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## THE FREE PRESS JOURNAL

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# ANGELS OF MUMBAI



**Chief Guest**

**Shri. Mangal Prabhat Lodha**  
Hon'ble Minister of Skills,  
Employment, Entrepreneurship  
and Innovation Department



**Guest of honour**

**Smt. Ritu Tawde**  
Mayor, Mumbai

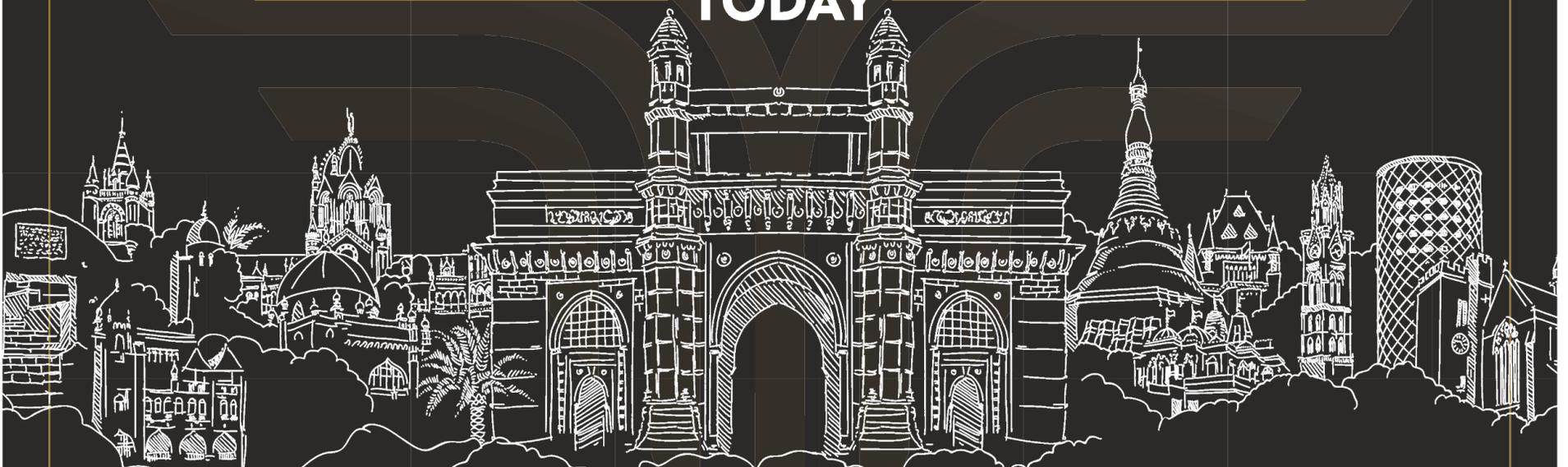


**Guest of honour**

**Shri. Ronnie Screwvala**  
Film Producer &  
Philanthropist

The jury selected **11 Angels of Mumbai** from the 36 Mumbaikars featured in the series over the past year; they will be felicitated with trophies

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**NATION**  
Gauhati HC issues notice to Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma on pleas against 'hate speech'



**GAMES**  
Aiden Markram special powers South Africa to convincing nine-wicket win against WI



**Cinema** Vijay Deverakonda, Rashmika Mandanna make it official!  
**Edit** BMC Budget: Disturbing but we are not horrified enough



## CRACKDOWN | All soft & hard copies of Class 8 Social Science textbook with chapter on judicial corruption to be seized, compliance report filed. Showcause notices against officials issued

### Heads must roll: SC bans NCERT textbook

**FPJ News Service**  
NEW DELHI  
The Supreme Court on Thursday imposed a blanket ban on a Class 8 Social Science textbook published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) that carried a section on "corruption in judiciary", issued contempt notices to senior officials, and ordered the

immediate seizure and take-down of all copies, physical and digital. A Bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi said the publication appeared to be the result of a "deep-rooted, well-orchestrated conspiracy" to undermine the judiciary and warned that "heads must roll", Bar & Bench and Live Law report.

**The top court also directed the NCERT director to furnish names and credentials of members of the National Syllabi Board who prepared the offending chapter and to produce the original minutes of the meetings where the chapter was deliberated and finalised**

During the hearing, the CJ remarked, "We need to find who is responsible, and we will see who are there. Heads must roll! We will not close the case." He added, "They fired the gunshot. Judiciary is

bleeding today." The Court issued show-cause notices under the Contempt of Courts Act to the Secretary of School Education, Ministry of Education, and NCERT Director Dr Dinesh Prasad Saklani, asking why suitable action should not be initiated against them or those responsible for the offending chapter. "The NCERT, in coordination with the Union and State

Education Depts is directed to ensure that all copies of the book (hard or soft) currently in circulation, whether held in storage, retail outlets, or educational institutions, are seized and removed from public access. Compliance be filed," the Court ordered. It directed that no instruction be imparted to students based on the book.

## Pradhan promises action on drafters

**PTI**  
JAMSHEDPUR/NEW DELHI  
Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Thursday said, "I am very sad at what has happened and express regret... There was no intention to insult the judiciary. An inquiry will be conducted and accountability fixed. Action will be taken against those involved in drafting the chapter. As soon as we

got to know (about it), the circulation of the textbooks was put on hold." "In a democratic country like India, the judiciary is supreme, and we have utmost respect for it. We have taken the issue very seriously. The court's directives will be complied with," he said. NCERT on Wednesday also apologised for "inappropriate content" after facing the Supreme Court's ire over.



## Modi is leader with most Insta followers

**PTI**  
NEW DELHI  
PM Narendra Modi has crossed the milestone of 100 million followers on Instagram, becoming the first world leader and politician to achieve this feat on the platform, officials said on Thursday. Modi joined Instagram in 2014, and over the past decade his account has evolved into one of the most engaging digital spaces among global leaders, officials said. Among major global leaders, Modi

## India sets store by BoP, Gaza Peace Plan, IMEC

**Ashwin Ahmad**  
NEW DELHI  
India and Israel elevated their relationship to a Special Strategic Partnership on Friday. The upgrade took place during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to Israel on February 25-26, a visit that saw him hold talks with his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu, and President Isaac Herzog. Modi, the first Indian PM to address the Knesset, on Wednesday had spoken about how India and Israel could work to-



gether in different formats. "We will also work closely in different formats such as the India-Middle-Europe Economic Corridor and the I2U2 framework between India, Israel, UAE and the US," the PM had said in his address. "Defence and security is another pillar of the partnership. In November last year, we signed an MoU on Defence Co-operation. In today's uncertain world, a strong defence partnership between trusted partners like India and Israel is of vital importance."

## Role play explained

**Board of Peace:** Misri spoke about India seeking a role for itself under Trump's Gaza Peace Plan. This suggests that India sees itself as a re-builder of infrastructure of hospitals and homes that have been damaged by the war. Such a role would allow employment of Indian workers. Israeli reports say around 75,000 foreign workers are needed to replace Palestinian workers. **IMEC:** India is very keen for IMEC to succeed as it views it as a counter to China's BRI.

## CBI books new case against Anil Ambani

**Somendra Sharma**  
MUMBAI  
The CBI has registered a fresh case against Reliance Communications (RCOM), its promoter and former chairman Anil Ambani, and others on a complaint by Bank of Baroda, alleging conspiracy, cheating and criminal misconduct under the IPC and the Prevention of Corruption Act in connection with an alleged Rs 2,220 crore bank fraud. Reliance Communications, a private telecom service provider, had established a pan-India integrated wireless and wireline network and owned IP-enabled connectivity infra-



## India 'no longer' linked to crime, says Canada

**FPJ News Service**  
MUMBAI  
Canada has said it no longer believes India is linked to violent crimes on its soil, in a significant shift ahead of PM Mark Carney's visit to India, even as both countries prepare to hold talks aimed at restoring normal ties. The revised assessment was conveyed by senior Canadian officials during a media briefing in Ottawa ahead of Carney's visit, according to a report in the Toronto Star. Carney will land in Mumbai on Friday.

## He has 100 million followers on Insta

now has the highest number of Instagram followers. He has more than twice as many followers as US President Donald Trump on the social media platform. Trump holds the second spot with 43.2 million followers. He is followed by Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto with 15 million followers, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva with 14.4 million, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan with 11.6 million and Argentine President Javier Milei with 6.4 million.

## JUSTICE VARMA PROBE

### Speaker reconstitutes panel

**FPJ News Service**  
NEW DELHI  
Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has reconstituted the three-member panel formed to probe allegations against Justice Yashwant Varma, replacing a retiring member with the Chief Justice of the Bombay HC. The committee will now include Justice Shree Chandras-

hekhar, Chief Justice of the Bombay HC, in place of Justice Manindra Mohan Shrivastava of the Madras HC, who is set to retire on March 6, Bar & Bench reports. The panel was originally constituted on August 12, 2025. It comprised Supreme Court judge Justice Aravind Kumar, Madras HC Chief Justice Manindra Mohan Shrivastava and Senior Advocate B

Vasudeva Acharya. The Supreme Court recently rejected a plea by Justice Varma to quash the Speaker's decision to constitute the three-member committee. On August 07, the Supreme Court also dismissed his plea against the in-house committee report and former CJJ Sanjiv Khanna's recommendation for his removal.

## HC dismisses Maha's 50-year claim on Manpada forest land

**Urvi Mahajani**  
MUMBAI  
In a landmark judgement that brings a half-century-old legal battle to a close, the Bombay HC has dismissed the Maharashtra government's claim over 193 acres of prime land in Thane's Manpada area. It ruled that the State failed to legally acquire the land as a "private forest" in 1975 due to fundamental procedural blunders. A bench of Justices Ravindra Ghuge and Ashwin Bhobe upheld the rights of the landowner, D Dahyabhai and Co Pvt Ltd, and asked Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC) to



release statutory compensation in the form of Development Rights Certificates (DRC/TDR) in 21 days. The verdict was passed on February 20, but was made available on late Wednesday night. The HC dismissed the plea filed by the State challenging

orders of the Maharashtra Revenue Tribunal (MRT) and Sub-Divisional Officer refusing to treat the entire land at Chital-sar-Manpada as a private forest under Maharashtra Private Forests (Acquisition) Act, 1975. The dispute dates back to 1975 when the government proposed acquisition of more than 217 acres owned by D Dahyabhai & Co Pvt Ltd for forest purposes. It said a notice issued on August 29, 1975, under the Indian Forest Act vested the land with the Forest Department and formed part of Sanjay Gandhi National Park.

## CJI VOWS REGISTRY REFORMS

**FPJ News Service**  
NEW DELHI  
CJI Surya Kant on Thursday promised reforms in the Supreme Court Registry after discovering that a petition, which had earlier been dismissed by a three-judge bench, was listed again before another bench. Calling it a serious issue, the CJI said he would undertake a deeper administrative probe and question Registry officials who "think they are permanent", Bar & Bench reports.

## Now, upbeat India eye 'Win'dies

### Thrash Zimbabwe by 72 runs, look to secure World Cup semifinal berth

**Haridev Pushparaj**  
MUMBAI  
India did themselves a huge favour beating Zimbabwe by 72 runs after piling up the highest total of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026, putting themselves on course to qualify for the semifinals if they defeat the West Indies at Eden Gardens in Kolkata on Sunday, March 1. Team India will be buoyed by the performances of Abhishek Sharma, who struck a fiery



55, and Hardik Pandya, who smashed a brilliant 50 to propel India to 254/6 in 20 overs. There were valuable contributions

from Tilak Varma (44), Ishan Kishan (38), Suryakumar Yadav (33) and Sanju Samson (24). Arshdeep Singh scalped 3/24 in a

disciplined bowling display to restrict Zimbabwe to 184/6 in 20 overs. The emphatic win ensured India collected two crucial points and set up a virtual quarterfinal against two-time champions West Indies in Kolkata for a place in the last four. The morale-boosting victory against Zimbabwe also improved their net run rate from -3.80 to -0.100.

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## ED grills Anil Ambani in ₹40,000 cr fraud case

**Ashish Singh**  
MUMBAI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday questioned Anil Ambani, chairman of the Reliance Group, for more than 10 hours in connection with an alleged Rs40,000-crore bank fraud-linked money-laundering case. He has been called again on Friday.

The 66-year-old businessman reached the federal probe agency's office in central Delhi at around 10.30 am and left late in the evening after his statement was recorded under the

provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). This was his second round of questioning; he had earlier been examined in August 2025.

Officials said the ED examination primarily focused on the sanction and utilisation of loans, the flow of funds between group entities, and transactions flagged during the course of the investigation. Investigators are understood to have confronted him with financial documents, corporate records and details of inter-

nal decision-making arrangements linked to the alleged irregularities.

Ambani's statement was recorded under the PMLA, and investigators are understood to have confronted him with financial documents, financial decisions and corporate arrangements linked to the alleged irregularities.

On Wednesday, the ED provisionally attached Ambani's Mumbai residence, 'Abode', valued at Rs3,716 crore, under the provisions of the

Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

The ED has initiated an investigation based on an FIR registered by the CBI under various provisions of the Indian Penal Code and the Prevention of Corruption Act against Reliance Communications, Anil Ambani and others.

According to the agency, RCom and its group companies availed loans from domestic and foreign lenders from 2010 to 2012 onwards, of which Rs40,185 crore remains outstanding. Nine banks have

declared the group's loan accounts as fraud.

The ED has constituted a Special Investigation Team following directions from the Supreme Court and filed three money-laundering cases against the Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group. It alleged diversion of over Rs13,600 crore towards evergreening of loans, Rs12,600 crore to connected parties and more than Rs1,800 crore into fixed deposits and mutual funds, later rerouted to group entities. Ambani has been summoned again tomorrow.

## CID ramps up probe, reviews crash angles

**Ankit Shukla**  
PUNE

The Crime Investigation Department (CID) has intensified its probe into the plane crash that claimed the life of former Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar and others. Sunil Ramanand, Additional Director General of Police, CID, briefed the media on Thursday in Pune.

Ramanand said the primary objective of the investigation is to determine whether the incident was part of a criminal conspiracy, an act of criminal negligence or an illegal omission. He said the investigation into the accidental death is being conducted by professionals.

Ramanand added that multiple agencies are assisting in the probe, including Baramati Government Medical College, the forensic department of Pune's Forensic Medical College, aviation authorities and other concerned agencies. The Superintendent of Police, CID Pune, is heading the investigation, and all supporting teams are cooperating professionally, he said. He said the report submitted by the



Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) will be taken into consideration as an important factor in the CID's investigation.

"Our main motive is to thoroughly investigate whether there was any criminal intent behind the incident. If any such facts emerge during the probe, additional sections will be invoked accordingly," Ramanand said.

He added that substantial evidence has already been collected in connection with the case and the matter remains under active investigation.

Considering the seriousness of the case, the state government has also written to the Centre seeking a CBI probe, he said.

**Rohit Pawar, cousin move Baramati police**

**Pune:** NCP (SP) MLA Rohit Pawar and his cousin Yugendra Pawar on Thursday approached the Baramati police, seeking registration of an FIR against VSR Ventures over the January 28 plane crash. The move comes a day after Rohit Pawar filed a similar complaint at the Marine Drive police station in Mumbai against VSR Ventures and its directors. Backed by a large number of supporters, Rohit Pawar and Yugendra Pawar submitted a written complaint at the Baramati Taluka police station on Thursday morning.

(Full story on Pune e-paper)

## Raut freed in defamation case

**Mumbai:** The special court for cases against MPs and MLAs on Thursday acquitted Shiv Sena UBT MP Sanjay Raut in a defamation case filed by BJP leader Kirit Somaiya's wife Dr Medha Somaiya. Raut was held guilty by the magistrate court in September 2024 and was sentenced to 15 days' imprisonment and a fine of Rs25,000, to be paid to Dr Somaiya. The complainant claimed that she will approach the High Court against Raut's acquittal.

## CM ridicules Tipu-Shivaji Maharaj comparison

**Mumbai:** Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday said that accurate teaching of history over the past seven decades would have prevented any glorification of Mughal ruler Aurangzeb. He asserted that historical narratives must reflect facts and opposed portraying invaders as heroes. Speaking in the State Assembly during the Budget session, Fadnavis criticised attempts to compare Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj with Mysuru ruler Tipu Sultan. He said Shivaji Maharaj remains universally respected for his administrative vision and welfare-oriented governance. "We will always oppose those who treat invaders as heroes," he said. Fadnavis also condemned Maharashtra Congress chief Harshwardhan Sapkal for allegedly equating Shivaji Maharaj with Tipu Sultan, calling the remarks "shameful". The Chief Minister stated that earlier NCERT textbooks devoted 17 pages to Mughal history and only one page to Shivaji Maharaj. Under PM Narendra Modi, the curriculum now gives 20 pages to Maratha history, he added.

## State launches minority training institute

**Mumbai:** The Minority Research and Training Institute (MARTI) was launched by Deputy Chief Minister and minister for minority development Sunetra Pawar.

An amount of Rs3.12 crore has been approved through supplementary demands for the current year to meet the institute's office expenses. A consultant has recently been appointed to complete the registration of the institute under the Companies Act and the process is currently underway. Instructions have been issued by the department to initiate the institute's operations, said Pawar. MARTI has been set up to develop institutes on the lines of the Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Research and Training Institute, the Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj Research, Training, and Human Development Institute, and the Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Research and Training Institute. The institute monitors government minority development departments, evaluates their performance, and advocates appropriate budgets and welfare awareness. It also monitors the Prime Minister's new 15-point programme for minorities and raises relevant issues with the Minority Commission, the high court, and the Supreme Court.

## DAMAGING OPEN SPACES | In a letter to CM, Gagrani, MAC has warned that the Racecourse is not vacant land but a vital natural ground that absorbs rainwater and moderates heat

# Architects flag Coastal Rd project, Racecourse park

**Shefali Parab-Pandit**  
MUMBAI

The Mumbai Architects Collective (MAC) has raised additional objections to the masterplan to redevelop open spaces along the Mumbai Coastal Road Project and build a central park at Mahalaxmi Racecourse.

Around 119 members of the MAC have written to Municipal Commissioner Bhushan Gagrani and Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis opposing the projects. They have warned that the 298-acre project risks cost overruns, environmental harm, weak land governance and limited public access without an integrated plan.

The members of MAC include architects, designers and urban planners such as Alan Abraham, PK Das, Nitin Killawala, Rahul Kadri and Vikas Dilawari. Earlier, the MAC wrote on Feb 19 warning that underground construction could permanently damage one of Mumbai's last open spaces. After Gagrani's Feb 22 presentation on the coastal road and Mahalaxmi project at a South Mumbai Residents Association (SMRA) dialogue, the MAC reiterated that its concerns reflect a commitment to responsible planning, prudent use of public funds and safeguarding the city's long-term environmental resilience.



**MCA's Concerns**  
The proposed three-level underground basements would irreversibly damage Mumbai's 'Sponge City' capacity

**This is not a simple park upgrade but a major concretised project imposing long-term environmental risks**

In the letter, the MAC warned that the Racecourse is not vacant land but a vital natural ground that absorbs rainwater, recharges groundwater and moderates heat. "The proposed three-level underground basements would irreversibly damage Mumbai's 'Sponge City' capacity, worsen monsoon runoff and undermine climate resilience. Unlike natural maidans, which are low-carbon and low-maintenance, under-

**In a city adopting a progressive parking policy to curb vehicle growth, adding 6,200 new parking spaces is contradictory**

**If underground parking is truly necessary, it should be beneath existing roads and impermeable surfaces, not under one of the city's natural grounds**

ground facilities demand intensive energy and infrastructure. This is not a simple park upgrade but a major concretised project imposing long-term structural and environmental risks," the letter stated.

The MAC further noted that in a city adopting a progressive parking policy to curb vehicle growth and congestion, adding 6,200 new parking spaces is contradictory. "If underground parking

is truly necessary, it should be beneath existing roads and impermeable surfaces, not under one of the city's large, flood-absorbing natural grounds. Prioritising thousands of car bays over public transport connectivity risks reinforcing an elite-access model rather than promoting inclusive, city-wide mobility," the members stated.

They noted that neither presentation included a public access policy. Key questions such as access points, hours, fees or memberships remain unanswered. The MAC has demanded a written response from civic authorities on each issue within 14 days to ensure a transparent planning process. It has requested a technical discussion and welcomed a joint meeting with the state government, BMC and the MAC.

Last week, during the presentation, Gagrani stated that the 70 hectares of open space along the coastal road would be transformed into an extended green corridor with civic amenities, including indigenous forest nature trails, pickleball courts, amphitheatres and Miyawaki gardens, to offset Mumbai's declining green cover. He also proposed converting the 112-acre Mahalaxmi Racecourse into a public botanical garden, complemented by an underground recreational hall with sporting facilities.

## Singing of full Vande Mataram gets BMC nod

**Shefali Parab-Pandit**  
MUMBAI

A proposal by a BJP corporator to make singing all six stanzas of the national song Vande Mataram mandatory at events in the Municipal Corporation Hall, civic school ceremonies and other official functions was unanimously approved at the BMC general body meeting on Thursday. It will now be forwarded to civic chief Bhushan Gagrani for administrative clearance before implementation.

The notice of motion moved by BJP group leader and House Leader Ganesh Khankar was discussed in the civic house the same day. Composed by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee on Nov 7, 1875, Vande Mataram marked its 150th anniversary in 2025. Following Central government guidelines, singing all six stanzas while standing at attention as a mark of respect is mandatory.

In line with this, Khankar sought its rendition at Municipal Corporation Hall events, civic school functions and other official programmes, including flag hoisting ceremonies and events attended by the President or Governors. The motion received unanimous support, including from the Opposition.

Meanwhile, a separate motion to play the state song Jai Jai Maharashtra Mazha in the civic house was moved by BJP corporator and Education Committee Chairperson Rajashri Shirwadkar and was approved unanimously.

## PIL in HC seeks court-monitored probe into crash

**FPJ News Service**  
MUMBAI

A public interest litigation (PIL) has been filed in the Bombay High Court seeking a court-monitored probe into the Learjet crash at Baramati on Jan 28 that killed Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar and five others.

The PIL, filed by social activist Ketan Tirodkar, seeks directions to the state Criminal Investigation Division (CID) to investigate the 'accidental death' of Pawar. He has also sought the constitution of a judicial commission headed by a retired High Court judge, along with aviation experts, including a retired director of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and a chief maintenance engineer from a commercial airline.

The activist claimed that he wrote to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on February 20 requesting a CID probe into the crash. He also filed several Right to Information (RTI) applications with the DGCA, Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), Chief Minister's Office and Baramati police, seeking details ranging from booking of the flight to black box analysis and regulatory permissions for the aircraft.

As he did not receive any response, he filed the PIL. The PIL flags several

### LEGAL MOVE

**The PIL was filed by social activist Ketan Tirodkar**

**He also sought the constitution of a judicial commission headed by a retired High Court judge**

**Earlier, he wrote to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on February 20 requesting a CID probe into the crash**

**The petition is yet to be listed for hearing**

issues, including the alleged last-minute switch from road travel to a flight. It also questions the replacement of two originally deputed pilots, reportedly due to a traffic jam.

The plea refers to repeated landing requests for different runways at Baramati and raises doubts over whether the Learjet was duly registered in India or was operating on a US-registered number.

The petition also refers to public statements and press conferences by Ajit Pawar's nephew, MLA Rohit Pawar, alleging irregularities in the aircraft's operations and sharing purported chats between airline staff, pilots and politicians.

The petition is yet to be listed for hearing.

## Lay down air crash facts in House, says Ram Shinde

**FPJ Political Bureau**  
MUMBAI

Prof Ram Shinde, chairman of the State Council, on Thursday directed the state government to place before the House the facts related to the Baramati air crash in which Ajit Pawar died.

The directions from the Chair came following an adjournment motion moved by NCP (SP) member Shashikant Shinde, who demanded a discussion on the crash. He said several leaders, including MLC Amol Mitkari and MLA Rohit Pawar, have raised suspicions regarding Ajit Pawar's death, with some demanding a CBI probe.

Shinde further stated that the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) had ordered the grounding of four aircraft belonging to VSR Ventures over non-compliance with approved procedures in the areas of airworthiness, air safety and flight operations.

The NCP (SP) state chief alleged no FIR was registered despite the DGCA's order, raising suspicion, and accused VSR Ventures of callousness. He sought investor details and questioned possible sabotage. Meanwhile, NCP (SP) member Amol Mitkari demanded action against a Deputy Commissioner of Police for allegedly refusing to accept his and Rohit Pawar's plea to register an FIR against VSR.

## Oppn confused & puzzled over devpt vision, says CM

**Kalpesh Mhamunkar**  
MUMBAI

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday strongly defended the state government's investment initiatives and participation in the World Economic Forum at Davos, terming the Opposition "confused and puzzled" over its criticism of investment agreements and the vision of a 'Viksit Maharashtra'. Replying to the motion of thanks on the Governor's address during the Budget Session, Fadnavis said the Opposition was criticising the government's economic roadmap without proper study or understanding.

The CM said Maharashtra's Viksit Maharashtra document provides a roadmap to transform the state into a \$1 trillion economy within four to five years. He said participation at Davos is vital to maintain Maharashtra's relevance globally. "Davos is serious busi-

**Davos is vital to maintain Maharashtra's relevance globally, says Fadnavis**

ness. Foreign investors expect Maharashtra's presence there," he said. He added that Maharashtra accounts for nearly 39% of national foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows and is targeting \$13-14 billion from US companies.

Highlighting investment performance, Fadnavis informed the House that 98% of Memorandums of Understanding signed in 2022 are under implementation, followed by 80% in 2023, 70% in 2024 and 88% in 2025. While only 35% of MoUs convert into investments nationally, Maharashtra has achieved a 55% conversion rate, with over 75% of Davos agreements translating into projects.

He said the state's economy has expanded from Rs13 lakh crore in 2012-13 to Rs51 lakh crore and aims to reach Rs90 lakh crore to achieve the one trillion-dollar target. Unemployment has declined from 4% in 2021-22 to 3.1%, while over 1.2 lakh government appointment letters have been issued.

Fadnavis also announced plans to develop Gadchiroli as a steel hub with local participation.

On welfare measures, the CM said financial aid worth Rs15,472 crore has been extended to distressed farmers, electricity bills worth Rs23,000 crore have been waived and over 10 lakh agricultural pumps distributed in the past three years.

He also informed that work on Dr BR Ambedkar's memorial at Indu Mills in Mumbai is progressing, with the 230-foot statue ready and Rs400 crore allocated for completion of the project.

## NCP unanimously picks Sunetra Pawar as president

**Parth Pawar will be NCP's candidate for Rajya Sabha**

**Kalpesh Mhamunkar**  
MUMBAI

Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar has been unanimously appointed as the national president of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). The announcement was made by party leader Praful Patel during the national working committee meeting held at Worli on Thursday.

Patel said the proposal for her appointment received unanimous approval from party members.

Sunetra succeeds her late husband, Ajit Pawar, who held the position until his tragic passing in the plane crash.

Addressing the party office-bearers and workers soon afterwards, she said the party would connect with all sections of society and ensure that no one is left behind.

"The NCP is my family and I will not leave any section of society behind. We will move ahead by taking everyone along," she said, adding that she would make sincere efforts to carry forward the

party's ideology and strengthen its organisation across the state and beyond.

Calling the occasion both painful and a moment of great responsibility, Pawar said the party was yet to recover from the untimely demise of its beloved leader Ajit Pawar.

Patel also announced that Parth Pawar will be the party's candidate for the Rajya Sabha seat vacated after Sunetra Pawar assumed office as Deputy Chief Minister. Nomination papers are scheduled to be filed on March 5.



### Consensus call

Sunetra Pawar greets party members after being elected president of the Nationalist Congress Party at NSCI Dome, Worli — Vijay Gohil

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# Rebuilt flyover opens with new identity

Devashri Bhujbal  
MUMBAI

Reconstructed in record time, the British-era Bellasis flyover was opened to the public on Thursday, bringing much relief to commuters. Notably, the modern structure has shed its colonial past after being renamed as Punyashlok Ahilyabai Holkar flyover. However, the new name didn't appear on the flyover signboards, with the civic officials saying it will be added in the coming days.

The key connector, which links Tardeo-Nagpada to Mumbai Central and passes over the Mumbai Central railway station, has carriageway and wide footpaths on both sides for safe pedestrian movement. The flyover was inaugurated at 11am by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis and his deputy Eknath Shinde via video conferencing, and

was thrown open for the public at 4pm.

The flyover got completed last month – 15 months ahead of the deadline, but the inauguration was awaited. The old structure, built in 1893, was dismantled in June 2024 after a structural audit declared it unfit. The bridge is 333-metre long – 138.39-metre on the east side and 157.39-metre on the west. The remaining 36.90-metre span passes over the railway tracks.

Work over the tracks was executed by the railway authorities, while girder bracing, deck sheet installation, slab casting and construction of both approach roads were completed by the civic body. Close coordination between the BMC's bridges wing, the railway department, the local ward office and the traffic police enabled the project to be completed ahead of schedule, a release said.



Earlier known as Bellasis bridge, the new structure has been renamed as Punyashlok Ahilyabai Holkar flyover; however, boards with new name are yet to appear

# Air pollution control panel holds 1st meet



After several days, Mumbai recorded 'satisfactory' AQI of 60 on Thursday

Devashri Bhujbal  
MUMBAI

The high-powered committee (HPC), appointed by the Bombay High Court to find ways to curb air pollution in Mumbai and the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), convened its first meeting at the BMC HQ on Monday.

Deputy municipal commissioner of the environment and climate change department (E&CC) is the nodal officer of the committee, which is led by former judges Amjad Sayed and Anuja Prabhudessai. The meeting

was attended by the representatives from the Thane and Navi Mumbai civic bodies, traffic police and the agencies, including the MMRDA and the central and pollution control boards. Discussion focused on taking active steps to control the air pollution in the region.

The HPC has been also tasked to ensure compliance with the court's earlier directions, review reports submitted by the BMC, state pollution control board and civic bodies. The HC had constituted the committee, citing high pollution levels and

"lackadaisical approach" by the civic authorities.

Meanwhile, during the BMC budget presentation on Wednesday, the civic chief had stated that only 35% of the factors driving air pollution are in the civic body's control. He had said that the meteorological conditions play a key role in determining the city's air quality. For instance, dust particles remain suspended mid-air due to slow wind patterns. A dedicated climate budget and the current year's 'Climate Action Plan' will be unveiled in June, the officials said.

# BMC budget talks of AI surveillance for quick response

Shefali Parab-Pandit  
MUMBAI

To enhance surveillance across the city, the BMC 2026-27 budget has proposed to install video analytics (VA) software on 500 existing CCTVs apart from installing 650 new cameras at a cost of Rs46.67 crore.

The initiative aims to improve urban security, accelerate civic response mechanisms and strengthen disaster preparedness by shifting from manual monitoring to technology-driven oversight. A civic official said that the AI-enabled VA software can provide early warnings, enabling quicker mobilisation for relief and rescue operations.

"The live feeds from these AI-enabled cameras will also be shared with other agencies, including the police and the state disaster management department to enhance coordination and responsiveness," said a senior civic official.

The upgraded system will also help authorities curb littering, illegal dumping and encroachments, enabling more efficient and proactive civic enforcement across the

city. The hi-tech cameras will further help the civic body to swiftly address woes like overflowing garbage, footpath obstructions and water-logging. Currently, the BMC lacks an incident alert system, limiting the scope of manual monitoring.

Additionally, the disaster management department is exploring a satellite-based communication system to improve coordination during disasters. Currently, the department relies on MTNL landlines – 90% of which are non-functional – along with the digital mobile radio (DMR) system and mobile phones. However, during major emergencies, mobile networks often get congested and the DMR system may lose coverage in some areas, impeding communication.

The BMC has also proposed setting up an on-premises data centre and disaster recovery facility at the City Institute of Disaster Management in Parel. This infrastructure aims to ensure robust system resilience, enhanced data security and uninterrupted operations during emergencies, enabling faster and more reliable decision-making.

# HC takes away redvpt project from bldr due to slow pace of work

Mulund's Endeavour CHS had moved court, claiming they have remained displaced for more than five years

Urvi Mahajani  
MUMBAI

Granting major relief to members of a Mulund housing society, who have remained displaced for over five years due to stalled redevelopment, the Bombay High Court has directed a defaulting developer to hand over "peaceful possession" of the project site to the society. The developer's request to stay the order was rejected.

In an order dated February 16, Justice Somasekar Sundaresan directed M/s Alag Property and Constructions Pvt Ltd to hand over possession of the redevelopment property to The Mulund Endeavour CHS Ltd, while appointing the court receiver to take charge of the land and transfer control of the project to the society. The court passed the order, while allowing the society's petition filed under section 9 of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, seeking interim protection pending arbitration proceedings between the parties.

The dispute concerns redevelopment of the society's property in Mulund East, comprising four residential buildings constructed on a plot measuring about 4,182 sq mt. The society had executed a development agreement with the developer in July 2016 and handed over possession in January 2020 after members vacated their homes. However, the society alleged that despite passage of nearly nine years since execution of the agreement, redevelopment remained largely incomplete. According to the society, only about 30% of construction had been completed even though the revised deadline for completion expired in January 2025.

## Society argues...

Despite passage of nearly nine years since execution of the agreement, redevelopment remained largely incomplete

Just about 30% of construction had been completed

Even the revised deadline for completion expired in January 2025

## Developer contends...

Nearly 40-45% of construction had been completed

Delays attributable to Covid, environmental restrictions and ongoing negotiations

Third-party rights had already been created in respect of sale flats

It further claimed that transit rent, brokerage, transportation charges and hardship compensation payable to members had remained unpaid since January 2023, with total arrears amounting to Rs9.77 crore. Municipal tax dues of over Rs1.13 crore had also allegedly remained unpaid, exposing the property to recovery action. Advocate Mayur Khandeparkar, appearing for the society, submitted that members, who vacated their homes in 2020, were continuing to suffer financial hardship due to non-payment of dues and indefinite delay.

The developer, represented by advocate Karl Tamboly, opposed the plea, contending that nearly 40-45% of construction had been completed and delays were attributable to Covid, environmental restrictions and ongoing negotiations between parties. It also argued that third-party rights had already been created in respect of sale flats and termination of the agreement was unjustified.

After examining the material on record, the court held that the project was "way behind schedule" and that the developer was seeking to renegotiate the original redevelopment arrangement. "In a nutshell, what is writ large

on the face of the record is that the developer is seriously in default in the time and cost commitments owed under the development agreement," the court observed.

The judge noted that society members had vacated their homes more than five years ago and continued to remain without permanent accommodation. Referring to earlier rulings on redevelopment disputes, the court emphasised that such agreements involve entrustment of a society's sole asset – its homes – and loss of faith due to contractual breaches justified intervention.

Rejecting concerns over third-party purchasers, the court held that buyers take commercial risks linked to the developer's performance and that the society cannot be bound by interests created by a defaulting developer. The court receiver has been authorised to take possession of the property, with the police assistance if necessary, and hand over the redevelopment project to the society, which is now free to appoint a new developer or undertake self-redevelopment.

The court clarified that interim protections will continue until the constitution of an arbitral tribunal, before which the dispute will now proceed.

# Rights body rejects Waze's 'starvation, poor diet' claim

Pranali Lotlikar  
MUMBAI

The State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) has rejected an application filed by suspended cop Sachin Waze, currently lodged in Thane Central Prison in connection with his alleged involvement in the Antilia terror scare case, seeking a medicated diet for his diabetic condition.

His wife, Mohini, stated that her husband is a severe diabetic patient who has been advised a strict diet by doctors but is being deprived of appropriate food. She submitted that he is starving, not being provided sugar-free food and that his medical condition is deteriorating.

Advocate Aarti Kalekar, appearing on her behalf, argued that the jail authorities had admitted in their reply that Waze is served upma, sheera or poha. "This is certainly not the diet of a person suffering from diabetes," she

## Waze's wife said he has diabetes, but wasn't given food as per medical diet

said.

Kalekar also objected to the manner in which the plea was decided. "We were taken by surprise when the commission passed its order without hearing the prisoner's plea in person through video conference and relied solely on the prison authorities' reply. In my honest opinion, when the State is the custodian of a prisoner, any alleged violation of human rights calls for the complainant's say, but has not been so in this case," she said.

She further alleged that Waze was recently provided yogurt beyond its shelf life, which caused a stomach infection and required hospitalisation. She claimed that his request to speak with the jail superintendent was refused.

In its reply dated January 27, 2026, the Superintendent of Thane Central Prison stated that as per the Maharashtra Government Notification dated May 24, 2005, all inmates are provided a regular diet. Breakfast includes sheera, poha or upma, along with 100ml of milk and a banana, while lunch consists of chapati, dal, rice and vegetables. The authorities said inmates who are ill are given meals as per the medical officer's advice and may purchase additional items from the prison canteen.

The report stated that Waze is being provided food as per the directions of the medical officer and items permitted by courts where his matters are pending. The commission noted that no medical documents were filed with the complaint and observed that necessary food is being provided as per medical advice. It held that care is being taken considering his diabetic condition.

# Govt owes whopping ₹10,931 crore to civic body

Mumbai: The state government owes Rs10,931 crore to the BMC, deputy chief minister Eknath Shinde informed the legislative assembly on Thursday.

In a written reply, Shinde,

who holds the urban development portfolio, said that as of December 31, 2025, various state departments collectively owed this sum to the Mumbai civic body. The municipal commis-

sioner had written to the departments concerned on December 9, 2025, requesting them to clear the outstanding amounts, he said. The corporation is following up with these depart-

ments for the recovery of the dues, Shinde added.

The BMC on Wednesday presented a budget of Rs80,952 crore for the financial year 2026-27.

— PTI

## The information was shared by deputy CM Eknath Shinde in the assembly

## KEY CIVIC ISSUES REACH ASSEMBLY

# Stray dog count has risen in 6 yrs: Govt tells assembly

FPJ Political Bureau  
MUMBAI

The state government informed the assembly on Thursday that the population of stray dogs has increased significantly in both rural and urban areas over the past six years. However, he refused that sufficient funds, specifically for stray dog control measures, were not allocated to the local self-government bodies.

In a written reply to a question raised by Kashinath Date and other members, deputy CM Eknath Shinde said that between 2021 and 2023, 30 lakh dog-bite cases were reported and 30 people died of rabies across the state. The population of stray dogs has risen in the districts of Ahilyanagar, Sangli, Raigad and Jalna as well as in the cities of Vasai-Virar, Bhiwandi and the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, said Shinde.

Regarding the measures taken to tackle the issue, he said a government resolution, dated January 5, directed the



DATA FROM 2021 TO 2023



authorities to take steps to prevent entry of stray dogs on the premises falling under the tourism department.

Shinde further said that instructions were also passed to comply with the Supreme Court directions, issued in August 2025, regarding the feeding of stray dogs in public places, and sterilisation and vaccination drives. Similarly, orders have also been issued for the implementation of the Animal Birth Control Rules, 2023, Shinde asserted.

# BMC shifting buffalo sheds polluting rivers

Kalpesh Mhamunkar  
MUMBAI

The BMC has been directed to relocate buffalo sheds situated along the rivers flowing through the city, informed minister of state (MoS) Madhuri Misal in the assembly on Thursday.

Replying to MLA Abu Azmi's question over the rise in the river pollution due to cattle waste, the MoS said the process of shifting cattle sheds has already begun, with alternative land identified and financial provisions made. Penal action has also been initiated, though enforcement has slowed due to several unregistered establishments, she added. The MoS informed the House that projects are underway to rejuvenate the Dahisar, Poisar, Oshiwara and Walbhat rivers and that two sewage treatment plants (STP) for the Dahisar river will become operational by March 31.

## Assembly Speaker seeks action-taken report from the MPCB within a week

# Delivery of expired food to leave a bad taste for e-platforms

Kalpesh Mhamunkar  
MUMBAI

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) minister Narhari Zirwal on Thursday warned that strict action will be taken against online food delivery platforms found supplying expired items. Replying to a question raised by MLA Bhimrao Tapkir in the assembly, the minister, who also handles the consumer affairs portfolio, stressed that consumer safety would not be compromised under any circumstances.

He informed that a complaint was received in Pune flagging the delivery of "expired food items" through Blinkit. Although initial inquiry found no concrete evidence, a detailed audit and examination of documents later confirmed that outdated products had been distributed through the platform, the minister said. Legal action has been initiated against the company and a fine of Rs2 lakh

## FDA minister spoke about the Pune case, where an online platform was found delivering expired products

has been imposed, he added.

He also informed that 191 new FDA officers have been appointed to strengthen enforcement and that they have been directed to take suo motu action instead of waiting for complaints.

The minister further said that suggestions from public representatives in major cities will be compiled and forwarded to the Centre for strengthening regulations related to online food delivery services. During the discussion, MLA Amit Deshmukh suggested obtaining self-declarations from companies, assuring that expired food items would not be sold through their platforms.

# Rohit Arya case: Notices sent to top police and govt officials

Pranali Lotlikar  
MUMBAI

In the death of hostage-taker Rohit Ashok Arya, who was killed after a three-hour siege in October last year, the State Human Rights Commission (MSHRC) has sought fact-finding inquiry reports and issued notices to senior state and police officials. The division bench comprising chairperson Justice AM Badar and member Sanjay Kumar heard multiple connected complaints.

Arya was shot dead during a police operation on October 30 last year after he took 17 children and two adults as

hostage on the pretext of holding auditions for a web series. The police said the act was well-planned as he had installed motion sensors to detect anyone else trying to enter the premises.

The commission noted that by an earlier order it had directed its investigation wing, along with the registrar, to conduct a fact-finding inquiry into the death and submit a report. In its recent order, the commission recorded that it had received the inquiry report and directed that copies be supplied to the police department.

In a complaint, Advocate

Nitin Satpute and Associates sought directions to prosecute DCP Datta Nalawade, senior inspector Jitendra Sonawane and assistant police inspector Amol Waghmare for the alleged murder of Arya. The complaint also prayed that the officers be kept out of the jurisdiction of the police station concerned and that the investigation be handed over to the CBI.

The commission directed that if it finds any actionable material, it will issue notices under Section 16 of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993. The matter has been adjourned for further hearing on April 23.

## Apple opens its 2nd outlet in Borivali

Pooja Mehta  
MUMBAI

Apple Inc strengthened its presence in India with the opening of its second retail store in Mumbai. The new outlet, Apple Borivali, began welcoming customers on Thursday at Sky City Mall.

The launch follows the success of Apple BKC, the company's first physical store in the city. It operates official stores in Mumbai and the Delhi NCR region, along with outlets in Bengaluru and Pune.

The Borivali store reflects Apple's global design language, with tall glass facades, open product tables and spacious interiors that allow customers to explore devices at their own pace.

Visitors can browse and test the entire product portfolio, from the latest iPhone models and Mac computers to iPads, Apple Watch devices and AirPods.

## Sacred items returned by Customs

Somendra Sharma  
MUMBAI

The Customs department at Mumbai airport has started an initiative to hand over religious texts, sacred items and mementos left behind by international travellers to their respective religious communities.

In this initiative, 35 kirpans were handed over to a Chembur-based welfare trust and four Bibles to a church. The handover of religious articles took place earlier this month.

The Sat Sri Akaal Welfare Trust in a letter addressed to the chief commissioner of Customs, CSMI Airport, Mumbai, expressed their gratitude and appreciated the efforts of the Customs department for the exemplary cooperation, support, and understanding extended during the dignified and respectful handover of religious articles pertaining to Sikhism.

## Elderly duped of ₹1.16cr in fake CBI scam

Poonam Apraj  
MUMBAI

A 78-year-old Mulund resident was allegedly cheated of Rs1.16 crore by cyber fraudsters posing as CBI officers and threatening him with arrest in a fake money-laundering case linked to Naresh Goyal.

Thomas Mathew Pulikottil, a retired director of a fabrication chemical company, received a WhatsApp call on December 26, 2025, from a man claiming to be a CBI officer investigating a case involving Goyal. The caller said a Canara Bank account opened in Pulikottil's name was used in a Rs2 crore transaction and threatened arrest. Fearing arrest, Pulikottil transferred Rs1 crore from his HDFC Bank account and additional funds from his wife's account. He also sold a flat and transferred the proceeds. He later filed a complaint on the National Cyber Crime Helpline on February 25.

## Feb 28: Librarian awards in Worli

Mumbai: The H T Parekh Foundation will host the inaugural Harsha Parekh Librarian Awards (HPLA) on Saturday, February 28, at the Hall of Harmony at Worli's Nehru Centre, to recognise the extraordinary contribution of children's librarians and library leaders across India. The award ceremony aims to honour individuals who go far beyond managing bookshelves. The ceremony featured a distinguished lineup of speakers, including Anant Goenka, actor and producer Tara Sharma Saluja and bestselling author Ashwin Sanghi.

## LAND BID | The plan was proposed by Grand View Estates Pvt Ltd, a firm belonging to Shapoorji Pallonji Group; court calls revival plan a "ruse" for land control

# HC bins Swadeshi Mills revival plea

FPJ News Service  
MUMBAI

Holding that a revival proposal cannot be used as a means to secure valuable real estate assets of a company under liquidation, the Bombay High Court has refused to stay the winding up of Swadeshi Mills Company Ltd.

The court rejected a scheme proposed by Grand View Estates Pvt Ltd, a firm belonging to the Shapoorji Pallonji Group.

Justice Sharmila Deshmukh, on February 23, ruled that the proposal was not a genuine attempt to revive the textile undertaking but a move aimed at securing control over the company's prime 48-acre land parcel at Chunabhatti for redevelopment gains. "The facts would reveal that the present application is nothing but a ruse to obtain valuable land for exploitation in the real estate market," the court observed.

Swadeshi Mills, established in 1890 by Jamsetji Tata to promote indigenous textile production during British rule, has been in liquidation for over two decades. Winding-up proceedings began in 1997 after creditors moved the high court. After erosion of its net worth, the company was declared sick by the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction, which recommended liquidation in February 2001. A provisional liquidator was appointed in 2002 and the high court ordered winding up on September 5, 2005.

Grand View Estates and its sister concern Forbes and Company Ltd, together holding over 52% shares, approached the court under Section 466 of the Companies Act, 1956 seeking a stay on liquidation and approval of a revival scheme.

The applicants proposed immediate payment of about Rs252 crore, including Rs237

### THE CASE

The applicants proposed immediate payment of about ₹252 crore, including ₹237 crore towards workers' dues

48-acre Chunabhatti parcel central to dispute

Proposal failed test of "bona fides, commercial morality and public interest"

crore towards workers' dues, settlement of certain unsecured creditors and deferment for their own dues amounting to nearly Rs1,100 crore to future dates. They contended that restarting textile manufacturing was technically unviable but argued that the plan would serve public and economic interest and had labour

union backing.

Two shareholders opposed the plea, pointing out that a similar revival proposal had already been rejected by a division bench in 2022, which had found the scheme to be an attempt to acquire the company's valuable land at a concessional cost.

Accepting these objections, Justice Deshmukh held that the proposal failed to meet the test of "bona fides, commercial morality and public interest". The court noted that the repayment funds were proposed to be raised by encumbering the company's own assets. "The revival proposal is required to meet the test of bona fides, commercial morality and public interest which is not met in the present case and the scheme in the present case is a ruse to reap the benefits of the development without sharing the same with the other stakeholders," the court said.

"In return, without expend-

ing any of its funds, by way of backdoor method, the applicant seeks to utilise the valuable asset of the company in liquidation without having to face public auction," the court said.

Observing that the Chunabhatti land would "command astronomical prices" owing to its redevelopment potential, the court said profits from redevelopment would first be used to repay the applicants' substantial dues, leaving other stakeholders at a disadvantage.

Termining the revival plan neither credible nor comprehensive, the court refused to halt the winding up and noted that valuation of the property by the Official Liquidator is underway, leaving scope for value maximisation through a transparent public auction.

"There is no credible and comprehensive revival plan presented for this Court to be satisfied that the winding up ought to be stayed," the judge added.

## Silver jubilee: Couple tours on scooter to celebrate 25 years



Amit Srivastava  
MUMBAI

In a world where anniversaries are often celebrated with grand banquets and glittering gatherings, a Navi Mumbai couple chose a far more meaningful way to mark their milestone. To celebrate 25 years of marriage on February 25, 50-year-old Samir Shah and his wife Rekha embarked on a 25-day scooter journey across India.

"It was all 25/25/25," said Shah, who is chief strategic officer at a private company, recalling how the idea quietly took shape. Rekha remained unaware of the plan until January 29. Within just one-and-a-half days, they packed their essentials. As seasoned travellers who had previously completed 15-18-day road trips, most necessities were already at home. Their scooter was serviced on January 30, and on February 1, they set off - carrying more faith than fixed plans.

The couple had explored India's dramatic northern landscapes before - from the breathtaking valleys of Spiti Valley to the golden dunes of Jaisalmer, the rugged terrains of Leh-Ladakh and even Umling La, one of the world's highest motorable roads. South India, however, remained largely unexplored. This journey finally took them to sacred and scenic destinations such as Rameshwaram, Dhanushkodi

and Kanyakumari. They also revisited parts of Kerala, reliving memories of their honeymoon 25 years ago.

Choosing a scooter was deliberate. Comfortable, economical, easy to park and practical, it symbolised closeness and simplicity. With enough storage and the ability to reach right up to someone's doorstep, it perfectly reflected their philosophy of staying connected.

The adventure tested them from the very first day. After a late-afternoon start and surviving on a simple vada pav, they battled heat and steep ghats before reaching Lonavala - only to encounter a flat tyre. Rekha gently asked whether they should turn back. For Shah, however, there was no looking back.

Divine moments marked the journey - Meenakshi Amman Temple, Ramanathaswamy Temple, Padmanabhaswamy Temple and Murudeshwar Temple. Along the way, strangers became well-wishers, offering directions, dry fruits and even meals.

For Shah, the ride mirrors life itself: take it one day at a time. "To have a successful marriage, accept each other as you are instead of focusing on what's missing. No one is perfect, so take it easy, be patient and keep moving forward together. Cherish the golden years by giving your partner the freedom to shine in what they do best," he said.



### New fleet

State-of-the-art vehicles were inducted into the Mumbai Police force and flagged off on Thursday at Nariman Point by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, along with the Commissioner of Police - Vijay Gohil

## State loses 50-year claim over 193 acres in Manpada

Urvi Mahajani  
MUMBAI

In a significant ruling ending a five-decade-long dispute, the Bombay High Court has dismissed the Maharashtra Government's claim over 193 acres in Thane's Manpada area, holding that the state failed to legally acquire the land as a "private forest" in 1975 due to procedural lapses.

The bench agreed with the contentions raised by Cherag Balsara, counsel for the original owners, that the notice was not served on the company, but was served upon

"D.Dayabhai".

The judges found serious procedural lapses in the acquisition process. The court found the State's original notice was "void ab initio" (void from the beginning). The notice was signed by a "Jungle Rakshak" (Forest Guard) who lacked the legal authority to issue such orders, and was addressed to "D. Dahyabhai and Company", a partnership firm, rather than to the actual owner, a private limited company - M/S D. Dahyabhai and Company Private Limited.

"The non-service of the notice on the original land

owner is apparent and fatal... The contention of the State that the owner's subsequent reaction indicated service is a contention in desperation, a result of surmises and conjectures," the bench observed in its detailed 373-page judgement.

Rejecting the State's argument that subsequent correspondence by the landowner implied knowledge of acquisition, the court said the contention was "an attempt to take advantage based on presumptions."

While the Forest Department claimed the land was part of the Sanjay Gandhi National

Park (SGNP), the court observed that the State had been in "deep slumber" for decades. Meanwhile, the land had been integrated into Thane's Development Plan since 1999 for public projects, including roads, a bus depot, and the ongoing twin-tunnel project.

TMC counsel, Ram Apte, informed the court that it has already taken possession of over 100 acres for "Park Reservation No. 4".

The court ruled that refusing to compensate the owner while utilising the land violated Article 300A of the Constitution, which protects the

right to property. The court dismissed the petition and allowed the landowner's petition.

To balance environmental concerns, the court noted TMC's commitment to maintaining the "natural greenery" of the park.

The judges emphasised that ministerial acts like revenue entries cannot replace legal acquisition: "Mutation entries are ministerial in nature and cannot perfect an acquisition that lacks the statutory predicates. They neither create title in the State nor divest title from the private owner."

## BMC public health staff protest over 2-year delay in promotions

FPJ News Service  
MUMBAI

Around 200 employees of the Public Health Department of the BMC staged a protest on Thursday outside the Executive Health Officer's office at the F/South ward in Parel, demanding long-pending promotions and resolution of service-related grievances.

The Municipal Mazdoor Union alleged that promotions have been delayed for nearly two and a half years despite repeated representations to senior civic officials. Key posts such as Junior Overseer, Surveillance Inspector, and Tuberculosis Inspector have remained vacant during this period. These positions are filled through internal promo-



tions based on seniority among employees who have passed the Sanitation Inspector Diploma examination, said Pradip Narkar, Joint Secretary of the Union.

Following the protest, a meeting was held under the chairmanship of Executive Health Officer Dr Daksha Shah, in the presence of Deputy Executive Health Officer (Headquarters) Dr Prakash Valleppar and union leaders. During discussions, the civic administra-

tion stated that out of 67 sanctioned Sanitation Inspector posts, 52 employees have already received promotion orders, while the remaining 15 cases will be processed after consultation with the Promotion Committee. They also highlighted that nearly 40% of the department's 859 sanctioned posts remain vacant. The meeting concluded with assurances that employees' demands would be addressed promptly to ensure timely promotions.

## Aarey Hosp handover to BMC moves forward, proposal sent for approval

Amit Srivastava  
MUMBAI

Residents of Aarey will soon have better access to medical facilities as the transfer of Aarey Hospital in Aarey Dairy Colony to the BMC is set to move forward. The proposal has been sent to the Improvement Committee for approval.

In 2025, the state government handed over Aarey Colony Hospital to the BMC on a 30-year lease following pressure from the Maharashtra Human Rights Commission (MSHRC) and repeated questions in the Assembly.

MP Ravindra Waikar, who has long advocated the hospital's transfer to the BMC, welcomed the move. He organised

### In 2025, the state gov't handed over the hospital to the BMC on a 30-year lease following pressure from the MSHRC

a meeting at the P South Municipal Office with key officials, including Deputy Commissioner Bhagyashree Kapase, Assistant Commissioner Aniruddha Kulkarni, ARC CEO Shipoorkar, senior police officers, fire brigade officials and local residents to discuss the smooth implementation of municipal healthcare services at the hospital.

During the meeting, Waikar

asked officials to ensure municipal services begin without delay to improve healthcare access for local residents.

Aarey is home to 27 tribal hamlets and a significant non-tribal population. The hospital was originally built to serve workers of Aarey Dairy, the largest among Mumbai's three dairies in Kurla, Worli and Aarey. Its usage declined as staff numbers fell from 600 to 65.

Dinkar Desai Road, which connects the eastern and western suburbs, is heavily used by motorists. As the area is forested, it is prone to incidents involving wild animals, including snake bites and attacks, making timely medical care critical.

## T-Series staff loses ₹30L in fake investment

Megha Kuchik  
MUMBAI

An employee of T-Series was allegedly defrauded of Rs30 lakh by a professional associate on the pretext of investment. The Bangur Nagar Police have registered an FIR against Suhail Patel for cheating and criminal breach of trust. According to the FIR, complainant Alok Shukla, 41, a resident of Andheri West, works as an officer at T-Series and has known Patel since 2011. Patel runs three firms - Ninety Nine Innovation Pvt Ltd, The Bolt Idea and Thrive Creators - from an office in Malad West.

In November 2024, Patel allegedly called Shukla to his office and proposed that an investment in Ninety Nine Innovation Pvt Ltd would yield substantial returns. He later emailed Shukla, promising Rs1.50 lakh per month as profit.

Trusting him, Shukla transferred Rs30 lakh within three days from his ICICI Bank account to the HDFC Bank account of the company. Patel assured him that a formal agreement would be executed soon, but no agreement was signed. He allegedly provided no documentation and said returns would begin from December 2024. No payments were made.

## 2 held for opening 55 shell a/cs to divert cyber funds

Poonam Apraj  
MUMBAI

The Mumbai Crime Branch Unit 3 has arrested two persons for allegedly opening 55 bank accounts in the names of multiple shell companies to receive and divert proceeds of cyber fraud amounting to several crore.

The suspects have been identified as Shakib Nawaz

Shorati Ali Khan, 46, a resident of Madanpura, Nagpada, and Zameer Ahmed Mohammad Javed Ansari, 42, a resident of Bhiwandi in Thane district.

The action was taken after Crime Branch Unit 3, Mumbai, registered an FIR on receiving credible information that certain individuals had formed multiple companies and opened bank

accounts in their names to channel funds obtained through cyber fraud.

Acting on the tip-off, the police conducted a raid on February 25 at an office located in the Masjid Bunder, Mandvi area of south Mumbai. During the operation, officers found that the suspects, in conspiracy with other wanted persons, had established nine companies

### Police conducted a raid on Feb 25 at an office located in the Masjid Bunder, Mandvi area of south Mumbai

using Aadhaar and PAN card details of various individuals. They subsequently opened 55

bank accounts in the names of these companies and used them to receive and transfer funds obtained through online fraud.

During the raid, police seized 10 mobile handsets, three laptops, two pen drives, cheque books of various banks, and cash amounting to Rs1,03,880. The total value of the seized property is Rs2,35,880.

Preliminary investigation has revealed that bank accounts operated by the suspects were used to facilitate financial transactions involving crores of rupees obtained through cyber fraud. The police suspect the involvement of more individuals in the racket and are conducting further investigation to identify other suspects and trace the money trail.

## Briefs

## ₹4cr tender for crematorium

The Panvel Municipal Corporation (PMC) has floated a nearly Rs4 crore tender to set up a full-fledged animal crematorium, addressing a long-pending civic demand. Officials said the engineering department has initiated the process, formalities are likely to be completed within the next few days, and the work is expected to begin soon. The facility will serve pet owners and streamline disposal of stray animal carcasses, which are often left unattended after accidents or natural deaths. Authorities said the project will improve sanitation and strengthen the city's animal welfare infrastructure.

## NMMC recovers ₹650cr prop tax

**Navi Mumbai:** The Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation has collected Rs650 crore in property tax so far in the current financial year, with 62% of the total amount received through digital payments. A total of 1.82 lakh taxpayers paid Rs650 crore to date, including Rs383 crore through digital modes and Rs267 crore through offline payments. Civic officials said the steady increase in online payments has improved transparency and convenience in tax collection. Municipal Commissioner Dr Kailas Shinde said, "The use of digital platforms ensures transparency, saves time and makes the process simple."

## Body found; 6th in last 7 days

**Virar:** The discovery of an unidentified man's body in Phulpada, Virar, has intensified fear in the locality. It is the sixth such case within a week, raising concerns over poaching. Residents alerted authorities, and police, along with a forensic team, took custody of the body and conducted a panchama. An investigation is underway to establish the identity and cause of death. With deaths mounting, locals are questioning law enforcement's effectiveness. They demand round-the-clock patrolling, swift arrests, and stronger security measures to restore safety in the crime-hit neighbourhood.

## Fake degrees submitted to MU; 1 booked

**Megha Kuchik**  
MUMBAI

The BKC police have registered an FIR against Afrin Fakhare Alam Khan for allegedly submitting ten forged academic documents to the University of Mumbai for verification. The complaint, filed by assistant registrar Vikas Sudhakar Daware of the examination and evaluation department at the Kalina campus, led to the case on February 24.

In May 2025, Afrin approached the department claiming she had completed a BSc and an MSc in Biochemistry and presented photocopies of her mark sheets and certificates. Officials found discrepancies during scrutiny and directed her to apply through the university's online verification portal. On May 28, 2025, she uploaded ten documents, including TY BSc (Sem V and VI, 2021-22) mark sheets, MSc (sem I-IV, 2022-24) mark sheets, and corresponding passing and degree certificates. Further checks revealed that mark sheets purportedly issued by St Xavier's College also did not tally with institutional records, leading officials to suspect that the documents were fabricated. A second level of verification further confirmed that the documents were forged. Detailed checks revealed mismatched seat and certificate numbers, with several entries untraceable in official databases. Institutional verification confirmed the documents were fake.

## Mumbai-Goa highway work to be over by May

**Ravikiran Deshmukh**  
MUMBAI

The state government informed the state assembly on Thursday that the long-delayed work on the Mumbai-Goa highway will be completed by May this year. The four-lane widening of the highway will be finished, except for the Indapur-

Mangaon bypass, the government has said.

In a written reply, public works department minister Shivendra Rajee Bhosale said instructions have been given to contractors to keep the road motorable and ensure maintenance of the completed stretches.

Both the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) and

## Instructions given to contractors to keep the road motorable &amp; ensure maintenance of the completed stretches

the state PWD are engaged in widening the 471km crucial link connecting the entire

Konkan region with Mumbai and Goa. The project, which began approximately 18 years ago, remains incomplete.

According to the minister, 44 accidents occurred between March and December last year on the stretch connecting Indapur to the Kashedi tunnel, resulting in 23 deaths. He said the number of accidents and the

death ratio were lower compared to the previous five years.

Of the 437.88km stretch from Panvel to Zarap, widening work has been completed on 417km. Work on the remaining 18km is underway and is expected to be completed by next month, except for major bridges and flyovers, the minister said.

## Leopard mutilated in Shahapur forest; sparks public anger



**Danish Azmi**  
THANE

In a case of suspected wildlife poaching, a leopard was found dead with its paws severed in the Washala forest range of Shahapur taluka triggering widespread concern among environmentalists and local residents. The carcass was discovered on February 24 at Kordyathak nala within the limits of Susarwadi village.

Forest officials from the Washala range reached the spot after being alerted by locals. Upon inspection, the leopard was found lying dead in the stream, with all four paws cut off. The mutilation has raised strong suspicions of poaching, as leopard claws and whiskers are often illegally traded due to superstition-driven beliefs and black-market demand.

Sources said the matter falls under the jurisdiction of the Shahapur forest division. When contacted, Washala forest range officer Eknath Rongte declined to comment

on the incident. Similarly, no official statement was immediately issued by the department regarding the preliminary findings.

Veterinary officials stated that the exact cause of death will be confirmed only after the final post-mortem report is received. The forest department has carried out the disposal of the carcass as per prescribed wildlife protocols.

Eyewitnesses in the area alleged that the leopard may have been killed elsewhere and later dumped in the nala to mislead investigators. However, forest authorities have neither confirmed nor denied this possibility.

The incident has sparked public anger, with environmental groups demanding a high-level inquiry and strict action against the culprits. Activists have also urged the department to intensify night patrolling, deploy camera traps in sensitive zones, and strengthen ground intelligence to prevent wildlife crimes.

## SIR | Rais Shaikh urges formation of JAC to ensure transparency; monitor revision of rolls

## Oppn must unite to safeguard voters' rights, says SP MLA

**Manoj Ramakrishnan**  
MUMBAI

Samajwadi Party MLA Rais Shaikh has called for the immediate formation of a Joint Action Committee (JAC) comprising all opposition parties to monitor and ensure transparency and fairness in the proposed special intensive revision' (SIR) process in Maharashtra.

Shaikh outlined key measures, such as the creation of a monitoring mechanism to prevent the arbitrary deletion of names from electoral rolls, guiding workers in every constituency, informing citizens of their rights, providing legal assistance where required, and conducting a legal review of the entire process to ensure it is carried out in accordance with rules and in a transparent manner. Shaikh stated that an urgent meeting should be convened during the ongoing budget session of the state assembly to hold a detailed discussion on the issue and finalise a concrete action plan.

In his letter to Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee president Harshvardhan Sapkal, Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar faction) state president Shashikant Shinde, and Shiv

## MLA SEEKS...

Monitoring mechanism to prevent arbitrary deletion of names from electoral rolls

Guidance for workers in every constituency during the SIR process

Voting right's public awareness drive

Legal aid for those whose names may be wrongfully removed

Sena leader and MP Sanjay Raut, Shaikh emphasised the need for coordinated action to ensure transparency and fairness in the implementation of the SIR process.

"During the SIR of electoral rolls, there is a possibility of serious irregularities during its execution. The names of minority communities, marginalised sections, and other ordinary citizens could be unlawfully removed from the voters' list," said Shaikh.

Citing past instances where similar complaints had surfaced in different regions, Shaikh stressed that ensuring transparency, legal accuracy, and justice in the SIR process is essential.

"Therefore, a Joint Action Committee of all opposition parties should be constituted without delay. The committee should oversee the SIR process, collect complaints, initiate necessary legal steps, and provide continuous guidance to party workers and local leadership. An urgent meeting should be convened during the ongoing Budget Session of the Legislature to hold a detailed discussion on the issue and finalise a concrete action plan," added Shaikh.

The Election Commission has directed chief electoral officers of 22 states and union territories to complete preparatory work related to the upcoming SIR of electoral rolls, stating that the SIR is expected to begin in April. These states are Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Ladakh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Delhi, Odisha, Punjab, Sikkim, Tripura, Telangana, and Uttarakhand. Currently, the SIR is underway in 12 states and union territories.

## Yusuf Heights row: State home dept begins probe; town planning officials questioned

**Danish Azmi**  
KALYAN

In the case of high-profile illegal construction controversy surrounding Yusuf Heights in Kalyan, a forensic team from the state home department visited the KDMC headquarters and initiated a comprehensive probe. The case came to light after crucial documents linked to the project allegedly went missing from the record room of the Kalyan Dombivli Municipal Corporation (KDMC).

The police officials confirmed that a statement has been recorded from town planning surveyor Kunal Shasane, who claimed that he had handed over the con-

cerned files to his senior officers in the department.

The disappearance of official files from the civic body's headquarters has triggered alarm within administrative circles and intensified scrutiny over the functioning of the town planning department.

The team reportedly took temporary control of the record room, examined registers, verified document entries, and scanned CCTV footage installed in and around the section.

Several officials and employees, particularly from the town planning wing were questioned as part of the preliminary inquiry. Investigators are examining whether the

## RTI query uncovers missing KDMC file on disputed building

FIR registered after KDMC records on controversial 10-storey building in Kalyan could not be traced

The Maharashtra Information Commission (MHC) has ordered the Kalyan Dombivli Municipal Corporation (KDMC) to provide information regarding the missing files related to a controversial 10-storey building in Kalyan. The MHC stated that the KDMC has failed to provide the requested information within the stipulated time frame.

## VERIFICATION...

Team took control of record room

Examined registers

Verified document entries

Scanned CCTV footage installed in and around the section

file was misplaced due to procedural lapses or deliberately removed to suppress critical evidence.

Sources further claim that the issue may not be limited to a single file. Documents related to another controversial structure, Mariam Tower, are also said to be untraceable. According to sources, the missing documents pertain to approvals and records related to Yusuf Heights, a building already embroiled in controversy over alleged illegal construction on reserved land.

The reported disappearance of two important building files has deepened suspicion and placed the town planning department under the scanner.



## Sixes under skyline

Youngsters play cricket on the open stretch beneath the Mumbai Coastal Road in Worli, turning urban space into a playground - Salman Ansari

## Student's bank account used to channel ₹2.6cr duped money; MNS criticises 'police inaction'

Complainant says account was opened by a friend working with RBL Bank; fraud linked to victims in Uttarakhand; police say inquiry is underway

**Danish Azmi**  
DOMBIVLI

A postgraduate student from Dombivli has alleged that fraudulent transactions amounting to Rs2.6 crore were routed through her bank account without her knowledge, in what appears to be a major cyber fraud linked to victims in Uttarakhand.

The student has accused the police of failing to take serious cognisance of her complaint despite repeated representations over the past three months.



internal targets for opening new accounts.

Tiwari alleged that Singh offered her some money while facilitating the process and assured her that the account was being opened as part of routine banking procedures. However, a few months later, she discovered that transactions worth Rs2.6 crore had been processed through her account. Additionally, another

## ALLEGATIONS

Police failed to take cognisance of student's complaint for 3 months

Uhasnagar resident involved in the racket

Despite giving details, no concrete action has been taken so far

Uhasnagar in the racket. Despite submitting details and following up for nearly three months, she alleged that no concrete action has been taken so far.

Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) leader Avinash Jadhav has questioned the police inaction and the state's claims of cracking down on cybercrime. He further questioned why an alleged suspect, who was reportedly called in for questioning, was let off without further action. "If no firm steps are taken, how will the truth emerge? How will justice be delivered to the student and the victims who were cheated?" he asked.

Senior police inspector Ganesh Javadwad of Ramnagar police station confirmed that an application had been received and an inquiry is currently underway.

## MahaRERA dues recovery will intensify

**Mumbai:** The government will take strict action to recover pending dues under Maharashtra Real Estate Regulatory Authority (MahaRERA), state minister Shambhuraj Desai told the assembly on Thursday.

Replying to a question raised by BJP MLA Atul Bhatkalkar regarding non-implementation of MahaRERA orders issued for compensation to homebuyers, Desai said the state government aims to raise the recovery rate beyond 34%.

The Centre has directed states to ensure effective implementation of RERA in the interest of homebuyers, Desai said, adding Prime Minister Narendra Modi had also reviewed the issue with chief secretaries of all states and advised a strict recovery policy. "The state government has issued special instructions to all district collectors to speed up recovery. PTI

## Egg trafficking: 3 women held, cops widen their probe

IVF facility operated from a Thane office; accused deleted data from mobiles; pharmacist also arrested

**Danish Azmi**  
THANE

In the case of an alleged illegal trade of human ova in Badlapur, a pharmacist and three women have been arrested, as investigators probe what they suspect could be a wider network operating across Mumbai and Thane.

The accused were produced before a court in Ambarnath, which remanded them to police custody till February 28, citing the gravity of the offence and the need for detailed interrogation.

According to the police, the case revolves around an alleged racket that lured economically vulnerable women with monetary incentives ranging from Rs25,000 to Rs30,000 in exchange for extracting their eggs.

Officials claim that the network may have functioned through agents active in different parts of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region.

Investigators have identified pharmacist Sumit Sonkambale as a key link in the chain. The police allege that he supplied hormonal injections meant to increase egg production without proper medical authorisation or oversight.

The police revealed that the accused had deleted crucial data from his mobile phone before arrest. Digital forensic experts are now attempting to retrieve the erased data to establish communication trails, financial transactions and possible links to clinics or intermediaries.

Apart from Sonkambale, the arrested accused include Sulakshana Gadekar, Ashwini Chabukswar and Manjusha Wankhede. Earlier, a hospital employee from Ulhasnagar, identified as Sonal Grelwal, was also taken into custody in

connection with the probe.

The prosecution informed the court that agents associated with the racket were active in Mumbai and Thane districts, and that it was imperative to trace where the extracted ova were sent and who the ultimate beneficiaries were.

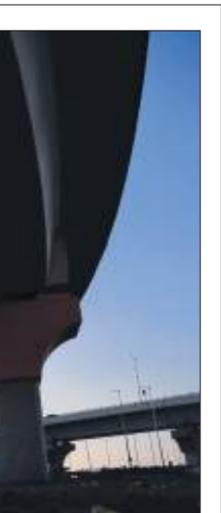
Meanwhile defence counsel have rejected the allegations, claiming that the arrested women were merely working as intermediaries and that no conclusive scientific or chemical analysis report has yet been submitted before the court to substantiate the charges.

Family members of one of the accused argued that medicines recovered from her residence were meant for personal medical use by her ailing husband and child. Advocate Dilip Valanj further contended that the real masterminds allegedly influential doctors and large medical establishments have not yet been brought under scrutiny, and that the investigation has so far targeted only lower-level operatives.

## Women's commission takes suo motu cognisance

Taking note of the developments, the Maharashtra state commission for women has initiated a review of the case. Commission chairperson Rupali Chakankar held a meeting with officials concerned and sought a detailed status report.

Chakankar described the allegations as "extremely serious" and said the possibility of a larger, organised racket could not be ruled out. She emphasised that a thorough and impartial probe was essential and assured that strict action would be recommended against those found guilty.



## Collision caused extensive damage to two-wheelers too

At least six persons were injured after a speeding four-wheeler allegedly went out of control and rammed into multiple parked vehicles in the Vertex area of Kalyan (West) on Thursday, police said. The car driver Dr Sanjay Bendel has been taken into custody by the Khadakpada police for questioning.

According to preliminary information, the accident occurred when the driver of the car suddenly lost control of the vehicle, which then crashed into three to four vehicles parked along the roadside. The impact was severe, leaving two persons seriously injured, while four others sustained minor injuries.

The injured were immediately rushed to a nearby private hospital by local resi-

dents who gathered at the spot moments after the collision. Police officials confirmed that the two seriously injured victims are currently undergoing treatment and are reported to be in stable condition. The four others were treated for minor injuries.

The collision also caused extensive damage to at least two two-wheelers, which were badly mangled due to the force of the impact. Eyewitnesses described the crash as "sudden and loud," prompting panic in the otherwise busy locality. The police are also examining CCTV footage from nearby establishments to reconstruct the sequence of events.

Initially treated as accidental, the case was reclassified as murder following post-mortem report; suspects held using CCTV footage, digital payment evidence

## Man beaten to death over suspected wire theft in Mahape; 4 held in 48 hrs

**Raina Assainar**

NAVI MUMBAI

A 31-year-old man was beaten to death on suspicion of stealing electric wires in the Mahape MIDC area, and the Navi Mumbai police crime branch cracked the case within 48 hours by arresting four accused after tracking digital payment transactions and CCTV footage.

The victim, Sandeep Vishwakarma, 31, a resident of Mankhurd, had been missing since February 15. His body was found under suspicious circumstances near a drain in Mahape MIDC on February 16. Initially suspected to be an accidental death, the case took a turn after the post-mortem report revealed grievous external and internal injuries, confirming he had been brutally assaulted. Following the report, a murder case was reg-

istered at the Rabale MIDC police station and an intensive probe was launched.

Simultaneously, the crime branch unit 1 began a parallel investigation. Technical analysis revealed Vishwakarma's last location was in Vashi. The police found he had contacted a scrap dealer in Sector 26, Vashi, shortly before his death. During questioning, the scrap dealer disclosed that a group of men had forcibly taken both him and Vishwakarma to a warehouse in Mahape.

The police discovered that while Vishwakarma was being assaulted inside the warehouse, one of the accused extorted money from the scrap dealer through a PhonePe transaction. Tracking the digital payment trail, the police zeroed in on Sanket Jagtap alias Babya, 29. During interrogation, he confessed and named his accomplices.

The police said Vishwakarma was allegedly caught red-handed stealing electric DP and pole wires in Mahape. Enraged, the four accused allegedly thrashed him mercilessly, leading to his death. They later dumped his body near a drain using an autorickshaw driven by one of them. The arrested accused were identified as Pritam Bhoir, 26, Shivaji Dumbare, 57, Amol Gunjal, 31, and Sanket Jagtap, 29.

The accused were produced before a court, which remanded them to police custody for further investigation. The operation was carried out under the guidance of assistant commissioner of police Prerna Katte and led by senior police inspector Tanaji Bhagat, along with assistant inspectors Nilesh Bankar, Anant Lamb and their team. Further investigation is underway.

## 46 pieces of 220kV XLPE copper cable stolen from a locked Bhandup substation

Copper cable worth ₹7 L stolen from MSETCL substation

**Avadhut Kharade**

MUMBAI

Unidentified persons broke into a warehouse at the Bhandup GIS substation and stole copper cables worth Rs6.79 lakh belonging to the Maharashtra State Electricity Transmission Company Limited (MSETCL), also known as Mahapareshan. The Bhandup police have registered a case against unknown persons and initiated a probe.

According to the FIR, the complainant, Harmita Kaurthi, 39, is a deputy executive engineer with MSETCL. She is posted at the 220/22kV GIS substation behind the MSEDCL office in Bhandup (West). The substation has a designated shed for power distribution equipment and scrap material. It remains locked and the keys are with on-duty security personnel.

On the night of February 21, while Kaurthi was on duty, security guards informed her the next morning that unidentified persons had entered around midnight and again at 3am. The guards confronted the intruders, who

fled the spot.

Kaurthi and her colleagues then reviewed CCTV footage, which showed suspicious movement near the warehouse where MSETCL equipment and scrap were stored. During an inspection of the warehouse inventory, staff found that 46 of 61 pieces of 220kV, 1000 sq mm XLPE copper cable measuring a total of 91.70mt were missing. Further examination of the footage showed that four persons broke the warehouse lock and entered the shed around 3am on February 19 and again at about 3.45am on February 20, making away with the copper cables.

Kaurthi lodged a complaint at Bhandup police station. Police registered an offence under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and are conducting further investigations to identify and apprehend those involved.

In a separate incident on February 20, unidentified individuals stole a 25ft copper cable from the MSEDCL office premises on LBS Road, Bhandup. The police registered an FIR in the case.

## Abandoned newborn: Doc held, gets bail

**FPJ News Service**

MUMBAI

The Samta Nagar police arrested a doctor, who was later released on bail, for allegedly failing to inform the police about an abandoned newborn. A 29-year-old woman has also been booked for allegedly abandoning her premature baby girl at Dhanwantari Hospital on February 24.

According to the police, the hospital, run by Dr Lalchand Yadav, 57, who holds a Bachelor of Ayurvedic Medicine and Surgery (BAMS) degree, was not equipped to handle childbirth procedures. Despite this, he admitted the woman, who later delivered a premature baby girl at the facility.

After giving birth, the woman allegedly abandoned the child at the hospital and fled. The doctor also allegedly failed to inform the police. The matter came to light after the police received information from their sources.

The woman is currently absconding. The police said she is unmarried and belongs to a well-off family. The newborn was shifted to Shatabdi Hospital in Kandivali West for treatment, and her condition is stable.

## Demolition debris falls on adjacent bldgs; developer, contractor booked

**Avadhut Kharade**

MUMBAI

Debris from an ongoing demolition of a seven-storey building fell onto neighbouring residential premises on 60 Feet Road, Ghatkopar East, on Wednesday, allegedly endangering lives and property.

The Pant Nagar police registered a case against the developer, M/s Orient Corp, the contractor, M/s Navdurga Infra Venture Company Pvt Ltd, site manager Vaibhav Nande, on-site workers, and other persons held responsible for the incident.

According to the FIR, the complainant, Ramesh Sawant, 62, a Malad-based private employee, resides with his family at Laxmi House, plot no 200, 60 Feet Road. The adjacent Parnakutir Building has been taken up for redevelopment by M/s Orient Corp.

Parnakutir is flanked by Laxmi House on one side and Amar Smruti Building on the other, both of which are occupied. For the past 15 days, work was underway to remove doors, windows and grills from the old structure. Demolition of slabs and walls began on February 23.

## Debris fell from a 7-storey Ghatkopar bldg; residents confronted site manager; ward officials inspect

At 10am on the day of the incident, a large chunk of debris and cement allegedly fell into the compound of Laxmi House, triggering a loud noise and causing residents to rush out of their homes in alarm. Shortly thereafter, debris and cement blocks also fell into the premises of Amar Smruti.

Residents confronted site manager Vaibhav Nande, who was present at the site. Sawant alleged that while carrying out the demolition, the developer, contractor and personnel concerned failed to take adequate precautions to prevent debris from falling onto adjoining buildings or surrounding areas, and necessary safety measures and protective arrangements were not implemented.

Following the complaint, the police informed BMC's N-Ward office, whose officials visited the site for inspection.



### Protest for justice

Days after businessman Dhrumil Patel was killed in an accident caused by a minor driver in Vidyavihar, Patel's kin and friends protested outside the school where the minor appeared for his board exams — Salman Ansari

## Biker killed while saving mom, child

Civic apathy, encroachments under scanner after fatal dumper accident in Bhiwandi

**Danish Azmi**

BHIWANDI

A 24-year-old motorcyclist lost his life in an accident near Anjur Phata in Bhiwandi on Thursday evening while trying to save two pedestrians, a mother and a child.

The deceased, Bhargav Patil, 24, a resident of Kharbav was

run over by a speeding dumper in front of a Jain temple. According to preliminary information, Patil attempted to save a woman and a child who were crossing the road when the heavy vehicle lost control and crushed him.

The entire incident was captured on a nearby CCTV camera, and the footage has since

surfaced, showing the horrifying sequence of events.

Local residents alleged that rampant encroachments along the stretch have narrowed the road, creating a bottleneck and increasing the risk of accidents. They blamed the civic administration for failing to



clear illegal structures and regulate heavy vehicular movement in the busy area.

"This is not just an accident; it is the result of the civic body's negligence. Encroachments have reduced the usable road space, and no strict action has been taken despite repeated com-

plaints," a local shopkeeper said. Personnel from the Narpoli police station rushed to the spot, conducted a panchnama, and sent the body to the Government Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital for post-mortem. A case is being registered against the dumper driver, and further investigation is underway.

# Staff crunch hits Yerawada mental hospital

**Indu Bhagat**  
PUNE

India's largest government-run psychiatric facility, the Regional Mental Hospital (RMH) at Yerawada, is facing an acute staff shortage, affecting care for patients with serious mental illness. Officials told The Free Press Journal (FPJ) that 13 Class 1 officer posts are vacant. Of these, seven have been filled, including one physician, one paediatrician, one surgeon and three psychiatrists, while one officer is absconding. The hospital requires 15 more psychiatrists to extend services to peripheral areas.

Dr Srinivas Kolod, Medical Superintendent of the hospital, said, "RMH, which houses at least 1,000-1,500 patients, has only three psychiatrists on duty, and around 15 vacancies exist. The hospital is facing a staff crunch; however, medical facilities are not compromised. If we get the required number of psychiatrists, we would be able to provide services in peripheral areas, too. We also need at least 130 Class 3 and Class 4 workers and 10 cooks." "We have filled seven vacancies, which has already lowered our burden. With more hiring of staff, the services would become better, which will ensure early diagnosis, timely treatment and proper rehabilitation," added Kolod.



Class 3 and Class 4 employees are required to clean patients, work as caretakers, assist doctors in physiotherapy and help in therapy and rehabilitation, including assisting patients in

**Only three psychiatrists attend over 1,000 patients at RMH**

speaking and communicating. "All patients deserve to be properly assessed, screened, diagnosed, treated and counselled. However, it is simply not possible for just three psychiatrists to manage all of these responsibilities effectively. As a result, we are left with no choice but to prioritise those who are critically or severely ill and require immediate medical attention. Therefore, we need more staff

and psychiatrists," said an official on condition of anonymity.

As per government norms, minimum quality standards for mental health services require at least one psychiatrist for every 100 patients, along with one anaesthetist on call per hospital if electroconvulsive therapy is administered, one Resident Medical Officer per 100 patients, one Clinical Psychologist per 200 patients, one Psychiatric Social Worker per 100 patients and one Psychiatric Nurse per 75 patients. However, data shared by officials indicates a severe shortage of staff.

# Rohit Pawar demands FIR in crash case

**Varad Bhatkhande**  
PUNE

Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar (NCP-SP) leader and Karjat Jamkhed MLA Rohit Pawar on Thursday criticised the Maharashtra government and police, alleging inaction in the suspicious death of Ajit Pawar, the former deputy chief minister, in a plane crash in Baramati.



File photo

**MLA alleges police inaction over Ajit Pawar death, seeks probe**

Speaking to the media in Baramati after a two-hour standoff at Baramati Taluka Police Station with a delegation of over 100 lawyers, Pawar expressed anger over the refusal to register a first information report (FIR). He was accompanied by his cousin Yugendra Pawar. "In this state, an FIR is registered for stolen pigeons in Pune within an hour, yet the police are avoiding filing an FIR regarding the suspicious death of the state's deputy chief minister," Pawar said.

He alleged that attempts to initiate criminal proceedings in Mumbai and Baramati were being blocked. "It seems someone has tied the hands of the Baramati police. Despite the legal team citing all relevant statutes and Supreme Court guidelines, no case is being registered," he said. Rohit Pawar further claimed that the police appeared visibly moved but were unable to act. "Their pens wouldn't move to sign the FIR due to immense pressure from those in power," he said.

Rohit Pawar demanded the resignation of the Union Aviation Minister and levelled allegations regarding VSR Aviation Company. He alleged that the VSR company has close ties with a prominent Maharashtra leader and the Union Aviation Minister. He said the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) had grounded five VSR aircraft two days ago. "If these planes had technical faults, why was that

specific aircraft provided to Ajit Dada? The DGCA only conducts technical audits, not criminal ones. Therefore, a criminal case must be filed by the CID or CBI," Rohit Pawar said.

Yugendra Pawar claimed that the DGCA, in its report, pointed to criminal negligence on the part of VSR Ventures. "If criminal negligence is established, then an FIR should be registered against the firm," he said. Following the crash, an accidental death report was registered at Baramati Taluka Police Station and later transferred to the state Crime Investigation Department for further investigation.

After reports and viral videos surfaced showing Rohit Pawar and MLA Amol Mitkari arguing with officials from Mumbai Police, it was reported that Rohit Pawar received a call from the office of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. Rohit Pawar confirmed that he received the call. "The call was regarding the proposal to build a memorial for Ajit Pawar," he said.

Rohit Pawar said a meeting is scheduled for Friday evening. "We will demand the memorial, but I will also present all the information and documents I have regarding the crash investigation. We don't want to play politics; we want justice," he said.

# MLA Shirole flags expired food sales

**Chesna Shetty**  
PUNE

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA Siddharth Shirole on Thursday raised concerns in the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly over the alleged sale of expired food items through quick commerce platforms, calling for immediate government intervention. During a starred question discussion, Shirole flagged alleged lapses in storage standards and inspection protocols at dark stores operated by companies such as Blinkit, Swiggy and Zepto.

Taking to X, he wrote, "Serious lapses in storage standards and inspection protocols at dark stores operated by companies such as Blinkit, Swiggy, and Zepto pose a direct threat to citizen health. When food safety is compromised, it is not merely a regulatory issue; it becomes a public health concern." "I called upon the government to immediately conduct a comprehensive audit of all online food delivery warehouses and dark stores in Pune. Any violations must invite strict

penal action, and a structured compensation mechanism must be put in place to protect consumer rights," he added.

Emphasising that safe food is a fundamental right, Shirole said there should be zero tolerance for the sale of expired food products and called for greater accountability from quick commerce platforms to safeguard public health. A day earlier, during the discussion on the motion of thanks to the Governor's address to the joint sitting of the Budget Session, Shirole proposed high-speed rail corridors connecting Pune with Mumbai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad, along with semi-high-speed rail links to Nashik and Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar.

The BJP MLA also demanded the establishment of two dedicated high-speed rail stations in Pune to position the city as a national mobility and economic hub. He urged Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis to personally review and expedite the Memorandum of Understanding related to the redevelopment of the Shivajinagar Bus Terminus.

# RIVER SHIELD | 10-12 floating fences proposed along 44km Mutha stretch after achieving success in pilot campaign

# PMC plans trash barriers

**Indu Bhagat**  
PUNE

In a move to curb pollution in the Mutha River, the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) has decided to install trash barriers at multiple locations along the riverbed flowing through the city.

Following the success of a pilot project near Baba Bhide Bridge, the civic body is preparing to implement similar systems at 10 to 12 locations across the 44km stretch of the Mutha River within city limits. Funds for the project are expected to be allocated in the upcoming municipal budget, informed Kishori Shinde, Deputy Commissioner of PMC's Environment Department.

Large quantities of plastic waste, thermocol, footwear, school bags, plastic bottles and other household garbage are dumped into the river. Offerings to gods, idols and coconuts are also immersed directly into the water. The waste flows downstream, severely polluting the river and affecting its ecological balance.



The initial experiment was carried out by the Worship Earth Foundation near Baba Bhide Bridge. According to the foundation's founder, Parag Mate, the results have been significant. The amount of garbage now collected in one week earlier accumulated over four months. At present, three to four dumper trucks of waste are removed from the river every week due to the barrier.

Encouraged by the outcome, PMC's Environment Department is considering

scaling up the project across the entire river stretch in the city.

A trash barrier is a floating fence installed on the surface of a river. It is designed to ensure that the natural flow of water remains uninterrupted while floating waste such as plastic, thermocol, bottles and other debris gets trapped. The accumulated waste can then be removed using machinery or by sanitation workers and disposed of scientifically. Officials said the system can

trap waste floating up to a depth of nearly six feet below the water surface.

Officials added that to control pollution across the river effectively, at least 10 to 12 such barriers will have to be installed at strategic locations across Pune.

With the pilot project yielding measurable results, the city administration now faces expectations to scale up efforts to restore the Mutha River, considered the lifeline of Pune, to a cleaner state.

# PCMC to table 44th budget tomorrow

**Varad Bhatkhande**  
PIMPRI-CHINCHWAD

The Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation (PCMC) will present its 44th budget for the financial year 2026-27 on Feb 28, with no tax hike or rate increase proposed.

The election for the chairperson of the Standing Committee will be held at 11am on Saturday. Immediately after the election, Municipal Commissioner Shriharan Hardikar will present the budget to the newly elected chairperson at a special meeting scheduled for 12pm.

After four years of administrative rule, an elected body has resumed charge, and residents are keen to see which new schemes and projects will be included in the budget.

The Accounts and Finance Department of PCMC has prepared the 2026-27 budget



**Five years' budget overview**

- 2021-22: ₹7,139 crore
- 2022-23: ₹6,497 crore
- 2023-24: ₹7,127 crore
- 2024-25: ₹8,676 crore
- 2025-26: ₹9,675 crore

after holding multiple department-wise meetings with officials regarding works and financial provisions.

Officials said the budget will outline various Central Government-sponsored schemes, administrative facilities, development projects, health services, civil engin-

earing works, citizen infrastructure, essential development funds and revenue estimates.

The civic body's financial position remains strained. PCMC faces liabilities of Rs4,493 crore. Deposits have declined, and the corporation carries a debt of Rs560 crore. The budget is being presented against this fragile backdrop, drawing close attention from residents.

Once selected, the chairperson will have to secure the Standing Committee's approval on Saturday. Failing this, after Mar 1, the budget will be

placed before the General Body for approval.

Abhishek Barne has emerged as the likely chairperson of the Standing Committee. His nomination was filed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Wednesday and, with no opposing candidate in the fray, his election is expected to be formalised on Saturday.

Barne is a two-time BJP corporator representing the Thergaon area. He previously served as a member of the Standing Committee and chaired the 'G' Ward Committee. Party leaders reportedly chose him due to his familiarity with committee functions and civic administration.

In the 16-member Standing Committee, BJP holds 11 seats, while the Nationalist Congress Party has four and the Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde faction) has one, making Barne's election effectively unopposed.

# Youth found dead in upscale society

**Varad Bhatkhande**  
PIMPRI-CHINCHWAD

A 25-year-old man was found dead in an upscale housing society in Punawale in the early hours of Thursday, two days after he told his family he was travelling to Chennai for work. The deceased was identified as Vaibhav Dattatraya Sutar, a resident of Kalewadi. An Accidental Death Report has been registered at Ravet Police Station under the

Pimpri-Chinchwad Police Commissionerate.

Senior Inspector Nitin Phatangare, in charge of Ravet Police Station, told The Free Press Journal (FPJ), "Around 2am, we received information that a man had jumped from the 24th floor of Pethkar Siyona Housing Society in the Punawale area. We went to the spot where his friends Saurabh Tapkir and Harshvardhan Chinchwade had taken him to the hospital." "Tapkir lives in

the Punawale area, and they had gotten together to eat food on Wednesday. We are investigating the matter further. An ADR has been registered at Ravet Police Station," he added. Phatangare also told the FPJ, "We have found out that the deceased youth has been in distress and frustration for the last couple of years. We have received the post-mortem report, and according to preliminary information, we suspect it is a suicide. However,

the motive behind it is currently unknown. Investigation into the incident is ongoing." Police sources said Sutar had told his family that he worked in an IT company in Hyderabad. When he returned a few days ago, he claimed he was being transferred to Chennai. Police clarified that he was actually working at his friend Saurabh Tapkir's poultry farm in the Chandkhed area of Maval tehsil.

## 2024 PORSCHE CASE

# SC seeks state's reply on bail plea

**Agencies**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday sought a response from the Maharashtra government on a bail plea filed by Vishal Agarwal, father of the minor involved in the 2024 Pune Porsche accident case. On May 19, 2024, a 17-year-old boy, allegedly under the influence of alcohol, fatally knocked down two IT professionals in Pune's Kalyani Nagar area while driving a Porsche.

A bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan issued notice to the state government on Agarwal's appeal challenging the Bombay High Court order denying him bail. The matter has been posted for hearing on Mar 10. The High Court had on Dec 16, 2025, rejected the bail plea of Agarwal and the other accused. On Feb 2, the apex court granted bail to three accused, observing that parents are to be blamed for incidents involving juveniles as they do not have control over their children. The court granted bail to Amar Santish Gaikwad, an alleged middleman, Aditya Avinash Sood and Ashish Satish Mittal, parents of two other juveniles in the car, noting that they had been in custody for 18 months.

On Jan 23, the top court sought a response from the Maharashtra government on a plea filed by Gaikwad seeking bail. Earlier, on Jan 7, it sought a response from the state on pleas filed by two other accused seeking bail. Sood and Mittal, aged 52 and 37, were arrested on Aug 19 last year after their blood samples were used for tests in connection with two minors who were in the car along with the 17-year-old main accused at the time of the accident. The Bombay High Court had on Dec 16 last year rejected the bail pleas of eight accused, including Gaikwad, Sood and Mittal.

Earlier, the Juvenile Justice Board granted bail to the minor accused on certain conditions, including writing a 300-word essay on road safety, sparking outrage. Pune Police then approached the board seeking a review of the order. The board modified its decision and sent the juvenile to an observation home. In June, the High Court ordered the release of the juvenile.

While the juvenile was released from the observation home, 10 accused, including his parents, Vishal Agarwal and Shivani Agarwal, doctors Ajay Tawre and Shreehari Halnor, Sassoon Hospital staffer Atul Ghatkamble, Sood, Mittal and Arun Kumar Singh, were sent to jail in the blood sample swapping case.

# Trucks dump debris on riverbed

**Indu Bhagat**  
PUNE

Large-scale dumping of debris and soil has been reported on the riverbed near Keshavnagar, east of Mundhwa Bridge, with residents alleging encroachment under the guise of riverfront development.

Residents and commuters told The Free Press Journal (FPJ) that hundreds of trucks have been unloading debris in the riverbed area, creating a massive land parcel. The activity is visible from the road, raising questions about how such large-scale dumping continues without action from the authorities.

The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) is implementing the Mula-Mutha River Improvement Project, which includes beautification of a 44km stretch of the riverbank at an estimated cost of Rs4,727 crore. The project is being executed in 11 phases, with three pilot phases under way. Each phase is estimated to cost around Rs700 crore from municipal funds.

The 5.3km stretch between Sangamwadi and Mundhwa is being developed on a public-private partnership basis. Beautification work is in progress between Sangamwadi and Mundhwa Bridge. Officials clarified that the river improvement work does not extend to the eastern side of Mundhwa Bridge.

Despite this, a temporary construction road has been laid in the riverbed on the

Keshavnagar side, extending around 200 to 300 metres from the bridge. Local sources estimated that nearly 1,000 to 1,200 truckloads of debris have been dumped to create an elevated belt almost as high as the bridge.

"The scale of the dumping has led to speculation about whether the land is being prepared for future commercial use. Why is PMC not acting against the builders for dumping debris on the riverbed? The dumping is being done in daylight; the violators seem to have no fear and appear to have political backing. Also, why have officials from the municipal and Water Resources Department not intervened?" Aniruddh Kale, a local, told the FPJ.

Kushal Sinha, a resident of Keshavnagar, said, "For the past couple of days, the dumping can be seen near the riverbed. The debris is placed in such a manner that a flat surface is created. We urge the authorities to take action before the entire riverbelt is encroached."

In recent weeks, PMC has acted against a developer for illegal construction in the riverbed near the municipal headquarters, sealing the site and imposing a fine of Rs10 lakh. Activists are demanding similar scrutiny in the Keshavnagar case.

Authorities acknowledge the seriousness; however, the FPJ received no response when it attempted to contact PMC's Additional Commissioner.

## Danve alleges ₹1,150 crore land scam, Bhumre denies

FPJ News Network  
CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Ambadas Danve on Tuesday alleged that Member of Parliament (MP) Sandipnarao Bhumre conducted a Rs1,150 crore scam involving land near the Samruddhi Expressway in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar. Bhumre refuted all the allegations and warned that he would file a defamation case in the matter.

Danve, at a press conference, claimed that land measuring 23 acres and 30 guntas was acquired in Gut No. 10 in Jatwada Shivar. The present market value of the land is around Rs1,150 crore. To grab the land, a hibinama of the land, or gift deed, was made in the name of Bhumre's driver, Javed Rasul Shaikh, in 1971. However, Javed was born in



1985, so how was the gift deed made in his name, Danve questioned. He demanded that a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry be conducted into the matter.

Bhumre, on Wednesday, addressed the press and refuted all the allegations. He admitted that Javed is his driver but said the allegations regarding the hibinama are



false and baseless.

"Danve is not stable, and all his allegations are baseless. It is a gimmick only to defame my reputation. The Gut No. mentioned by Danve, does not exist. Hibinama is done by the Muslim law, then how can a Hindu woman do the transaction? I will file a defamation case in this regard," Bhumre said.

## Police nab 3

Agencies  
LATUR

Three men in their 20s were arrested for allegedly kidnapping a minor girl in Latur district, police said on Thursday. The trio was taken into custody within an hour of receiving a complaint, an official said. A minor girl was allegedly abducted in a blue car within the jurisdiction of Deoni police on Wednesday, he said. After receiving a complaint, a search operation was launched.

The official said a highway security team intercepted the car at Gevrai in Beed, detained the three accused and rescued the girl. The accused, Udgir residents Kalim Hakani Sheikh (20), Ashpak Karim Sheikh (20), and Bilal Khaled Qureshi (25), were subsequently arrested, the official added.

## VILLAGE CONFLICT | 206 booked after Ambhai stone pelting; four injured, ten-day custody granted

# Police arrest 13 in clash

FPJ News Network  
CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

Police have arrested 13 persons from both groups in connection with a stone pelting case in Ambhai village in Sillod taluka and registered cases against 206 persons at the Ajanta police station. All those arrested were produced before the Sillod court on Wednesday and remanded in police custody for 10 days, the Ajanta police informed.

Two groups clashed over petty reasons in Ambhai village on Tuesday at around 8pm. Tension escalated when the groups pelted stones at each other and vandalised vehicles. Four people were seriously injured in the stone pelting, and several shops and vehicles were damaged. Tension prevailed in the village after the incident.

The dispute arose over the issue of the sale of mutton, which led to stone pelting. Villagers panicked during the incident, and heaps of stones were seen on the road. The villagers alleged that it was a planned attack as stones were



pelted in such large numbers over a petty reason related to buying mutton. Hence, a detailed inquiry into the matter should be conducted,

they demanded.

On receiving information, Sub-Divisional Police Officer Dineshkumar Kolhe and senior officers of the Ajanta,

Sillod city, rural, Fardapur and Soyegaon police stations rushed to the spot. Police resorted to a mild lathi charge to disperse the crowd. A strict police bandobast has been deployed in the village.

After scrutinising CCTV footage and videos that went viral on social media, police launched a combing operation and arrested Ram Sonu Chavan, Guruprasad Kailas Bavaskar, Abhijeet Dhanraj Munde, Kailas Bhagwa Munde, Kailas Ratan Shirmre, Samadhan Devrao Sapkal, Shahrukh Babu Shah, Bablu Ali Shah, Aslam Vazir Shah, Ajim Jafar Pathan, all residents of Ambhai, Kalim Laddu Shah of Naygavhan, and Amjad Shah Mustaq Shah and Irshad Shakur Khan of Mangrul in Sillod in connection with the case.

A video of the incident has gone viral on social media in which some youths are seen carrying sticks and shouting provocative slogans. Police are trying to trace the youths seen in the video and have appealed to residents to maintain peace and harmony in the village.

## Agri-tech sector worth \$100bn, says Nandwana

FPJ News Network  
CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

"We initially identified agricultural problems worth over \$100 billion and focused on seven key areas. By concentrating on horticulture seeds, we demonstrated how limited resources can create a large-scale impact. Today, 30 million farmers recognise BigHaat, and nearly 3 million farmers use our platform daily," stated Sachin Nandwana, co-founder and director of BigHaat.

He was speaking at the grand finale of the seventh edition of the Bharat Agri-Tech Innovation Challenge (BATIC) 2025, organised by the Marathwada Accelerator for Growth and Incubation Centre (MAGIC) at the Aryabhata Auditorium, MGM Campus, on Wednesday. The event witnessed the presence



of entrepreneurs, investors, industry representatives, agri-experts, academicians and students from across the country, showcasing innovative solutions in the agri-tech domain. This year, the competition received an overwhelming response, with 225 teams participating from 85 cities across 20 states. Following a rigorous two-stage evaluation process based on technological excellence, market viability, scalability, sustainability and social impact, 16 startups were shortlisted for the grand finale.

GreenMinds AgroHub Pvt Ltd won the cash prize of Rs2 lakh, along with a trophy and incubation support. The first runner-up, Ghode & Jadhav Agritech Equipments Industries Private Limited, received Rs1.5 lakh, along with a trophy and incubation support. The second runner-up, SmartU Innovation Private Limited, received Rs1 lakh, along with a trophy and incubation support.

In the pre-revenue stage category, AVN AgroBharat Private Limited won Rs1 lakh, along with a trophy and incubation support. The first

runner-up, Agritech Fusion, received Rs75,000, along with a trophy and incubation support. The second runner-up, BSVS Farmtech, received Rs50,000, along with a trophy and incubation support.

A total prize pool of Rs6.75 lakh, along with incubation support from MAGIC, was awarded to the winners. An eight-member jury panel evaluated the finalists. Participating startups presented solutions across agri-inputs, smart farm equipment, data-driven decision systems, sustainable agriculture, supply chains and digital platforms.

## Admin detains history-sheeter

FPJ News Network  
BEED

In a major crackdown on criminal activities in Beed town, the district administration has detained an alleged history-sheeter under the Maharashtra Prevention of Dangerous Activities (MPDA) Act.

The action was jointly initiated by District Collector Vivek Johnson and Superintendent of Police Navneet Kanwat, officials said. The accused, Vaibhav

Sanjay Varat (25), a resident of Swarajya Nagar here, has been booked in nine serious criminal cases, including theft, robbery, illegal possession of arms, violation of prohibitory orders, attempt to murder and causing grievous injuries.

Police said preventive action had earlier been taken against Varat, but as there was no improvement in his conduct, a proposal for his detention under the MPDA Act was submitted on Jan 16, 2026. Acting on the

proposal, Collector Johnson issued orders on Feb 23 directing his immediate detention.

Following the order, police arrested the accused and on Feb 24, lodged him at Harsul Jail. Meanwhile, the police administration has warned of strict action under preventive laws against those involved in illegal activities such as sand smuggling, unlawful gutka trade, black marketing, extortion, hooliganism and illegal gambling.

## ZP school enters global record

FPJ News Network  
BEED

Students of Zilla Parishad Primary School, Talwat Bargaon, in Georai tehsil of Beed district have secured a place in the Cyber Book of World Records for their distinctive participation in a global National Anthem singing initiative organised on the occasion of India's 76th Republic Day.

## Pankaj Bhojar assures action in road death

FPJ News Network  
NASHIK

Strict action will be taken against those responsible for the death incident on the Govardhan-Sula Wine Road in Nashik, Minister of State Pankaj Bhojar informed the Legislative Assembly.

The issue was raised by MLA Seema Hiray, who demanded a thorough investigation and stringent action against the accused. Bhojar was responding to the matter in the House.

On Mar 8, 2025, a tragic incident took place near the Palm Springs Hotel on the Govardhan-Sula Wine Road in Nashik, where a youth, allegedly under the influence of intoxicants, drove a car at high speed and rammed into a person standing by the roadside, resulting in the victim's death on the spot. Police promptly took cognisance of the incident and registered a case. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has personally taken note of the matter. An official found responsible for the delay in the investigation has been suspended. A detailed inquiry is under way, and strict action will be taken against all those found involved in the case, Bhojar stated.

## Fire erupts in tunnel

FPJ News Network  
NASHIK

A major fire broke out in a container inside a tunnel on the Samruddhi Highway at around 6pm on Thursday. The driver pulled the vehicle aside in time, preventing a major accident. According to police, the container (MH04HS1462) was travelling from Mumbai to Bengaluru when the driver, Qasimkhan Munnakhkar (35), sensed a burning smell near check post number 627. He immediately parked the vehicle along the side of the tunnel, after which the engine caught fire. The Ghoti Police patrol team rushed to the spot and extinguished the blaze using the water pressure system installed inside the tunnel.

## WORDROOTS | Senior litterateur inaugurates Dialect Festival at KTHM campus

# Karnik hails Marathi dialects

FPJ News Network  
NASHIK

Dialects are the true pride of Maharashtra and have enriched and strengthened the Marathi language, senior litterateur Madhu Mangesh Karnik said on the eve of the Fourth World Marathi Conference beginning Feb 27 at the KTHM College campus of Maratha Vidya Prasarak Samaj.

A Dialect Festival was organised ahead of the conference and inaugurated by Karnik at Mahakavi Kalidas Kalamandir.

Among those present were Kiran Kulkarni, secretary of the Marathi Language Department; Nitin Thakre, general secretary of the institution; Shyamkant Devare, director of the Marathi Language Development Department; Pradeep Dhawale, vice president of the Maharashtra State Board



of Literature and Culture; former president of the All India Marathi Literary Conference Uttam Kamble; Shripad Bhalchandra Joshi; Milind Joshi; and Vishwas Thakur. Distinguished literary contributors were felicitated at the event.

Speaking on the occasion, Karnik said that Maharashtra has always valued literature, art and music. Dialects have been deeply rooted in the soil of Maharashtra for thousands of years. Giving due importance to dialects will further

enrich the Marathi language. He added that the state government's initiative through this festival would significantly contribute to the growth of Marathi.

Shripad Joshi emphasised that Marathi should evolve into a language of knowledge

and technology. Revitalising dialects would help Marathi attain that status. He suggested that linguistics should be introduced as a subject from class 8 onwards.

Milind Joshi said Nashik, the literary land associated with the renowned writer VV Shirwadkar, is a sacred place for literature. He stressed that dialects are the lifelines of the Marathi language and cannot be ignored.

Nibandh Kanitkar compered the programme, and Dhawale delivered the vote of thanks. A large number of citizens and students attended the event.

In the first session of the Dialect Festival, Shambhu Patil and his team from Jalgaon presented a programme titled "Are Sansar Sansar", based on the songs and poems of noted poet Bahinabai Chaudhari, captivating the audience.

## 5th International Devgiri film fest starts tomorrow

FPJ News Network  
JALGAON

The fifth International Devgiri Short Film Festival will be held in Jalgaon on Feb 28 and Mar 1. The festival is jointly organised by Ajanta Film Society and Kanha Lalit Kala Kendra, and preparations are under way.

Announcing details at a press conference, Jayendra Lekurwale, chairman of the Film Festival Organising Committee, said the two-day festival will feature film exhibitions, short film screenings, masterclasses, seminars, open forums and touring talks. Shashikant Vadodkar of Kanha Lalit Kala Kendra, Vineet Joshi, president of Ajanta Film Society, treasurer Sanjay Hande, Suchitra Londhe, Chitra Sadhana Prant coordinator Kiran Sohale and Shradha Shukla were present. This is the fifth year of the festival. Short films, documentaries, campus films and children's films from 20 states across the country and abroad have been received. After evaluation by expert judges,

80 short films have been selected for screening during the festival. As many as 300 young filmmakers from across the country are expected to attend. Lekurwale said citizens of Jalgaon will get an opportunity to watch quality short films and documentaries on various subjects. The festival venue has been named Dadasaheb Chitra Nagri, and the screening halls have been named after actor Dharmendra Deol, actress Sandhya Shantaram and actress Priya Marathe.



Manoj Joshi to receive Chitratapasvi; Aaroh Velankar, Surbhi Hande honoured

During the festival, actor

Atul Gangwar will conduct a masterclass on Abhijit Gokhale's film and social awareness, actor Manoj Joshi's transition from theatre to the film industry, and the film production process, including challenges and opportunities.

The inaugural ceremony on Saturday evening will be held in the presence of Guardian Minister Gulabrao Patil, Jain Industry Group president Ashok Jain and Suresh Bhel. On the occasion, actor Manoj Joshi will be conferred this year's Devgiri Chitratapasvi Puraskar.

## Car hits 6-year-old outside school

FPJ News Network  
NASHIK

A case has been registered at Igatpuri Police Station against a car driver, the principal, the school management committee and the principal's husband after a speeding car allegedly hit a 6-year-old student outside Little Blossom School in Igatpuri during school dispersal on Feb 18. The incident has triggered anger among parents and raised concerns over student safety on school premises.

According to the complaint filed by parent Kundalik Davkhar, a resident of Girnare, Igatpuri, Yash Kadam was driving a car at speed and carelessly hit the student with a four-wheeler while he was leaving school at around 3.30pm. The student suffered serious injuries and is undergoing treatment, the parents said.

The complaint states that after the accident, the school management gave wrong information and tried to suppress the matter. An attempt was allegedly made to hide



Father alleges cover-up after Feb 18 crash in Igatpuri

the matter for four days, and the CCTV footage was refused to be shown. Later, they came home and assured the family, but the parents alleged that an attempt was made to play with the child's life. "My son has suffered a head injury and had to get 4 stitches. The school management tried to suppress the matter. I have registered a case so that this does not happen to any other child," said Kundalik Davkhar.

A case has been registered against Kadam, principal Mantri, Little Blossom School Management Committee and the principal's husband, Pappu Mantri.

## Expert panel to review semi-HSR corridor



FPJ News Network  
NASHIK

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis informed the Legislative Council during Question Hour that a special committee of experts will be appointed to work out a positive solution regarding the Pune-Nashik Semi High-Speed Railway project after concerns that the original alignment would interfere with the antenna of the Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope observatory.

He said limited modifications to the route would be considered, and villages currently left out would be connected through an alternative alignment. The issue was raised by member Satyajit Tambe.

Providing further details, the Chief Minister said two meetings have been held with the Central Government regarding the Pune-Nashik High-Speed Railway project.

## Fadnavis says alternative alignment may address telescope concerns, connect left-out villages

Due to the original design of the route, there is interference with the antenna of the Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope observatory. As this is an international observatory with participation from 32 countries, the Central Government has clarified that changes to its operational regulations are not possible.

He further stated that the expert committee will conduct a detailed study of the feasibility and technical aspects of the alternative alignment. He also said discussions will be held with the Union Railway Minister to arrive at a positive and practical solution in this regard.

## 16k vie for 3k seats

FPJ News Network  
NASHIK

The pre-entrance examination for 3,093 seats in 37 Eklavya Model Residential Schools across the state will be held on Mar 1. A total of 16,042 students have applied for the examination, which will be conducted at 46 centres. The examination will be held from 11am to 1pm for class 6 and from 11am to 2pm for classes 7 to 9. Of the total 3,093 seats, 2,220 are for class 6 and 873 for classes 7 to 9. For class 6, admissions will be

granted through a preliminary examination, while for classes 7 to 9, vacant seats will be filled based on marks. Division-wise, Nashik Division has received 7,353 applications for 1,192 seats, Nagpur Division 3,887 applications for 923 seats, Amravati Division 3,074 applications for 395 seats, and Thane Division 1,728 applications for 583 seats. Nashik Division has received the highest 7,353 applications, and 18 centres have been set up within the jurisdiction of the Divisional Additional Commissioner's Office.



27.46 pts



14.05 pts



00 paise



₹1300



₹7400

SENSEX 82,248.61 | NIFTY 25,496.55 | USD/INR 90.91 | GOLD 1,62,000.00 | SILVER 2,70,000.00

**Briefs****India, Israel to hold next round of FTA talks in May**

India and Israel will hold the next round of negotiations for the proposed free trade agreement (FTA) between the two countries in May, the commerce ministry said on Thursday. The two sides concluded the first round of four-day talks. Both countries are engaged in discussions covering a wide range of areas, including trade in goods and services, rules of origin, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, technical barriers to trade, customs procedures, intellectual property rights, digital trade, and other key chapters, it said. "Both sides also agreed to continue inter-sessional engagements virtually. The next round of in-person negotiations will be held in May 2026 in Israel," it said.

**Carbon trading platform by Sept: Official**

The carbon trading platform is likely to be functional in India by September, which will be a driver for renewable energy transition, a senior official said on Thursday. "Carbon trading platform is on track and most likely by September, you'll find that also happening in the country. Probably that will be another driver for RE (renewable energy) to pick up, and particularly in the C&I (commercial and industrial) segments that will be a big driver," said Central Electricity Authority Chairman Ghanshyam Prasad, addressing the India Energy Summit.

**BofA cuts IDFC First Bank target price**

Multinational brokerage Bank of America Securities (BofA) downgraded the rating on IDFC First Bank Ltd. to 'Neutral' and cut its 12-month target price to Rs 75 from Rs 95, citing near-term headwinds after the bank was de-empowered by the Haryana government following a fraud incident. The brokerage predicted a 13 to 14 per cent cut to the bank's EPS estimates which prompted a downgrade from its earlier 'Buy' rating.

**Aadhaar centres on Google Maps**

The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) and tech giant Google have teamed up to enable the display of authorised Aadhaar centres on Google Maps, a move that aims to enhance ease of access and convenience for residents across the country. An official release said the initiative will help residents identify Aadhaar Centres based on the nature of services offered, like adult enrolment, child enrolment or only address and mobile update.

**Gushwork AI raises ₹81 cr**

AI start-up Gushwork has raised USD 9 million, about Rs 81 crore, in a funding round led by Susquehanna Asia VC and plans to invest in product development, hiring talents and customer acquisition, a top company official said on Thursday. Venture capital Lightspeed and B Capital also participated in the funding round. Gushwork builds agentic AI with focus on autonomous marketing agents to increase visibility for businesses on AI Search engines.

**REFORMS | Report flags need to boost tax compliance to meet 2047 goal****India to grow between 6.8-7.2% in FY27: EY Economy Watch**

PTI NEW DELHI

India's GDP could grow between 6.8% and 7.2% in the next fiscal, the EY Economy Watch report said on Thursday.

It suggested that to attain the Viksit Bharat goal by 2047, India may have to increase its tax-GDP ratio largely by improving tax compliance, as major tax reforms have already taken place.

"In the background of India's extensive bilateral trade agreements with other major economies or economic groups, India's medium-term prospects have brightened. We estimate India's real GDP growth to be in the range of 6.8% to 7.2% in FY27," EY India

Chief Policy Advisor DK Srivastava said.

The EY Economy Watch report said major tax reforms were undertaken in the current fiscal, particularly relating to personal income tax and the Goods and Services Tax.

Both these reforms involved a considerable amount of revenue forgone, aimed at increasing household disposable incomes so that private consumption demand could be supported.

"These tax reforms involved considerable sacrifice of the Government of India's gross tax revenues, which were expected to fall short of the Budget Estimates for FY26. In spite of apprehension of this revenue shortfall, the government was widely expected to



adhere to its budgeted fiscal deficit target for FY26," the report said.

**New GDP series to include data on GST, e-Vahan, household services**

The new series of GDP with base year 2022-23 will include data on goods and services tax, e-Vahan and household services provided by cooks,

drivers and domestic help to make economic data more accurate.

The GDP data for the third quarter (October-December 2025), based on the new series, will be released on Friday.

According to an FAQ on the new series issued by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), the base year is

updated from time to time to reflect changes in the economy over the years.

The base year of the national accounts is being revised from 2011-12 to 2022-23. Although the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation revises the data series every five years, this could not be done earlier because of the Covid pandemic and implementation of GST. It further said back-series data is expected to be released by December 2026.

In the new series, actual level estimates are being prepared using regular annual surveys such as the Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) and the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS).

**Sentiment cautious**

FPJ News Service MUMBAI

Indian equities erased early gains on Thursday as investors turned cautious ahead of key global and domestic cues, triggering profit booking after a volatile session.

Benchmark indices ended nearly unchanged, pressured by heavyweight banking and blue-chip stocks. The mood was shaped by uncertainty around upcoming US-Iran nuclear talks and major data releases, including US initial jobless claims and India's GDP figures.

"Investors rotated towards non-cyclical pockets such as pharma and healthcare, while defence stocks gained on optimism over potential India-Israel technology transfer initiatives," said Vinod Nair, head of research at Geojit Investments. He added that sentiment improved late in the day after reports of meetings between Indian and US commerce officials raised hopes of progress in bilateral trade discussions.

The BSE Sensex slipped 27.46 points to close at 82,248.61 after swinging more than 600 points intraday. The NSE Nifty edged up 14.05 points to 25,496.55. Shares of Trent, Eternal, Power Grid, HDFC Bank, Asian Paints, UltraTech Cement, NTPC and Axis Bank weighed on the benchmarks, while Bharat Electronics, Sun Pharma, Adani Ports, Maruti and Bharti Airtel provided support.

Market strategists said strong institutional inflows failed to lift prices, reflecting a

**The mood was shaped by uncertainty around upcoming US-Iran nuclear talks and major data releases**

"sell on rallies" trend. "Despite heavy combined buying by foreign and domestic institutions, the market could not sustain its early momentum," said Dr. V. K. Vijayakumar, chief investment strategist at Geojit Investments.

He noted that as valuations stretch, bearish positions are increasing, likely limiting upside in the near term. Vijayakumar advised investors to gradually accumulate fundamentally strong stocks, particularly in financials, automobiles and capital goods. He also said information technology shares appear to be stabilising after a steep recent correction, even as uncertainty persists in the sector.

**'Processed food false narrative by influencers harming sector'**

Food Processing Industries Minister Chirag Paswan on Thursday said social media influencers are spreading a "false narrative" that processed food is harmful and called for a collective effort to counter it, warning that the misinformation was impeding the sector's growth. Addressing a session, Paswan said the perception that "processed food means not good" was being actively promoted online. "We are facing this challenge not only in our country, but also globally — the kind of false narrative through the influencers on processed food. Processed food means not good — such narrative is being set. I do not know the intention behind it. But this is being done," he said. "This is impacting the sector and it will increase further. We need to counter this narrative," he added. -PTI

**SEBI REVAMPS MFs CATEGORISATION RULE; INTRODUCES LIFE CYCLE FUNDS**

PTI NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) on Thursday came out with a revamped framework for classification of mutual fund schemes, introducing Life Cycle Funds, scrapping the Solution Oriented Schemes category and tightening disclosure and overlap norms to enhance uniformity and investor protection.

The move, aimed at ensuring "true-to-label" positioning and curbing exaggerated return claims in scheme names, comes as Sebi seeks to align the regulatory architecture with the evolving mutual fund landscape and emerging opportunities across asset classes. In its circular, Sebi has broadly classified schemes into five categories — equity, debt, hybrid, life cycle and other schemes — as well as



Fund of Fund Schemes and Passive Schemes such as Index Funds or ETFs (exchange traded funds). "For easy identification by investors, in order to bring uniformity in names of schemes for a particular category across mutual funds and to ensure that schemes remain 'true to-label', the scheme name shall be the same as the scheme category," Sebi said. "Words or phrases that highlight or emphasise only the return aspect of the scheme shall not be used in the name of the scheme," it added. The "type of scheme" description in offer documents and advertisements must strictly follow Sebi's prescribed format.

**Sebi asks regulated entities to disclose registration details on social media from May 1**

Sebi on Thursday directed all entities regulated by it to clearly display their registered name and registration number while posting securities market-related content on social media platforms.

The new rule will come into effect from May 1. The directive will apply to stock brokers, portfolio managers, Mutual Funds and other intermediaries and agents. Sebi said the move is aimed at helping investors easily identify content shared by registered and regulated entities and distinguish it from posts by unregistered or unregulated players operating on social media. As per the circular, the requirement will cover all types of content, including videos, written posts and other material related to the securities market.

**Sebi revises valuation methodology for gold, silver held by MFs**

Sebi on Thursday revised the valuation methodology for physical gold and silver held by mutual fund schemes, mandating the use of polled spot prices published by stock exchanges for calculating the value.

The spot prices used for settlement of physically delivered bullion derivatives contracts will now form the basis for pricing such holdings, replacing the earlier benchmark-linked approach.

This will become effective from April 1, 2026, Sebi said in its circular. "It has been decided that with effect from April 1, 2026, the mutual funds shall value physical gold and silver by using the polled spot prices published by the recognised stock exchanges which are used for settlement of physically delivered gold and silver derivatives contracts," Sebi said.

**'Customs procedures must speed up global access for exporters'**

PTI NEW DELHI

Revenue Secretary Arvind Shrivastava on Thursday said customs procedures must actively enable Indian exporters to access global markets with speed and certainty, as India increases its focus on expanding domestic manufacturing and supporting MSME and entrepreneurs.

Stating that the two main



resources and technology. Speaking at the National Symposium on Customs Reforms 2026, Shrivastava said the thought process of the relationship between the Revenue Department and stakeholders is changing. "Instead of an authoritative and adversarial relationship between the tax department and the industry, we are building a relationship of partnership, collaboration and cooperation," he said.

resources and technology. Speaking at the National Symposium on Customs Reforms 2026, Shrivastava said the thought process of the relationship between the Revenue Department and stakeholders is changing. "Instead of an authoritative and adversarial relationship between the tax department and the industry, we are building a relationship of partnership, collaboration and cooperation," he said.

**Shrivastava said the Customs department will make efforts to build systems and enhance capacities**

India today stands at an important juncture in its economic journey, he said, adding that expanding trade volumes, deeper integration into global value chains, a growing digital

commerce ecosystem and rising aspirations of citizens require governance systems that are efficient, transparent and responsive. "Equally significant is the focus on export opportunities. As India seeks to expand manufacturing and support MSME, digital entrepreneurs and startups, customs procedures must actively enable exporters to access global markets with speed and certainty," he said.

**Goyal meets US Commerce Secretary Lutnick, discusses trade and economic partnership**

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday met US Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick and US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor to discuss ways to further strengthen and expand trade relations between the two countries. "Hosted US Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick and US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor. Engaged in very fruitful discussions to expand our trade and economic partnership," Goyal said in a social media post.

The meeting holds immense importance as both countries are looking to finalise the legal text for the first phase of a bilateral trade agreement. Goyal on Tuesday had said "as soon as there is more



clarity on the tariffs front in the US, India will resume trade talks with America".

**AI like Y2K moment, to benefit Indian companies, says Goyal**

Seeking to address fears of job losses in the Indian IT sector due to the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI), Commerce

and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal expressed confidence that the new technology would enhance opportunities for Indian enterprises. The nature of jobs will evolve, the minister said, adding that he is "not worried at all" about the adverse impact of AI on jobs in the country.

The minister compared the massive AI spending by global companies in the past few years with the Y2K boom at the beginning of the 21st century. "Just like the Y2K moment, where India got a lot of opportunity when they thought the sky is going to fall on heads, but after Jan 1, 2000, we never looked back... I see AI as a similar turning point," Goyal said, speaking at an award event organised by EY. -PTI

**Silver declines by ₹7,400, gold by ₹1,300 amid weak global trends**

PTI NEW DELHI

Silver prices declined by Rs 7,400 to Rs 2,70 lakh per kg while gold dropped by Rs 1,300 to Rs 1,62 lakh per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday due to weak global trends and profit-booking by traders. According to the All India Sarafa Association, silver fell by Rs 7,400, or nearly 3 per cent, to Rs 2,70,500 per kg (inclusive of all taxes) from the previous closing level of Rs 2,77,900 per kg. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity

depreciated by Rs 1,300, or nearly 1 per cent, to Rs 1,62,900 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes). It had settled at Rs 1,64,200 per 10 grams in the previous market session.

Traders said the decline was largely driven by weak trends in the international markets and mild profit-booking after prices touched three-week highs earlier in the week. A firm US dollar further dampened the investor appetite for bullion. In the international market, spot silver decreased USD 1.91, or 2.15 per cent, to USD 87.28 per ounce.

**RBI clears SBI MF proposal to acquire 9.99% stake in Bandhan**

The Reserve Bank of India has approved a proposal by SBI Mutual Fund to acquire up to 9.99% stake in Bandhan Bank, according to a regulatory filing on Thursday.

The lender said the approval was conveyed in a letter dated February 25, 2026, permitting the fund house to build an aggregate holding of up to 9.99% of its paid-up share capital or voting rights. The clearance is subject to compliance with the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, the Reserve Bank's 2025 directions governing acquisition and holding of bank shares, the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999, and regulations issued by the Securities and Exchange Board of India, among other statutes.

The central bank has set a one-year deadline to complete the acquisition of the approved stake, failing which the permission will lapse. It has also capped the fund's aggregate holding at 9.99% at any time. If the holding falls below 5%, fresh regulatory approval will be required to raise it to 5% or more, the filing added.

**Govt bonds end lower on short sales before auction**

Informist MUMBAI

Prices of the most-traded government bonds ended lower on Thursday as traders made space in their portfolios ahead of the weekly gilt auction on Friday, dealers said. Some traders also expect India's GDP growth data to be higher than earlier estimates, which weighed on bond prices.

The 6.48%, 2035 gilt closed at ₹98.49, down from ₹98.61 on Wednesday. Its yield

closed at 6.6943%, up from 6.6777% at the end of Wednesday's trading session. Bonds maturing in 30 years or more erased all gains from earlier in the day but did not fall sharply. Losses in bonds maturing in up to five years were also limited.

The upcoming auction's large supply of the 10-year benchmark bond weighed the most on prices of the 6.48%, 2035 and 6.68%, 2040 gilts. The government will sell ₹32,000 crore of the 6.48%, 2035 bond on Friday.

**RBI calls for close coordination****DIGITAL FRAUDS**

PTI NEW DELHI

The Reserve Bank on Thursday said close coordination among all stakeholders is necessary to prevent or mitigate digital fraud.

A two-day workshop for executive directors and heads of fraud risk management of 60 major banks, conducted by the Reserve Bank of India, concluded on

Wednesday. The workshop was attended by officials from the Union Home Ministry's Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) and the Maharashtra Police.

"The need for close coordination among all stakeholders to effectively address the growing concerns arising from such frauds was also highlighted," the Reserve Bank of India said in a statement on Thursday.

The importance of robust governance and oversight



arrangements, strong internal controls, well-laid-out processes, and the use of advanced technologies for the prevention and mitigation of cyber-enabled frauds was emphasised, it said.

The central bank also asked banks to conduct

focused customer awareness drives as part of the efforts, it added.

Banks shared best practices and technological initiatives implemented by them for the prevention and mitigation of cyber-enabled frauds at the workshop, it said.

The workshop was part of the Reserve Bank's ongoing supervisory and developmental engagement with banks to address the incidence and increasing sophistication of cyber-enabled frauds, it added.

## Briefs

**'Reforms by Dr Singh helped take India on 30-yr econ growth'**

Former German chancellor Angela Merkel on Thursday hailed the economic reforms initiated by ex-prime minister late Manmohan Singh, and said they helped take India on a 30-year economic growth path. She also said that India has tremendous potential for economic development. Delivering the inaugural Dr Manmohan Singh Memorial Lecture, Merkel said that being the world's most populous country, India reported a more than 5 per cent growth rate in the past few years. She also lauded the FTA inked between India and the European Union recently, and recalled that she too had some contributions to it.

**Credit industry's AUM grows 17%**

India's lending industry's assets under management stood at Rs 130 lakh crore as of December 2025, reflecting a strong 17 per cent year-on-year growth, a report said on Thursday. The report from data and technology company Experian said credit sourcing of new loans in Q3 FY26 grew 36 per cent YoY compared to 7 per cent a year earlier, driven by sustained demand from consumers and businesses, the report further said. The report highlighted strong growth in lending activity, led by accelerated sourcing growth, rising secured lending, and improving asset quality.

**Engg goods exports cross \$100 bn mark in 10 months this fiscal**

Engineering goods exports from India grew by 4.52 per cent year-on-year to \$101.13 billion during the April-January period of 2025-26, crossing the \$100 billion mark for the first time in the current fiscal, EEPC India said on Thursday. Driven primarily by copper, iron and steel, and motor vehicles, engineering goods exports recorded a 10.4 per cent (on-year) rise in January to \$10.40 billion even as shipments to the US recorded a decline during this period.

**India Inc. likely to sustain 8-10% revenue growth in Q4**

The committee of Directors of Vedanta Ltd has approved raising up to ₹3,000 crore through debentures on a private placement basis. The fundraise is aimed at strengthening the company's capital structure while optimising borrowing costs. The company informed bourses that it will issue up to three lakh unsecured, rated, listed and redeemable non-convertible debentures (NCD) with a face value of ₹1,00,000 each, aggregating to ₹3,000 crore. The NCD will be listed on the BSE. Previous issues of debt instruments and bonds have attracted significant investor interest. In October last year, a \$500 million bond issue was oversubscribed three times, while an NCD issuance in June last year received nearly 60% oversubscription. The company continues to access domestic and international debt markets. The latest fundraise comes at a time when the conglomerate has been gradually deleveraging its balance sheet and refinancing debt to lower overall borrowing costs.

**PNGS Reva Diamond IPO subscribed 1.23 times**

The initial public offer of PNGS Reva Diamond Jewellery Ltd got subscribed 1.23 times on the final day of bidding on Thursday. The Rs 380-crore IPO received bids for 70,31,776 shares against 57,06,235 shares on offer, as per NSE data. The portion for non-institutional investors fetched 1.54 times subscription, while the quota for RIs got subscribed 1.29 times. QIBs category received 1.04 times subscription.

**Eligible manufacturer-importers to get duty deferment facility from Mar**

PTI NEW DELHI

The Revenue Department will roll out the 30-day duty deferral facility for eligible manufacturer-importers from March, which will help them better manage liquidity, a senior official said on Thursday.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Budget for 2026-27 had proposed to provide eligible manufacturer-importers the same duty deferral facility as is available to Authorised Economic Operators (AEO).

This was done to encourage such importers to get

themselves accredited as full-fledged Tier 3 AEO in due course.

The Budget also enhanced the duty deferral period for Tier 2 and Tier 3 AEO from 15 days to 30 days.

Speaking at the National Symposium on Customs Reforms 2026, Revenue Department Joint Secretary (Customs) Anupam Prakash said at present there are about 6,000 entities operating under the Customs trusted ecosystem, of which 1,500 entities have AEO T2 and T3 accreditation.

"We want to increase the number of entities in trusted scenarios. For eligible manu-



facturer-importers, the process will start from next month. They will get the same duty deferment feature and the capital available with these importers will improve and they can contribute to manufacturing and export,"

Prakash said.

He also said that the Customs Department is discussing with other Government departments how the trusted ecosystem could be further enhanced.

This would mean from next

**Sitharaman in the Budget for 2026-27 had proposed to provide eligible manufacturer-importers the same duty deferment facility as is available to Authorised Economic Operators (AEO).**

month eligible manufacturer-importers can clear goods on the day of import and have the option to pay customs duty within 30 days.

**IRFC OFS fails to get full subscription**

PTI NEW DELHI

The Government's 2% share sale offer in Indian Railway Finance Corporation Ltd (IRFC) failed to get full subscription on the final day, with both retail and institutional investors giving a lacklustre response to the offer for sale (OFS).

On Feb 24, the Government proposed to sell over 26.13 crore shares, or a 2% stake, in IRFC at a floor price of ₹104 per share, along with a green shoe option of an equal number in the two-day OFS.

Of the 23.52 crore shares reserved for institutional investors, bids were received



for 22.34 crore IRFC shares on Wednesday. The bids represented 94.98% of the shares offered to such investors.

After market hours on Wednesday, the Government decided not to exercise the green shoe option. Of the over 3.79 crore shares offered to retail investors on Thursday, bids were received for about 5.9 lakh shares.

**IRFC board to null second interim dividend for FY26 on March 9**

The board of IRFC will meet on March 9 to consider paying a second interim dividend for 2025-26 (April-March). If approved, the record date for the dividend will be March 13, the company said in an exchange filing on Thursday.

The trading window for designated persons will be closed from Feb 27 till 48 hours after the outcome of the board meeting is declared.

In the current financial year, IRFC had earlier paid an interim dividend of ₹1.05 per share after reporting its earnings for the September quarter.

**Motilal Oswal Alternates raises ₹1,700 crore private credit fund**

PTI MUMBAI

Motilal Oswal Alternates on Thursday announced the first closure of its private credit fund, India Credit Excellence Fund I, at ₹1,700 crore.

The fund also includes ₹200 crore in commitments from the Motilal Oswal Group, a company statement said.

The fund will focus on secured lending and customised solutions targeting mid-market businesses that are profitable, growing and fundamentally creditworthy but unable to access capital at the



right tenor and structure from banks or capital markets, the release added.

"India's private credit market is at an inflection point. We estimate the addressable market to grow to over ₹10 lakh crore over the next few years. This will be driven by mid-market corporates actively seeking flexible, non-dilutive capital as traditional financing channels face structural con-

**Jio Financial Services infuses ₹2K cr in arm**

PTI NEW DELHI

Jio Financial Services Ltd (JFSL) on Thursday said it has infused ₹2,000 crore in its subsidiary Jio Credit Ltd to fund business growth.

The company has subscribed to and has been allotted 3,35,71,923 equity shares of ₹10 each of Jio Credit Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary and non-banking financial company, for cash at a premium of ₹585.70 per equity share, aggregating ₹1,99,98.88 crore, JFSL said in a statement.

Jio Credit Ltd will utilise the amount to fund its business operations, it said.

Last month, JFSL reported

**Jio Credit Ltd will utilise the amount to fund its business operations**

a 9% drop in consolidated profit at ₹269 crore in the third quarter ended December 2025.

The company had earned a consolidated net profit of ₹295 crore in the same quarter of the previous fiscal.

However, its consolidated net profit stood at ₹695 crore in the second quarter of the current fiscal.

Total income nearly doubled to ₹901 crore from ₹449 crore in the third quarter of the previous fiscal.

**Two promoters sell 5.2% stake in Home First via bulk deals for ₹6.60 billion**

Informist NEW DELHI

Home First Finance Ltd's two promoters, Aether (Mauritius) and True North Fund V, sold a 5.2% stake for ₹6.60 billion at ₹1,190 per share.

True North Fund V sold around a 2.6% stake in Home First Finance Ltd in two bulk deals, while Aether (Mauritius) sold around a 2.5% stake. At the end of the December quarter, True North Fund V held a 7.5% stake and Aether (Mauritius) held a 4.9% stake in the listed company.

At the same time, Pictet - Indian Equities bought a 1.7% stake in Home First Finance Ltd and Societe Generale bought a 0.8% stake in a bulk deal each.

Shares of the company closed at ₹1,177 per share on Thursday on the NSE, down 5.7% from Wednesday.

**GMDC, NTPC in pact to explore coal, lignite gasification, end use**

Gujarat Mineral Development Corporation Ltd (GMDC) on Thursday said it has signed a memorandum of understanding with state-run power firm NTPC Ltd to explore developing a framework to study the feasibility of gasifying coal from its blocks in Odisha and lignite from its mines in Gujarat for downstream use.

While GMDC will undertake pilot projects for gasification, NTPC will assess the potential end-use application of the syngas produced, including evaluation of techno-commercial viability, market opportunities and applicability across relevant industrial sectors. Following the pilot initiatives, NTPC and GMDC will work to develop a framework to jointly produce, market and commercialise the syngas. -Informist

**Vedanta to raise up to ₹3K cr via debentures**

PTI NEW DELHI

The committee of Directors of Vedanta Ltd has approved raising up to ₹3,000 crore through debentures on a private placement basis.

The fundraise is aimed at strengthening the company's capital structure while optimising borrowing costs.

The company informed bourses that it will issue up to three lakh unsecured, rated, listed and redeemable non-convertible debentures (NCD) with a face value of ₹1,00,000 each, aggregating to ₹3,000

crore. The NCD will be listed on the BSE. Previous issues of debt instruments and bonds have attracted significant investor interest.

In October last year, a \$500 million bond issue was oversubscribed three times, while an NCD issuance in June last year received nearly 60% oversubscription. The company continues to access domestic and international debt markets. The latest fundraise comes at a time when the conglomerate has been gradually deleveraging its balance sheet and refinancing debt to lower overall borrowing costs.

**InvIT investors get return of ₹5,565 cr in Q3**

Listed Infrastructure

Investment Trusts (InvIT) collectively distributed ₹5,565 crore to around four lakh unitholders during the third quarter of FY26, marking another quarter of steady growth. The sector, comprising 26 business trusts, distributed ₹4,287 crore to unitholders in the second quarter of the ongoing financial year. Distribution represents the overall return paid out to unitholders and comprises multiple components such as interest, dividends, repayment of capital and other income streams. -PTI

**Creditors can pursue simultaneous CIRP against both debtors, guarantors**

PTI NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday said simultaneous Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) proceedings are maintainable against both a principal debtor and its corporate guarantor for the same debt.

A bench comprising Justices Dipankar Datta and Augustine George Masih held that there is no statutory bar under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) preventing a financial creditor from initiating parallel action



to recover dues.

"The Judge is not to innovate at pleasure. He is not a knight errant roaming at will in pursuit of his own ideal of beauty or of goodness," Justice Datta wrote in the opening of the 47-page judgment. "Thus, whilst approving that the IBC is not a recovery proceeding, we negate the contention that CIRP can be prohibited against a guarantor or co-bor-

**NSE CEO Chauhan pitches for minimum qualifying criteria for derivatives trading**

PTI MUMBAI

NSE Managing Director and CEO Ashishkumar Chauhan on Thursday made a case for minimum qualifying criteria for those participating in derivatives trading to prevent people from lower strata of society from wasting money on speculation.

In light of capital markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi)'s finding that over 90% of traders lose money in derivatives trading, the head of the IPO-bound stock exchange said no developing country can allow lower strata



citizens to waste money, energy and resources on speculation.

Speaking at an event here, Chauhan proposed minimum qualifying criteria for participating in derivatives, in line with similar regulations in Singapore, the US and other countries, so that lower strata people do not participate in

the Indian derivatives market and lose money.

Both the Government and regulatory bodies have taken numerous measures to curb retail participation in the futures and options segments, aiming to channel more money into the cash segment.

The Government in the 2026-27 Budget raised the securities transaction tax in a bid to dissuade people from speculative trading.

The policy and regulatory measures have impacted volumes in the market. Stockbrokers and bourses derive a sizeable proportion of their revenue from executing trades.

**Canara Bank raises ₹5K cr via 10-yr Tier-II bonds at 7.24% coupon**

PTI MUMBAI

State-run lender Canara Bank on Thursday raised ₹5,000 crore through a bond sale.

The Basel III-compliant Tier-II bonds maturing in 10 years were sold at a coupon rate of 7.24%, market sources said. The base issue was ₹2,000 crore, while the remaining amount was raised by utilising the green shoe option, they said.

The lender received five bids for a cumulative amount of ₹1,970 crore at a 7.20% cou-

pon, two bids each for cumulative amounts of ₹2,970 crore, ₹3,610 crore and ₹4,430 crore at coupon rates of 7.21%, 7.22% and 7.23%, respectively, market participants said.

Additionally, the bank received five bids for a cumulative amount of ₹5,350 crore at a 7.24% coupon and two bids for a cumulative amount of ₹5,403 crore at a 7.25% coupon, market participants added.

The lender accepted the bid at 7.24%, choosing to raise up to the upper limit of ₹5,000 crore, they said.

**GAIL breaks ground for 30-acre R&D centre in Sohna, Haryana**

GAIL (India) Ltd on Thursday conducted the groundbreaking ceremony for its upcoming R&D Centre at Sohna, Haryana. Spread over 30 acres, the upcoming facility is envisioned as a state-of-the-art innovation hub aimed at strengthening GAIL's technological capabilities across its core natural gas

business and emerging clean energy segments. The centre will house seven key research verticals, including natural gas pipeline integrity and asset management, natural gas applications and NG/CO<sub>2</sub> valorisation, petrochemicals and polymers, renewables, biotechnology, nanotechnology, and advanced analytical sciences.

**Briefs**

**Crisil Intelligence launches GenAI platform**

Crisil Intelligence on Thursday announced the launch of a generative artificial intelligence-led research, data and analytics platform. The platform christened 'i360' is aimed at delivering vital, actionable intelligence instantly, as per an official statement.

**ICICI Prudential tie-up with SK Finance**

ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Company on Thursday announced a tie-up with SK Finance under which the non-bank lender's customers will get group credit protection. The lender will offer credit life insurance solutions to over 9.3 lakh customers and enable them to provide financial security to their families, as per an official statement.

**Kotak Mahindra Bank initiative for women entrepreneurs**

Kotak Mahindra Bank and IIM-Bangalore's incubation centre NSRCEL on Thursday launched an initiative focused on nurturing women entrepreneurs. The initiative christened 'Womentum 2026' will focus on founders beyond the metro cities, an official statement said.

**Kaynes Sanand expansion timeline**

Kaynes Semiconductor expects its mass manufacturing unit at Sanand to be ready by the September quarter of the current financial year, with the entire facility slated to become fully operational by the end of 2028, a senior company executive has said. Addressing the IESA Vision Summit 2026 in Bengaluru, Rajeev Sethi, Vice-President for Sales at Kaynes Semiconductor, outlined the phased development of the company's outsourced semiconductor assembly and testing (OSAT) plant. He noted that the Sanand facility has been structured into three distinct units, of which one is already operational. The company's pilot production line is currently functional and has a capacity to manufacture three lakh chips per month. This initial phase marks the beginning of Kaynes' entry into scaled semiconductor production and supports early customer engagements.

**Saatvik Green bags new order**

Saatvik Green Energy Ltd, one of India's fastest-growing fully integrated renewable energy company has announced that it has received and accepted an order aggregating to Rs 87.10 crore from a renowned Independent Power Producer (IPP)/EPC player for the supply of solar photovoltaic (PV) modules. The order is scheduled to be executed by March 2026. This significant order win reinforces sustained demand for Saatvik's high-quality solar modules and further strengthens the Company's growing footprint among leading IPP and EPC players in India's expanding renewable energy sector. The development underscores continued customer confidence in Saatvik's advanced manufacturing capabilities, product reliability, and timely execution track record.

# India's energy demand to overtake US, China

**PTI**  
NEW DELHI

India's role in the global energy system is set to expand sharply, with its energy demand projected to surpass that of the US in the 2040s and overtake China in the 2060s, according to an India-focused scenarios sketch released by Shell India.

Titled India's Energy Transition in a Security-Focused Age, the report outlines three possible futures shaped by geopolitics, digitalisation and climate imperatives: Archipelagos, Surge and Horizon.

India's energy demand has grown nearly 40% over the past decade, driven by rapid economic expansion and population growth. The report states that as this momentum continues, India's position in the global energy landscape will strengthen significantly.

The analysis indicates that



fossil fuels' share in India's energy mix is expected to peak this decade. While their proportion may decline thereafter, absolute consumption could continue to rise across scenarios as overall energy demand potentially doubles over the next two to three decades.

The report highlights a structural pivot from imported fossil fuels to domestically produced renewable energy, a shift

expected to enhance energy security while advancing decarbonisation.

Solar and wind energy have expanded from around 3% of final electricity consumption in 2015 to more than 20% at present. Across all scenarios, they are projected to account for 59% or more of electricity generation by 2050.

Low-carbon fuels are expected to play a major role in India's future energy mix, particularly in hard-to-electricity sectors. The report points to strong domestic bioenergy potential and supportive policy measures as key drivers of growth. However, even as fossil fuels' share declines, overall volumes are projected to increase as India's total energy needs rise.

**Shell report projects India's energy demand to surpass US and China in coming decades**

Electricity's share in total energy demand is now comparable to that of advanced economies. Natural gas and liquefied natural gas are expected to serve as transition fuels, with demand projected to rise by 50% or more over the next decade to support grid reliability, industrial expansion and artificial intelligence-driven power consumption.

# Bullion futures down amid stronger dollar, Fed pause

**Informist**  
MUMBAI

Gold and silver futures declined on the Multi Commodity Exchange of India on Thursday, tracking losses on the COMEX as the US dollar strengthened and expectations grew of a prolonged pause in interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve.

A firmer dollar typically makes commodities priced in the currency, such as gold and silver, more expensive for holders of other currencies, thereby dampening demand. At 1608 IST, the dollar index, which measures the greenback against a basket of six currencies, was up 0.1% at 97.75.

At 1609 IST, the most-active April gold contract on the MCX was down 1% at ₹159,445 per 10 grams. On the COMEX, the corresponding April contract was 0.6% lower at \$5,197.1 per ounce. The most-active May silver contract on the MCX fell 4% to ₹267,751 per kilogram, while the same



contract on the COMEX declined 4% to \$87.61 per ounce. Chicago Federal Reserve President Austan Goolsbee said interest rate reductions would not be appropriate until clearer evidence emerged that inflation was easing.

Federal Reserve Governor Christopher Waller said policymakers could look through the impact of tariffs, adding that recent data suggested the labour market was in better condition than previously indicated, reducing the urgency for further rate cuts. Despite the decline, gold prices remained above the psychologically significant

\$5,200 per ounce level earlier in the session as investors monitored developments surrounding US-Iran talks scheduled for later in the day.

Analysts said safe-haven demand could limit the downside amid persistent global trade uncertainty and geopolitical tensions. Market participants are closely watching the outcome of discussions between US and Iranian officials in Geneva aimed at resolving their long-running nuclear dispute. Tariff-related uncertainty has also supported demand for precious metals.

President Donald Trump recently imposed a baseline 10% tariff on all US imports for 150 days after the US Supreme Court struck down most of the earlier levies. He has also indicated the possibility of raising the baseline tariff to 15%, although no executive order has yet been signed.

Traders are now awaiting US Producer Price Index data and weekly unemployment claims for further direction.

# 'Sustained capital mobilisation vital for India's 2047 goal'

**PTI**  
NEW DELHI

India must sustain the mobilisation of both domestic and global capital if it is to achieve developed economy status by 2047, Chief Economic Adviser V. Anantha Nageswaran said on Thursday.

Addressing the Global Securities Markets Conclave 2.0 at Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City), Nageswaran emphasised that the country's objective was not merely to attract financial flows, but to channel them into productive investment.

"The objective is not merely to attract financial flows, but to channel them towards productive investments that enhance productivity, strengthen infrastructure, foster innovation and generate employment," he said. He underlined the need for a financial system that blends technological sophistication with institutional prudence, describing such a framework as a stabilising force in an increasingly uncertain global environment. Cautioning against over-reliance on emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, the Chief Economic Adviser said technology alone could not create vibrant financial markets. "The financial ecosystem flourishes when regulators, market participants



**Long-term, demonstrable commitment to India's productive economy reduces the cost of capital for everyone who seeks returns**

and innovators perform complementary roles," he observed. According to Nageswaran, policymakers can provide stability and predictability, but liquidity, innovation and market depth ultimately depend on investors, intermediaries and institutions. India's financial sector reforms, he added, reflect an effort to contribute constructively to the evolving global financial system. He called upon investors, asset managers and financial entrepreneurs to commit patient capital and engage constructively with regulators.

# Gold enters structural bull cycle, says MOFSL report

**PTI**  
MUMBAI

Gold has entered a long-term structural uptrend, driven by global de-dollarisation, mounting fiscal stress and intensifying geopolitical tensions, according to Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd (MOFSL).

In its latest Precious Metals Quarterly Report, the brokerage said gold prices crossed USD 5,000 per ounce in early 2026, marking one of the strongest bull phases in modern history. It described the current rally not as a cyclical upswing but as a "structural repricing phase" signalling the start of a new supercycle.

MOFSL expects Comex gold to move towards USD 6,000 per ounce over the next 12 months, translating to around Rs1.85

**Central banks have also been steady buyers, adding roughly 1,000 tonnes annually over the past four years to diversify reserves away from dollar-based assets**

lakh per 10 grams domestically. In the medium term, prices could climb to USD 7,500 per ounce if geopolitical risks and fiscal pressures intensify further. Navneet Damani, Head of Research, Commodities at MOFSL, said the long-term outlook for gold remains positive as global reserves gradually diversify away from dollar-centric assets while physical supply stays constrained.

"Gold prices are likely to remain supported around and above USD 5,000 per ounce," he said.

The brokerage noted that gold continued to rally between 2023 and 2025 even when real interest rates were positive — a period when prices typically weaken. This divergence, it said, reflects growing investor concern over rising global debt and doubts about the long-term stability of fiscal and monetary systems.

Manav Modi, Analyst — Commodities at MOFSL, said gold's resilience despite positive real rates signals a shift in investor thinking. Real returns are increasingly viewed as policy-driven and temporary, lowering the opportunity cost of holding gold and reinforcing its appeal as a hedge against systemic risks.

# Govt bonds anchor India's sustainable debt market: S&P

**PTI**  
NEW DELHI

India's sovereign green bonds continue to provide stability to the country's sustainable debt market, even as overall issuance remains relatively subdued, according to a recent outlook report by S&P.

Across the Asia-Pacific region, nearly \$180 billion worth of sustainable bonds issued during the 2020–2021 boom years are scheduled to mature in 2026, potentially reshaping supply dynamics. However, in India, fresh issuance is expected to remain modest, with government-backed green tranches serving as the primary pillar of activity amid limited corporate participation.

India's sustainable bond issuance declined to \$2 billion in 2025, reflecting cautious market sentiment and tighter financial conditions. Green bonds dominated the landscape, accounting for 62% of total volumes, while the remaining share comprised social bonds. The report noted that green-labelled instruments stand to benefit from India's ambitious climate objectives. Under the framework of the country's Climate Finance Taxonomy, annual investments of approximately \$250

**Sovereign green bonds dominate India's sustainable market amid modest issuance and limited corporate participation**

billion will be required until 2047 to meet long-term sustainability and energy transition goals. This sustained capital requirement is expected to provide structural support to green financing instruments.

By contrast, social bonds — including those linked to financial inclusion and women's empowerment — are likely to remain a niche segment. Investors often perceive such instruments as more complex, limiting broader uptake.

Sovereign issuances have played a dominant role in shaping the domestic market. In 2025, they accounted for 94% of India's green bond issuance and 58 per cent of the overall sustainable bond market. Additional tranches of rupee-denominated sovereign green bonds have helped establish a domestic green yield curve, attracting strong institutional interest.

# Airtel's NBFC foray seen cash flow neutral

**ANI**  
NEW DELHI

Bharti Airtel's entry into the non-banking financial company space is poised to become a strategic growth lever, with analysts at Citi Research indicating that the planned capital infusion is unlikely to strain the telecom major's financial position.

The brokerage notes that Airtel currently generates robust annual consolidated free cash flows of approximately ₹600 billion, excluding spectrum-related payments. Alongside this, the company

**Airtel's move into lending is expected to diversify revenues without straining balance sheet strength**

has initiated the final call on its partly-paid rights issue, further strengthening its capital base. In Citi's assessment, the proposed ₹200 billion infusion into the NBFC business over the coming years should not materially affect Airtel's leverage profile or liquidity. Over the past two

years, Airtel has quietly built a credible lending service provider model by harnessing technology, data analytics and deep customer insights. The next phase involves integrating this digital credit engine with a fully licensed NBFC structure, following regulatory approval from the Reserve Bank of India. This transition enables Airtel to deploy its own balance sheet to scale lending operations. The company's digital lending platform has already recorded cumulative disbursements of nearly ₹90 billion, supported by underwriting systems,

portfolio management tools and real-time risk monitoring frameworks. With a monthly run rate exceeding ₹5 billion, the foundation appears firmly established. Citi describes the NBFC venture as a "natural adjacency", allowing Airtel to diversify beyond core telecom services while leveraging its expansive customer base, distribution reach and a data science team exceeding 500 professionals. The strategy aims to extend beyond personal and gold loans over time, deepening product offerings and enhancing revenue streams.

# Tata deploys hydrogen trucks at VOC Port

Tata Motors is set to deploy 40 green hydrogen-powered heavy-duty trucks at V.O. Chidambaranar Port, marking a significant stride in India's transition towards sustainable port-led logistics.

The initiative follows a memorandum of understanding signed with the V.O. Chidambaranar Port Authority, in the presence of Sarbananda Sonowal, Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways. The collaboration will begin with trials of a hydrogen-powered prime mover, followed by the phased induction of H2 internal combustion engine (ICE) prime movers over the next two years.

At the heart of the fleet is the Tata Prima 55-tonne prime mover, engineered to deliver high performance while reducing emissions. Designed for cost-efficient and sustainable transportation, the trucks are expected to handle demanding cargo operations within the port ecosystem. The Ministry-funded pilot underscores the Centre's commitment to advancing green hydrogen adoption and accelerating decarbonisation across critical infrastructure. By introducing hydrogen-powered heavy-duty vehicles into live port operations, the project aims to evaluate their operational feasibility and total cost of ownership parity compared with conventional diesel trucks. Tata Motors' commercial vehicles leadership described the initiative as a milestone in mainstreaming hydrogen trucking within industrial applications. Months of preparatory assessments have focused on integrating hydrogen vehicles into cargo handling workflows without compromising efficiency or reliability. —PTI

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# Gen X emerges as premium powerhouse; per capita spending rises

**PTI**  
NEW DELHI

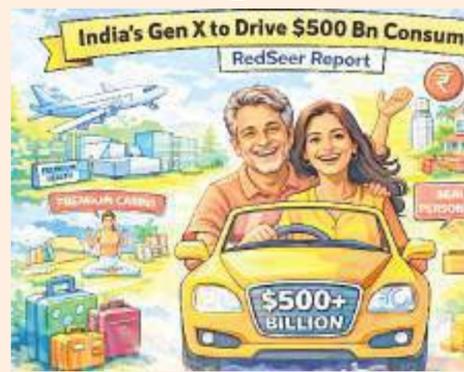
India's Generation X is projected to consume goods and services worth over USD 500 billion by FY30, underpinned by rising per capita spending and growing preference for premium, outcome-driven products, according to a report by consulting firm RedSeer.

The report, titled "The Sorted Generation: Gen X as India's Hidden Consumer Powerhouse", highlights that Indians aged roughly 45–60

years are emerging as a disproportionately valuable cohort for durable, premium growth across sectors.

Spending on preventive healthcare is expected to reach USD 73 billion by FY30, expanding at a 17% CAGR, as Gen X shifts focus from reactive treatment to longevity-led prevention. The report notes a marked transition towards proactive wellness, regular diagnostics, and lifestyle management.

Similarly, nutraceutical spending is projected to touch USD 20 billion by FY30,



growing at a robust 25% CAGR, reflecting an outcomes-first approach to everyday health optimisation. Commenting on the findings, Mriganak Gutguthia, Partner at RedSeer Strategy Consultants, said Gen X is perhaps the most understated force in India's consumption narrative. Financially secure and digitally confident, this cohort is deliberate in its choices, prioritising health outcomes, experiential travel, well-designed homes, and products built for longevity.

"As India's retail market approaches the trillion-dollar mark, Gen X will determine where premiumisation gains depth and where long-term brand loyalty is established," Gutguthia said.

The report also points to efficacy-led premiumisation in beauty and personal care (BPC), with the Gen X BPC segment projected to reach USD 8 billion by FY30 as preferences shift from trend-driven purchases to treatment-based solutions.

In travel, Gen X consumers are opting for slower, com-

fort-led experiences. The segment has recorded a 25% year-on-year increase in alternative accommodations, including luxury villas and boutique stays, alongside a strong preference for premium airline cabins and five-star hotels. Education continues to remain a "legacy spend" for Gen X parents. Urban households are investing between Rs 10–20 lakh per child annually, with rising adoption of international curricula such as Cambridge and IB programmes, as well as overseas education pathways.

DII / FPI trading activity			
	BUY VALUE	SELL VALUE	NET VALUE
DII	19,242.72	14,211.15	5,031.57
FII / FPI	14,607.90	18,073.89	-3,465.99

All figures in ₹ crores

Never invest in a business you cannot understand.

Warren Buffett



# Mkts end flat amid heightened volatility



## Motilal Oswal Wealth Management

**MUMBAI**  
Nifty index opened positive but failed to hold its opening highs of 25570 zones and drifted lower in the first half of the session. It recovered from 25400 zones and closed in marginal gains. Index has been hovering in a choppy manner and fresh follow up buying is required for momentum to continue. It formed a bearish candle on the daily frame with long lower shadow indicating support based buying is intact. Now it has to cross and hold above 25500 zones for strength to rebuild towards 25650 then 25750 zones while supports can be seen at 25350 then 25250 zones. On option front, Maximum Call OI is at 25500 then 25600 strike while Maximum Put OI is at 25500 then 25400 strike. Call writing is seen at 25500 then 25600 strike while Put writing is seen at 25400 then 25450 strike. Option data suggests a broader trading range in between 25000 to 26000 zones while an immediate range between 25300 to 25700 levels. S&P BSE Sensex index opened on positive note and traded within a narrow range of nearly 250 points during the first two hours of session. However, it later broke this range and witnessed profit booking towards 81950 zones. In the last hour index saw some

recovery helping it to close on flattish note. On the daily chart, it formed a small bodied candle with longer lower shadow indicating buying interest at lower levels. However, follow up buying will be required to resume upward momentum. Now it has to cross and hold above 82500 zones for strength to rebuild towards 82700 then 83000 zones while supports can be seen at 82000 then 81700 zones. Bank Nifty index opened marginally negative but buying interest was visible from lower levels towards 61250 zones in the initial hour of the session. However it failed to hold at higher zones and drifted lower towards 60800 levels but some recovery was seen again in the last hour of the session. It formed a small bodied candle on daily scale as buying interest is visible at lower zones but momentum is missing at the higher levels. Now it has to hold above 61000 zones for an up move towards 61500 then 61765 marks while on the downside support is seen at 61000 then 60750 zones. Nifty future closed positive with gains of 0.03% at 25637 levels. Positive setup seen in Fortis, Bank of Baroda, BEL, CG Power, Shriram Finance, Lupin, Eicher Motors, Motherson, SBIN and Sun Pharma while weakness in CDSL, Lodha, Muthoot Finance, Eternal, Asian Paints, CAMS, Coforge, Dixon, Kfin Technologies and Hudco.

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## Swiggy, IRCTC expand 'Food on Train' service across India

Food delivery and quick commerce firm Swiggy on Thursday said it has expanded its 'Food on Train' service, in collaboration with IRCTC, to 152 stations across India in 12-month period, up from 70 stations a year-ago, driven by a rising nation-wide demand for diverse culinary options. The company also said it plans to focus on diversity by doubling down on transit hubs across India, from major junctions to regional stops like Itarsi (Madhya Pradesh), Tirunelveli (Tamil Nadu) and Kharagpur (West Bengal). Swiggy has doubled down on its 'Food on Train' service, marking a 117 per cent growth in network expansion-- from 70 stations in

February 2025 to 152 stations as of February 2026, it said.

Swiggy also announced the launch of Holi special food menu for travellers from February 28 to March 8 and said that it also has expanded its 'Train Friendly Dishes' menu, a segment engineered for high-speed convenience. "This nationwide expansion is perfectly timed for the Holi travel rush. We will be focusing on diversity by doubling down on diversity by doubling down on transit hubs across India, from major junctions to regional stops like Itarsi, Tirunelveli, and Kharagpur," said Deepak Maloo, Vice President for food strategy, customer experience and new initiatives at Swiggy. —PTI

## Shadowfax sets up automated sortation facility in Delhi

Shadowfax on Thursday said its largest automated sortation facility, set up at an investment of Rs 50 crore in the National Capital Region, is now fully functional. The 2.1 lakh sq ft facility is equipped with an automated sorter capable of processing 48,000 shipments per hour, a benchmark that ranks among the

highest in the Indian logistics industry, with a peak capacity of 1-million shipments per day. The sorting centre with up to 80 direct linehaul routes, which bypass intermediate hubs, serves as the nodal point for the company's dedicated same-day and next-day delivery vertical, Shadowfax Prime, it said.

## Hot stocks

Company Name	25/2/2026	7 DSMA	21 DSMA	50 DSMA	250 DSMA	BSE 1 Year High Price	Pu/Sre
Ajanta Pharma	3022.60	2965.86	2886.26	2797.42	2624.65	3041.10	100
Data Pattern	3071.70	2977.06	2782.24	2647.44	2557.44	3267.20	100
Anand Rathi Wea.	3055.40	3031.83	2977.22	3023.85	2541.92	3323.85	100
P I Industries	3097.00	3068.68	3130.91	3186.15	3588.93	4329.00	100
Akzo Nobel	3090.85	3071.24	2956.07	3048.16	3343.36	3909.25	100
Thermax	3184.45	3111.39	2964.93	2963.48	3252.87	4088.00	100
Timken India	3332.55	3204.22	3155.88	3077.88	3003.90	3575.65	100
Siemens	3348.90	3243.83	3181.21	3094.32	3060.18	3411.50	100
L&T Technology	3272.10	3386.23	3634.04	4014.96	4271.82	4883.60	100
Gujarat Fluoroch	3488.80	3447.57	3341.97	3413.99	3606.44	4097.60	100
M & M	3491.50	3461.50	3510.58	3585.38	3290.86	3840.00	100
Muthoot Finance	3504.30	3471.19	3648.54	3768.95	2937.09	4149.00	100
Netweb Technol.	3629.00	3482.87	3268.36	3234.90	2556.64	4480.00	100
eClerx Services	3298.55	3502.10	4026.33	4346.27	3803.27	4985.95	100
Escorts Kubota	3596.90	3512.51	3570.10	3644.06	3474.95	4171.35	100
BASF India	3524.80	3581.91	3677.19	3736.50	4458.64	5418.20	100
GE Vernova T&D	3815.15	3691.46	3553.00	3186.63	2536.33	3862.00	100
CEAT	3747.60	3799.96	3854.74	3817.36	3527.21	4431.60	100
TVS Motor Co.	3931.95	3855.36	3782.36	3730.49	3160.64	3944.90	100
Avenue Super.	3886.20	3870.58	3849.18	3799.45	4098.15	4916.30	100
Kaynes Tech	3908.65	3900.26	3805.18	3815.49	5468.58	7705.00	100
AIA Engineering	3909.75	3926.13	3973.24	3932.71	3430.03	4200.00	100
Supreme Inds.	4052.15	3942.86	3776.38	3578.65	3871.69	4740.00	100
Schaeffler India	4266.40	3957.44	3843.20	3802.71	3843.16	4392.85	100
Trent	3928.10	4062.06	4043.94	4052.45	4907.68	6259.00	100
Hind.Aeronautics	3984.45	4109.44	4215.18	4324.46	4492.72	5166.00	100
Titan Company	4326.65	4258.66	4167.82	4103.49	3619.79	4379.95	100
Torrent Pharma	4419.80	4294.09	4117.25	3995.36	3543.54	4443.00	100
Larsen & Toubro	4299.70	4319.80	4147.85	4054.92	3699.94	4440.00	100
CRISIL	4535.90	4555.06	4632.10	4563.06	4872.11	6329.95	100
Siemens	4890.75	4633.10	4489.68	4302.85	4502.03	5490.00	100
KEI Industries	4947.70	4713.38	4485.67	4362.39	3833.70	4974.00	100
Tata Elxsi	4577.60	4755.25	5091.38	5275.18	5601.35	6733.50	100
Bayer Crop Sci.	4730.60	4770.16	4632.84	4520.58	5061.75	6539.95	100
Cummins India	4918.50	4774.84	4446.20	4319.43	3719.52	4958.75	100
LTI Mindtree	4564.45	4851.97	5390.25	5793.83	5708.96	6430.00	100

## Top gainers (value)

Company Name	25/2/2026	26/2/2026	Chg in ₹	% Chg
Hitachi Energy	24995.65	25386.75	391.10	1.56
TVS Holdings	15160.10	15543.80	383.70	2.53
Mah. Scooters	13271.75	13566.55	294.80	2.22
Solar Industries	13460.35	13742.05	281.70	2.09
Oracle Fin.Serv.	6611.40	6857.15	245.75	3.72
Apar Inds.	10582.20	10790.60	208.40	1.97
Eicher Motors	8010.45	8192.20	181.75	2.27
Linde India	6715.50	6894.25	178.75	2.66
Force Motors	25258.05	25431.85	173.80	0.69
Data Pattern	3071.70	3244.40	172.70	5.62
Bosch	36573.00	36732.75	159.75	0.44
Polycab India	8350.55	8504.00	153.45	1.84
Maruti Suzuki	15060.10	15213.05	152.95	1.02
Alkem Lab	5617.85	5750.75	132.90	2.37
Mankind Pharma	2155.05	2280.05	125.00	5.80
Tube Investments	2617.60	2718.65	101.05	3.86
Schaeffler India	4266.40	4346.15	79.75	1.87
Divi's Lab.	6398.10	6470.30	72.20	1.13
Netweb Technol.	3629.00	3697.75	68.75	1.89
J K Cements	5666.20	5734.30	68.10	1.20
KEI Industries	4947.70	5007.00	59.30	1.20
Navin Fluo.Intl.	6427.75	6484.30	56.55	0.88
Tejas Networks	317.90	327.35	54.45	17.13
GE Vernova T&D	3815.15	3864.70	49.55	1.30
Hero Motocorp	5737.25	5786.70	49.45	0.86
Garden Reach Sh.	2423.05	2470.20	47.15	1.95
Finolex Cables	826.30	871.80	45.50	5.51
Persistent Systems	4731.55	4776.00	44.45	0.94
Cummins India	4918.50	4962.30	43.80	0.89
ZF Commercial	15484.20	15527.95	43.75	0.28
Glennmark Pharma.	2084.30	2127.15	42.85	2.06
L&T Technology	3272.10	3314.85	42.75	1.31
Sai Life	924.65	964.20	39.55	4.28
P I Industries	3097.00	3131.35	34.35	1.11
CreditAcc. Gram.	1305.20	1339.05	33.85	2.59
Fortis Health.	930.80	964.05	33.25	3.57
Bharat Dynamics	1240.75	1272.50	31.75	2.56
A B Real Estate	1261.10	1292.80	31.70	2.51
Gravita India	1594.10	1625.55	31.45	1.97
Lupin	2292.45	2323.20	30.75	1.34
Timken India	3332.55	3362.55	30.00	0.90
Astrazeneca Phar	8820.65	8850.60	29.95	0.34
P & G Hygiene	11435.05	11463.25	28.20	0.25
Concord Biotech	1218.85	1246.95	28.10	2.31
Welspun Corp	797.05	824.35	27.30	3.43
IndusInd Bank	937.20	964.45	27.25	2.91

## Top losers (value)

Company Name	25/2/2026	26/2/2026	Chg in ₹	% Chg	
MRF	147646.84	143570.50	-4076.34	-2.76	
Angel One	2491.20	246.30	-2244.90	-90.11	
Page Industries	32692.20	32222.05	-470.15	-1.44	
Dixon Technol.	10394.00	10118.75	-275.25	-2.65	
Bajaj Holdings	11156.60	10956.40	-200.20	-1.79	
Fine Organic	4890.75	4708.80	-181.95	-3.72	
Honeywell Auto	31414.95	31250.35	-164.60	-0.52	
Neuland Labs.	13329.00	13211.80	-117.20	-0.88	
UltraTech Cem.	13042.55	12934.10	-108.45	-0.83	
Shree Cement	26839.05	26734.15	-104.90	-0.39	
Amber Enterp.	8046.60	7943.75	-102.85	-1.28	
PTC Industries	18063.05	17966.05	-97.00	-0.54	
Abbott India	26413.10	26335.70	-77.40	-0.29	
Siemens Ener.Ind	2998.25	2922.30	-75.95	-2.53	
Tata Elxsi	4577.60	4506.45	-71.15	-1.55	
Trent	3928.10	3857.75	-70.35	-1.79	
Home First Finan	1246.00	1176.25	-69.75	-5.60	
Muthoot Finance	3504.30	3438.15	-66.15	-1.89	
Akzo Nobel	3090.85	3029.55	-61.30	-1.98	
LTI Mindtree	4564.45	4504.70	-59.75	-1.31	
Balkrishna Inds	2515.70	2461.60	-54.10	-2.15	
CRISIL	4535.90	4483.65	-52.25	-1.15	
Pfizer	5144.00	5093.05	-50.95	-0.99	
Bayer Crop Sci.	4730.60	4679.95	-50.65	-1.07	
Wipac Auto	7793.35	7743.35	-50.00	-0.64	
Gujarat Fluoroch	3488.80	3440.30	-48.50	-1.39	
CEAT	3747.60	3702.60	-45.00	-1.20	
Affle 3i	1371.80	1329.20	-42.60	-3.11	
A B B	6165.55	6123.85	-41.70	-0.68	
Supreme Inds.	4052.15	4010.90	-41.25	-1.02	
Ajanta Pharma	3022.60	2981.35	-41.25	-1.36	
Poly Medicure	1296.15	1259.70	-36.45	-2.81	
The Bombay	1761.80	1726.75	-35.05	-1.99	
Burmah	1620.50	1588.55	-31.95	-1.97	
Mastek	1287.70	1256.55	-31.15	-2.42	
TBO Tek	975.45	945.80	-29.65	-3.04	
Nippon Life Ind.	36426.90	36397.45	-29.45	-0.08	
3M India	2376.90	2347.90	-29.00	-1.22	
DOMS Industries	727.30	698.90	-28.40	-3.90	
Aegis Logistics	2673.90	2645.85	-28.05	-1.05	
Endurance Tech.	2650.85	2624.85	-26.00	-0.98	
Glaxosmi. Pharma	2722.30	2699.00	-23.30	-0.86	
Radico Khaitan	1411.85	1389.40	-22.45	-1.59	
United Spirits	998.75	976.75	-22.00	-2.20	
KFin Technolog.	2415.70	2395.00	-20.70	-0.86	
Asian Paints	1620.50	1588.55	-31.95	-1.97	
Hitachi Energy	24995.65	25477.95	10897.55	14580.40	133.80
Polycab India	8350.55	8526.95	4557.45	3969.50	87.10
Eicher Motors	8010.45	8220.00	4756.20	3463.80	72.83
Bajaj Auto	10098.75	10186.60	7088.25	3098.35	43.71
GE Vernova T&D	3815.15	3939.95	1252.85	2687.10	214.48
KEI Industries	4947.70	5058.00	2443.70	2614.30	106.98
Cummins India	4918.50	4975.00	2594.75	2380.25	91.73
Data Pattern	3071.70	3280.00	1350.50	1929.50	142.87
TVS Motor Co.	3931.95	3970.00	2191.30	1778.70	81.17
Torrent Pharma.	4419.80	4469.35	2891.45	1577.90	54.57
Schaeffler India	4266.40	4408.80	2851.00	1557.80	54.64
Acutaas Chemical	2165.05	2200.00	930.03	1269.97	136.55
Ajanta Pharma	3022.60	3052.20	2022.05	1030.15	50.95
Bharat Forge	1900.55	1919.00	919.00	999.90	108.79
J B Chemicals & Lupin	2086.35	2125.55	1303.00	809.55	62.13
Shriram Finance	2				



## Briefs

JAIPUR

## Girl, 9, dies; cardiac arrest likely

In a tragic incident, a nine-year-old girl died after collapsing while playing at a private school in Nagaur, Rajasthan. The incident occurred at Gotan International School in Gotan town on February 23. She was rushed to a government hospital, where doctors declared her dead. Preliminary investigations indicate cardiac arrest. This is the second blow to the family, as her elder brother died similarly four months ago. School director Ramkunwar Ola said, "While playing, she suddenly collapsed." Dr Sukhrum Bervall said, "It is likely a case of cardiac arrest," but no postmortem was conducted.

-Manish Godha

CHANDIGARH

## Amit Shah to launch Punjab poll campaign

The BJP will launch its Punjab Assembly poll campaign with a "Badlav Rally" by Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Moga on March 14, ahead of the February 2027 elections. Briefing reporters on Thursday, Punjab BJP working president Ashwani Sharma said people, "distressed on all fronts", have decided to oust the AAP and see the BJP as a credible alternative. He termed Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann "remote-controlled" from Delhi and accused the AAP government of failing on promises, worsening law and order, rampant mafia-linked corruption, unpaid salaries and pensions, unpunished sacrilege cases, MSP issues, "tax recovery terror", poor roads and rising extortion and killings.

-Rajesh Moudgil

KOLKATA

## Bomb threats at passport &amp; post offices

After several session courts, now passport and post offices received bomb threats, leading to immediate evacuation and extensive search operations of the premises. Police along with bomb squad and sniffer dogs were seen inspecting the Passport Seva Kendra in Kolkata and also post offices in the district where bomb threat mails were sent. At several districts people were seen emptying the post office building for their safety. Blame game started between Trinamool Congress (TMC) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) over such bomb threat mails.

KOLKATA

## DA protesters threaten to escalate stir

Protesting state government officials over Dearness Allowance (DA) issue on Thursday hit the streets throwing traffic out of gear in the city. The protestors warned of bigger protests on March 13 across the state if the administration doesn't hold a meeting with them. After the rally was taken out from the Esplanade area in central Kolkata, Kolkata police had set up three-tier barricades near the Indian Museum to stop the rally from reaching the residence of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. Despite several requests from the protestors that they want to march till Hazra in south Kolkata near the Chief Minister's residence, the police refused to open the barricades. Protestors wanted to meet the Chief Minister and Chief Secretary so that Supreme Court's verdict of clearing 25 per cent of backlog DA can be implemented.

-Aritra Singha

## SHIRTLESS PROTEST | The three accused were brought to Delhi after a dramatic 24-hour standoff with Shimla cops

## 3-day police custody for 3 IYC men nabbed in HP

PTI  
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Thursday sent three accused brought to the capital after a dramatic 24-hour standoff with the Shimla police following their arrest in the hill state over the shirtless protest at the AI Impact Summit here last week to three-day police custody.

Chief Judicial Magistrate Mridul Gupta passed the order on Delhi Police's plea seeking five-day custodial interrogation of the three accused Youth Congress activists.

The magistrate said the accused trio needs to be produced in court on completion of their police remand on March 1.

The accused were produced in the court amid heavy security arrangements.

During the proceedings, the public prosecutor said that Saurabh and Arbaz Khan from Uttar Pradesh, and Sidharth Avdhut of Madhya Pradesh were "hiding in Himachal Pradesh", and that they were arrested from a resort around 6:40 am on Wednesday.



Police detain Indian Youth Congress (IYC) members during a protest against the arrest of the outfit's chief Uday Bhanu Chib, in New Delhi on Thursday

PTI

## Order on pre-arrest bail plea of IYC neta reserved

New Delhi: Patiala House Court on Thursday reserved an order on the anticipatory bail plea of IYC General Secretary Nigam Bhandari in connection with the AI Summit protest case. The court will pronounce the order on Friday. Additional Sessions Judge Prashant Sharma reserved the order after hearing arguments on behalf of Nigam Bhandari and Delhi Police.

The prosecutor said the trio was produced before a magistrate in Shimla around 1:40 pm the same day, who

allowed Delhi Police's plea seeking transit remand, and directed their production in the Delhi court concerned

## 'Protesting a crime now'

New Delhi: Hitting out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, LoP of Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said that protesting under the tenure of "compromised" PM has become a "crime." In an 'X' post, Rahul Gandhi stressed that the world's largest democracy is being pushed to a stage where "dissent" is termed as "treason", meanwhile, asking questions are conspiracy. He further mentioned that lawsuits against people who protest against the government have become a normal thing.

within 18 hours.

He said that while Sidharth designed the T-shirt displayed by the Youth Congress workers at the Summit venue on February 20, Saurabh created a WhatsApp group. Saurabh and Arbaz were present during the protest, he said.

## BSP eyes Brahmin votes in 2027 polls

Biswajeet Banerjee

LUCKNOW

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has begun reworking its 2007 social coalition as party chief Mayawati places Brahmin outreach at the centre of preparations for the 2027 Uttar Pradesh assembly elections.

The party has named Ashish Pandey as incharge of Madhogarh in Jalaun district and Vinod Kumar Mishra as incharge of Mungra Badshapur in Jaunpur district. In the BSP's internal process, assembly incharges are usually the first step towards finalising candidates. These are the first names announced for 2027 and both

are from the Brahmin community.

BSP state president Vishwanath Pal said the party would go to voters with the slogan Sarvajna Hitay, Sarvajna Sukhay and that Brahmins were being accommodated across organisational tiers from booth committees to assembly-level structures. He added that the leadership intended to give the community "due respect" in candidate selection.

Political analyst Kamal Jayant said the move was aimed at rebuilding trust with Brahmins that the party lost after 2012. He said early signals were meant to revive the old social coalition before rivals consolidated their bases.



## Chargesheet filed against 13 over Goa nightclub fire

Panaji: The Goa police on Thursday filed a chargesheet in a court against 13 persons in connection with the fire at Birch by Romeo Lane nightclub, which claimed 25 lives and left several others injured in December last year, officials said.

The 13 accused include owners of the nightclub, a police official said.

The Anjuna police filed the 4,150-page chargesheet before the Judicial Magistrate First Class, Mapusa, in connection with the case, in which statements of 305 witnesses have been recorded, he said.

The blaze occurred at the nightclub located in Arpora, in North Goa, on December 6, 2025, wherein 25 persons were killed and several others were injured.

## Committed to making Bihar free of infiltrators, says Shah

Agencies

PATNA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday asserted that making Bihar free from infiltrators was not merely an electoral promise but it was BJP's and central government's commitment to it.

In his address to the personnel of the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) in Araria in Muslim-dominated Seemanchal region of the state, Shah said that making Bihar free from infiltrators was not merely an electoral promise as the campaign for an infiltrator-free India would soon begin from the Seemanchal region of Bihar.

Besides interacting with the personnel of SSB in Araria, Bihar, he inaugurated the Border Out Posts at Leti and Inderwa, along with e-inaugu-



rating and laying the e-inauguration stones for various SSB projects

Union home minister said, "Once our government is formed in Bengal, every infiltrator will be identified and sent out one by one." He said that demographic change caused by infiltration was dangerous for any country's culture, history, and geography as the central government would provide a permanent solution to this issue. He said that all illegal constructions within 10 kilo-

## I-T raids BSP MLA, recovers ₹11 cr, jewellery

Biswajeet Banerjee  
LUCKNOW

The Lucknow residence of Bahujan Samaj Party's lone MLA Umashankar Singh and premises linked to his associates were raided by the Income Tax Department, with officials recovering ₹11 crore in cash along with jewellery and luxury watches. The searches concluded on Thursday.

The coordinated operation began on Wednesday when Income Tax Department teams raided more than 30 locations across Lucknow, Ballia, Sonbhadra, Kaushambi, Mirzapur and Prayagraj. More than 50 officers were involved in the action, which started around 11 am and continued late into the night. Officials said cash was recovered from multiple premises, with the largest haul from the Vipul Khand house in Gomtinagar.

Three teams raided Singh's residence in Vipul Khand, the corporate office of his firm, Chhatra Shakti Construction Company, in Gomtinagar, and premises linked to a close associate on Wazir Hasan Road. In Sonbhadra, officials raided locations linked to mining firms, including Sai Ram



Enterprises, and the premises of mining trader C B Gupta and other businessmen associated with the sector.

Officials said documents linked to alleged tax evasion and benami assets were recovered during the searches. Singh was a three-time MLA from Rasra in Ballia district. He was undergoing treatment for blood cancer and had returned from the United States last month after a blood exchange procedure. He was in isolation at his Lucknow residence and was receiving treatment from the United States last month after a blood exchange procedure. He was in isolation at his Lucknow residence and was receiving treatment from the United States last month after a blood exchange procedure.

The searches followed findings in a recent report by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, which flagged revenue losses of around ₹60 crore due to illegal mining in Sonbhadra.

## Ex-SC judge BS Chauhan to lead Manipur probe panel

New Delhi: The Centre has appointed former Supreme Court judge Justice Balbir Singh Chauhan as the new Chairperson of the Commission of Inquiry investigating the violence in Manipur. The appointment comes after the resignation of Justice Ajai Lamba, which takes effect on February 28.

Justice Chauhan will assume charge of the Commission on March 1, stated the MHA ministry of Home Affairs order published in the gazette. The Commission of Inquiry was set up by the Centre on June 4, 2023, originally headed by Justice Ajai Lamba, the former Chief Justice of the Gauhati High Court. The panel is probing the sequence of events and facts relating to the ethnic violence in the state.

## Modi under US pressure: Rahul on trade deal

Bengaluru: Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Thursday continued his allegations against Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the recent India-US interim trade agreement, claiming that the PM is "trapped" and signed the anti-farmer agreement under pressure from US President Donald Trump.

Addressing the Farmers Convention event in Peravoor, Gandhi argued that allowing American farmers to sell crops like soybeans, corn, and fruits in India would "destroy the foundation" of the nation's agricultural sector. "No Indian PM would have allowed this. It is going to destroy the foundation which we built carefully," he claimed.

-PTI

## J&amp;K Budget bigger than Pak IMF bailout: India's dig in UN

Agencies

UNITED NATIONS/GENEVA

Slamming Pakistan at the UN, India has said the country lives in "la-la land" and finds it unbelievable that Jammu and Kashmir's developmental budget is more than double the recent bailout package Islamabad sought from the IMF.

Anupama Singh, First Secretary in the Permanent Mission of India to the UN in Geneva, exercised India's Right of Reply on Wednesday after Pakistan raised the issue of Jammu and Kashmir at the high-level segment of the 61st Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council.

"India is compelled to exercise its Right of Reply in



response to references made to it during the high-level segment by Pakistan and the OIC. We categorically reject these allegations," she said, referring to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

Singh added that it is hard to take lectures on democracy from a country where civilian governments rarely complete their terms.

"They ring hollow. The record voter turnout in general elections and Assembly elec-

tions in Jammu & Kashmir, is a testimony to the fact that people of Jammu & Kashmir have rejected the ideology of terrorism and violence propagated by Pakistan and are surging ahead on the path of development and democracy," she said.

In a strong retort, Singh said, "If the Chenab Rail Bridge, the world's highest bridge inaugurated in Jammu & Kashmir last year is fake, then Pakistan must be hallucinating or living in the la-la land."

"Or maybe, Pakistan finds it unbelievable that the development budget of Jammu & Kashmir is more than double the recent bailout package they sought from the IMF," she said.

## Lookout notice issued against YouTuber

Hyderabad: A lookout notice was issued against YouTuber Anvesh for allegedly making objectionable remarks against Hindu deities, police said on Thursday.

The case was registered against the YouTuber in December last year following a complaint by actress and BJP leader Karate Kalyani, who accused Anvesh, popularly known as Prapancha Yatrikudu, of making repeated derogatory, defamatory, and provocative statements against Hindu society, Hindu religious beliefs, revered Hindu deities, culture, and traditions, with the deliberate intention of creating communal hatred and provoking violence.

-PTI

## DGCA allows 48-hr free cancellation

FPJ News Service

MUMBAI

Passengers will be able to cancel flight tickets without additional charges within 48 hours of booking under revised norms issued by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation. The new rules will come into effect from March 26.

Under the updated civil aviation requirements, airlines must also provide full refunds in cases of medical emergency where the passenger or a co-passenger on the same PNR is hospitalised. The benefit will apply only if the booking is made at least seven days before departure for domestic flights and 15 days before departure for international flights.

The regulator mandated that refunds for cash payments be issued immediately, within seven days for

credit card transactions and within 14 days where tickets are booked through travel agents or online portals. It clarified that the responsibility to process refunds rests with the airlines, as agents act as their representatives.

In medical situations not involving hospitalisation, refunds will be processed on submission of a fitness-to-travel certificate vetted by an airline-appointed or DGCA-empowered aerospace medicine specialist. Airlines may offer a credit shell, but the choice to opt for it will rest solely with the passenger.

The DGCA also barred airlines from charging for correction of spelling errors in a passenger's name, provided the error is reported within 24 hours of booking made directly through the airline website. Airlines must refund statutory taxes and airport-related fees in case of cancellation.

## 'Digital platforms must share revenue'

Agencies

NEW DELHI

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Thursday asserted that digital platforms must take responsibility for the content they host and ensure fair revenue sharing with content creators and news organisations, cautioning that innovation will suffer if creators are denied due compensation.

Addressing the Digital News Publishers Association (DNPA) Conclave here,

Vaishnaw also underlined the need to regulate the use of AI-generated content, saying such material should not be generated without the consent of the person whose face, voice or personality is used.

"Platforms must take responsibility for the content that is hosted by them. The online safety of children and all citizens is the responsibility of the platforms," Vaishnaw said, underlining that digital intermediaries have transformed into



powerful media outlets.

He stressed that intellectual property must be respected and fairly compensated, noting that society's

progress in science, technology, arts, and literature depends on it. Digital platforms, he said, should ensure fair revenue sharing not just with news organisations but also with independent creators in remote areas, influencers, professors, and researchers.

"I request all platforms to rethink their negotiation policies. If voluntary action is not taken, many countries have already shown that legal pathways exist," he said.

He said digital platforms need to "wake up" and

understand the importance of reinforcing trust in the institutions that human society has built over thousands of years.

The minister for Information and Broadcasting, Railways and IT said the society is struggling with several issues that need to be addressed in the next decade -- online safety, authenticity of news content, safety of the children, protection against obscenity, protection against synthetically generated fake content.



MIKA'S MATRIX

## Briefs

NEW DELHI

## SC slams functioning of tribunals

Expressing serious displeasure over the functioning of tribunals in the country, the Supreme Court on Thursday said they have become a "liability" and "mess" without any "accountability" and flagged that technical members of a financial tribunal were even "outsourcing writing of judgement". A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi observed tribunals are "creation of the government" and are functioning like "no-man's land" without any accountability to anyone. The top court was hearing a plea for extension of tenure of tribunal members, including chairpersons, in wake of last year's verdict which struck down the Tribunal Reforms Act, 2021.

AMARAVATI

## Warrant against IPS officer Naik

A court in Andhra Pradesh on Thursday issued an arrest warrant against Bihar cadre IPS officer, M Sunil Kumar Naik, in the alleged custodial torture of former Member of Parliament K Raghu Ramakrishna Raju, who is now Deputy Speaker of the state Assembly. The Guntur mobile court issued the arrest warrant on a petition filed by the police. Guntur police had last year issued notice to the IPS officer, directing him to appear for questioning in connection with the case booked against him and others.

## CONTROVERSIAL PICTURE | High Court says there is non-application of mind by CBFC

## HC stays release of The Kerala Story 2

PTI KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Thursday granted an interim stay against the release of the film "The Kerala Story 2-Goes Beyond", saying that prima facie there is non-application of mind by the censor board while certifying the movie.

Justice Bechu Kurian Thomas passed the order on two pleas challenging the release of the film.

The film was scheduled to be released on February 27.

The court in its order also said that the guidelines for ensuring a film does not disrupt social harmony appear not to have been adhered to by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).

"Prima facie, these guide-



lines do not seem to have been borne in mind by the CBFC while granting certification and there is a manifest disregard of the applicable law, necessitating this court to interfere," it said.

It also said that dissemination of content, which has a tendency to create discord, disturb law and order, even undermine social harmony cannot come within the gamut of freedom of speech and expression enshrined in Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India.

The court directed the

central government to consider and pass orders within two weeks from Thursday on a revision petition moved by one of the petitioners -- Sreedev Nambodiri -- against the certification given to the movie.

The court said the Centre has to give an opportunity of hearing to the petitioner, CBFC and the producer -- Vipul Amrutlal Shah -- before passing any order on the revision petition.

"In the meantime, there will be an interim stay on the release of the film 'The Kerala Story 2-Goes Beyond', and the respondent 2 (CBFC) and respondent 3 (Shah) are directed to ensure that the movie is not released for public viewing for a period of 13 days from today," the court said.

## SC seeks Centre, states' response on false cases

IANS NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday issued notice on a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) seeking directions to the Union government and all states and Union Territories to instal display boards at police stations and public offices, highlighting the penal consequences of filing false complaints, fabricated charges and false evidence.

A Bench of Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant, and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi passed the order after hearing submissions made by petitioner advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay.

During the hearing, the CJI-led Bench observed that the constitutional principle of fraternity must guide societal conduct, warning that the misuse of criminal law through false cases has serious consequences for innocent citizens.

"The problem arises when false complaints are lodged.

## SC notice to Centre, EC on plea to cap party expenditure in polls

The Supreme Court on Thursday sought responses from the Centre and Election Commission on a plea seeking directions to impose ceiling on expenditure by political parties for election purposes. "Issue notice, returnable on April 27," the bench said. Advocate Prashant Bhusan appeared for the petitioner NGOs.

The poor complainant does not even know that a false case has been registered in his name and is being exploited," the apex court added.

The plea seeks installation of display boards at police stations, tehsil offices, district courts, panchayat bhawans, municipal offices and educational institutions, informing citizens about the legal consequences of filing false complaints, false charges, false statements and fabricated evidence.



In the Courtyard

## SC asks Centre to join meet on thana CCTVs

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Centre and others to participate in a meeting for creation of a centralised dashboard and standardisation of CCTV infrastructure in police stations. A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta passed the order after a submission by senior advocate Siddhartha Dave. Assisting the court as amicus curiae, Dave told the court that pursuant to an order dated January 29, a meeting was held on February 21, but the Union, the Delhi government and some other states did not participate in it, and as such, he could not file the report as required.

## ED places prosecution sanction order against PC

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has placed a prosecution sanction received from the competent authority against former Union Finance Minister and senior Congress leader P Chidambaram in respect of the offence of money laundering in the Aircel Maxis and INX Media case before a special court. These prosecution sanction orders have been placed before the Rouse Avenue Special Court here in the national capital by the ED to expedite the trial in these cases. The ED had initiated investigation under Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002 on Oct 9, 2011, in Aircel Maxis case registered by CBI against Chidambaram. In the case, ED said its investigation has revealed that Chidambaram granted Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) approval to Aircel Maxis in lieu of the quid pro quo.

## Court lists supplementary chargesheet against Vadra

New Delhi: The Rouse Avenue court on Thursday listed the supplementary charge sheet filed against Robert Vadra for consideration in a money laundering case linked with arms dealer Sanjay Bhandari. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) argued that pre-cognizance notice is not required in a supplementary charge sheet. This supplementary charge sheet was filed in December 2025, naming Robert Vadra in the money laundering case. Special Judge Sushant Changotra listed the matter for consideration on April 6 after noting the submissions of the Enforcement Directorate.

## Orissa HC orders police training

Cuttack: The Orissa High Court has directed the state police and the home department to ensure proper training of police personnel on the constitutional requirement of furnishing written grounds of arrest to every person taken into custody. The order was passed last week by Justice Gourishankar Satapathy while hearing a bail plea in connection with the July 2, 2025, robbery at a nationalised bank in Mandhatapur in Nayagarh district. Justice Satapathy said this is a mandatory condition for a lawful arrest, and failure to follow it makes the remand invalid.



## warm welcome

Jharkhand Governor Santosh Kumar Gangwar and CM Hemant Soren welcome President Draupadi Murmu at Birsa Munda Airport, Ranchi



## spiritual centre

The groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of the Shri Jagannath Spiritual and Cultural Center in Kadma, Jamshedpur, was held in the presence of President Draupadi Murmu, Governor Santosh Kumar Gangwar, Chief Minister Hemant Soren and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. Member of Parliament Bidyut Baran Mahto, Member of Legislative Assembly Saryu Rai, Member of Legislative Assembly Purnima Sahu and other dignitaries were also present on the occasion.

## From front page

## Heads must roll: SC...

"It shall be the personal responsibility of the NCERT Director and the principal of every school where the book has reached to effectuate immediate seizure and sealing of all copies of the book in their premises, and submit a compliance report. Ensure that no instruction is imparted based on the subject book. Principal Secretaries of all states are to comply. Compliance to be sent within 2 weeks." As an abundant precaution, the Bench imposed a complete ban on further publication, reprinting or digital dissemination of the book. "Any attempt to circumvent this order through electronic means or altered titles shall be seen as direct interference, willful breach and defiance of directions," it said.

The Court also directed the NCERT Director to furnish the names and credentials of members of the National Syllabi Board who prepared the offending chapter and to produce the original minutes of the meetings where the chapter was deliberated and finalised.

When the suo motu case was taken up, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, tendered an unconditional apology. He informed the Court that the NCERT had withdrawn the chapter and that only 32 copies had reached the market and would be retrieved. He also said that another chapter, referring to "justice delayed is justice denied" with inaccurate backlog figures would be revisited. "We cannot teach our children that justice is denied in the country," he said.

However, the CJI said the NCERT's press note did not contain "a single word of apology" and took strong exception to the Director's earlier communication to the Supreme Court defending the contents of the book.

The Bench observed that the chapter referred to complaints against judges in a manner that created an impression that no action was taken, and that comments attributed to former Chief Justice of India BR Gavai were taken out of context to suggest he had acknowledged corruption in the judiciary.

"It seems to us that there is a calculated move to undermine the institutional authority and demean the dignity of the judiciary," the order stated.

The Court said the chapter failed to acknowledge the judiciary's role in upholding the basic structure doctrine and preserving democratic values. "The silence is particularly egregious given the sheer volume of high-ranking officials who have been censured by this Court for corrupt practices, siphoning of public funds," it observed.

If proved to be a deliberate act, the publication could amount to criminal contempt for scandalising the institution and interfering with the administration of justice, the Court said.

The CJI thanked the media for highlighting the matter. "We are thankful to the media. They highlighted this," he said.

## India sets store by BoP...

On Thursday, India and Israel signed a total of 17 documents during the visit. AI, agriculture, science, and trade were some of the items of

interest with an MoU in cooperation in AI and a Letter of Intent on the establishment of Indo-Israel Cyber Centre of Excellence in India. An MoU on cooperation in the fields of Fisheries and Agriculture, and an MoU on cooperation in geophysical exploration showed that both sides were interested in broadening the relationship beyond the traditional defence field to other sectors. An MoU to allow cross border payments between the two countries through UPI was also signed.

After the signing, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said that India did see a role for itself in the Gaza Peace Plan. Responding to a question, at an MEA special briefing in Tel Aviv, he said. "What that role will be will depend on us getting a little more clarity as to how the situation will develop on the ground in Gaza." He added, "I will not speculate on which exactly is the area on which we may come in, but I can tell you with some conviction that India has very specific capabilities and very specific capacities which would be of considerable relevance in the kind of situation that we see on the ground in Gaza."

The Indian foreign secretary also confirmed that IMEC was discussed at length between the leaders of the two countries and said that Israel remained a "key actor" in the success of this corridor. "IMEC was discussed between the two leaders at some length. Obviously the regional situation does weigh on the progress of the initiative, and relationships between different countries that potentially lie on the IMEC corridor need to be in a certain state in order for the initiative to make progress."

With regard to India's stance on Palestine, Misri said that India's view on the Palestine issue had been made amply clear by the prime minister in his address to the Knesset. The foreign secretary said that "there have been initiatives taken in the past in this region to try and find a solution to the Palestinian question." Elaborating on this, he added. "Of course there are developments that have intervened since then, and the situation is not the same. In some ways it is even more difficult, and the path to peace has become even more challenging. But as the prime minister said this is not the time to lose hope; it is the time to sustain hope."

Reacting to the Trump Peace Plan Misri said that the Peace Plan "holds the promise of a just, durable, and lasting peace for all the peoples of the region while also addressing the Palestinian question."

## Role play explained

What Misri is stating with his remarks of certain countries activating "components of IMEC" is a push by India to activate I2U2 through digital connectivity and better economic and trade integration between the UAE and Israel. So India can still counter the BRI without needing the physical infrastructure and regional cooperation that IMEC requires.

Palestine: India sees Israel as a key partner. Quiet dialogue would most likely have taken place with the UAE before the Israel visit. India, UAE, Israel share a commonality of interests, and a partnership can develop into a maritime partnership where New Delhi can safeguard its interests through a naval presence in the Red Sea, thereby becoming an active player in the Middle East.

## CBI books new case...

The agency said the company's books were manipulated to conceal irregularities. The account had been declared a non-performing asset in 2017.

However, Ambani had obtained a stay from the Bombay High Court on classifying the account as fraud. The stay was vacated on February 23, following which Bank of Baroda filed its complaint and the CBI registered the FIR.

The FIR alleged that Ambani, as promoter and chairman, exercised overall control over the company's management and financial affairs. As chairman of the audit committee, he had oversight of the end use of borrowed funds, inter-corporate transactions and compliance with banking norms.

The CBI alleged that forensic audit findings indicated that, under his direction and with his knowledge, the company systematically diverted funds, carried out unauthorised transactions with related entities and misrepresented facts to lenders. It said his position as promoter and key decision-maker made him directly accountable for the alleged fraudulent conduct.

Following the registration of the latest case, the CBI conducted searches at Ambani's residence and at the registered offices of Reliance Communications. Documents related to the loan transactions were seized during the searches.

## India 'no longer' linked...

"We have a very robust diplomatic engagement, including between national security advisers, and I think we can say we're confident that that activity is not continuing," a senior official said on Wednesday. The official added that Canada did not believe such activities were ongoing at present.

"I really don't think we'd be taking this trip if we thought these kinds of activities were continuing," the official said. The statement suggests Canadian authorities do not currently see foreign interference or violent activity linked to India.

Carney will undertake a four-day visit to India beginning Friday, his first since assuming office as Prime Minister. His visit will include stops in Mumbai and New Delhi, where he will hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Canadian Prime Minister will begin his engagements in Mumbai, where he will meet business leaders, financial experts, innovators and corporate executives from both countries. He will arrive in New Delhi on Sunday, with bilateral talks scheduled with Modi on Monday.

The Ministry of External Affairs said the visit comes at an important stage in the normalisation of bilateral ties. "The forthcoming meeting between the leaders will provide an opportunity to reaffirm the positive momentum and shared vision of India and Canada in building a forward-looking partnership," the ministry said.

Relations between India and Canada had deteriorated sharply following the June 2023 killing of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar outside a gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia.

At the same time, both countries have stepped up engagement at official levels.

India's High Commissioner to Canada, Dinesh Patnaik, in an interview with Bloomberg said discussions between National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and his Canadian counterpart Nathalie Droinin in Ottawa had resulted in an action plan to

enhance cooperation.

"They have put together a wonderful action plan to take forward the security cooperation between both sides," Patnaik said.

He said cooperation would cover areas such as transnational crime, extremism, cybercrime, illegal immigration fraud and organised crime.

"We are looking at cooperation in all sectors. Both sides have understood that if we have to make Canada safe and India safe, we need to discuss and talk about all the issues," he said.

He said bilateral ties are undergoing a "total reset", with both countries moving past the diplomatic tensions of 2024 towards a pragmatic partnership. Patnaik referred to the fallout under former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and credited Carney with adopting a more pragmatic approach and positioning Canada as an independent partner.

He said Carney's visit could result in multiple agreements spanning nuclear power, oil, critical minerals, artificial intelligence, research and education — areas crucial to India's energy security and technological ambitions, and to Canada's efforts to diversify its economic partnerships.

## Modi is most followed...

The combined follower count of the next five major world leaders is still lower than Modi's individual total, officials said.

"This underlines Prime Minister Modi's unmatched global outreach and popularity among the youth across the world," officials noted.

In India, the gap in followers is significant, as Modi is far ahead of other Indian political leaders on Instagram.

The second spot is held by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath with approximately 16.1 million followers, followed by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi with approximately 12.6 million followers.

## Speaker reconstitutes...

Earlier this year, Justice Varma told the three-member committee that he was not present at his official residence when a fire incident took place. He said no cash was recovered from the premises by the fire brigade that arrived to douse the fire.

The controversy began after a fire broke out at Justice Varma's house on the evening of March 14. The incident allegedly led to the recovery of unaccounted cash by firefighters. A video later surfaced showing bundles of cash burning in the fire.

Justice Varma and his wife were travelling in Madhya Pradesh at the time. Only his daughter and his aged mother were present at the house when the fire broke out.

Justice Varma denied the corruption allegations and said it appeared to be a conspiracy to frame him.

## CJI vows registry...

The development came while a bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, Justice Joymalya Bagchi and Justice Vipul Pancholi was hearing a plea challenging the Uttar Pradesh Gangsters and Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act, 1986. The plea assailed the state law on the ground of repugnancy owing to Section 111 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.

A petition filed by Siraj Ahmad Khan challenging provisions of the 1986 Act is currently pending

before a bench of Justice J.B. Pardiwala and Justice K.V. Viswanathan. In that backdrop, Irfan Solanki sought that his petition, raising similar grounds, be tagged with the matter pending before the Justice Pardiwala-led bench.

The State of Uttar Pradesh pointed out that a similar challenge had earlier been brought in Md. Anas Chaudhary v. State of Uttar Pradesh. That matter was heard by a three-judge bench comprising the then Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, Justice Pamiidighantam Sri Narasimha and Justice Dipankar Datta. By an order dated December 12, 2022, the court had declined to entertain the petition under Article 32 and dismissed it, granting liberty to the aggrieved person to pursue remedies before the competent forum.

Justice Bagchi questioned whether the argument of repugnancy would stand in light of the General Clauses Act.

"If this argument is taken to a logical conclusion, that due to Section 111 of BNS... the organised crime section in state law is vitiated due to repugnancy. What about MCOCA and all other such laws. What about the general clauses act?.. Can a general law on organised crime... lead to repugnancy of a state special law, especially when Section 26 of the general clauses act..." Justice Bagchi asked. However, the CJI-led bench took strong exception to the fact that a similar plea had landed before the Chief Justice's court despite an earlier dismissal.

Though Senior Advocate Shoeb Alam sought to withdraw the plea, CJI Kant insisted that the petition remain on board so that the matter could be taken to a logical end.

## Now, upbeat India eye...

This followed South Africa's convincing nine-wicket victory, which made India's path to the semifinals far clearer: win both remaining matches against Zimbabwe and West Indies to secure a place in the last four, to be played at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai.

With a poor net run rate of -3.80 earlier, India would have been under immense pressure had the Proteas lost to West Indies at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai, bringing net run rate calculations into play and forcing them not just to win, but to win by huge margins.

However, Aiden Markram's scintillating knock of 82 not only powered South Africa into another T20 World Cup semifinal but also significantly boosted India's chances of progressing.

Although West Indies lost to South Africa despite a late flourish from Jason Holder and Romario Shepherd, the Windies will pose a formidable challenge when the two sides clash at Eden Gardens on March 1, with India's semifinal hopes still hanging in the balance.

The Suryakumar Yadav-led side will have to contend with a strong West Indies outfit that relishes playing at the hallowed Eden Gardens — the venue of their famous 2016 T20 World Cup triumph, when Carlos Brathwaite went ballistic against Ben Stokes to seal the title in the final over.

India's batters will need to deliver against the West Indies, with the top order of Ishan Kishan, Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson, Tilak Varma and Suryakumar Yadav required to be at their absolute best to counter the Windies' pacers and spinners on an Eden track that can often be two-paced.

IN SHORT >> MMC workers warn of self-immolation

MARGAO: In a major development on the row over regularization of services of the Margao Municipal workers, 14 sanitation workers on Thursday threatened self-immolation by dousing themselves with petrol if their issue of fixation and clearance of arrears are not settled within two days.

ED attaches ₹7 cr properties in Goa

PANAJI: The Enforcement Directorate has provisionally attached immovable properties worth about Rs 7.17 crore in Goa in connection with a money laundering probe arising out of international narcotics trafficking. ED said the attachment was carried out under provisions of PMLA.

State challenges Zenito's bail order

PANAJI: Nearly three months after the North Sessions Court granted bail to accused Zenito Cardozo in the activist Rama Kankonkar attempt-to-murder case, the State has approached the High Court of Bombay at Goa challenging the order.

WEATHER >> Max: 32.5 C, Min: 22.2 C, Humidity: 85%

MLA ends hunger strike after TCP suspends St Andre zone changes

CHIEF TOWN PLANNER ISSUES LETTER 'FREEZING' ALL PROVISIONAL, FINAL PROPOSALS UNDER SECTION 39A IN CONSTITUENCY

THE GOAN NETWORK

PANAJI St Andre MLA Viresh Borkar of the Revolutionary Goans Party (RGP) on Thursday night called off his six-day hunger strike at Azad Maidan after receiving official confirmation that all provisional and final land conversion proposals under Section 39A in his constituency have been suspended with immediate effect.

Fellow protester Tushar Gawa was also ended his fast. The communication, issued on the Chief Town Planner's letterhead and handed over by North Goa Collector Ankit Yadav, addressed clarifications sought by Borkar. Before formally withdrawing, he consulted villagers from Siridao-Palem, who had spearheaded and supported the agitation.

He hailed their steadfastness, particularly the women, some of whom are vendors and even a 90-year-old participant. "This was our second fight for freedom," Borkar de-

Scrap Sec 39A in Assembly or 'andolan' will continue: Viresh

PANAJI: St Andre MLA Viresh Borkar has warned that the agitation against Section 39A of the TCP Act will intensify if the provision is not scrapped in the upcoming Assembly session.

Stating that the 'andolan' would continue outside the Goa Assembly Complex if the government fails to act, he expressed hope that Section 39A would be taken up for discussion and subsequently scrapped for the rest of Goa.

He added that the Chief Minister has assured that the matter will be discussed during the session.

Urging legislators across party lines to support the move, Borkar appealed to all MLAs to back the proposal when it comes before the House.

Issuing a strong warning, he said that if the provision is not repealed in the Assembly, the agitation will be escalated in a more aggressive manner.

Environmentalists Claude and Norma Alvares were present throughout, providing legal guidance.



FIR against locals will be dropped, says Borkar after getting CM's call

PANAJI: St Andre MLA Viresh Borkar revealed that Chief Minister Pramod Sawant assured him over the phone that the FIR against villagers would not be pursued.

Earlier in the evening, the police booked an FIR against Borkar and 38 other Siridao villagers based on the complaint by TCP department that some files went missing after the day the agitators stayed overnight. They have been booked for stealing 10 files.

Borkar and his RGP dismissed the charges as fabricated.

Borkar expressed gratitude to Goans worldwide, opposition parties, and RGP leaders for their solidarity.

Earlier, North Goa Collector Ankit Yadav met the RGP legislator at the Azad Maidan site of the fast, armed with a letter issued by the Chief Town Planner that the government has "suspended" all the zoning change proposals under 39A in his St Andre constituency.

Borkar however, refused to withdraw his protest, insisting on outright "cancellation" of all zoning changes under 39A in St Andre and not mere 'suspension' of the proposals.

Collector Yadav personally made a second visit later and met Borkar with a request to call off his fast but to no avail.

Borkar and the other leadership of the agitation have rejected the communication of the Chief Town Planner, arguing that "suspension" carried no legal weight and demanded categorical cancellation.

They also sought clarity on whether the proposals could be revived later, insisting that only outright cancellation would be acceptable.

Oppn leaders meet Gov, seek session to repeal Sec 39A

THE GOAN NETWORK

OPPN TO GOVERNOR

PANAJI A joint delegation of Opposition leaders from the Congress, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), and Revolutionary Goans Party (RGP), including MLAs met Governor Puspapati Ashok Gajapathi Raju at Lok Bhavan on Thursday, demanding an urgent special session of the Goa Legislative Assembly to repeal Section 39A of the Town and Country Planning (TCP) Act.

Leader of Opposition Yuri Alemao said the delegation urged the Governor to intervene, stressing that the issue is highly sensitive and could trigger law and order problems if not addressed immediately.

He pointed out that while the Assembly session is scheduled for March 6, the deteriorating health of RGP MLA Viresh Borkar, who is on a hunger strike at Azad Maidan, makes it imperative to debate Section 39A without delay.

Alemao said the Governor has the powers to summon a special session and must act in view of the growing public unrest. He also highlighted Borkar's worsening condition, calling for urgent government

response. AAP MLA Venzy Viegas warned that Goans would not remain silent if attempts were made to stall development works in their constituencies or if cases were filed against individuals protesting against Section 39A. He cautioned that people would take to the streets in large numbers if action was taken against the agitators. The delegation also submitted a draft Bill prepared by Retired Chief Justice of Allahabad High Court, Ferdino Rebello, aimed at protecting Goa's land by removing provisions related to land conversion.

- Issue highly sensitive, could trigger law & order problems
Governor has powers to summon special session
Must act in view of growing public unrest
People will take to streets if govt takes action against agitators

Tension at Bicholim PS as activist summoned in Lodha land row

SHERLEKAR GRILLED FOR HOURS AFTER PLAINT BY PANCH MEMBER; SUPPORTERS, POLITICAL LEADERS RALLY IN HIS SUPPORT, POLICE SUMMON HIM AGAIN FOR INQUIRY

THE GOAN NETWORK

BICHOLIM

Tension prevailed for several hours at the Bicholim police station on Thursday night after social activist Swapnesh Sherlekar was summoned for questioning by the police in connection with the Lodha project issue at Carapur-Sarvan.

As news of the notice spread, social activists and leaders from various parts of the State rushed to the police station in support of Sherlekar.

Sherlekar had reportedly extended support to women and farmers in Carapur-Sarvan area regarding the Lodha project land issue.

Following a police complaint filed by panchayat member Tanvi Sawant, alleging that people were instigated against her, the Bicholim police issued a notice to Sherlekar and called him for questioning.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Shridevi B V and Police Inspector Vijay Rane recorded Sherlekar's statement for several hours. A large number of prom-



Social activist Swapnesh Sherlekar speaks to the media outside the Bicholim police station in the presence of political leaders and supporters after being summoned by police late Thursday evening.

THE COMPLAINT & ALLEGATIONS

- Complaint filed by panchayat member Tanvi Sawant alleging instigation
Allegation that people were provoked against the elected representative
Inquiry into the argument between farmers and the panch member
Verification of Sherlekar's alleged role in mobilising locals over the land issue
Recording of statement as part of preliminary investigation into the complaint

inent leaders and activists gathered at the police station to extend their support. Among those present were South Goa MP Viriato Fernandes, GPCC President

on Friday for further inquiry.

The controversy centres around land allegedly sold for the Lodha project without adequately informing local tenant farmers (kul farmers) of Carapur-Sarvan.

The farmers had first visited the project site and later approached the residence of Panch member Tanvi Sawant to express their concerns. An argument reportedly took place between the two sides. Subsequently, Sawant filed a complaint at the Bicholim police station, alleging that people were provoked against her.

Addressing the gathering, MP Viriato Fernandes stated that the struggle is between those trying to save land and those involved in selling it, urging elected representatives to "wake up" and stop acting as brokers.

GPCC President Amit Patkar criticised the government, alleging increasing authoritarianism and claiming that social activists are being targeted through complaints and legal actions.

Regularisation dispute: 14 MMC workers threaten self-immolation

Sanitation staff armed with petrol bottles demand fixation and arrears, implementation of HC order

THE GOAN NETWORK

MARGAO

In a major development in the row over the regularisation of services of Margao Municipal workers, 14 sanitation workers on Thursday threatened self-immolation by dousing themselves with petrol if their issues of pay fixation and clearance of arrears are not settled within two days.

Armed with petrol bottles, the workers issued the threat in front of the Margao Municipal building on Thursday evening as they raved that even after two High Court orders, including a contempt petition order, the council is deliberately harassing them.

Margao Municipal Chief Officer Madhu Narvekar later told the media that he would clear all issues as per the High Court directions by Tuesday-Wednesday, including rectification of the date of the order.

The 14 MMC daily wage workers were regularised and issued fixed orders in March 2010. However, due to political differences this order was held in abeyance by the DMA in June 2020. After pleading before all possible political leaders in vain, 12 of them preferred to move to the High Court for justice.

After a four-and-half-year-



MMC sanitary workers with petrol bottles threatened self-immolation in front of the Margao Municipal building on Thursday. Santosh Mirajkar

old legal battle, the High Court quashed the order of abeyance and upheld the regularisation. However, even after a five months lapse, the workers maintained that the Council failed to implement the High Court order and to rub salt over the wounds of these poor workers, the Council directed the workers to apply for the Temporary Status scheme.

"Left with no other option, we once again moved the High court with a contempt petition. The Chief Officer, in response, filed an undertaking on January 22, 2026, before the High Court that the provisions of the August 4, 2025 order would be implemented within 4 weeks," MMC worker Dominic Furtado said.

The beleaguered workers were once again played upon, when the Chief Officer Madhu Narvekar issued a fresh order dated February 13, 2026 stating that the services of the workers were regularised with effect from February 13, 2026, which was much contradictory to the High Court order, as the workers stand regularised with effect from March 2020. The workers immediately submitted their objection to the fresh order and claimed that they stand regularised since March 2020 with all arrears payable to them. With the Chief Officer's own deadline of 4 weeks having expired, the frustrated workers gathered in front of the Margao Municipal Council building with petrol bottles and warned the Council that they would self-immolate themselves if justice was not done to them within 2 days.

Goa's forest limits set for major overhaul

THE GOAN NETWORK

PANAJI

Forest boundaries in Goa are set to undergo a comprehensive overhaul, with the Union Government's Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) proposing a nationwide exercise to digitise geo-reference and formally re-notify forest limits in compliance with the Supreme Court's directions. The exercise is expected to help notify around 1,041 sq kms of forest, recorded outside forest area as per Forest Survey of India report.

The move is part of a centrally driven plan to create a state-wide, authoritative forest boundary dataset using DGPS/CORS-based surveys



and a GIS-enabled Forest Boundary Decision Support System (FB-DSS). The initiative aims to replace legacy forest maps-many of which lack precise geodetic coordinates-with accurate, satellite-based and

REDRAWING THE LINES

- CAMPA proposes nationwide digitisation and geo-referencing of forest boundaries
Aims to re-notify forest limits in line with SC directions
Expected to formally notify 1,041 sq km of forest land
To create a state-wide, authoritative forest boundary database
Replaces outdated legacy maps lacking accurate geodetic coordinates
Draft maps to be displayed at panchayats for review, objections
Certified geo-coordinates to form legal basis for re-notification

field-validated digital records. The decision was taken during a meeting held in December, last year.

Officer said that Goa has long grappled with disputes involving forest, revenue and

private land, alleged encroachments, and land-use changes and long pending forest right claim settlements. As per the FSI report 2024, the total forest cover of Goa stands at 2,265.7 sq kms.

Birch became death chamber with no emergency exit, says chargesheet

4,350 PAGES DETAIL DEADLY LAPSES; 13 ACCUSED NAMED, BUT ONLY TWO FACE HEAT

AGNELO PEREIRA THE GOAN NETWORK MAPUSA

The 4,350-page chargesheet filed by Anjuna Police in the December 6 inferno at Birch by Romeo Lane reads less like a routine prosecution document and more like a catalogue of systemic failure, negligence and alleged criminal complicity.

Nearly three months after the blaze that killed 25 people - 23 of them trapped in a windowless basement - police have pieced together what

they describe as a chain of reckless decisions that turned a popular Arpora nightclub into a death trap.

According to the chargesheet filed before a Mapusa court, the club had only one functional exit - the main entrance door. There was no emergency exit on the ground floor or deck level.

The basement, where most of the victims were found, had neither an exit nor even a window. It comprised a kitchen and storeroom - spaces never meant to hold crowds in a

crisis. When the fire spread, there was simply no route to escape.

Police have alleged that despite full knowledge of the risks, the management organised a "spectacular fireworks show" indoors without proper safeguards. The fire, police conclude, originated from this display.

The chargesheet states that at the time of the incident, the club did not possess a valid fire safety NOC or health clearance. It also allegedly lacked basic firefighting

equipment. Even more damning are claims that other permissions - including the trade licence - were obtained by fabricating documents.

Police suggest the club continued operations despite regulatory deficiencies that should have shut it down.

Police have named 13 accused in the case, including the partners of the hospitality firm that owned the club, senior managerial staff, event organisers and two former panchayat functionaries.

Briefs

AHMEDABAD

PM Modi like to hold roadshow in Sanand

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to hold a road show in Sanand on February 28 during his day-long visit to his home state of Gujarat. During the visit, Modi is set to inaugurate the Micron Technology semiconductor unit in Sanand and symbolically launch its first chip. The company is scheduled to commence commercial production of semiconductors from February 28. The project, being established at an investment of US\$ 2.75 billion, is expected to achieve a production capacity of 14 million units per week once fully operational. The proposed road show will stretch approximately 3 kilometres from the Sanand helipad to the event venue. Enthusiasm is reportedly high among local residents ahead of the Prime Minister's visit.

JAMNAGAR

Six-planet Parade to light up Jamnagar sky on Feb 28

Sky-watchers in Jamnagar are set for a rare celestial spectacle on Saturday evening as a striking "Planet Parade" will unfold over the western horizon. The astronomical event, featuring six planets visible at the same time, will be observed on February 28 shortly after sunset. To mark the occasion, the Jamnagar Astronomical Mandal in collaboration with the Rangtali Group will organise a public demonstration from 6 pm to 7 pm at the exhibition ground. Four telescopes will be set up to provide live views of the planets, allowing astronomy enthusiasts and the general public to witness the rare alignment.

SURAT

700 MWe indigenous reactor achieves a key refuelling milestone at Kakrapar

The Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) has announced a significant operational milestone with the successful completion of refuelling of 4,000 fuel channels at Unit-4 of the Kakrapar Atomic Power Station (KAPS-4), a 700 MWe reactor, on February 15, 2026. KAPS-4 is the second indigenous developed 700 MWe Pressurised Heavy Water Reactor (PHWR) and reflects the technological maturity of India's advanced nuclear power programme.

AHMEDABAD

Flyer caught at Ahmedabad Airport for smuggling gold concealed in body

In yet another case of gold smuggling at Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport, Customs officials have recovered gold capsules concealed inside the body of a passenger who arrived from Abu Dhabi. Based on profiling, Air Intelligence Unit (AIU) officers intercepted a male passenger, namely Fakhrudin, hailing from Uttar Pradesh, who was travelling on an Air Arabia flight from Abu Dhabi on February 19, 2026. During questioning, the passenger admitted to swallowing capsules containing contraband. Following an order issued by the Chief Judicial Magistrate, the passenger was admitted to Civil Hospital, Ahmedabad, for medical examination and recovery of the concealed material. During excretion under medical supervision, three irregularly shaped gold capsules were recovered.

INDUSTRIAL UNREST | Around 5,000 L&T contract workers at ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel plant in Hazira turned violent over salary hike and 8-hour shift demands.

Hazira L&T workers' violent protest halts AM/NS India plant operations

FPJ News Service SURAT

Around 5,000 contract workers of Larsen & Toubro went on a violent rampage at the ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel (AMNS) plant in Hazira on Thursday, bringing operations at the under-construction facility to a grinding halt. What began as a protest over salary hikes and working hours quickly spiraled into chaos, with vehicles torched, offices vandalized, and police forced to lathicharge and fire over 40 tear gas shells to regain control.

The unrest reportedly intensified after a viral WhatsApp video showed clashes involving refinery workers in Panipat, triggering anger among workers at the Hazira plant. Within minutes, thousands gathered, shouting slogans and demanding an 8-hour shift system and double overtime pay.

Vehicles Torched, Property Damaged

Eyewitnesses said the situation turned violent when agitated workers began vandalizing company property. Three company fire engines were severely damaged, four

bikes were set ablaze, and entry-exit gates equipped with advanced security systems were smashed. Inside the premises, employees allegedly set fire to machines, fans, tables, and vehicles.

Plant operations were completely stopped as workers blocked movement and raised slogans. "The atmosphere became extremely tense. Thousands were running inside the plant after police action," said a source.

Police Action, Officers Injured

A massive police convoy rushed to the site. Deputy Commissioner of Police Shefali Baranwal confirmed that more than 35 tear gas shells were fired and over 20 workers detained. "Initially, we tried to convince them that their grievances would be heard. But when stone pelting began, we had to take immediate action. Strict FIRs will be registered," she said.

During the clash, DCP Baranwal suffered a stone injury on her hand. PI V.L. Parmar was seriously injured when a tear gas shell exploded in his hand, while Constable Vijay also sustained injuries. All injured officers were shifted to hospital.



Whenever the Gujarat government notifies the labour code, we will implement all its provisions immediately.

L&T spokesperson

Workers Speak "We Work 12 Hours for ₹600-700" Workers alleged exploitation

L&T management is expeditiously handling the situation in discussion with the workers. Local authorities are also involved in managing the situation on ground

AM/NS India spokesperson

and long-pending wage issues. Ravi, a worker, claimed, "We

demand 8-hour duty and double overtime. Right now, we get single rate overtime. Some of us earn ₹600 to ₹700 for 12 hours of high-risk erection work at heights."

Another worker, Sikandar, said, "We only want fair pay and proper shifts. They make us work 12 hours under pressure. The vandalism began when security personnel tried to beat workers."

Fire Department on Standby

Sub Fire Officer Dhaval Mohit from Palanpur Fire Station said, "When we arrived, some vehicles were already burning. The company's internal fire engines controlled the fire. We are on standby."

Viral Video Trigger

According to police, the viral video of refinery unrest in Panipat worsened tensions. "The matter became complicated after the video spread on WhatsApp, leading to mass gathering and escalation," DCP Baranwal added.

With tight security now deployed at the Hazira plant, investigations are underway. Authorities have indicated that more detentions and legal action may follow as they assess the full extent of damage.

INTUC slams L&T over Hazira workers' exploitation

FPJ News Service SURAT

Amid rising tensions at Hazira's industrial hub, the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) has strongly condemned alleged exploitation of contract workers at the AMNS India plant, escalating the labour rights battle in Gujarat.

Gujarat INTUC President Naishadh Bhupatray Desai accused Larsen & Toubro (L&T) and its contractors of violating key labour laws at the AMNS India Hazira facility. "Skilled workers engaged in high-risk operations are being denied Provident Fund, ESI benefits, identity cards and even pay slips. This is a serious violation of the Contract Act, EPFO, ESI and Payment of Wages Act," Desai alleged.

More than 5,000 workers from Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh,

Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha recently protested demanding rightful wages and statutory benefits. However, Desai appealed for calm. "I urge workers to stay away from violence and maintain industrial peace. Let us fight this legally in the Gandhian way. INTUC Gujarat will extend full legal support to ensure justice," he said.

Desai demanded immediate criminal proceedings against L&T managers, principal employers, contractors and subcontractors operating at the plant. He called upon the Surat Labour Department, Factory Inspector's Office, EPFO and ESI departments to conduct a joint site inspection and submit an urgent report. "The Surat District Collector must directly register a case and initiate criminal action," he insisted.

Gujarat ATS arrests Punjab grenade-heroin smuggler

FPJ News Service AHMEDABAD

In a major anti-terror and narcotics crackdown, the Gujarat Anti-Terrorism Squad has arrested a key accused involved in smuggling heroin, hand grenades and pistols from the Pakistan border into Punjab. The accused, identified as Rehmat Ali Sheikh, had been absconding for nearly a month before being tracked down in Ahmedabad.

According to ATS officials, Rehmat Ali was wanted in a case registered at Amritsar district's Rajasasi Police Station. He allegedly supplied



consignments of heroin, grenades and firearms across the Punjab border in January. Two of his associates were earlier arrested, leading to the recovery of 42 kg heroin, four hand grenades, a Star

Mark pistol and 46 cartridges. ATS DYSP Harsh Upadhyay said the accused fled Punjab after the arrests and escaped to Nepal before sneaking into India through Bihar. "We received specific intelligence

that Rehmat Ali had reached Ahmedabad and was hiding in the Rakhial area under the guise of working in an embroidery factory. Based on technical and human surveillance, he was arrested from the unit," Upadhyay said.

Investigators revealed that the accused is part of a larger cross-border narcotics and arms smuggling network operating from the Pakistan border. "The consignments included not just drugs but military-grade explosives and weapons, posing a serious threat to national security," an ATS officer stated.

Gujarat Warns Officials show respect to public representatives or face action

FPJ News Service GANDHINAGAR

In a strong administrative message, the Gujarat government has issued a written circular directing all government officials and employees to maintain proper decorum and respect toward ministers, MPs and MLAs during official interactions and district visits. The move comes after repeated complaints that public representatives were not being greeted appropriately and that protocol was being ignored.

The circular, issued by the General Administration Department, makes it clear that any violation will invite disciplinary action. The government has

taken serious note of representations claiming that elected representatives were not receiving due respect from certain officers during official tours and meetings.



Sources said the decision was taken to strengthen coordination between the administration and people's representatives. "Public representatives are the voice of the people. Maintaining dignity and protocol is essential for smooth governance," a senior official stated.

The warning is unambiguous — officers failing to comply with the new directives could face departmental proceedings. Political observers believe the move aims to prevent friction between the bureaucracy and elected leaders, ensuring faster resolution of public grievances.

The issue gained prominence two months ago when five BJP MLAs from Vadodara district wrote to Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, alleging non-cooperation and inefficiency among certain officials. The letter, which began with "Vande Mataram," questioned the working style and mindset of officers posted in the district.

Sword attack on police, gaurakshaks in Surat village sparks massive crackdown

FPJ News Service SURAT

Tension exploded in Hathoda village of Mangrol taluka, Surat district, after a late-night operation to prevent alleged cow slaughter turned into a violent clash, leaving a cow protection volunteer critically injured and two police personnel hurt.

According to officials, the incident occurred when Kosamba police acted on a tip-off about suspected cow slaughter in Hathoda. A police team, accompanied by local gaurakshaks, reached the village to conduct a search. What followed was a sudden and brutal escalation.

"Six men arrived on motorcycles and began arguing with the team. Within minutes, they mobilised a mob of nearly 50 people who allegedly attacked us with sharp weapons," a senior officer said.

During the assault, cow protection volunteer Satyaprakash Yadav suffered a severe head injury after being struck with a sword. Two police personnel were also injured, with one sustaining a fractured arm. All the injured are currently undergoing treatment at a hospital in Kim-Kosamba.

Under the leadership of DySP B K Vanar, at least 15 police teams have launched an intensive combing operation.

Calling the attack "extremely serious," Surat District Superintendent of Police Rajesh Gadhia ordered immediate heavy deployment in Hathoda, effectively converting the village into a fortified police camp. "No one will be allowed to take the law into their hands. Strict action will follow," a police official stated.

Several suspects have been detained, and forensic science teams are gathering evidence from the scene to strengthen the case.

Meanwhile, cow vigilante Sajan Bharwad expressed anger over what he termed repeated inaction. "We have complained many times about illegal cow slaughter in Hathoda, Kosli and Jankhavav.

Gujarat earns ₹116 crore from liquor sales in 'Dry State'

FPJ News Service GANDHINAGAR

Despite being a constitutionally "dry state," Gujarat has earned a staggering ₹116 crore from liquor sales over the past two years, according to official figures released by the state government.

The revenue came from 32 licensed hotels and resorts across Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar districts that are permitted to serve alcohol strictly to authorised permit holders. The disclosure has reignited debate over the enforcement of prohibition in a state that has upheld a liquor ban since its formation in line with the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi.

Officials confirmed that the ₹116 crore was generated through regulated sales at these star-category establishments. "All licences have been issued as per law, and prohibition rules remain firmly in place," a senior official stated.

However, data reveals a sharp rise in liquor permits. In the Ahmedabad Civil area alone, 1,248 applications were submitted over two years, with only 29 rejected — a nearly 98% approval rate.

Over time, the number of

In the Ahmedabad Civil area alone, 1,248 applications were submitted over two years, with only 29 rejected — a nearly 98% approval rate.

authorised establishments has expanded. What was once limited to a handful of hotels catering primarily to foreign tourists has now grown to 32 licensed properties across the twin districts.

Sources indicate that the number could increase further as Gujarat prepares to host the upcoming Commonwealth Games. The government is reportedly considering relaxing certain liquor regulations to accommodate international visitors, a move that has drawn criticism from opposition parties and social organisations.

Love Beyond Religion; Surat's interfaith wedding inspires social harmony

FPJ News Service SURAT

In a time when divisions often dominate headlines, a heartwarming story from Surat is redefining the narrative. At the upcoming mass marriage ceremony organised by Yashvi Foundation, a fatherless Muslim woman will marry her Hindu partner according to Hindu rituals — with the blessings of both families.

Farha Vadgama, who lost her father at a young age, lives with her mother in the Palanpur Jakatnaka area. Raised by her mother, Allah Rakhi, Farha has worked at a private company for the past seven years. It was there that she met Mohit, a resident of Bhatha village. What began as a workplace friendship slowly blossomed into love.

"We worked together for



seven years. We understood each other and decided to speak honestly with our families," Farha said. "Initially, I was scared because our religions are different. But my mother's happiness matters the most to me. Once she agreed, I had no fear of society."

Her mother admitted the journey was not easy. "At first, I refused for years. We had arguments. But my daughter's happiness is my priority. If she is happy, I am happy," Allah Rakhi said.

Mohit echoed similar sentiments. "There were difficulties in the beginning

because of religion. But since we have been together for years, both families eventually understood and agreed," he said.

What makes this union even more significant is Farha's voluntary decision to marry according to Hindu rituals. The couple will be among 101 daughters participating in the third consecutive all-caste mass marriage organised by Yashvi Foundation on March 14, 2026.

The foundation has earned recognition for supporting fatherless and needy daughters. After facilitating marriages for 21 daughters in 2024 and 51 in 2025, this year's ceremony will see 101 brides begin a new chapter in life. Pre-wedding rituals include a wedding ceremony on February 25 and a mehendi function on March 11.

After ₹3,727 crore drug bust, Gujarat accelerates statewide de-addiction mission

FPJ News Service GANDHINAGAR

In a major step to combat rising drug abuse, the Gujarat government has announced that drug treatment and de-addiction centres will be opened in every district of the state. The decision comes after authorities seized over 41,000 kg of narcotics worth Rs 3,727 crore during 2024 and 2025, exposing the alarming spread of the drug menace. While intensifying its crackdown on traffickers and dismantling interstate and international supply chains, the government

has now shifted focus toward rehabilitation, aiming to rescue youth trapped in addiction and provide them a path back to mainstream society.

Minister Kaushik Vekaria shared the data while replying to questions related to the Home Department. According to the official statement, narcotics worth Rs 244.59 crore — including ganja, charas, heroin, cocaine, opium and MD drugs — were seized from Jamnagar and Kutch districts alone.

The alarming trend has prompted the Gujarat government to make a budgetary

provision for 2026-27 to establish drug de-addiction and treatment centres in every district. The move aims to rescue young people from addiction while continuing strict enforcement against traffickers.

Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghvi emphasized a two-pronged strategy. "Drug peddlers are being arrested without leniency. At the same time, we are counseling youth who fall prey to addiction, keeping their future in mind. Our focus is both enforcement and rehabilitation," he said. Sanghvi added that aut-



horities are targeting the entire supply chain. "Investigations are being carried out from top to bottom — from international suppliers and

domestic handlers to delivery agents and local distributors. We are determined to break the backbone of the drug mafia."

Sanand Industrial Estate gets premium hotel boost

FPJ News Service AHMEDABAD

To increase facilities for national and multinational companies operating in the Sanand Industrial Estate, the auction process for hotel construction has been completed. A plot measuring 20,168.54 square metres (approximately 5 acres) in the Sanand-2 Industrial Estate was specially reserved for the development of a premium hotel. The auction for this plot was concluded on 22 December 2025. Following the e-auction, the

highest bidder has been allotted the plot in accordance with the prescribed rules. The developer has been granted a four-year moratorium period to begin construction of a 3 to 5-star hotel. Meanwhile, construction of a five-star hotel is already in progress about 3 km from the Sanand Industrial Estate, further strengthening hospitality infrastructure in the area. On 28 February 2026, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi will inaugurate Micron Technology's advanced semiconductor plant at the Sanand Industrial Estate.

## Briefs

### LUCKNOW Fire at Silk Directorate Building

A fire broke out at the Silk Directorate Office building in Lucknow, resulting in significant damage and the burning of important documents, officials said. The blaze, which occurred on Tuesday, prompted firefighters to rush to the scene and bring the situation under control after strenuous efforts. No casualties have been reported so far, but several administrative records and files were destroyed in the fire.

### BALLIA 252 Couples Wed Under CM's Mass Marriage

As many as 252 couples tied the knot at the Government Polytechnic Ground under the Chief Minister's Mass Marriage Scheme. The ceremony was inaugurated by ministers Dayashankar Mishra 'Dayalu' and Dayashankar Singh. Newlyweds received blessings and 24 types of household gifts. Officials said the enhanced financial assistance of ₹1 lakh reflects the government's commitment to supporting economically weaker families and promoting social welfare initiatives.

### KANPUR Blood donation camp held in Martyr's memory

A large blood donation camp was organised at Agrasen Bhawan, Kidwai Nagar, in memory of martyr Shubham Dwivedi, who lost his life in the Pahalgam terror attack on April 22, 2025. Conducted with support from the IMA Charitable Blood Center, the initiative aimed to pay tribute and support patients in need. IMA Kanpur President Dr. Anurag Mehrotra inaugurated the camp, while family members and doctors observed a two-minute silence.

### LUCKNOW Teachers Protest TET Requirement

Hundreds of teachers demonstrated outside the UP Basic Education Office on Wednesday, protesting the mandatory Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) requirement for recruitment. The three-hour protest saw educators demanding a review of the policy, arguing it adversely affects employment opportunities and overlooks experienced candidates. Traffic was briefly disrupted as teachers marched, chanting slogans. Officials said a delegation will meet authorities to present their concerns for consideration.

### LALITPUR Protest Against Mandatory TET

Recognised organisations of the basic education sector held a large protest at the District Basic Education Officer's office under the banner of the Teachers Federation of India, opposing the mandatory Teacher Eligibility Test (TET). The agitation followed a phased campaign, including a social media trend on X and black ribbon demonstrations. Thousands of teachers participated, submitting a memorandum addressed to the Prime Minister through the district administration, reflecting strong resentment over the policy.

## FLASHPOINT | Shankaracharya Probe Intensifies After Findings

# Shankaracharya Case: Medical Report Confirms Minor Abuse

UP State Bureau  
VARANASI/PRAYAGRAJ

The Shankaracharya case has entered a more contentious phase after claims emerged that a medical examination report has supported allegations involving minors, dramatically escalating the controversy. While authorities have yet to release an official, detailed statement on the findings, sources associated with the investigation indicated that the report has strengthened aspects of the complaint, adding a new dimension to the ongoing probe.

The case, already under intense scrutiny, has generated significant public attention due to the stature of the religious figure involved. Legal observers note that medical documentation, if formally validated in court proceedings, could become a crucial evidentiary component. However, officials have maintained



### Supporters Rally as Police Probe Shankaracharya in Varanasi POC SO Case

procedural caution, emphasizing that conclusions can only be drawn after the full investigation and judicial review. Supporters of the seer have continued to reject the allegations, describing them as baseless and motivated, and have urged restraint against what they call a "trial by media." Representatives close to the Shankaracharya insist that the defence will challenge any interpretation of the medical findings, arguing that investigative processes must remain



warned against politicising sensitive legal matters. The case has thus evolved beyond a legal dispute into a broader debate touching on faith, accountability, and institutional integrity.

Legal experts underline that medical reports alone do not determine guilt but can substantially influence investigative direction. They stress that corroborative evidence, witness testimony, and forensic analysis remain central to establishing facts. Meanwhile,

law-enforcement agencies are reportedly continuing to record statements, examine records, and gather supplementary material relevant to the allegations. The controversy has sparked widespread discussion across social and religious circles, reflecting the delicate balance between respecting religious institutions and addressing serious accusations through due process. Analysts observe that such cases often carry layered implications, affecting not only individuals but also public trust and societal perceptions.

As proceedings advance, authorities have urged the public to avoid speculation and allow investigative agencies and courts to perform their roles. With the matter still unfolding, the case stands as a significant test of both legal procedure and public discourse, where the final determination will rest firmly within the judicial framework.

## Maurya Pushes Rail Tech, Investment Ties During Germany Visit



UP State Bureau  
LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya, during his Germany visit, participated in key industrial and investment engagements aimed at boosting global partnerships and technology cooperation for the state. Maurya met Nishant Mittal, CEO of RAILONE GmbH, and inspected the company's advanced manufacturing facility, reviewing modern railway track systems and concrete sleeper technologies. He noted that such innovations could significantly support Uttar Pradesh's rapidly expanding rail and infrastructure projects.

### Focus on rail modernisation, defence cooperation, and global partnerships during Nuremberg meetings.

The delegation also visited the historic Nuremberg Castle and museum, highlighting Germany's industrial heritage and development journey. Addressing the Defence Investors Conclave and an Indian diaspora gathering in Nuremberg, Maurya presented Uttar Pradesh's evolving economic landscape, emphasising investor-friendly policies, transparent governance, and growing industrial opportunities.

## ₹11 Crore Cash Seized from BSP MLA's Premises, Raids Continue

UP State Bureau  
LUCKNOW

The Income-Tax Department launched extensive raids on Wednesday at the homes and offices of BSP MLA Uma Shankar Singh, the sole Bahujan Samaj Party legislator in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly, officials said. Teams of about 50 officers were deployed at his Gomti Nagar residence in Lucknow and other properties to scrutinise financial records and electronic devices amid allegations of undisclosed income and tax irregularities.

Uma Shankar Singh, who represents the Rasra constituency in Ballia district, is reportedly under medical isolation due to ongoing treatment for cancer, with recent surgeries leaving him in a fragile condition.



### Massive I-T searches at the residences of BSP's lone MLA Uma Shankar Singh

The sudden action sparked political reactions. UP government minister Dinesh Pratap Singh, a relative by marriage, strongly criticised the timing of the raids, calling the action insensitive given the law-

maker's health struggles and warning authorities against jeopardising his wellbeing. The raids form part of a broader investigation that has also seen simultaneous actions in other districts against business interests linked with political figures. Supporters of the MLA have said Singh is cooperating, while political observers note that the high-profile case is intensifying debate ahead of the 2027 Uttar Pradesh assembly elections.

## 3 Women Killed in Mahoba Road Accident

UP State Bureau  
MAHOB

Three women were killed and two others seriously injured after being hit by a pickup vehicle on a busy road in Mahoba district, police said. The accident occurred when the group of women was walking along the roadside, and the speeding pickup lost control before striking them. District officials, including CO Arun Kumar Singh, confirmed the fatalities and said the injured were rushed to a nearby hospital for treatment. Police have seized the vehicle and are questioning the driver as part of the investigation. The tragic incident has shaken local residents, who are demanding stricter traffic enforcement in the area.

## Job Scam: 250 Indians Duped of ₹3.12 Crore in Russia

UP State Bureau  
GONDA/LUCKNOW

Around 250 young Indians were cheated of a combined ₹3.12 crore in a fraudulent overseas employment racket after falling for fake job advertisements on social media that promised placement in Russia, police and officials said. The victims, hailing mostly from Uttar Pradesh, responded to enticing posts claiming guaranteed jobs abroad and paid large sums as processing fees, visas, and travel arrangements. However, upon reaching Russia, the job offers vanished, leaving many stranded without employment or support. Local authorities describe the scam as highly organised, with fraudsters exploiting the aspirations of unemployed youth seeking better opportunities



### Hundreds of young jobseekers from India, including many from Uttar Pradesh

overseas. Several victims have returned to India, while others are trying to make sense of the situation with limited

resources. Complaints have been filed with Gonda police, and investigators are coordinating with cybersecurity units to trace the perpetrators. Officials are also advising job-seekers to verify authentic recruitment channels and avoid offers that appear too good to be true. The case highlights growing concerns over social media-based employment scams targeting vulnerable youth.

## Shiksha Mitra Arrested for Alleged Student Misconduct

UP State Bureau  
SULTANPUR

A Shiksha Mitra (para-teacher) was arrested in Sultanpur district on Thursday following allegations of inappropriate behaviour against a minor girl student, police confirmed. The incident came to light when the student's family lodged a complaint accusing the teacher of bad touching the girl at the school premises. The matter was quickly registered at the local police station under relevant sections of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

Prompt action by the Sultanpur police led to the suspect's arrest, with investigators now recording statements and gathering evidence. School authorities said they are cooperating fully with law enforcement and have suspended the accused pending further inquiry. Meanwhile, the stu-



### Girl student accused him of inappropriate physical contact, prompting swift police action

dent has been provided support and counselling services. Officials reiterated that they take allegations against minors extremely seriously and urged parents and community members to report any incidents immediately. The district administration assured strict legal action following due process.

## Elderly Couple Found Murdered in Farrukhabad

UP State Bureau  
FARRUKHABAD

A shocking double murder has rattled the Kainganj area of Farrukhabad district after an elderly couple was found dead inside their home, prompting a robbery angle in early police investigations. Local residents were stunned when a young man delivering milk on Thursday afternoon found 70-year-old Purushottam Kaushal and his 65-year-old wife Pushpa Devi lifeless inside their residence.

The milkman, noticing silence and no response to calls, pushed open the door and discovered the couple's bodies. Purushottam was found with a rope tied around his neck, while Pushpa Devi's body lay nearby. Neighbours quickly gathered, raising the alarm. Officers arriving at the scene observed that several



### Farrukhabad double murder shakes neighbourhood as police probe robbery link

household items were strewn about, suggesting that a robbery attempt might have preceded the killings. Police have not ruled out possible motives and are pursuing multiple lines of inquiry, including theft or personal enmity.

Forensic teams were called in to collect evidence, and access to the house has been restricted to preserve the crime scene.

## Female Constable, Son Die as Car Bursts

UP State Bureau  
RAMPUR



A tragic accident in Rampur district claimed the lives of female constable Lata Singh and her young son Laddu after their car caught fire following a collision with a dumper truck. The incident occurred on a busy road when the vehicle they were travelling in collided with the heavy-duty truck, causing the car to ignite. Emergency responders rushed to the scene, but both victims succumbed to burn injuries.

## SP Leader Criticises Mayawati Over 'PDA Diwas' Remark



UP State Bureau  
LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party leader Ram Babu Sudarshan has strongly criticised BSP chief Mayawati for allegedly terming the observance of "PDA Diwas" on Kanshi Ram's birth anniversary as "drama." Sudarshan called the remark unfortunate, stating that Kanshi Ram symbolises social justice and empowerment for backward, Dalit, and minority communities. He asserted that no single party can claim exclusive ownership of the late leader's legacy.



### Ram Babu Sudarshan defends Kanshi Ram's legacy, calls for statewide observance on March 15

Sudarshan announced that March 15, 2026, will be marked as Bahujan Samaj Diwas / PDA Diwas across district headquarters, urging party workers to participate actively. He maintained that the initiative promotes social unity and representation, not political confrontation.

## nightmare

# How a system glitch declared a living man dead

UP State Bureau  
KANPUR

In an astonishing case of administrative failure, a man from Nirala Nagar, Govind Nagar in Kanpur was mistakenly declared dead on official records, costing him identity, services and government benefits due to a hospital error, local civic activist Gaurav Sahu alleged.

According to Gaurav, the trouble began in September 2025, when he took an unidentified patient to Murari Lal Chest Hospital. During admission, the patient's docu-

ments included a copy of Gaurav's Aadhaar. Miscommunication and hospital staff negligence resulted in Gaurav being wrongly recorded as the deceased person instead of the patient who died. As a result, the health department issued a death certificate in his name dated September 12, 2025.

The consequences were swift and disruptive. When Gaurav later tried to access basic services, he was stunned to learn that his ration card was invalidated, his bank account blocked, and his Aadhaar showed him as



"deceased". Even his driving licence and other official records reflected him as no longer alive, effectively stripping him

### Kanpur Man Declared Dead on Paper, Loses Identity in System Error

of legal identity and access to essential services. "I conducted the last rites of a deceased person and now I'm treated as dead in government systems," Gaurav said, highlighting the psychological and practical toll of the error. Efforts to correct the mistake are ongoing as Gaurav continues to visit various

departments, including the health department, municipal offices, and Aadhaar centres, seeking rectification. Officials from the City Medical Officer's (CMO) office acknowledged the complaint and said an inquiry has been initiated to address the anomaly and prevent such alarming cases in the future.

The incident has raised questions about data accuracy and inter-department coordination in government databases, underscoring how a single clerical error can lead to far-reaching consequences for an individual's legal existence.

## Dayal Opticals Opens Flagship Store in Mumbai's Kala Ghoda

UP State Bureau  
LUCKNOW/MUMBAI

Dayal Opticals has launched its newest and largest retail boutique in Kala Ghoda, marking the brand's formal entry into Mumbai's prestigious heritage district. Known for its long-standing presence in Delhi's Khan Market and across Delhi-NCR, the brand's expansion reflects a strategic move beyond North India while retaining its core emphasis on clinical precision and curated eyewear. Designed as a comprehensive eye-care destination, the Kala Ghoda outlet offers advanced eye testing,



professional consultation, and a refined selection of premium eyewear. Company Director Sarvash Kalra described Kala Ghoda as a natural extension of the brand's legacy, citing its cultural and architectural significance. The launch event drew notable personalities including Harbhajan Singh, Geeta Basra, Angad Bedi, and Sangeeta Bijlani.

**DEMARCATON FLIP-FLOP** | Authorities mark violations but legal status of pre-notification buildings under review

# Pre-2022 constructions likely to be spared in Bhoj Wetland drive



Illegal construction in Khanugaon under Bhoj Wetland catchment

**Our Staff Reporter**  
BHOPAL

The ongoing demarcation drive around Bhoj Wetland took a decisive turn on its second day after authorities realised that constructions raised before the March 2022 wetland notification cannot be summarily demolished.

## 25 encroachments marked within 50 metres of FTL at Upper Lake

On Thursday, a joint team from Nazul Sant Hirdaram Nagar (Bairagarh Circle), along with officials from the Revenue Department and Municipal Corporation Bhopal, carried out demarcation up to the Army's Naval Water Sports Complex in the Khanugaon boundary.

The District Task Force (DTF) used a Total Station

## Over 50 permanent structures within 50-metre zone

A ground survey conducted by Free Press at Khanugaon revealed more than 50 permanent constructions within the 50-metre boundary of the Upper Lake, including a school, college, marriage gardens, and a large number of farmhouses along the Bhoj Wetland shoreline. Nearly 30 temporary encroachments were also spotted within the prohibited area. The Bairagarh administration has completed demarcation from the Raja Bhoj statue to Halalpura and adjoining stretches over two days, identifying nearly 50 structures so far. However, uncertainty remains over which of these will face demolition. The final list is expected to be placed before a review meeting on Friday.

## 90% structures predate 2022 wetland rules

Officials indicated that nearly 90% of the identified constructions were built before the March 2022 notification issued by the Housing and Environment Department, which introduced revised buffer norms of 50 metres in urban areas and 250 metres in rural areas.

machine to mark structures falling within 50 metres of the Full Tank Level (FTL) as defined by Town and Country Planning (T&CP).

Around 25 permanent

markers were installed and painted yellow, identifying approximately 25 encroachments within the restricted 50-metre zone of Bada Talab.



Demarcation being carried on at Halalpura

## TT Nagar demarcation delayed

In the TT Nagar Nazul area, including Bhadbhada, Prempura and Sevaniya Gond, demarcation was delayed due to the non-availability of the authorised Town and Country (T&C) map during inspection in Suraj Nagar. Officials said marking will begin once the map is available.

## Master plan norms overlooked?

Under the Master Plan 2005, implemented in 1995, the Full Tank Level (FTL) of the pond was fixed with a mandatory 50-metre buffer zone. However, critics argue that these earlier norms are not being strictly applied in the

current drive, creating procedural obstacles. For now, the administration maintains that only structures within the 50-metre radius have been identified, and further scrutiny will determine the course of action.

## Official statement

Speaking with Free Press Bairagarh SDM Ravi Shankar Rai clarified that the initial assumption that all constructions within the buffer zone would be demolished was incorrect. "Structures completed before March 2022 with valid documentation will be re-verified. This process may take about a week. Only after compiling the list in the prescribed format will demolition proceedings begin," he said.

# Anandpur Trust encroached upon govt land: Revenue Min

Trust hogged limelight after PM's visit

**Our Staff Reporter**  
BHOPAL

Revenue Minister Karan Singh Verma, in a written reply, informed the House on Thursday that the Anandpur Trust had encroached upon the government land.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Anandpur in April last year. The trust hogged the limelight after Modi's trip. Afterwards, there have been several disputes

## Trust has over 2,100 hectares in its possession in Ashoknagar

about the trust.

Verma said the trust had encroached upon 0.618 hectares of the revenue department in the Basakhedhi area, Ashoknagar, and 3.52 hectares of the forest department in the Isagarh area.

The trust has over 2,100 hectares in its possession in Ashoknagar. It also purchased land belonging to the SC/ST communities.

A dispute over the Anandpur Trust recently cropped up in the district.

According to reports, a complaint made by the trust led to the transfer of the collector of Ashoknagar, but the trust denied filing such a complaint.

There are allegations of exploitation by the trust. After the government's confirmation about encroachment upon the government land by the trust, it is clear that its activities are controversial.

The trust has an empire, which is barricaded, and one can go there only with the permission of its officials.

## Mayor's no for slaughter house

**Indore:** Mayor Pushyamitra Bhargav has clarified that there is no proposal to construct a slaughter house in Laledipura Machal or nearby villages, putting to rest recurring controversy surrounding a project first proposed in 2017.

Responding to concerns raised by local cattle rearers and villagers, the Mayor stated that the Indore Municipal Corporation has no intention of developing a slaughter house in the area. He said misinformation regarding the old proposal has led to repeated disputes, which required a clear clarification from the civic administration. Bhargav said that he has received inputs from residents and cattle owners regarding the issue and has once again instructed all concerned officials that no slaughter house will be built at Laledipura Machal.

# Man sentenced to death for killing 6 including 2 minors

**Our Staff Reporter**  
BHOPAL

The district and sessions court, Mandla has awarded capital punishment in the Maneri case in which six people, including two minor children, were killed over a family dispute.

ADJ Pravin Sinha passed the order.

The incident took place at Maneri village in Mandla district in July 2020. The accused Harish Soni, 36 and Santosh Soni, 34, were both residents of Maneri village. In a dispute over ancestral land, they first attacked their cousins Rajendra Soni and Vinod Soni's families with swords and

later attacked other relatives and villagers.

The accused threw chilli powder in the eyes of the victims before attacking them with swords. Police arrested Harish Soni while Santosh Soni died in police firing. The deceased included Rajendra Soni, 47, his daughter Priyanka Soni, 25, his brother Vinod Soni, 45, Vinod Soni's five-year-old son Om, his three-year-old daughter Shreyansh Soni and their relative Dinesh Soni, 49.

As per district prosecution officer Ramesh Mishra, when the police team tried to arrest both Harish Soni and Santosh Soni, they attacked the cops.

# School teachers protest at Rani Kamalapati station over recruitment delay



Teachers (grade -2) protest at Rani Kamalapati Railway station, on Thursday over delay in recruitment

**Our Staff Reporter**  
BHOPAL

Around 10,700 school teachers (Grade 2) protested at Rani Kamalapati Railway Station on Thursday against the prolonged delay in recruitment.

According to protesters, the Class 2 teacher recruitment process in Madhya Pradesh began in 2022, with the eligibility test held in 2023. The selection test was conducted in April 2025, and the selection list was released in September 2025, but appointments have not yet been made. The Directorate of Public Instructions

(DPI) said the process could take another six months to one year. What should have been completed between 2022 and 2024 has now stretched into a five-year process.

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) report presented in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly revealed serious gaps in the school education system. It stated that 1,895 schools have students but no teachers, 435 schools have no students, and 29,116 schools face a shortage of 99,682 teachers. Rural areas are worst affected, with only 70% of staff positions filled.

# EOW registers FIR against two bus operators, RTO clerk

**Our Staff Reporter**  
BHOPAL

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) has registered a case against two bus operators and a clerk of the Road Transport Department for allegedly evading road tax amounting to Rs 9 crore, officials said on Thursday. The action pertains to the non-payment of road tax for 16 buses, resulting in financial loss to the state exchequer. Further investigation is underway.

The two bus operators, Sanjay Keshwani and Sadhna Keshwani, own 16 buses, which were registered at the Regional Transport Offices (RTOs) in Dindori, Jabalpur, Shahdol, Mandla and Balaghat. Between 2006 and 2025, the two operators failed to pay due road tax, but managed to regularly procure the fitness certificate and other permission from the RTO. In 2006, the bus operators informed the RTO that their buses had been scrapped. However, the scrapping existed only on paper, and the buses allegedly continued to operate commercially. In 2017, the RTO initiated action against the operators. A clerk posted in Dindori, Pushp Kumar Pradhan, allegedly helped the bus operators evade departmental action, as files related to the tax records went missing from the office. As a result, the department suffered a tax loss of Rs 9 crore.

# Cong creates ruckus over Dhirauli coal block issue

Seeks JPC probe, stages walkout

**Our Staff Reporter**  
BHOPAL

The Congress on Thursday created ruckus in the Assembly over the issue of Singhrauli's Dhirauli coal block allotted to Adani Group. It demanded formation of Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to probe compensation-related matters among other things.

When the government didn't accept the JPC demand, it staged a walkout. Earlier, the Speaker had adjourned the house twice due to pandemonium.



Leader of Opposition, Umang Singhar, raised the issue during Question Hour. He said a paltry compensation has been given to tribals despite government claiming that they (the tribals) would Rs 50 lakh. It was alleged that the

tribals were not getting more than Rs 2 to Rs 3 lakh. Out of eight villages, only five were acquired.

Alleging anomalies in compensation, he said money has been given even to non-stakeholders. For instance, Rs 15.94

lakh compensation has been given to Sarai police station in-charge Jitendra Bhaduria's wife Priyanka Singh so that Bhaduria could provide protection required to Adani.

Likewise, Rs 14.83 lakh was given to traffic in-charge

Deependra Singh Kushwah's wife Swati Singh. He demanded that until the compensation issue was not settled, mining should be stopped.

The land acquisition award sum was Rs 368 crore and out of it, Rs 144.68 crore has been distributed. Work is underway for redressal of remaining amount.

The in-charge minister of Singhrauli, Sampatiya Uiquey said she had visited the area and saw soil separation work was underway apart from chopping of trees.

On one occasion during the course of discussion, Opposition members trooped to the Well, raising slogans.

# Ahead of Holi, 28,000 buses set to go off road from March 2 in MP

**Our Staff Reporter**  
BHOPAL/ASHTHA

Around 28,000 buses will go off the roads from 6 am on March 2 ahead of Holi festival in protest against proposed transport policy which allows permission to carry commercial goods and operate buses under the PPP mode in Madhya Pradesh. The strike stems from opposition to the proposed Madhya Pradesh Transport Policy, which aims to introduce a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model for bus

route operations. Under the proposed system—Bus route tenders will be handed over to seven private companies and the companies will determine passenger fares. Govind Sharma, state president of Bus Operators Association said, "Legal permission to carry commercial goods is major safety concern. Secondly, PPP mode of bus operation will increase bus fare. The current fare stands at Rs 1.25 per kilometre while under the proposed new structure, it could rise to Rs 1.75 per kilometre, he added.

# BSF officer among 3 duped of 12.5L in separate incidents

**Our Staff Reporter**  
INDORE

Cyber fraudsters targeted three persons, including a BSF assistant sub-inspector (ASI) and duped them of around Rs 12.5 lakh under the guise of high-yield investment and task-based trading opportunities in separate incidents in the city.

In the first incident, a 58-year-old BSF ASI residing in Aerodrome police station area was duped of Rs 1.60 lakh on the pretext of higher profits in investment. The complainant told police that on January 22,

he received a WhatsApp call from an unknown number promising higher returns on investment. To gain his trust, the fraudsters sent a forged 'profit slip' showing fake gains. Convinced by the document, the ASI transferred a total of 1.60 lakh in multiple instalments. When the fraudster began making excuses to avoid payouts, the officer realised he had been duped and approached the Cyber Cell.

In the second incident, a 60-year-old man residing in the Dwarakapuri area was duped of Rs 1.50 lakh with similar fake promises. The victim was

added to a Telegram investment group where he was initially given small 'tasks' to complete. After receiving minor payouts that built his confidence, he was persuaded to make a larger investment. As he transferred Rs 1.50 lakh to the fraudsters, they deleted the group and vanished. Police are currently tracing the Telegram IDs of the fraudsters.

In the third incident, a 49-year-old man was duped of Rs 9.60 lakh in Annapurna area under the pretext of a trading scheme. He was lured into a fake online trading scheme via a WhatsApp group.

# 650 hectares of tribal land sold to non-tribals in 3 districts over 14 years

**Our Staff Reporter**  
BHOPAL

In Burhanpur, Indore and Khandwa districts, land belonging to tribal people was sold to non-tribals between 2009 and 2023, the state government said in a written reply to a question raised by Congress MLA BalaBachchan on Thursday. In Burhanpur, 196 hectares of land were sold in 66 cases, with the then collector granting permission in 64 of them. In Indore, 153 hectares were sold, with five former collectors giving permission in 28 cases, while the additional collector approved 72 cases. In Khandwa, 288 hectares were sold, but the government did not disclose the names of collectors or officials who granted permission.

## National Tribal Commission complaint

Congress MLA Heeralal Alawa raised a question based on a complaint submitted by the National Tribal Commission, New Delhi on December 4, 2025. The Commission reported that 1,153 hectares of tribal land were sold to four non-tribals NatthuKol, ParhladKol, Rakesh Singh Gond and Raghuraj Singh Gond in Dindori, Jabalpur, Seoni, Katni, and Umaria districts.

**Tina Khatri**  
INDORE

Tell a classroom of children to touch their toes and most will manage. Ask them to hold a plank, and many will succeed. But ask them to keep running — and nearly two out of three will run out of steam.

The latest national fitness assessment shows that only 34 per cent of children meet healthy standards for aerobic endurance. Experts say the reason is not inactivity, but fragmentation — children are active in short

bursts, not sustained stretches that build cardiovascular capacity.

Dr. Vijay Krishnamurthy, sports researcher, calls it a structural problem. "Activity has become fragmented," he said. "Short PE periods, occasional sports practice, bursts of play — that is not enough to build cardiovascular capacity. Endurance requires progression and consistency. Without that, stamina declines."

Overall fitness levels suggest recovery on the surface. In 2020, 70.5 per cent of children were classified as



fit. That number dropped sharply to 56.2 per cent in 2022 during prolonged pandemic disruptions. By 2025, overall fitness rose to 84.8 per cent, exceeding pre-pandemic levels.

But endurance has not recovered at the same pace. Aerobic fitness stood at 27.5 per cent in 2023, im-

proved to 32.8 per cent in 2024 and reached 34.4 per cent in 2025 — a gradual rise, but still leaving two-thirds of children below healthy benchmarks. "Aerobic endurance is closely linked to long-term heart health and metabolic stability," sports physiotherapist Dr Ankush Agrawal said.

He added that persistently low stamina in childhood increases the risk of cardiovascular disease and lifestyle disorders later in life.

In rapidly urbanising cities such as Bhopal and Indore, shrinking open spaces,

increased screen exposure and mounting academic pressure have reduced prolonged outdoor play, Agrawal added. "Activity has become scheduled and time-bound," he said.

In contrast, children perform well in flexibility (70%), core stability (87%) and show adequate muscular strength (50%). However, only 60% fall within a healthy BMI range.

The imbalance is clear: children can bend, balance and perform short physical tasks. They struggle with sustained effort.

**Quick Trail**

**BENGALURU**  
**11 arrested for kidnap, assault of film director**

Eleven people, among them a woman, were arrested for allegedly kidnapping and brutally assaulting a Kannada film director and robbing him of gold ornaments and cash, police said on Thursday.

The matter came to light after he filed a complaint at Aduogodi police station on February 11, they said.

Among those arrested is a female actor named Aishwarya, who is also a social media influencer, police added. According to police, in his complaint, T A Anish stated that he had directed a new film titled 'Jeevanada Bhashe', which is yet to be released.

An investor in the film, along with another associate working with him, developed a financial dispute with Anish. About two months ago, the complainant moved from Bengaluru to Mumbai.

During this period, he informed a female actor friend residing in Indiranagar, Bengaluru, that he was planning to sell his car. The accused came to know of this through the actress and told the complainant they would help him sell the vehicle, a senior police officer said.

**BENGALURU**  
**Minister praises free auto-driving training**

Karnataka Minister Ramalinga Reddy on Thursday termed the initiative to provide free auto-driving training to women and transgender persons as commendable, and assured full government support.

He was speaking after inaugurating a free auto-driving and skill development training programme for women and transgender persons at BTM Layout, organised in collaboration with Bangalore Political Action Committee (B PAC) and CGI, a global IT and business consulting firm.

The state transport minister appreciated efforts aimed at economically empowering women and transgender persons, officials said.

According to a statement, he noted that auto-rickshaws have become indispensable for commuting in Bengaluru and continue to serve as the backbone of the city's transport system.

He added that discussions would be held with the government to introduce additional schemes and facilities for the welfare of the auto drivers' community, and appropriate steps would be taken after the State Budget.

**BENGALURU**  
**K'taka to establish Innovation Labs: Min**

In a major initiative to foster scientific curiosity and promote experiential learning at the grassroots, the Karnataka government is taking steps to establish 'Innovation Labs' in over 60 residential schools across the state, Science and Technology Minister N S Boseraju said on Thursday.

He made the announcement while inaugurating the 'National Science Day' celebrations, organised by the Department of Science and Technology at the Jawaharal Nehru Planetarium here.

Elaborating on the government's push to draw rural students towards advanced technology, Boseraju stated that both 'Nehru Stream Labs' and 'Innovation Labs' are being rolled out statewide.

According to him, in a strategic collaboration with the Kalyana Karnataka Region Development Board (KKRDB), novel 'Nehru Stream Labs' is being set up in Karnataka Public Schools across the Kalyana Karnataka region.

Furthermore, under the SCSP (Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan)/TSP (Tribals Sub-Plan) grants for the 2025-26 academic year, Rs 6 crore has been allocated to build 'Innovation Labs' in over 60 residential schools, he said.

**AIR QUALITY CONCERNS | BJP MLA Suresh Kumar had sounded warning**

**Serve notices if AQI crosses 100, says Minister Khandre**

**NT Correspondent**  
BENGALURU

Forest, Ecology and Environment Minister Eshwar B. Khandre on Thursday instructed that if the Air Quality Index (AQI) in the city exceeds 100, notices must be issued immediately to the concerned local bodies. "If corrective measures are not taken within the stipulated time, cases will be filed as per rules," he said.

The announcement comes amid growing concerns over air and water pollution in the city, raised by Rajajinagar BJP MLA Suresh Kumar. It signals the state government's intent to enforce stricter environmental standards and mobilise political and administrative action across Bengaluru. Mr. Khandre convened a meeting with officials to ensure that Bengaluru does not become another gas chamber, like Delhi. Speaking to reporters after the meeting, he highlighted that air pollution, water pollution and



Khandre said this amid growing concerns over air and water pollution in the city.

noise pollution are increasing across the city and emphasised that cooperation from all public representatives, beyond party lines, is essential to tackle the problem.

During the discussions, Suresh Kumar expressed concern that dust on city roads is worsening air quality and contributing to a rise in respiratory problems among children. He said doctors are advising residents to move to the outskirts of Bengaluru for health reasons and urged that immediate action be taken to maintain

safe air quality levels.

Responding to these concerns, Mr Khandre noted that air quality is already being monitored at 11 fixed locations and through 13 mobile units across the city. He added that, following discussions with Deputy Chief Minister and Bengaluru Urban Development Minister D. K. Shivakumar, a meeting will soon be held under the Deputy Chief Minister's chairmanship with all public representatives of Bengaluru, including 28 MLAs, and senior officials from urban local bodies to deliberate on

pollution control measures.

Recalling the city's past, Mr Khandre said that a few decades ago Bengaluru was known as a "pensioners' paradise" and an "air-conditioned city". "Today, even in the Garden City, heat intensity is increasing. While global warming and climate change are contributing factors, the state government is taking all necessary steps to increase the city's green cover and protect its air quality," he added.

Addressing the growing problem of single-use plastic, the Minister said aware-

ness is the only way to curb its use and instructed that awareness squads be formed in coordination with local bodies and other departments. He also directed the Environment Department to personally review and submit a report within one month detailing how many sewage treatment plants exist in Bengaluru and across the state, how many are functioning, their installed capacity, how many million litres per day (MLD) of liquid waste are currently being treated, and how many MLD of water are entering water bodies without treatment.

A discussion was also held on measures implemented under the Water Act and the Air Act to control pollution in the city. Those present included MLA Suresh Kumar, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Head of Forest Force Meenakshi Negi, Chief Wildlife Warden Kumar Pushkar, Environment Department Principal Secretary Srinivasulu, and other senior officials.

**Premji varsity student council worried over FIR against students**

**NT Correspondent**  
BENGALURU

Days after an ABVP protest over an event concerning Jammu and Kashmir in the Azim Premji University here, the varsity's student council on Thursday expressed concern over an FIR registered against the members of a reading circle.

It urged the administration to reconsider pursuing criminal action against the students connected to the SPARK reading circle. In a statement, the council said that organising a campus event without prior administrative approval may constitute a breach of University protocol. However, it is of the view that such a breach is best addressed through the University's own internal mechanisms such as the disciplinary committee, rather than through an FIR.

The Akhil Bharatiya Vid-yarthi Parishad (ABVP) staged a demonstration recently against the university, alleging that an event at the institution was promoting

separatism and secession of Jammu and Kashmir and an "insult" to the Indian Army.

Raising slogans, activists of the Akhil Bharatiya Vid-yarthi Parishad smeared the university's nameplate with black ink and claimed that the event was part of a larger agenda to "divide" India and Kashmir.

The protesters alleged that a programme conducted inside the campus by the All India Students' Association (AISA) backed organisation Spark opposed India and promoted anti-national thoughts.

In an official statement, the university had said that it had not authorised any event of this nature, saying the University follows strict procedures before any event is held on campus.

According to police, a complaint was filed by the administration, alleging that an Instagram page named "Spark Reading Circle, APU" circulated a post calling for a discussion on the 1991 Kunan-Poshpora incident without obtaining prior permission.

**HM distances himself from 'next CM' slogans**

**NT Correspondent**  
BENGALURU

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Thursday distanced himself from slogans raised by his supporters in Tumakuru, projecting him as the next Chief Minister, and asserted that he would not fuel speculation or lobby for the post as any decision rests with the party high command.

Speaking to reporters in Bengaluru, Parameshwara said he had no role in the slogans raised by his followers and reiterated that leadership decisions would be taken at the appropriate time by the party leadership.

"I am not prepared to create any more confusion," he said, adding that "our High Command will take a decision at the appropriate time."

Responding to questions about alleged lobbying by party workers and supporters, he said, "I am not going to do any lobbying. Didn't you hear what I said yesterday? Someone asked me whether I was going to Delhi. I did not go to Delhi. That's it." The minister also said such decisions are left to the Congress high command.

He maintained that while well-wishers may express their feelings, he had discouraged them from doing so. "Our well-wishers here may be expressing their feelings. How can I tell them not to do that? I have told them not to do it... but in all this, as I said, I am not going to join or encourage this confusion," he said. Regarding missing children cases, the Home



Minister said the government was taking it seriously. He also said that instructions had been issued to trace foreigners overstaying their visas.

He also referred to ongoing verification drives in Bengaluru to identify illegal stay and scrutinise identity documents.

Reiterating that recruitment to vacant government posts would continue in a phased manner, Parameshwara said discussions would be held on employment generation and other administrative matters

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**Shivakumar says guarantees are 'burden' on govt, but will continue**

**NT Correspondent**  
BENGALURU

The ruling Congress' five "guarantees" aimed at different segments of the society are a "burden" on the state exchequer but the people will continue receiving these benefits, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said on Thursday. He was repeating his remarks made on Wednesday.

He, however, said that many drew benefits in the name of "dead people", which has to be stopped.

"There is no need to revise the guarantees," he told reporters in Bengaluru.

Shivakumar on Wednesday said that the state government's five guarantees were aimed at strengthening families financially and mentally. He asserted that welfare measures would continue despite the burden on the exchequer.

His comments have led to a debate in the state, with ruling and opposition leaders weighing in.

While the Congress said the benefits of the guarantees should be limited to people below the poverty line, the opposition BJP charged that development works have come to a halt in the state.

The five guarantee schemes are 'Gruha Jyothi', offering 200 units electricity free to every household, 'Gruha Lakshmi' scheme that provides Rs 2,000 to every woman head of a family and 'Anna Bha-

ya' offering 10 kg rice to every member of the BPL family a month.

The 'Yuva Nidhi' scheme promises Rs 3,000 dole to unemployed graduates and Rs 1,500 to unemployed diploma holders for two years (in the 18-25 age-group) and the 'Shakti' scheme permits free travel for Karnataka women to travel within the state.

Speaking at an event here earlier, Shivakumar said the guarantees were designed to ensure that money remains in the hands of citizens.

**Shock in Nelamangala as 7 JD(S) councillors disqualified**

**NT Correspondent**  
BENGALURU

In a significant political setback for the Janata Dal (Secular), seven councillors of the Nelamangala City Municipal Council have been disqualified

by Bengaluru Rural Deputy Commissioner A.B. Basavaraju for defying the party whip during a crucial leadership election.

The disqualification, issued under Section 4(2) (iii) of the Karnataka Local Authorities (Prohibition of Defection) Act, 1987, takes immediate effect and removes the members from their elected positions. The councillors—Anand G, Pad-

manabha Prasanna, Dakshayani Ravikumar, Narasimhamurthy, Bharathibai, Sharada Umesh and Latha Hemanthkumar—were elected on the JD(S) ticket but allegedly voted in favour of Congress candidates during the election of the municipal council president and vice-president held on February 13, 2025. Deputy Commissioner Basavaraju stated in his order, "The respondents have violated the party whip and acted against the directions of their political party. Therefore, exercising powers under the Karnataka Local Authorities (Prohibition of Defection) Act, they are disqualified from the municipal council membership with immediate effect."

The action was initiated following a complaint filed by the district unit of the Janata Dal (Secular), which accused the members of betraying party discipline and influencing the leadership election outcome.

Party sources said the cross-voting was seen as a serious act of indiscipline and undermined the party's organisational integrity at the local level.

The decision has triggered political ripples in Nelamangala, with analysts suggesting the disqualification could alter the power dynamics in the municipal council and strengthen rival political forces.

The anti-defection law is intended to prevent elected representatives from switching loyalties.

**KPSC crisis reflects failure of system, says JD(S) leader**

**NT Correspondent**  
BENGALURU

In sharp criticism of Karnataka's recruitment system, JD(S) Youth Wing President Nikhil Kumaraswamy has called for urgent structural reforms in the Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC), warning that repeated failures have shattered the confidence of lakhs of job aspirants.

Addressing Chief Minister Siddaramaiah through a public message on X, Nikhil said the crisis goes beyond political blame and represents a long-standing structural failure.

"I am writing not as a politician, but as a concerned Kannadiga. Karnataka's recruitment crisis is not limited to one government or one term. It is the result of systemic

failures over the last two decades," he said. He emphasised that repeated question paper leaks, recruitment scams, exam cancellations, and growing vacancies have severely damaged trust in the system. "Young people are not asking for sympathy. They are asking for justice and dignity. Their confidence has been broken by repeated failures," he stated.

**Power row dents party's prospects, says Tanveer**

**NT Correspondent**  
MYSURU

Karnataka Pradesh Congress committee working president and MLA Tanveer Sait on Thursday said that the power sharing tussle has not only led to internal stability but has also damaged the party's image in the state.

Speaking to reporters here, he demanded that the high command clarify on the issue before it causes serious damage to the party's prospects. "Let CM Siddaramaiah also give up his post, facilitating the smooth transition of power to other leaders if he had agreed to power sharing," he said. The power sharing tussle has not only led to confusion among party leaders but has also impacted the party's voters, denting the Congress image, he said. Sait said he will be meeting AICC General Secretary and Karnataka in charge Ran-deep Singh Surjewala at New Delhi shortly. "I will request him to bring this to the notice of the high command leaders and sort out the leadership issue," he said.



Yellow Tabebuia flowers in full bloom at Freedom Park, in Bengaluru on Thursday. | Satish B

**THE TECH TRAIL**  
**KDEM takes digital revolution beyond B'luru**

**Rithu Dravid | NT**  
BENGALURU

With a focus on "Beyond Bengaluru" that aims to decentralise the state's tech growth by developing the start-up ecosystem by "going beyond" the capital city, Sanjeev Gupta, CEO of Karnataka Digital Economy Mission (KDEM), is steering Karnataka towards becoming a global tech hub.

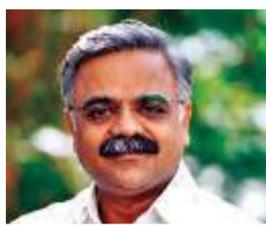
He says the focus is on developing specific high-potential regions or clusters like (Mysuru, Mangaluru, Hubballi-Dharwad, Kalaburagi, Shivamogga and Tumkur) to create a diverse, statewide tech landscape with emphasis on emerging tech clusters, startup growth, and talent development. In an interview with News Trail, he shared specific insights on KDEM's growth trajectory 'Beyond Bengaluru', driven by the state's strong tech ecosystem, proactive government policies and inclusive growth.

**How do you plan to leverage the "Beyond Bengaluru" initiative to**

**drive growth in emerging tech clusters like Mysuru, Mangaluru, and Hubballi-Dharwad?**

So, around 2020, there was a realization that Karnataka's growth was too Bangalore-centric, and other districts were lagging behind. Two key questions that emerged were how to spread growth to other regions, and how to increase Karnataka's contribution to India's trillion-dollar digital economy target. This led to the creation of KDEM, with a focus on digital economy growth, identifying key focus areas and setting up an empowered, independent organization to drive this mission.

KDEM defined the digital economy to include IT, ITes, GCCs, electronics, manufacturing (ESDM) and tech startups. And the key focus areas are built around Karnataka's strength - talent. The idea is to position Karnataka as a global talent hub, leveraging quality talent to drive growth in these sectors. So, KDEM's approach is to focus on talent and spread growth beyond



Sanjeev K Gupta, CEO of Karnataka Digital Economy Mission (KDEM)

Bangalore, with industry taking the lead and government playing a supportive role. The government's role is to enable and facilitate, acting as a co-pilot to help industry drive the digital economy. This means government agencies will support and provide resources, while industry leads the charge.

By dividing Karnataka into clusters and appointing local industry leaders as anchors, KDEM ensures

localized focus and ownership. These leaders can tap into regional strengths and drive growth tailored to each cluster's needs. By enabling hyper-local solutions, like identifying unique industry opportunities in each cluster (e.g., AI & Cyber Security in Mysuru, GCCs in Mangaluru). Local anchors understand regional nuances, ensuring initiatives are tailored and effective. So KDEM grouped Karnataka's districts into clusters based on regional uniformity and potential, like Mangaluru with coastal districts, Tumakuru with surrounding areas, and Kalaburagi with its own set of districts. This helps tailor strategies to each cluster's strengths.

**Karnataka aims to lead in deep tech, what specific strategies will KDEM employ to achieve this goal and stay competitive?**

KDEM's targeting companies in deep tech, AI, semiconductors, and agritech - aligning with Karnataka's strengths. They're also focusing on GCCs and IT/ITes to drive regional

growth. KDEM's initiatives will certainly boost Karnataka's digital economy by attracting investments, creating jobs, and driving innovation. The focus is on tech, manufacturing, and skill development. Scaling the cluster-based model to other regions, deepening partnerships with industry leaders, and pushing for more policy reforms are the priorities.

So, KDEM's approach is to be driven by industry needs, with the government playing a supportive role. The mission was set up with a unique structure: 51% industry equity and 49% government equity, ensuring industry leads the charge. The industry equity is represented by several associations like NASSCOM (17%), IESA (17%) and ASSOCHAM (17%).

**What incentives or infrastructure plans does KDEM have to attract companies to set up manufacturing units, like the PCB park in Mysuru?**

KDEM's approach is likely to boost

regional development in Karnataka by attracting investments, creating jobs, and fostering industry-specific ecosystems in each cluster.

So it creates a 'product' for each cluster (Mysore, Mangalore, etc.), highlighting features like industry ecosystem, talent pool, social infrastructure, startup ecosystem, and policy benefits. Industry anchors help shape this product and pitch it to global industries. By doing this, KDEM aims to attract investments tailored to each cluster's strengths. KDEM Mangaluru cluster will spearhead investments in IT, ITES and FinTech sectors generating revenues worth USD 1 Bn and 1,00,000 jobs by 2026. The Hubballi-Dharwad-Belagavi region will attract huge investments by 2026 as well. The Mysuru cluster with the IT, ITES and ESDM sectors has the potential to generate 43,000 direct employment over the next five years. Over the last 3.5 years we have had 151 companies setting up operations in these clusters especially in Mangaluru and Mysuru.

NEWS in SHORT

**BHAINSA**  
**STU secretary seeks amendment of GO 25**  
State Teachers' Union (STU) state General Secretary Juttu Gajender urged the government to immediately amend the GO 25 related to rationalization of teacher posts for the welfare of the education sector. He was speaking at a meeting of key members held in Bhainsa on Thursday. He demanded that steps should be taken to ensure that there should be one teacher for every 20 students in primary schools. He also demanded that the DA arrears of CPS teachers be paid immediately. He suggested that the PRC should be implemented with an acceptable fitment for the employees. He further suggested that the new health scheme should be extended to all Model, Aided, Gurukul and KGBV teachers. He demanded that all kinds of promotions should be made by framing service rules. He appealed to the state government to abolish the contributory pension system as mentioned in the manifesto and revive the old pension system.

**STATION GHANPUR**  
**Car falls into reservoir**  
A tragic road accident took place in Ghanpur area of Jangaon district on Thursday. A car which was going from station Ghanpur to Desai Tanda in Chilupur mandal it lost control and plunged into the reservoir. According to locals, the car overturned and fell into the reservoir. Dharawat Charan (18) was seriously injured when the windshield of the car shattered during the accident. He reportedly got out of the car and was found unconscious with injuries. Locals immediately rushed him to a nearby hospital. However, the whereabouts of Bhukya Pawan, who was driving the car, were not known initially, and SI Rajesh along with the police personnel reached the spot and started a search operation in the reservoir. Later, the body of Bhukya Pawan was found. The cause of the accident is yet to be ascertained. Police are investigating.

**SRI SATHYASAI**  
**Collector reviews Handri Neeva works**  
District Collector A Shyam Prasad said that steps are being taken to expedite the work on the Handri-Neeva Sujala Sravanthi (HNSS) canal in Puttaparthi constituency and fill all 195 tanks with water. On Thursday, he along with HNSS officials inspected the canal, pump houses and regulator structures on the ground. The Collector inspected the ongoing works on the 344.90 km (near Janakampally-Puttaparthi road) of the Handri-Neeva main canal. He questioned the officials about the technical issues such as the width of the canal, water storage capacity and the speed of flow. The Collector, who inspected the works at the OT-3 (343.250 km) regulator in the canal, stated that the construction is likely to supply water to about 143 tanks.

# Metro exit: L&T going scot free

METRO INDIA NEWS | HYDERABAD

The Telangana government's reported move to take over the Hyderabad Metro Rail project from Larsen & Toubro (L&T) has sparked intense debate. L&T has indicated that the metro venture has become financially unviable and expressed its intent to exit the transport business. Instead of invoking stringent provisions under the Concession Agreement, the State government is understood to be opting for an equity buyout route — a decision that could transfer the entire debt burden onto the public exchequer.

**What the Agreement says**  
The Concession Agreement between the govern-

ment and L&T clearly defines the consequences of project abandonment. Under Article 37.1.1(d), if the concessionaire abandons or expresses intent to abandon the project without prior written approval, it constitutes a Concessionaire Default. Further, Article 37.3.1 specifies that in the event of termination due to such default, the government is required to pay only 90% of the "Debt Due" (after insurance adjustments). Crucially, no compensation is payable toward the equity invested by L&T. Additionally, Article 39.2.1 empowers the government to retain 5% of the previous year's revenue in an escrow account for 120 days after handover to address any asset deficiencies. These provisions, experts note, were designed to protect public interest in case of private operator failure.

**Financial implications**

As per Article 48.1, the total project cost was estimated at Rs 12,132 crore, while under Article 25.1.1, the government committed Rs 1,458 crore as Viability Gap Funding (VGF). Currently, L&T's outstanding bank debt is estimated at around Rs 12,000 crore. If the government were to invoke termination under Concessionaire Default, it would need to pay only 90% of the Rs 12,000 crore debt — approximately Rs 10,800 crore —

leaving about Rs 1,200 crore to be borne by L&T. Moreover, the company's entire equity investment would stand forfeited. However, by choosing an equity buyout instead of declaring default, the government is reportedly preparing to assume 100% of the debt burden. Financing mechanisms could involve institutions such as Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC), effectively transferring the full liability to the State.

## Shivendra Pratap appointed JMD of Metro Rail

Shivendra Pratap formally assumed charge as the Joint Managing Director (JMD) of Hyderabad Metro Rail Limited (HMRL) at Metro Rail Bhavan on Thursday. Prior to this appointment, Shivendra Pratap served as the Additional Collector of Mahabubnagar district. On assuming office, he called on the Managing Director of HMRL, Sarfaraz Ahmad.



**Public concerns**

The decision has raised critical questions. Why should the State forgo a potential Rs 1,200 crore saving available under the agreement? Why

compensate equity when the contract allows forfeiture under default conditions? And is the move aimed at avoiding arbitration disputes or facilitating approvals for the Phase-II expansion?

While the government may argue that an amicable takeover will prevent prolonged legal battles and ensure smoother future expansion, critics maintain that the financial consequences ultimately fall on taxpayers. The debate now centers on whether the chosen route prioritizes administrative convenience over fiscal prudence — and whether the public is being made to underwrite a private operator's commercial setback.

## 'Employees are true brand ambassadors'

METRO INDIA NEWS | HYDERABAD

Minister for Labour, Employment, Mines and Geology Dr. G. Vivek Venkatswamy said employees serve as the genuine brand ambassadors of any organisation, with the Human Resources department playing a vital role in the implementation of progressive policies within a company. Dr. Venkatswamy emphasised that employee satisfaction is directly linked to enhanced productivity. He made these remarks during the 3rd HR Summit organised by ASSOCHAM at HICC Novotel on Thursday.

Expressing his delight in attending the event, he conveyed a sense of reconnection with industry leaders, reminiscing about his previous role as President of CII. He recalled that his father, Kaka Venkatswamy, had held the position of Labour Minister in united Andhra Pradesh and subsequently within the Union Government.

Reflecting on the past, the Minister noted the multitude of HR-related issues, such as wage disputes and labor concerns, acknowledging considerable advancements that have occurred over the years. He remarked that although HR departments were once viewed as less significant, they have now evolved to become one of the most essential components of any organisation. Ensuring the well-being of employees and maximising productivity is a shared responsibility of both



management and HR departments. He identified the retention of talented employees and enhancement of productivity as ongoing challenges faced by HR professionals. The Minister expressed optimism that the summit would yield innovative ideas to further refining HR practices. He also highlighted the initiatives of the State Government, asserting that Telangana is prioritizing skill development in the years to come. Existing ITIs are being upgraded to Advanced Training Centres (ATCs) with the support of Tata's CSR initiatives. Numerous ATCs are set to be established in rural regions and are anticipated to commence operations within the year.

Dr. Venkatswamy called on HR leaders and management to recruit skilled personnel trained at these centers and encouraged them to propose new courses that align with future industry demands. Furthermore, he stated that departmental officials have been directed to maintain close collaboration with industries to ensure a unified approach to employment generation.

## HC pulls up CS over Group-1 recruitment case

METRO INDIA NEWS | AMARAVATI

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Thursday expressed strong displeasure over the delay in implementing its earlier directions in the controversial Group-1 recruitment case pertaining to appointments made during the previous YSRCP government's tenure. The court came down heavily on State Chief Secretary K. Vijayanand, warning of contempt proceedings for non-compliance with judicial orders. During the hearing, the division bench sharply questioned the failure of the administration to act immediately as directed earlier, asking whether officials understood the meaning of the word immediate. The court had previously ordered that candidates selected through the Group-1 recruitment process be shifted to non-focal posts that would not influence the ongoing investigation into alleged irregularities.

Observing that the directions had not been implemented despite sufficient time, the bench issued stern remarks, cautioning that continued delay could invite serious consequences. "If the Chief Secretary himself does not respect court orders, what lesson will subordinate officials learn?" the judges asked, underscoring the importance of administrative accountability. The court also questioned the State's reluctance to transfer officers holding sensitive posts such as Deputy Collectors and Deputy Superintendents of Police. In a strongly worded exchange, the



bench asked whether the candidates had managed officials or whether there was any collusion, reflecting its concern over the lack of compliance. Appearing for the government, Advocate General submitted that the delay occurred due to ambiguity over the classification of focal and non-focal posts, prompting the administration to seek legal clarification. The bench, however, rejected the explanation, remarking that even basic tools could define the terms and that the administration's reasoning was unacceptable. In a pointed warning, the court asked whether the Chief Secretary intended to comply with the orders or face legal consequences, including possible imprisonment under contempt provisions. Responding to the bench, the Chief Secretary assured that the govern-

ment would implement the court's directions and submit a compliance report by Thursday. The division bench comprising Justice Battu Devanand and Justice Harinath Sharma recorded the assurance and adjourned the hearing to Thursday. The court clarified that personal appearance of the Chief Secretary would not be required if the orders were implemented within the stipulated time-frame.

The Group-1 recruitment case has drawn significant public and legal attention amid allegations that certain appointments could potentially influence ongoing investigations, making the court's intervention a crucial step in ensuring procedural fairness and adherence to judicial authority.

## TG sets deadline for ongoing road projects

METRO INDIA NEWS | NALGONDA

Minister for Roads and Buildings Komatireddy Venkat Reddy on Thursday reviewed the progress of key works in Nalgonda district and set strict deadlines for their completion. At a review meeting held at the Minister's camp office, Indira Bhavan, the progress of Buddharam, Appajipeta and Bramanavellam roads came up for detailed discussion and the Minister directed officials to complete the works within two months and avoid further delays. The Pagidimari Bridge over

Somannavagu was also reviewed, with instructions to finish the project within three months. The Minister instructed authorities to immediately commence the proposed four-lane road from Kanagal Junction to Kanagal village and to expedite the Kanagal-Thimmanagudem road works. Periodic progress reports were sought. Komatireddy Venkat Reddy also examined the status of works at Mamidala, Godhorigudem and Yellammagudem and specifically ordered that the CC road in Mamidala be laid without further delay to address public inconvenience. Strong directions were issued to the concerned contractor to immediately begin the Narketpally-Mandra road works. The progress of YTPS road works was also reviewed with the Superintending Engineer, Nalgonda. Reiterating the government's commitment to strengthening road connectivity across Nalgonda district, Komatireddy Venkat Reddy emphasised that infrastructure development remains a top priority and warned that accountability would be fixed for any negligence or delay.

## Lookout notice issued against YouTuber Anvesh

METRO INDIA NEWS | HYDERABAD

A lookout notice was issued against YouTuber Anvesh in connection with a case booked against him for allegedly making objectionable remarks against Hindu deities, police said on Thursday. The case was registered against the YouTuber in December last year following a complaint by actress and BJP leader Karate Kalyani, who accused Anvesh, popularly known as

Prapancha Yatrikudu, of making repeated derogatory, defamatory, and provocative statements against Hindu society, Hindu religious beliefs, revered Hindu deities, culture, and traditions, with the deliberate intention of creating communal hatred and provoking violence. The lookout notice was recently issued against Anvesh, to trace him as he is outside India, a police official at Panjagutta Police Station said.



# AP to roll out QR Code system for civic services

METRO INDIA NEWS | AMARAVATI

In a major step toward digitising urban governance and making civic services more citizen-friendly, the Andhra Pradesh government has decided to introduce a QR code-based system for property tax payments and municipal services across all cities and towns in the State. The initiative aims to eliminate the need for residents to visit municipal offices and enable seamless access to services directly from their smartphones. Under the new system, every residential house and commercial establishment will be assigned a unique Quick Response (QR) code. Officials said these codes will be affixed to house walls or entrances, allowing property owners to instantly access municipal records by simply scanning the code using a mobile phone. Once scanned, the QR code will display comprehensive

property details, including building area, annual property tax liability, pending dues, and payment history. Citizens will be able to clear taxes online from home through integrated digital payment options. Commercial establishments and shop owners will also be able to verify and pay trade licence fees through the same platform. Officials said preparations are underway to roll out the system shortly, with municipal authorities currently compiling and verifying property databases to ensure accuracy. The move is expected to significantly reduce paperwork, long queues, and repeated visits to civic offices, a long-standing grievance among urban residents. The government believes the initiative will enhance transparency in tax collection while improving compliance, as property owners will have instant access to updated information about dues and municipal records.



Beyond tax payments, the QR-based platform will also function as a civic grievance portal. Residents can register complaints related to garbage clearance, drainage blockages, sanitation issues, or other municipal concerns directly through the system without

needing to meet officials in person. Complaints submitted through the portal will be routed automatically to the concerned department, enabling quicker response and monitoring of service delivery. The QR codes will also provide neighbourhood-level in-

formation, including details of nearby public and commercial facilities such as theatres, gyms, function halls, hotels, shops, and educational institutions. Contact numbers and basic service information will be accessible through the interface, making it a localized digital in-

**Say yes to QR Code!**

- Every house and commercial unit to get a unique QR code for instant access to property details and tax payments.
- Residents can pay property tax, clear dues, and verify trade licences online via smartphone.
- Platform to serve as a civic grievance portal for sanitation, drainage, and other municipal complaints.
- Initiative aligns with the Centre's City Service Centres programme to boost digital urban governance.

formation hub. Officials said the initiative aligns with the Central government's nationwide "City Service Centres" programme aimed at strengthening digital municipal governance. By integrating payments, grievance redressal, and local information services into a single access point, the State hopes to

build a more responsive and technology-driven urban administration. The government expects the QR code system to improve transparency, reduce administrative delays, and save citizens considerable time while modernising civic service delivery across Andhra Pradesh's urban centres.

# Vijayan opens up in dialogue with Mohanlal

HD Bureau  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan spoke candidly about his childhood, political evolution and personal convictions during a widely watched conversation with actor Mohanlal, offering viewers an uncommon look at the private side of a leader known for his measured public persona. The interaction, held before a live audience and later circulated across digital platforms, moved beyond policy and governance to trace Vijayan's formative years in Kannur district, his early exposure to political activism and the influences that shaped his ideological commitments.

change with a mix of personal curiosity and reflections on public life, drawing out anecdotes that are seldom part of the Chief Minister's official addresses. Vijayan described growing up in a modest household in Pinarayi village, recalling the social inequalities he witnessed as a young boy. He spoke of walking long distances to school and observing the entrenched hierarchies that marked rural life in north Kerala during the 1950s and 1960s. Those experiences, he suggested, deepened his engagement with leftist politics and the trade union movement, eventually leading to his association with the Communist Party of India.

The Chief Minister reflected on the discipline and ideological clarity demanded by political life. He



Mohanlal steered the exchange with a mix of personal curiosity and reflections on public life

counted his years as a grassroots organiser and later as a party functionary,

emphasising collective decision-making within the party structure. While he avoided dwelling on controversies from his long career, he acknowledged that public life often requires resilience in the face of criticism and shifting political currents.

Mohanlal's questions also touched on the pressures of leadership. Vijayan, who has served multiple terms as Chief Minister, said the weight of administrative responsibility is constant, particularly in a state that frequently faces complex challenges ranging from public health emergencies to climate-related disruptions. He noted that governance demands a balance between ideological conviction and pragmatic decision-making, particularly when navigating

fiscal constraints and federal relations.

The conversation offered glimpses of Vijayan's personal interests. He spoke about his reading habits, mentioning literature and political theory as enduring influences. He also reflected on the importance of family support, crediting his late wife Kamala and his daughter Veena Vijayan for grounding him amid the demands of office. Such remarks contrasted with his typically reserved public image and were received warmly by the audience.

Political observers view the exchange as part of a broader trend in which public figures seek to humanise their image through cultural platforms rather than conventional political forums. In Kerala, where cinema and politics have

long intersected, dialogues between film personalities and political leaders often attract significant public attention. Mohanlal himself has maintained a careful distance from partisan politics, though his stature in the film industry lends weight to any public engagement with political leaders.

Vijayan addressed questions about the evolving political landscape in Kerala and nationally, stressing the need for secular values and social cohesion. Without naming opponents, he reiterated his government's commitment to welfare programmes, public education and healthcare expansion. He defended decentralised governance and highlighted Kerala's history of participatory planning as a model.

## Gold challenge adds sarcasm to Veena attack

HD Bureau  
KOCHI

Overnight attacks on Congress offices across Kerala have intensified a political confrontation after allegations that Health Minister Veena George was assaulted during a protest at Kannur railway station. The Youth Congress responded on Thursday with a public challenge, offering one sovereign of gold to anyone who can produce video evidence of an alleged attack on the minister. The challenge was issued by the Kannur Youth Congress District Committee as the minister was shifted from Kannur District Hospital to Government Medical College, Pariyaram, for further treatment after stating that she suffered a neck injury amid the scuffle.

The episode has sharpened tensions between the ruling LDF and the opposition UDF, with both sides trading accusations over what transpired at the station. Veena George said she was manhandled while attempting to leave the railway premises after a protest linked to local political issues. Visuals from the station showed jostling between party workers and police as slogans were raised. Government representatives described the



One sovereign of gold to anyone who can produce video evidence of the alleged attack

incident as a "targeted attack" and alleged that Congress activists obstructed the minister's movement. Congress leaders denied any assault, arguing that the confrontation was exaggerated for political effect.

## Unnithan dares Vijayan

HD Bureau  
KOCHI

Kasaragod MP Rajmohan Unnithan on Thursday publicly challenged Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan to institute a judicial inquiry into the alleged attack on Health Minister Veena George in Kannur, dismissing the government's version of events and ridiculing claims that Kerala Students' Union activists were responsible. Addressing reporters, Unnithan questioned the credibility



of the allegation that the minister had been assaulted during a protest. "It might have been a 'kuttichathan' that struck her neck," he said, using the Malayalam term for an imp to mock the claim of physical attack.

Unnithan's remarks have sharpened the political confrontation, coming at a time when the government is under scrutiny over healthcare infrastructure, staffing shortages and patient safety standards in certain districts. Veena George, who has held the health portfolio since 2021, has overseen the state's response to multiple public health challenges.

## No need for surgery

HD Bureau  
KOCHI

Veena George will continue to be treated in the intensive care unit of Kannur Government Medical College Hospital after a medical board concluded that, despite severe pain from a neck injury, there is no immediate need for emergency surgery. Doctors overseeing her care said the decision was taken following detailed clinical assessments, imaging studies and consultations among specialists. The board determined that her condition remains stable and that conservative management, including pain control and close neurological monitoring, is appropriate at this stage.

## Violence erupts at Cong offices

HD Bureau  
KOCHI

Several Congress offices in Kannur district were attacked in separate incidents after a student protest by the Kerala Students Union against Health Minister Veena George escalated into clashes, leaving the minister alleging she was injured during the demonstration. Police said vandalism was reported late on Wednesday and in the early hours of Thursday in parts of Kannur, a district with a long history of political rivalry and street-level confrontations. Window panes at the Congress office in Pattari near Malur were smashed, while damage was also reported at other local party premises. No serious injuries were reported in the attacks on the offices, though tension remained high across the district.

Kannur has witnessed decades of political rivalry, particularly between cadres of the CPM and the Congress, often spilling into violent episodes. While large-scale clashes have declined compared to earlier periods, sporadic incidents continue to surface during moments of heightened political tension. Political analysts note that student protests and ministerial visits frequently become flashpoints, especially in districts where party networks are deeply entrenched.

Police officials confirmed that cases have been registered in connection with both the protest and the attacks on party offices. CCTV footage from the affected areas is being examined to identify those involved in the vandalism. Additional personnel were deployed in sensitive pockets of Kannur to prevent further escalation.

## FREEDOM WITH A RIDER | Court referred to reasonable restrictions

# HC halts The Kerala Story sequel release

HD Bureau  
KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Thursday stayed the release of the Hindi film The Kerala Story 2: Goes Beyond, holding that there was a prima facie case that the Central Board for Film Certification had not adhered to statutory guidelines while granting clearance for public exhibition. A Division Bench issued an interim order restraining the producers from releasing or screening the film until further directions, and directed the CBFC to re-examine the certification process in light of the objections raised.

The court observed that film certification is not a mere formality and must reflect due application of mind,



The court observed that film certification is not a mere formality and must reflect due application of mind

particularly when a subject has the potential to affect communal harmony and public order.

The petition challenging the sequel's release was filed by individuals and civil society groups who argued that the film's promotional material and reported narrative

could aggravate tensions in the state. They contended that the CBFC had failed to scrutinise whether the content complied with the Cinematograph Act, 1952, and the certification guidelines framed under it, which require films to avoid content that could incite violence or disrupt social cohesion.

Counsel for the petitioners submitted that the earlier film in the series had generated intense debate and legal scrutiny, and that the sequel's trailer suggested a continuation of themes that had been widely criticised. They urged the court to intervene before the film's release to prevent potential unrest.

The Bench noted that the Supreme Court has consistently held that freedom of expression under Article 19 of the Constitution is subject to reasonable restrictions, including considerations of public order and decency. While acknowledging that prior restraint is an extraordinary measure, the court said that interim intervention may be justified where statutory safeguards appear to have been bypassed.

Appearing for the CBFC, counsel submitted that the Board had followed due procedure and that certification was granted after examination by the appropriate committee. The producers argued that the film was a work of fiction inspired by events and that suppressing its release would amount to censorship beyond the law.

## Rahul lays stone for Wayanad houses

HD Bureau  
KOCHI

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi laid the foundation stone on Thursday for 60 houses to be built by the Congress for survivors of the Mundakkai-Chooralmala landslides at Meppadi in Wayanad district.

The houses, each measuring about 1,100 square feet, are being constructed under a party-led rehabilitation initiative aimed at families who lost homes and livelihoods in the landslides that struck the hilly region amid intense monsoon rains. The event drew local residents, party workers and community leaders to Meppadi, near the disaster zone. Addressing survivors at the gathering, Gandhi recalled meeting families in the aftermath of the tragedy. "You have lost a lot, but you have not lost your spirit. You never lost your courage. Most importantly, you did not lose your compassion," he said.

HD Bureau  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Fresh claims over the fabrication of a sexual harassment allegation have injected new controversy into the long-running solar case that has shadowed Kerala's political landscape for more than a decade. A lawyer representing one of the accused has told a magistrate that a four-page letter alleging sexual misconduct against former chief minister Oommen Chandy and senior Congress leaders was drafted at the direction of Minister K B Ganesh Kumar and later altered by the accused in her own handwriting.



A four-page letter alleging sexual misconduct against Oommen Chandy and senior Congress leaders was drafted at the direction of Ganesh Kumar

The statement was made by advocate Fenyl Balakrishnan before Kottarakkara Judicial First-Class Magistrate E R Arjun Raj. According to the submission, the letter was prepared and handed over to the accused in the solar case by Saranya Manoj.

The accused, Balakrishnan stated, subsequently made changes to the document in her own handwriting before it surfaced as part of the broader allegations that shook the state's political establishment.

The solar case, which first erupted in 2013, centred on allegations that a woman and her associates defrauded investors by promising solar energy projects. As investigations widened, the case expanded into a political storm, with accusations lev-

elled against several prominent leaders, including Oommen Chandy, who served as chief minister between 2011 and 2016.

Chandy consistently denied wrongdoing, maintaining that the allegations were politically motivated. He died in July 2023 after a prolonged illness, with multiple cases linked to the controversy still navigating legal channels.

Balakrishnan's statement introduces a new dimension by suggesting that the sexual harassment complaint was not independently authored but was instead orchestrated. The claim, if substantiated, could have implications for ongoing proceedings and for the reputations of those named. Minister Ganesh Kumar has not publicly admitted to directing the drafting of any such letter and has previously rejected allegations of misconduct in various contexts.

## Chintha faces backlash over slogans

HD Bureau  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Controversy has erupted around CPM leader Chintha Jerome after her participation in a protest march where deeply misogynistic slogans were raised, prompting sharp criticism from opposition figures and sparking debate within the state's political circles. The march was organised by the Democratic Youth Federation of India's Kollam East Block Committee in protest against the alleged attack on Health Minister Veena George at Kannur railway station.



Visuals and videos circulating on social media showed participants chanting slogans that critics described as demeaning towards women. Jerome's presence at the event has drawn scrutiny, particularly from Congress leader V T Balram,

who accused her of hypocrisy given her previous public positions on gender equality.

The DYFI march in Kollam was projected by organisers as an expression of solidarity with the minister and a condemnation of what they

termed political violence. However, footage from the rally shifted the focus from the alleged attack to the tone of the slogans used during the demonstration. Women's rights advocates and sections of civil society voiced concern that language heard in the videos perpetuated misogyny, undermining the stated purpose of defending a woman leader.

Chintha Jerome, a prominent face of the CPM's youth and cultural outreach initiatives, has previously spoken about progressive values and gender justice. Her critics argue that participation in an event where

such slogans were raised sits uneasily with that record. V T Balram, a senior Congress leader and former legislator known for his sharp social media commentary, publicly questioned Jerome's stance, suggesting that silence or presence in the face of misogynistic rhetoric amounts to tacit approval.

Balram's remarks intensified an already polarised exchange between the Left and the Congress. He contended that leaders who speak against sexism must be consistent, regardless of the political context. CPM supporters responded by accusing the Congress of diversionary tactics.

# HC quashes case over Shanmugam remark against DMK

The Madras High Court has ruled that a speech by AIADMK Rajya Sabha member C. Ve. Shanmugam criticising the DMK government's welfare measures, including his remark that it "may even give a wife to everyone", does not amount to misogyny and cannot attract proceedings before the Tamil Nadu State Commission for Women.

Justice A. D. Jagadish Chandira, allowing a petition filed by the parliamentarian, quashed the summons issued by the Commission and

held that the impugned speech must be viewed in the political context in which it was delivered. The court observed that the statement, though couched in strong language, was directed at what the MP described as an expanding culture of cash transfers and free schemes, and not at women as a class.

The case stemmed from a public meeting where Shanmugam, a senior leader of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and former state minister, crit-

icised the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam government's welfare initiatives. Referring to financial assistance and subsidised schemes rolled out by the administration, he remarked that the government was distributing benefits in such abundance that it might even "give a wife to everyone." The comment triggered objections from political opponents and women's groups, leading the State Commission for Women to initiate proceedings.



**At this rate, they might even offer a wife to everyone."**

In his order, Justice Chandira examined whether the statement fell within the ambit of remarks that insult or demean women, or whether it constituted political hyperbole aimed at gov-

ernment policy. The court held that the speech could at best be construed as a rhetorical device used to criticise the policy of offering what the opposition terms "freebies". It did not, the

judge said, single out women for denigration or contain language that directly attacked their dignity.

The ruling underscores the judiciary's approach to balancing freedom of speech in political discourse against the mandate of statutory bodies tasked with protecting women's rights. The court noted that political speech often involves exaggeration and metaphor, and cautioned against stretching such expressions into actionable offences unless a clear

case of derogatory intent is made out.

Shanmugam had argued that the Commission lacked jurisdiction and that his remarks were protected under the constitutional guarantee of free expression. His counsel contended that the statement was a critique of fiscal policy and populist governance, not a comment on women. The State Commission, on the other hand, maintained that the remark trivialised women by portraying them as objects that could be distributed, thereby

warranting its intervention.

Justice Chandira's order emphasised that statutory commissions must act within the confines of their authority.

The court found no material to indicate that the speech targeted women in a manner that would justify proceedings under the relevant provisions governing the Commission's powers. It added that while public figures are expected to exercise restraint, the threshold for curbing political speech must remain high.

**NO CONFIRMATION | Continued uncertainty about the meeting date**

## DMK, Cong deal stalled over seat claim dispute

HD Bureau  
CHENNAI

Seat-sharing negotiations between the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the Congress ahead of the Tamil Nadu Assembly election have hit an impasse, with the Congress leadership holding firm on its demand for 40 constituencies and the DMK signalling it cannot meet that figure.

A senior DMK functionary familiar with the discussions said the stalemate persists, underscoring the strain within an alliance that swept the 2021 Assembly election and later performed strongly in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls in the state. "All I can say is that the stalemate continues. The Congress wants 40 seats — one seat for each Lok Sabha constituency, a number that is



**In the 2021 election, the DMK contested 173 seats and won 133, returning to power after a decade in opposition**

impossible for us to accommodate," the source said.

The DMK had indicated that talks could take place on February 26 or 27, but there has been no confirmation of a meeting. Party insiders suggest that while informal channels remain open, nei-

ther side has shifted from its initial position, complicating efforts to finalise a formula in good time before the electoral calendar gathers pace.

Tamil Nadu has 234 Assembly constituencies. In the 2021 election, the DMK contested 173 seats and won 133,

returning to power after a decade in opposition. The Congress, as a key ally, contested 25 seats and secured 18 victories. Other partners in the Secular Progressive Alliance, including the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi and the Left parties, were also

accommodated within the coalition arithmetic.

The Congress's current demand for 40 seats represents a significant increase from its 2021 allocation. Party leaders argue that their performance in parliamentary contests and their organisational footprint across districts justify a larger share. In the 2024 Lok Sabha election, the DMK-led alliance won the bulk of the state's 39 seats, with the Congress contributing to the tally in constituencies it contested. Congress leaders contend that the momentum from that victory should be reflected in the Assembly arrangement.

For the DMK, the challenge lies in balancing alliance management with electoral pragmatism. Chief Minister M K Stalin has sought to project unity within the bloc.

## EPS hits back at Stalin's 'slave' jibe

HD Bureau  
CHENNAI

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami has accused the ruling DMK of being a "slave" to the Congress, sharpening an escalating war of words with Chief Minister M. K. Stalin as political parties position themselves ahead of key electoral contests. Addressing a gathering at Vanagaram near Chennai on Wednesday, Palaniswami rejected Stalin's charge that he was a "slave of Delhi" — a reference to the BJP-led government at the Centre — and turned the allegation back on the DMK leadership. "We have never been slaves of anyone. We believe in our constructive work. By implementing welfare projects, we had secured the support of the Centre. But your party is not like us. The Congress had secured seats by intimidating the DMK," he said. The remarks reflect intensifying friction between the two



**"We have never been slaves of anyone. We believe in our constructive work"**

Dravidian majors in Tamil Nadu, with both sides accusing each other of compromising regional autonomy for political expediency. Stalin, who also serves as DMK president, has repeatedly portrayed the AIADMK as aligned with the BJP, arguing that its positions in Parliament and during previous alliances weakened the State's bargaining power with the Union government. Palaniswami's count-

erattack seeks to reframe that narrative. He argued that the AIADMK, during its tenure in office from 2017 to 2021, engaged with the Centre to secure funds and clearances for infrastructure and welfare schemes without surrendering its political independence. He cited flagship initiatives undertaken under his administration, including housing and road projects, as examples of what he described as "constructive cooperation" rather than subservience.

## CBI ordered to probe MKU corruption

HD Bureau  
CHENNAI

Madras High Court has directed the Central Bureau of Investigation to probe allegations of corruption at Madurai Kamaraj University, acting on a public interest litigation that raised questions over appointments and administrative conduct within the institution.

A division bench comprising Justice G Jayachandran and Justice K K Ramakrishnan issued the order on Wednesday while hearing a petition filed by G Venkateshan from Madurai. The petitioner contended that serious irregularities had been brought to his notice by students and members of staff at the university, prompting him to seek an independent inquiry. At the centre of the petition are allegations concerning S V Gomathi, who joined Madurai Kamaraj University in August 2013 as a junior clerk on compassionate grounds with a monthly salary of



**The bench observed that the claims raised in the petition required thorough scrutiny**

₹10,000. According to the petition, Gomathi went on to become an influential figure within the university's administrative set-up, allegedly in collusion with certain officials. The petitioner claimed that she was appointed to multiple positions over time and is currently serving as a superintendent in one of the university's sections.

The court's direction for a

CBI probe signals judicial concern over the nature of the allegations and the need for an impartial investigation. While ordering the central agency to conduct the inquiry, the bench observed that the claims raised in the petition required thorough scrutiny by an agency independent of the state machinery to ensure credibility and public confidence.

## BJP sharpens narcotics charge against DMK

HD Bureau  
CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu BJP has escalated its campaign against the State government, alleging a steep rise in narcotics trafficking and demanding the creation of a dedicated Special Anti-Narcotics Task Force to counter what it describes as an expanding drug network.

The party's State spokesperson ANS Prasad accused the government led by Chief Minister M K Stalin of

failing to stem the flow of ganja and synthetic narcotics. Prasad alleged that the State was at risk of turning into the country's drug hub if stronger enforcement mechanisms were not put in place.

Addressing reporters, Prasad cited seizure data and a series of high-profile arrests over the past four-and-a-half years to argue that trafficking routes had widened across districts.

He contended that urban centres, coastal belts and border areas had emerged as



vulnerable corridors for narcotics movement, including cannabis sourced from neighbouring States and synthetic substances transported through inter-State networks.

He called for the immediate constitution of a Special Anti-Narcotics Task Force with independent powers and inter-agency coordination, saying existing policing structures were "fragmented and reactive".

The DMK government has rejected the allegations, maintaining that enforcement has intensified under

its tenure and pointing to official statistics on drug seizures and arrests. Senior police officials have highlighted coordinated operations with central agencies, including the Narcotics Control Bureau, and periodic crackdowns targeting both local peddlers and larger supply chains.

The State has also publicised awareness campaigns in educational institutions and neighbourhoods, presenting them as preventive measures aimed at reducing demand.

## Veerappan aides' acquittal in abduction case upheld

HD Bureau  
CHENNAI

Madras High Court on Wednesday upheld the acquittal of nine men accused of assisting forest brigand Koose Munisamy Veerappan in the 2000 abduction of Kannada cinema icon Rajkumar, closing a legal chapter that has spanned more than two decades.

A Division Bench confirmed the 2018 judgment of a sessions court in Gobichettipalayam that cleared the



nine surviving accused of

charges ranging from kidnapping and conspiracy to

offences under the Arms Act. The High Court found no compelling reason to interfere with the trial court's assessment of evidence, which had held that the prosecution failed to establish the case beyond reasonable doubt.

The nine men — Govindaraj, Andril, Pasuvanna, Puttusamy, Kalmandiraman, Maran, Selvam, Amirthalingam and Nagaraj — had been among 14 cited as accused in the case. Veerappan,

the sandalwood smuggler whose activities across Tamil Nadu and Karnataka made him one of the country's most wanted fugitives, was killed in October 2004 in an encounter with the Special Task Force. Three other co-accused — Sethukuli Govindan, Chandra Gowda and Sethumani — also died in the same operation.

Rajkumar, a towering figure in Kannada cinema, was abducted from his farmhouse in Gajanur on 30 July 2000 by Veerappan and his associates.

offgrid

## Chennai parking surge exposes policy gaps

HD Bureau  
CHENNAI

More than 11,000 cars crowd Chennai's primary and secondary roads during the busiest half hour of the day, according to a comprehensive parking demand assessment, laying bare the strain on the city's transport network and raising questions about the effectiveness of policies introduced over the past 15 years.

The study, commissioned to guide reforms by the Greater Chennai Corporation, estimates that about 11,456 vehicles are in circulation across key corridors

during peak 30-minute windows. Urban mobility specialists say the figure reflects not only rising private vehicle ownership but also limited off-street parking supply and weak enforcement of kerbside regulations.

Chennai's vehicle population has expanded sharply over the past decade, in line with state transport department data that show sustained growth in car registrations. Analysts attribute the trend to rising household incomes, expanding suburbs, and gaps in last-mile public transport connectivity. While the city has



invested in metro rail expansion and bus fleet modernisation, private car usage remains high, particularly in commercial and mixed-use neighbourhoods.

Greater Chennai Corporation

has announced successive parking initiatives since 2010. Metered parking zones were introduced in selected localities in that year, followed by proposals for multi-level parking structures

in 2016. The civic body has now signalled a shift towards a technology-driven "smart parking" model slated for phased implementation in 2026, promising digital payments, dynamic pricing and real-time occupancy tracking.

On the ground, however, congestion and haphazard roadside parking continue to dominate several arterial and interior roads. Field surveys conducted as part of the demand study recorded widespread encroachment of footpaths, informal parking on carriageways, and limited turnover in high-demand commercial str-

etches. Urban planners involved in similar studies note that without strict enforcement and calibrated pricing, technological overlays alone are unlikely to deliver behavioural change.

Transport economists argue that the figure of 11,456 cars within a compressed time frame signals a systemic mismatch between demand and supply. Peak-hour clustering often occurs near office hubs, retail corridors and educational institutions. In neighbourhoods such as T Nagar, Anna Nagar and parts of Mylapore, narrow streets designed decades ago now

carry traffic volumes far beyond their intended capacity.

Policy documents released by the civic administration over the years have outlined ambitions to treat parking as a demand-management tool rather than a revenue stream. Draft mobility plans have recommended higher on-street parking fees in congested zones, integration with public transport, and the development of park-and-ride facilities along metro corridors. Implementation has lagged, partly due to coordination challenges between municipal authorities, traffic police and

state transport agencies.

Officials within Greater Chennai Corporation have indicated that the upcoming smart parking framework will divide the city into zones based on land use intensity and traffic density. Rates are expected to vary by time of day, with higher tariffs during peak hours. Digital platforms are planned to allow motorists to locate available slots and pay electronically, reducing dependence on cash-based collection systems that have faced criticism for leakage and weak monitoring.



**The Free Press Journal**  
Founder Editor: S Sadanand

## Much ado about names

If governance were an Olympic sport, renaming would surely be India's strongest event. It requires no feasibility study, no environmental clearance, no parliamentary debate of consequence—just a fresh coat of paint on signboards and a press release thick with cultural pride. For governments pressed for quick achievements, it is the administrative equivalent of instant coffee. In recent years, the renaming drive has gathered impressive momentum. The BJP governments at the centre and in states have energetically rechristened towns, roads, railway stations, and institutions. The underlying impulse is not hard to decode: anything redolent of the mediaeval period—read Muslim—must make way for names deemed more authentically Indian. History, after all, is far easier to repaint than to rewrite.

When former President APJ Abdul Kalam passed away, Aurangzeb Road in Delhi was promptly renamed in his honour. The Mughal emperor and the "People's President" shared little beyond their religion, but symbolism rarely waits for logic. Rajpath, the grand boulevard of imperial pomp, had already shed its colonial aura after Independence; under Prime Minister Narendra Modi it became Kartavya Path—the Path of Duty—suggesting that a change of signage might inspire civic virtue. Raj Bhavans, too, have been reborn as Lok Bhavans, though the metamorphosis has done little to reduce the considerable expense of maintaining these stately reminders of the Raj. Renaming, it seems, is more about optics than outcomes.

Not to be outdone, non-BJP states have joined the great nomenclature yagna. The Left Democratic Front government in Kerala has proposed renaming the state as Keralam. The Union government has been only too happy to oblige; once Parliament passes a resolution, Kerala will officially become Keralam. Unlike the Bombay State becoming Maharashtra and Gujarat (divided along linguistic lines) or Mysore becoming Karnataka—changes that aligned state names with linguistic identities—the Kerala-to-Keralam shift is largely phonetic. Keralam is how Malayalam speakers refer to their state. Yet language, that stubborn repository of habit, may have the last laugh. "Kerala" slips easily into adjectival duty: Kerala State, Kerala House, Kerala cuisine. "Keralam," however, resists such flexibility. "Keralamites" sounds like a new species of mineral. In Malayalam, "Keralathinte Peru" (Kerala's name) renders the final "m" silent, quietly defeating the purpose of the change. One might argue that Portugal's people are called Portuguese, not "Portugalese", but linguistic quirks evolve organically; they rarely obey government orders. Shakespeare famously asked, "What's in a name?"—assuring us that a rose would smell just as sweet by any other name. He did not, of course, know Malayalam, a language playful enough to be read the same way in either direction. Nor did he foresee that, centuries later, political rivals would find common ground in the art of renaming. For now, the LDF and the BJP appear united on at least one front: name-calling brings them together.

## Boong: Honest, unpretentious

Sometimes, some of the most unsung movies walk away with enormous recognition and totally unexpected awards. There are some very telling examples: dissident director Jafar Panahi's Iranian work 'It Was Just An Accident' won Cannes's highest Palm d'Or and Jim Jarmusch's 'Father Mother Sister Brother' walked away with Venice's Golden Lion. They were not even in the running for the prizes.

Similarly, and unexpectedly, Lakshmi Priya Devi's first feature, Boong, has garnered the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Award this year. An incredible honour that a Manipuri film has won for the first time. The movie may not have a very original plotline, for we have often seen children trying to find their parents. In the 2007 'August Rush', a musically gifted orphan runs away to New York City to find his biological parents. 'Lion' examines the plight of a five-year-old Indian boy who finds a foster home in Australia but a quarter century later returns home looking for his original family. In 'Kannathil Muthamittal', a little girl pesters her adoptive parents to help find her mother, a rebel fighter in Sri Lanka.

In Boong, a naughty schoolboy is bold enough to go looking for his missing father along our country's border with Myanmar. He does not care about the bullets flying all around him. Interestingly, Devi's film coincided with the break of hostilities there—an ethnic conflict reportedly the longest the world has ever seen.

The movie acts as a metaphor for a troubled region, highlighting the abject neglect the place has suffered. We see how deeply under-represented it is, and Boong's travel helps us witness the harsh realities of living in turbulent times. Once Boong learns the truth about his father, he is thrust into a dilemma, which ultimately pushes him towards maturity and adulthood. Devi brings this transformation with depth and feeling. What is more, her approach is refreshingly gentle and focuses on innocence, which becomes an ever-present leitmotif throughout the work.

Devi's creation may revolve around a child, but to term it a children's film will be too simplistic. She reveals through his eyes the prevailing ethno-racial tensions, a separatist movement, the anger against 'Indian culture', the obsession with English-medium education and the stigma of single parenting. And then there is that streak of rebellion—a must for any change: Boong is expelled from school for reciting Madonnas' 'Like a Virgin', which he does with disarming innocence. The movie is honest and unpretentious.



**MumbaiNaama**

SMRUTI KOPPIKAR

If you are a pedestrian or a BEST bus commuter, then the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation thinks little of you. If you own or drive cars, especially the coastal road, then the civic body believes that it must spend lavishly on you. This much is clear in the fine print of the BMC budget 2026-27 presented on Wednesday.

The civic budget outlay for the next financial year is pegged at a staggering Rs 80,952 crore—let's say almost Rs 81,000 crore—substantially higher than the last year's revised estimates of Rs 67,417 crore. In many ways, it is an unsettling budget, and the devil, as always, lies in the details. Details such as the spending on certain projects that the municipal corporation seems driven by an invisible force to undertake or expand at the cost of public funds and Mumbai's ecology.

In this budget, Municipal Commissioner Bhusan Gagrani said that the capital expenditure surpasses revenue expenditure. It sounds reassuring until you unpack the details. Nearly 42 per cent of the capex is reserved for only four projects, namely, the coastal road (north and last leg), Goregaon-Mulund Link Road, ongoing road concretisation, and wastewater treatment facilities. Of these

four, the coastal road extension and the GMLR carry a tag of Rs 4,700 crore and Rs 2650 crore, respectively. This is a total spend of Rs 7,350 crore on extending or constructing two roads that are almost entirely for the use of Mumbaiers using private vehicles.

What else has been allocated a similar sum? The entire public health system of the BMC on which millions of average Mumbaiers depend every day.

The health budget is Rs 7,456 crore. This, too, is a mirage because nearly 30 per cent of the budget has been set aside for the redevelopment of BMC's 16 peripheral hospitals which cater to an estimated 70 per cent of civic patient care and the 16-storey multi-specialty hospital at Kamathipura. The redevelopment push in the civic healthcare system, as healthcare activists repeatedly point out, has meant a stealth or backdoor privatisation of many of its services, if not a handover to private entities.

It is important to remember that Mumbai's peripheral hospitals—forming the second tier to the three main civic and one government hospital—offer healthcare to more than 5 million outpatients besides handling nearly 2.5 lakh admissions and over 42,000 surgeries every year, including emergency and accident cases. These are

astonishing volumes of patients and surgeries for any municipal healthcare system in the world. What redevelopment will mean for this system, on which millions depend for affordable care, is still unclear, but it cannot be good news.

In the Mumbai subtextual language, 'redevelopment' has acquired a treacherously euphemistic meaning that somehow leads to opening public resources to the private sector, which then sees happy profits while the people of Mumbai, through the BMC, are stripped of their ownership or control over these resources. Land is a prime example of this mechanism. Huge parcels of public land across the city—acres and acres of it in Dharavi alone, where the BMC owns over 60 per cent of the land spread—are turned over to private companies and consortiums.

Hospitals and healthcare services have been following the trend more quietly. This is where Kamathipura's super-specialty hospital makes sense. Kamathipura is set to be one of Mumbai's largest redevelopment projects spread across nearly 34 acres. The MHADA-led redevelopment plans to replace nearly 800 dilapidated buildings, some over a hundred years old, with 57-78 storey towers that will house the area's residents as well as

bring in hundreds of new homeowners and businesses.

The stated purpose of all redevelopment is to upscale existing residents or users; the underlying principle is the welfare of the private class. Sometimes, this slips out in official documents, such as the Environmental Impact Assessment of the coastal road. Why has the BMC been unusually persistent on building the coastal road at an eventual total cost of over Rs 35,000 crore, callously riding over all objections and suggestions from people and completely indifferent to the massive ecological impact it will have when 45,675 of 60,000 mangroves are cut only for the Versova-Dahisar belt and tidal waves change along the western coast?

While minimising or ignoring the environmental impact, the EIA honestly stated that the coastal road "will unlock opportunities for development" and "increase the property value of the surrounding areas". This is touching concern for the wealth potential of the already wealthy property owners along this belt.

Now, circle back to the annual budget allocation for the coastal road which, it's important to remember, is meant for about 10 per cent of all commuters in Mumbai—and offers nothing at all for the 47 per cent who commute daily by foot, the 2 million who use BEST

buses every day, or the 7.5 million suburban train commuters. The total spend on this one vanity project that will benefit private property owners, from 2022-23 till the current financial year, has been not less than Rs 15,200 crore, the BMC's budget documents show.

Add the allocation for 2025-26, and the total is nearly Rs 20,000 crore of public funds spent in five years that hold no benefit for the largest majority of people in Mumbai.

The large-scale ecological damage is, of course, not counted in this cost, but it will extract a price from every Mumbaier in the coming years as the depleted mangroves will worsen flooding. So, who is paying for whom is crystal clear. And this is just one project allocation in the budget.

American author Mercedes Lackey once observed that "...everything written is at least in part fantasy. Except maybe the national budget. That's horror." We, in Mumbai, are not adequately horrified by what the BMC budget tells us year after year.

Smruti Koppikar, an award-winning senior journalist and urban chronicler, writes extensively on cities, development, gender, and the media. She is the Founder Editor of the award-winning online journal 'Question of Cities' and can be reached at smruti@questionofcities.org.

# BMC Budget: Disturbing but we are not horrified enough

The stated purpose of all redevelopment is to upscale existing residents or users; the underlying principle is the welfare of the private class

# AI anxiety drives IT rout, but the fear may well be overdone

Software consultancy is not going to become entirely redundant, but it is certainly going to change from being human-resource-intensive



**Comment**

A L I CHOUGULE

Until about a decade ago, Infosys, TCS, HCL Tech, Wipro, and several others in the booming information technology (IT) sector were the darlings of the stock market. Considered a value buy, the IT sector was a dependable long-term growth driver when the rest of the market remained range-bound over earnings and valuation concerns or went through volatile phases. This was mainly because India's IT sector, combined with Business Process Management, has been a global leader in technology services, with the export earnings estimated at US \$224 billion (FY2024-25), contributing to a total industry revenue of US \$283 billion. Though things have changed for the celebrated Indian IT firms in recent years, rarely have they faced a narrative shock as sharp as the current wave of artificial intelligence (AI) anxiety.

Over the last four years, following the slowdown in global growth, particularly in the US and Europe, Indian tech companies have been heavily affected because their earnings have remained under pressure. Now the fear of AI, expected to disrupt their business model, has triggered a massive sell-off in the IT shares. While the IT services sector, employing roughly 5.8 million professionals and significantly contributing to employment and economic growth, is expected to maintain its position as a major

contributor to India's foreign exchange earnings, a different story is taking hold—a lot of pessimism and ripples of worry over a compelling narrative about AI's impact on the sector. Most of the talk hovers around doom scenarios.

With valuations of the top IT companies tanking over worries of AI making main roles at technology giants redundant, the massive crash in IT equity shares has sent the Nifty IT index plunging 21 per cent so far this month, marking its sharpest decline in 23 years. The crash, which wiped out around Rs 6.8 lakh crore market capitalisation, was primarily triggered by a "structural value reset" driven by fears that rapidly advancing automation tools could compress project timelines and disrupt the labour-intensive delivery model, thus impacting tech firms' benchmark earnings. The obvious question then is: what lies ahead for the IT services sector, a key driver of India's economic growth and a major wealth creator over the past 25 years, in an increasingly automated world?

The immediate cause for anxiety and intensified sell-off has been the launch of Claude Opus 4.6 by US-based AI firm Anthropic, which has heightened apprehensions that next-generation large language models can automate coding, software testing, and enterprise workflows more efficiently than before. Since a significant share of revenue for the IT companies comes from

application development, maintenance, system integration, and long-term enterprise software contracts, the fear is that rapid AI-driven automation could compress billing hours, reduce workforce intensity, and alter the economics of traditional time-and-material contracts. If AI impacts 25-30 per cent of traditional application development and maintenance work, it could potentially dent overall revenues by 10-12 per cent over the next three to four years, according to equity research analysts.

A widely circulated report by Citirini Research, which is said to be more of a financial thriller than equity research, has warned that AI automation could halt India's US \$200 billion IT export sector by 2028, citing potential for mass contract cancellation. This has heightened fear that AI will erode the people-heavy "labour arbitrage" model, which currently generates 22 to 45 per cent of revenue for major firms through managed services.

There are no easy answers whether AI will eventually render IT services obsolete over the long term. But the question is whether the panic is overdone. In absence of evidence, the conversation around AI and its impact appears narrative-driven. Still, the story that it is coming for not just the IT sector but also large swathes of the Indian economy is too strong to shake.

A slowdown, or contraction, in India's IT sector, whether through

layoffs or reduced hiring, will have consequences on employment and growth. A considered and reasoned view is that AI will have limited revenue disruption on legacy services in the near-term, though efficiencies may exert pricing pressure over time. Some of the multi-national brokerages, like JP Morgan, are of the view that IT services firms will continue to play a critical role as the "plumbers of the technology world", even as agentic AI expands its ability to write more software and automate complex tasks. The CLSA has said fear of AI-led disruption in the Indian IT services may be overdone, adding AI is being absorbed largely as an incremental efficiency and productivity tool rather than a wholesale replacement of traditional IT services.

Some critics claim that the sharp meltdown in Indian IT stocks exposes a deeper problem—an industry largely trapped in short-term thinking instead of long-term planning. They argue that these companies failed to see "beyond their noses", focusing "obsessively on the next quarter's order book and earnings guidance rather than structural shifts reshaping global technology spending". This is a valid criticism of the ecosystem and mindset that focused on valuation and market capitalisation and appreciated buy-backs and short-term capital returns for investors rather than question the model that failed to stay relevant amid global

tech spending priorities being reshaped by AI.

The blame for the mismatch between the Indian IT and global tech firms in scale and relevance, according to tech experts and market analysts, goes to the promoters and managements of our tech firms, as well as the broader market ecosystem.

While the Indian IT companies, despite having billions at their disposal, did not invest in research, the market gave excessive importance to cash flows, hiring numbers, balance sheets, and bonuses over research and innovation. That the IT companies failed to foresee the AI threat to their business model is a sad commentary on their vision and planning. Though earnings do not change overnight while sentiment does, most of the brokering commentary suggests the debate is less about whether AI will reshape the sector and more about how quickly.

There is little doubt that AI is going to boost productivity and, hence, will require fewer hands to achieve the same amount of work. However, software consultancy is not going to become entirely redundant, but it is certainly going to change from being human-resource-intensive. This should be a worry for India's employment scenario.

The writer is a senior independent Mumbai-based journalist. He tweets at @ai\_chougule

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Stalin vs EPS

The announcement marking the birth anniversary of former CM Jayalalitha has once again pushed welfare politics to the centre of TN's electoral debate. Edappadi K. Palaniswami, general secretary of the AIADMK, has promised Rs 10,000 as a one-time "karunai thogai" for every family, projecting it as relief for rising household expenses. With the TN legislative assembly nearing, direct cash assistance has become a dominant campaign theme.

A.P. Thiruvadi, Chennai

### Voting must

The SC has called for a mechanism to make voting compulsory. A bench led by Surya Kant observed that low voter turnout, especially among educated and urban citizens, weakens democ-

racy. Yes, it is a good idea and makes democracy vibrant. But as of today, only criminals, looters, corrupt politicians, scamsters, murderers, and caste politicians sponsored by political parties stand and win elections. So making voting compulsory under the present circumstances is hard to expect.

Sravana Ramachandran, Chennai

### Disposing e-waste

Disposing e-waste responsibly is essential. E-waste, or hazardous waste, includes all the electronic items like fax machines, small hard drives and dial-up modems, VCRs and video tapes, secondary computers, refrigerators, mobile phones, television sets, etc. Dumping of toxic waste is hazardous to the environment as well as human health. Recycling

### Restraint in public life

The recent technology summit in New Delhi was intended to showcase India's readiness to lead in artificial intelligence. Instead, reports of logistical confusion and an unbefitting protest shifted attention from substance to spectacle. While protest is integral to democracy, methods matter. Disruptive theatrics only dilute serious political critique and inadvertently strengthen the very narratives they seek to challenge. Equally, the government must recognise that efficient administration and measured security arrangements are vital signals of institutional credibility. India's global aspirations demand both competence in governance and restraint in opposition.

or reusing it is the best method to get rid of it.

C.K. Subramaniam, Navi Mumbai

### Organ donation

In a positive development,

the centre has said that there has been a four-fold increase in organ transplantation in the past 12 years. Nearly 20% of organ transplantation is being done through organs do-

nated by the deceased. That nearly 5 lakh donors have registered to donate organs and tissues after death through Aardhaar verification since Sept 2023 can only mean that a

noted by the deceased. That nearly 5 lakh donors have registered to donate organs and tissues after death through Aardhaar verification since Sept 2023 can only mean that a

new awareness has dawned on people. However, India's organ donation rate remains low at 0.3 to 0.8/m population.

Dr Ganapathi Bhat, Akola

### Freebies' culture

Political parties promising freebies and cash packages to lure voters when the elections are round the corner has come to occupy centre stage of late. Freebies and promises are not only acts of indirect corrupt practices, but they are also set to rock the apple cart of the Indian economy in the long run. Instead of splurging money on freebies, political parties may ponder over generating employment opportunities for the educated unemployed as a long-term solution to mitigate the unemployment.

H.P. Murali, Bengaluru



Gopalaswamy J., Chennai

## Kabul begins retaliatory offensive

Afghanistan's Taliban administration has announced the launch of retaliatory military operations against Pakistani border posts following recent airstrikes attributed to Pakistan. According to Zabihullah Mujahid, spokesperson of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, "large-scale offensive operations" were initiated along the disputed Durand Line in response to what he described as repeated provocations and violations by Pakistani military forces. "In response to repeated provocations and violations by Pakistani military circles, large-scale offensive operations have been launched against Pakistani military positions and installations along the Durand Line," Zabihullah Mujahid, spokesperson for the Taliban administration, said on X.

## Danish PM calls snap poll

Danish PM Mette Frederiksen announced on Thursday the Scandinavian country would hold a parliamentary election on March 24. Folkeeting, or parliament, has 179 seats — 175 of which go to lawmakers representing Denmark and two apiece to lawmakers from kingdom's two semiautonomous territories, Greenland and the Faroe Islands.

## GENEVA ROUND | Tehran says deal within reach as DC deploys more forces to West Asia; negotiations crucial to prevent conflict

# US, Iran hold nuke talks

AP  
 GENEVA

The United States and Iran held hours of indirect nuclear talks in Geneva on Thursday, seen as a last opportunity for diplomacy as Washington deploys additional aircraft and warships to West Asia.

US President Donald Trump is seeking a deal to curb Iran's nuclear programme, viewing the moment as opportune amid domestic dissent in Iran following nationwide protests last month.

Tehran, however, insists it will continue enriching uranium despite damage to its facilities after Trump ordered strikes in June on three nuclear sites during a 12-day war last year.

Iran has warned that any American attack would make US bases in West Asia legitimate targets and has



US special envoy Steve Witkoff (C) and Jared Kushner meet Oman's Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi (R). —AFP

You can't let the craziest and worst regime in the world have nuclear weapons.  
**JD Vance**, US Vice President

threatened Israel, raising fears of a wider regional conflict. "There would be no victory for anybody. It would be a devastating war," Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said.

"Since the Americans' bases are scattered through different places in the region,

then unfortunately perhaps the whole region would be engaged and be involved, so it is a very terrible scenario."

Araghchi is relaying messages to US special envoy Steve Witkoff through Omani mediation. Oman's Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi met Araghchi in Geneva and is passing proposals between the sides. The talks lasted about three hours and are set to resume. He has been clear it has been a positive atmosphere, a constructive exchange of ideas.

Ali Shamkhani, a prominent adviser to Iran's supreme leader, has suggested a deal can be reached if the negotiations focused solely on Iran's commitment not to develop nuclear weapons. "If the main issue of the negotiations is

## Iran enemy, but Trump's military op view doubted

A new poll finds many US adults continue to view Iran's nuclear programme as a threat — but they also don't have high trust in President Trump's judgment on the use of military force abroad. About half of US adults are "extremely" or "very" concerned Iran's nuclear programme poses a direct threat to the US.

preventing Iran from producing nuclear weapons, this would be in line with the supreme leader's fatwa (religious edict) and Iran's defence doctrine, and an immediate agreement is within reach," he said on X. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Iran is attempting to rebuild elements of its programme, though not currently enriching uranium. Tehran says enrichment has stopped since June but has blocked IAEA inspectors from bombed sites.

Meanwhile, for the first time, the US has deployed combat aircraft to Israel for a potential war mission, as per *The Wall Street Journal*. The F-22 Raptors deployed to Israeli air bases will help the US in defending Israeli territory and American troops.

## WEF head Brende quits as Epstein ties revealed

**B**rende resigned from his roles as the president and CEO of the World Economic Forum, following revelations of his links with the late financier and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Brende, a former Norwegian foreign minister who became WEF head in 2017, announced his departure on Thursday, joining the ranks of prominent figures to have left their jobs or faced criminal probes after their contacts with Epstein.

"After careful consideration, I have decided to step down as President and CEO of the World Economic Forum. My time here, spanning 8-1/2 years, has been profoundly rewarding," Brende said. "I am grateful for the incredible collaboration with my colleagues, partners, and constituents, and I believe now is the right moment for the Forum to continue its important work without distractions."

Brende's departure came weeks after the WEF, organiser of the annual Davos summit, launched an independent probe into his relationship with Epstein, following revelations in the files the Norwegian had 3 business dinners with the financier and had communicated with him via email and text message.

## Hillary denies info about Epstein's crimes, calls for Trump to be quizzed

Former US Secretary of State **Hillary Clinton** told lawmakers she has no knowledge of Epstein's crimes as she gave closed-door testimony on Thursday to the Republican-led House Oversight Committee. In an opening statement, Clinton said she had never knowingly interacted with Epstein or his associate Ghislaine Maxwell and had no information relevant to probes into their activities. She urged the committee to seek testimony from President Trump. "As I stated in my sworn declaration on January 13, I had no idea about their criminal activities. I do not recall ever encountering Epstein. I never flew on his plane or visited his island, homes or offices. I have nothing to add to that," Clinton said.



## DOJ REVIEWS IF ANY RECORD 'WITHHELD'

Justice Department said it is reviewing if it improperly withheld documents from Epstein files after reports records containing uncorroborated allegations against Trump were not publicly released.

News organisations reported summaries of interviews conducted by FBI in 2019 with an unidentified woman were missing from the records. The woman alleged she was sexually assaulted by Trump and Epstein as a minor in the 1980s. Trump has denied wrongdoing. DoJ said it would publish any document found to have been improperly withheld if required under federal law.

## NOBEL PRIZE WINNER AXEL QUILTS COLUMBIA

Richard Axel, a Nobel Prize-

winning scientist, has resigned as co-director of a leading brain research institute at Columbia University after acknowledging his past friendship with Epstein. Axel said he would step down from his leadership role at Columbia's Zuckerman Mind Brain Behaviour Institute. Axel said he would continue his work as a professor and researcher.

## THEY ARE CAREGIVERS: HAWKING'S FAMILY

A stunning photo of late renowned astrophysicist Stephen Hawking positioned between two women in bikinis has gained significant attention online as his connections to Epstein have resurfaced in public discourse. Hawking's family said the women were his long-term caregivers.

## US-China ties have reached strategic stability, says Rubio

AFP  
 BASSETTERRE

The US and China have achieved a state of "strategic stability" in their long-fractious relationship, as per Secretary of State **Marco Rubio**.

Rubio made the assessment ahead of President Trump's scheduled visit to China later this month. "I think we've reached a point at least of a sort of strategic stability in the relationship," Rubio told reporters in Saint Kitts and Nevis.

He suggested both nations recognised the mutual damage of an all-out trade war.

Rubio, a China hawk, said the US would continue raising key concerns. This includes efforts to diversify supply chains away from Chinese dominance. He vowed to keep pressing China to join trilateral nuclear talks. The push follows a US officials' meeting with Russian and Chinese counterparts in Geneva. This meeting occurred after the

New START treaty between the US and Russia expired. "They have publicly said they're not willing to do it," Rubio said of China's stance on nuclear negotiations.

He said the US would continue advocating for a deal it believes would benefit global security. China's nuclear arsenal is growing but remains smaller than those of the US and Russia. Trump is scheduled to visit China from March 31 to April 2.



## Fraud conviction: HK mogul Lai wins appeal

AP  
 HONG KONG

A Hong Kong appellate court on Thursday quashed fraud convictions against onetime media magnate Jimmy Lai, handing the prominent activist a rare legal victory.

Lai, 78, an outspoken critic of China's ruling Communist Party who founded the now-defunct 'Apple Daily', will stay in prison as he was sentenced to 20 years weeks ago after being convicted in another case brought under a China-

imposed national security law.

The conviction overturned on Thursday was from an earlier fraud case in which prosecutors alleged a consultancy firm controlled by Lai had used office space his media business rented for publication and printing purposes.

In 2022, a lower court sentenced him to five years and nine months in jail and fined him HK\$2 million.

The Court of Appeal held that Apple Daily Printing breached lease terms, it had no duty to disclose the breach.

## Kash Patel fires 10 FBI agents

Agencies  
 WASHINGTON

FBI director Kash Patel has ordered the firing of at least 10 agents linked to a 2022 probe into US President Trump retaining classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago residence, US media reported.

The move has drawn criticism from the association representing bureau personnel.

The FBI raided Trump's Florida residence in 2022, when he was out of office, as part of a probe into the alleged mishandling of classified documents following his first White

## CLASSIFIED DOCUS PROBE

House term. The case included secret Pentagon and CIA records but was later dropped.

Trump has denied any wrongdoing. In July 2024, US District Judge Aileen Cannon, a Trump appointee, dismissed the documents case, ruling that former special counsel Jack Smith had been unlawfully appointed.

The US Justice Department appealed but ultimately dropped the case after Trump won the November 2024 presi-

dential election and returned to office.

Reports said the firings took place on the same day Patel claimed authorities had obtained his phone records in Trump-related probes conducted under the Biden administration, when he was not leading the agency.

Meanwhile, FBI official Marshall Yates, who led the bureau's congressional affairs office and played a key role in Trump's probe of his political enemies, is leaving his role reportedly to spend more time with his family, according to CBS News reports.

## Trump's 3rd-country deportation push runs into legal hurdle

**Washington:** The Trump administration's effort to fast-track deportations to third countries hit a legal setback after a US appeals court refused to pause a lower court order blocking the policy.

The US Court of Appeals for the First Circuit in Boston on Wednesday denied the government's emergency request to lift a preliminary injunction that restricts deportations of certain migrants to countries other than their own.

"The emergency motion for a stay of the April 18 preliminary injunction pending appeal and for an immediate administrative stay is denied, the government not having met the standard for the relief sought," the court said.

The three-judge panel said the administration had failed to satisfy the legal test required to secure a stay

while the case proceeds on appeal.

Citing the Supreme Court's ruling in *Nken v Holder*, the court noted a party seeking a stay must "make a 'strong showing that (it) is likely to succeed on the merits' in its appeal" and demonstrate irreparable harm, among other factors.

The dispute centres on the Department of Homeland Security's March 30 guidance regarding third-country removals.

Under that policy, US authorities sought to deport certain migrants to countries willing to accept them, even if those countries are not their nations of origin.

The court expressed concern about "the continuing application of Department of Homeland Security's March 30 Guidance Regarding Third Country Removals."

## 'Donald Dash': Report shows Americans are now leaving US in record numbers

IANAS  
 WASHINGTON

In its 250th year, the US is witnessing a rare reversal. More Americans moved out than moved in last year, a shift not seen since the Great Depression, a major financial daily has reported.

The US experienced net negative migration in 2025, with an estimated loss of about 150,000 people, according to calculations by the Brookings Institution. The outflow is expected to increase in 2026. Total in-migration fell to between 2.6 and 2.7 million in 2025, down from nearly 6 million in 2023, as per *The Wall Street Journal*.

A *Wall Street Journal* analysis of 15 countries with partial or full 2025 data found at least 180,000 Americans moved to them. The number



is likely higher once complete figures are reported.

There is no single dataset that fully captures the estimated 4 to 9 million Americans already living abroad. The State Department estimated 1.6 million lived in Mexico in 2022. Canada hosts more than 250,000. The UK has over 325,000 Americans living in the country, part of over 1.5 million Americans now living in Europe, it said.

move to Albania. "Previously, the Americans leaving were super-adventurous and well-credentialed," Expats founder Jen Barnett was quoted as saying. "Now they're ordinary people, like me." She said the company's goal is "to move 1 million Americans."

Commentators have labelled the trend the "Donald Dash", as numbers spiked during Trump's second term. But the movement has been building for years. Remote work, rising living costs, and lifestyle preferences are key drivers.

A White House spokesman said the US economy is outperforming other developed nations and the administration is deporting thousands of illegal immigrants while attracting "countless ultra-high net worth foreigners", some paying "\$1 million for a Gold Card to come settle in the US."

In Portugal, American residents has jumped 500% since the Covid pandemic. It rose 36% in 2024 alone. Ireland welcomed 10,000 Americans in 2025, double the previous year. More Americans moved to Germany last year than Germans moved to the US.

Relocation firms say demand is surging. On a recent conference call hosted by Expats, nearly 400 Americans signed up to learn how to

## Ask Interpol to issue red notice to arrest Tulip: Dhaka court

**Dhaka:** A court in Dhaka, the Bangladesh capital, on Thursday ordered authorities to request Interpol to issue a red notice for the arrest of British lawmaker Tulip Siddiq over alleged corruption in a private real estate project.

Siddiq, a former British minister and MP from Hampstead and Highgate in London, faces corruption charges as the Anti-Corruption Commission pursues a case against her.

She has been sentenced to six years in jail in three other corruption cases involving her aunt, former PM Sheikh Hasina. —PTI

Siddiq rejected the allegations, termed the verdicts a "complete farce" and said she is a British citizen, not a Bangladeshi national.

The commission alleged she used her connection with Hasina to influence the award of land to a private company in Dhaka's upscale Gulshan area. Siddiq is the daughter of Hasina's younger sister Sheikh Rehana.

Dhaka Metropolitan Senior Special Judge Mohammed Sabir Faiz issued the order on a petition by Assistant Director AKM Mortuza Ali Sagar. There was no reaction from Siddiq. —PTI

## Smaller than a chicken: One of smallest dinosaurs discovered

**I**n Argentina's Patagonia region 95 million years ago, some huge dinosaurs roamed the landscape, including fearsome meat-eater Giganotosaurus, at 8 tonnes, and immense long-necked plant-eater Argentinosaurus, perhaps 70 tonnes. But this was no mere land of giants.

Researchers have found a well-preserved and complete skeleton of one of the world's smallest-known dinosaurs, named *Alnashetri cerropoliensis*, Reuters reported.

About the size of a crow, it probably hunted small animals such as lizards, snakes, mammals and invertebrates.

The fossil, preserved with the bones positioned as they



An artist's impression of a Cretaceous Period dinosaur, *Alnashetri cerropoliensis*.

would have been in life, offers rare insight into Alvarezsaurids, an unusual family of dinosaurs within the theropod group.

The specimen, nicknamed "Alna", was unearthed in sandstone at La Buitrera in

northern Patagonia's Rio Negro Province. Alna was a small female that lived in a desert environment and died after reaching age four, almost fully grown. Her body was quickly covered by a sand dune, accounting for the fossil's remarkable preservation.

Apart from birds, *Alnashetri* is the most diminutive dinosaur known from South America and rivals the smallest discovered globally.

"*Alnashetri* is truly tiny. Weighing around 0.7kg, it is smaller than a chicken," said University of Minnesota palaeontologist Peter Makovicky, lead author of the research published on Wednesday in the journal *Nature*.

## Trump calls De Niro 'sick and demented'

**Washington:** US President Donald Trump called screen legend **Robert De Niro** (R) "sick and demented" after the actor urged Americans to "resist" his administration.

The 'Taxi Driver' and 'The Godfather' star is a vocal critic of Trump, and used his lifetime achievement award speech at the Cannes Film Festival last year to slam the "phillistine" President.

"Trump deranged Robert De Niro, another sick and demented person with, I believe, an extremely low IQ, who has absolutely no idea what he is doing or saying — some of which is seriously criminal!" Trump wrote in a lengthy post on Truth Social.



His remarks came after De Niro criticised the President in a podcast aired, saying: "Everybody has to stick together to get them out and get back on track."

"The story is our country, and Trump is destroying it, and who knows what his reasons are, but it's sick," the 82-year-old actor told *The Best People* with *Nicolle Wallace* podcast.

"People have to resist, resist, resist, resist, resist. That's the only way." —AFP

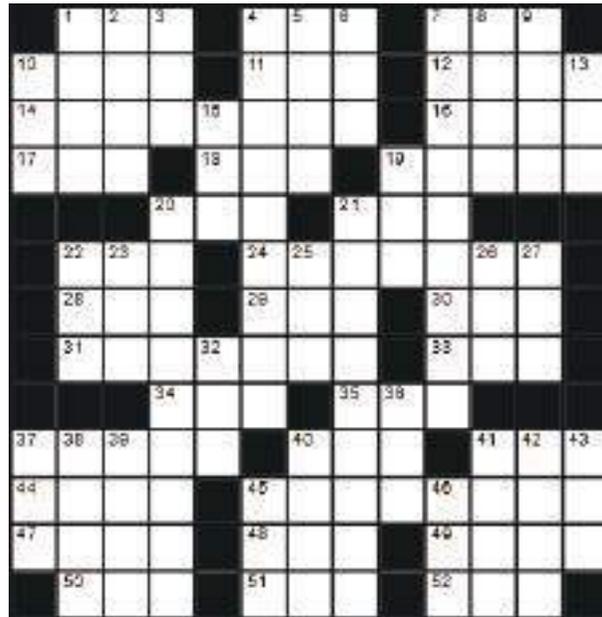
## China parl panel axes 9 military officials

**Beijing:** The standing committee of China's parliament on Thursday removed nine suspended military officials from its list of deputies endorsing action against them by the ruling Communist Party headed by President Xi Jinping.

Their removals came ahead of the commencement of the annual two sessions, the National People's Congress, the main legislature, and the advisory body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, early next month.

NPC Standing Committee of has finalised the agenda for the meeting. The two sessions were set to begin on March 4.

**Crossword #1788**



**Across**

- 1 Kimono sash
- 4 Diameter, in short?
- 7 Writing implement
- 10 December festival
- 11 "Like" suffix
- 12 Polluted air
- 14 Undertakings
- 16 One in Oldenburg
- 17 Writing fluid
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- 44 "To be" in Paris?
- 45 Geometrical figure
- 47 Word indicating that the author is unknown
- 48 Dilip Kumar and Nadira's love story of 1952
- 49 Popular snack Masala \_\_\_\_\_
- 50 In short opposite of "synonym" ?
- 51 Ring Laser Gyro
- 52 A period of time

**Down**

- 1 A prophetic sign
- 2 State \_\_\_\_\_ of India : SBI in short?
- 3 First in short
- 4 An order
- 5 Understanding term? (1,3)
- 6 American Helicopter Society
- 7 Pen name
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- 23 Battery size
- 25 Make a mistake
- 26 Charge
- 27 Suitable
- 32 Attempt or have a go at
- 36 Thurman of Kill Bill
- 37 \_\_\_\_\_ good boy : behave yourself (2,1)
- 38 Volcano in Sicily
- 39 Scientology founder, Hubbard (1,3)
- 40 By mouth
- 41 In a tizzy
- 42 Not this - "see" anagram?
- 43 Arabian for one, South China for another?
- 45 Liquid distilled from wood or coal
- 46 BJP and their allies?

**YOUR DAY** By Vinayak Vishwas Karandikar



**ARIES:** Aries: A day of sudden ideas, emotional and spiritual growth, group activities, and possible travel. New social connections and exciting collaborations will bring fresh energy. Gains from networking, online ventures, or social groups are likely. Expenses on spirituality, education, or mental well-being will prove rewarding. Support your ankles, calves, nervous system, sleep, and mental peace through light exercise. Lucky number: 7; Lucky colour: Light Blue



**TAURUS:** Recognition, career visibility, business partnerships, and strategic planning will bring positive outcomes. Gains through reputation, authorities, government dealings, legal matters, or financial planning are indicated. Those in administration, politics, finance, law, consultancy, and working on contracts will achieve success. Gentle care for knees, joints, bones. Lucky number: 4; Lucky colour: Green



**GEMINI:** A day of learning, communication, travel, and spiritual expansion, bringing clarity and success. Gains from foreign trade, higher studies, or long-distance contacts are likely. Expenses on health, communication tools, or professional growth will prove beneficial. Take care of your throat, sinuses, eyes, hips, thighs. Lucky number: 5; Lucky colour: Yellow



**CANCER:** Transformation, emotional depth, and opportunities for growth in work and relationships are indicated. Money will flow through inheritance, insurance, or property. Spending on family needs will bring lasting stability. Healthcare workers, researchers, finance professionals, insurance agents, and mental health practitioners will progress steadily. Lucky number: 2; Lucky colour: White



**LEO:** Recognition, rewards, and productive partnerships will bring success and fulfilment. Gains and fruitful expenses through spouses, business alliances, luxury, or career advancement are likely. Businesspersons, consultants, mediators, finance professionals, medical professionals, and HR professionals will benefit. Lucky number: 9; Lucky colour: Orange



**VIRGO:** Routine, discipline, financial growth, and steady achievements will bring satisfaction. Earnings through services, contracts, education, travel, or leisure remain positive. Government employees, healthcare workers, analysts, teachers, and legal and entertainment professionals will thrive. Lucky number: 6; Lucky colour: Brown



**LIBRA:** Creativity, romance, family bonding, and emotional relaxation will bring happiness. Gains through entertainment, speculation, children-related projects, home décor, or leisure activities are likely. Artists, performers, investors, media professionals, and people into spirituality will find success. Romantic energy will be high; meditation and quality family time will strengthen bonds. Lucky number: 3; Lucky colour: Pink



**SCORPIO:** Domestic focus, property matters, self-reflection, and emotional growth will bring constructive outcomes. Money will flow through property, land, family business, education, therapy, or travel. Builders, designers, real estate professionals, researchers, consultants, psychologists, and tourism professionals will benefit. Lucky number: 2; Lucky colour: White



**SAGITTARIUS:** Communication, effort, patience, short travel, and dynamic planning will bring fruitful results. Gains through media, networking, recovery of stuck payments, or financial planning are likely. Writers, teachers, journalists, salespersons, public speakers, and communicators will excel. Lucky number: 9; Lucky colour: Red



**CAPRICORN:** Material stability, financial gains, and delayed rewards will bring satisfaction. Money flow through possessions, family wealth, health, or home investments is likely. Bankers, accountants, traders, finance professionals, and teachers will thrive. Quality time will enhance emotional comfort at home. T Lucky number: 8; Lucky colour: Silver

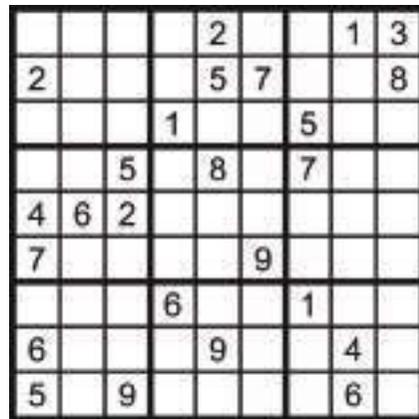


**AQUARIUS:** Personal growth, individuality, travel, investments, and self-improvement are emphasised. Money through creativity, self-efforts, healthcare, professional courses, or investments is indicated. Innovators, leaders, healthcare professionals, people in tourism, finance, and independent professionals will progress well. Harmonious communication and emotional balance will strengthen bonds. Lucky number: 3; Lucky colour: Blue



**PISCES:** The day promises reflection, spirituality, celebrations, emotional fulfilment, and joyful travel experiences. Gains through hidden channels, thoughtful planning, vacations, or self-development are likely. Spiritual healers, NGO workers, entertainers, sportsmen, and behind-the-scenes workers will progress. Lucky number: 7; Lucky colour: Black

**FPJ - SUDOKU - 678**



**Solution**

Down: 1 Omen, 2 Bank, 3 Ist, 4 Direction, 5 I see, 6 AHS, 7 Pseudonym, 8 Emt, 9 Non-u, 10 XVI, 11 Gem, 13 Gem, 15 Uj, 19 D, 20 Truculent, 21 Playing, 22 Eff, 23 AAA, 25 Err, 26 Fee, 27 Fic, 28 Tr, 32 Tr, 36 Uma, 37 Be, 46 NDA, 48 An, 49 Dosa, 50 Ant, 51 RLG, 52 Age.



**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.

**Patriotism vs Political opposition in a democracy**

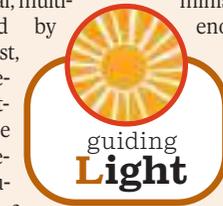
Swami Brahmadevananda Saraswati

Protesting against a government and making a protest anti-national are two entirely different things. The AI Summit, for example, was a gathering held in the national interest, aimed at giving direction to how AI should serve people. It was a multi-national, multidimensional, multi-industry initiative—and by staging a shirtless protest, the opposition not only demeaned itself but also attempted to demean the nation. Of course, the freedom to protest is constitutionally recognised as a fundamental right. The opposition's job is to protest against the government, not against the nation. A country like India can have multiple political views and multiple political parties. Chaotic as the different voices seem, that is what a great democracy is about, and that is perfectly valid.

But running through all parties there should be a sense of patriotism—a duty towards the country that transcends narrow political ideologies. Whatever your political persuasion, it should be animated by a patriotic spirit. Opposing the government is one thing; attempting to malign the nation is something else entirely. In many countries, such an act would be con-

sidered treason. In India, given its deeply tolerant nature, people get away with it—except through a long-drawn-out legal process if they are brought to justice. There was a time when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was leader of the opposition and Indira Gandhi was prime minister. Vajpayee was trusted enough to be chosen to represent the nation at international conferences abroad. For all her authoritarian tendencies, Indira Gandhi knew one thing—that Vajpayee would never let the nation down. He may have been her most formidable critic, but she never doubted his commitment to the nation. How many leaders in the opposition today can the same be said of? Certainly not the current Leader of the Opposition. So why are we discussing this in a spiritual column? Because this is dharma—spirituality expressed at the social and national level. One cannot ignore what is unfolding at the national level. Dharma and spirituality must be brought into every aspect of life, including politics.

*The writer is the founder of Aarsha Vidya Foundation. You can write to him at aarshavidyaf@gmail.com*



**GODDESS LAKSHMI**  
MESSAGE FOR THE DAY

A day of new beginnings, luxury, shopping, self-care, resolving mother issues and restoring faith in oneself. Financial transactions will be a focus. Someone's words will affect your confidence; however, remain confident — you are enough. Mothers in heaven are sending love. Plan your finances and avoid overindulgence.

**Tip for the day:** Donate money to any women-related cause and invest in self-care.



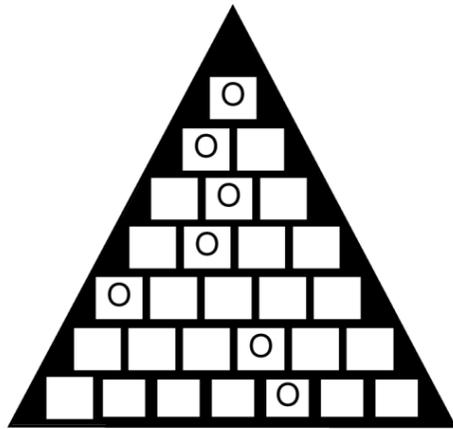
*Lots of divine miracles your way, Sheetal Sapan Mhatre.*



### 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 Oxygen for the chemist
- 2 Not off
- 3 Male child
- 4 Horse race victory measure
- 5 Pizza place fixtures
- 6 Of the veins
- 7 Apprehensive



O, On, Son, Nose, Ovens, Venous, Nervous.

#### Solution to Alpha Triangle

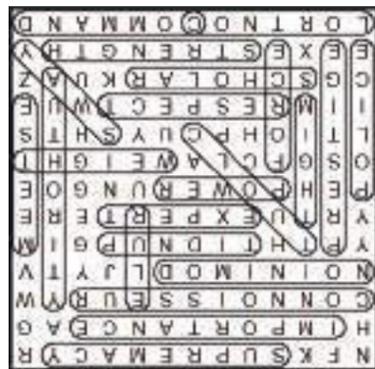
N F K S U P R E M A C Y R  
 H I M P O R T A N C E A G  
 C O N N O I S S E U R Y W  
 N O I N I M O D L J Y T V  
 Y P T H T I D N U P G I M  
 Y R T U E X P E R T E R E  
 P E H P O W E R U N G O E  
 O S G F C L A W E I G H T  
 L T I O H P C U Y S H T S  
 I I M R E S P E C T W U E  
 C G S C H O L A R K U A Z  
 E E X E S T R E N G T H Y  
 L O R T N O C O M M A N D

### In Charge

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.

- |             |           |
|-------------|-----------|
| Authority   | Police    |
| Clout       | Power     |
| Command     | Prestige  |
| Connoisseur | Pundit    |
| Control     | Respect   |
| Dominion    | Rule      |
| Esteem      | Scholar   |
| Expert      | Strength  |
| Force       | Supremacy |
| Importance  | Sway      |
| Might       | Weight    |



### 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

$$\boxed{\phantom{0}} \boxed{\phantom{0}} \boxed{\phantom{0}} \boxed{\phantom{0}} \boxed{\phantom{0}} \boxed{\phantom{0}} \boxed{\phantom{0}} = 13$$

2 2 4 9

Medium

$$\boxed{\phantom{0}} \boxed{\phantom{0}} \boxed{\phantom{0}} \boxed{\phantom{0}} \boxed{\phantom{0}} \boxed{\phantom{0}} \boxed{\phantom{0}} = 6$$

1 4 5 7

Hard

$$\boxed{\phantom{0}} \boxed{\phantom{0}} \boxed{\phantom{0}} \boxed{\phantom{0}} \boxed{\phantom{0}} \boxed{\phantom{0}} \boxed{\phantom{0}} = 24$$

1 2 2 6

Hard -  $2 \times 6 \times 1 \times 2 = 24$   
 Medium -  $5 - 4 \times 7 - 1 = 6$   
 Easy -  $2 + 4 + 9 - 2 = 13$

#### Our Solutions:

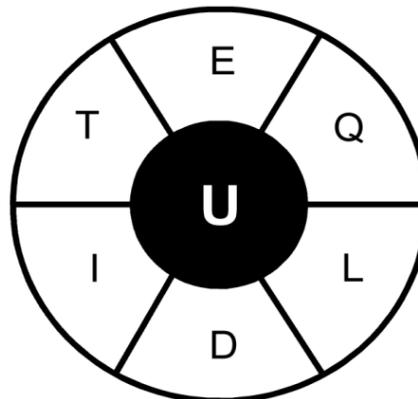
Riddler

The boy at the zoo started to call out the name of the animal he saw, but he became so excited that he got his words all mixed up. See if you can take all twelve of the letters in "Oh, it's a pom pup!" and rearrange them to make a single word that will be the name of the huge beast the boy is pointing to.

Answer: Hippopotamus

### 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.



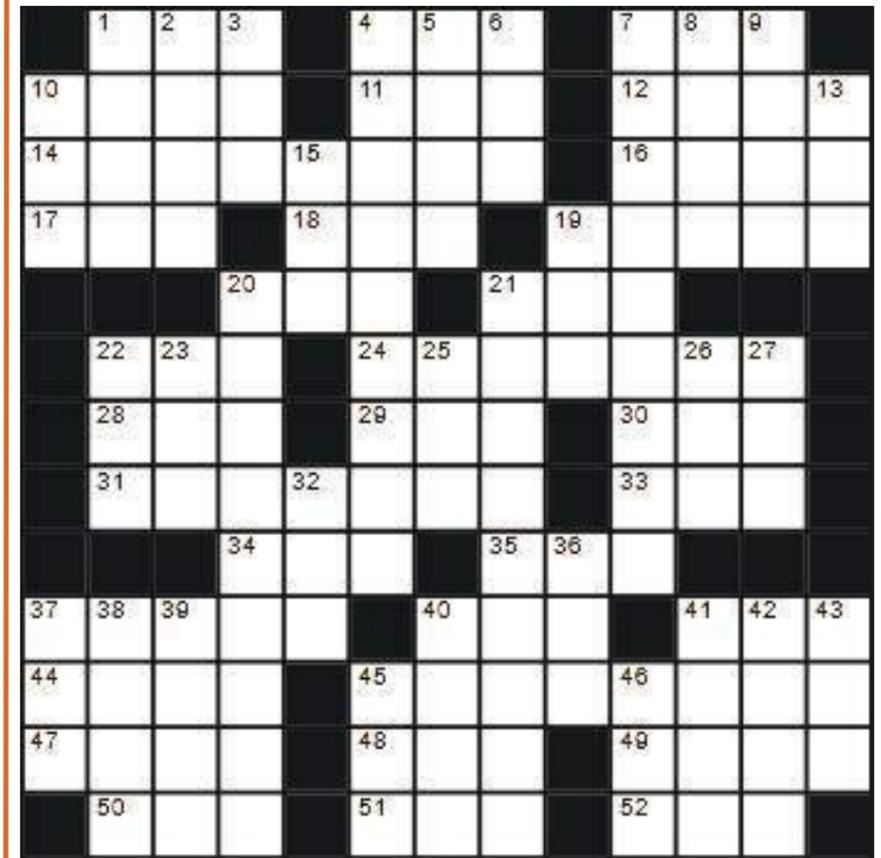
Ratings:

08 average; 09 good; 11 outstanding.

dilute, duel, duet, lieu, lute, quiet, quilt, QUILTED, quilt, quite

SOLUTION :

### Crossword #1788



Across

- 1 Kimono sash
- 4 Diameter, in short?
- 7 Writing implement
- 10 December festival
- 11 "Like" suffix
- 12 Polluted air
- 14 Undertakings
- 16 One in Oldenburg
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- 20 Facial spasm
- 21 Rubber stamp
- 22 The organ of hearing
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- 28 Fijian island
- 29 Irish Rep. Army
- 30 Indonesia's earlier name
- 31 Mill

Down

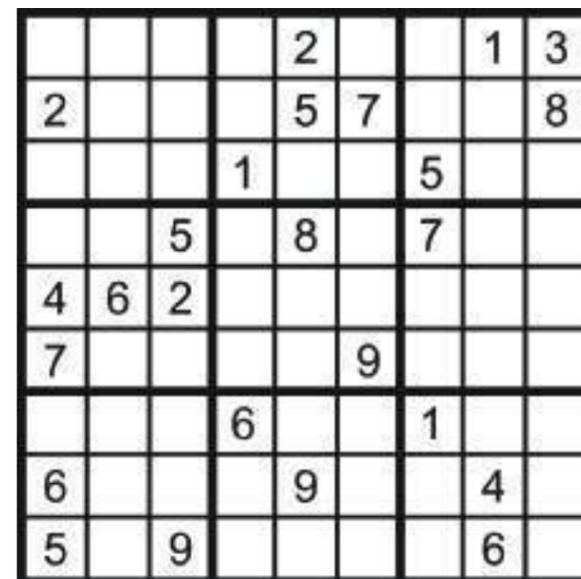
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- 34 Container of tea or coffee in a cafe, perhaps
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Down

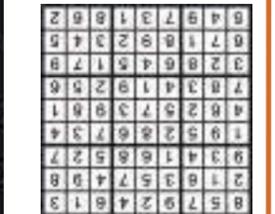
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- 39 Scientology founder, Hubbard (1,3)
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- 41 In a tizzy
- 42 Not this - "see" anagram?
- 43 Arabian for one, South China for another?
- 45 Liquid distilled from wood or coal
- 46 BJP and their allies?

### SUDOKU



45 Tar, 46 NDA.  
 40 Oral, 41 Agog, 42 Eise, 43 Sea.  
 36 Uma, 37 Be a, 38 Ema, 39 L Ron.  
 23 AA, 25 Et, 26 Fee, 27 Ft, 32 Ty.  
 20 Truculent, 21 Plaything, 22 Et.  
 10 Xyl, 13 Gem, 15 Uzi, 19 Dal.  
 7 Pseudonym, 8 Emir, 9 Non-  
 4 Direction, 5 I see, 6 AHS.  
 Down: 1 Omen, 2 Bank, 3 Ist, 51 Rtg, 52 Age.  
 47 Anon, 48 Aan, 49 Dosa, 50 Amt.  
 40 Ohm, 41 AEs, 44 Etre, 45 Triangle.  
 33 Yet, 34 Um, 35 Tum, 37 Belly.  
 28 Lau, 29 RA, 30 NEI, 31 Factory.  
 20 Tic, 21 Pad, 22 Ear, 24 Tell off.  
 16 Eine, 17 Ink, 18 Zee, 19 Durum.  
 11 Ish, 12 Smog, 14 Ventures.  
 Across: 1 Obi, 4 Dia, 7 Pen, 10 Xmas.



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.



### Briefs

COLOMBO

#### Shanaka wants govt to stop negativity



Fitness and form were not the only areas in which Sri Lanka failed, said captain **Dasun Shanaka** as he also blamed the "negative environment created outside" for his team's ouster from the T20 World Cup and oddly urged the government to protect the players from criticism. Shanaka apologised to his country for the ouster from the Super Eight stage after a 61-run loss to New Zealand following a 51-run defeat at the hands of England.

PRAGUE

#### Gukesh draws with Niemann



World champion **D Gukesh** survived some anxious moments in the early middle game before finally drawing with Hans Moke Niemann of the United States in the first round of the masters section of the Prague International Chess Festival here. The Berlin defense that went wrong for white could be a perfect heading for the encounter between the world champion and Niemann, who is walking his way to the elite chess circles after being indirectly accused of foul play.

AALMERIA (SPAIN)

#### Ronaldo buys stake in Saudi-owned club



**Cristiano Ronaldo** has purchased a stake in Spanish second-division club Almeria, a consulting firm representing the Portuguese soccer star said on Thursday. Brunswick Group said in a statement that Ronaldo bought a 25 per cent share of the club that has a Saudi Arabian owner. Ronaldo, 41, moved to Saudi Arabia to play for Al-Nassr at the end of 2022. "It has been a long-time ambition of mine to contribute to football, beyond the pitch. UD Almeria is a Spanish club with strong foundations and clear potential for growth," Ronaldo said in the statement.

## New Zealand spinners set to test Brook's England

Match is of significance to Black Caps as they bid to seal semis slot

PTI  
COLOMBO

New Zealand spinners, led by their mercurial skipper Mitchell Santner, will pose some difficult questions to an English line-up spearheaded by the marauding **Harry Brook** when the two sides clash in a Super Eight game of the T20 World Cup here on Friday.

The match is of greater significance to the Black Caps as they bid to seal a semi-final spot while England are already through to the last four stage after logging two consecutive wins.

The huge 61-run win over Sri Lanka has elevated New Zealand's net run-rate to +3.050 and to ensure that they progress, the Kiwis have to just avoid a heavy defeat.

Pakistan, after their defeat to England, have a net run-rate of -0.461 and would not only need New Zealand to lose badly but also have to beat Sri Lanka by a heavy margin to eclipse the Black Caps' NRR.

New Zealand have shown that they are comfortable playing against as many six spinners in the match versus Sri Lanka. They actually beat the co-hosts in their own game.

While Brook and Will Jaks have both been comfortable against the likes of Saim Ayub, Mohammed Nawaz and Shadab Khan, New Zealanders Santner, Rachin Ravindra, Glenn Phillips, Cole

### Squads:

**ENGLAND:** Harry Brook (captain), Jos Buttler (wk), Tom Banton, Jacob Bethell, Phil Salt (wk), Ben Duckett, Sam Curran, Will Jaks, Jamie Overton, Rehan Ahmed, Liam Dawson, Jofra Archer, Adil Rashid, Josh Tongue, Like Wood  
**NEW ZEALAND:** Mitchell Santner (captain), Finn Allen, Tim Seifert, Devon Conway, Mark Chapman, Cole McConchie, Daryl Mitchell, James Neesham, Rachin Ravindra, Jacob Duffy, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Kyle Jamieson, Ish Sodhi.

McConchie could prove to be more handy on a slightly tackier Premadasa track compared to Pallekele.

Brook is in good form, as demonstrated by his match-winning hundred against Pakistan, and the team would expect veteran Jos Buttler to up his game after having a quiet tournament so far.

A good start by Buttler will put England in a strong position. At the other end, the off-spin of Jaks and the left-arm spin of Liam Dawson could be equally challenging for the Kiwis.



## MASSIVE | Fifties from Abhishek, Pandya help India win by a huge 72 runs

# Rampant India thump Zim

PTI  
CHENNAI

Abhishek Sharma rediscovered his form with a typically blazing fifty and Hardik Pandya bludgeoned a half-century, powering India to a formidable 256 for four and thereafter the bowlers did the rest as India kept their semi-final hopes on track to overwhelm Zimbabwe by 72 runs in their must-win T20 World Cup Super Eight match here on Thursday.

Chasing the monumental 257 for victory, Zimbabwe tried to show some fight but were ultimately restricted to 184/6 in 20 overs.

Arshdeep Singh was the pick of the Indian bowlers with figures of 3/24.

Earlier, India amassed their highest-ever total in T20 World Cups and the overall highest in this ICC showpiece, but the story of the day was offered by Abhishek (55, 30b, 4x4, 4x6).

Since returning from a stomach bug, Abhishek looked a distant shadow of his dominating self, registering three ducks in a row.

But on a smooth Chepauk pitch, the left-hander found his bearings, also easing the worries of the Indian team management over the sudden slump in his form.

The 25-year-old was involved in two excellent partnerships— a 48 for the opening wicket with Sanju Samson and then a 72 off 42 balls with Ishan Kishan (38) for the following wicket — that gave the hosts a strong platform.

Re-drafting Samson into the eleven and pairing him with Abhishek proved a good move eventually as the Kerala right-hander smoked 24 off 15 balls to ease any nerves that his partner had.

Once Samson departed, lofting Blessing Muzarabani to



India's Abhishek Sharma plays a shot against Zimbabwe. PTI

### Scoreboard

**INDIA:** S Samson c R Burl b B Muzarabani 24, A Sharma c S Raza b T Maposa 55, I Kishan c R Ngarava b S Raza 38, S Yadav c T Musekiwa b R Ngarava 33, H Pandya (not out) 50, T Varma (not out) 44. **Extras** (LB-4, W-7, NB-1) 12. **Total:** (For 4 wks, 20 overs) 256. **Fall of wickets:** 1-48, 2-120, 3-150, 4-172 **Bowling:** R Ngarava 4-0-62-1, B Muzarabani 4-0-43-1, T Maposa 2-0-40-1, B Evans 4-0-52-0, S Raza 3-0-29-1, B Bennett 2-0-16-0, R Burl 1-0-10-0.

**Zimbabwe:** B Bennett (not out) 97, T Marumani c I Kishan b Patel 20, D Myers c T Varma b Varun 6, S Raza c A Sharma b A Singh 31, R Burl lbw A Singh 0, T Munyonga b A Singh 11, T Musekiwa c Samson b Dube 7, B Evans (not out) 1. **Extras** (B-1, LB-1, NB-2, W-7) 11. **Total:** (for 6 wks, 20 overs) 184. **Fall of wickets:** 1-44, 2-72, 3-144, 4-144, 5-162, 6-173 **Bowling:** A Singh 4-0-24-3, H Pandya 3-0-21-0, J Bumrah 3-0-21-0, V Chakravarthy 4-0-35-1, A Patel 4-0-35-1, S Dube 2-0-46-1.

Ryan Burl in the deep, Abhishek took charge of Indian innings.

He hammered Tino Maposa, Brian Bennett and Richard Ngarava for sixes as India stormed to 80 for one in the Power Play segment, their second best after the 86/1 made against Namibia in a group match.

The bat flow, feet movement and eye-hand coordination, which were missing in

this interim, was back. He fetched his first fifty off just 26 balls with a single off spinner Sikandar Raza.

Abhishek's belligerence and the largesse of Zimbabwe fielders helped India maintain the tempo even after the Power Play overs, scoring 81 runs between overs seven and 14.

The tourists were also guilty of modest catching effort — dropping Kishan (26)

and Suryakumar Yadav (4) However, Abhishek could not further extend his innings, skying Maposa to Raza in the deep, much to Zimbabwe's relief.

However, the relief did not last long as India's middle-order batters, who were struggling to force the pace on slower surfaces in earlier matches, rediscovered their range in the mixed soil surface at the MA Chidambaram

Stadium. India reached the team 100 in 9.1 overs but the next 100 flowed in just 7.3 overs.

Pandya (50 not out) and Tilak Varma (44 not out) used the long handle to telling effect, scoring 84 runs for the fifth wicket as India maximised the final five overs, in which 80 runs were scored.

India will now have to play out of their skins to beat the West Indies on March 1.

## Markram says he wants to continue playing good cricket

South Africa skipper says it is hard to say they are peaking early, and wants to tackle things head-on

Irfan Haji  
AHMEDABAD

South Africa has had a perfect tournament so far in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup. They defeated New Zealand in the initial stage and then overwhelmed defending champions India in the Super Eight game. On Thursday, they defeated West Indies by nine wickets to remain strong contenders for a semifinal berth. All these wins have come here in Ahmedabad, which has become their fortress, making them the only unbeaten team in the tournament.

However, SA has faced problems in the knockouts in the past, and the Aiden Markram side will hope they haven't peaked early in the tournament.

"Peaking too early, it's hard to say. We've just taken it game by game and are trying to tackle it head-on and see where it sort of gets us. So yeah, hopefully we can keep continuing the good cricket we're playing," Markram, who made an unbeaten 82 in



South Africa's Aiden Markram in action. PTI

"Peaking too early, it's hard to say. We've just taken it game by game and are trying to tackle it head-on and see where it sort of gets us. So yeah, hopefully we can keep continuing the good cricket we're playing," Markram, who made an unbeaten 82 in

**Aiden Markram**  
SA captain

46 balls against West Indies, said in the post-match press

conference on Thursday. Markram has already scored 264 runs in the tournament and is the second-highest scorer in the tournament. He is happy to play games at Ahmedabad and win them comprehensively. The final will also be played in Ahmedabad.

"We've been fortunate to play here for sure. We sensed it was tacky up front, it was tacky in the previous day's game that we played here, and obviously that affects the toss and how you operate in the power play, I guess."

## SA on the cusp of semifinals

Proteas thrash Windies by nine wickets to make things simple for India

Irfan Haji  
AHMEDABAD

South Africa thrashed West Indies by nine wickets to have one foot in the semifinals of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup at the Narendra Modi Stadium here on Thursday. The win ensured India has things in their own hands in the bid for semifinal qualification.

Skipper Aiden Markram smashed an unbeaten 82 in 46 balls as South Africa made short work of chasing 177 in their second Super Eight game with 3.5 overs to spare. Left-handers Ryan Rickelton (45 not out) and Quinton de Kock (47) also came up with breezy knocks as hosts, who were playing their fifth game here, made up for most of the conditions to remain unbeaten in the tournament.

West Indies bowlers were unimpressive with the ball after seaming all-rounders Jason Holder and Romario Shepherd launched the fight-back with the bat to put on a record-high eighth-wicket partnership of 89 runs in the T20 World Cups to give their side a fighting total of 176 for eight in 20 overs. The partnership came in just 57 balls. Shepherd remained



South Africa's Lungi Ngidi (right) with team-mate Ryan Rickelton celebrates. PTI

unbeaten on 52 in 37 balls while Holder was run out last over after making 49 in 31 balls. They hit seven sixes and seven boundaries between them. West Indies played a total of 53 dot balls and hit 11 sixes and 15 boundaries.

It was after South African seamers rattled the West Indies batting line-up to reduce them to 83 for 7 in 10.2 overs. Kagiso Rabada (2 for 22) started the destruction while Lungi Ngidi (3 for 30) and Corbin Bosch (2 for 31) ran through the middle order. Keshav Maharaj went for 43 runs in his four overs while Marco Jansen conceded 50. Openers Markram and De

Kock (47 in 24 balls) gave Proteas a dream start of 95 in eight overs. Skipper Markram led the chase by raising the team's fifty (53) in five overs and outscoring De Kock with 43. De Kock caught up with two sixes of Shamar Joseph, followed by pasting spinners Gudakesh Motie and Roston Chase before the latter dismissed De Kock.

At the halfway mark, they were 109 for 1 with Markram already completing a half-century, and from there it was a mere cakewalk with Rickelton joining the party with his skipper. West Indies had also got off to a rollicking start.

### Markram obliges Indian fans

Spectators' stands at the Narendra Modi Stadium were almost empty before the toss between South Africa and West Indies, which was understandable as India wasn't involved in the Super Eight game, besides it was a working day, a day game, and extremely hot outside. However, as the match started, spectators started to come gradually in numbers, with most of them sticking to Indian jerseys, while many also supported South African jerseys. There were a few West Indian fans as well. Around 30,000 fans were in the stadium as the evening approached. A few of them were wearing Aiden Markram jerseys, and the South Africa skipper obliged with cracking match-winning effort.

### opinion

## West Indies skipper defends slam-bang approach

Irfan Haji  
AHMEDABAD

Despite losing wickets in a hurry, there was no attempt from West Indies batters to forge partnerships and instead went for their shots in a nine-wicket loss to South Africa.

"With the evolution of T20 cricket these days, there's no right or wrong way to go about it. It's just how best we can execute on a given day in whichever situation we're faced with," West Indies

skipper Shai Hope said in the post-match press conference. Hope said they were 40 to 60 runs short on that good batting surface.

"It was a good surface that reminded me of pitches in South Africa. Their seamers got good shape and movement early. Maybe we didn't assess as well as we could have, and then obviously, with the wickets in the power play, they would always push us back.

West Indies, who were fresh from scoring 254 in

Mumbai, got off to a rollicking start with 29 in two overs after South Africa won the toss and elected to bowl first. Kagiso Rabada, who hasn't been at his best in the tournament, breathed fire to dismiss Hope (16) and Shimron Hetmyer (2) in his first over.

Lungi Ngidi accounted for King (21) and Roston Chase (2) in his first over after getting hit for two consecutive boundaries. The Caribbean side was 43 for 4 in four overs.

However, Sherfane

Rutherford and Rovman Powell went for their shots and didn't seem in the mood to forge a partnership. The Caribbean side was reduced to 83 for seven at the halfway mark.

"Credit to them (Jason Holder and Romario Shepherd) for taking us from 83-7 to 176. It gives us some confidence to recover from such situations. But I think we were 40 to 50 or 60 runs short, the way the pitch was playing," he added.

West Indies now have to

win their last game against India to harbour semifinal qualification hopes.

"I wouldn't say it's a difficult road. I think this is how it's supposed to be. Because when you come into crunch time of a tournament, every opposition or every game you play now is supposed to be a challenge in some way and this is the reason why it's Super 8s, and then if you get to the semis in the finals is the reason why because the better teams or the best teams in the latter half."



West Indies' captain Shai Hope plays a shot during the Super Eight match against South Africa. PTI

**Briefs**

PUNE

**Suryavanshi, Tendulkar power DY Patil**



India's Under-19 World Cup hero Vaibhav Suryavanshi and Arjun Tendulkar lit up the DY Patil Ground in Talegaon as DY Patil Blue pulled off a high-octane chase against Indian Navy on Day 4 of the 20th DY Patil T20 Cup on Thursday. Suryavanshi slammed 63 off just 19 balls with seven boundaries and five sixes. Tendulkar on the other hand remained unbeaten on 55 off just 29 balls with seven boundaries and two sixes. Indian Navy posted 219 for four in their 20 overs.

MUMBAI

**Cathedral & John Connon, Jamnabai win**

A thrilling day of playoff and knockout action unfolded at the MSSA Turf and MSSA Ground as the Dream Sports MSSA Inter-School Football Tournament showcased tightly contested battles, shootout drama and high-scoring wins across the Boys U-8 Third Division and Boys U-10 MSSA Cup. Young footballers displayed grit, skill and composure under pressure, making it one of the most exciting days of the tournament so far. At the MSSA Turf, Green Acres (Chembur) opened with a hard-fought 2-1 win over Shishu Vihar. St. Mary's ICSE 'B' (Mazagaon) edged past Swami Vivekanand Int. (Gora) in a 2-0 shootout after a 1-1 draw. Cathedral & John Connon (Fort) followed with a 2-1 victory over Next School (Mulund), before Jamnabai Narsee International (Juhu) recorded a strong 3-0 win powered by a brace from Yuvraj Thakkar. Cresmondal advanced 1-0 on penalties after a 2-2 draw against St. Mary's.

**CL | Juventus, beaten by Galatasaray, fell short of completing its own recovery**

**Vinicius helps Real advance**

AP

MADRID

With the winning goal and another corner-flag dance, Vinicius Junior fittingly had the final say in an emotionally charged rematch with Benfica to guide Real Madrid into the round of 16 of the Champions League on Wednesday.

Defending champion Paris Saint-Germain also advanced from the playoffs, but only after narrowly getting past Monaco, while Atalanta pulled off a remarkable comeback against Borussia Dortmund with a dramatic last-second goal to maintain Italian involvement in the competition.

Juventus fell short of completing its own second-leg recovery, eliminated by Galatasaray after extra time.

Vinicius jeered by Benfica fans

Playing a week after being the target of alleged racial abuse in the first leg against Benfica, Vinicius wrapped up Madrid's 2-1 win over the Portuguese team, and a 3-1 victory on aggregate, with his team's second goal in the 80th minute at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium.

The Brazil star slotted a low finish into the corner and celebrated his goal as he did last week, by dancing beside the corner flag.

Vinicius was loudly booed by Benfica fans nearly every time he touched the ball, a hangover from the first leg when he accused Benfica



**3-1**  
Real Madrid-Benfica aggregate scoreline

player Gianluca Prestianni of calling him a "monkey".

Prestianni denied racially insulting Vinicius while confronting him with his jersey over his mouth, but did not play Wednesday's game after being provisionally banned for one match by UEFA. Benfica coach Jose Mourinho, who previously led Madrid, was also suspended for the game and did not take his place in the dugout.

Benfica opened the scoring in the 14th minute through Rafa Silva to briefly level the tie at 1-1 on aggregate, only for Aurelien Tchouameni to equalise two minutes later for

Madrid.

Madrid maintained its record of playing in the round of 16 every year this century and will play either Manchester City or Sporting Lisbon next.

Juve comeback stamped out by Galatasaray

Juventus almost pulled off one of the great Champions League recoveries.

Trailing 5-2 from the first leg, Juve went ahead against Galatasaray when Manuel Locatelli converted a penalty before half-time and overcame a red card to defender Lloyd Kelly by scoring more goals through Federico Gatti and Weston McKennie to take

the game to extra time.

It could have been worse for Galatasaray, with Kenan Yildiz also hitting the post for Juventus in regulation.

Galatasaray fought back in the added 30 minutes with an extra man, scoring through Victor Osimhen and Baris Yilmaz as Juve won 3-2 on the night but lost 7-5 on aggregate.

Atalanta the only Italian team standing after wild finish

With Juventus out, Italy's record of having at least one team in the round of 16 since that stage was reintroduced to the Champions League in 2003-04 was maintained

**PSG keeps title defence alive**

PSG also survived an early scare in the second leg to advance from the playoffs for a second straight season. Protecting a 3-2 lead from last week, the titleholder went behind to Maghnes Aklouch's 45th-minute goal but was then boosted by a red card to Monaco's Mamadou Coulibaly in the 58th minute. Goals by Marquinhos and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia put PSG in front in the game. Jordan Teze's stoppage-time equaliser came too late for Monaco. PSG's reward is a meeting with either Barcelona or Chelsea. PSG right back Achraf Hakimi played a day after being ordered to stand trial in a rape case.

thanks to Atalanta's fightback against Dortmund.

Atalanta substitute Lazar Samardzic converted a penalty with the last kick of the game in the eighth minute of stoppage time, following a video review, to seal a 4-1 win on the night and a 4-3 victory on aggregate.

Extra time was looming when a mistake by Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel allowed Atalanta to launch one last attack.

**Pride's Prince prevails to land RN Kanga Trophy**

It was Shubankar who seized the initiative early as the field settled

Joe Williams

MUMBAI

After missing the kick at the gates, The Milenium Force had plenty of ground to make up, but the spotlight firmly belonged to Pride's Prince, who produced a resolute late surge to land the RN Kanga Trophy, the main event on the 14th day of the Mumbai meeting at the Mahalaxmi Race Course here on Thursday.

As the field settled into the mile-long journey, it was Shubankar who seized the initiative early, pushing his mount to the front and dictating the pace with confidence. He maintained a clear advantage for most of the 1600-metre contest, turning for home still firmly in command and looking every bit the likely winner approaching the final furlong.

However, the complexion of the race changed dramatically inside the last 100 metres. Pride's Prince, ridden with patience and precision, began to assert himself, finding a telling burst of acceleration just when it mattered most. Despite his sluggish start, The Milenium Force, the tote favourite also made steady progress down the stretch, closing in strongly to threaten the leaders.

What followed was a grip-



ping duel in the final 50 metres, as Antony Raj on Pride's Prince and P Trevor aboard The Milenium Force locked horns in a thrilling drive to the wire. With both jockeys asking for maximum effort, it was Antony Raj who held his nerve, extracting that decisive final response from Pride's Prince to edge ahead close home.

Although the winning margin was just short neck (SN), but it was enough to seal a memorable victory in the day's marquee race. The Milenium Force finished a creditable second after his early setback, while Shubankar's bold front-running effort saw him fade late but still earn respect for setting up a truly competitive contest. The RN Kanga Trophy once again lived up to its billing, delivering drama, determination, and stirring finish for racing enthusiasts.

**Ranji Final**

**Sensational Nabi puts J&K in commanding position**

PTI

HUBBALLI

India's latest pace sensation Aqib Nabi rocked Karnataka's star-studded top-order with a sensational opening spell as Jammu and Kashmir took a vice-like grip on the Ranji Trophy final despite Mayank Agarwal's defiant hundred here on Thursday.

At stumps on the third day, eight-time champions Karnataka were placed at 220 for five, trailing the visitors by 364 runs with Agarwal batting on 130 in the company of wicketkeeper Kruthik Krishna (27).

**Scoreboard**

**Jammu & Kashmir 1st Innings**

(O/n: 527/6; 156 overs) Q Iqbal c Rahul b P Krishna 6, Y Hassan c Rahul b P Krishna 88, S Pundir c sub (KV Aneesh) b Patil 121, P Dogra b Gopal 70, A Samad c K Krishna b P Krishna 61, K Wadhawan c Rahul b S Shetty 70, S Lotra c Patil b Vyshak 72, A Mushtaq c Padikkal b P Krishna 28, A Nabi c K Krishna b P Krishna 2,

Y Singh (run out) 30, S Kumar (not out) 1. **Extras:** (B-14, LB-16, W-5) 35.

**Total:** (all out, 173.1 overs) 584 **Fall of wickets:** 1-18, 2-157, 3-303, 4-307, 5-417, 6-471, 7-539, 8-543, 9-573

**Bowling:** V Patil 32-2-116-1, V Vyshak 34-10-75-1, P Krishna 34.1-7-98-5, S Gopal 34-2-139-1, S Shetty 37-3-125-1, K Nair 2-1-1-0

**Karnataka 1st Innings:** KL Rahul c Wadhawan b A Nabi 13, M Agarwal

(batting) 130, D Padikkal c A Samad b Kumar 11, K Nair b A Nabi 0, R Smaran c Wadhawan b A Nabi 0, S Gopal lbw Y Singh 27, K Krishna (batting) 27. **Extras:** (LB-2, NB-10) 12. **Total** (For 5 wks, 69 overs) 220.

**FoW:** 1-27, 2-56, 3-57, 4-57, 5-162

**Bowling:** A Nabi 14-3-32-3, S Kumar 14-3-45-1, Y Singh 10-3-32-1, A Mushtaq 20-2-62-0, S Lotra 9-0-42-0, A Samad 2-0-5-0.

Nabi ended the day with impressive figures of 3/32 in 14 overs.

This was after Jammu and Kashmir, riding on Shubham Pundir's 121 in a collective batting effort, posted a mam-

moth first-innings total of 584 in their maiden Ranji final. Nabi, then, took centre stage.

Jammu and Kashmir were in the box seat once they put up a huge first-innings total,

and Nabi then left the Karnataka batters searching for answers.

The 28-year-old Nabi, who dominated the season with over 55 wickets in nine games going into the summit

showdown, including a 12-wicket match haul (7/40 & 5/70) against Madhya Pradesh in the quarter-final, got the ball to move away and nip back while also dismissing out occasional yorkers.



J&K's Aqib Nabi celebrates after scalping Karnataka's R Smaran in Hubballi. PTI

**Drazic strike gives FC Goa three points against SC Delhi**

The Gaurs provisionally climbed to top of the table with seven points

FPJ News Service

GOA

Dejan Drazic's first half strike proved decisive as FC Goa edged past Sporting Club Delhi 1-0 to register their second consecutive victory in Match 15 of the Indian Super League 2025-26 season at the PJN Stadium Fatorda, in Goa on Thursday, February 26, 2026.

The Gaurs provisionally climbed to the top of the table with seven points from three matches, while SC Delhi remain at the bottom. Dejan Drazic was adjudged the Player of the Match.

FC Goa head coach Manolo Marquez made one change to his starting line-up, handing Ishan Pandita the nod up front in place of Muhammed Nemil. SC Delhi Head Coach Tomasz Tchorz, meanwhile, made three alterations, with Nora Fernandes starting in goal ahead of Vishal Yadav, Ayush Adhikari coming into midfield in place of Mohammed Aimen, and Alex Saji replacing Clarence Fernandes in defence.

Both sides enjoyed spells of pressure in the opposition half, but clear-cut openings were at a premium as neither attack was able to break down resolute defending for long stretches by either side. Sandesh Jhingam came closest for the hosts when he glanced a header narrowly wide of the



**FANCODE**

**1-0**  
FC Goa-Sporting Club Delhi scoreline

Drazic timed his run to perfection and finished clinically past the goalkeeper, scoring his third goal of the season.

The home side had a chance to double their lead at the hour mark when they were awarded a penalty after SC Delhi midfielder Ayush was adjudged to have handled the ball inside the box. However, Drazic, who was taking his third penalty in as many matches, failed to capitalise, blasting his effort over the crossbar.

The Gaurs continued to pile the pressure in search of a second goal but were denied by resolute defending from the visitors. Their best opportun-

ity came just before the water break when Ayush Chhetri's effort was cleared off the line by Rafael Ribeiro. Moments later, Ribeiro had a chance to make an impact at the other end from a corner, but his towering header drifted wide of the target.

The home side saw out the final quarter by keeping hold of possession and protecting their one goal lead.

Tomazs Tchorz introduced changes in search of an equaliser, but his side struggled to create any clear-cut opportunities to trouble the goalkeeper, as FC Goa secured another hard-fought three points.

**East Bengal face Jamshedpur in top-of-the-table clash**

EBFC head into the fixture at the top of the table on the back of a 4-1 victory against Sporting Delhi

FPJ News Service

KOLKATA

East Bengal FC will take on Jamshedpur FC as both sides aim to secure a third consecutive victory in Match 16 of the Indian Super League 2025-26 season on Friday, Feb 27, at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan in Kolkata. The match is scheduled to kick off at 5 pm IST.

The second match of the day will see Bengaluru FC host Punjab FC at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium in Bengaluru, with kick-off at 7.30 pm IST on Friday.

Both matches will be streamed live on FanCode and telecast on Sony Sports Ten 2. East Bengal FC vs Jamshedpur FC

East Bengal FC head into the fixture at the top of the table on the back of a 4-1 victory against Sporting Club Delhi in their previous encounter. Goals from Edmund Lalrindika, Miguel Figueira and a brace from Youssef Ezzejari ensured a comfortable win for the Red and Gold Brigade.

With both East Bengal and Jamshedpur tied on six points from their opening two games, the winners of this clash will move to the top of the table temporarily.

Speaking on the need to maintain their winning form and the weight of home



expectations, East Bengal FC head coach Oscar Bruzon emphasised his team's focus. "The most important objective is to secure the three points, but we will do it our way by respecting our pattern of play and performing at our highest level. Jamshedpur are strong in transitions, dangerous on set-pieces and very well organised, so we must stay concentrated and disciplined for the full 90 minutes."

East Bengal midfielder Saul Crespo said, "They are a strong team. We know some of their players and their quality. We also know their coach. It will be a difficult game, but we are confident as a team this season. We started very well. We are in a great moment and we want to continue in the same way with the help of the fans."

Jamshedpur FC, meanwhile, arrive in Kolkata in fourth place with six points,

separated from the hosts only by goal difference. The Men of Steel secured a 1-0 victory over Punjab FC in their last outing, courtesy of a 78th-minute strike by Vincy Barretto, and registered a second consecutive clean sheet. They will aim to carry this defensive organisation into the clash against opponents who have started the season strongly in attack.

Acknowledging the home support at the VYBK and the need to convert defensive resilience into points, Jamshedpur FC head coach Owen Coyle views the pressure as a vital developmental tool for his side. "It's a huge game away in Kolkata against East Bengal. They are a fantastic club with a proud history and heavy investment this season. Oscar Bruzon is a good friend and an excellent coach, but during the match both of us will do everything."

**Bengaluru FC lock horns with Punjab FC**

FPJ News Service

BENGALURU

Bengaluru FC return to the Sree Kanteerava Stadium looking to bounce back to winning ways after being held to a 1-1 draw by NorthEast United FC. Despite taking an early lead through Braian Sanchez's 20th-minute strike, the Blues were pegged back by a brilliant goal by Lalrinzuala Lalbiaknia.

Reflecting on his team's return to Bengaluru and the tactical adjustments needed to sustain their form, Bengaluru FC head coach Renedy Singh stressed the importance of maintaining the intensity. "We need to have more control with the ball and create more chances in the final third," he stated. "If we are consistent in defence, and carry the same intensity for 90 minutes, we will be closer to winning games."

Bengaluru FC midfielder Lalremtuanga Fanai said, "The intensity should be absolutely high according to the style of play adopted by the coach. My job is to help the defenders and to initiate the attack at the same time. I am absolutely enjoying this dual role. Getting great support from my teammates whenever the situation is challenging."

Punjab FC travel to Bengaluru after facing a setback in their first game against Jamshedpur, which they lost 0-1.

## The gut bacteria and foods that aid their health

Aparna Rao

Inside our digestive system resides a complex community of microorganisms known as gut bacteria or gut microbiota. These tiny inhabitants play a vital role in our overall health, influencing digestion, metabolism, immune function, and even mental well-being. Nurturing a diverse and balanced gut microbiota is essential for maintaining optimal health, and one way to achieve this is through our dietary choices. Here are some foods that aid in promoting the health of our gut bacteria:

### Fermented foods:

Fermented foods like yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, and miso are rich in beneficial bacteria, such as lactobacilli and bifidobacteria. Consuming these foods regularly can help replenish and diversify the gut microbiota, supporting its overall health and function.

### Diversity in plant-based foods:

Including a variety of plant-based foods in your diet ensures a wide range of nutrients and fibers for the gut microbiota. Aim for a colorful plate filled with a diverse array of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds.

### Omega-3 fatty acid-rich foods:

Omega-3 fatty acids, found in fatty fish like salmon, mackerel, and sardines, have been shown to have positive effects on gut health. They can help reduce inflammation in the gut, supporting a healthy environment for beneficial bacteria to thrive.

**Fiber-rich foods:** Dietary fiber acts as a prebiotic, nourishing beneficial gut bacteria. Whole grains, legumes, fruits, vegetables, and nuts are excellent sources, fueling bacterial growth and promoting a healthy gut environment.

### Polyphenol-rich foods:

Polyphenols are plant compounds found in foods like berries, cocoa, green tea, and colorful fruits and vegetables. These compounds have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties and can positively influence the composition of the gut microbiota.

### Probiotic supplements:

Probiotics are live beneficial bacteria that can be consumed in supplement form. They can help restore and maintain a healthy balance of gut bacteria, especially during times of illness, antibiotic use, or digestive disturbances. Probiotic supplements should be chosen based on specific strains and guided by healthcare professionals.



### 1 Use scalp scrubs

Since a healthy scalp is essential to hair growth, it is important to cleanse it regularly, since shampooing removes dirt and debris from the scalp, such as pollution, sweat, and old skin cells. Providing scalp massage facilitates blood circulation, which is essential for oxygenation and nutrients to reach hair follicles, as well as removing toxins. Use an exfoliating scalp mask once a week to keep your scalp supple and remove dead skin cells.

### 2 Apply conditioners and masks to your hair

During shampooing, the surface cuticles of the hair shaft are lifted, so conditioner is essential for smoothing them down and protecting them. If you use a good conditioner, you will not only restore moisture, but also give the hair a beautiful appearance and feel. In some cases, this may make it easier for you to manage your hair. When your ends are broken, your hair simply will not be able to grow as long as it would otherwise be able to if you use conditioning masks. Conditioning masks also strengthen your hair, preventing breakage - which can improve the thickness of your mid-lengths and ends. Also, they plump your hair shaft with moisture, enhancing the appearance of your strands.

### 3 Use natural scalp-friendly ingredients

Even though natural doesn't always mean better, some natural ingredients are worth the hype. Camelia oil has been used for generations to treat hair and scalp problems. As an antioxidant, camelia oil neutralises free radicals, ensuring your scalp remains strong and healthy. In addition to soothing scalps and moisturising hair strands, while balancing sebum, charcoal can absorb excess oils, kelp, and olive oil nourish and soothe, and honey is antibacterial and gentle.

### 4 Eat a well-balanced diet

Did you know that 97 percent of hair is composed of protein? So it requires sufficient amounts of complete protein, vitamins, minerals, and water, as well as omega-3 fatty acids found in oily fish, fruit, and vegetables. You should eat as much protein as possible at breakfast and lunch in order to ensure that your hair is getting the nutrients it needs to grow. Fish, eggs, lean meat, low-fat cottage cheese, quinoa, and pulses are great examples of protein foods.

### 5 Try supplements and vitamins

In addition to having high nutritional requirements, your hair also needs a variety of vitamins and minerals that can be difficult to obtain from a diet alone. Supplements can be of great assistance in providing your hair with nutrients that are easily accessible. Ideally, you should seek out supplements that contain protein, iron, zinc, vitamin B12, vitamin D, omega 3, and biotin. Before taking supplements, you should consult with your physician and have a blood test performed.

**Amritha K**

There may be times when you wonder what you can do to improve the growth of your hair. Is there any product that can help? Can you make changes to your diet? Are there any medications or treatments that can help? There are 80,000 to 120,000 hair follicles on your scalp when you're born, and it's natural to lose about 100 hairs a day. Although genetics play a significant role in maintaining healthy hair growth, there are several other factors that must also be considered. It is generally believed that hair grows half an inch per month. That works out to approximately six inches, or 15 cm, per year, though this may vary from person to person. Although there are effective treatments that promote hair growth, any treatment or regime requires time; you can expect to see results after 6 weeks at the very least; however, more noticeable changes to hair growth can be observed after three months. Here are some tips for boosting hair growth naturally.

## How to grow hair fast and naturally?



### Bonus tips:

- The use of dyes & bleaches should be limited.
- Make use of gentle hair ties.
- Be gentle when brushing your hair, especially if it is wet.
- Sleeping on a silk pillowcase reduces friction and helps retain moisture, minimizing tangles and breakage to support hair growth.
- Regular trims (every 8-12 weeks) remove split ends, prevent breakage, and help maintain hair length.
- Despite the fact that it is impossible to increase your hair density, you can naturally do so by eating a well-balanced diet with hair-growth nutrients such as biotin, vitamin C, and protein, by avoiding permanent dye and heat drying, you may also reduce hair damage and basically following hair-healthy measures.

### 6 Use heat protectors

You need to use heat protectors if you want to reduce the damage caused by heat styling. Be sure not to hold the dryer too close to your hair and hold it approximately 12 inches from it.

## Tests to be performed before family planning

Dr. Prajakta Chaudhary

Fertility Specialist, Nova IVF Fertility, Mira Road, Mumbai

Men and women understand that simple health tests before planning a baby can help couples prepare better for a healthy pregnancy. Here, the expert lists out tests for men and women to be taken without fail, and then only start family planning. Ensure your overall well-being before conceiving. Family planning is an exciting step for couples, but it also comes with responsibility. Couples dream of embracing motherhood, but often neglect their fertility health. Many couples focus only on pregnancy after conception, but health preparation before trying to conceive is equally important. Pre-pregnancy tests can be advised to the couples to check for hidden medical issues, nutritional gaps, or infections that could affect fertility, pregnancy, or the baby's health. Getting tested early allows couples to make lifestyle changes that focus on diet, exercise, and start treatment in time, reducing stress and improving the chances of a smooth pregnancy.

### Tests for women

- Hormone tests: These check thyroid levels, prolactin, and reproductive hormones that control ovulation and menstrual cycles. Hormonal imbalance can affect fertility and pregnancy.
- Ovarian reserve tests: Tests like AMH (Anti-Müllerian Hormone) help assess egg quantity and fertility potential, especially important for women planning pregnancy later in life.
- Ultrasound scan: A pelvic ultrasound checks the uterus and ovaries for conditions like fibroids, cysts, or PCOS, which demand timely attention. Take charge of your well-being and manage these conditions as per the expert's advice.
- Infection screening is imperative: Couples, opting for blood tests for infections such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C, HIV, and rubella immunity, help prevent complications during pregnancy and ensure the safety of the mother and the baby. So, don't neglect these tests at all.
- Blood sugar and hemoglobin tests: Tend to detect diabetes, anemia, or nutritional deficiencies that may affect pregnancy outcomes. If any problem is identified, then timely management of these issues will be crucial for improving pregnancy outcomes.

### Tests for men

- Semen analysis is the need of the hour: This helps to evaluate sperm count, movement, and shape, which are key factors when it comes to natural conception.
- Hormone tests: Are ignored by many couples. Testosterone and other hormone tests will be beneficial when it comes to knowing the hormonal causes of low sperm production or even sexual health issues.
- Blood sugar and general health tests: Diabetes, cholesterol, and blood pressure checks are important as lifestyle diseases can impact fertility.

Pre-family planning tests will help couples to plan a pregnancy without any challenges. When both partners get tested, it creates confidence and clarity and makes the pregnancy safe and comfortable. Early detection and timely treatment tend to improve fertility and pregnancy outcomes.



Shivangi Karn

While the majority of the world is running behind diets and exercises that help promote weight loss, there are some looking for a diet that would help them gain weight - and that too in a healthy way. Because as you know, gaining weight is a piece of cake but doing it in the right way can be tricky. There are various other reasons due to which you can be underweight like inadequate eating habits, prolonged meal time gaps, poor selection of foods, eating disorders like Nervosa and bulimia, etc. One of the main reasons people look for ways of weight gain is when one falls underweight. An underweight person is someone whose body weight is considered too low to be healthy. Underweight people have a body mass index (BMI) of under 18.5 or a weight 15 per cent to 20 per cent below that normal for their age and height group. At a particular age, both men and women tend to identify themselves with their bodies and that is when a super-thin frame may cause frustration. Also, being underweight isn't healthy. Depending on your height and age, your doctor can advise you how much your ideal weight should be. Here's how to gain weight in a healthy way.

## How to gain weight in a healthy way?

### Peanut butter

Peanuts are packed with protein and fat and are an ideal food choice for people who are looking to gain weight naturally. One teaspoon of peanut butter has around 100 calories. It also contains vitamins like magnesium, folic acids, vitamin B and vitamin E. You can boost your peanut butter intake by applying it on a slice of bread and having it for breakfast.



### Whole fat milk

One of the simplest solutions to gain weight naturally is by drinking whole fat milk. Replace skimmed milk with whole milk and your body will get 60 calories per glass. Milk is also rich in vitamins and nutrients and is also a good source of vitamin D and vitamin A.

### Avocado

Avocados are an excellent way to add good healthy fats in your diet. A half of an avocado contains 140 calories and is also a good source of vitamins and minerals, such as vitamin E, folic acid and potassium. You can enjoy avocados by putting them in salads, smoothies or as a spread.

### Whole wheat bread

Whole wheat bread is another food that can help you to gain weight. Whole wheat bread has nutrients to support a healthy breakfast and also add enough calories.

### Eat healthy but dense foods

Choose nutrient-rich foods that pack a lot of carbohydrates, protein or fat into a small serving. Also, go for dried fruits with no added sugar or preservatives.

### Nuts

When it comes to gaining weight, nuts are another good option. It makes for a great snack choice and has good sources of fats and nutrients. They also have fibre and will keep your stomach full for a longer period of time.

### Drink your food

Though liquids aren't as filling as solid foods when you're trying to gain weight, they can provide you with enough nutrition. Go for smoothie and milkshakes that are prepared at home.

### Eat right before bed

Healing, repair and regeneration of the body take place while we sleep. Eating a fresh and healthy snack before going to bed gives you enough energy that works on your body while you sleep. It is critical to understand that gaining weight the right way and not by hogging on unhealthy foods is a better choice for your body. The best way to gain weight naturally is to go the natural way.



Neha Ghosh

The modern-day lifestyle has brought with itself stress, pollution of the cities and in addition to all these, an unhealthy diet has contributed to the detriment in the overall approach towards the living style of people. This, in turn, has caused a rise in the risk of developing various health conditions like diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high risk of cancer etc. From Vegan to DASH, the list of healthy diets is (almost) never-ending. Studies claim that the last decade witnessed one of the major awakenings of health-obsession, where people switched to adopting healthy lifestyles and habits. Health experts attribute it to the equally rising number of health problems which have resulted in the exponentially high number of deaths from lifestyle-related diseases such as heart disease and stroke; obesity and type 2 diabetes; and diseases associated with smoking, alcohol and drug abuse.

In a recent study published in the Open Inflammation Journal, the researchers have shed some light on the role played by the Indo-Mediterranean diet on heart health. Before we get into what an Indo-Mediterranean diet is, let's explore the Mediterranean diet. The Mediterranean diet focuses on the pattern and proportion of the food being consumed. It is an extremely nutritious diet incorporating a lot of fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, olive oil, poultry and fish and limiting red meat and taking red wine in moderation.

Saturated or trans fats are also kept out of the diet plan and on the other hand, it is high in monounsaturated fats and dietary fibre. Many researchers have proved that those who have followed the Mediterranean diet for a long number of years have had lower mortality rates. The Mediterranean diet helps in losing weight, maintaining healthy blood sugar levels and reducing the risk of heart attack, depression, Alzheimer's disease and even stroke.

## The connection between Indo-Mediterranean eating and a stronger heart



One of the primary benefits of the Mediterranean diet is that it helps boost heart health. The Mediterranean diet is rich in monounsaturated fats and omega-3 foods that are good for the heart. Olive oil and fish, two of the primary parts of the diet, maintain a healthy cholesterol level and are low in saturated fats and thereby automatically reduces the chances of getting a heart attack or any other such cardiovascular problem. Now that you are familiar with the Mediterranean diet and its link to one's heart health, let us take a look at what the Indo-Mediterranean diet is and how it can boost heart health.

A Mediterranean diet is flexible, that is, unlike most diets, this one can be adapted to local conditions. Although closely related to the Mediterranean diet, an Indo Mediterranean diet is distinguished by its focus on fruits, vegetables, nuts, and whole grains, whereas the Mediterranean diet focuses on omega-3 foods like fish and olive oil.

Majority factors such as differences in culture, religion, geography, and resources influence dietary patterns are the ones that directly affect the adoption of changes in diets and in the case of the Mediterranean diet, nutritionists point out that the economic growth of a nation are also contributing factors (developed and developing countries).

### What's in an indo-mediterranean diet?

- An Indo-Mediterranean diet consists of the following (in a vague sense of quantity):
- Fruits (400-500 g)
- Vegetables
- Nuts (25-50 g)
- Whole grains (rice, legumes, maize, wheat)
- Mustard seed oil or soybean oil (3-4 servings)

### Why is it good for heart health?

The study, which analysed the role of nutrition in the management of heart failure with respect to the Indo-Mediterranean diet analysed the behavioural risk factors, food intakes, fatty acid intake and on the ratio of polyunsaturated fatty acid/ flavonoid intake; and the results suggested the following:

- Indo-Mediterranean style foods reduced the risk of pre-heart failures, heart failure and arrhythmias.
- The anti-inflammatory effects of the Indo-Mediterranean diet play an effective role in reducing the risk of cardiovascular mortality in patients with recent myocardial infarction and high risk of cardiovascular diseases.
- The researchers pointed out that treatments in patients with heart diseases and problems who follow an Indo-Mediterranean diet could yield more beneficial results.



The anti-inflammatory effects of the Indo-Mediterranean diet had a positive effect on reducing the stress on the heart, in every individual.

The researchers concluded the study by stating that the anti-inflammatory properties of the Indo-Mediterranean diet makes it extremely beneficial for improving your heart health, and also that it is an advisable diet for people suffering from heart-related problems.

Although there are hundreds of diets out there, only a few are popular, owing to the good reason of safety and effectiveness. Several studies have been conducted on exploring the best types of diet and the Mediterranean diet has, many a time, emerged as the winner. And the combination of a Mediterranean diet with legume and wheat indeed proven to be effective for improving health. In a previous study, the Mediterranean diet was found to be beneficial for individuals with diabetes.



# MAKING FOREVER OFFICIAL

**Vijay Deverakonda and Rashmika Mandanna tie the knot in an intimate Udaipur ceremony, share emotional notes on social media**



Actors Vijay Deverakonda and Rashmika Mandanna on Thursday got married in a private ceremony attended by close family and friends at a luxury hotel on the outskirts of Udaipur. The couple later shared pictures from their wedding on social media along with emotional messages for each other. Mandanna wore a red sari paired with traditional gold jewellery, while Deverakonda complemented her in an off-white dhoti with a red shawl. Sharing the photographs, Deverakonda wrote, "Missed her in a way that made me feel like my day would've been better if she were around... So, I made my best friend... my wife." Mandanna introduced him as "My Husband! Mr. Vijay Deverakonda!!" and penned a heartfelt note, calling him the man who taught her "what true love feels like" and expressing excitement about beginning their new life together.



Digvijay Rathee

Rajat Dalal

## Monalisa questions Digvijay's individuality

After her recent elimination from *The 50*, Monalisa strongly criticised co-contestant Digvijay Rathee, calling him insecure and questioning his individuality in the game

Rashita Sahni

After her recent elimination from *The 50*, Monalisa did not hold back in an exclusive conversation with *The Free Press Journal*. The actress strongly criticised co-contestant Digvijay Rathee, calling him insecure and questioning his individuality in the game. She particularly took issue with his repeated nominations of her husband, Vikrant Singh Rajpoot, and accused him of lacking the courage to play against strong contestants. She also pointed out the irony of Digvijay continuing to align with Rajat Dalal, despite an altercation between them earlier in the show. Monalisa questioned Digvijay's individuality and accused him of targeting strong players while continuing to support Rajat despite their him hitting him in the first week. "There were four or five moments when I lost my cool, but the most triggering one was the day I was eliminated. Digvijay was constantly nominating Vikrant again and again. He nominated him for the third time without any valid reason - even he did not seem to know why. I was furious because both teams had agreed that all five

of us would be nominated together and eliminated together. It really hurt me that we were being pushed in back-to-back like that. That is why I told him he has no existence of his own, no personality of his own. The very first day, he was beaten up badly by Rajat Dalal yet he still sits in the same team, supports that same team and continues to play with them. So what is his identity? What is his standing? And he is out there targeting a strong player like Vikrant. By targeting him, what are you trying to prove? If you do not want to play with strong players, then who do you want to play with? That is why I felt extremely bad and that is why I reacted."

Monalisa also implied that Digvijay's repeated nominations stemmed from insecurity towards Vikrant. "Yes, Digvijay is insecure of Vikrant, that is the reason, what other reason could there be? I do not like this approach. If I were in the game and given a chance to nominate someone, like it happens in *Bigg Boss*, I would never nominate a strong player. I would want to play with strong players because that is where the real fun and challenge lies. But Digvijay's game was very strange in that sense and I did not like it."



## Aamir shares health update on Salim Khan



Ever since the news of legendary screenwriter Salim Khan being hospitalised surfaced, fans and well-wishers have been waiting for updates on his health. Now, Aamir Khan has shared a reassuring update, stating that Salim Khan is recovering well and is expected to return home soon. The *Lagaan* actor spoke to the media during an event on Wednesday and informed that he went to meet Salim Khan but could not see him directly as he is in the ICU. However, he spent time with the family, who shared that he is improving well. "Main Salim sahab se milne gaya tha, hum sab dua kar rahe hain ki woh jaldi se theek ho jaayen. Kyunki woh

ICU mein the, main unse personally nahi mil paya. Unke family ke saath main baitha tha. (I went to meet Salim Sahab, and we are all praying that he recovers soon. Could not meet him personally since he was in the ICU. I sat with the family)," Aamir said. "Jo mujhe Alvira ji bata rahi hai, har roz unki health improve ho rahi hai. Hum sab prarthna kar rahe hain ki woh jaldi ghar aa jaayen aur unki health bhi wapas aa jaaye. (Alvira ji tells me every day that his health is improving. We are all praying that he returns home soon and that his health is fully restored)," he added. Salim Khan, who is 90 years old, has been admitted to the hospital since February 17 after suffering a minor brain hemorrhage.

Aamir Khan shared a health update on Salim Khan at the Mumbai Press Club during an event on Wednesday.



Photos: Instagram

## Ustad Shujaat Husain Khan and Pandit Rakesh Chaurasia reflect on their historic debut collaboration

Aman Jain

Mumbai witnessed a landmark evening for Hindustani classical music recently as Strings & Wind played to a sold-out audience of over 1,000 patrons at the Jamshed Bhabha Theatre, NCPA. The concert marked the first-ever collaboration between legendary sitar maestro Ustad Shujaat Husain Khan and two-time Grammy Award-winning flautist Pandit Rakesh Chaurasia. The evening featured individual solo performances before culminating in a captivating *jugalbandi* that seamlessly blended melody, rhythm, improvisation and emotional depth. In an exclusive interview with *The Free Press Journal*, Ustad Shujaat Husain Khan and Pandit Rakesh Chaurasia reflected on their debut collaboration, the role of spontaneity and innovation in tradition, global recognition, and the importance of platforms like Strings & Wind in preserving artistic integrity for future generations. Excerpts:

say it for the first ever, it gives a kind of scary feeling. But yeah, we're both musicians and we travel the world and perform, and we got an opportunity to come together and play a little bit. So it's just fun. The whole idea is not to prepare. How we prepared is one thing, but how we didn't prepare is the more important thing here. The part that we will play together is something that we are absolutely unaware of, unprepared. Every time we do this, it is a whole tour. Every time we play, it will be different. We will play be-

cause we want to enjoy ourselves too. **Pandit Rakesh Chaurasia:** It began with a shared curiosity and respect for each other's musical voice.

What drew me in was the idea of a true dialogue between flute and strings—not a display, but a conversation. My preparation was simple: deep listening, understanding my partner's phrasing and *layakari*, and choosing *ragas* that allow space and flexibility. In a *jugalbandi*, the real music happens when you listen more than you play.

ting them to hear who we are individually, our instruments, our thoughts, our personalities, our characters that come out in our music. And then we just get together and have a picnic; we enjoy ourselves. These are our conversations that we have. So again, there's no thought given to balancing or practicing. It's just two musicians getting together and playing music. Yes, I come from the *Imdadkhani gharana*. But innovation has always been a cornerstone of every musician of our time. Even traditional great artists innovated and put their own personality into their concerts. It's very important. **Pandit Rakesh Chaurasia:** Balance comes from clarity and humility. Each solo allows the artist to establish their own musical identity and mood. When we come together for the *jugalbandi*, that individuality doesn't disappear—it listens. You hold on to your voice, but you leave enough space for the other to speak. When there is mutual respect and alertness on stage, the dialogue feels natural and the music breathes as one.

the music alive and meaningful for each generation.

**Pandit Rakesh Chaurasia, as a torchbearer of the Hariprasad Chaurasia legacy and a two-time Grammy winner, how do global platforms influence your approach to Indian classical music?**

**Pandit Rakesh Chaurasia:** Global platforms have widened the audience, but they haven't changed my core approach. My foundation remains the same—*guru-shishya parampara* and the legacy of my *Gurujii*, Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia. International recognition brings responsibility: to present Indian classical music with honesty and depth, without diluting its essence. If we stay true to the raga and its spirit, the music speaks universally on its own.

**Both of you spoke about the challenge of aligning schedules. Does this rarity make collaborations like these more meaningful?**

**Ustad Shujaat Husain Khan:** We have different paths that we take in different careers. So of course, aligning schedules is definitely a rarity. That's why it does make it more meaningful. I totally agree.

**Pandit Rakesh Chaurasia:** Absolutely. When collaborations are rare, they carry a different intensity and sincerity. Limited time together means everyone comes with deeper focus and commitment. You value each moment on stage more, listen more closely, and give your best. That rarity makes the experience—not just for us, but for the audience as well—far more meaningful.



## When Sitar meets Flute

The evening featured solo performances followed by a *jugalbandi*. How do you balance individual musical identity while creating a shared dialogue on stage? **Ustad Shujaat Husain Khan:** That is the whole pleasure of going out in front of people—get-



Ustad Shujaat Husain Khan

Pandit Rakesh Chaurasia

This concert marked your first-ever collaboration together. What drew you to this partnership, and how did you prepare musically for the *jugalbandi*? **Ustad Shujaat Husain Khan:** Strings & Wind. Yes, when you

# 'Words on paper, but are they being implemented?'

**Actress Dia Mirza addresses growing pollution in major cities, urges government to act responsibly, quickly**

Actress Dia Mirza recently opened up about the growing pollution levels in cities like Mumbai and Delhi, calling out the government for not doing enough. The actress added that they need to shift from mere words to real action and focus on tangible "outcomes" rather than just plans on paper.

The *Rehnaa Hai Tere Dil Mein* actress was speaking at the launch of the Zero Prize, India's first national, results-based environmental award. This initiative links financial rewards directly to verified reductions in air, water, and land pollution.

When asked by ANI if she believes the government is doing enough to tackle pollution, Dia responded with a firm "outright no." "The answer is an outright no," she stated.

"Unfortunately, we have to move from words to scalable action and outcomes. We should now be celebrating outcomes, like, for example, what Indore city has achieved. How they have successfully established protocols and systems that manage their waste so efficiently. Why hasn't this become a pan-India initiative? Why are we still struggling to get people to segregate the bare minimum, which is wet and dry? Even though they are not doing. Waste is a huge contributor to pollution, right? So we need to do much, much more."

Dia continued, "We have the right words on paper, and there are many powerful programs. But are they truly being implemented on the ground? No, they are not, which is why there is such a big gap," she added.



Photo: Instagram\_@diamirzaofficial

# Javed Akhtar praises Assi

Screenwriter and lyricist says *Assi* is narrated in a very graceful and compelling manner, highlighting its powerful courtroom drama, fight for justice



Photos: Instagram

Lyricist and screenwriter Javed Akhtar recently praised Taapsee Pannu's latest theatrical release, *Assi*. The film hit cinemas on February 20, clashing with Siddhant Chaturvedi and Mrunal Thakur's *Do Deewane Seher Mein*.

*Assi* is a courtroom drama that follows a teacher, Parima (played by Kani Kusruti), who is brutally gang-raped while returning home. Taapsee Pannu portrays Parima's lawyer, Raavi, who fights tirelessly for justice. Akhtar shared that the film has been narrated in a very graceful and compelling manner.

Speaking to India Today, Javed said, "Some pictures touch your heart. And some films operate on an intellectual level, they engage your



A still from Assi

mind. But very few films manage to touch both your heart and your mind at the same time. I believe *Assi* is one such film."

Further, he added that on one level, it is a deeply emotional story that will resonate with ordinary people. On another level, it raises serious questions and does not provide easy answers. Instead, it

places those questions before society. "Anyone who thinks deeply, who pays attention to what is happening around us, will walk away from this film reflecting on it. It has been narrated in a very graceful and compelling manner. And ultimately, the film leaves you with both answers and questions," Akhtar concluded.



Taapsee Pannu

# It's a wrap for Wamiqa

Actress Wamiqa Gabbi, who is gearing up for the release of her upcoming film *Bhoot Bangla*, has wrapped up the Lucknow schedule of her upcoming project and left a playful 'guess the film' tease on social media.

Wamiqa took to Instagram stories, where she shared a video of herself boarding the flight with her team and saying that it's a wrap for her on the film, which reportedly stars Bhuvan Bam and is by Dharma Productions. "#LucknowScheduleWrap for us But you have to guess the film," she wrote as the caption. She then shared a playful video of herself from onboard a flight and wrote: "*Hamla Achanak se kia tha.*"

Meanwhile, talking about her upcoming film *Bhoot Bangla*, the film is by Priyadarshan. It brings the iconic trio of Priyadarshan, Akshay Kumar and Paresh Rawal. The project will also see Tabu, Rajpal Yadav and Mithila Palkar in crucial roles, along with others.



Photos: Instagram\_@wamiqagabbi



Poster of the film

# 15 yrs of Tanu Weds Manu

Fifteen years ago, *Tanu Weds Manu* arrived in cinemas and went on to redefine the landscape of Hindi film romance. Directed by Aanand L Rai, the film starred Kangana Ranaut and R. Madhavan in lead roles, delivering performances that remain widely celebrated.

Unlike the glossy, larger-than-life romantic dramas of its time, *Tanu Weds Manu* embraced a loud, unapologetic, and proudly heartland narrative. The film introduced audiences to a heroine who defied the "ideal bride" stereotype — impulsive, flawed, and fiercely independent — a portrayal that struck a chord with viewers.

At a time when romantic comedies were becoming increasingly polished and predictable, the film stood out for its authenticity. From its rooted dialects and chaotic family dynamics to its awkward yet honest romance, it brought India's hinterland into the mainstream without reducing it to caricature.

Beyond its critical acclaim, the film proved that culturally grounded stories could achieve commercial success. It demonstrated that flawed female protagonists could headline box office hits and that stories set beyond metropolitan cities resonated strongly with audiences.

Over the years, *Tanu Weds Manu* evolved into a cult favourite, paving the way for its blockbuster sequel and reinforcing a storytelling voice that continues to find trust and popularity among viewers.

Marking 15 years of its release, the makers shared a special post celebrating the film's journey — a reminder that sometimes a quiet cinematic revolution begins with one unpredictable bride, one sincere groom, and a love story that refuses to follow the rules. Even today, the film's dialogues, music, and unforgettable characters remain etched in pop culture, frequently referenced across social media and cinema conversations. Its legacy lies not just in nostalgia, but in how it reshaped mainstream romance, inspiring filmmakers to embrace small-town stories with sincerity, humour, and emotional depth.



A still from Tanu Weds Manu

Photos: IMDb

# Gulshan Devaiah rejects trends

Actor Gulshan opens up about personal style, rejecting trends and choosing honesty, comfort & self-expression in fashion

Actor Gulshan Devaiah, who is known for his quirky, unconventional, and out-of-the-box fashion choices, says that he has never been comfortable with the idea of dressing to please the moment. Talking about his approach to fashion, Gulshan Devaiah said: "Fashion came into my life much before acting did. I studied fashion at NIFT, so for me, clothing has always been about individuality rather than chasing trends."

"I've never been comfortable with the idea of dressing to fit into a box or to please the moment. I style myself because it feels natural, I know what I like, what I'm comfortable in, and how I want to express myself."

The actor understands that trends come and go, brands rise and fall, but personal style evolves with life and experience. "I enjoy experimenting, being quirky, because that's part of the process. As long as it feels honest, fun and true to who I am, I'm happy."

Gulshan Devaiah recently featured alongside Saiyami Kher in a soulful romantic music video titled *Aise Na Humko* composed by celebrated lyricist-composer Swanand Kirkire. Gulshan had described the collaboration as a creative continuation rather than a conventional reunion.



Photo: Instagram

# Old is gold: Zeenat

While a lot of young actresses find it uncomfortable to be seen in the same clothes twice, veteran actress Zeenat Aman proudly proclaimed through her latest social media post that she is all about repeating clothes. She shared that, according to her, "Old is Gold", and hence, she could never relate to people's need to throw away perfectly fine clothes simply because they have been spotted in them.

Zeenat Aman revealed that she does not shy away from repeating her outfits from time to time. Posting a couple of photos of herself posing in a stunning brown co-ord set,

along with a pearl necklace and diamond earrings, the *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* actress wrote on her official Insta handle, "Old is gold, don't you think?! Goofing around in the foyer of my apartment building before stepping out for an event. I'm all for repeating outfits, and never quite understood the compulsion to use and throw perfectly good clothes just because you've been seen in them once! This gorgeous ensemble is by AM:PM, a brand I shot for the year before last, and I have repeated it for formal events. (sic)."

Actress Zeenat Aman went on to add that while doing her spring cleaning recently, she came across some of her outfits that happened to be almost 25 years old.



Photo: Instagram\_@thezeenataman

The Free Press Journal honours pioneers in Maharashtra's tourism sector who give back to society through their work. These are our Angels Of Tourism, who bring you tourist experiences that are sustainable and inclusive, journeys that are full of heart and purpose. **By Pooja Patel**



## Slow living, the quiet Konkan way

**N**estled in the quiet rhythms of the Konkan countryside, Mother and Stories Farm is more than just a homestay. It is a way of life rooted in slowing down, reconnecting and living with intention. It is a space that invites others to step away from the rush and rediscover the beauty of a simpler, more mindful way of life.

Their homestay is set on a farm that has orchards of Alphonso mangoes, black pepper, coconuts, among other produce. "It's not just what the guests can see, but also the smells. Every season is different and brings a different fragrance," she explains. She adds that they have a policy where guests must book a minimum of three nights, as that is the only way to truly experience the place. "Our stay is like visiting your grandmother's home as a child: a safe, caring space where you don't have to worry about anything. That is the feeling we want to create for our guests," she explains.

Food here is deeply rooted in seasonality and tradition. Meals are crafted using locally available fruits, vegetables and seafood, and prepared in authentic Malvani home-style cooking. Staying true to their earthy approach, dishes are cooked over a woodfire in handmade earthen pots sourced from a local artisan. The result is not just a meal, but a sensory connection to the land and its traditions.

Kalyan Karmakar, author and food and travel writer, shares, "I had never stayed at a homestay or on a farm before, and the experience truly exceeded all my expectations. I believed I was familiar with Malvani cuisine, but staying here opened me up to an entirely new and authentic world of flavours. The experience was deeply warm and family-oriented. Reshma and her family, personally prepared many of the meals, while a local cook, Payal, made traditional bhakris. What made it especially memorable was the way they explained each dish to me as I was eating it, which added a meaningful cultural and personal layer to the entire experience."

**ANGEL:** Mother and Stories Farm

**ENDORSER:** Kalyan Karmakar, author and food and travel writer



# Where the wild feels like home

**T**ucked away near Gothe Village in Mulshi lies The Fragrant Sun, an 18-acre eco-farm stay that feels less like a getaway and more like a gentle return to nature. More than just a property, it is a deeply personal labour of love shaped by its owner, Kavita Berry, whose vision has been to create a space that is as soulful as it is sustainable.

Spread across the sprawling land are eight thoughtfully designed cottages, along with a meditation room, a cosy living area, a kitchen and a veranda dining space. Every corner of the property bears Berry's creative touch, as she has personally designed and handcrafted much of the space, ensuring that it remains rooted in earthy, organic aesthetics.

"In 2017, my husband Sanjeev and I decided to open their home to guests, not as a commercial venture, but as a way to share the beauty of their surroundings while keeping the property self-sustaining," says Berry. Their commitment to ethical living is evident in their practices: the space has solar energy, and in keeping with their philosophy of living in harmony with nature, they have consciously chosen not to install air conditioning. Even if it means closing during the peak summer months of April and May.

Architecture and design follow the same philosophy. The cottages are built using local materials such as mud plaster, stone and wood, blending seamlessly with the natural landscape. Inside, the decor tells a story, each piece carefully selected, handcrafted or up-cycled from vintage finds, creating a harmonious mix of rustic charm and understated luxury.

What truly sets the place apart, however, is its raw, unmanicured landscape. "Unlike conventional resorts with perfectly trimmed lawns, we embrace the wild beauty of nature: fallen leaves, dried grass and all. While some might see it as untidy, we find this untamed quality deeply appealing. For us, the



**ANGEL:** The Fragrant Sun

**ENDORSER:** Dr Varun Nagaraj, Dean, S.P. Jain Institute of Management & Research



charm lies in its wild, untouched spirit, far removed from manicured gardens, yet profoundly comforting in its authenticity," she says.

Dr Varun Nagaraj, Dean, S.P. Jain Institute of Management & Research, shares, "Visually, the place is beautiful, and the hospitality is excellent: attentive, yet never intrusive. You always know that someone is available if you want to talk or spend time together, and the meals are truly exceptional, which I consider a hallmark of The Fragrant Sun."



## Art in the wilderness

**T**ucked away in Karjat, The Art Village Karjat (AVK) is not just a place to stay, it is a living, breathing ecosystem where art, nature and mindful hospitality exist in seamless harmony. The space was built with a simple yet profound guiding principle: respect the land, its creatures and its rhythms.

The property offers six rooms across three spacious earth-built cottages, two per cottage, keeping interiors naturally cool. AVK's distinct interdisciplinary spirit brings together fine artists, farmers and astro-science practitioners in constant exchange. Artists arrive from everywhere: Odisha's Patachitra to Rajasthan's Matani Pachedi, and to Assam's Majuli's mask makers.

"Guests are introduced to an art session upon arrival and depending on the day, this could range from watercolor painting and printmaking to calligraphy, sound therapy, yoga, Kathak dance or Hindustani classical music. The idea is not to follow a fixed itinerary, but to immerse oneself in whatever creative energy unfolds," Ganga Kadakia of AVK says.

There's a kund, a stunning stepwell-style swimming pool, draws inspiration from traditional Indian architecture. At the center of the land stands a massive 20-foot meditation egg housing a shivling, surrounded by a lotus-inspired structure, a space designed for stillness and introspection.

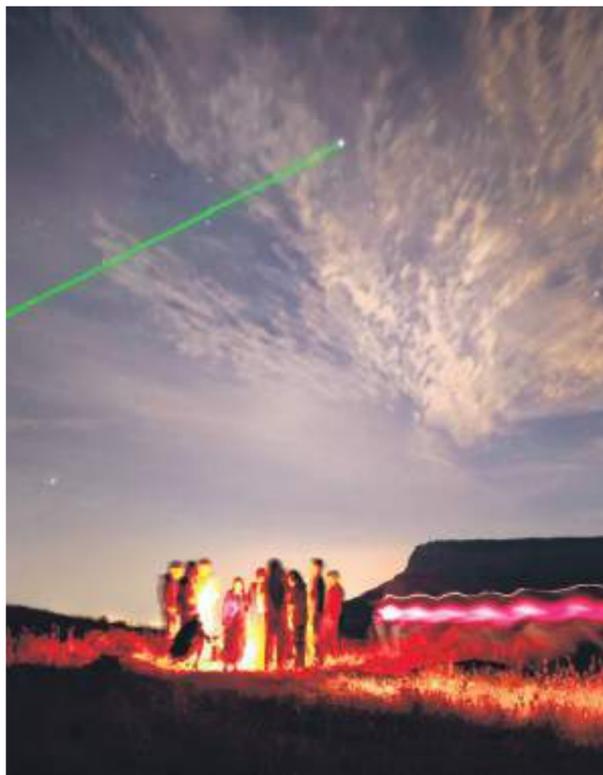
Guests can walk through the fields and even participate in harvesting with the team. The farm is also home to rescued animals, a gaushala and goats, reinforcing AVK's commitment to compassionate living.

"For recreation, there is a pickleball court, while the café serves as the social heart of the village — a space for pizza-making workshops, farm-to-table meals and conversations that linger long after the plates are cleared. A dedicated library for young adults adds another layer of quiet retreat," she adds.

Harshh Lunia, actor, jeweller and founder of Tabdak Tabdak India, shared, "The Art Village Karjat brings you back to life's natural rhythm — a space to reset and recharge. With its stepwell-style pool, earth cottages, art experiences, farm-fresh food, open spaces and rescued animals, it is a sustainable, vibrant retreat where families or individuals can find peace, play and connection. Additionally, the fact that they provide a home to rescued animals makes it even more extraordinary."



# Journeys under the open sky



**O**n a recent Valentine's weekend, a small group walked through a dark forest in Matheran, guided only by torchlight and anticipation. The trail led them to the Garbett plateau, where telescopes were trained on a sky dense with stars. There was a campfire, quiet conversation, and the slow unfolding of constellations. It was, in many ways, a signature

Vagabond Experiences moment—intimate, immersive and deliberately far removed from the noise of urban life. For Shannon Fernandes, co-founder of the Mumbai-based travel experiences company, the goal was never adventure for its own sake. It was about connection. "Unlike other treks that are crowded, with groups sometimes as large as 75-100 people, our approach is to curate wholesome experiences for a maximum of 20 people at a time," he says.

Founded in 2014 by a group of friends fresh out of college, Vagabond began by blending their love for music and the outdoors, featuring musicians writing their own music in Mumbai. These early 'Fields of Sound' camps that combined live performances with the outdoors evolved into other experiences centred around nature, including treks, the hugely popular and rare firefly night trails, camping nights and stargazing walks. With each of these, the founding philosophy remained intact, that

empathy and shared, safe and inclusive experiences create stronger communities.

Vagabond's experiences emphasise immersion, whether it is understanding landscapes and respecting ecosystems or engaging with local knowledge. Local residents often serve as guides and knowledgeable resources. "Nobody knows an area like the local people," he says. "And when they're

part of the experience, there is also a sense of giving back." Participants return repeatedly, forming friendships that outlast individual trips, building a community bond that is central to the company's purpose, to travel not as consumption, but as a shared presence.

Performing arts and travel enthusiast Keith D'Souza says Vagabond is unique because the company leaders see themselves as travellers too. "They're just as wowed by a waterfall as you, even if they've seen it several times earlier," he says. "They bring a high quality of professionalism to the tours while also somehow making it feel like we are travelling with friends."

An experience manager certified in administering first aid accompanies groups on outdoor events. At some events, an expert naturalist explains the finer nuances of an event, such as the firefly mating season. "It's not just a pretty sight at midnight, it is a marvel of nature," says Fernandes. "We want those who travel with us to learn how to co-exist with nature."

**ANGEL:** Vagabond Experiences

**ENDORSER:** Keith D'Souza, Creative & Strategy, BookMyShow



# Weaving tourism and textiles into one ecosystem

**S**ince the pandemic, Deepa Krishnan's followers on Instagram have become accustomed to her soothing voice explaining a traditional weave or embroidery, often filmed inside The Magic Room in Mumbai's Sion, her space to exhibit and learn about Indian crafts and textiles. The pieces, sourced from artisan groups across Gujarat, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Odisha, Assam and more states, are part of an ecosystem she has built over nearly two decades linking tourism, crafts and livelihoods.

Krishnan is the founder of Magic Tours of India, a guided travel company launched in 2006 that now operates across more than two dozen cities with over 300 experiences, from heritage walks and food explorations to village and textile trails. Many programmes are co-created with local communities. The company also trains and employs youth from Mumbai and Delhi's

informal settlements as guides.

Her business philosophy is that responsibly designed tours must also be commercially viable to generate sustained community benefit. Rather than treating social responsibility as a separate initiative, she embeds it into everyday business practice, from fair sourcing from artisans, timely payments, moderate margins and patience to turn profitable. Her crafts venture took four years to break even.

"I have been trying to build social responsibility into the DNA of my work, without making a big fuss about it," she says.

When inbound tourism collapsed overnight during the Covid-19 pandemic, livelihoods that depended on her were at risk, including employees, guides, village partners, craftspersons. Krishnan sold her apartment in Chennai to sustain salaries while launching The Magic Room, pivoting to domestic tourism and textile retail. The two

streams now reinforce each other financially while supporting more than 500 artisans. "You need to be open to new ideas, to look dispassionately at your strengths, and find ways you can leverage them into opportunities," she says.

Beyond tourism, Krishnan's work includes farming collectives and livelihood initiatives in tribal villages in Jawhar. Besides leading Abhyudaya, an education programme for children from low-income communities, she worked earlier as a business consultant to ABN AMRO, Barclays, Citigroup, Morgan Stanley and Standard Chartered Bank.

Krishnan is cautious about language around empowerment. Communities she works with, she says, already possess dignity



and agency; tourism's role is to engage with them respectfully as equals rather than presume to be their saviours.

"What stands out most to me about Deepa's work is the genuine intent that underpins all she does," says Sudha Meruva, a former director at a multinational company. "As someone who has engaged with both her tourism and textile ventures, I have witnessed the care with which she bridges people to authentic stories, skilled artisans, and vibrant communities. She leads with integrity and showed remarkable resilience in supporting her network during challenging times of the pandemic. Her journey reflects how businesses grounded in trust and respect can create meaningful impact beyond mere commerce."



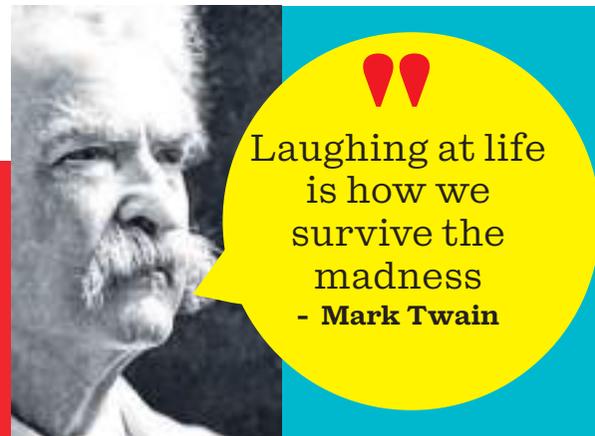
**ANGEL:** Deepa Krishnan

**ENDORSER:** Sudha Meruva, former director of engineering at an MNC



# FREE PRESS JOURNAL SCHOOL

MUMBAI | FRIDAY | FEBRUARY 27, 2026



The Supreme Court on Thursday imposed a "complete blanket ban" on any further publication, reprinting or digital dissemination of the NCERT's Class 8 social science book

## 'Gunshot fired, judiciary is bleeding'



### States can tax farm income

**E**conomist Montek Singh Ahluwalia has opined that state governments can tax large agriculture farms that are diversifying and getting high income levels, to strengthen finances. He said that the revenue generated from taxing diversified agriculture can be retained entirely by the states



The Supreme Court on Thursday imposed a "complete blanket ban" on any further publication, reprinting or digital dissemination of the NCERT's Class 8 social science book as it contains "offending" contents on corruption in the judiciary, saying a gunshot has been fired and the institution is bleeding. The government, on its part, expressed anguish, with Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan promising to fix accountability and take action against those involved in drafting it. Observing that there appeared to be a "deep-rooted conspiracy" and a "calculated move" to undermine the institution and demean the dignity of judiciary, the Supreme Court directed that all copies of the book -- physical and digital -- currently in circulation be seized immediately.

**DID U KNOW?**  
A bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant issued show-cause notices to the NCERT director



### Railways to employ ex-servicemen: MoU signed



**N**ine out of 70 railway divisions in the country have signed memorandums of understanding with Army organisations to recruit ex-servicemen as pointsmen, the Railway Ministry said on Thursday. A pointsman is a railway employee responsible for operating track switches and directing trains from one line to another to ensure safe shunting and yard operations.

### India must have chemical, biological weapons: CDS



**I**ndia must stay ready with indigenous chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) defence equipment for early warning systems, Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan said on Thursday. Gen Chauhan was addressing a CBRN conclave organised by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). Gen Chauhan made the remarks after inaugurating the two-day conclave.

You must be the change you wish to see in the world, because transformation begins with each one of us - Mahatma Gandhi



likes and views are very skewed because har cheez kharidi jaa sakti ha - Shreya Ghoshal

# Villages of Excellence with Israeli help

**DID U KNOW?**

Villages of Excellence will take the benefits of Israeli agricultural technology to the grassroots level

**O**n the back of the success of the Centres of Excellence established with Israeli cooperation across India for strengthening the agricultural sector, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday announced the creation of "Villages of Excellence" to further deepen

agricultural cooperation between the two countries. "The Centres of Excellence established in India with the cooperation of Israel are excellent examples of our friendship. Seeing their success, we have set a target to increase their number to 100," he said.



## Stay on release of Kerala Story 2



**T**he Kerala High Court has directed the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) to re-watch and reconsider the clearance of 'The Kerala Story 2', following claims that the film contains hate-spreading content. The Kerala HC also imposed a 15-day interim stay on the film's release. This follows the concern that certain scenes in the film allegedly incite hatred and threaten communal harmony.

## Dhadak 2 in Ivy League Universities



**F**ilmmaker Karan Johar has expressed pride as Dhadak 2 is being screened at Ivy League universities, calling it a significant milestone for the team at his production house. Karan took to Instagram, where he shared a poster of the film starring Siddhant Chaturvedi and Triptii Dimri. Karan said that seeing Dhadak 2 resonate in prestigious academic spaces has been a "great moment. He wrote: "Dhadak 2 being screened at all the Ivy League universities is such a moment of pride for us."

# Futuristic warfare



**A**n analysis of India's security challenges and discussions on modern and futuristic war fighting topped the agenda at the third edition of the Future Warfare Course (FWC-03), an official said on Thursday. The course, which culminated on Wednesday at Manekshaw Centre, featured an enhanced curriculum covering specialised subjects and domain-specific warfare developments in military operations, the Defence Ministry official said in a statement. The course was organised by the Doctrine, Organisation

An analysis of India's security challenges in futuristic war fighting topped the agenda at the third edition of the Future Warfare Course (FWC-03)



and Training (DOT) under the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS) from February 2 - 25, 2026. Curated through the vision of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan, the FWC 3.0 provided a heady mix of

operational and strategic alignment and technological proficiency to the participants. A total of 39 officers from the Army, Navy and Air Force participated in the course. The course was conducted in two phases.



## HBO's 'Industry' in for 5th season

**A**merican network HBO has renewed its critically acclaimed financial drama series "Industry" for a fifth and final season. The fifth season will bring to a close the series created by Mickey Down and Konrad Kay, which follows ambitious young graduates navigating the brutal, high-octane world of London investment banking. The show's fourth season concludes its run on March 1.

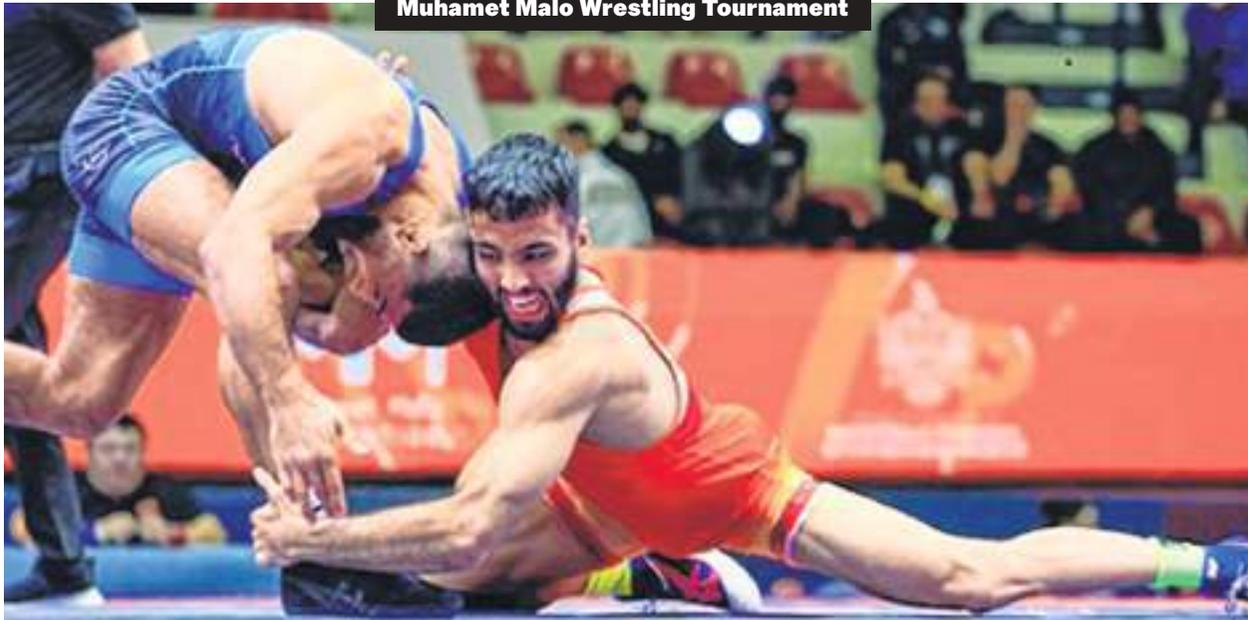


♥ All you have to do is dream big and try fulfilling it  
- Kapil Dev

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MUMBAI | FRIDAY | FEBRUARY 27, 2026

**Muhamet Malo Wrestling Tournament**



He topped the podium with four straight wins on technical superiority

# Indian wrestler clinches gold



23 world champion Sujett Kalkal clinched the gold medal in the men's 65kg freestyle category at the Muhamet Malo 2026 wrestling tournament in Tirana, Albania. He topped the podium with four straight wins on technical superiority. The 23-year-old Indian dominated Azerbaijan's Rashid

Babazade 10-0 in the final. He had a convincing 11-0 win over USA's two-time Pan American champion Joseph McKenna in the semifinal after beating Nika Zakashvili of Georgia 10-0 in the quarter-finals and starting his campaign with a 16-4 victory over Endrio Avdyli of Albania. This is his second straight gold medal in the 2026 UWW Ranking Series, following his Zagreb Open victory in Croatia earlier this month. Sujett

warmed up with a 16-4 victory over Endrio Avdyli, who tossed the Indian for a four at the start of the bout. Nika Zakashvili (Georgia) fell next, 10-0, before Sujett defeated Joseph McKenna (USA), 11-0, the same scoreline as the one in the semifinals of the Zagreb Open.

**DID U KNOW?**  
Sujett laced Rashid to win 10-0 to capture a second straight Ranking Series gold medal.

## South Africa beat West Indies

Skipper Aiden Markram led from the front with an unbeaten 82 as South Africa chased down a challenging target of 177 runs in just 16.1 overs for the loss of only one wicket and secured a nine-wicket win over the West Indies in their second match in Super 8s stage of the ICC T20 WC 2026 played at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Thursday.



## Harmanpreet to play second ODI



India all-rounder Deepti Sharma has confirmed the availability of captain Harmanpreet Kaur for the second ODI against Australia, offering reassurance after the skipper's knee scare in the series opener. Harmanpreet had

injured her left knee while batting against Megan Schutt of Australia during the first ODI in Brisbane, a match India eventually lost after clinching the preceding T20I series 2-1.

## Gold in Ch'garh: Kapil meets CM



In a significant step towards expanding India's golf ecosystem and strengthening sports-led tourism development, Padma Bhushan Kapil Dev, President of

the PGTI, held discussions with CM of Chhattisgarh Vishnu Deo Sai on the future growth of golf infrastructure in the state. The meeting was also attended by Subodh Kumar Singh, IAS, senior representatives of the Government of Chhattisgarh, and PGTI CEO Amandeep Johl.

**QUICK NEWS**

### MO: Kecmanovic upsets Zverev

Alexander Zverev bowed out of Mexican Open after losing to Serbian Miomir Kecmanovic 6-3, (3)6-7, 7-6(4). This is the second time Zverev has been knocked out in round of 16 in Acapulco, after winning title in 2021 edition.

### CL: VINICIUS SCORES WINNER

Real Madrid advanced to the Champions League last 16 with a 2-1 home win over Benfica, sealing a 3-1 aggregate victory. Vinicius Jr. scored the decisive goal in the 80th minute to settle an anxious night at the Santiago Bernabeu.

### Ronaldo buys 25% stake

Portugal star Cristiano Ronaldo has made a big investment in the Spanish Football. He has purchased a 25% stake in the second-tier club UD Almeria, which is currently owned by the Saudi Arabian investors.



It was my dream to score a century in the IPL.  
- Vaibhav Suryavanshi

MUMBAI | FRIDAY | FEBRUARY 27, 2026

## Suryavanshi, Tendulkar power DY Patil Blue to win

India's Under-19 World Cup hero Vaibhav Suryavanshi and Arjun Tendulkar lit up the DY Patil Ground in Talegaon as DY Patil Blue pulled off a high-octane chase against Indian Navy on Day four of the 20th DY Patil T20 Cup on Thursday. Suryavanshi slammed 63 off 19 balls with seven boundaries and five sixes. Tendulkar, on the other hand, remained unbeaten on 55 off 29 balls with seven boundaries and two sixes.



## Bengaluru braces for ISL match



The floodlights at Sree Kanteerava Stadium are prepared to illuminate this Friday as former champions Bengaluru FC host Punjab FC in an important match of the Indian Super League (ISL) 2025-26 season. The visiting 'Shers' come for their second straight away game, aiming to recover after a close 1-0 defeat to Jamshedpur FC.



FP SCHOOL is a publication for and of school students. Principals, teachers, parents and students are welcome to send news and pictures of functions held at schools, students who have excelled in different fields and stories, poems etc penned by students for publication to: [freepresschool@gmail.com](mailto:freepresschool@gmail.com)

### Ranji Trophy final Day 3

Mayank Agarwal produced a century to anchor Karnataka's resistance, but J&K retained firm control on the proceedings at stumps on Day 3

# Karnataka- 220/5 at stumps



Opening batter Mayank Agarwal produced a magnificent rear-guard century to anchor Karnataka's resistance, but Jammu and Kashmir retained firm control on the proceedings at stumps on Day 3

of the Ranji Trophy final at the Hubli Cricket Ground, the home side closing at 220/5 in response to the visitors'

**DID U KNOW?**  
Despite Mayank's heroic effort, J&K remain firmly in command of the contest after three days.



imposing first-innings total of 584. Resuming the day with Jammu and Kashmir's lower-order at the crease, Karnataka struck early through Prasad Krishna, who completed a superb five-wicket haul as the visitors added 57 runs to

their overnight tally. Valuable contributions from Sahil Lotra (72), Abid Mushtaq (28), and Yudhvir Singh Charak (30) helped push Jammu and Kashmir to a commanding 584, establishing a dominant platform in the summit clash.

## AKMAL TROLLS BABAR AZAM

Pakistan cricketer Umar Akmal has trolled Babar Azam in his latest social media post. He mocked the Pakistani star batter by comparing his 94 runs knock against Australia with Babar Azam's 25 from

24 balls against England in T20 WC. Umar Akmal shared the screenshots from his ICC T20 WC 2014 match against Australia where he scored 94 runs off 54 balls to lead Pakistan to a 16-run victory.

## Abhishek produces record low of 64

Abhishek Kumar produced a tournament low score, a sublime bogey-free eight-under 64 in third and final round, to register a sensational come-from-behind victory in first leg of the INR 25L DP World PGTI NexGen 2026 played at Aravalli Golf Club in Haryana, on Thursday.

The Panchkula-based 24-year-old Abhishek Kumar (72-73-64), who was overnight tied 10th and eight shots off the lead, delivered eight birdies in the last round, including five on the trot, to outshine all his rivals as he ended the week with a tournament total of seven-under 209.

FP SCHOOL EDITOR: AMRISH HERDENIA

# Fun DIY Experiments, Magnetic Compass, and Tasty Science Snacks

**TINA KHATRI**

On National Science Day, we embark on a quest where questions are keys and curiosity is the compass. From the magnetic pull of Earth to the crunch of crispy vegetables, today we unlock the wonders that lie beneath the surface.

Craft your own magnetic compass and let the Earth's unseen forces guide you;

## Never lose direction: Compass

### Never Lose Direction: DIY Compass (Quick Guide)

#### 1. GATHER MATERIALS

- ▶ Needle or straightened paperclip
- ▶ Magnet
- ▶ Small cork/foam/leaf (to float it)
- ▶ Bowl with ~1 inch of water
- ▶ Pliers (optional)



#### 2. MAGNETIZE THE NEEDLE

- ▶ Rub the magnet along the needle in one direction only.
- ▶ Lift and repeat from the same starting end.
- ▶ Do this 20–50 times.

#### 3. MAKE IT FLOAT

- ▶ Push the needle through cork/foam or
- ▶ Lay it on a floating leaf or bottle cap.

#### 4. USE YOUR COMPASS

- ▶ Place the float in water away from electronics.
- ▶ Let it spin and settle.
- ▶ It will align North–South.
- ▶ Check with a real compass to confirm which end points North.

whip up a batch of baked vegetable chips and witness the magic of heat transforming humble veggies into crispy creations; and dive into a poem of discovery, where science and adventure collide.

This day isn't just about experiments—it's about embracing the thrill of the unknown and letting your curiosity set the course. Ready to explore? Let the science begin!



## Baked Vegetable Chips

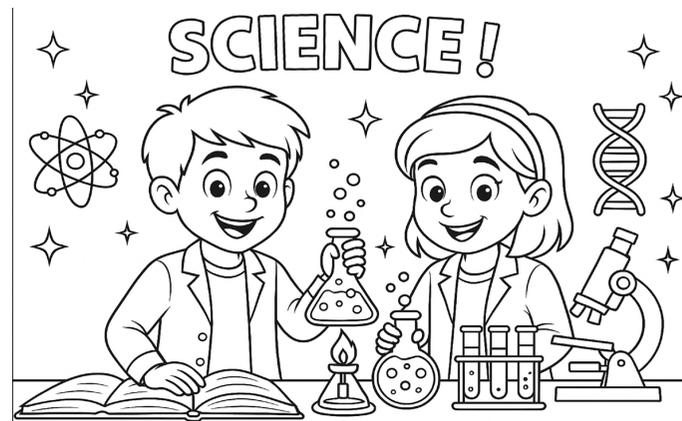
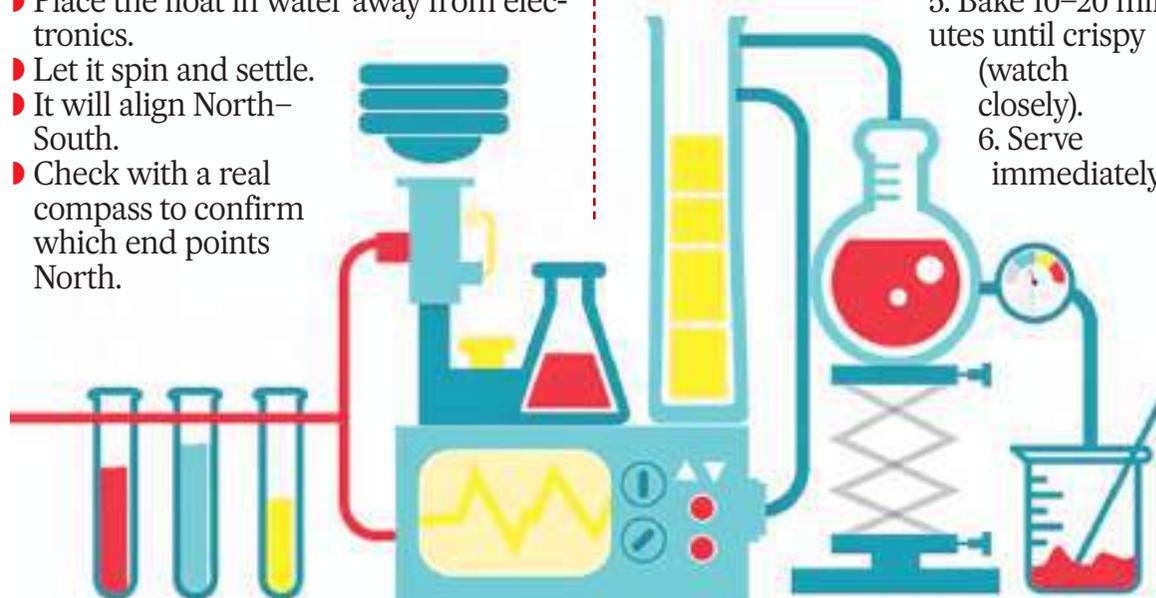
Food Science: Low-temperature baking evaporates moisture, concentrating flavour and creating crisp texture.

#### INGREDIENTS:

- ▶ Kale leaves (or thinly sliced sweet potato/zucchini)
- ▶ 1 tbsp olive oil
- ▶ Salt, pepper, seasonings

#### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 150°C (300°F).
2. Wash/dry kale or thinly slice vegetables.
3. Toss with oil and seasonings.
4. Spread in a single layer on a baking sheet.
5. Bake 10–20 minutes until crispy (watch closely).
6. Serve immediately.



## Mystery of Science

- ▶ Fill in the blanks with any scientific words or ideas that inspire you. Let your creativity flow!
- ▶ On this National Science Day, we stand so tall, With questions that rise, and answers to \_\_\_\_\_ (verb).

A world full of wonder, yet waiting to see,  
What mysteries are hidden in the \_\_\_\_\_ (place).

The stars in the sky, the secrets they hold,  
Of \_\_\_\_\_ (scientific concept), so shiny and bold.  
The \_\_\_\_\_ (particle) that dance in a \_\_\_\_\_ (motion),

In the \_\_\_\_\_ (atom part) they twist with emotion.

Beneath the earth's surface, so deep and so \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective),

There's energy that's waiting to \_\_\_\_\_ (verb).  
A spark in the dark, an idea takes flight,  
Could it be in \_\_\_\_\_ (scientific concept), that we find the light?

The oceans are vast, with creatures so \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective),

In their depths, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of a creature) has grown.

What secrets lie under the \_\_\_\_\_ (water body),  
Perhaps in the shadows, a \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective) discovery.

Look to the sky, so vast and so \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective),

Where \_\_\_\_\_ (scientific discovery) shines like a light.

How far will we travel? How high will we soar?  
Exploring the \_\_\_\_\_ (space), we'll always want more.

But it's not just the \_\_\_\_\_ (place), the atoms, or the sea,

The wonders of science are found even in \_\_\_\_\_ (everyday object).

A question, a theory, a spark in the \_\_\_\_\_ (noun),

And suddenly the \_\_\_\_\_ (discovery) breaks the chain.

Science is a puzzle, with pieces to find,  
The answers are waiting for those who \_\_\_\_\_ (verb).

So, fellow adventurers, with curiosity in hand,  
What will you discover? What will you \_\_\_\_\_ (verb)?



# BMC school students display exemplary science skills



The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) Schools for the very first time had successfully organised ward-wise Science Exhibitions across A to T Wards, showcasing innovation, creativity and scientific temper among students. Informs Prachi Jambhekar, deputy commissioner, education, BMC, "Despite being the first year of organising these ward-wise science exhibitions of BMC Schools. The scale and qualitative presentations by students are absolutely mind-blowing. Their creativity, enthusiasm and level of expertise visible from their projects is simply outstanding. It speaks volumes of the exemplary services rendered by BMC educators as well. The final round of these exhibitions was on display at N M Joshi Marg Municipal Secondary School, attended by over 500 visitors, it served as a grand platform where BMC school students displayed their topmost science projects and helped instill scientific temper among the masses."

A total of 24 projects were presented, reflecting the practical learning and application-based approach encouraged in BMC schools. In the ward-wise Science Exhibition awards, Mithanagar English MPS School secured the first rank and received a cash prize of Rs 12,000. Pant Nagar English MPS School was awarded the second prize of Rs 8,000, while Sion MPS School received Rs 5,000. A consolation prize of Rs 2,500 was presented to Gundavali MPS School.



Despite being the first year of organising these ward-wise science exhibitions of BMC Schools. The scale and qualitative presentations by students are absolutely mind-blowing — Prachi Jambhekar



Deputy commissioner, education, BMC

In the Kitchen Garden project category, Mominpura Urdu Medium BMC School won the first prize of Rs 11,000. Barve Nagar School secured the second prize with Rs 8,000, and IB Patel Urdu Medium School was awarded the third prize of Rs 5,000.

The exhibition witnessed enthusiastic participation, with 23 display tables set up and three students presenting at each table. The projects covered diverse and socially relevant themes including agriculture, health, hygiene, kitchen garden

initiatives, herbal plantations and mathematics-based models. These themes reflect programmes that are being actively implemented across all BMC schools in the city, reinforcing experiential learning and real-life application of knowledge. Chhaya Salve, superintendent of CPD, education, BMC Schools, highlighted, "Such exhibitions strengthen confidence, teamwork and problem-solving skills among students, while fostering curiosity and scientific thinking." Salve was responsible for implementing these science exhibitions on behalf of BMC, at the ward-level schools the preparations for the same were on for the last six months.

The event was graced by several distinguished dignitaries, including MLA Aamin Patel, President of the Education Committee. Also present were Rajshree Shirwadkar, President, Education Committee; Sujata Khare, Education Officer (Secondary); Kiratwardhan Kiratkudve, Education Officer (Primary);

and the Administrative Officer (Schools). Their presence encouraged the participating students and appreciated the collective efforts of teachers and school administrations in making the exhibition a success.

Approximately 500 visitors attended the exhibition, including parents, community members and education officials, making the event a vibrant platform for collaborative learning. The initiative formed part of the Science Day celebrations conducted across all BMC schools, emphasising inquiry-based education and scientific awareness among students.

According to Varsha Ghangurde, administrative officer for G South Ward, "The efforts of students and teachers in presenting thoughtful and innovative projects are really commendable."

Through these exhibitions, BMC Schools continue to promote holistic education, encouraging young learners to explore, experiment and excel beyond the classroom.