress for the whole. The modern world operates in much the same way, even though nations often behave as if they live in isolation. The modern world has perfected a curious moral skill. Nations have learnt how to be deeply outraged about some wars and curiously patient about others. Leaders condemn certain violations of sovereignty with thunderous speeches while describing similar events elsewhere as complex regional matters. Yet, the world we inhabit is no longer arranged into neat compartments.

Countries frequently treat conflicts and crises as if they can be geographically contained. Wars are described as regional matters, humanitarian disasters as distant tragedies, and political instability as somebody else's problem. Yet, the architecture of the global economy and the realities of geopolitics repeatedly remind us that such thinking belongs to another era. The world today is deeply interconnected through human migration,

energy systems, supply chains, financial markets, and technology networks. When instability emerges in one region, it affects travel swiftly through these invisible arteries of global interdependence.

The ongoing hostilities in West Asia offer a striking illustration of this reality. Military confrontations involving powerful nations rarely remain confined to their immediate geography. They quickly transform into global economic and strategic disruptions. The Strait of Hormuz, a narrow maritime corridor linking the Persian Gulf with the wider world, carries a significant share of global oil supply. Any disruption there reverberates through energy markets across continents, influencing fuel prices, manufacturing costs, and inflation levels in countries thousands of miles away.

Industries dependent on global logistics, from electronics to pharmaceuticals and fertilisers, begin to experience delays and cost pressures. Financial markets globally react immediately to the uncertainty. Governments far removed from the battlefield are forced to recalibrate fiscal and energy policies.

Despite this reality, global political behaviour continues to reflect a troubling pattern of selective engagement. The justification frequently invokes humanitarian values, democratic principles or strategic necessity. Yet, the application of these principles is rarely consistent. The institutions created after the Second World War were built

on the hope that rules-based cooperation could prevent the recurrence of destructive global conflicts. Multilateral frameworks, such as the UN and other international forums, were designed to encourage dialogue, restraint, and collective problem-solving. Over time, however, the effectiveness of these institutions has been increasingly tested by the realities of power politics.

The deeper lesson emerging from these realities is not merely economic but philosophical. Leadership in the twenty-first century requires a broader understanding of responsibility. National interest and global stability are no longer opposing ideas. They are closely intertwined.

This interconnected world, therefore, demands a more mature style of leadership than the one often displayed in contemporary geopolitics. Demonstrations of power may produce short-term tactical advantages, but long-term stability requires a deeper commitment to cooperation and restraint.

Selective morality has quietly become one of the defining characteristics of modern geopolitics, and it lies at the heart of many of the tensions shaping today's world. Powerful nations often frame interventions in the language of values while overlooking comparable suffering elsewhere when strategic interests are absent. Entire regions have endured prolonged hardship without meaningful global mobilisation. Several African na-

tions struggled for decades with fragile economic growth, internal violence, and humanitarian distress, while receiving limited sustained global attention. The absence of consistent global engagement during such periods illustrates how geopolitical priorities often overshadow universal principles. Just as the human body cannot isolate pain to one organ, the global system cannot isolate instability to one region.

India's own experience reflects this imbalance. For decades, the country has faced repeated cross-border terrorism and security challenges that have resulted in significant loss of life and economic disruption. Yet, these challenges were frequently treated by parts of the international community as regional security issues rather than as threats with broader implications. Only when similar security concerns began affecting Western societies did global discourse shift towards recognising the dangers of transnational terrorism urgently.

This selective morality has consequences far beyond the immediate crises it ignores. It gradually erodes faith in multilateral institutions and encourages unilateral behaviour by nations that feel their concerns are not adequately recognised. No nation, however large or economically self-sufficient it may appear, can insulate itself from disruptions elsewhere.

Political instability that forces migration flows can transform social and political dynamics across conti-

nents. Modern world has quietly woven humanity into a shared strategic ecosystem. Every disturbance in this system eventually finds pathways into the lives of people who may seem geographically removed from the original crisis. History offers examples of such foresight. After the devastation of WWII, countries that were once bitter enemies chose to build institutions that encouraged cooperation and reconstruction. That vision shaped decades of global economic expansion and relative geopolitical stability. The lesson remains relevant today. Durable peace emerges not from selective intervention but from shared responsibility.

The world cannot choose which of its wounds it is willing to ignore. Every conflict that is dismissed as distant, every injustice that is treated as peripheral, and every instability that is considered someone else's problem eventually returns in unexpected ways. Markets will reflect it, societies will experience it, and future generations will inherit its consequences.

Humanity is not a loose collection of independent parts. Recognising this may be the first step towards rebuilding a global order that is wiser, fairer, and more stable than the one we are currently struggling to sustain. If justice were applied as selectively in physics as in geopolitics, gravity itself would collapse.

Dr Srinath Sridharan is a policy researcher and corporate adviser. X: @ssmumbai

# Selective morality will not ensure durability of peace

Every conflict dismissed as distant and every instability considered someone else's problem eventually returns in unexpected ways

## Is Lula a radical firebrand, a populist or an institutionalist?

A seasoned statesman, Lula has prioritised pragmatism and balance over posturing and polarisation, making him an institutionalist rather

powerful? We do not want to participate only to eat the dessert; we want to eat the main course, dessert and then have coffee."

Lula is one of the founding leaders of both IBSA and BRICS. The first IBSA Summit in September 2006 in Brasilia was attended by President Lula, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and South African President Thabo Mbeki. President Lula and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh also attended the first BRICS Summit in Yekaterinburg in 2009. By describing BRICS as a 'café com leite' (coffee with milk) alliance, Lula sought to give a new meaning to this organisation. He borrowed the term from Brazilian singer Flavia Coelho's song 'café com leite', which serves as a metaphor for a harmonious blend of two different elements coming together to create something delightful.

Since he co-founded the Workers' Party in 1980, Lula has been a coalition builder, and his party consists of trade unions but also intellectuals and church leaders. He will run the 2026 elections not as a leftist firebrand but as a unifier and a consensus builder. As Andre Vitor Singer, a political science professor at the University of Sao Paulo, says, Lula has realised that to govern,

he needs a "Rooseveltian dream" for Brazil, that is, dedicating himself to the country's democratic ideals.

Currently, the Workers' Party holds only six of 31 cabinet positions. Two of his cabinet positions are held by those who had supported Jair Bolsonaro in the past. President Lula has had to exert his influence over his own party to keep the government running smoothly. The pragmatist Lula has followed a big-tent approach to consensus building.

Lula the pragmatist has taken a forthright stand on global issues, whereas India and other BRICS members have followed a timid policy. Under Lula, Brazil is the only BRICS country to vote in favour of the UN resolution condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Brazil called for withdrawing Russian troops from Ukraine.

At the same time, Lula rejected American and German requests to send military supplies to Ukraine. In his quest to resolve the Ukraine crisis, Lula came out with the suggestion that Kyiv recognise Russian sovereignty over Crimea to make way for peace. Lula said no to Gustavo Petro's anti-oil bloc. As a front-runner for the presidential race in Colombia, Petro had called on ideological allies across Latin America

and the world to join him in forming a new bloc to lead the economy away from fossil fuels.

President Lula also vetoed Venezuela's bid to join BRICS, as President Maduro abused Lula's trust by failing to comply with the promise to present the official results. He has also kept a distance from Miguel Diaz-Canel of Cuba and President Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua.

President Lula believes that democracy would flounder if inequality reigns. A great champion of the fight against social exclusion and global hunger, he introduced a number of schemes, like Bolsa Familia, ProUni, and Minha Casa Minha Vida, which lifted millions out of poverty. Lula's ability to compromise and negotiate has earned him the sobriquet 'pelego' (accommodationist). As a seasoned statesman, Lula has prioritised balance and pragmatism over posturing and polarisation. In younger days, Lula was certainly a radical firebrand. It will be churlish to describe him as a populist, as his Workers' Party rejected populism from its inception. As historian John D French, in his biography of Lula, notes, he has all along been an institutionalist.

The author comments on global affairs.



*Guest Column*

ASH NARAIN ROY

During his visit to Brazil in the late 1960s, General Charles de Gaulle said presumptuously that Brazil was "not a serious country" and that it was a "country of tomorrow". De Gaulle forgot that in August 1944, during a White House internal meeting, the possibility of adding Brazil as the sixth permanent member of the Security Council had been discussed.

At the Dumbarton Oaks conference, US Under Secretary of State Edward Stettinius raised the Brazil question. However, the invitation never arrived despite President Vargas taking up the issue with Stettinius. The military rule from 1964 to 1985 remains one of the most terrible periods in Brazilian history, as it was marked by state-sanctioned repression, human rights violations, censorship, and an artificial economic transformation.

Brazil, under the leadership of Luis Inacio Lula da Silva, ticks all the boxes to become a world leader. As Brazilian diplomat and writer Sergio Franca Danese argues, Brazil under Lula has earned a well-deserved place in the comity of nations given its "assets—natural, economic, human, and diplomatic—that grant

it a place at the table of global negotiations".

Historian Andre Pagliarina, in his book, *Lula: A People's President and the Fight for Brazil's Future*, says that Lula has positioned himself "as one of the leading voices of the Global South". Few leaders from the developing world enjoy as much goodwill from broad swathes of the population as Lula does. Political scientist Robert D Putnam's "two-level game theory" explains how international negotiations occur simultaneously on two levels—domestic and international. President Lula's third presidency typifies Putnam's theory of how he has been wrestling with permanent negotiations with internal interest groups both in the government and the opposition, as well as with other countries and international actors.

From the very beginning, Lula demonstrated that he meant business. Within months of assuming power in 2003, he said, rather bluntly, on the sidelines of the G8 Summit in Evian, France, "We will not accept any more participating in international platforms as if we were the poor little ones of Latin America..." Lula further asserted, "What is the use of being invited for the dessert at the banquet of the

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Tale-spin

Apropos the article 'New age paradox: Don't look for gurus in age of Eklavyas' by Sanjeev Kotnala, it is heartening to read a very cogent treatment of the new age learning skill analysis by him. Indeed, the Indian epic tale of Drona-Eklavya is presented in a new version for the modern times. He is right in stressing that the teacher-student bond has weakened over the years, opening new avenues of self-learning skills in the new-age philosophy of life.

S.K. Sangam, Pune

#### Health scare

The old catechism of 120/180 once marked diabetic prudence. Then, lower became better, and better became urgent. A steady campaign re-framed risk, and the market responded with vials, pens, and quarterly earnings. Now the spotlight is on obesity. Drugs like semaglutide promise

slimmer figures and undoubtedly help many. Yet, a pill cannot substitute for habit any more than a syringe can replace restraint. When public health becomes product-led, the citizen risks becoming a consumer first and a custodian of his own body later.

R. Narayanan, Navi Mumbai

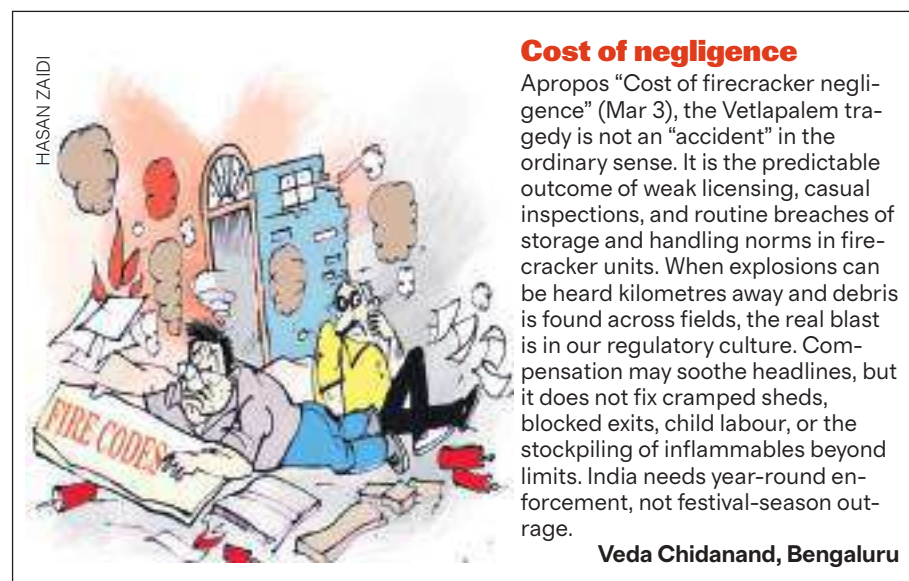
#### New hope for J&K

Jammu & Kashmir's maiden Ranji Trophy triumph is a beacon of hope and unity. Overcoming decades of challenges, this historic victory showcases grit, talent, and teamwork from every corner of the region. It inspires youth nationwide, proving that perseverance builds not just champions, but stronger bonds in our diverse nation.

T.S. Karthik, Chennai

#### West Asia conflict

With the escalation of military conflict in West Asia,



#### Cost of negligence

Apropos "Cost of firecracker negligence" (Mar 3), the Vetlapalem tragedy is not an "accident" in the ordinary sense. It is the predictable outcome of weak licensing, casual inspections, and routine breaches of storage and handling norms in firecracker units. When explosions can be heard kilometres away and debris is found across fields, the real blast is in our regulatory culture. Compensation may soothe headlines, but it does not fix cramped sheds, blocked exits, child labour, or the stockpiling of inflammables beyond limits. India needs year-round enforcement, not festival-season outrage.

Veda Chidanand, Bengaluru

the suspension of traffic through the Strait of Hormuz has raised serious concerns about disruptions in oil and natural gas supplies from the region to countries the world over. International crude oil prices have increased by nearly nine per cent. About 40 per cent of

India's oil imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz. The crisis is set to have a major impact on India in the coming days, with fuel prices expected to rise further, leading to increased inflationary pressure on consumers.

Dattaprasad Shirodkar, Mumbai

#### Act of violence

The arrest of 3 classmates on charges of murdering a fellow student in Bhandup comes as a shock and should act as an eye-opener. Constant exposure to social media and OTT platforms has an adverse impact on children, leading them to commit

such horrible acts. Gone are the days when fights among kids evaporated in thin air as soon as they left the playground or classrooms, and they mended their differences the very next moment.

S.N. Kabra, Mumbai

#### Cancer on the rise

Incidences of colon and rectal cancers are increasing worldwide, including India. Complex genetic and dietary factors contribute to colorectal cancers, including a fat-rich diet and food low in fibres. Abdominal pain and change in bowel habits, like constipation and bleeding from the rectum, should compel the affected to see a doctor. Screening and early investigations are crucial in detecting colorectal cancer early. High-risk patients with a family history should get tested regularly after the age of 40.

Dr. Ganapathi Bhat, Akola

CONFLICT DEEPENS | Israeli attacks in Tehran, Lebanon escalate tensions

# Drones, missiles unleashed; Iran strikes across West Asia



An explosion in Tehran

... and a destroyed stadium

FPJ News Service  
MUMBAI

Iran launched a Khorramshahr-4 heavy ballistic missile towards Israel early on Thursday, state media reported, as the West Asia conflict escalated on Day 6. The missile can reportedly carry a 1-tonne warhead and has an estimated range of about 2,000 km.

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps targeted Ben Gurion Airport and airbase near Israel's capital Tel Aviv. Israel reported multiple incoming missile attacks, with air raid sirens sounding in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem shortly after the Israeli military announced fresh strikes in Lebanon targeting the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah in the southern suburbs of Beirut.

Qatar said residents near the US Embassy in Doha were being evacuated as a precaution. In the UAE, fighter jets were heard flying over Dubai as tensions intensified. There were indications the conflict could begin affecting commercial shipping. A blast was reported on Thursday off the coast of Kuwait.

The UK Maritime Trade Operations centre, operated

**'They're wasting their time': Trump says he must be involved in picking next leader**

US President Donald Trump on Thursday said he must be personally involved in selecting Iran's next leader — just like he was in Venezuela. Trump acknowledged Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's son Mojtaba Khamenei is the most likely successor, but made it clear he found the outcome unacceptable. "They are wasting their time. Khamenei's son is a lightweight. I have to be involved in the appointment, like with Dely [Rodriguez] in Venezuela," he said. "Khamenei's son is unacceptable to me. We want someone that will bring harmony and peace to Iran," he told Axios. His remarks came after Israel attacked the Iranian building in Qom housing the clerical body responsible for selecting Iran's next supreme leader.

by the British military, said a tanker appeared to have come under attack but did not confirm the cause. Bahrain said an Iranian missile hit an oil refinery. The fire on Thursday night was extinguished and the refinery was working. There was no casualty.

In Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan exclave, suspected Iranian drones struck near Nakhchivan airport. Authorities said one drone hit airport infrastructure while another landed near a nearby school building. Two civilians were hurt.

Azerbaijan accused Iran, which denied the claim.

In Oman, Iranian drone

**1,230**  
deaths have been reported in Iran since the hostilities began, as per an Iranian agency.

strikes were reported near the Port of Duqm and the Port of Salalah, damaging the infrastructure. An oil tanker off Muscat was hit. One crew member aboard the tanker was killed and four were injured. A foreign worker at a port facility was also injured.

Israel, too, attacked Iranian-linked military facilities and strategic locations.

## STRAIT OF HORMUZ CLOSED TO US, ISRAELI SHIPS, OPEN TO OTHERS: IRAN

Iran has announced that the Strait of Hormuz will be closed to ships linked to the US, Israel and their allies, while vessels from other countries will still be allowed to pass through the strategic waterway. Iranian authorities said the restriction applies specifically to vessels associated with the US, Israel and certain Western nations, warning that such ships entering the strait could face military action. However, Tehran said ships from other countries would still be permitted to use the route. Meanwhile, Pakistan said it had 28 days of fuel reserves, left, and it ordered work from home and online classes. Bangladesh, too, asked citizens to minimise "unnecessary travels" as panic buying hit fuel stations in Dhaka.

## US WILL BITTERLY REGRET: ARAGHCHI

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi warned that the US would "bitterly regret" sinking an Iranian naval vessel in the Indian Ocean, as tensions escalated sharply between Iran, Israel and US forces across the region. On X, Araghchi condemned the attack on the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena, describing it as an "atrocious act at sea". "The US has perpetrated an atrocity at sea, 2,000 miles away from Iran's shores," Araghchi said. The sinking has triggered a strong reaction within Iran's political and religious establishment.

## CLERIC FOR SHEDDING TRUMP, ISRAELIS' BLOOD

Ayatollah Abdollah Javadi Amoli, a senior cleric, called for retaliation during a televised address. He called for "the shedding of Zionist blood, the shedding of Trump's blood", following the naval attack. "We are now on the verge of a great test and we must be careful to fully preserve this unity, to fully preserve this alliance," he said, adding, "The Imam of the time says, 'Fight the oppressive America, his blood is on my shoulders.'"

## HQ OF IRANIAN KURDISH FORCES IN IRAQ HIT

Iran's military has said it targeted the headquarters of Iranian Kurdish opposition groups in northern Iraq, according to BBC. The military said it attacked "Kurdish groups opposed to the Islamic revolution in Iraqi Kurdistan with three missiles". One person was killed and three others were injured in the strikes carried out on Tuesday and Wednesday.

## WAR TO COST ISRAEL \$3 BILLION A WEEK

The war with Iran could cost Israel an estimated NIS 9.4 billion (\$3bn) per week under current restrictions on economic activities, Israeli finance ministry has warned. "In a letter to Home Front Command chief, Major General Shai Klapper, Finance Ministry Director General Ilan Rom asked to ease restrictions to allow for a gradual, partial reopening of businesses and workplaces as early as Thursday," Times of Israel reported.

## Proxies hit Israeli, US-linked targets

FPJ News Service  
MUMBAI

Iran-backed armed groups launched coordinated attacks across West Asia, targeting Israeli territory and facilities linked to US interests, according to Reuters. "The Guardian" and regional security monitoring groups.

In Lebanon, the Iran-backed group Hezbollah fired rockets and drones towards northern Israel as cross-border hostilities intensified. Israeli authorities said air defence systems intercepted several projectiles, though some landed in open areas. Damage was reported in northern Israel, but officials did not release a detailed casualty count linked specifically to the latest salvos.

Hezbollah has been exchanging fire with Israel for months, but the pace of attacks has increased as tensions between Iran, Israel and the US escalate across the region. Israeli forces responded with air strikes on targets in southern Lebanon following the launches.

In Iraq, Iran-aligned mil-

**PM Keir Starmer says UK is sending four fighter jets to Qatar, confirms first repatriation flight has taken off**

ities operating under the umbrella of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed responsibility for drone attacks targeting what they described as "vital targets" linked to US interests in the region, according to statements cited by conflict monitoring organisations and the Institute for the Study of War.

One such claim involved a drone strike at a target in Jordan, as per monitoring reports referencing statements from the group. Authorities have not confirmed the extent of damage or any casualties, Reuters reported.

**European nations pledged military aid after Cyprus and western allies were attacked. The UK is sending more jets to Qatar. France is allowing the US to use a base for non-combat purposes. But leaders remain reluctant to get too closely involved in the war.**

## Rubio speaks to ministers

IANS  
WASHINGTON

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke to foreign ministers of Italy, Cyprus, Turkey and Saudi Arabia as Washington stepped up diplomatic consultations, the State Department said.

The calls focused on recent developments involving Iran and the broader regional situation. Rubio first spoke to Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani, and discussed developments in Iran and across West Asia. They reaffirmed the strong partnership between the US and Italy.

Rubio also spoke to Cyprus leader Constantinos Kombos about Iran and the conflict in West Asia. Both sides reaffirmed the strong partnership between Washington and Nicosia. Rubio held talks with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan. He said attacks on Turkey's sovereign territory were unacceptable and vowed full US support. He spoke to Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud. He thanked the Saudi leadership for the kingdom's response to the attack on the US Embassy in Riyadh.

## In Senate, Reps defeat move to stop Iran war

Washington: Senate Republicans voted down a Democratic-led effort to halt President Donald Trump's war against Iran, signalling early support for a conflict that has rapidly spread across West Asia with no clear US exit strategy, AP reported.

The legislation, a war powers resolution requiring congressional approval before further military action, failed on a 47-53 vote largely along party lines. Republican Senator Rand Paul backed the measure, while Democratic Senator John Fetterman opposed it. The vote forced lawmakers to publicly take a position on a war that could shape the fate of US troops and the stability of the region.

Earlier, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said senators would have to choose between supporting the American public, whom he said were "exhausted with forever wars in the Middle East", or backing Trump's push for military action.



Senator in scuffle with ex-marine

A confrontation broke out during a US Senate hearing when an anti-war protester, a former Marine, was forcibly removed after interrupting proceedings on the Iran conflict, leaving him with a broken arm. The incident occurred during a Senate Armed Services hearing when Brian McGinnis, a Marine Corps veteran and anti-war activist, interrupted lawmakers to protest US military action related to Iran. Rep Senator Tim Sheehy of Montana joined Capitol Police officers in removing McGinnis from the chamber after the disruption. During the struggle, a loud snap was heard and McGinnis said his arm had been broken.

## Over 200 killed in Congo coltan mine collapse

Goma: A mine collapse at a coltan mining site in eastern Congo left at least 200 dead, as per Congolese officials, a number disputed by the rebel group that controls the mine.

The collapse took place on Tuesday at Rubaya mines, controlled by M23 rebels, as per Ministry of Mines. Fanny Kaj, an official in the M23 rebel group disputed the figure and said the collapse was caused by "bombings" and only 5 people had been killed.

## BLACKOUT HITS CUBA

Havana: A blackout left millions of people without power in Havana and the rest of western Cuba on Wednesday in the latest outage on an island struggling with dwindling oil reserves and a crumbling electric grid. An energy official said it could take over 72 hours to restore operations at one of Cuba's largest thermoelectric power plants, where a shutdown sparked the outage.

## 7% hike in China defence budget

PTI  
BEIJING

China on Thursday hiked its defence budget to about 1.91 trillion yuan (\$277 billion), a rise of 7% from last year in yuan terms, as part of its efforts to ramp up rapid modernisation of armed forces to catch up with the US military.

Flanked by Chinese President Xi Jinping and other top leaders at the opening session of the National People's Congress (NPC), Premier Li Qiang presented his annual work report in which he proposed to hike defence spending to roughly 1.91 trillion yuan (\$276.9 billion) for the 2026 fiscal year, a 7% year-on-year increase, state-run "China Daily" reported.

The other highlight of his proposal was to lower the GDP target for the Chinese economy to 4.5 to 5% in the face of Trump's trade tariff



war, the worsening global crisis following the US-Iran war and headwinds in the domestic economy, owing to property market slump and unemployment crisis.

China, which in the past grew at double digits, has been setting a 5% target for the GDP in the last three years amid growing domestic and external economic challenges.

This year, the target was lowered to 4.5 to 5 per cent for the first time which was seen as an acknowledgment that the world's second largest economy faced headwinds relying more on external trade due to stagnating domestic consumption.

## Voting peaceful in Nepal's first election since Gen Z protests

Kathmandu: Thousands of people voted on Thursday in Nepal's first general election since violent Gen Z protests toppled the KP Sharma Oli-led coalition government, with corruption and generational change in leadership emerging as key issues in the politically fragile Himalayan nation. "The election to the House of Representatives has been conducted peacefully and enthusiastically," acting Chief Election Commissioner Ram Prasad Bhandari said.

According to preliminary estimates, about 60% turnout was recorded during voting.

The newly formed Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), led by former rapper Balendra Shah, who also served as the Mayor of Kathmandu, has emerged as a strong challenger to the two largest political parties, the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), or CPN (UML).

The RSP, formed in 2022,



received significant support during the campaign, and Shah is considered a strong contender for the prime minister's post. The Nepali Congress and CPN (UML) were part of the coalition government toppled by Gen Z protests last year.

Nepali Congress president Gagan Thapa is his party's prime ministerial candidate, while the CPN (UML) has projected Oli as its prime ministerial face. Except for a few sporadic incidents, the election was largely peaceful, Bhandari said, adding that ballot boxes were being collected and counting would begin soon after all ballot

# Global South to decide on the new world order

Erik af Hällström

"We in the West have to understand that unless we change our conduct towards the Global South, we could lose this game. We're currently looking at a new state of balance that's about a battle between values, power and interests." In his appearances around the world, Alexander Stubb, Finland's President since 2024, has consistently debated the question of the transformation of the global order.

Finland's president has been elected in direct popular elections since 1994. In 2024, nine candidates participated in the first round. In the second round, Stubb faced former foreign minister Pekka Haavisto from the Green Party. The difference in foreign policy views between the two candidates was minimal. Both saw Finland as a Western-allied country working for a rules-based world order. The newly elected head of state's message on election night on February 11, 2024, was clear: "Now we no longer have Alex's team, now we all play for Finland." Stubb wanted to be a unifying factor, the president of the entire people.

As president of the Republic, Stubb has advocated for value-based realism as the ideological base for Finnish foreign policy. By values, he means universal values like democracy, human rights and international law, by realism that we must keep up a credible defence capability. Realism also means we must be ready to sit at the same table with people who do not share our views or values.

Although being an EU enthusiast, Stubb has also talked about the rise of the Global South, showing understanding that global centres of gravity are changing. According to Stubb, it is the Global South that will decide on new global order.

Stubb made his political entrance with a bang in the European Parliament election in 2004. As a new candidate for the National Coalition Party, he received the second-most votes. He was one of the first politicians to use social media, updating his Facebook and Twitter accounts, sometimes live from a meeting.

In 2008, he became foreign minister, when his predecessor Ilkka Kanerva was forced to resign. In addition to his passion for foreign relations, Stubb has always been an ambitious athlete. He introduced exercise sessions on the agendas of his trips abroad as minister.

In Addis Ababa, Stubb



As part of his visit to India, Finnish President Alexander Stubb will be in Mumbai on Friday and Saturday

ran in the Ethiopian mountains together with Olympic gold medalist Haile Gebreselassie. With his interest in sports, Stubb is an excellent example of a healthy lifestyle. Maybe public health will improve if some people follow the president's example and go for a run? Stubb is an avid triathlete and also knows something about golf and ice hockey.

Stubb became the chair of his party in 2014 when his Jyrki Katainen became EU Commissioner, a job Stubb himself had dreamt of. He served as Finland's foreign trade minister, Prime Minister and finance minister before being challenged as party leader by current Prime Minister Petteri Orpo in 2016 and losing. By the way, it was Orpo who asked Stubb to become a presidential candidate.

Finland has also previously had presidents with an international profile, but Stubb has both studied and worked abroad. At home, he speaks English with his British lawyer wife, and Swedish with his children. After his political career, he worked in the European Central Bank, and as professor in Italy. From there, he was nominated to be a presidential candidate.

Unlike many other countries, Finland's president is not symbolic. The president leads foreign policy together with the government, is commander-in-chief of the armed forces and appoints high-ranking officials. Despite the fact most presidents have had a party political background, the president is above the daily politics. The newly elected presidents usually symbolically give up their party memberships.

Many see the president as an opinion maker and an example for the citizens. A popular habit in many Finnish families is to watch the president's New Year's address. On January 1, 2026, President Stubb emphasised a tripartite theme of peace, growth, and caring, urging a forward-looking, confident approach to national and European security.

He highlighted Nato/EU membership, sustainable

economic growth and social cohesion as key pillars for Finland's future.

Finland has always been lucky to have presidents who have been the right kind of president at the right time. Gustaf Mannerheim managed to pull Finland out of the war in 1944, JK Paasikivi was the most suitable person to negotiate with Soviet leaders Stalin and Molotov, Urho Kekkonen's life's work was neutrality and the philosophical Mauno Koivisto prepared Finland's EU entry. Tarja Halonen broke the glass ceiling by becoming the first woman to hold the post.

President Sauli Niinistö became steadily more popular during his 12-year period. He had the people's trust when, immediately after Russia invaded Ukraine, he made an appointment with President Joe Biden in Washington to redeem the Nato option. The Nato membership that entered into force in April 2023 has brought a new element to Finland's foreign policy. Finland has also entered into a bilateral defence agreement with the US.

The charismatic, Western-minded and multi-linguist Stubb is the president of Finland in a new era. Finland has already benefited from his international contacts. The country is now a full member of Nato and the EU. And as usual, Finland will take all memberships seriously. Non-alignment is a thing of the past and the political contacts with Russia have been frozen due to its aggression in Ukraine.

At the same time, Finland has a tradition of peace mediation and human rights, which are also mentioned in the government programme. Finland's active foreign policy will continue, but partly with new emphasis. If all goes well, Finland will be a rotating member of the United Nations Security Council at the end of Stubb's term.

The author is Finland's Consul General in Mumbai

## US court rules for tariffs refunds

AP  
WASHINGTON

In another setback for the Trump administration, a federal judge in New York ruled on Wednesday companies that paid tariffs struck down last month by the Supreme Court are entitled to refunds.

Judge Richard Eaton of the US Court of International Trade wrote "all importers of record" were "entitled to benefit" from the Supreme Court ruling that struck down sweeping double-digit import taxes that President Donald Trump imposed last year under the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA).

The Supreme Court found the tariffs unconstitutional under the emergency powers law, including the sweeping "reciprocal" tariffs he levied on nearly every other country. The majority ruled that the president could not unilaterally set and change tariffs

because the power to levy taxes belongs to Congress.

In his ruling, Eaton wrote that he alone "will hear cases pertaining to the refund of IEEPA duties". The ruling offers some clarity about the tariff refund process, which the Supreme Court did not mention in its Feb 20 decision.

Trade lawyer Ryan Majerus, a partner at King & Spalding and a former US trade official, said he expects the government to appeal or "seek a stay to buy more time for US Customs to comply".

The federal government collected over \$130 billion in the now-defunct tariffs through mid-December and could ultimately be liable for refunds worth \$175 billion, according to calculations by the Penn Wharton Budget Model.

Eaton was ruling specifically on a case brought by Atmos Filtration, a Nashville, Tennessee-based company that makes filters and other filtration products.



### Briefs

**MUMBAI**  
**Arjun marries Saaniya**



Cricketer **Arjun Tendulkar**, son of batting legend Sachin Tendulkar, married entrepreneur Saaniya Chandhok in a star-studded ceremony at The St. Regis Mumbai on Thursday. The wedding was attended by prominent figures from sports, entertainment and politics. Arjun, who has represented India at the U-19 level and played for Mumbai Indians in the IPL, currently represents Goa in domestic cricket. Saaniya is granddaughter of industrialist Ravi Ghai.

**KOLKATA**  
**Sammy pleads to go home**



West Indies head coach **Daren Sammy** has voiced frustration as the Caribbean team remains stranded in India for more than four days due to airspace restrictions following US and Israeli strikes on Iran. The team, eliminated from the T20 World Cup after a Super Eight loss to India on Sunday, has been unable to return home as flights through parts of the Gulf remain disrupted. Sammy expressed his frustration on social media, posting on X: "I just wanna go home."

**MAGENTA SHORES (AUS)**  
**Diksha is best Indian after first day**



**Diksha Dagar** carded a three-under 69 to emerge as the best-placed Indian, finishing tied 20th after the opening round of the Australian Women's Classic on the Ladies European Tour here on Thursday. Starting from the back nine at Magenta Shores, Diksha recovered well after an early bogey, striking three birdies in four holes before another bogey on the 18th saw her turn in one-under. She added two more birdies on the front nine to complete a solid round. Pranavi Urs shot 72 to lie tied 52nd, while Avani Prashanth (77) and Hitaashee Bakshi (82) struggled. Czech Republic's Sara Kousskova led the field with a course-record.

## India Women bank on Test form against Australia

Visitors rely on seniors to excel with pink-ball after ODI setback

**PTI**  
**PERTH**

After being hammered in the ODI leg, the Indian women's cricket team will look to its experienced players to deliver when it takes on Australia in a pink-ball Test — the first day-night Test between the sides in nearly five years — starting here on Friday.

India will take confidence from its recent Test form, having remained unbeaten in the last five matches. The Harmanpreet Kaur-led side won three consecutive Tests between December 2023 and July 2024, defeating England, Australia and South Africa, although all those victories came on home soil.

India's last two overseas Tests ended in draws against England and Australia in 2021. The match against Australia during that tour was also a day-night Test, which the visitors managed to draw. One of the highlights of that contest was Smriti Mandhana's century — the second of her two Test hundreds at the time.

The pink-ball Test will conclude the multi-format series between the two rivals. India won the T20I leg but was blanked in the ODIs, leaving Australia with an 8-4 lead in the points tally.

While two points were awarded for each win in the T20Is and ODIs, the Test carries four points for an outright victory. Australia will secure the overall series honours with a draw, while India must win the Test to level the final standings.

India will also draw confidence from its historic eight-



### Squads:

**India:** Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Smriti Mandhana (vc), Shafali Verma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Richa Ghosh (wk), Deepti Sharma, Kashvee Gautam, Sneh Rana, Amanjot Kaur, Uma Chetry (wk), Pratika Rawal, Harleen Deol, Kranti Gaud, Vaishnavi Sharma, Sayali Satghare.  
**Australia:** Alyssa Healy (c&wk), Darcie Brown, Maitlan Brown, Nicola Carey, Ashleigh Gardner, Kim Garth, Alana King, Phoe

wicket win over Australia at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai in December 2023 — its first-ever Test victory against the hosts.

The onus will be on senior players Harmanpreet Kaur, vice-captain Smriti Mandhana, Shafali Verma, Jemimah Rodrigues and Deepti Sharma to shoulder the batting responsibility. Attention will also be on stylish right-hander Pratika Rawal, who is expected to make her Test debut on Friday.

## TRIUMPH | Jacob Bethell's brilliant hundred in vain as India win by seven runs Samson special floors England

**Irfan Haji**  
**MUMBAI**

Defending champions India held their nerves to beat England by seven runs and set up a final clash with New Zealand in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup.

Sanju Samson blazed his way to 89 in 42 balls, powering India to 253 for 7 at the Wankhede Stadium here on Thursday. Jacob Bethell kept England in the hunt with a blistering knock of 105 runs in 48 balls, but the target proved too much in the end. Bethell was run out in the last over after hitting eight boundaries and seven sixes. England managed 246 for 7 in 20 overs.

Playing their third straight semifinal in the IT20 World Cup against England and losing a crucial toss, Samson negated the impact of a possible dew factor by setting a platform for a massive score to give his bowlers enough cushion.

England made one change, leaving out last match hero Rehan Ahmed and bringing in pacer Jamie Overton. But England pacers leaked 150 runs in 11 overs while spinners Will Jacks (2 for 40) and Adil Rashid (2 for 41) picked top-order wickets.

Samson made full use of an early reprieve given by Harry Brook off Jofra Archer to come up with another masterclass that included eight boundaries and seven sixes, following his unbeaten 97 against West Indies in Kolkata.

The Kerala dasher was given good company by Ishan Kishan (39 in 18 balls) as the left and right-handed duo shared 97 runs for the second wicket in just 45 balls to set the platform for the middle-order with half of the overs remaining. Shivam Dube (43



### Scoreboard

**India:** S Samson c P Salt b W Jacks 89, A Sharma c P Salt b W Jacks 9, I Kishan c W Jacks b A Rashid 39, S Dube (run out) 43, Suryakumar st J Buttler b A Rashid 11, H Pandya (run out) 27, T Varma b J Archer 21, A Patel (not out) 2, V Chakaravarthy (not out) 0. **Extras** (B-2, LB-1, W-9) 12. **Total** (For 7 wks, 20 overs) 253. **Fall**

**of wickets:** 20-1, 117-2, 160-3, 190-4, 212-5, 236-6, 251-7. **Bowling:** J Archer 4-0-61-1, W Jacks 4-0-40-2, J Overton 3-0-36-0, S Curran 4-0-53-0, A Rashid 4-0-41-2, L Dawson 1-0-19-0. **England:** P Salt c A Patel b H Pandya 5, J Buttler b V Chakaravarthy 25, H Brook c A Patel b J Bumrah 7, J Bethell (run out) 105, T Banton b A Patel 17, W Jacks c S Dube b A Singh

35, S Curran c T Varma b H Pandya 18, J Overton (not out) 2, J Archer (not out) 19. **Extras** (LB-3, W-10) 13. **Total:** (For 7 wks, 20 overs) 246. **Fall of wickets:** 13-1, 38-2, 64-3, 95-4, 172-5, 222-6, 225-7. **Bowling:** A Singh 4-0-51-1, H Pandya 4-0-38-2, J Bumrah 4-0-33-1, V Chakaravarthy 4-0-64-1, A Patel 3-0-35-1, S Dube 1-0-22-0.

in 25 balls) carried forward the momentum before Hardik Pandya (27) and Tilak Varma (21) did the finishing act.

Abhishek Sharma, who had just 80 runs in six games before the semifinal, took a thorough look at the pitch before the toss alongwith Kishan.

However, Abhishek's struggles against off-spinners continued as he fell to a mid-

wicket trap again set by Will Jacks, bowling into his legs. He could score just nine runs.

Opting to field first, England pacer Archer tested Samson with short stuff, but the opener got underway with a boundary and six in the first over. Samson, on 15, was let off by Brook at mid-on as Archer was the bowler at the receiving end. He latched on with a big six and a boundary to give

India a flying start. Archer gave 61 runs in his spell, including three sixes by Varma in the penultimate over, before hitting the timber. Sam Curran went for 53 runs, and Jamie Overton gave 36 in three overs.

Kishan also got into action in Overton's first over as India raced to 50 in 4.3 overs. Sam Curran was also wayward as hosts had a good powerplay

which yielded 67 runs. Adil Rashid bowled a tight seventh over, but Liam Dawson and Curran conceded 19 and 20 in their respective overs as Samson and Kishan's flurry of boundaries sent the Wankhede crowd louder. Rashid, who dismissed Kishan, was miserly in the first two overs but was taken apart by Shivam Dube in his third over.

## New Zealand's Allen all praise for team's bowlers

Explosive knock and disciplined bowling had powered Kiwis into final

**Haridev Pushparaj**  
**KOLKATA**

New Zealand opener Finn Allen praised his team's bowlers for setting up a commanding victory in the T20 World Cup semifinal, saying their early breakthroughs laid the foundation for a memorable performance in a high-pressure knockout match.

Allen, who played a sensational innings at the top of the order, said the bowlers were instrumental in establishing control from the start.

"First of all, it was an extremely impressive start from our bowlers," he said after the match. "They set the game up for us. Taking early wickets against a strong batting lineup like South Africa's was crucial."

The New Zealand attack struck early and never allowed South Africa to build momentum, restricting them to a manageable total. Allen credited the team's preparation, particularly the recent series against India, for helping the players adapt quickly to the conditions.



New Zealand's Finn Allen plays a shot. ANI

"I think it shows the importance of the India series we played before the World Cup," Allen said.

"We had five games on black-soil pitches, and that experience helped us understand these conditions better. As a team, we really rise to big occasions and are prepared to fight to the end."

The semifinal was played at Eden Gardens in Kolkata, a venue Allen is likely to return to during the Indian Premier League as part of the Kolkata Knight Riders setup. He

admitted it was a special experience performing at what could soon become a familiar ground.

"It was actually my first time playing in Kolkata," he said. "Obviously, it's nice to get a feel for the wicket here. The last game against India helped me understand the surface a bit, and that experience definitely helped going into this match."

Allen's partnership with Tim Seifert proved decisive during the chase. Seifert launched an aggressive

assault in the early overs, allowing Allen to settle into his rhythm before accelerating.

"Tim started brilliantly," Allen said. "He put their bowlers under pressure early, which made it easier for me to settle in. My role was just to support him—if the ball was in my area I tried to hit it for four or six, and if not I took singles and kept the strike rotating."

**Haridev Pushparaj**  
**KOLKATA**

South Africa's hopes of reaching the T20 World Cup final ended in disappointment as New Zealand delivered a dominant performance in the semifinal. After the defeat, the South African coach admitted his side simply failed to match the opposition's intensity and quality on the night.

"I don't think we were good enough," he said candidly after the match. "Obviously, it would have been nice to get the win, but that's no excuse. We were nowhere close to being competitive. New Zealand were excellent and fully deserved the result."

South Africa struggled to build momentum with the bat as New Zealand's bowlers exploited the conditions effectively. Their spinners applied early pressure, and the South African lineup never fully recovered.

"They strangled us upfront," the coach said. "We kept losing wickets and never really got any momentum. A lot went wrong for us tonight, but that was largely because they were so good and never



**Conrad Shukri**  
 South Africa coach

gave us any opportunities."

Reflecting on the team's campaign, he admitted it was frustrating that the setback came after a strong tournament. South Africa had performed consistently well throughout the competition but faltered at a crucial stage.

"We probably chose a really bad time to have an off night," he said. "In tournament cricket, especially in T20s, the margins are very small. You can do everything right for most of the tournament and then suddenly have one poor game."

The coach dismissed suggestions that nerves or the pressure of a semifinal affected the team. Instead, he pointed to the challenging pitch and disciplined bowling from New Zealand.

"In T20 cricket you sometimes have to make plays and take risks," he explained. "The wicket was a bit slow early on, which made things difficult. Maybe the batters could have given themselves a little more time, but it certainly wasn't nerves or the occasion getting to them."

South Africa eventually managed to post a total of around 170, which the team believed could have been defendable under the right circumstances.

However, the bowlers were unable to create enough opportunities to put New Zealand under sustained pressure.

### relief

## ICC arranges alternate flights for stranded Zim team

**PTI**  
**NEW DELHI**

A batch of Zimbabwe cricketers stranded in India due to the closure of Gulf airspace has begun its journey home after the International Cricket Council (ICC) arranged alternate travel routes to avoid the conflict-ridden region.

Zimbabwe's players had been stuck in New Delhi following the end of their T20 World Cup campaign after flights through the Gulf were

disrupted by the ongoing tensions triggered by US and Israeli strikes on Iran.

The team was originally scheduled to depart on March 2 but was unable to leave because of the airspace closures. The first group of players finally departed on Wednesday using alternate flight arrangements.

"Zimbabwe Cricket confirms that the Zimbabwe senior men's team participating in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 are on their way home from India after

Zimbabwe Cricket confirms that the Zimbabwe men's team are on their way home from India

Zimbabwe Cricket statement

travel arrangements following recent transit disruptions," the board said in a statement on X.

"Due to flight availability and revised routing, the squad will return to Harare in batches. The first group of players departed India today, Wednesday, while the final group is scheduled to leave on Friday afternoon," the statement added.

Zimbabwe had a memorable campaign in the tournament, defeating Australia and Sri Lanka to reach the

Super Eights before being eliminated last week.

The team's original travel plan involved flying from India to Harare via Dubai on an Emirates flight. However, that route had to be changed due to the Gulf airspace shutdown.

Zimbabwe's players are now travelling to Harare via Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, sources said.

Meanwhile, the West Indies cricket team is also stranded in India due to the same disruption.



**Briefs**

**MUMBAI**  
**Pankaj fancied to make it 4-in-a-row**



National champion and 27-time IBSF World Champion **Pankaj Advani** will start as the favourite to extend his dominance at the CCI Snooker Classic 2026, which begins on March 6 at the iconic Wilson Jones Billiards Hall of the Cricket Club of India. The Bengaluru-based cueist, who has won the last three editions, will aim to claim his fourth consecutive title at what has been a happy hunting ground for him.

**MUMBAI**  
**Sanchez emerges as the winner**



The prestigious Trofeo Laigueglia cycling event, held from March 4 to 5, 2026, brought together top international cyclists for an exciting and competitive race. Colombian rider Santiago Buitrago Sanchez emerged victorious on March 4, finishing with an impressive time of 4:38:50 after a strong and strategic performance. France's Romain Grégoire finished second, 25 seconds behind the winner, while Italy's Antonio Tiberi secured third place with the same time gap, making the fight for the podium extremely close. Several other riders also delivered notable performances, including Diego Ulissi, Andrea Vendrame, Christian Scaroni, Antonio Tomas Morgado, Simone Gualdi, Matteo Vercher and Mauri Vansevenant, all finishing within a narrow time margin behind the leaders.

**EPL | Chelsea thrash Villa; Newcastle end Manchester United's unbeaten run**

# Arsenal extend lead after City held by Nottingham Forest

**AP**  
LONDON

Arsenal moved seven points clear of Manchester City at the top of the Premier League after a narrow 1-0 victory over Brighton, while the defending champions were held to a 2-2 draw at home by struggling Nottingham Forest.

Arsenal's winner came early through Bukayo Saka in the ninth minute. The right winger surged down the flank and his scuffed effort from the edge of the penalty area slipped through the legs of Brighton goalkeeper Bart Verbruggen. The Gunners have played one game more than City but strengthened their grip on the title race.

City nearly snatched victory deep into stoppage time when substitute Savinho saw his effort cleared near the goal line.

Haaland struggles as City stumble  
Erling Haaland returned for City after missing the 1-0 win over Leeds with a minor injury but failed to make an impact.

City took the lead when Rayan Cherki produced a fine run down the right and delivered a cross that Antoine Semenyo volleyed home at waist height.

Forest responded in the 52nd minute with a sweeping counterattack that travelled



**SCORELINES**

- 1-0:** Arsenal-Brighton
- 2-2:** Man City-Nottingham Forest
- 2-1:** Newcastle-Man United
- 4-1:** Chelsea-Aston Villa

almost the length of the field. Morgan Gibbs-White finished the move with a brilliant back-heeled effort after Igor Jesus nodded down a cross.

Former Ballon d'Or winner Rodri restored parity six minutes later, heading home from a corner. But Forest struck again with 13 minutes remaining when Elliot Anderson curled a superb shot from outside the box into the bottom-right corner.

Newcastle end United's run

Manchester United's seven-match unbeaten run under new coach Michael Carrick ended with a dramatic 2-1 defeat at Newcastle.

Newcastle had Jacob Ramsey sent off in first-half stoppage time for a second yellow card for diving, yet still secured victory through substitute William Osula in the 90th minute.

Osula began the move deep in his own half before racing forward and curling a fine finish past goalkeeper Senne Lammens.

Earlier, Anthony Gordon had put Newcastle ahead from the penalty spot after being fouled by Bruno Fernandes, but Casemiro equalised with a header from Fernandes' free-kick just before halftime.

Chelsea cruise past Villa  
João Pedro struck a hat-trick as Chelsea defeated Aston Villa 4-1 to move above Liverpool into fifth place, just three points behind fourth-placed Villa in the race for

Champions League qualification.

Douglas Luiz had given Villa an early lead, but Pedro equalised in the 35th minute from Malo Gusto's cross and added another during first-half stoppage time from Enzo Fernández's pass.

Cole Palmer made it 3-1 in the 55th minute before Pedro completed his hat-trick in the 64th with a close-range finish from Alejandro Garnacho's cross.

# Lakshya storms into All England quarterfinals

Indian shuttler outlasts Ng Ka Long in thrilling three-game battle

**PTI**  
BIRMINGHAM

India's **Lakshya Sen** produced a determined and high-quality performance to defeat Hong Kong's Ng Ka Long Angus and advance to the men's singles quarterfinals of the All England Open Badminton Championships here on Thursday.

World No. 12 Lakshya, who finished runner-up in the 2022 edition of the prestigious tournament, showed remarkable resilience and composure during a fiercely contested round-of-16 clash. The Indian shuttler battled through intense rallies and physical exchanges to secure a hard-fought 21-19, 21-23, 21-10 victory over the former world top-10 player.

The 2021 World Championships bronze medalist will next face either China's sixth seed Li Shi Feng or Ireland's Nhat Nguyen for a place in the semifinals.

Lakshya entered the match with an unfavourable record against Ng Ka Long, having lost all three of their previous encounters. The Hong Kong shuttler also started strongly, taking an early lead in the opening game. However, Lakshya quickly regained control, recovering from a 4-6 deficit to surge ahead 15-11



**21-19, 21-23, 21-10:**  
**Lakshya-Ng Ka Long** scoreline

with a mix of aggressive returns and precise placement.

The Indian extended his advantage to 17-13 with a powerful overhead attack, but Ng Ka Long mounted a late challenge. At 17-15, Lakshya left a shuttle at the backline, which was judged out. With no video challenges remaining, he had to accept the decision.

Lakshya responded with a sharp smash to move to 19-17, but Ng Ka Long levelled the score at 19-19 with a superb cross-court winner. A powerful jump smash gave Lakshya a game point, and he sealed the opener when his opponent hit wide.

## MSSA: Ascend, CNS, AVM register dominant victories

**FPJ News Service**  
MUMBAI

The Dream Sports MSSA Inter-School Football Tournament continued to highlight promising young talent on Thursday at the MSSA Ground, Azad Maidan (Turf), where the Boys Under-8 MSSA Cup knockout matches produced an exciting day of football featuring dominant wins and a dramatic penalty shootout.

Ascend International School, BKC made an impressive start, registering a convincing 3-0 victory over Ramniwas Bajaj School, Malad. Aarav Podar, Mahia Gupta and Ziyadeer Gala were on target, each scoring a goal in a confident attacking display that set the tone for the day's action.

Smt. RSB AVM School, Juhu followed with an equally strong performance, defeating Orchid International

School, Masjid Bunder 3-0. Anjaneya Bhuyar, Abir Gangurde and Rudra Mevani found the back of the net to secure a comfortable win for their side.

CNS School, Kandivali continued the trend of dominant results with a solid 3-0 triumph over Kudilal Govindram School. Viyom Shah led the scoring with an impressive brace, while Kanav Hora added another goal to complete a commanding team performance.

SVKM J.V. Parekh International School, Vile Parle also progressed after defeating Parle Tilak ICSE School, Vile Parle 2-0. Miraan Shah and Ahhran Iyengar scored the decisive goals to ensure their team's advancement in the knockout stage.

In a closely contested encounter, JBCN, Mulund edged past New Activity School with a narrow 1-0 victory.

## MI Junior Swaraa stars in Modern English win

**FPJ News Service**  
MUMBAI

Swaraa Jadhav delivered a sensational all-round performance as Modern English School registered a massive 332-run victory over St. Aloysius High School in a league match of the Mumbai Indians Junior Inter-School Cricket Tournament 2026 in Mumbai.

The match turned out to be a completely one-sided contest, with Modern English School dominating both with the bat and the ball to secure one of the biggest wins of the tournament.

After electing to bat first, Modern English School got off to a blistering start thanks to a superb 124-run opening partnership between Swaraa Jadhav and Pragati. Swaraa led the charge with an explosive knock, scoring a rapid 67 off just 26 balls, setting the tone for a massive total. Pragati played the supporting role brilliantly, contributing a valuable 43 runs during the

opening stand. Once the strong foundation had been laid, the middle order ensured the momentum never dipped. Sarah Khatri and Tanvi Rane both produced excellent half-centuries to strengthen the innings further. Khatri scored a well-compiled 52, while Rane added 51 runs to keep the scoring rate high.

Towards the end, Ruth Saluja and Rianna Nikhil provided the finishing touches with useful unbeaten contributions. Saluja remained not out on 34, while Nikhil chipped in with an unbeaten 21, helping Modern English School pile up a colossal total of 351 for four in their allotted 20 overs.

Facing a daunting target, St. Aloysius High School struggled from the outset and failed to cope with the disciplined bowling attack. Their batting lineup collapsed under pressure, with wickets falling at regular intervals.

Swaraa Jadhav, who had earlier dazzled with the bat,



returned to produce an outstanding spell with the ball. She picked up five wickets while conceding just three runs, completing a remarkable all-round display. Her performance effectively dismantled the opposition batting order.

Nysa Bhalerao also chipped in with two wickets as St. Aloysius High School were bundled out for a mere 19 runs in just 6.5 overs, sealing a comprehensive 332-run

triumph for Modern English School.

**Brief Scores:**

**Boys U-16:** Anjuman-I-Islam Allana English School (CSMT) 206/9 in 40 overs (Yuvan Sharma 62, Kabir Jagtap 40 n.o., Yuvraj Bhingare 31, Ramprasad Vishwakarma 24; Nikhil Gurav 3/26, Ujjwal Singh 2/34, Nirav Saboo 2/35) bt IES New English School (Bandra) 170/7 in 40 overs

(Ujjwal Singh 40, Vedang Mishra 28, Shreyash Khilare 26; Yuvan Sharma 3/31, Prabhat Pandey 2/40).

● Al Barkaat Malik Muhammad Islam English School (Kurla) 255/7 in 40 overs (Ishaan Pathak 54, Arhaan Patel 32, Musab Syed 29, Mohammad Nameer 29, Abrar Shaikh 27 n.o., Pradnyankur Bhalerao 24; Chinmay Patil 2/40, Bhagwan Pandhare 2/48, Arjun Bora 2/72) bt Swami Vivekanand International School (Borivali) all out 157 in 33 overs (Shreyash Chopade 30, Aryan Purohit 24, Hridaan Kharade 23 n.o.; Aaditya Pandey 6/23, Pradnyankur Bhalerao 2/44).

**Girls U-15:** Dnyandeep Seva Mandal (Navi Mumbai) 53/4 in 7.1 overs (Ravulapalli Sravya 2/9) bt Swami Vivekanand International School (Borivali) all out 52 in 10.4 overs (Ravulapalli Sravya 29; Manisha Chaudhary 5/10, Kanika Raj 2/17).

# E Bengal, FC Goa play out goalless draw in Indian Super League

The Gaurs are provisionally third in the table with eight points from four matches

**FPJ News Service**  
KOLKATA

East Bengal FC and FC Goa played out a goalless draw in Match 22 of the Indian Super League 2025-26 season at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan in Kolkata on Thursday.

The Gaurs are provisionally third in the table with eight points from four matches, while the Red and Gold Brigade are a place below with seven points from four matches.

Miguel Ferreira was adjudged the Player of the Match.

East Bengal head coach Óscar Bruzón made two changes to the starting eleven, handing the first starts of the season to Mohamad Rakip and Naorem Mahesh Singh in place of Jay Gupta and Anton Søjberg.

FC Goa head coach Manolo Márquez named an unchanged side.

The visitors had the first look at goal when Ishan Pandita ran in behind the defenders to reach a lobbed



pass from Dejan Dražić, but centre back Anwar Ali made a crucial recovery tackle to deny the striker a shot.

East Bengal then controlled possession in midfield as Goa were content to play on the counterattack.

The first real chance arrived at the quarter-hour mark when Naorem Mahesh Singh slipped a precise pass to Bipin Singh on the left wing.

The winger delivered a pinpoint cross into the box for Yousef Ezzejari, who was unmarked, but the striker sent his attempt over the crossbar.

At the other end, Prabhsukhan Singh Gill produced a sharp save from Brison Fernandes after a slick passing move involving Ayush Dev Chhetri and Boris Singh opened up the defence.

Moments later, Boris Singh struck the post with a right-footed effort as FC Goa enjoyed their best attacking spell of the first half.

East Bengal also came close when Mohamad Rashid hit the crossbar with a long-range strike.

The midfielder's powerful attempt slipped through the goalkeeper's hands before striking the crossbar.

Despite several efforts, both teams went into the half-time break with the score at 0-0.

The second half proved cagey, with both teams tightening their defence and limiting clear opportunities in front of goal.

Both coaches introduced fresh legs, but the pattern of the contest remained largely unchanged.

FC Goa came closest when Abdul Rabeeh set up fellow substitute Raynier Fernandes at the edge of the box.

The midfielder struck a right-footed effort that sailed over the crossbar.

In the closing stages, East Bengal pushed forward in search of a breakthrough and committed more players in attack.

Crosses were delivered repeatedly into the penalty area, but the FC Goa defence stayed organised and cleared the danger.

Goalkeeper and defenders maintained their composure as the pressure increased in added time. Despite the late push, neither side could find the decisive finish.

# Mohun Bagan, Jamshedpur continue race for ISL summit

Bagan head coach Sergio Lobera stressed the importance of respecting the opposition

**FPJ News Service**  
BHUBANESWAR/JAMSHEDPUR

Mohun Bagan Super Giant will aim to continue their winning streak when they face Odisha FC in Match 23 of the Indian Super League on Friday, March 6, at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan in Kolkata. The match is scheduled to kick off at 17:00 IST.

Later in the day, Jamshedpur FC will look for their fourth consecutive victory of the season when they face newly promoted Inter Kashi at the JRD Tata Sports Complex. The match will kick off at 19:30 IST.

Both matches will be streamed live on FanCode and telecast on Sony Sports Ten 2. Odisha FC vs Mohun Bagan SG. The Mariners have a superior head-to-head record against Odisha FC in the ISL, winning six of the 13 meetings. Six matches ended in draws, while Odisha FC have won once.

Mohun Bagan head coach Sergio Lobera stressed the importance of respecting the



opposition.

"We will not win if we think it will be easy. We need maximum respect for the opponents. Anything can happen in football," Lobera said.

"On paper we might be favourites. However, we must prove it on the pitch. We will face problems if we lack absolute focus."

Mohun Bagan will look to continue their winning run, while Odisha FC will hope for a resilient performance against the table toppers.

The Juggernauts opened their campaign with consecutive draws, with the previous fixture ending 1-1 against

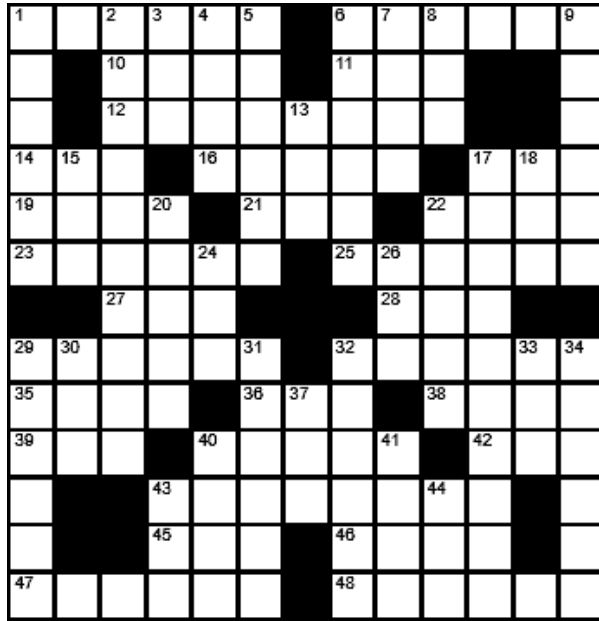
Chennaiyin FC. Captain Carlos Delgado rescued a point with a 68th-minute header. Odisha FC are currently ninth in the table with two points.

They will now face table toppers Mohun Bagan SG, who are chasing their fourth straight win in a bid to remain at the summit.

Odisha FC head coach TG Purushothaman emphasised the need for a stronger attacking approach.

"We are improving. However, defensive solidity alone is not enough. We must be more decisive in the final third," he said.

**Crossword #1794**



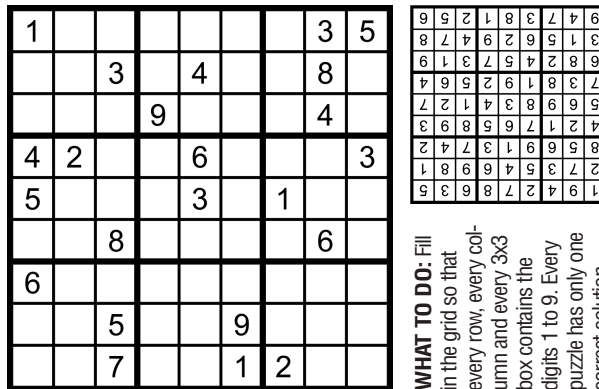
- Across**
- 1 Register (US)
  - 6 Expressed pain
  - 10 Morales of movies
  - 11 Eighth mo.
  - 12 Leg-spinner \_\_\_\_\_ Hirwani
  - 14 Monetary unit of Vietnam - "o ha" anagram?
  - 16 Plant with bitter leaves
  - 17 Vietnam, colloquially and in short ?
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  - 21 Not easily explained
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  - 28 Illustrative craft
  - 29 Three times
  - 32 Clergyman
  - 35 A forearm bone
  - 36 Out of health, unwell
  - 38 Hard drive interface
  - 39 Chow mein enhancer
  - 40 Guide vessel
  - 42 Item for auction
  - 43 Indian queen or empress
  - 45 Wrath
  - 46 Make a cardigan
  - 47 Aromatic medicinal drug?
  - 48 Not go to bed (4,2)
- Down**
- 1 Avoid
  - 2 Abandoning or forswearing
  - 3 Order of St. Augustine
  - 4 Zhivago's heroine
  - 5 Remain in hiding (3,3)
  - 6 Got by (4,2)
  - 7 Belonging to us
  - 8 \_\_\_\_\_ Khan Gold Cup : hockey trophy ?
  - 9 Smaller moon of Mars
  - 13 Sign of assent
  - 15 Foreman foe
  - 17 Impartiality
  - 18 Flightboard abbr.
  - 20 Drug used to treat Parkinson's disease (1-4)
  - 22 Big spread
  - 24 Wise hooter?
  - 26 Calorie in short
  - 29 Fall or roll end over end
  - 30 Treasure Island author's monogram
  - 31 One or the other
  - 32 Office record-keepers
  - 33 Income Tax Off.
  - 34 Brief sleep
  - 37 Milieu for a ewe
  - 40 Indian dress
  - 41 Have a fit
  - 43 Blend
  - 44 Actress \_\_\_\_\_ Peeples

**Solution**

Across: 1 Esal, 6 Moaned, 10 Esal, 11 Aug, 12 Narendra, 14 Hao, 15 Aha, 16 Aha, 17 Neutral, 18 Aha, 19 Aha, 20 Aha, 21 Aha, 22 Aha, 23 Aha, 24 Aha, 25 Aha, 26 Aha, 27 Aha, 28 Aha, 29 Aha, 30 Aha, 31 Aha, 32 Aha, 33 Aha, 34 Aha, 35 Aha, 36 Aha, 37 Aha, 38 Aha, 39 Aha, 40 Aha, 41 Aha, 42 Aha, 43 Aha, 44 Aha, 45 Aha, 46 Aha, 47 Aha, 48 Aha.

Down: 1 Aha, 2 Aha, 3 Aha, 4 Aha, 5 Aha, 6 Aha, 7 Aha, 8 Aha, 9 Aha, 10 Aha, 11 Aha, 12 Aha, 13 Aha, 14 Aha, 15 Aha, 16 Aha, 17 Aha, 18 Aha, 19 Aha, 20 Aha, 21 Aha, 22 Aha, 23 Aha, 24 Aha, 25 Aha, 26 Aha, 27 Aha, 28 Aha, 29 Aha, 30 Aha, 31 Aha, 32 Aha, 33 Aha, 34 Aha, 35 Aha, 36 Aha, 37 Aha, 38 Aha, 39 Aha, 40 Aha, 41 Aha, 42 Aha, 43 Aha, 44 Aha, 45 Aha, 46 Aha, 47 Aha, 48 Aha.

**FPJ - SUDOKU - 684**



**WHAT TO DO:** Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9. Every puzzle has only one correct solution.

**YOUR DAY** By Vinayak Vishwas Karandikar



**ARIES:** The day is perfect to fulfil your family responsibilities, study, and work. Spending on family, businesses, properties, education, vehicles, or health will bring long-term benefits. People in education, the hotel business, finance, and the automobile business will achieve success. Nurture family health and relationships to create harmony. Focus on eye care and digestive wellness for optimal energy. Lucky no.: 3; Lucky colour: Yellow



**TAURUS:** The day is ideal for travel, communication, and entertainment. Investments in communication, entertainment, children, or sports will be rewarding. People in communications, networking, advertising, entertainment, and tourism will see growth. Enjoy meaningful time with your children and younger siblings. Lucky no.: 8; Lucky colour: Blue



**GEMINI:** Today is favourable for studies and family responsibilities. Spending on family, houses, education, or vehicles will bring positive outcomes. People in banking, education, public speaking, and the automobile sector will succeed. You will enjoy shopping and household activities with family. Take care of your chest and eyes for optimal wellness. Lucky no.: 9; Lucky colour: Red



**CANCER:** The day is perfect for taking actions and achieving goals. Expenditure on travel, communication, and documentation will be fruitful. People in tourism, communications, consultancy, and the dairy and liquid businesses will progress. You will enjoy travel and quality time with your siblings. Gentle care will keep your shoulder, body, and head comfortable. Lucky no.: 6; Lucky colour: Pink



**LEO:** The day is ideal for travel and earning opportunities. Expenditure on family, travel, medical bills, or investments will bring growth. People working in the import-export business, hospitals, investment firms, tourism, and banks will benefit. Travel and family bonding will bring joy and learning. Take care of your throat and eye for optimal health. Lucky no.: 1; Lucky colour: Orange



**VRIGO:** Today is the day for your wishes to come true. Spending on the self, health, or friends will be rewarding. People associated with tourism, consultancy, and the dairy and liquid businesses will see success. Take your mother's guidance to enhance harmony at home. With care, minor coughs and colds will not affect your energy. Lucky no.: 2; Lucky colour: White



**LIBRA:** The day is great for work-related travel. Expenditure on travel, work, businesses, or medical matters will yield positive results. People in the export business, warehousing, finance, and tourism will thrive. Maintaining work-life balance will create harmony at home. Take care of your knees, stomach, and eyes. Lucky no.: 5; Lucky colour: Green



**SCORPIO:** Today, your gains are enhanced by luck and guidance. Spending on your father, higher education, or religious activities will be fulfilling. People associated with religious activities, tourism, and education will see success. Enjoy valuable time and advice from your father. Gentle care will keep muscles strong and pain-free. Lucky no.: 2; Lucky colour: Silver



**SAGITTARIUS:** The day is ideal for resolving business and family matters efficiently. Expenditure on businesses, repair work, or premium services will support growth. People in the occult, the repair work, security services, and the medical field will succeed. Maintaining focus will help balance your family and love life. Mindful care will keep your knees, digestion, and stomach in good condition. Lucky no.: 1; Lucky colour: Orange



**CAPRICORN:** The day is perfect for business or educational travel. Spending on travel, education, fathers, or spouses will be beneficial. People in communications, tourism, education, and religious fields will thrive. You will enjoy quality moments with your father or spouse. Gentle attention will support waist and muscle wellness. Lucky no.: 5; Lucky colour: Green



**AQUARIUS:** The day is ideal for learning and professional growth. Spending on premium services, repair work, health, or medical needs will yield positive outcomes. People working in the insurance sector, the occult, the sanitation department, the surgical department, and research will benefit. Harmonious communication will strengthen family ties. Mindful care will support digestion, stress relief, and overall wellness. Lucky no.: 7; Lucky colour: Grey



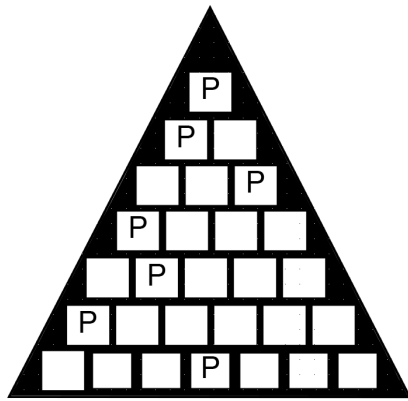
**PISCES:** The day is perfect for enjoying both family and business life. Spending on parties, entertainment, children, or spouses will bring joy. People in the share market, the art field, entertainment, and sports will succeed. Marriage proposals and family bonding will be favourable; married people can enjoy time with their spouses and children. Lucky no.: 9; Lucky colour: Red



### ALPHA TRIANGLE

Beginning at the top move towards the bottom seven letter word by adding a letter at each step and rearranging. A correct and different word must be made at each step answering to the clue given.

- 1 Phosphorus for the chemist
- 2 Public address, abbr.
- 3 Empty space
- 4 Throe
- 5 Parroting
- 6 Summoning in public
- 7 Breathless



Solution to Alpha Triangle

P, PA, Gap, Pang, Aping, Paging, Gaspung.

### Go Figure

Place the four numbers in the first, third, fifth, and seventh boxes and whatever operators you care to use in the second, fourth, and sixth boxes in the correct order to get the answer. Use the numbers only once. Operations should be carried out sequentially. BODMAS rule does not apply

The operators:



Easy

$$\square \square \square \square \square \square \square = 22$$

$$3 \quad 3 \quad 7 \quad 9$$

Medium

$$\square \square \square \square \square \square \square = 14$$

$$3 \quad 5 \quad 7 \quad 9$$

Hard

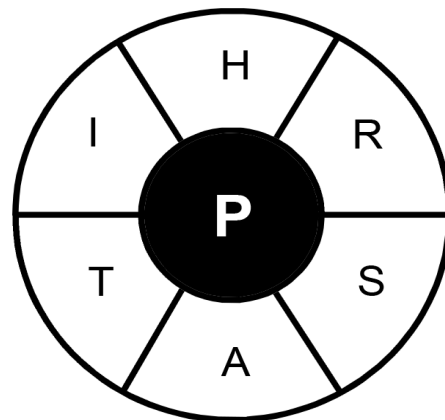
$$\square \square \square \square \square \square \square = 54$$

$$2 \quad 5 \quad 9 \quad 9$$

Our Solutions:  
 Easy - 9 + 3 + 8 + 5 = 25  
 Medium - 2 + 8 + 4 + 5 = 19  
 Hard - 8 x 7 - 3 + 8 = 61

### BULL'S EYE

How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown? Each word can use a letter only once and must contain the central letter. There should be at least one 7-letter word. British English Dictionary is used as reference.

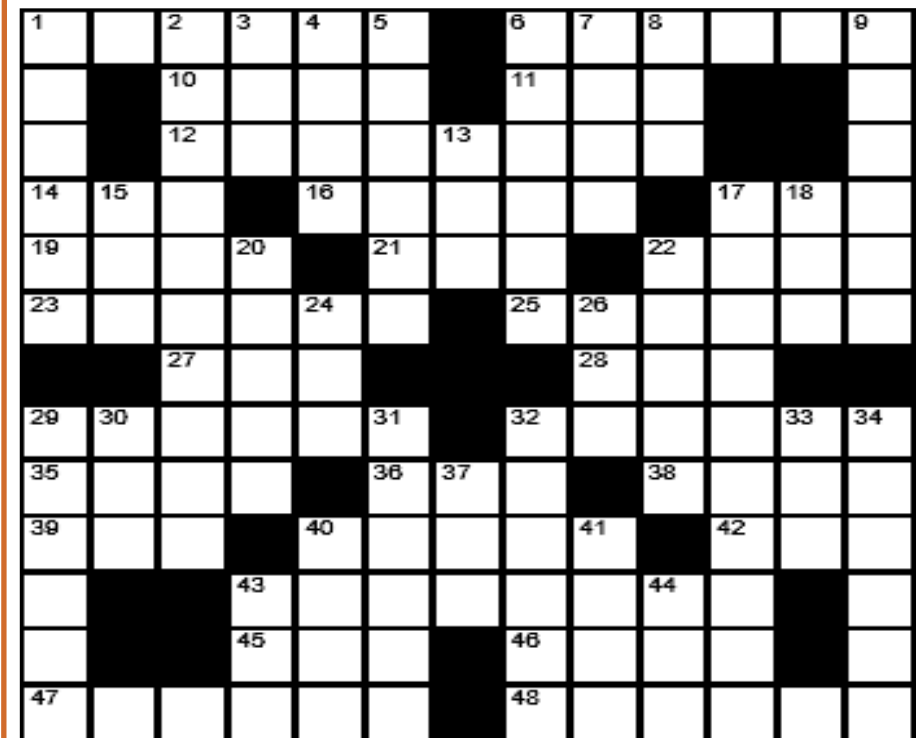


Ratings:

20 average; 22 good; 24 outstanding.

SOLUTION :  
 evil, live, veil, vile, visible

### Crossword #1794



Across

- 1 Register (US)
- 6 Expressed pain
- 10 Morales of movies
- 11 Eighth mo.
- 12 Leg-spinner
- 14 Monetary unit of Vietnam - "o ha" anagram?
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- 17 Vietnam, colloquially and in short ?
- 19 12th month of the Jewish calendar
- 21 Not easily explained
- 22 Flight prefix
- 23 One on a car may wind up and

down?

- 25 Happens
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- 28 Illustrative craft
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- 40 Indian dress
- 41 Have a fit
- 43 Blend
- 44 Actress
- Peoples

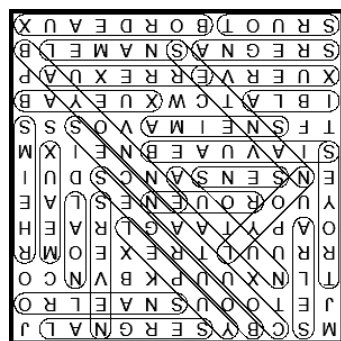
M S C B Y S E R G N A L J  
 J E T O O U S N A E L R O  
 T L N X U U P K B V N C O  
 R R U U L T R E X E O M R  
 O A P Y T A A G L R A E H  
 Y U O R O U E N E S L A E  
 E N S E N S A N C S D U I  
 S I A V U A E B N E I X M  
 T F S N E I M A V O S S S  
 I B L A T C W X U E Y A B  
 X U E R V E R R E X U A P  
 S R E G N A S N A M E L B  
 S R U O T B O R D E A U X

### French Cathedral

Can you find the words connected in one way or the other with the theme indicated by the title in today's Word Search?

The words may be read horizontally, vertically or diagonally either forwards or backwards, but always in straight lines. Use a ruler to cross them through as you find them.

- |          |           |         |
|----------|-----------|---------|
| Albi     | Bourges   | Nevers  |
| Amiens   | Coutances | Orleans |
| Angers   | Evreux    | Rheims  |
| Arles    | Langres   | Rouen   |
| Autun    | Laon      | Sens    |
| Auxerre  | Le Mans   | Tours   |
| Bayeux   | Le Puy    | Troyes  |
| Bayonne  | Lyon      |         |
| Beauvais | Meaux     |         |
| Bordeaux | Nantes    |         |



### RIDDLER

A clock strikes every hour—once at 1:00, twice at 2:00, and so on. The clock takes 6 seconds to strike 5:00 and 12 seconds strike 9:00. The time needed to strike 1:00 is negligible. How long does the clock need for all its striking in 24 hours?

Answer: At 5 the clock takes 6 seconds for 4 intervals between strikes, each interval is 1 1/2 seconds. The time needed to strike 9 confirms this calculation. At any hour there are 1 less intervals than strikes. Intervals in 24 hours are 2{0+1+1+2+3+4+5+6+7+8+9+10+11} = 132 Time needed for striking is, 1.5x132=198 seconds.

### SUDOKU

1						3	5
		3		4		8	
			9			4	
4	2			6			3
5				3		1	
		8					6
6							
		5		9			
		7		1	2		

WHAT TO DO: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9. Every puzzle has only one correct solution.

**Praveen Kumar**

For many, rice is an irreplaceable staple, yet its high carbohydrate and calorie content often leads to hesitation or guilt. If you're a rice enthusiast struggling to cut down, here's some good news! A simple cooking hack can make your beloved white rice healthier: boil it with coconut oil. While this may sound unconventional, the science behind it is intriguing and worth exploring.

**Calorie reduction benefits**  
Using this method, the calorie content of rice can decrease by around 10%. In some cases, with specific rice varieties, the reduction can go up to 50%. The key lies in choosing the right type of rice and following the procedure.

**Why coconut oil is important**  
Coconut oil, a source of healthy fats, plays a crucial role in this cooking method. White rice typically causes spikes in blood sugar levels, leading to rapid energy fluctuations and fat storage. However, the addition of coconut oil slows down the digestion process, mitigating these sugar spikes and making the meal more balanced.

## Low-carb rice with coconut oil!

### The science behind the method

Cooking rice with coconut oil and cooling it in the fridge alters its chemical composition. The process transforms digestible starch into resistant starch, which has unique health benefits.

■ **Resistant starch:** This form of starch resists digestion in the small intestine and takes longer to metabolize. This slow digestion helps prevent quick energy surges and fat accumulation, contributing to better weight management.

■ **Prebiotics and probiotics:** Resistant starch supports gut health by acting as a prebiotic, promoting the growth of beneficial bacteria. These bacteria boost immunity, aid digestion, and enhance nutrient absorption. A balanced gut microbiome supports brain function.

■ **Versatility in rice varieties**  
This method isn't restricted to white rice—it works with brown rice too. Brown rice, already known for its superior nutrient profile, becomes even healthier with this method.

■ **Final thoughts:** If you love rice but worry about its calorie impact, this cooking method could be a game-changer. By adding coconut oil and refrigerating the rice, you can enjoy a staple food with fewer calories and improved health benefits. Why not give it a try and relish your rice guilt-free?



### How to prepare low-carb rice with coconut oil

- Follow this easy method to enhance the health benefits of rice:
  - Take two cups of water in a pot and bring it to a boil.
  - Add one tablespoon of coconut oil to the boiling water.
  - Stir in a cup of rice and let it cook for 25 minutes.
  - Once cooked, refrigerate the rice for 10-12 hours.
  - Reheat as needed and enjoy your lower-calorie version of rice, packed with added benefits for your gut health!

**Devika Bandyopadhyay**

An abnormal inflammatory activity in the cells of the skin can cause a rare skin disease known as lichen nitidus. This appears as small, glistening bumps on the skin's surface. These bumps are skin coloured. Read on to know more about this rare disease, its symptoms and treatment.

**What is lichen nitidus?**  
This is a chronic inflammatory disease which appears as shiny, flesh-coloured (sometimes reddish brown) discrete papules. Against a dark skin, these appear hypopigmented. This disease mostly affects children and young adults. The bumps caused on the skin are painless but can get very itchy at times. Dermatologists sometimes refer to this skin disease as mini lichen planus. Most of the time, this disease clears up on its own. This is not an infectious disease.

## Lichen Nitidus Explained: A deep dive into its causes and characteristics

### Symptoms of lichen nitidus

It is basically identified by the clusters of small, glistening bumps or papules. The symptoms of this disease are based on the characteristics of these tiny bumps.

- They are flat-topped and round in shape.
- The size of the bumps can range from pinpoint to a pinhead size.
- In some cases, these bumps can begin to itch intensely.

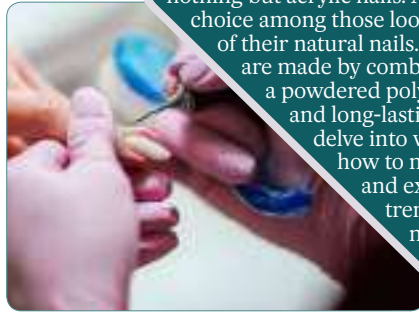
### What are the causes of lichen nitidus?

The exact cause of this disease is not known. This is not a contagious condition. Papules appear as a response to inflammation that is controlled by white blood cells. These are called T lymphocytes. The ideal responsibility of these cells is to heal diseases or injuries. However, T-lymphocytes appear to be activated in case of lichen nitidus.

- They usually appear in line where there is a crease or constant pressure on the skin. These bumps can be found on the folds of the skin - such as inside the wrist or elbow.
- These bumps are skin coloured. People with fair skin might find these bumps to appear pinkish. People with dark skin might find these bumps to be slightly lighter than their normal skin colour.
- These bumps can be found to be located on the abdomen, chest, genital areas, arms, etc. They rarely occur on the soles of the feet or fingernails.
- Sometimes these bumps' appearance clears up from one site but appears on another site of the body.

### What are acrylic nails?

Acrylic nails are artificial extensions that are applied over the natural nails to provide length, strength, and a polished appearance. The process involves a professional nail technician shaping and buffing the nails, then applying the acrylic mixture using a brush and allowing it to harden. Once dry, the nails can be further shaped, painted, and decorated according to personal preference.



### How to maintain acrylic nails?

Proper maintenance is crucial for keeping your acrylic nails looking beautiful and in good condition. Here are some essential tips:

#### Regular fills:

Acrylic nails require regular fills every two to three weeks to maintain their appearance. During the fill process, the technician will file and reshape the nails, fill in the regrowth gap near the cuticle, and reapply a fresh layer of acrylic.

#### Cuticle care:

Keep the cuticles moisturized to prevent them from becoming dry and brittle. Apply cuticle oil regularly and gently push back the cuticles to maintain a neat appearance.

#### Gentle handling:

Avoid using your acrylic nails as tools to open cans or perform other activities that may cause stress or breakage. Treat them with care to prolong their lifespan.

### Regular maintenance

If you are among the lazy ones who do not believe in maintaining your nails, then this is not for you. Acrylic nails require to be maintained on a regular basis like every 2 to 3 weeks. You need to keep filling your nails on regular basis so that the fungus can't grow over your nails.

**Neeta Senacha**

We often see our favourite bloggers and celebrities with exceptionally beautiful nails and it makes us wonder how they manage such beautiful nails. But the secret towards that is nothing but acrylic nails. Acrylic nails have become a popular choice among those looking to enhance the appearance of their natural nails. These artificial nail extensions are made by combining a liquid monomer and a powdered polymer to create a durable and long-lasting nail coating. Let's delve into what acrylic nails are, how to maintain them, and explore the latest trends in acrylic nail designs.



■ **Abstract nail art:** Embrace your artistic side with abstract designs featuring geometric shapes, bold lines, and vibrant colors. This trend allows for unique and eye-catching nail creations.



■ **Natural and nude:** Emphasizing the beauty of natural-looking nails, nude and neutral shades are in vogue. These shades give a classy and sophisticated appearance that complements any outfit.

## Acrylic nails: A guide to long-lasting nails

### Trends in acrylic nails:

Acrylic nails offer a wide range of creative possibilities, allowing individuals to express their personal style and stay on-trend. Here are some popular trends in acrylic nail designs:

- **Minimalist elegance:** Simple and understated designs are gaining popularity, with muted colors, negative space, and delicate accents like thin lines, dots, or tiny embellishments.



■ **French fade:** A modern twist on the classic French manicure, the French fade features a gradual blend of colors from the nail bed to the tip. It offers a soft and elegant look suitable for any occasion.

Acrylic nails provide a versatile canvas for creativity and personal expression. With proper maintenance and care, acrylic nails can maintain their beauty and durability. Whether you prefer minimalist elegance or bold nail art, the latest trends in acrylic nails offer something for everyone to enjoy.



#### Nail products:

Use non-acetone polish remover and gentle nail products that are specifically formulated for acrylic nails. Harsh chemicals can damage the acrylic and weaken the nails.

#### Avoid excessive moisture:

Prolonged exposure to water can weaken the adhesive bond, causing lifting or breakage of the nails. Wear gloves when doing household chores and use caution when immersing your hands in water for extended periods.

## Dharma is never black and white

**Swami Brahmanandananda Saraswati**

The US-Iran conflict offers us a perfect case study of dharmic tension at the national and social level. Does any country have the right to invade another while negotiations are ongoing, without congressional approval? The answer seems a clear no.

Consider this side. Can we trust a fundamentalist regime bent on dominating its own citizens, sponsoring terror groups across the region, and pursuing nuclear weapon program? There, too, the answer is a clear no.

So how do we reconcile these two positions? Dharma is very often not black and white. There are a million shades of grey in between, and human intelligence lies precisely in navigating those grey areas with wisdom and discernment. Unless we learn to negotiate ambiguity not only on the social or national stage but in our own individual lives there is no way to live a life of dharma.

The problem arises when we understand dharma in terms of absolutes, in terms of rigid binaries, which is never the case in real life. There is no law, whether made by God or by man, that does not have exceptions. Those exceptions exist

precisely to address the grey areas. It is therefore essential that when we live a life of dharma, we do not simply follow a checklist of do's and don'ts, but cultivate the capacity to understand the finer nuances present in each unique situation. This requires not just knowledge but a certain maturity of judgment.

This is why, in India, dharma was always taught not only through abstract principles but through story. The Purānas, the Pañcatantra, the Mahābhārata, the Rāmāyana — these were all rich case studies in dharma, carefully crafted so that one could appreciate its subtleties, sit with its tensions, and learn to navigate its grey areas with both clarity and compassion.

That is what makes intelligent living and genuine growth possible. If we merely follow a prescribed set of rules, society may function but no real individual growth takes place. And dharma is ultimately meant for growth: the steady unfolding of the individual in wisdom, character, and inner freedom.

(The writer is the founder of Aarsha Vidya Foundation. You can write to him at aarshavidyaf@gmail.com)



**Amritha K**

Supplements are really popular these days - they're all over social media, influencers and celebrities endorse them, and everyone's talking about them. Because of this, it's natural for us to buy some supplements, whether it's for hair growth or gut health. You might be tempted to buy yourself some supplements since they do not generally require a prescription from your physician. The question is, how many of these are actually good for your health? Let's find out the types of supplements you should avoid.

### Supplements you should avoid

#### Sexual enhancement supplements

Many Sexual Enhancement Supplements claim to provide relief from erectile dysfunction (ED), while others claim to increase stamina and even size - I mean, if you believe that pills can increase the size, then that's on you, right? Some sexual enhancement supplements were found to contain possibly toxic, harmful ingredients that were not listed on labels and, in some cases, contained in prescription drugs, according to an FDA medical fraud investigation conducted in 2022.

#### Weight loss supplements

Weight loss supplements, also known as diet pills, have been marketed as supplements that can assist individuals in losing weight. It is common for these products to promise you a boost in your metabolism, a reduction in cravings, a meal replacement, or the prevention of your body from absorbing the food you eat. According to research, weight loss supplements can cause vomiting, nausea, mood shifts, anxiety, stroke, seizure, irregular heartbeat, heart attack, and even death.

#### Types of supplements you should avoid!

In the following instances, doctors may recommend that patients take vitamins, supplements, or minerals.

- Pregnancy
- Lactation
- Special diets
- Deficiencies
- Health improvement
- Infants receiving human milk or less than 32 oz. per day of formula



## Not All Vitamins Are Equal: Five supplements you should avoid!

#### Exercise/sport enhancement supplements

There are various forms of exercise and sport enhancement supplements, including bars, drinks, capsules, and powders. Each one promises multiple benefits, including increased energy and increased muscle mass. Protein, carbohydrates, amino acids, vitamins, and minerals are all good for athletes. However, using too many supplements concurrently can lead to health concerns such as rapid heartbeat and addiction.

#### Green powders

Even though green powder appears healthy, experts advise against the use of green powders that claim to contain whole food sources of nutrients and pre- and probiotics. As a result, consumers are tricked into believing that green powder can replace actual greens or green vegetables. This is highly misleading. Greens powders do not boost energy, performance, or digestion.

#### Caffeine pills

The use of caffeine pills is generally considered safe for most individuals as long as they take them moderately and limit other sources of caffeine while under the influence of caffeine pills. In spite of this, caffeine pills can be harmful due to their stimulant properties. These pills can result in anxiety, insomnia, an increase in heart rate, and an increase in blood pressure.

#### Are supplements necessary?

Even among experts, supplements remain controversial. However, they are recommended as a standard in some cases. In other cases, they may fill in the gaps for nutrient deficiencies in the diet. In most cases, supplementation is not the only possible solution for adults to achieve and maintain good health. Supplements are not generally the first line of defence that dietitians turn to when treating health problems. Experts suggest that diet and exercise changes are typically more effective first.

#### Are there any side effects for supplements?

Supplements are not tested by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for effectiveness, potency, or purity. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the manufacturer to ensure that their products are safe and beneficial for human consumption. While some supplements have historically been more popular than others, you should always take supplements with caution.

**Note:** While some supplements may appear harmless, some contain powerful ingredients that may interact with medications, produce unwanted side effects, or even harm your health.



### Does lichen nitidus go away?

Most of the time, this disease heals on its own without the requirement of any specific treatment. This disease is self-limited and asymptomatic. However, if the itching gets severe or this disease begins to interfere with your daily life activities, you might want to visit a dermatologist. This disease is harmless otherwise and does not cause any long-term skin problems. Nevertheless, a person might feel embarrassed due to the visibility of these bumps.



### Psychological and social impact of lichen nitidus

While lichen nitidus is a harmless condition, its visible appearance on exposed areas like the arms, chest, or face can sometimes cause embarrassment or self-consciousness in affected individuals. This is especially true for young adults and children, who may feel stigmatized or shy in social situations. Educating oneself and others about the non-contagious and self-limiting nature of the disease can help reduce social anxiety. Support from friends, family, or even counseling can be beneficial for individuals struggling with the emotional impact of the condition.

### How is lichen nitidus treated?

Although this disease does not require any specific treatment and heals on its own, you might want to see a doctor if rashes like tiny bumps appear on your skin for no particular reason. These could be due to an allergic reaction. A prompt diagnosis would help prevent future complications.

- If this disease is accompanied by pus oozing out of the bumps or high fever, then it could hint at something serious & would require immediate medical attention.
- A doctor can easily diagnose this illness by closely looking at the bumps using a magnifying glass. At times, thorough examination might involve taking a small tissue (process of biopsy) and then looking at it under a microscope.
- In case the bumps get so severe that it stops you from performing any activity, then your doctor could try glucocorticoids. Oral glucocorticoids may be tried if the disease is symptomatic and extensive in nature.
- If the appearance of the bumps gets worse with humidity or sunlight, then air conditioning or just cool air can help relieve the discomfort and swelling.
- Phototherapy can clear up lichen nitidus. Medications that in general help with this condition are antihistamines, a topical drug called tacrolimus, a synthetic version of vitamin A (retinoid), etc.



# Raw and unsettling

**Actor and film director Mahesh Manjrekar opens up about the play *Animal*, the making and crushing of dreams in the *mayanagri* & more**

Kabir Singh Bhandari

After over two decades of friendship and a creative partnership, powerhouse Mahesh Manjrekar and veteran theatre producer Ashvin Gidwani have come together once again, this time with *Animal*, a stark and uncompromising new Hindi play. Years after their successful first stage collaboration, *Double Deal*, the duo returns with a work that is rawer, leaner, and far more unsettling. An unflinching, actor-driven work, *Animal* examines the slow, often invisible erosion of the human spirit in the pursuit of ambition. At its centre is Dattu, played by Manjrekar, a young man from a small town near Pandharpur, Maharashtra, who arrives in Mumbai chasing the promise of stardom. What begins as faith in the city and belief in himself gradually turns into a fight for survival. Alone on

stage, Dattu addresses the city, imagined audiences, and his own fractured conscience, as performance and confession merge into one. *Animal* comes to the stage after nearly nine years of discussion and preparation. In the production, Manjrekar takes on the dual role of director and performer. Mumbai functions as an unseen force within *Animal*. Rather than being depicted visually, the city is felt through sound, pace, and pressure — a presence that tests endurance rather than offering refuge. The city does not seduce in this play; it evaluates.

In an interaction with *The Free Press Journal*, Manjrekar tells us about the play, the making and crushing of dreams in the *mayanagri*, and the combination of talent, timing, luck, and survival. Excerpts:

**How much of *Animal's* struggles have been drawn from your own life experiences?**

When I read *Animal*, I didn't see just Dattu; I saw every young

I have lived long enough in this industry to know that struggle is not dramatic; it is silent, repetitive, and humbling. Mumbai *mayanagri* is both a dream factory and a dream crusher. — Mahesh Manjrekar

boy who arrives in Mumbai with a suitcase full of dreams and pockets full of hope. I have lived long enough in this industry to know that struggle is not dramatic; it is silent, repetitive, and humbling. While the character is not autobiographical, the emotional truth certainly comes from lived experiences... the hunger to prove yourself, the sting of rejection, the loneliness in a crowded city. I have seen it. I have felt parts of it. As an actor and director, you borrow from life. You observe, you absorb, and then you

translate that truth on stage. That's what makes Dattu real.

**Has it been painful for you seeing similar characters like Dattu suffering in the *mayanagri* over the last few decades?**

Mumbai *mayanagri* is both a dream factory and a dream crusher. I have seen boys arrive at stations with fire in their eyes and, years later, leave with silence in their hearts. Yes, it is painful. Because talent is never the only currency here. Timing, luck, survival... they all play their part. But I don't see Dattu as just a victim. I see resilience. I see madness. I see hope that refuses to die. And that, to me, is inspiring. The city tests you. It doesn't promise fairness — it promises opportunity.

**What is the toughest, or most challenging part of a play like *Animal*?**

The toughest part is honesty. A play like *Animal* cannot be performed with vanity. It demands vulnerability. When a character stands alone, especially in a monologue-driven format, there is no background score, no camera trick, no edit. Just truth. The challenge is to hold the audience with nothing but emotion and conviction. To make them laugh, then disturb them, then move them... all within the same breath. Theatre is unforgiving. But when it works, it is magical.

(Presented by AGP World, *Animal* is directed by and stars Mahesh Manjrekar, and premieres on Saturday, March 7, at the Tata Theatre, NCPA, Mumbai)



## Sonu Sood offers help to stranded travellers

Actor offers free accommodation to travellers stranded in Dubai after flight disruptions caused by the ongoing US and Iran conflict

Actor Sonu Sood has offered a message of hope amid the ongoing West Asia conflict involving the United States, Israel and Iran, while also announcing humanitarian assistance for travellers stranded in Dubai due to widespread flight disruptions.

Speaking to ANI about the escalating situation, Sood expressed optimism for peace. "I hope everything will be fine and I wish happiness for everyone."

On Thursday, the actor also took to social media to announce free accommodation for people stranded in Dubai

as flights remain disrupted due to temporary airspace closures across parts of West Asia.

In an Instagram post, Sood wrote that anyone left without a place to stay could reach out to him for help.

"War has left many travelers stranded in Dubai. If you or someone you know has nowhere to stay, we are offering safe accommodation free of cost. No nationality. No conditions. Just humanity. DM us if you need help," he wrote.



Photo: Instagram @sonu\_sood

## Lara Dutta stranded in Dubai

Bollywood actress Lara Dutta Bhupathi, who is currently in Dubai with her daughter and former tennis star Mahesh Bhupathi, on Wednesday said she is feeling "nervous" and "stressed out" due to the ongoing conflict and is hoping to return to Mumbai.

The actor said she had travelled to Dubai for a brand-related commitment when the Israel-Iran war began. She recalled hearing explosions and seeing missiles being intercepted while she was at a studio. "I can't lie, it's been

stressful days. We are nervous and it's been scary. Lots of fighter jets flying overhead and loud booms. Though we live in a villa in a very safe neighbourhood, the windows shake, the house and the doors rattle, and it's unnerving. But I haven't felt unsafe, not even once," the actor said in a video clip.

She praised the UAE government, saying they are doing an "incredible" job and ensuring everyone is protected regardless of nationality.

"We feel like we count and we matter. The UAE government is doing everything in its power to protect us and keep us safe," she said.



Photo: Instagram @larabuthathi



Allu Arjun with the couple, Vijay and Rashmika



Ram Charan gives Vijay and Rashmika a bouquet

## Virosh host grand reception

Actor-couple Rashmika Mandanna and Vijay Deverakonda hosted a grand reception for family, friends, and industry colleagues. The two stars tied the knot on February 26 in a private ceremony at a luxury hotel on the outskirts of Udaipur. The reception, held on Wednesday evening, was attended by a host of celebrities.



Naga Chaitanya with his mom Amala Akkineni and dad Nagarjuna



Nani with wife Anjana Yelavarthy



Ravi Teja at Virosh wedding reception



Krithi Shetty



Kriti Sanon



Mrunal Thakur



Newlywed couple Arjun Tendulkar and Saaniya Chandhok (centre) with family members

Photos: PTI/ANI

## Glittering wedding bash

Cricketer Arjun Tendulkar, the son of Indian cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar, married longtime girlfriend and businesswoman Saaniya Chandhok in a grand ceremony in Mumbai on Thursday. The wedding brought together prominent personalities from the worlds of cricket, business, politics and Bollywood, turning the occasion into one of the most high-profile social events of the year. Arjun, the son of Sachin Tendulkar and Anjali Tendulkar, tied the knot with Saaniya Chandhok, granddaughter of noted industrialist Ravi Ghai.



Shah Rukh Khan with wife Gauri and Suhana

Photos: PTI/ANI/X



Aamir Khan



Farhan Akhtar



Arjun Tendulkar & Saaniya Chandhok



Abhishek Bachchan and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan



**A**ctors Govinda and Neelam Kothari starred together in many hit films in the 80s, such as *Ilaam*, *Love 86*, *Hatya*, *Sindoor*, *Khudgarz*, *Do Qaidi*, and others. When two actors work together in so many films, speculations often begin that they are dating. Similarly, Govinda and Neelam were also rumoured to be in a relationship at that time.

Recently, in an interview with Siddharth Kannan, the actor opened up about the rumours of having an affair with Neelam. He said, "Dekhiye hum sab jitne youngsters, jo gaon type ke hote hain, un sabhi ke liye gorriyan bahut achi lagti hain. Yeh jo opposite attraction hai na, yeh hua karta hai. She was different and such a good girl. Aise lagta tha jaise doll hai (Look, all of us youngsters, who are of the village type, are attracted to fair girls. This opposite attraction happens. She was different and such a good girl. She looked like a doll!)"

The actor revealed that he was initially a fan of Neelam and never thought that he would work with her. When she became his heroine, he couldn't believe it.

Govinda further said, "Uss time pe, abhi jaise affairs hote hain, vaise toh hote nahi the. Hum bawaal machate the. Ho gaya, lag raha hai, chal raha hai. Pehle wala romance hota tha, woh dekhne maatr ka tha. Kitna acha kaam kar paye na hum log. Har film dekhiye, gaane superhit, filmein hit (At that time, affairs didn't happen like they do

# Govinda Neelam **on** affair rumours

**Govinda opens up about past dating rumours with co-star Neelam Kothari, recalling their hit films and admired on-screen chemistry**

now. Earlier, romance was simply admired from a distance. We did great work together—every film had superhit songs and the films were hits!)"

Neelam and Govinda's on-screen pairing was loved by the audience. A few years ago, the two also appeared together on a reality show and showcased their amazing chemistry on stage. A video of them dancing to-

gether had gone viral.

Meanwhile, Govinda has been making headlines because of his alleged relationship with a struggling actress. His wife, Sunita Ahuja, has claimed in several interviews that a young girl is using the actor as a sugar daddy.



Photo: Instagram

## Mahesh Bhatt applauds film *Tanvi The Great*

**F**ilmmaker Mahesh Bhatt has heaped praise on actor Anupam Kher's directorial *Tanvi The Great*, calling it the most outstanding movie he has watched this year.

Anupam took to Instagram to share a video message from Mahesh Bhatt, in which the veteran filmmaker applauded the film's emotional depth and storytelling.

In the post, Mahesh Bhatt said: "*Tanvi The Great* is the most outstanding picture I've seen in the year 2025. It's a brave film, it's a sensitive film, it's an entertaining film. It plows through the heart of a young autistic child, the rarest of the rare creations which nature

has entrusted us with. Do watch it on the 3rd of March."

Sharing the clip, Anupam expressed gratitude to Mahesh Bhatt for his appreciation and longstanding support. Anupam wrote: Thank you #MaheshBhatt Saab for your appreciation of our film #TanviTheGreat! It means the world to us. Apart from introducing me to the world of cinema with a film like *Saaransh* you have been a great support to whatever I do."

"But your appreciation for TTG has really helped me personally to stick to my value system and make a film I completely believe in!" he added.



Photo: Instagram

Anupam Kher and filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt

## Priyanka stuns at Paris

**Priyanka Chopra turns heads at Paris Fashion Week, attending Dior's fall/winter 2026 show in a stunning head-to-toe ensemble**

**Aanchal Chaudhary**

**A**fter making headlines in some of the most jaw-dropping ensembles for her *The Bluff* press tour, Global actress Priyanka Chopra is now taking over fashion shows. Bollywood's beloved *desi girl* grabbed eyeballs at Paris Fashion Week, attending creative director Jonathan Anderson's Dior fall/winter 2026 ready-to-wear show at the picturesque Jardin des Tuileries in an exquisite look that was nothing less than runway couture.

Priyanka was seriously giving model energy in the front row in a head-to-toe Dior ensemble featuring a body-hugging black tee and a chic charcoal-grey blazer. While the upper wear was minimal and chic, the real show-stealing element was the skirt!

The actress paired her look with an eye-catching jacquard skirt that was wrapped like a blanket with an asymmetrical hemline. The statement piece featured intricate floral embroidery and a black knot detail around the waist that was both elegant and classy.



Photo: Instagram\_@priyankachopra

## Fardeen's sunrise reflection

**Fardeen Khan shares a reflective note on hope, resilience and new beginnings, comparing life's struggles with rising sun**



Photos: Instagram\_@fardeenkhan

**A**ctor Fardeen Khan shared a profound note about hope, resilience, and new beginnings, comparing the rising sun to the quiet courage it takes to start again. Taking to Instagram on Thursday, the actor posted a reflective piece titled "Sunrise Again," which speaks about how the sun returns each morning "quietly," much like forgiveness, reminding people that every day offers a fresh start despite the mistakes and unfinished moments of the past.

He wrote: "Sunrise Again. The sun does not arrive loudly. It returns the way forgiveness returns- quietly, as if the world had been waiting all night for the courage to begin again. Look at it there, lifting itself from the horizon like a promise the earth almost forgot."

Fardeen added: "Yesterday burned itself into dusk, carrying our mistakes, our unfinished words, the things we meant to say and the things we should never have said. Yet the sky does not remember them. Morning opens its hands and the light spills out- gold across the roofs, through the palms, into the silent streets where even the shadows are still deciding who they will be today."

Through the post, Fardeen highlighted the deeper message of renewal, writing that the sun sets every evening "without despair" and rises again from the other side of the world, teaching that life continues even after difficult endings. "This is the secret the sun keeps teaching us: It falls every evening without despair. It disappears without argument." "And still, from the other side of the world, it gathers its fire again and begins. So the day rises-not as proof that life is perfect, but as proof that life continues. That endings are only the quiet turning of the earth, and somewhere beyond the night we feared too long-the light is already on its way. - Charlotte Thompson. #goodmorning-everyone #sunrise #newbeginnings #divinity #time."



## Rhea gorges on crispy dosa in Hyderabad

**A**ctress Rhea Chakraborty, who attended the wedding reception of stars Rashmika Mandanna and Vijay Deverakonda, treated herself to a delicious South Indian meal during her time in Hyderabad, sharing a glimpse of her food indulgence.

The actress was seen enjoying a plate of crispy dosa with chutney and sambhar, giving a peek into her love for the city's iconic flavours while soaking in the local culinary experience.

She then shared a picture with the newly married couple and wrote: "Can't stand in between these two and not feel the love. Congratulations to the most stunning couple.. Uff Love and light!"

Rhea, who started her television career in 2009 with *MTV India's TVS Scooty Teen Diva* where she was the first runner-up. She has hosted several MTV shows.

In 2012, she made her film debut with the Telugu film *Tunega Tunega* where she played the character Nidhi. In 2013 she debuted in



Photo: Instagram\_@rhea\_chakraborty



Photos: Instagram\_@rhea\_chakraborty

Bollywood with *Mere Dad Ki Maruti* as Jasleen. In 2014, she played the character of Sonali in *Sonali Cable*. She was last seen on screen in *Chehre*, a mystery thriller film directed by Rumi Jaffery. The film stars Amitabh Bachchan and Emraan Hashmi in lead roles, alongside Krystle D'Souza, Rhea Chakraborty, Siddhanth Kapoor, Annu Kapoor, Alexx O'Neil, Samir Soni, and Dhritiman Chatterjee in supporting roles.

## 'Mere maut ke zimmedar...'

**Anurag Dobhal shares emotional video on personal struggles**

**A**nurag Dobhal, a popular You-Tuber and *Bigg Boss 17* contestant, shocked fans after sharing an emotional video about his personal struggles. He revealed that he was diagnosed with a brain tumour at the age of 14 and later faced pressure from his family over his studies. Dobhal also spoke about meeting his wife Ritika on social media and marrying her against his parents' wishes. He claimed that just days before the wedding, his parents said they would not attend, leaving him to manage the ceremony on his own.

He said, "Mere se haath judwaye, pair padhwaaye. Mere se sorry buhwaya gaya saare relatives ke saamne. Papa aur mumma ne iss level tak torture kiya ki bola ki naa



hum khush rahenge naa tujhe khush rehne denge." In the post, Anurag said, "Mere maut ke zimmedar mummy, papa, Kalam (brother) and Shreya. I have nothing left to do anything. I am under a lot of depression. Mujhe samajh nahi aaraha kaise yeh feeling eliminate karoon. Iss video ke baad shayad main gayab ho jaaunga. Main bas sona chahta hoon. 5 din se kuch khaya nahi hai, dimaag ekdam khatam ho gaya hai."

# FREE PRESS JOURNAL

# SCHOOL

MUMBAI | FRIDAY | MARCH 6, 2026



A calm sea never made a sailor skilled enough for storms  
- Franklin D. Roosevelt

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited Iran Embassy on Thursday and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held a phone conversation with his Iranian counterpart Seyed Abbas Araghch

## India condoles Khamenei's death, placates Iran



India on Thursday condoled the death of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei with Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri conveying to the Iranian ambassador New Delhi's message of sympathy. Separately, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held a phone conversation with his Iranian counterpart Seyed Abbas Araghchi. Misri visited the Iranian embassy and signed the condolence book on behalf of the government of India. Mohammad Fathali. Khamenei was killed in an Israel-US strike on February 28. India chose not to react to Khamenei's killing. Misri's visit to the Iranian embassy and signing of the condolence book assumed significance as several opposition parties had criticised the government for not reacting to Khamenei's death.

**DID U KNOW?**  
The conflict has reached our backyard. Yet the Prime Minister has said nothing, LoP Rahul Gandhi said.

## End of innings for Nitish

JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar on Thursday filed nomination papers for Rajya Sabha elections, virtually bringing the curtain down on his tenure as the state's longest-serving chief minister, paving the way for a new government, likely to be headed by the BJP.



## Iran livid over warship attack



Iran launched a new wave of attacks Thursday morning at Israeli and American bases and threatened that the United States would "bitterly regret" torpedoing an Iranian warship in the Indian Ocean. Frigate Dena, a guest of India's Navy carrying almost 130 sailors, was struck in international waters without warning, Iran said.

## WB Guv quits, Mamata says Ravi will replace him



West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose, who made headlines over his differences with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, has resigned, sources have said. The reason for his resignation -- which comes ahead of the assembly election in the state -- is not known yet. His replacement, Mamata Banerjee claimed, will be RN Ravi, the Governor of Tamil Nadu.

The only impossible journey is the one you never begin. Step one—commit, start. The rest is momentum and faith - Tony Robbins



Many middle-level jobs could face pressure as automation expands - Kristalina Georgieva

MUMBAI | FRIDAY | MARCH 6, 2026

## Young doctors should upgrade their knowledge

**DID U KNOW?**  
AI has improved diagnosis and treatment, but the role of doctors remains irreplaceable.

Minister of State Dr Jitendra Singh presented awards in New Delhi to 26 young medical professionals from across India who excelled in specialities including oncology, paediatrics, endocrinology, orthopaedics and emergency medicine, an official statement said on Thursday. The

minister expressed satisfaction that many of the honours went to young doctors rather than senior professionals, noting that early recognition boosts their confidence. The minister said that recognising young doctors early in their careers strengthens the future of health-care services in the country.



## Maamla Legal Hai Season 2



Popular courtroom comedy series "Maamla Legal Hai" will return for its second season on Netflix on April 3, the streaming platform announced on Thursday. Produced by Posham Pa Pictures, the new season promises another round of chaotic and humorous cases from the fictional Patparganj District Court, blending satire with everyday courtroom drama. The series features actor-politician Ravi Kishan as lawyer VD Tyagi.

## Shekhar Kapur post pic, gets trolled



Filmmaker Shekhar Kapur, who is known for his fascination with AI, shared an AI generated image of the late actors Dilip Kumar,

Dharmendra, Dev Anand and Rajesh Khanna. On Thursday, the director took to his X, formerly Twitter, and shared the monochromatic picture of the legends. The picture shows them sitting together for a meal, and sharing laughs. However, the filmmaker was trolled for the picture as social media users pointed out how it was an AI-generated picture.

# INDIA democratising AI

India is helping to democratise AI not only for its own people but also for many developing nations, Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the IMF, said



India is emerging as a key player in the global Artificial Intelligence revolution and is helping to democratise the technology not just for its own citizens but also for developing countries around the world, Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, said on Thursday. Speaking at the Asia in 2050 Conference in Bangkok, Georgieva said the rapid development of AI has the potential to reshape the global economy, with Asia playing a central role in this trans-



formation. "AI could increase Asia's economic growth by nearly one percentage point every year if countries successfully use the technology to improve productivity," she said. "India is helping to democratise AI not only for its own people

but also for many developing nations," she added. According to her, India's large digital ecosystem, growing technology sector and young workforce could help make AI tools more accessible across the world.



## Toxic vs. Dhurandhar 2 clash averted

Escalating tensions in the West Asia have turned out to be a blessing in disguise for "Dhurandhar 2" and "Toxic: A Fairy Tale for Grown-Ups", which were set to lock horns at the box office on March 19. The makers of "Toxic" said they have decided to move the film's release to June 4, owing to geopolitical uncertainty.



In India, health is not a profession, it is a service  
- Mansukh Mandaviya

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Asian Games 2026 Japan

Mandaviya chaired a meeting at SAI headquarters to review preparations for Asian Games

# Minister reviews Asian Games preparations



Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports Mansukh Mandaviya on Thursday chaired a meeting at SAI headquarters to review preparations for the 2026 Asian Games in Japan, scheduled to be held from September 19 to October 4. Over 700 Indian athletes are expected to compete across more than

40 sports disciplines at the Games scheduled to be held in Aichi-Nagoya. During the meeting, Mandaviya reaffirmed the government's commitment to athlete welfare and performance, an official statement said. "Our athletes are our top priority. Every possible support, from training and sports science to logistics, kit support, food support and medical care, will be provided so that they can prepare without distractions and

deliver their best at the Asian Games," he said. "Our aim is not to make them suffer at any cost and ensure they remain focused on increasing our medal tally at the competition," he said. Senior officials from MYAS, SAI, and other stakeholders briefed Mandaviya on the country's readiness ahead of the event.

**DID U KNOW?**  
Over 700 Indian athletes are expected to compete across more than 40 disciplines at Games.

## Indian contingents leave for WBF

India's young boxers are preparing to compete internationally as the Indian youth boxing team leaves on Friday for the World Boxing Futures Cup 2026, taking place in Thailand, from March 8 to March 15. The tournament will gather some of the best young boxers from around the globe, providing an important opportunity for them to gain international experience and compete against the top opponents.



## Suryavanshi leads blue to semis



Teenage sensation Vaibhav Suryavanshi blazed 58 off just 19 balls to power DY Patil Blue into semi-finals of the 20th DY Patil T20 Cup with a four-wicket win over Income Tax in quarter-finals held at the DY Patil University ground, Navi Mumbai. Suryavanshi struck four boundaries and six sixes as he provided early impetus for Blue to chase down Tax's imposing total of 211/6.

## Maha Assembly erupts over WC passes



The Maharashtra Legislative Assembly on Thursday witnessed heated exchanges as members across party lines demanded better access to passes for the high-stakes India vs England T20 World Cup semi-final at the Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai. The debate, laced with patriotic fervour and political wit, even saw calls from some legislators for the state government to reclaim the iconic stadium from the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA).

### QUICK NEWS

#### Jayden replaces Nesar

West Indian pace bowler Jayden Seales has signed for Hampshire for the opening block of the 2026 County Championship. The 24-year-old fast bowler replaced Michael Nesar, who was recalled by Cricket Australia earlier this month.

#### PERRY NEARS POTENTIAL RETURN

Australia captain Alyssa Healy says veteran allrounder Ellyse Perry is edging closer to fitness ahead of the upcoming day-night Test at the WACA, though the final call on her availability will be made closer to the match.

#### Siddons appointed as coach

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) has appointed former Australian cricketer Jamie Siddons as head coach of the senior women's team, the board announced on Thursday. Siddons previously coached the Bangladesh senior men's team from 2007 to 2011.



Everyone wants their son like Virat, but not their daughter like Smriti  
- Jay Shah

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## Dame Therese appointed chair of T20 WC 2028

Dame Therese Walsh has been appointed as Chair of the ICC Men's T20 WC 2028 Tournament, to be co-hosted by Australia and NZ. Dame Therese is currently chair of Air New Zealand, and a former Chair of TVNZ and Director of NZ Cricket. She played a leading role in both the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2015 co-hosted across Australia and New Zealand and the IRB Men's Rugby World Cup in 2011 in New Zealand.



## Pak player reported for misbehaving



To add insult to injury, an unnamed Pakistan player was reported and later fined for misbehaving with a female staff during their stay at a hotel in Kandy, Sri Lanka, for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup matches and fined by team manager, a news report said on Thursday.



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### Historic Ranji Trophy

ICC chairman Jay Shah met members of Jammu & Kashmir's team after their historic Ranji Trophy win, in which they beat Karnataka

# SHAH MEETS J&K PLAYERS



ICC chairman Jay Shah met members of Jammu & Kashmir's team after their historic Ranji Trophy win, in which they beat the eight-time champions Karnataka at the Hubli Cricket



Ground on February 28 to win their maiden title. After the win, the players wished to meet Shah and

acknowledge the role his leadership played in strengthening cricket in the region during his tenure as BCCI Secretary. ICC chairman fulfilled their wish and shared words of encouragement with the players as they cel-

ebred their historic success. "The historic triumph of Jammu & Kashmir in the Ranji Trophy will remain a proud milestone for cricket in the region," The BCCI wrote on X, sharing photos of the meet.



**DID YOU KNOW?**  
The BCCI also congratulated the entire J&K squad and cricket fraternity for scripting a remarkable chapter.

## Pune to host 41st PSPB tournament

Pune is all set to welcome an array of national and international stars in the 41st edition of the prestigious PSPB Inter-Unit Hockey Tournament to be played at the Major Dhyanand Hockey Stadium, Pune. The tournament

is being organised under the aegis of Petroleum Sports Promotion Board (PSPB), and brings together leading Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) from across India to compete in the true spirit of sportsmanship and excellence.

## Rifle and pistol shooters, Trials ready

Following a dominant performance at the Asian Rifle/Pistol Championship on home soil, where India topped the medal tally with an impressive 76 medals including 39 gold, 18 silver and 19 bronze, top Indian rifle and pistol shooters, will now turn their attention to

the National Selection Trials 3 (Group A), scheduled at the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting range in Delhi between March 06-10, 2026, ahead of a packed international and domestic calendar beginning next month. Almost all of India's top guns will be competing in 10 events.

FP SCHOOL EDITOR: AMRISH HERDENIA

# Fun, Colour, & Creativity await you

• **TINA KHATRI**

Get ready to celebrate Women's Day like never before—this weekend is your chance to mix, make, and marvel! Step into a world where tea changes colour like magic, toast turns into perfect geometric patterns, and old newspapers burst into bold, inspiring art. Every activity is a playful adventure where science fizzles, shapes dance, and imagination takes the lead.

Roll up your sleeves, grab your materials, and let your creativity shine. From colourful collages to edible tessellations, from magical chemistry in a cup to crafts made from things you thought were “waste,” this is your weekend to explore, experiment, and celebrate the amazing women in your life. Adventure, learning, and fun are just a craft away!



## Newspaper collage posters

### Materials:

- Old newspapers or magazines
- Glue
- Chart paper
- Scissors
- Markers (optional)

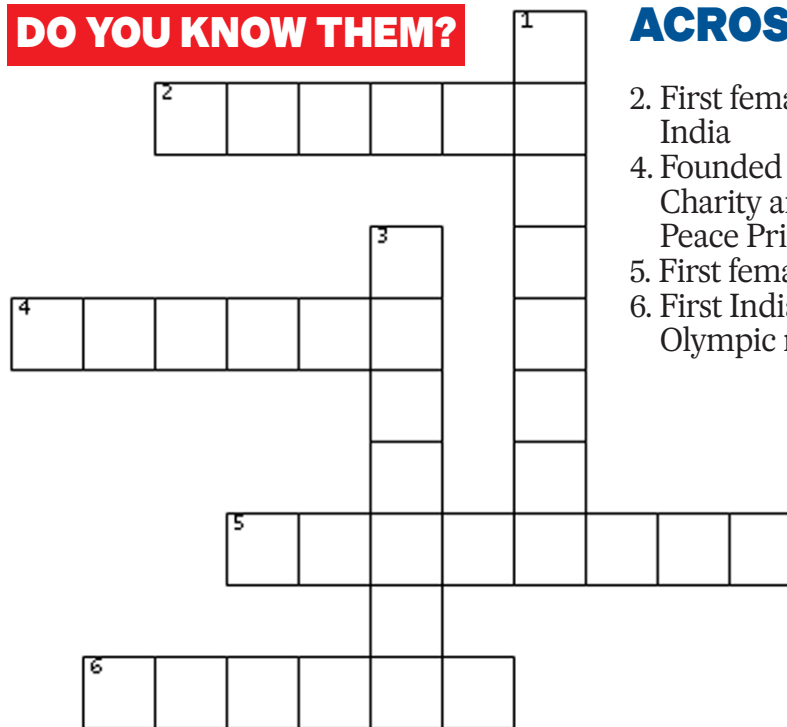
### Instructions:

1. Cut out pictures, symbols, or words like “Inspire” and “Dream Big.”
2. Arrange the pieces on chart paper in a design you love.
3. Glue everything in place.
4. Add drawings, doodles, or quotes to personalise your poster.



**Try it: Make your collage tell a story about a woman who inspires you.**

## DO YOU KNOW THEM?



### ACROSS

2. First female Prime Minister of India
4. Founded the Missionaries of Charity and won the Nobel Peace Prize
5. First female President of India
6. First Indian woman to win an Olympic medal

### DOWN

1. India's first female pilot
3. First Indian woman to go into space



## Ph-changing magic tea

### Materials:

- Dried butterfly pea flowers
- Hot water
- Lemon juice or vinegar
- Clear glass cups

### Instructions:

1. Brew the butterfly pea flowers in hot water until the tea turns bright blue.
2. Pour the tea into clear cups.
3. Add a few drops of lemon juice or vinegar. Watch the colour change from blue to purple or pink.

Try it: Experiment with different amounts of lemon juice. Can you make the tea change from one shade to another?

## Cucumber & Mint Yogurt Toast

### MATERIALS:

- 1–2 slices of whole wheat or multigrain bread
- 2–3 tablespoons thick plain yogurt (dahi)
- 4–5 thin cucumber slices
- A few fresh mint leaves
- Pinch of salt and sugar (optional)
- Chaat masala (optional)

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Chill the yogurt in the fridge for at least 15 minutes.
2. Spread the thick yogurt evenly over the toasted bread slices.
3. Arrange the cucumber slices on top in any fun pattern—hexagons, stripes, or even a smiley face!
4. Sprinkle a pinch of salt, sugar, or chaat masala if you like a tangy twist.
5. Garnish with fresh mint leaves for a final refreshing touch.





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# Being an artist in India



Being an artist in India is like being a cactus in a rainforest. You do not thrive, but if you do, you are praised. You try persistently to survive in the conditions, but the surroundings always drown every last bit of life in you. Our society tries its best to kill art and the artist with hollow ideologies like, “Art is a hobby.” Yet, if once in a blue moon, a cactus blooms in the rainforest, people suddenly celebrate the same art that till yes-

terday was dismissed as a “hobby.”

And then, society frames them as exceptions. Lectures about “job security”, encouraging you to run in the rat race while telling you that passion is risky business. India has three streams after the 10th boards, yet the only question anyone asks is: “Commerce or Science?” An artist? You might as well be unemployed.

And ironically, India is considered a land which is steeped in art. Classical music, poetry, dance, storytelling are the factors which enthrall our land and culture. Yet, our prosperous nation aims at erasing its own identity by discouraging



**Aarav Das, IX, NES High School, Bhandup, Mumbai**

those who create. Our ‘cactuses’—aspiring writers, indie artists, musicians—all collectively face ‘rain’ on a daily basis,

told to “focus on something practical” while their art silently crumbles beneath the load of a thousand ‘thoughtful pieces of advice’.

And still, the artist persists. They create in spite of the odds, in spite of society, in spite of the constant taunt and shame. Because art in India is not just painting and poetry, it is also a monotonous loop of fighting to assert your existence, and refusing to agree on the society's definition of what your life should look like.

Because as every artist hopes, maybe one sunrise will make the rain forest realize that cactuses bloom the sweetest fruits.

## Charlie the Wonderdog – A Family Adventure

Charlie the Wonderdog is a charming animated family film that blends science fiction, superhero adventure and heartfelt storytelling. The story centres on Charlie, an affectionate golden retriever whose ordinary canine life takes an extraordinary turn after a mysterious alien abduction grants him superpowers. What follows is a lively journey of self-discovery, bravery and loyalty.

Voiced by Owen Wilson, Charlie is instantly likeable. Wilson's warm, easy-going delivery brings humour and sincerity to the role, making Charlie both relatable and heroic without losing his playful spirit. The animation is bright and visually pleasant, with colourful cityscapes and energetic action sequences that are engaging without being overwhelming for younger viewers.

**MOVIE REVIEW**

**Cut**



**Advika Shukla, VI, NES High School, Bhandup**

At its heart, the film is about more than superpowers. It gently explores themes of courage, kindness and believing in oneself. Charlie's trans-

formation into a superhero mirrors the emotional journey many children experience — learning to recognise their own strengths and using them responsibly. The film also celebrates the timeless bond between pets and their families, highlighting loyalty and unconditional love in a way that feels genuine rather than sentimental.

That said, the narrative does follow a familiar superhero formula. Some viewers may find the storyline predictable, with clear villains and conventional plot twists. The film occasionally leans heavily on well-worn genre stereotypes, and deeper character development for supporting roles would have added greater emotional depth. The humour, while light and child-friendly, may not always resonate with adults.



Overall, Charlie the Wonderdog is an enjoyable, feel-good adventure best suited to children aged seven and above. It delivers positive messages, gentle laughs and an uplifting conclusion. While it may not redefine the superhero genre, it succeeds as a wholesome, family-friendly film that leaves audiences smiling — and perhaps hugging their pets a little tighter afterwards.