

# Aryan Age

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## Maharashtra Opposition alleges Rs 3000-Crore scam, preference for Megha Engineering

**Mumbai :** Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) leaders staged a protest at the Maharashtra legislature complex today, on the third day of the monsoon session. The opposition shouted slogans standing on the steps of the Vidhan Bhavan (Maharashtra legislature complex building) here, accusing the Fadnavis government of favouring a private company called Megha Engineering & Infrastructure Ltd which had bagged a major tunnel project in Thane, and alleging that the deal involved a Rs 3,000-crore scam.

"Megha Engineering and Infrastructure is the government's favourite contractor," and "Megha gets the cream while farmers remain hungry," were some of the slogans shouted by MVA opposition leaders.

MVA opposition MLAs and Members of Legislative Council (MLCs) also shouted slogans alleging the government cancelled the deal later on, only because it feared action by the Supreme Court.

The opposition's reference was to the tender process for the Thane-Borivali twin tunnel project which was cancelled by the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) in May, after Larsen & Toubro (L&T), which had been disqualified during the tendering process, moved the Supreme Court.

Leader of Opposition in the legislative council Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena MLC Ambadas Danve, Satej Patil of Congress and Sharad Pawar-led NCP leader Jayant Patil were among those who took part in the protest and shouted slogans. "Despite serious concerns being raised about the project, the government continued to push it.

This is not merely a technical lapse. It is a Rs 3,000-crore scam which the people of Maharashtra must not ignore," Danve said.

Congress MLA Satraj Patil alleged that the Megha Engineering which won the contract was a buyer of electoral bonds. "This is not

some coincidence. The government is rewarding the same company from which it received kickbacks. This raises fundamental questions



about transparency and fairness," Patil said.

Senior Sharad Pawar-led NCP leader Jayant Patil called for a reassessment of all agreements signed with Megha Engineering & Infrastructure Ltd, which he called "the government's favourite contractor". The opposition waved placards highlighting the disregard for farmers while favouring Megha Engineering. Danve pledged to continue addressing these governance matters in both houses until

living near the drains. If the protective wall of the drains is not built as per the rules, will action be taken against those engineers if there is an obstruction in the flow of water? Also, what is the government's plan to repair such drains wherever there are? Is the government going to ensure that the natural width of drains remains the same?" Replying to Mungantiwar's question, Water Conservation Minister Sanjay Rathod simply said, "Suggestion for action" which means that the government will consider it or listen to advice and then take action on it.

However, Mungantiwar expressed his displeasure about the minister's style of replying to Speaker Rahul Narvekar and said, "Water Conservation Minister Sanjay Rathore is our friend. However, when I asked if the natural width of drains will remain the same or not, he only replied with 'suggestion for action'. What is expected from the minister is an assurance that the natural width of drains will be maintained. Without giving such an assurance, what does simply saying 'suggestion for action' mean? This is a double meaning answer. Why are you giving Dada Kondke style double meaning answers?"

Mungantiwar's reference was to the late Marathi comedy film actor-director Dada Kondke who was infamous for his double meaning dialogues and who was featured in the Guinness Book of World Records for directing the largest number of hit films.

This led to Speaker Rahul Narvekar asking Minister Rathod to give a proper answer to Mungantiwar's question.

Finally, Rathod said, "We will survey such drains. We will check the width of the drains and examine if they need to be widened. We will conduct an inquiry under the supervision of the District Magistrate through the Land Records Department. We will send a proposal to the District Planning Committee regarding the construction of the remaining drains".

## Opposition Walks Out Twice Over Surge in Farmer Suicides in Maharashtra

**Mumbai :** Tensions ran high in the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly on Wednesday as the Opposition staged two walkouts, accusing the state government of ignoring the worsening agrarian crisis. The protest was sparked by a sharp rise in farmer suicides, with 767 cases reported between January and March 2025, and widespread dissatisfaction over pending payments to soybean and cotton growers.

Senior Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar raised the issue through an adjournment motion, highlighting that 200 of the suicide cases were deemed ineligible for compensation, while 194 remained under investigation. He criticized the government for prioritizing infrastructure spending over farmer welfare, pointing to the recent ₹20,000 crore allocation for the Shaktipeeth Mahamarg project, while loan waivers remain unfulfilled.

Wadettiwar also slammed ministers for making derogatory remarks against farmers and questioned the delay in providing promised one-and-a-half times the support price for crops. He cited a tragic case from Latur, where a 65-year-old farmer reportedly yoked himself to a plough, reflecting the dire state of agriculture.

Despite being allowed to voice their concerns, the Speaker, Rahul Narvekar, rejected the adjournment notice and deferred the discussion to Thursday. This led to loud protests and walkouts by members of the Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT), and NCP (SP), who accused the government of being apathetic and politically evasive.

Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar dismissed the Opposition's allegations, saying the government was open to debate and committed to addressing farmers' issues. However, the Opposition remained unconvinced, also expressing anger over non-payment to soybean farmers in Vidarbha, despite government claims of Direct Benefit Transfers.

Unsatisfied with the response from Agriculture and Marketing Minister Jaikumar Rawal, the Opposition walked out again, demanding immediate and concrete action.

## Maharashtra to Amend MCOCA for Stricter Action Against Drug Smugglers: CM Fadnavis

**Mumbai:** Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced on Wednesday that the Maharashtra government will introduce amendments to the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) during the ongoing monsoon session to tighten enforcement against drug trafficking. This move aims to address the issue of drug offenders arrested under the NDPS Act, 1985 securing bail too easily.

Responding to a query raised in the state council by BJP legislator Parinay Fuke, Fadnavis informed that every police station now has a dedicated NDPS unit, with designated officers and district-level coordination committees to curb narcotics smuggling. He added that cooperation with the Central Government and other states has improved intelligence sharing and enabled joint crackdowns on inter-state smugglers.

He reaffirmed that cannabis cultivation remains banned, including in states like Madhya Pradesh, and assured that stern action will be taken against those involved in the trafficking of ganja, gutkha, or similar banned substances.

Highlighting the need for rehabilitation, Fadnavis

said the state is working on expanding and upgrading de-addiction centres with pending matters within the government's 150-day mission plan. He said directives had been issued to departments to expedite the process.

Fadnavis also highlighted welfare measures for the police, including the now-stabilized 8-hour duty system, weekly offs, and significantly increased leave encashment. Major housing projects for police personnel are underway across the state, including in Mumbai.

Reviving the DG Loan Scheme, which was previously halted, is another step the government is taking to support the police



proper policy support.

In a separate discussion, the Chief Minister addressed compassionate recruitment cases in the police force, promising to resolve all

force, he said.

To counter rising lifestyle diseases, annual health check-ups are now mandatory for officers over 40, and biannual for those above 50. Mental health counselling programs are also being implemented.

State Home Minister Yogesh Kadam added that free treatment is now available for 40 different illnesses under a government initiative, with 270 hospitals partnered statewide. In addition, cancer screenings, yoga sessions, meditation programs, and gyms have been introduced for the wellbeing of police personnel.

## Over ₹22,500 Crore Lost by 1.5 Crore Investors in Maharashtra Over a Decade: CM Fadnavis

**Mumbai:** Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis revealed that more than 1.5 crore investors outside Mumbai have fallen prey to fraudulent investment schemes over the past 10 years, resulting in a staggering loss of ₹22,552 crore. This data was shared during the state legislative council session on Wednesday, highlighting the growing menace of financial and cyber fraud.

Fadnavis, who also holds the Home portfolio, noted that in Mumbai alone, the Economic Offences Wing reported that 2.71 lakh people were cheated out of ₹2.95 lakh crore in similar scams over the same period.

From 2016 to May 2025, the state saw 46,321 cyber crime cases related to investor fraud, accounting for losses amounting to ₹11,033.97 crore. In 2024 alone, 58,157 complaints were filed on the Maharashtra National Cyber Crime Reporting portal, involving frauds worth over ₹1,187 crore. Most complaints came from Mumbai (31,583), followed by Pune (13,971) and Thane (12,582).

Fadnavis informed that Maharashtra currently operates 50 cyber police stations, supported by modern technology to aid in swift investigations. A Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) has been set up in

Mumbai and replicated across police jurisdictions to monitor and prevent financial frauds.

To tackle the rising threat, the government has launched awareness campaigns across the state, targeting citizens, students, teachers, and officials. Police personnel have been trained in cyber crime detection, and specialized labs have been developed for better investigation.

In a separate query, the CM also disclosed a rise in m e p h e d r o n e - r e l a t e d offences, with 303 cases in 2022, 642 in 2023, and 545 in 2024, underscoring the ongoing fight against drug-related crimes in Maharashtra.

## Congress slams govt over allowing surge in cab prices

**New Delhi :** The Congress party today slammed the central government's decision to allow cab aggregators such as Ola, Uber, and Rapido to implement dynamic pricing up to twice the base fare during peak hours, calling it a move that will further burden the common man.

In a post on social media platform X, Congress called the policy "bad news" for daily commuters and accused the Modi government of "burning a hole in the pockets" of ordinary citizens.



**New Delhi :** A day after Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah linked heart-related deaths in Hassan district to Covid vaccine, the Union Health Ministry today rebut his claims saying that extensive studies by ICMR and AIIMS have conclusively found no such connections.

Siddaramaiah had on Tuesday said "hasty approval and distribution" of the Covid vaccine to the public could also be a reason for these deaths and urged everyone to visit the nearest health centre immediately for a check-up if they have symptoms such as chest pain or difficulty breathing, and not to ignore these signs.

## Digital Tools Like Poshan Tracker Revolutionizing Women and Child Welfare: PMO

**New Delhi :** Technological initiatives such as the Poshan Tracker and direct benefit transfers are reshaping the landscape of women and child welfare in India, according to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

In a recent post on X (formerly Twitter), the PMO highlighted the transformative impact of these tools, citing their role in delivering real-time and effective support throughout the country. The post was shared alongside an article by Union Minister for Women and Child Development, Annapurna Devi, which showcases how the government has successfully

used digital innovation to improve social welfare services.

Devi emphasized that platforms like the Poshan Tracker, a grievance redressal system, and the direct transfer of financial benefits are making a tangible difference in the lives of women and children. She noted that technology is driving a significant shift—not only in nutrition and education but also in access to justice, dignity, and empowerment.

The Minister explained that integrating technology into the Ministry's operations ensures that services reach even the remotest areas

efficiently, transparently, and swiftly. These improvements have expanded access to vital resources, including nutrition, education, legal protection, and other key entitlements.

A flagship example is the Poshan Tracker, which supports the national goal of creating a healthier, well-nourished India. Anganwadi centres have been digitized under this initiative, functioning as modern community centres that bridge the rural-urban gap. The platform also offers e-learning modules for Anganwadi workers to support early childhood education.

Recently honored with the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration (2025), the Poshan Tracker enables real-time monitoring of nutrition data through dashboards. It features innovations like geo-tagged Anganwadi centres and face recognition for Take-Home Ration distribution, ensuring both transparency and efficiency.

Devi also shared that under the Saksham Anganwadi initiative, around 14 lakh Anganwadi centres have been integrated into the Poshan Tracker system. The platform now covers over 10.14 crore



beneficiaries, including pregnant women, nursing mothers, children under six years of age, and adolescent girls, demonstrating significant progress in delivering services at the grassroots level.

## Covid vaccine safe for heart, says Health Ministry citing AIIMS, ICMR studies

can result from a wide range of factors, including genetics, lifestyle, pre-existing conditions, and post-Covid complications, the Ministry said in a statement.

The ICMR and NCDC have been working together to understand the causes behind sudden unexplained deaths, especially in young adults between the ages of 18 and 45 years.

To explore this, two complementary studies were undertaken using different research approaches -- one based on past data and another involving real-time investigation.

The first study was conducted by ICMR's

National Institute of Epidemiology (NIE) was titled "Factors associated with unexplained sudden deaths among adults aged 18-45 years in India - a multi-centric matched case control study," from May to August 2023 across 47 tertiary care hospitals in 19 states and Union territories, the statement said.

It looked at individuals who appeared to be healthy but died suddenly between October 2021 and March 2023. The findings have conclusively showed that Covid-19 vaccination does not increase the risk of unexplained sudden deaths in young adults.

The second study titled "Establishing the cause in sudden unexplained deaths in young" is currently being conducted by the AIIMS, Delhi. This is a prospective study aimed at determining the common causes of sudden deaths in young adults. "Early analysis of data from the study indicates that heart attacks or myocardial infarction (MI) continue to be the leading cause of sudden death in this age group," the statement said.

Importantly, no major changes in the pattern of causes have been observed when compared with previous years.

In majority of the

unexplained death cases, genetic mutations have been identified as a possible cause of these deaths. The final results will be shared once the study is complete.

Together, these two studies offer a more comprehensive understanding of sudden unexplained deaths in young adults in India. It has also been found that Covid-19 vaccination does not appear to increase the risk, whereas, the role of underlying health issues, genetic predisposition and risky lifestyle choices does play a role in unexplained sudden deaths, the statement said.

Without naming the State

and Karnataka Chief Minister's statement on doubting vaccine's efficiency, the statement said "Scientific experts have reiterated that statements linking COVID vaccination to sudden deaths are false and misleading, and are not supported by scientific consensus.

"Speculative claims without conclusive evidence risk undermining public confidence in vaccines, which have played a crucial role in saving millions of lives during the pandemic. Such unfounded reports and claims could strongly contribute to vaccine hesitancy in the country,

thereby adversely impacting public health."

The Karnataka chief minister had said more than 20 people have died due to heart attacks in the past month alone in just one district of Hassan. In a post on X, he wrote: "The government is taking this matter very seriously. To identify the exact cause of these series of deaths and to find solutions, a committee of experts has been formed under the leadership of Dr Ravindranath, Director of Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and Research, and they have been instructed to submit a study report within 10 days."



## Preparations begin for ‘Bahuda Yatra’ of trinity of Sri Jagannath Temple



**Puri:** Preparations for the Bahuda Yatra (return car festival) of the holy Trinity of the Sri Jagannath Temple began today.

According to tradition, on the fifth day of the Rath Yatra, Mahalaxmi - the consort of Lord Jagannath - upset over being left behind during the journey to Gundicha Temple, arrived there Tuesday night in a ceremonial procession. The ritual was conducted by servitors and priests, with the goddess carried in a decorated palanquin.

Upon arrival, the procession entered the Gundicha Temple. From a distance, standing at the Jai Vijay doors of the Jagamohan, Mahalaxmi caught a glimpse of Lord Jagannath and symbolically ordered his return to the main temple.

Her Ajnamallya (divine order) was handed over to Lord Jagannath's servitors, directing them to make arrangements for the return journey. On her way back, she ritually damaged a piece of the Nandighosh chariot of Lord Jagannath - a symbolic act steeped in tradition.

Today, the chariots - starting with Darpadalan of Devi Subhadra, followed by

Taladhvaj of Lord Balabhadra - were skillfully pulled backwards for about 500 meters along the Badadanda (Grand Road). The chariots made a southward turn and then veered toward Nakachana Dwar, the exit gate of Gundicha Temple, popularly known as Dakshini Moda.

Devotees and police personnel together pulled the chariots and stationed them at Saradhabali, facing the main temple. The Nandighosh chariot of Lord Jagannath will be pulled tomorrow.

The Trinity - Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra, and Devi Subhadra - along with Sudarshan, Ramakrushna, and Madanmohan, will board the chariots on July 5 for their return to the main temple in the ritual known as Bahuda Yatra. Large numbers of devotees are visiting Gundicha Temple to offer prayers. It is widely believed that having a darshan of the deities on the Adapa Mandap of the Gundicha Temple grants moksha (liberation from the cycle of rebirth). Devotees are also partaking in Mahaprasad (holy food offered to the deities) within the temple premises.

## Karnataka cabinet announces major decisions



**Nandi Hills:** Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah today announced a series of significant administrative, educational, and infrastructure decisions following a high-level state cabinet meeting, including key renaming initiatives and major budgetary allocations for social welfare and water projects.

Addressing reporters after the cabinet meeting, the Chief Minister said, “We have declared Bangalore Rural District as Bangalore North. We have changed the name of Bagepalli to Bhagyanagar.”

In a major gesture, he added, “We are going to name Bengaluru City University after the former Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh. It will now be known as Dr Manmohan Singh University.” Siddaramaiah highlighted that the cabinet discussed 48 agenda items, collectively amounting to Rs 3,400 crore in sanctioned funds.

Countering opposition criticism regarding fiscal constraints, he asserted, “The

BJP repeatedly claims this government has no money. That is not true.”

On the crucial Yettinahole drinking water project, the CM detailed the revised cost estimate now stands at Rs 23,251 crore, out of which Rs 17,147 crore has already been spent.

“An additional Rs 6,103 crore will be used to complete the project. Though primarily a drinking water project, we will also fill 50% of the lakes. The Gravity Main Canal is already 82–85% complete. A total of Rs 9,807 crore has been spent,” he added. Drinking water supply will soon reach Kolar, Chikkaballapur, Bengaluru Rural, and Hassan within two years, he assured. In a major education welfare initiative, Siddaramaiah said, “The Labour Department will open one residential school for children of workers in every district, with Rs 1,175.25 crore sanctioned for construction. In addition, we have allocated Rs 10 crore to build two residential schools to coach candidates from backward communities for competitive exams, including the UPSC.”

He further announced a major boost to the floriculture sector, stating, “Bengaluru earlier had the only hi-tech flower market. We are now establishing a new one in Chikkaballapur at a cost of Rs 141 crore.”

## Amarnath Yatra: ‘Bam Bam Bhole’ chants echo through Yatri Niwas as LG Sinha flags off first batch of pilgrims

**Jammu:** The chants of ‘Bam Bam Bhole’ echoed in the air early this morning as the Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha flagged off the first batch of pilgrims here from the Bhagwati Nagar Yatri Niwas base camp.

Enthusiasm was visible among the devotees who boarded the buses for onwards journeys.

Chanting ‘Bam Bam Bhole’ and ‘Har Har Mahadev’, the devotees expressed happiness at the start of the yatra.

A senior official announced the establishment of 60 RFID centres in five prominent districts within the Jammu region.

He also added that the yatra will be allowed only via road under proper regulation by the administration and security forces, adding that elaborate arrangements have been put in place in the Bhagwati Nagar Yatra camp, where the Yatris will arrive before leaving in convoys for Baltal and Pahalgam base camps.

A total of 141 lodgment centres have also been established in Jammu Division with adequate civic amenities and security arrangements, while 52 langars and 60 RFID centres are made functional in Jammu, Kathua, Samba, Udhampur and Ramban Districts, and five registration centres with a token centre at Saraswati Dham are also made operational in Jammu, he added.

However, the convoy was escorted by security forces from Jammu to the base camps in Kashmir.



## BJP yet to set ball rolling for new UP president

**Lucknow:** Even as new BJP presidents have been elected in the bordering states, Uttar Pradesh BJP leaders and workers are yet to get any information about the election of new President in the state.

Already delayed by over seven months, the ruling party is yet to set the ball rolling for the election of its new state president. The process for election of the new state President has been completed in Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh.

The tenure of the incumbent UP BJP chief Bhupendra Singh Chaudhary ended earlier this year. However, the election was postponed as the party's central leadership was busy with the Delhi assembly poll.

A senior party leader here on Wednesday confirmed that the election of new party chief will just be a formality as only the candidate finalised by the party high command

for the top post will file the nomination paper.

“Keeping in mind the Samajwadi Party’s Pichda, Dalit and Alpsankhyak (PDA) formulation, the new UP BJP chief is most likely to be from the OBC or Schedule Caste (SC) category” he said.

Several UP Ministers and OBC leaders are frontrunner for the post.

He added “The new state president will be elected keeping in view the 2027 assembly polls in the state.”

“The party is going all out to regain lost ground after its below par showing in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls in Uttar Pradesh. This was primarily due to shifting of OBC and Dalit votes to the Samajwadi Party’s PDA formulation,” the leader claimed.

But party leaders maintained that new party president will be elected by next month. “The compulsion of maintaining 50 per cent

elected state presidents for electing the national president have been completed by appointing new presidents in several states, so there no need for hurry in UP,” another leader said.

The BJP’s central leadership has initiated the proceedings to complete the election process of state presidents of various states. Thereafter, the BJP will appoint its new national president.

According to the BJP’s constitution, the party’s national president could only be elected after completing the election process of 50 percent of its state units.

The term of BJP’s incumbent national president JP Nadda ended in January last year, but the national executive committee in January 2024 extended his term till June 2025 in view of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

## First batch of Amarnath Yatris reach base camps in Kashmir

**Srinagar:** Amid strict security measures, the first batch of the Amarnath Yatris with more than 4,500 devotees reached the Kashmir valley today, officials said.

The yatris were welcomed by locals, senior officials of police and civil administration at several places. The pilgrims were welcomed with garlands in Kulgam, Anantnag and Srinagar, the officials said.

The pilgrims will proceed toward the holy Cave shrine of Shri Amarnath Ji tomorrow via Pahalgam in Anantnag and Baltal Sonamarg in Ganderbal routes, officially beginning the 38-day yatra.

The officials said the pilgrims reached the valley through the Navyug tunnel in Qazigund area of south Kashmir’s Kulgam district where they were welcomed by DIG south Kashmir Javid Iqbal Matoo, Kulgam Deputy Commissioner (DC) Athar Aamir Khan, senior BJP



leader Ravinder Raina, civil society, trade fraternity, fruit growers, and market associations.

While the pilgrims taking the Pahalgam axis were welcomed at Anantnag by officials, the yatris on their way to the cave shrine via the Baltal axis were welcomed at Pantha Chowk in Srinagar by DDC Chairperson Aftab Ahmed, Deputy Commissioner Akshay Labroo, SSP Srinagar Sundeep Chakravarthy and others.

Speaking on the occasion, the DC said that the

Amarnathji Yatra is a significant spiritual journey and they are committed to ensure smooth conduct of the pilgrimage with safety and comfort of all pilgrims. He added that the District Administration Srinagar along with Srinagar Police has put in place comprehensive arrangements to ensure the smooth conduct of the annual Yatra and cater to the needs of the pilgrims. Officials along with locals welcomed the Pilgrims and prayed for smooth, safe and peaceful conduct of Shri Amarnath Ji Yatra.

## Hemant Khandelwal new Chief of MP BJP

**Bhopal:** Hemant Vijay Khandelwal (60) was today chosen unopposed as the new President of the Madhya Pradesh Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Khandelwal, the BJP MLA from Betul, was the only one to file nomination for the post during the nomination process held at the BJP Headquarters at Bhopal this morning in the presence of the election in-charge union minister Dharmendra Pradhan, election officer

Vijay Narayan Shejwalkar and election observer Saroj Pandey. MP CM Dr Mohan Yadav escorted Khandelwal to the stage, to file his nomination.

Yadav, Union Agriculture Minister and former CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan, and outgoing state chief and Lok Sabha Member from Khajuraho Vishnu Dutt Sharma proposed Khandelwal’s name for the top slot. Born on September 3, 1964 at Mathura in Uttar



Pradesh, Khandelwal was elected to the Lok Sabha from Betul in 2008, through a by-poll after the death of his father Vijay Khandelwal, who

was till then the Lok Sabha Member. Hemant Khandelwal was the MLA from Betul from 2013 to 2018. He was again elected the BJP MLA from the seat in 2023. Hemant Khandelwal has been the Betul district BJP President, and the treasurer of the MP BJP. Presently, he is the chairman of the Kushabhau Thakre Trust too. The official announcement of Khandelwal’s name as the new State BJP President is awaited from the BJP.

## Odisha CM directs compensation to five lakh Chit Fund victims within 3-4 Months

**Bhubaneswar:** Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi today directed officials to ensure that the compensation is paid to five lakh more depositors affected by the chit fund scam within the next 3–4 months. According to sources from the Chief Minister’s Office (CMO), the process of refunding chit fund money has been simplified and decentralized

to the district level, following the Chief Minister’s instructions. Accelerating the refund process, the state government has disbursed Rs.47.07 crore to 1,26,137 small depositors over the past year. It is noteworthy that between 2014 and 2024, only Rs.119 crore had been refunded to 2,79,109 small depositors affected by the Chit Fund scam in the state.



## Income Tax department inaugurates first-ever taxpayer hub in Chandigarh

**Chandigarh:** The Income Tax Department, Chandigarh, inaugurated the Taxpayer Hub at the Convention Hall here today.

The event was graced by Chief Guest Manpreet Singh, renowned national hockey player and four-time Olympian, along with Jyoti Kumari, Principal Director General of Income Tax (Admin and TPS), New Delhi, and Amrapalli Das, Principal Chief Commissioner of Income Tax, Chandigarh.

According to an official statement, the Taxpayer Hub will remain open to the general public from July 2 to 4 at the same venue, offering a vibrant and interactive platform for tax-related education, services, and public engagement.

The double Olympic medalist Manpreet, in his

address, described the event as a vital platform for citizen engagement and awareness.



He emphasized how taxpayers’ contributions support essential public services such as sports, education, healthcare, and infrastructure. He specifically acknowledged that improved sports facilities including better equipment, training, and infrastructure are a direct result of taxpayer support, enabling athletes to excel at national and international levels. He urged citizens to pay their taxes honestly and expressed hope that the Taxpayer Hub would

effectively educate and raise awareness.

Amrapalli Das, Principal Chief Commissioner of Income Tax, stated that the initiative is more than an event. It is a platform for information, interaction, innovation, and inclusion. Aimed at educating and empowering taxpayers, the Taxpayer Hub promotes voluntary compliance and reflects the Department’s taxpayer-friendly approach.

Over three days, it will feature interactive kiosks, seminars, grievance redressal camps, stakeholder engagement, school outreach programs, and the active participation of officers acting as facilitators, not enforcers. The inauguration ceremony included the release of brochures highlighting taxpayer services and awareness initiatives.

## Monsoon fury in Mandi: 10 dead, 34 missing amid landslides & cloudbursts

**Shimla:** The death toll in Mandi district due to landslides and multiple cloudburst incidents on July 1 has risen to 10, while 34 people remain missing, according to the latest report issued by the Himachal Pradesh State Emergency Operation Centre.

The monsoon fury, which has been consistently wreaking havoc in the state for the past three years, has again brought devastation to several regions of Mandi, especially in the sub-divisions of Karsog, Thunag, Padhar and Gohar. Between June 20 and July 1, the state has reported around 90 people either killed or missing in weather-related incidents.

According to the 32-hour situation report released at 8 am on July 2, 10 deaths were

confirmed from various parts of Mandi. As many as 34 people are officially reported missing; many are feared trapped under debris or washed away by flash floods. Five people have sustained injuries, and over 370 have been rescued or evacuated, with 11 still stranded.

Rescue teams from NDRF and SDRF have been deployed at Karsog, Gohar, and Thunag, where severe cloudbursts caused destruction of homes and public infrastructure. Among the worst-

affected areas are Siyanj, Gohar reported 9 people washed away, with 2 bodies recovered and 7 still missing. Parwara and Talwara village reported two missing from a family, with one body recovered. Thunag and Pakrair areas together account for 17 missing and two deaths.

Several locations including Kutti Bypass, Old Bazaar Karsog, and Bada in Gohar also reported fatalities and multiple missing cases.

With National Highway-305 blocked, and damage reported to 24 houses, 12 cowsheds, and one hydroelectric project, the state continues to grapple with monsoon-triggered destruction. Relief operations are underway but hampered by accessibility challenges in hilly terrains.

## Mayawati opposes integration of primary schools by UP govt

**Lucknow:** Bahujan Samaj Party supreme leader Mayawati has opposed the Uttar Pradesh government’s decision to integrate primary schools in the state.

In a statement here today, Mayawati said the decision taken by the UP Basic Education Council, which has closed a lot of schools under the guise of coupling/integration of primary schools, is not justice to the easy and cheap government education system given to crores of children of poor people near their home.

“This action appears to be inappropriate, non-essential and anti-poor. There is an appeal to the government that it should immediately withdraw this decision of its coupling/integration in the interest of poor students,” she demanded.



The BSP president further said, “If the government does not withdraw its decision, then our party wants to assure all the affected parents that the BSP, after the formation of the government in 2027, the old system will be restored in the state here after cancelling this decision.”

However, she hoped that the UP government would consider changing its decision in view of the interest of education of the poor people.

## Worse than emergency: Sukhbir Badal slams Kejriwal’s crackdown on Akalis

**Chandigarh:** Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal today launched a scathing attack on former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, accusing him of orchestrating a communal and politically motivated crackdown against the SAD and the Sikh community.

He termed the developments as “worse than the draconian days of the Emergency.”

Badal alleged that Kejriwal had committed “heinous sacrilege” by using police forces to prevent Sikh devotees including Akali workers from offering prayers at Gurdwara Sri Amb Sahib in Mohali this morning.

Earlier in the day, Badal

courted arrest along with a large number of his party workers while protesting against what he called the false and vindictive case filed against senior SAD leader Bikram Singh Majithia. “This is nothing but Kejriwal’s vendetta politics driven by hatred for Punjabis, designed to divert attention from his government’s corruption and loot in Punjab,” he charged.

According to Badal, large contingents of police blocked Akali workers from visiting the Gurdwara and forcibly detained them. SAD leaders from Majha were reportedly prevented from crossing the Beas bridge, with police checkpoints set up across Punjab to stop them

from reaching Mohali.

“Everything in Punjab is



being directed by Arvind Kejriwal, a communal and non-Punjabi leader. These police cases are merely a smokescreen. The real issue is his hatred for Punjabis,” said Badal. while addressing

the media from inside a police van.

the primary targets.”

Badal alleged that peaceful political dissent is being “brutally suppressed”. “Not even during the Emergency or the historic Jaito Da Morcha were Sikhs stopped from visiting their sacred shrines, but today Akali workers and I were prevented from paying obeisance at Gurdwara Amb Sahib.” Calling the incident a “broad daylight murder of democracy, civil liberties, and human rights,” Badal questioned the silence of human rights advocates.

“Where are the so-called champions of human rights today,” he asked.

“I am not afraid of repression personally - resistance runs in my blood.



BMC Plans Major Pedestrian Subway to Link Metro, Mahalaxmi Racecourse, and Haji Ali Parking in South Mumbai

Suicide Note Alleges Financial Fraud, Leads to FIR Against Four in Mumbai

**Mumbai** : The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is set to significantly enhance pedestrian connectivity in South Mumbai with a new underground subway. This ambitious project aims to create a seamless link between the Acharya Atre Chowk Metro station, Mahalaxmi Racecourse, and the Coastal Road's Haji Ali parking hub.

The primary stretch of the subway will span 1 kilometer with a width of 7.5 meters, connecting the Nehru Science Centre exit of the Acharya Atre Chowk Metro station to Mahalaxmi Racecourse. A 120-meter branch will extend from this main passage. The BMC is considering two design options: one that directly con-



nects the subway to the car park, which would expand the subway's width to 18 to 25 meters in its preliminary stage, and another that does not. To advance the

project, the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Limited (MMRCL) will appoint a consultant to prepare a detailed feasibility and project report. A Memorandum of

Understanding (MoU) will be signed between the BMC and MMRCL to clearly define their respective roles and responsibilities. Two exits from the

Acharya Atre Chowk Metro station are currently being evaluated for the subway connection: one near Worli Naka and the other closer to the Nehru Science Centre.

Adding to the area's development, the Haji Ali Car Parking Hub has been redesigned from a two-level to a four-level underground structure, now capable of accommodating 1,200 cars. This revision was prompted by the cancellation of a proposed public parking lot at Amarsons Interchange in Breach Candy.

Meanwhile, Reliance Industries Limited is developing 70 hectares of open space around the Mahalaxmi Racecourse, which is slated to become South Mumbai's largest open space development.

**Mumbai** : The suicide of a 29-year-old man in Mankhurd has prompted an FIR against four individuals, including a bank officer, after a suicide note surfaced alleging financial fraud and cheating. Tauhid Ahmed Khan, who worked at a glass shop, was found dead by hanging in his shop on June 7, 2025.

His brother discovered a suicide note on the shop's computer the following day, which blamed several people for his financial ruin. The note specifically names Narayana Lal Devda, his wife Chanda Devi, their associate Naresh Kumar Teli, and Bank of Baroda officer Jyotsna Jagtap.

According to the complaint filed by Tauhid's father, Taufiq Khan, the accused allegedly defrauded Tauhid of ₹14 lakh. The suicide note details several grievances, including his bank account being frozen without notice and unexplained losses from his shop. It also mentions a ₹42,000 loss due to a fraudulent Telegram link. Tauhid had reportedly paid ₹8.5 lakh

to Narayana Devda for two rental properties under leave-and-license agreements, but he never received possession. One of these properties was allegedly sublet illegally, and rent payments ceased. The



accused then reportedly vacated the area and became unreachable, pushing Tauhid into depression.

Taufiq Khan has submitted transaction details and the suicide note to the police, demanding action against those named. The Mankhurd police have registered an FIR under the BNS section for abetment to suicide, and further investigation is underway.

Six-Month Manhunt Ends:

Mumbai Police Apprehend Teen Accused of Kidnapping Minor

Carnac Bridge Sees Early Use, Awaits Official Opening

**Mumbai** : What began as a seemingly straightforward elopement case involving a 13-year-old girl from Mumbai Central quickly escalated into a six-month, cross-country manhunt for a 19-year-old man. The accused, Samir Shaikh, evaded authorities by ditching his and the girl's mobile phones and constantly moving, costing the police approximately ₹30,000 in logistics, technical assistance, and human intelligence.

The prolonged chase culminated in Shaikh's arrest in West Bengal on Sunday. The case was initially registered on January 6 at Nirmal Nagar in Bandra (East) after the minor's 39-year-old medical salesman father reported

her missing, having last seen her with Shaikh, a resident of Behram Baug slum in Bandra (East). The girl had gone for a stroll with Shaikh on January 5.

Police faced significant challenges as Shaikh stopped using mobile phones and switched to internet calling, making him difficult to track. Investigators noted his apparent "expertise in anticipating police actions in kidnapping cases," which they believe stemmed from studying crime web series.

Shaikh even took the minor to Nepal, aware that Nepalese police do not share mobile network details with Indian authorities. After a brief stay, they moved to West Bengal. The crucial breakthrough

came when Shaikh logged into his Gmail account to check emails.

"He abandoned his mobile. This made it difficult to track his location. Later, we learned that he communicated with his family members only using internet calling," a police officer stated. The police team, led by DCP Manish Kalwaniya, including ACP Prakash Chougule, Senior Inspector Ramesh Wagh, Inspector Yuvraj Khade, Sub-Inspectors Sudarshan Bankar, Shailesh Chaudhary, and Vishal Daundkar, invested ₹30,000 to develop a human intelligence network and acquire the necessary technology to outsmart Shaikh, who worked as a fire alarm technician and was

trained in LAN networking.

During the extensive search, police discovered Shaikh traveled to Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Nepal, and finally to his maternal relatives in West Bengal. Shaikh's family in Bandra (East) reportedly did not cooperate with the investigation.

A prior tip-off in May led a team led by Sub-Inspector Bankar to Malda in West Bengal, but they returned without locating him. Subsequently, another lead emerged: Shaikh was using Instagram. "This was the first lead which helped the team track down the internet protocol address and the mobile device details that he used to access Instagram and also the Gmail account he logged into

to check mail. The location was shown in West Bengal," the officer explained.

Upon reaching West Bengal, the police employed decoy tactics. With local assistance, they managed to get Shaikh to a gas agency for a KYC update, where he submitted his new mobile number to obtain a gas cylinder. An officer revealed that Shaikh and the minor "traveled without tickets on trains and buses and frequently changed his location of stay during the five months of elopement. He used to do odd jobs to earn a livelihood."

The minor's parents had also filed for habeas corpus in court, alleging that the police were not treating the case seriously.

All necessary files have been submitted, and the BMC is simply waiting for the final order.

Unofficial usage was observed on Monday, with two-wheelers and pedestrians utilizing the bridge to save time. Once officially opened, the Carnac Bridge is expected to significantly ease traffic congestion on the busy P D'mello Road and Mohammad Ali Road.

The ₹60 crore project replaced a British-era bridge demolished in November 2022. Reconstruction was completed on June 10, with load tests on June 15, and the railway NOC received on June 24.

The BMC plans a public opening without a formal ceremony, similar to the Vikhroli bridge. The bridge has successfully completed load tests and secured a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Railways.

Mumbai Teacher and Friend Arrested for Allegedly Grooming and Sexually Assaulting Teenage Boy

Kandivali Police Bust 'Jamtara' Cyber Fraud Ring in Mumbai, Seize 56 ATM Cards

**Mumbai** : A female teacher from a prominent Central Mumbai school and her friend have been arrested by Dadar police on charges of sexually assaulting a teenage male student for a year. The 38-year-old teacher, who is married with children, reportedly groomed the minor by offering emotional support, taking him to luxury hotels, and providing him with alcohol and anxiety medication. Police stated that the survivor, now 17, initially met the teacher through school extracurricular activities, including dance groups she organized. Over time, the accused allegedly gained his trust and isolated him from his peers.

She would reportedly pick him up from secluded locations in her sedan—which has since been seized by police—and take him to five-star hotels where the alleged abuse took place. Investigators revealed that the teacher administered anxiety pills without medical supervision and gave the boy alcohol.

The survivor confided in a close female friend in early 2025, who encouraged him to inform a school counselor. Upon being notified, the school management immediately reported the incident to the police. During questioning, the boy disclosed that he had remained silent for months, hoping the teacher would

stop the abuse, but eventually spoke out due to emotional distress and anxiety. He lodged a formal complaint after passing out of the school.

The teacher and her friend were arrested last week and have been remanded in police custody. They face multiple charges under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, including sections 376 (rape), 328 (causing hurt by poison), 506 (criminal intimidation), and 34 (common intent) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Police are currently reviewing the teacher's past interactions with other students and examining her

digital footprint for potential evidence of grooming or inappropriate conduct. A senior investigating officer stated, "The accused projected herself as a mentor, but used her position of trust to exploit a vulnerable minor. This is a serious breach of professional and moral boundaries."

The school has suspended the teacher and issued a statement confirming their full cooperation with law enforcement and expressing support for the survivor.

Note: The victim's identity has been withheld to protect his privacy, in accordance with Supreme Court directives on cases related to sexual assault.

**Mumbai** : In a significant operation, the Kandivali Police have successfully apprehended three cybercriminals hailing from Jamtara district in Jharkhand, a region notorious as India's hub for online fraud. The arrests were made while the accused were in Mumbai to withdraw money obtained through illicit online scams. Authorities have seized a substantial haul, including 56 ATM cards, eight mobile phones, and ₹90,000 in cash from their possession.

The arrested individuals have been identified as Mohammad Imran Ansari (36), Ali Uddin Sarfuddin Ansari (34), and Rajkumar Madhuban Prasad (33). According to Kandivali Police Senior Inspector Ravi Adane, the trio has admitted to their involvement in numerous cyber fraud cases spanning across the country.

Jamtara, a district in Jharkhand, has become synonymous with cy-

ber scams, even gaining widespread recognition through a popular web series. Reports indicate that a significant portion of the area's residents are involved in cybercrime, orchestrating scams that impact various states.

The breakthrough in this case occurred when the Kandivali Police Cyber Cell received intelligence that fraudsters from Jamtara, implicated in a scam registered in Bastar, Chhattisgarh, had traveled to Mumbai with the intention of withdrawing illegally acquired funds from a local bank account. Acting swiftly on this tip-off, a team led by Inspector Harish Gawli and Assistant Inspector Deepak Kadbane raided a hotel in Kandivali, leading to the apprehension of the suspects. Investigators have shed light on the common modus operandi of these cyber fraudsters, who typically avoid using their own bank accounts to receive money. Instead, they operate

through "third-party accounts"—bank accounts opened either fraudulently using other individuals' documents or by enticing people with promises of commission. Many of these accounts are reportedly opened using Aadhaar card details without the actual person's knowledge.

In recent years, hundreds of such bank accounts have reportedly been opened in Mumbai under the guise of government schemes like "Ladki Bahin Yojana," solely for the purpose of laundering proceeds from scams. Police anticipate that further interrogation of the accused will likely expose several other intricate cyber fraud networks operating nationwide. The successful operation was conducted under the guidance of Senior Inspector Ravi Adane, with key contributions from Inspector Harish Gawli, API Deepak Kadbane, PSI Shrikant Magar, and ASI Sharad Gavkar.



**Mumbai** : The Bombay High Court on Tuesday, July 1, 2025, declined to intervene in the Maharashtra state government's decision to establish a memorial for the late Shiv Sena chief Balasaheb Thackeray at the Mayor's Bungalow in Shivaji Park.

Chief Justice Alok Aradhe and Justice Sandeep Marne dismissed four Public Interest Litigations (PILs), stating, "We do not find that any valid ground of challenge is made out." Senior advocates Sunip Sen and Uday Warunjikar, representing two petitioners, clarified that their clients were not opposed to a memorial for Thackeray. However, they challenged the chosen site, the shifting of land reservation, the composition of the trust, and the nominal annual rent of Re 1 for land valued at hundreds of crores.

The judges ruled that the state government's choice of site, approved by the land-owner BMC, "would undoubtedly fall in the realm of policy" and "outside scope of judicial review." They noted that the decision, which came after more than a year of deliberations based on a high-powered committee's recommendations, was "well-considered." Regarding the land use, the court observed that the only change in the Development Plan (DP) was the alteration of the label from 'mayor's bungalow' to 'Balasaheb Thackeray Rashtriya Smarak' and

the deletion of the green zone, substituted by a residential zone. The judges found no "procedural impropriety" as these changes were effected after following due procedure under the Maharashtra Regional and Town Planning Act. The court also found no "arbitrariness" in the government's decision to include three members from the political party and two from Thackeray's family on the board of trustees, given that the memorial is intended to honor Thackeray.

The contention regarding a valuable piece of land being offered to the trust virtually free of cost "does not appeal," the judges stated. "Any piece of land in the city of Mumbai is bound to be valuable and therefore it is not for this court to decide which land needs to be chosen for setting up the memorial..." the court said, clarifying that the BMC would retain ownership of the land leased to the trust for 30 years.

The judges further noted that work on the memorial is "virtually complete by now." Based on pictures submitted by senior advocate Darius Khambata and advocate Joel Carlos, representing the Balasaheb Thackeray Memorial Public Trust, the court observed that the "grandiose structure of mayor's bungalow has not only been kept intact, but has been restored," ensuring its "heritage significance is not disturbed."

Maharashtra Governor Mandates Biometric Attendance for College Staff and Students

**Mumbai** : In a move aimed at addressing concerns over dwindling attendance, Maharashtra Governor C. P. Radhakrishnan, who serves as the chancellor of public universities in the state, has directed all vice-chancellors to implement mandatory biometric attendance for both staff and students across universities and their affiliated colleges. This directive was reported by Yogita Rao.

While college principals acknowledge the need to tackle falling attendance, they foresee significant challenges in enforcing such a comprehensive system.

Following the Governor's instruction, Mumbai University issued a circular on June 24, mandating biometric attendance for its staff and linking salaries to it. This particular decision has met with opposition from university staff. However, the university has yet to issue any similar directive specifically for students.

The Governor's directive em-

phasizes the importance of regular attendance monitoring. Currently, many universities utilize biometric systems for teaching and non-teaching staff, but no such arrangement is in place for students.

Public universities in Maharashtra have not yet issued circulars to enforce the Governor's mandate for students. One vice-chancellor described the issue as "sensitive." A city college principal confirmed having a biometric system for campus entry but not for attendance in individual lectures.

"The implementation will be challenging," remarked a principal, highlighting that "the university will not be able to monitor the functioning of around 900 colleges." The principal also noted that many colleges have struggled to enforce the existing 75% attendance norms, with only a few strictly adhering to the rules.

Another principal pointed out a fundamental data gap: universities do not have comprehensive infor-

mation on the number of teachers in affiliated colleges. "Aided colleges still have some structured systems in place, at least for the aided courses, but many unaided colleges run without any consistent regulation," the principal added.

An educationist, speaking anonymously, suggested that a stringent directive from the government is the only way to resolve the issue. "The government should enforce the attendance norms through the universities and instruct them to take stringent action against colleges flouting norms," the educationist stated. They further recommended that "Universities should be asked to set up flying squads to conduct surprise checks to find out if lectures are being conducted. If students are not attending lectures, they should be debarred from exams." The educationist concluded by emphasizing that this is a systemic problem requiring collective effort from multiple stakeholders.

Yes Bank Fined ₹50,000 for Aadhaar-Related Delay in Account Opening

**Mumbai** : The Bombay High Court has ordered Yes Bank Ltd. to pay ₹50,000 in compensation to Microfibers Pvt Ltd. for an unreasonable delay in opening the company's bank account. This delay occurred despite the Supreme Court's September 2018 ruling that Aadhaar is not mandatory for this purpose. Microfibers Pvt Ltd. initially applied for an account in January 2018 but was unable to rent out its premises without an opera-

tional account. Yes Bank insisted on an Aadhaar card in April 2018, even after being informed of the Supreme Court's interim orders.

After the company filed a High Court petition, Yes Bank, in a June 2018 hearing, stated it would comply with the Supreme Court's definitive September 2018 judgment and open the account without insisting on Aadhaar. However, the account was not opened until January 2019.

Justices Mahesh Sonak and Jitendra Jain, in their June 26, 2025, ruling, noted the bank's failure to file a reply and the three to four-month period the petitioner was unable to rent premises. While the High Court found the ₹10 lakh compensation claim "exaggerated," it directed Yes Bank to pay ₹50,000 within eight weeks, acknowledging the bank's continued insistence on Aadhaar after clear Supreme Court directives.

Ivory Walking Stick Worth ₹10 Lakh Seized in Ghatkopar, Two Arrested

**Mumbai** : In a joint operation, the Crime Branch Unit 5 of Kurla, Mumbai, and the Forest Department have successfully apprehended two individuals for the illegal possession of a intricately carved ivory walking stick. The artifact is estimated to be worth approximately ₹10 lakh in the international market. The arrests took place on July 1, 2025, around 7:00 PM, near Sarvodaya Hospital, under the Metro Bridge on LBS Road in Ghatkopar (West), Mumbai.

According to Crime Branch officials, Assistant Police Inspector Dhanraj Chaudhary received confidential intelligence indicating that two individuals would arrive at the specified location to sell the illicit ivory artifact. Acting on this crucial tip-off, and under the guidance of senior officers, the Crime Branch promptly informed the Territorial Forest Officer (Wildlife) at Teen Hath Naka, Thane. Consequently, one officer and two forest staff members were deputed to assist in the operation. A coordinated team comprising officers from Crime Branch Unit 5 and forest officials then set up a trap at the designated spot. At approximately 7:00 PM, the two suspects weresuccessfully apprehended in possession of the carved ivory walking stick. The seized item and the two accused individuals have been handed over to Forest Circle Officer Janardan Bhosale, along with Forest Guards Vikram Pawar and Jyoti Bhosale, for further legal proceedings. An ongoing investigation is underway to delve deeper into the matter.



Editorial Railways' relief!

Good news for lakhs of passengers travelling by train! The Railway Administration has decided to put an end to the fear of reservations and the uncertainty of ticket confirmation till the last minute. From July 1, the reservation chart for long-distance trains will now be published 8 hours in advance, not 4. This will be a big relief for the passengers who are planning.

In the last few days, the Railway Board has made one or the other decision. Along with a slight increase in fares in long-distance mail-express trains, the Railway Administration has made important changes in the ticketing system. The most important and in the interest of the passengers is the decision to publish the reservation chart 8 hours before the departure of the train instead of 4 hours.

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav recently approved the proposal of the Railway Board in this regard and this decision has been implemented across the country from July 1. Most passengers prefer railways for long-distance travel in India. Indian Railways also has its own glorious history and culture. The Indian Railways network, which extends over 65 thousand km, is considered the fourth largest railway network in the world.

Indian Railways embraces the bustling urban centers and remote villages. The train that connects various regions of the Indian subcontinent creates countless stories of travel as it runs forward. The railway, which is the first choice for cheap, fast and safe travel, also provides employment to millions of hands.

One or the other feature of Indian Railways can be mentioned. But, in the current situation, while providing services to the passengers, the railway administration has to face criticism on many issues. Reservation in trains is a key issue. A few days ago, train reservations were opened for passengers going to Konkan on the occasion of Ganeshotsav. As soon as this reservation started, it was filled in just 3 minutes.

This caused a lot of disappointment to the servants who had been planning to go to Konkan for the last one and a half to two months. Every year, lakhs of servants have to endure this pain. Our metropolis had stated that this was happening because the number of tickets for certain trains running on the Konkan Railway route was very insufficient. Any long-distance journey requires planning.

Earlier, a train passenger could reserve a ticket for up to 120 days. The railway administration has reduced this limit by half and brought it to 60 days. Once a train ticket is reserved, the passenger's future plans are decided. Some want to go to their hometown, while others just want to travel. Accordingly, passengers have to make arrangements for accommodation, food, and travel at the designated place. For this, the issue of confirming the reservation is very important.

Many people travel by train with their families and friends. There are also women, children, or the elderly, in such cases, a big problem arises if the ticket is not confirmed. Because the journey is long-distance. Another problem is that the ticket has been purchased by spending money and the journey has to be made. But since the ticket is not reserved, there is no place to sit. In such a case, passengers on the waiting list travel in AC or sleeper coaches and are caught in the clutches of ticket inspection, it is assumed that they will have to pay a huge fine.

Moreover, the passenger has to pay the entire journey fare between the station from which he travelled and the station at which he was caught. It is allowed to travel only in general coaches with a waiting ticket. But passengers should not tell a different story of the general coach which is always full. The railway administration has given some relief to the passengers stuck in such a dilemma.

Earlier, the reservation chart was prepared only 4 hours before the departure of the train, due to which the waiting ticket holders had to wait till the last minute for the ticket confirmation. Now the reservation chart will be prepared 8 hours before the departure of the train. This will help reduce the uncertainty faced by the passengers in the waiting list. According to the new scheme, the reservation chart for trains departing before 2 pm will be prepared at 9 pm the previous day.

The Indian Railways has also clarified that this change will be implemented in a phased manner to ensure that this process is carried out smoothly without any hindrance. Many passengers travel from remote areas and suburbs to reach important railway stations. Such passengers will know the status of their tickets 8 hours in advance. If necessary, such passengers will get more time to cancel the ticket or make alternative travel arrangements.

Apart from this, the railway administration is developing a modern passenger reservation system. The current system has the capacity to reserve 32 thousand tickets per minute. The new system will have the capacity to reserve 1.5 lakh tickets per minute. Similarly, the capacity of ticket enquiry will increase tenfold from 4 lakh to 40 lakh per minute. This modern passenger reservation system is expected to come into service by December 2025.

Not only this, from the end of July, Tatkal tickets will be reserved only after OTP-based authentication on the IRCTC website and app. The rail travel experience starts with ticket reservation. The steps taken by the railway administration to make the ticket booking process even easier and more transparent are certainly welcome. It is expected that if the fear of confirmed tickets is eliminated, the further train journey of the passengers will also be hassle-free.

The Railway Administration has taken important steps for the convenience of passengers, from technical improvements in the ticket reservation process, to increasing the ticket enquiry capacity and transparency in the reservation system. There is no doubt that these efforts to improve the travel experience will receive a very positive response from the passengers. There is no doubt that this improvement will be a relief for travel, there is no doubt about it!

First-Ever National Workshop on Pension Disputes

In a significant move aimed at reducing pension-related legal disputes and ensuring swifter justice for India's growing population of retired government employees, Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh today, while chairing the first-ever "National Workshop on Pension Litigation" organized by the Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare at Vigyan Bhawan here, said that in no case should the vital energies of our elder citizens be allowed to be consumed inconsequentially for avoidable reasons because they may be "retired from government service but not retired from service to the nation".

Addressing a packed hall of senior officials, legal experts and pension administrators, Dr. Jitendra Singh underlined the Centre's firm commitment to pensioners' welfare, while also drawing attention to the mounting pressure on government finances due to litigation. He noted that with over 60 lakh pensioners today—a figure that now exceeds the number of serving Central Government employees—the challenges of pension administration have entered a new phase that requires urgent institutional coordination and systemic reforms.

"Pension-related litigation often arises from misinterpretation of rules, and unresolved grievances can lead to unnecessary hardship for senior citizens," Dr. Jitendra Singh said. Currently, over 300 pension-related cases are pending in various forums, with nearly 70% before Central Administrative Tribunals (CAT). The Minister acknowledged that the Government is impleaded in nearly all of these cases, indicating the systemic nature of the problem.



lem.

"Litigation is usually the last resort, not the first," the Minister said, cautioning against underestimating the grievances of pensioners. He also reflected on how, in many cases, both winning and losing parties in tribunals often appeal further, underlining the depth of discontent and the challenge of resolution.

To address these concerns, the workshop focused on legal training for nodal officers, stronger real-time coordination with the Department of Legal Affairs, and the potential use of technology—including AI-driven dashboards and repositories—to improve decision-making and case tracking.

However, Dr. Jitendra Singh emphasized that no algorithm can replace human empathy and administrative sensitivity. "AI can assist, but welfare must be guided by intelligence of the humane kind," he remarked. He ended on a poignant note, calling for a mindset shift in how retirees are viewed: "They may retire from government service, but not from serving the nation."

As part of the workshop

proceedings, Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh launched a set of key publications and initiatives aimed at enhancing awareness and grievance redressal mechanisms related to pension matters. These included a Compendium of Case Studies on Pension Litigation, a Flyer on Pension Litigation, and a Booklet on last year's Special Campaign on Family Pensioners' Grievances. He also formally launched the Special Campaign 2.0, a month-long nationwide drive dedicated to resolving pending grievances of family pensioners and super senior pensioners. These initiatives are expected to support capacity building, promote best practices, and

ensure targeted outreach to some of the most vulnerable sections among pensioners.

Joining the workshop virtually, Attorney General of India R. Venkataramani stressed the need for a structured national approach to litigation management, with a special focus on pension disputes. He proposed an ambitious target of achieving "zero pension litigation" by 2028 through anticipatory administrative measures, timely grievance resolution, and a culture of accountability. Emphasizing the unique nature of pension litigation compared to other service-related legal matters, he advocated for the adoption of mediation and conciliatory mechanisms as viable alternatives to adversarial proceedings.

The Attorney General also highlighted chronic delays in processing pension claims—particularly for armed forces personnel—and called for the use of digital tools to improve real-time coordination between nodal officers, law officers, and his office. He proposed establishing a digitally connected standing platform to monitor and manage litigation across departments. "Pursuit of happiness," he said, "should extend to our retirees," urging all stakeholders to work collectively to ensure that pensioners are not left to navigate legal complexities in their twilight years. Earlier in the day, Secretary of the De-

partment of Pension and Pensioners' Welfare, V. Srinivas, outlined the rationale behind convening the National Workshop, stating that the initiative was conceived to strengthen the capacities of nodal officers, streamline administrative processes, and reduce avoidable pension-related litigation. He emphasized the need to address recurring legal disputes, eliminate anomalies in notifications, avoid contempt cases, and build a robust knowledge management system. Highlighting recent reforms, Secretary pointed to the launch of the CCS Pension Rules, NPS Rules, and Extraordinary Pension Rules in 2021 as key legislative milestones. He noted the digital empowerment of pensioners, including the integration of pension portals with banks and the submission of over 4.6 crore Digital Life Certificates. Citing the Department's experience of being party to nearly 6,000 pension-related court cases, he stressed the urgency of efficient legal coordination and early-stage policy vetting. The Secretary also announced upcoming initiatives, including inter-ministerial consultations on the CCS Unified Pension Scheme Rules 2025 and a month-long national family pension awareness campaign starting July 1.

The plenary session of the workshop was graced by a distinguished panel of dignitaries, including Secretary (Ex-Servicemen Welfare), Dr. Niten Chandra; Secretary (Law), Dr. Anju Rathai Rana; Learned Additional Solicitor General, Shri Vikramjit Banerjee; Member (A), CAT Delhi, Dr. Chhabilendra Roul; and Joint Secretary (Pension), Shri Dhrubajyoti Sengupta.

Lifestyle and Pre-Existing Conditions identified as key factors

The matter of sudden unexplained deaths has been investigated through several agencies in the country. These studies have conclusively established that there is no direct link between COVID 19 vaccination and the reports of sudden deaths in the country.

Studies by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) affirm that COVID-19 vaccines in India are safe and effective, with extremely rare instances of serious side effects. Sudden cardiac deaths can result from a wide range of factors, including genetics, lifestyle, pre-existing conditions, and post-COVID complications.

The ICMR and NCDC have been working together to understand the causes behind sudden unexplained deaths, especially in young adults between the ages of 18 and 45 years. To explore this, two complementary

studies were undertaken using different research approaches—one based on past data and another involving real-time investigation. The first study, conducted by ICMR's National Institute of Epidemiology (NIE), was titled "Factors associated with unexplained sudden deaths among adults aged 18-45 years in India – A multicentric matched case-control study." This study was carried out from May to August 2023 across 47 tertiary care hospitals in 19 states and Union Territories. It looked at individuals who appeared to be healthy but died suddenly between October 2021 and March 2023. The findings have conclusively showed that COVID-19 vaccination does not increase the risk of unexplained sudden death in young adults.

The second study, titled "Establishing the cause in sudden unexplained deaths in young," is currently being conducted by the

All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi with funding and in collaboration with ICMR. This is a prospective study aimed at determining the common causes of sudden deaths in young adults. Early analysis of data from the study indicates that heart attacks, or myocardial infarction (MI), continue to be the leading cause of sudden death in this age group. Importantly, no major changes in the pattern of causes have been observed when compared with previous years. In majority of the unexplained death cases, genetic mutations have been identified as a possible cause of these deaths. The final results will be shared once the study is complete.

Together, these two studies offer a more comprehensive understanding of sudden unexplained deaths in young adults in India. It has also been revealed that COVID-19 vac-

cination does not appear to increase the risk, whereas, the role of underlying health issues, genetic predisposition and risky lifestyle choices does play a role in unexplained sudden deaths.

Scientific experts have reiterated that statements linking COVID vaccination to sudden deaths are false and misleading, and are not supported by scientific consensus. Speculative claims without conclusive evidence risk undermining public confidence in vaccines, which have played a crucial role in saving millions of lives during the pandemic. Such unfounded reports and claims could strongly contribute to vaccine hesitancy in the country, thereby adversely impacting public health.

The Government of India remains committed to evidence-based public health research to protect the well-being of its citizens.

ICAI Foundation Day



"In the past eleven years, India has risen from the eleventh to the fourth largest economy in the world. Our GDP has more than doubled—from USD 2.1 trillion in 2014 to USD 4.3 trillion in 2025" said Shri Hardeep Singh Puri, Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas, here today.

"We have recently overtaken Japan and are poised to become the third-largest economy by 2030, overtaking Germany."

The Minister remarked, highlighting the nation's resilience during global headwinds and the critical role played by bold policy reforms, extensive social welfare schemes, and sound financial management.

Shri Hardeep Singh Puri was addressing the 77th Foundation Day of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, celebrating a decade of transformation marked by unprecedented economic growth and social progress under the Government of India.

Under the flagship social initiatives, Shri Puri noted, over 27 crore citizens have been lifted out of multidimensional poverty, nearly four crore houses have been sanctioned under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, and 15.4 crore rural households now enjoy piped water through the Jal Jeevan Mission.

Ayushman Bharat has expanded health coverage to over 70 crore individuals with a ₹5 lakh insurance benefit, rein-

forcing India's commitment to inclusive development, the Minister added.

The Minister emphasized India's success in attracting global investment, with USD 748 billion of foreign direct investment inflows between 2014 and 2025—an increase of 143% over the previous decade—and the expansion of source countries from 89 to 112.

Landmarks in policy reform, including the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, Production-Linked Incentive schemes, the Goods and Services Tax,

Direct Benefit Transfers, and the elimination of over 25,000 compliances and 1,400 obsolete laws, have strengthened the nation's business landscape.

The transformation in tax administration underscores India's evolving financial culture: annual Income Tax Returns filed grew from 3.6 crore in FY 2013-14 to 8.5 crore in FY 2024-25, with 95% processed within 30 days. Each return, each rupee of tax collected, translates into tangible benefits—LPG connections for mothers, medicines for the

poor, electricity for rural homes, pensions for the elderly, and employment opportunities for youth.

India's banking sector has witnessed a historic turnaround, with gross non-performing assets of Scheduled Commercial Banks dropping from 14.58% in FY 2017-18 to below 3% in FY 2024-25. The digital economy's backbone, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI),

Now handles nearly 50% of real-time digital transactions globally, serving over 500 million active users. Fintech adop-

tion stands at 87%, compared to the 67% global average, facilitated by India's universal digital identity and access through Aadhaar and mobile services.

Shri Puri also spotlighted the Ministry's flagship Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, which has delivered over 16.5 crore LPG connections since 2014, empowering women, reducing indoor air pollution, and promoting public health. The growing market capitalization of Oil & Gas PSUs—nearly doubling to ₹8.79 lakh crore since 2014—reflects the sector's robust performance and the trust of investors.

Looking ahead, the Minister called on chartered accountants to embrace artificial intelligence and advanced analytics, automating routine tasks to focus on strategic advisory roles and harnessing data-driven insights for more effective decision-making. "Embracing AI is no longer optional.

It is essential for staying competitive and innovative in today's evolving financial world," he noted.

In closing, Shri Puri urged the ICAI community to uphold transparency, efficiency, and accountability as India marches towards a developed nation by 2047.

"On this special day, remember that your profession has the power to protect and sustain our economy. Your dedication is vital for building Viksit Bharat."



## MLC Tambe demands immediate action against harmful substances like energy drinks, analogue paneer

**Mumbai:** Maharashtra Food and Drug Minister Narhari Zirwal today acknowledged the grave risk posed by unrestrained sale of harmful substances like energy drinks and analogue paneer in the open market and assured the state Legislative Council that immediate steps would be taken to address the issue.

He gave this assurance after MLC Satyajee Tambe expressed concern over unmonitored and unchecked sale of adulterated and harmful food items in the markets across Maharashtra and criticised the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) department for its lack of action on the culprits.

Products such as ‘Sting’ and ‘Charged’ en-



ergy drinks and analogue paneer are being sold openly without any control.

Tambe pointed that the phenomenon poses a grave health risk to the youth of Maharashtra.

He had raised the same issue in the upper house last year, urging the government to ban the sale of energy drinks within 500 metres of education-

responsibility by stating there are manpower shortages, a lack of modern laboratories and inadequate vehicles.

“However, these cannot be excuses to shirk responsibility. This reflects an indifferent attitude from negligent officials, and such behaviour is unacceptable,” he asserted.

Tambe urged that FDA officers should be assigned specific targets for enforcement actions and held accountable for non-performance through disciplinary measures.

His pointed questioning prompted a response from Minister Zirwal, who acknowledged the gravity of the situation and assured the House that immediate steps would be taken to address the issue.

## Provide Rs 10 lakh aid to lightning-affected Maha farmers, demands Congress



**Mumbai:** Continuing its aggressive stance against the ruling Mahayuti government on the farmers’ issues in the legislative council on the second day today, the opposition Congress demanded that farmers and farm labourers who die due to lightning in the state should be given a financial assistance of Rs 10 lakh by the state government.

Congress leader Vijay Vadettiwar said the Rs 4 lakh assistance currently being given to such farmers and farm labourers should be increased to Rs 10 lakh.

During question hour, Vadettiwar also demanded a financial assistance of Rs 25 lakh for the victims of tiger attacks in the state.

He said the government has already clarified that there were 236 deaths due to lightning in Maharashtra in 2022, while there were 181 casualties in 2023. “The government should immediately provide financial assistance to the families of victims,” he said.

## Maha DyCM Pawar reviews development projects

**Mumbai:** Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar today said that the central government is providing full support for the development projects being implemented in the state through the 15th Finance Commission.

The Deputy Chief Minister emphasized that development projects for the state should be meticulously planned with a long-term vision of 100 years and completed within the stipulated timeframe, ensuring top-notch quality.

To achieve this, Pawar instructed officials to ensure that all the funds of the 15th Finance Commission are available on time and spent by the end of the current financial year by maintaining coordination



and contact with the central authorities.

During a meeting at the Mantralaya, he reviewed the progress of ongoing projects and directed that not a single rupee allocated for state development should go unused.

Some notable initiatives include creating artificial coral reefs near Sindhudurg district using the decommissioned INS Guldar ship from the Indian Navy. This project aims to promote marine life and develop world-class scuba diving, submarine experiences, and underwater museums, among other attractions.

## Congress appoints Taluka presidents through direct interview

**Mumbai :** The Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee has begun strengthening party organisation and boosting activities across various districts in the state.As part of this effort, appointments of taluka presidents are now being made through direct interviews. So far, the state Congress president has personally conducted interviews and appointed 83 taluka presidents.This initiative, led by Congress state president Harshvardhan Sapkal, aims to give committed and hardworking grassroots workers an opportunity to take up key roles.

The decision has been widely welcomed by Congress workers, bringing renewed enthusiasm and energy within the party structure.

Party observers toured districts and, after discussions with local office-bearers, recommended certain names to the state Congress.The appointments were made after interviews conducted by a selection committee, headed by Harshvardhan Sapkal. The committee included senior Congress Working Committee member Bala-saheb Thorat, Legislature Party Leader MLA Vijay Wadettiwar, Legislative Council Congress Group Leader MLA Satej Patil, State Working President and CWC Member Naseem Khan, MP Chandrakant Handore, MP Praniti Shinde, Shivajirao Moghe, AICC Secretary B M Sandeep, Kunal Choudhary, and State Vice President Adv Ganesh Patil, among others.The selection process is still ongoing, and the remaining appointments will be announced shortly.



## Funds worth Rs 3.20 crore transferred using fake letterhead, signature & voice call in name of MLC Lad

**Mumbai:** BJP MLC Prasad Lad today informed the Maharashtra Legislative Council that a huge sum of money amounting to Rs 3.20 crore was allegedly transferred by unidentified persons using his forged letterhead, signature and AI (artificial intelligence) generated bogus voice call, raising eyebrows of many.

Giving this information in the upper house, he said that a fund of Rs 3.20 crore was transferred to Beed district from Ratnagiri using a bogus letterhead and signature of Prasad Lad.

The alleged scammers made an AI generated voice



call of Prasad Lad and told officials in Ratnagiri to immediately transfer the funds

to Beed. The alleged call was made yesterday evening.

After that, the shocking incident of transfer of funds took place.

When an officer from Ratnagiri became suspicious about this transfer, he spoke to Lad over the phone to confirm about his letter and call. After talking to Lad, this shocking type of fraud came to light.

The names of four suspects have come to light and further investigation is on, Lad added.

## Maharashtra cyber heist: Crypto trader held in Rs 2 crore fake WhatsApp boss scam

**Mumbai:** The Maharashtra Nodal Cyber Police arrested a 27-year-old cryptocurrency trader from Sonapat in Haryana for his role in a cyber fraud.Scammers impersonated the Managing Director of an electronics company on WhatsApp and tricked the company’s accountant into urgently transferring Rs 2 crore for a fake project. The money was routed through 13 layers of bank accounts, crypto exchanges, and cash handlers to evade detection.

The complainant, an account manager at an electronics manufacturing firm, filed the complaint after being duped into transferring large sums of company funds to fraudulent

accounts between April 10 and April 15, 2025.

A message from a WhatsApp number bearing the photo of the company’s director asked to urgently process RTGS payments for supposed project and legal expenses. Believing the number belonged to his boss, the victim accountant transferred ₹95 lakh to PR Education & Immigration Pvt Ltd and ₹95 lakh to AK Infra (ICICI Bank Account).

A third attempted transaction of ₹90 lakh to “Rajanandani Jewellers” was halted after the victim became suspicious and called his boss, who denied any such instructions. By then, the damage was done, and ₹1.90 crore was already transferred from the company’s account.

The firm then lodged an FIR, and police started an investigation.

During the course of the investigation, it was revealed that the funds moved through a complex 13-layered laundering network, beginning with accounts belonging to Akshay Kumar (AK Infra) and then into 34 different bank accounts.

From the AK Infra account, ₹19 lakh was traced to a Punjab National Bank account held by Nisha Rana Rathin in Greater Noida. She withdrew the amount in cash and deposited it into Spice Money Company’s account, a financial tech platform.

## Builder Booked for Unauthorised Construction, Assault in Bhandup Redevelopment Project

**Mumbai:** A city-based developer and his associates are facing serious legal action following.

A complaint by the Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) over unauthorised construction and structural violations at a redevelopment site in Bhandup (West).

The project, located at Aniraj Tower, has now become the centre of a major controversy involving not only planning breaches but also alleged assault.

A formal complaint was filed at the Bhandup police station by Laxmikant Manekar, an Assistant Engineer with the SRA, against Sudhanshu Infrastructure Pvt. Ltd., including its representative Abhayjit Dubey, for flouting urban development norms under the Maharashtra Regional and Town Planning (MRTP) Act, 1966.

According to the FIR, the developer illegally modified the building’s approved layout by converting a designated shop on the 8th floor into a hall without seeking necessary approvals. Additionally,

across the 1st to 8th floors despite the absence of fire safety clearance and Occupation Certificates (OC).

The project, involving redevelopment of an older structure demolished over six years ago, has been under scrutiny after repeated complaints from society members about procedural violations. Despite multiple notices issued by the SRA — beginning 22 January 2025, followed by enforcement actions under Sections 53(1), 53(6), and 53(7) of the MRTP Act — the builder failed to comply or provide adequate explanation.

In a blatant act of defiance, the developer is accused of tampering with the seal placed by the authorities on 6 June, reopening the unauthorised space by breaking through a wall and constructing a new entrance. The space was sealed again on 10 June, and both incidents were documented through official panchamas.

It also came to light that 27 commercial units on the 1st and 2nd floors were already handed over to shopkeepers, further compounding violations, since occupation without clearance is a punishable

## Mumbai Police Spend Six Months, ₹30,000 to Nab Elopement Accused in Cross-State Chase

**Mumbai:** What started as a seemingly routine case of a minor girl allegedly eloping with a 19-year-old quickly spiraled into a complex, tech-savvy game of hide-and-seek across multiple states — and even Nepal. The Mumbai Police finally arrested the accused, Samir Shaikh, from West Bengal after a six-month-long manhunt that cost the department approximately ₹30,000 in expenses on logistics, technology, and informants.

The case originated on January 6, when the parents of a 13-year-old girl from Mumbai Central filed a missing complaint at the Nirmal Nagar police station in Bandra (East). Her last known whereabouts were with Shaikh, a local youth from Behram Baug slum, with whom she had gone for a walk on January 5. Due to the girl’s age, police registered a kidnapping case.

However, locating the duo proved far more difficult than expected.

Tech-Savvy Accused Eludes Police Using Digital Smarts

Shaikh, who had previously worked as a fire alarm technician and had training in LAN networking, reportedly used knowledge gleaned from crime web series to evade arrest.

He ditched both his and the girl’s mobile phones and communicated only via internet calling apps, keeping law enforcement off his trail. Investigators said he deliberately avoided mobile networks to avoid digital footprints and reportedly told others he knew that Nepal was outside the jurisdiction of Indian mobile surveillance.

The accused and the minor briefly stayed in Nepal, knowing Indian authorities couldn’t access telecom data there, before moving back to West Bengal.

Police Track Gmail and Instagram Activity

The breakthrough came when Shaikh reportedly logged into his Gmail account, inadvertently giving investigators a digital trail. Later, usage of Instagram helped the cyber team identify an IP address and device details, finally pointing to his location in West Bengal.

With this lead, a team of Mumbai police officers traveled to Malda and used decoy operations to apprehend Shaikh. Officers posed as gas agency staff offering a KYC update and lured him in when he attempted to book a cylinder using his new mobile number. Locals assisted in the operation.

Investigators revealed that Shaikh and the mi-

## Enforce biometric attendance in colleges, guv tells state varsities

**Mumbai:** Governor C P Radhakrishnan, chancellor of public universities in the state, has asked all vice-chancellors to make biometric attendance mandatory for staff and students in universities as well as affiliated colleges, reports Yogita Rao.His directive comes amid concern over low attendance in colleges. While principals agree that falling attendance must be tackled, they say implementation of such a directive could be challenging.Mumbai University consequently issued a circular on June 24 for university staff and said that salaries would be linked to attendance. This has been opposed by university staff. It, however, hasn’t issued any directive for students yet.The Governor’s directive says attendance should be monitored regularly. While many universities use a biometric attendance system for teaching and non-teaching staff, no such arrangement has been introduced for students.

Public universities in Maharashtra are yet to issue circulars to enforce the Governor’s directive. One vice-chancellor termed it a ‘sensitive’ issue. A city college principal said they do have a biometric system for students entering the campus, but not for attendance in each lecture.

“The implementation will be challenging, the university will not be able to monitor the functioning of around 900 colleges. Moreover, colleges have failed to impose the 75% attendance norms. Barring a few colleges where the attendance rules are strictly followed, many are unable to get students to attend lectures,” said the principal.

Another principal pointed out that the universities do not have data on the number of teachers in affiliated colleges. “Aided colleges still have some structured systems in place, at least for the aided courses, but many unaided colleges run without any consistent regulation,” said the principal.

An educationist, on condition of anonymity, said the only way to fix the problem is a stringent directive from govt. “The govt should enforce the attendance norms through the universities and instruct them to take stringent action against colleges flouting norms. Universities should be asked to set up flying squads to conduct surprise checks to find out if lectures are being conducted. If students are not attending lectures, they should be debarred from exams,” said the educationist, adding that it is a systemic problem and will take efforts from multiple stakeholders to resolve.



# ‘South Park’ S27 premiere delayed due to streaming uncertainty

**Mumbai :** It seems that ‘South Park’ fans eager for the show’s long-awaited return will unfortunately need to wait a little longer, as the popular Comedy Central has delayed the premiere of its highly anticipated Season 27 by two weeks, shifting the release from July 9 to July 23.

The delay comes as the show’s streaming future remains uncertain, with its \$500 million exclusive licensing deal with HBO Max expiring at the end of June. So far, no replacement deal has been officially announced, according to The Hollywood Reporter.

While Paramount Global—co-owner of South Park Digital Studios alongside creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone—has long sig-



nalled.

Its intention to bring the show to its own platform, Paramount+, the rollout hasn’t gone as planned.

In May, Paramount co-CEO Chris McCarthy told investors that ‘South

Park’ would be arriving on Paramount+ in July. Yet as of July 1, there was still no sign of the show.

On the platform, and no formal announcement to explain the hold-up, leaving fans puzzled.

Meanwhile, streaming rights to the series have reportedly been offered to other platforms. Both Warner Bros. Discovery (HBO Max’s parent) and Netflix are said to be in the mix.

As per THR, a legal

letter from Parker and Stone’s attorney accused Paramount executives—specifically those tied to its pending acquisition by Skydance—of interfering in the negotiations.

The letter claimed there were efforts to shorten the exclusivity window on Paramount+ and allow new episodes to appear on other platforms after 12 months.

While the legal wrangling continues, all 26 seasons of ‘South Park’ remain available on Max under an extended agreement. Paramount+ is still expected to begin streaming the show ahead of the new season’s debut.

Season 27 will continue under the stewardship of Parker and Stone, with Anne Garefino, Frank C. Agnone II, and others returning as producers.

# War 2 Promotions: Hrithik Roshan and NTR Keep Distance Strategic Move, Not a Fallout

**Mumbai :** Rumors of a rift between Hrithik Roshan and NTR Jr. have surfaced as the duo is noticeably avoiding joint appearances for War 2 promotions. However, insiders reveal that the absence of shared promotions is not due to any personal discord, but a deliberate marketing tactic by (YRF).According to industry sources, the production house is intentionally keeping the two stars apart ahead of the film’s release to amplify the on-screen tension between their characters. War 2, one of the most anticipated films of 2025, features the first-ever face-off between Hrithik and NTR in the YRF Spy Universe. The studio believes that withholding joint public appearances will heighten the impact of their cinematic conflict.“Neither joint interviews nor shared promotional content is planned before the release,” a senior trade analyst confirmed. “The studio wants audiences to witness their brutal rivalry



on-screen first—untainted by off-screen camaraderie.”This strategic separation follows a well-established YRF playbook. For the original War (2019), Hrithik Roshan and Tiger Shroff only appeared together publicly after the film’s release. Similarly, Pathaan relied on curated digital content featuring Shah Rukh Khan rather than traditional media tours. That approach contributed to its record-breaking success. YRF has consistently chosen

mystery over media buzz to promote its Spy Universe entries. Even Tiger Zinda Hai leaned into legacy storytelling rather than actor-led promotions, preserving key character reveals for the big screen.With Ayan Mukerji at the helm and Aditya Chopra producing, War 2 is poised to be a major IMAX release on August 14, 2025. It also introduces Kiara Advani to the YRF Spy Universe in what is said to be her most action-oriented role to date.

# Harshaali Malhotra to Make Tollywood Debut in Balakrishna’s Akhanda 2: Thandavam

**Mumbai :** Harshaali Malhotra, who rose to fame as the lovable Munni in Bajrangi Bhaijaan, is all set to make her Telugu film debut in Akhanda 2: Thandavam, the much-awaited sequel to the 2021 blockbuster Akhanda. She will be portraying the character of Janani in the action-packed spiritual drama.

The announcement was made on Wednesday by the production house, 14 Reels Plus, via their official X (formerly Twitter) account. Sharing her first look from the film, the makers wrote:

“A smile of an angel and a heart of gold. Introducing Bajrangi Bhaijaan

fame #HarshaaliMalhotra as ‘Janani’ from #Akhanda2 #Akhanda2Thandavam – in theatres this Dussehra, 25th September.”

Directed by Boyapati Sreenu, the film reunites him with superstar Nandamuri Balakrishna for their fourth collaboration. The teaser, which was unveiled on Balakrishna’s birthday, has already set

high expectations, showcasing the actor in a powerful, divine

avatar. With visuals of Lord Shiva’s mount Nandi, a flaming Trishul, and intense fight sequences choreographed by celebrated action directors Ram-Lakshman, the teaser has thrilled fans.

M u s i c for the s e q u e l is once again c o m - posed by S Thaman, who has previously delivered chart-topping scores

for Balakrishna’s recent hits. The film is produced by Raam Achanta and Gopichand Achanta under the 14 Reels Plus banner and presented by M Tejeswini Nandamuri.

Joining the ensemble cast are Samyuktha as the female lead and Aadhi Pinisetty playing the main antagonist. The movie has been shot across visually stunning and culturally rich locations, including Georgia and Prayagraj’s Maha Kumbh Mela, further enhancing its grandeur.

Akhanda 2: Thandavam is scheduled for a grand theatrical release on Dussehra, September 25, 2025.

the legendary Prince Of Darkness!,” reports Metal Hammer.

Being held at Villa Park in Birmingham, the concert will

see the band’s original lineup reuniting for an onstage performance, for the first time in 20 years on July 5.

# From one legend to another, Judas Priest pay tribute to Black Sabbath

**Mumbai :** Paying a thunderous tribute to their fellow British metal icons, heavy metal legends Judas Priest paid a fiery tribute to Black Sabbath in their cover of the classic Sabbath song ‘War Pigs’.Later yesterday, the ‘Metal Gods’ unveiled their own rendition of ‘War Pigs’ from Black Sabbath’s second album ‘Paranoid’, ahead of the Back to the Beginning mega concert in the UK.

The concert will mark the final Black Sabbath show ever, as well as Ozzy Osbourne’s retirement from live performances.Commenting on the cover, Priest said “We are honoured to show our love for Ozzy (Osbourne) and Black Sabbath with our homage to War Pigs: a song we play at every show around the world that fans sing along to – reinforcing their love as well for



the legendary Prince Of Darkness!,” reports Metal Hammer.

Being held at Villa Park in Birmingham, the concert will

see the band’s original lineup reuniting for an onstage performance, for the first time in 20 years on July 5.

# Trailer of Aankhon Ki Gustaakhiyan unveiled

**Mumbai:** The trailer of “Aankhon Ki Gustaakhiya”, a tender, emotionally resonant romantic drama starring Vikrant Massey and debutante Shanaya Kapoor, has been officially released.

Directed by Santosh Singh, the film introduces Shanaya Kapoor, daughter of industry veterans Sanjay Kapoor and Maheep Kapoor, in her first feature role.

The trailer opens on an intriguing note: Shanaya is shown blindfolded, while Massey appears wearing dark sunglasses, setting the tone for whimsical yet emotionally layered narra-



tive. Their initial altercation is quirky and whimsical, Shanaya unexpectedly slaps Massey, only to apologise moments later.

As they journey together on a train, sharing songs, si-

lences and shy glances, their relationship evolves from chance meeting to profound intimacy. Yet, not all is idyllic questions of reconciliation and reconciliation and resilience.

# Prabhas’ New Look from Fauji Goes Viral, Fans Nostalgic for Mirchi Era

**Mumbai :** Prabhas has once again set social media abuzz — this time with a striking new look from the set of his upcoming film Fauji, directed by Hanu Raghavapudi. A behind-the-scenes photo shared by a crew member has gone viral, drawing comparisons to the actor’s beloved appearances in films like Darling and Mirchi.

The fresh, charismatic look has delighted fans, many of whom have been longing for a return to Prabhas’ earlier on-screen charm. For years, the actor’s appearance has been a subject of intense online scrutiny. Starting with Radhe Shyam and peaking during the Adipurush phase, internet trolls

frequently targeted his physical transformation post-Baahubali. The shift in appearance — due to the heavy physical demands of Baahubali, which required significant weight gain — led to persistent criticism and concern among his loyal fan base.

Adding to fans’ worries, Baahubali co-star Rana Daggubati also faced major health issues due to rapid

weight changes during the franchise’s shoot. Prabhas, too, struggled to bounce back to his earlier physique, which only amplified fans’ concern over his well-being.

However, there’s good news now. Prabhas recently took a summer break in Italy, dedicating time to self-care and physical fitness. The viral Fauji photo is reportedly the result of that focused effort, and fans couldn’t be happier.

The actor isn’t slowing down professionally either. He has a string of films lined up — including The Raja Saab, which has already generated buzz with its first look, though some fans still hold mixed feelings. Meanwhile, Fauji and Spirit (directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga) are both being shot simultaneously, while his collaboration with director Maruthi is also nearing release.

Prabhas’ fans are hopeful that this new phase — marked by a refreshed appearance and a packed film slate — signals a strong comeback to the charm and energy that once defined his blockbuster hits.



# Bill Burr to develop sitcom based on comedian Earthquake’s life

**Mumbai :** In a collaboration poised to blend raw humour with real-life storytelling, comedian Bill Burr is developing a scripted comedy for Fox based on the life of fellow stand-up icon Earthquake, also known as Nathaniel Stroman.

mourous portrayal of perseverance and reinvention, “Earthquake” will delve onto the journey of a man who turned adversity, raw honesty and razor-sharp wit into a legendary career in stand-up.

Earthquake is a come-



Burr is producing the project through his North Hill Productions; 3 Arts Entertainment will also produce through Fox Entertainment Studios. Right now the commitment is just for a script; Burr, Dave Becky, manager Jermaine Smith and (Burr’s producing partner) Mike Bertolina are executive producers, reports The Hollywood Reporter.

Described as a character-driven, sharply hu-

dian, actor, voice artist and radio personality. In 2022, he had an episode of Chappelle’s Home Team, titled “Earthquake: Legendary,” on Netflix. Earthquake was a staple of shows like BET’s Comic View and HBO’s Def Comedy Jam. His specials include “About Got Damm Time”, “Walter Latham Presents”, “From the Out-house to the Whitehouse” and “These Ain’t Jokes for Showtime”.

# Trailer of Rajkummar Rao’s film ‘Maalik’ unleashed

**Mumbai :** The trailer for ‘Maalik’, an intense action-drama starring National Award-winning actor Rajkummar Rao, has been officially released, offering a gritty glimpse into the rise of a reluctant gangster navigating power, bloodshed and politics.

For the first time in his career, Rajkummar Rao embraces the persona of a feared gangster, breaking away from his signature roles of understated characters.

In the trailer, Rajkummar is seen firing bullets continuously. Set against the turbulent socio-political backdrop of Prayagraj, Uttar



Pradesh, ‘Maalik’ chronicles the metamorphosis of a common man into a feared underworld figure and eventually, a political player.

The trailer opens to an imposing scene of heavy police presence, layered with a voice-over that sets the tone

for the protagonist’s inner conflict and impending descent, “You are the son of a helpless father, do not try to become what you are not.”

Moments later, Rajkummar Rao is seen on the screen. He is seen walking with a gun on his shoulder.

In the trailer, Rajkumar Rao is seen causing bloodshed.

Rajkummar Rao says, “I was the son of a helpless father, that was my fate. But you will be the father of a powerful son, that’s yours.” The trailer shows how a common man becomes a gangster and then enters politics.

The trailer also features Manushi Chhillar in a pivotal role as Rao’s on-screen wife, adding an emotional layer to the story. Apart from this, Swanand Kirkire, Saurabh Shukla and Anshuman Pushkar lend to the story.

Directed by Pulkit, ‘Maalik’ and is set to hit cinemas on July 11.

# Adrian Grenier absent as production begins on The Devil Wears Prada sequel

**Mumbai :**As cameras begin rolling on the sequel to the 2006 “The Devil Wears Prada”, one familiar face from the original will be notably absent.

Adrian Grenier, who essayed the role of Nate, the often-debated boyfriend of Anne Hathaway’s Andy Sachs, will not reprise his role in the follow-up.

Production has kicked off in New York.

And Italy, with familiar faces including Meryl Streep, Anne Ha-

thaway, Emily Blunt and Stanley Tucci reprising their roles. Oscar-winner Kenneth Branagh joins the cast as Miranda Priestly’s husband, further elevating the film’s already star-studded lineup, reports The Hollywood Reporter.

At the end of the movie, Andy leaves fashion journalism behind to work.

At a newspaper as viewers see Andy and Nate reconciling and on good terms, again.

So, when it came to casting,

fans were wondering if the Entourage star was coming back, too.

However, what’s previously been reported is that the upcoming film will see Priestly deal with print magazines struggling. Her other former assistant, Emily (Blunt) is now a powerful advertising executive that works with Runway.

Branagh will portray Priestly’s husband, while Tucci will reprise his role of Nigel, Runway’s art director.

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# Glen Powell to headline in Edgar Wright’s gritty reboot of ‘The Running Man’



**Mumbai :** The electrifying first trailer for “The Running Man”, a pulse-pounding reimaging of Stephen King’s 1982 dystopian novel, with Glen Powell leading the charge has been unveiled.

Helmed by acclaimed filmmaker Edgar Wright, the narrative unfolds in a chillingly plausible future where a televised competition invites participants to survive 30 harrowing days while being relentlessly pursued by government-sanctioned assassins.

Every move is tracked, filmed and broadcast to a ravenous public. Powell plays a desperate father entering the brutal gauntlet not just for survival, but to protect his daughter, elevating

the stakes with a deeply human core, reports The Hollywood Reporter.

“I have never worked harder on a movie in my life,” said Powell at CinemaCon in April, where he debuted the first footage from the film, which has has a November 7 release date from Paramount.

Edgar Wright co-wrote the screenplay with Michael Bacall, promising a darker, more faithful adaptation of King’s original narrative, one that critiques mass media, surveillance and society’s obsession with violence-as-entertainment.

The cast also includes William H. Macy, Lee Pace, Emilia Jones, Michael Cera, Daniel Ezra, Jayme Lawson with Colman Domingo .



# SPORTS

## Poor England slump to second T20 defeat by India

**Bristol** : A poor all-round performance from England saw India take a 2-0 lead in the five-match T20 series with a convincing 24-run win here.

England dominated the opening powerplay as India slipped to 31-3 - including Saturday's centurion Smriti Mandhana for 13 - but contributions of 63 apiece from Jemimah Rodrigues and Amanjot Kaur led a brilliant recovery to 181-4 on Tuesday.



The pair added 93 for the fourth wicket as England lost control of the middle overs, before Richa Ghosh's unbeaten 32 boosted the innings at the death.

In reply, England's all-too-familiar batting frailties were exposed once again as they failed to recover from an early wobble to 17-3, eventually scrambling to 157-7 after Tammy Beaumont's 54 and a cameo of 35 from Sophie Ecclestone.

Opensers Danni Wyatt-Hodge and Sophia Dunkley fell in the first two overs and captain Nat Sciver-Brunt was caught at mid-on for 13, before Beaumont's counter-attacking knock kept England in the game with 106 needed from the final 10 overs.

But Beaumont's run-out in the 12th over shifted the game back in India's favour and Amy Jones - who added 70 for the fourth wicket with Beaumont - and Alice Capsey both followed shortly after in the 15th, dismissed by the left-arm spin of Shree Charani.

Ecclestone's 23-ball knock ensured England finished with some respectability but with many of the same mistakes repeated from the thrashing at Trent Bridge, the new leadership of Sciver-Brunt and Charlotte Edwards is being put to the test by a rapidly improving India who are building plenty of confidence going into their home 50-over World Cup in the autumn, according to a BBC news.

If India's dominance at Trent Bridge was lit up by Mandhana's individual class, this innings required an all-round team effort after their powerhouses - Mandhana herself and captain Harmanpreet Kaur, who was returning from injury, both fell cheaply.

England experimented with Capsey's off-spin for the first over, which conceded 11, but seamers Lauren Bell and Lauren Filer dragged the control back brilliantly.

## Five top-10 seeds fall in first-round upsets at Wimbledon

**London**: Five top-10 seeds, including China's Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen, crashed out of the first round at Wimbledon in a day of upsets and soaring temperatures. Zheng, the No. 5 seed in the women's singles draw, suffered her third consecutive first-round exit at the grass-court Grand Slam, falling to Czech doubles specialist Katerina Siniakova 7-5, 4-6, 6-1 yesterday. The match was played as London endured its hottest day of the year, with temperatures surpassing 33 degrees Celsius. "I should have done better in my service games," said Zheng, who was broken twice after leading 5-3 in the opening set. "I don't think the surface is a challenge for me. I just felt that I should raise my level in my service games today." Siniakova, 29, a 10-time women's doubles Grand Slam champion, will face four-time major winner Naomi Osaka in the second round. Second-seeded Coco

Gauff and third-seeded Jessica Pegula were also knocked out of the women's singles on a day filled with surprises. Gauff, the reigning US Open champion who won last month's French Open, was beaten 7-6 (3), 6-1 by Ukraine's Dayana Yastremska. "I'm obviously disappointed how the result went today," said Gauff, 21. "Dayana started off playing strong. I think I couldn't find my footing out there today." Gauff, a three-time



**Dubai** : Travis Head, Pathum Nissanka and Lhuandre Pretorius have all made huge gains in the ICC Men's Test Player Rankings after their match-winning efforts with the bat this past week.

Left-hander Head has gained three places to move back into the top 10 for batters after scores of 59 and 61 in a low-scoring first Test of the three-match ICC World Test Championship (WTC) series against the West Indies in Bridgetown that Australia won by 159 runs.

Sri Lanka opener Pathum Nissanka has galloped 14 places to 17th after scoring 159 in Sri Lanka's 11th innings and 78 runs victory in the second Test against Bangladesh that helped win the WTC series 1-0 while debutant Pretorius has entered the rankings in 68th position after the left-hander struck 153 runs as South Africa defeated Zimbabwe by 328 runs in Bulawayo to take a 1-0 lead in the two-Test series.

There were also huge gains for other

South Africa batters in the latest weekly update, but regular captain Temba Bavuma not featuring in the Bulawayo Test meant that he ceded ground to India's Rishabh Pant, who is now in sixth position, just one below his career-best ranking of fifth that he had attained in July 2022.

## Real Madrid edges Juventus to move into Club World Cup quarterfinals

**Miami** : Gonzalo Garcia's second-half header lifted Real Madrid to a 1-0 victory over Juventus on Tuesday, securing the Spanish side a place in the FIFA Club World Cup quarterfinals.

The breakthrough came in the 54th minute when Trent Alexander-Arnold delivered a precise cross from the right, allowing Garcia to nod home from close range. The 21-year-old now has three goals and one assist in four tournament matches.

Persistent rain in the Hard Rock Stadium area eased shortly before kickoff, avoiding further delays after earlier weather disruptions during the tournament.

Juventus made six changes to its starting lineup, with Kenan Yildiz, Francisco Conceicao and Randal Kolo Muani replacing Nicolas Gonzalez, Teun Koopmeiners and Dusan Vlahovic in the attack.



Real Madrid welcomed back star forward Kylian Mbappe, who was named as a substitute after having missed the group stage with gastroenteritis.

Despite Madrid controlling early possession, Juventus carved out the sharper chances. Yildiz in-

tercepted a pass and surged through midfield to slip Kolo Muani through on goal, but the French forward lifted his effort over the bar. Yildiz threatened again minutes later, forcing a corner with a deflected shot. Jude Bellingham nearly opened the scoring for Ma-

drid in the 29th minute, but Juventus goalkeeper Michele Di Gregorio produced a reflex save to deny him from Alexander-Arnold's cut-back. Di Gregorio kept his side in the match with another close-range stop to deny Federico Valverde just before halftime.

The Italian keeper continued his strong performance after the break, parrying efforts from both Bellingham and Dean Huijsen, but was finally beaten by Garcia's decisive header.

Garcia made way in the 68th minute for Mbappe, who made his Club World Cup debut. Late saves from Di Gregorio kept Juventus in contention, but the Serie A side failed to find an equalizer against Madrid's disciplined defense.

Real Madrid will face either Borussia Dortmund or Monterrey - who play later Tuesday night - in Saturday's quarterfinal in New York.

## Wolves swoop to make Strand Larsen loan permanent

**London** : The Wolverhampton Wanderers have moved quickly to turn striker Jorgen Strand Larsen's loan from Celta Vigo into a permanent deal.

The 25-year-old Norwegian spent last season on loan from the Spanish side and despite Matheus Cunha capturing most of the headlines, he finished the campaign with an impressive 14 goals in 35 appearances. Strand Larsen has agreed to a four-year contract until the end of June 2029, with the club moving to seal the agreement the day after his loan expired.

Four of his goals arrived in a six-match winning run that saw the club climb away from the relegation zone after the arrival of Vitor Pereira as first team coach.

"It's been a good first season in the Pre-

mier League," said Stand Larsen, who was pleased at his rapid adaptation to the league. "I've been able to take the steps quite earlier than I've done before. Previously when I moved to a new country, I've needed more time to get into it and score goals."

"As a striker, the team need you to score the goals and be on the end of the crosses, so to score 14 goals - and come back after my injuries and a little dip of form - it was a good season for me in that respect," he added, saying Pereira was responsible for his excellent second half of the season. "Since Vitor and his staff came in, I scored eight goals, and seven goals in seven or eight games, so it was a good end of the season," he concluded.

## All-rounder Amanjot eager to contribute more for India

**Bristol** : All-rounder Amanjot Kaur scored her first T20I fifty as India notched up another impressive win to go 2-0 up in the T20I series against England.

Fresh from a massive 97-run win over England in the first T20I at Nottingham, India continued their successful run in the series, with a 24-run win in the second T20I as well, despite being in trouble early in the game on Tuesday.

Having lost three quick wickets, including that of the previous match centurion Smriti Mandhana, the visitors came back in the match courtesy of half-centuries by Jemimah Rodrigues and Player of the Match Amanjot

Kaur. Speaking after hitting her first-ever T20I fifty, Amanjot credited Rodrigues for giving her crucial advice during their 93-run partnership that helped India finish their first innings on 181/4.

"The credit goes to Jemi (Rodrigues), the way she paced her innings. She told me to stay on the wicket," she said.

"The wicket was quite damp and slow, compared to the one in Nottingham and we planned to take it deep," Amanjot said.

"We wanted to get going in the 16-18th overs and Richa (Ghosh) finished well too," she said.

Amanjot also picked the crucial wicket of the England



skipper Nat Sciver-Brunt, that helped stifle the hosts' chase. The all-rounder added that she wants to contribute more for the country, an ICC report said.

"It is the first of many (50s). I am being called an all-rounder. But I'd still say that I am the purest of the batters and purest of bowlers," she said.

"My plan (against Brunt) was very simple. I wanted to keep it on the stump and bowl. We knew 170 was a par total on this wicket," Amanjot said.

Amanjot added that the new-look Indian team had come well-prepared for the T20I series.

## Head, Nissanka & Pretorius prosper in ICC Men's Test Player Rankings

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Wiaan Mulder (up 17 places to 56th) and Corbin Bosche (up 15 places to 59th) of South Africa and Zimbabwe's Sean Williams (up two places to a career-best 15th) have also progressed after notching centuries in Bulawayo while Craig Ervine's scores of 36 and 49 have lifted him four places to 48th.

## Goalkeeper Kepa switches Chelsea for Arsenal

**London** : Arsenal has completed the signing of goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga from Chelsea after paying his five-million pound (6.8 million US dollar) release clause. The 30-year-old moves to north-London to provide backup and competition to fellow Spaniard, David Raya, who is currently first choice with the club that finished last season second in the Premier League. He joins Arsenal after impressing last season on loan at Bournemouth, after spending the 2023-24 campaign at Real Madrid. A product of the Athletic Club Bilbao youth system, Kepa joined Chelsea for 80 million euros (94.3 million US dollars) in the summer of 2018,

in what is still a world record transfer for a goalkeeper. Although he made 163 appearances for Chelsea in all competitions, Kepa never really convinced at the south-London club and after two seasons as first choice, with Chelsea signing Edouard Mendy to relegate him to the substitutes' bench and sending him on loan in the last two seasons. "I'm really, really happy to be here, really excited and looking forward to what is coming," Kepa told the Arsenal website after his move. "The ambition that is shown in this club, when I talk with (coach) Mikel (Ar-



teta) and (goalkeeping coach) Inaki Cana, shows me their desire to win... I think we are so close to winning and, hopefully, altogether, we can achieve it," he said. Arteta also expressed his satisfaction at signing a fellow Basque. "We are really happy to have Kepa joining us. He is a player we know, having come up against him many times in recent seasons. He brings a wealth of experience, which his teammates will benefit from, and he has a real hunger to win." "Kepa works hard and will elevate our levels. I know he will fit in perfectly, already knowing some of his teammates, and we are really excited about his future with us," said the Arsenal coach.



## Dortmund, Real Madrid to meet in Club World Cup last eight

**New York** : Borussia Dortmund and Real Madrid will clash in the FIFA Club World Cup quarterfinals after eliminating Monterrey and Juventus in the round of 16. In Atlanta, Guinea international striker Serhou Guirassy struck two first-half goals as Dortmund secured a 2-1 win over Monterrey yesterday. Guirassy opened the scoring in the 14th minute when he played a slick one-two with Karim Adeyemi before side-footing a low effort that beat Argentine goalkeeper Esteban Andrada at his near post. The Mexican side was undone once more by the Adeyemi-Guirassy combination in the 24th minute as the center-forward carressed a first-time shot past Andrada after Adeyemi's layoff. Former Real Madrid defender Sergio Ramos had a gilt-edged chance to equalize in the 91st minute but headed inches wide following Erick Aguirre's cross. The result means Dortmund will face Real Madrid in New Jersey on Saturday for a place in the last four while Monterrey bows out. "I think I could have scored at least three goals but I'm happy to have helped the team win," Guirassy said. "It was difficult, they are a good team with experienced players. I think we had a very good first half; the second half was a little bit harder, but our mindset was tough." The 29-year-old said the Bundesliga club would be ready for the challenge of confronting the 15-time European champions.

"I expect a very tough game. Real Madrid want to go through so it will be a tough game but we will be prepared," Guirassy added.

Ramos, who joined Monterrey on a free transfer in February, praised his teammates and said his side deserved to advance.

"Everyone who saw tonight's game realizes that this team gave it all," the 39-year-old former Spain international said.

"Things sometimes don't go the way you want them to. We had tons of chances, we didn't know how to take advantage of them like in other games. It's sad to leave a Club World Cup, but today everyone feels proud of how we represented Rayados."

In Miami, Gonzalo Garcia continued his prolific scoring form as Real Madrid edged to a 1-0 victory over Juventus. Garcia broke the deadlock in the 54th minute when he soared to meet Trent Alexander-Arnold's cross with a powerful header past Michele Di Gregorio.

The 21-year-old, who had never started for Real Madrid before this competition, has now scored three times and provided one assist in the United States.

"I'm very happy with my goal but especially with the way we fought as a team to reach the quarterfinals," said the Real Madrid youth academy graduate.

"I always try to be in the area and in a position to score, whether that be with my head, my knee or whatever."

Real Madrid dominated for long periods and could have put the result beyond doubt long before the final whistle if not for the heroics of Di Gregorio, who made 11 saves.

The Spanish club also had Kylian Mbappe back from illness, with the forward coming on in the 68th minute for his first appearance of the tournament. Juventus manager Igor Tudor said his team had suffered in the sweltering South Florida heat.

"It's disappointing but we have to keep in mind the quality of the opponent, the conditions and the tiredness of the players," the former Croatia international defender said.



BSE Sensex		Nifty 50		Nifty 500		Nifty Next 50		Nifty 100		Nifty Bank		Nifty Midcap 100	
Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change
83,409.69	-0.34%	25,453.40	-0.35%	23,547.25	-0.29%	68,729.80	-0.29%	26,068.05	-0.34%	56,999.20	-0.80%	59,667.25	-0.14%
Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open
83,697.29	83,790.72	25,541.80	25,588.30	23,615.45	23,653.05	68,930.20	68,980.90	26,156.10	26,198.90	57,459.45	57,558.20	59,750.05	59,795.05
High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
83,935.01	83,150.77	25,608.10	25,378.75	23,669.30	23,463.85	69,144.85	68,335.15	26,223.20	25,987.20	57,628.40	56,833.80	59,864.75	59,361.60

### Top Gainers

Company	Current	% Gain
Tata Steel	165.88	3.64
JSW Steel	1,059.90	2.94
Asian Paints	2,419.40	2.11
UltraTechCement	12,436.00	1.85
Maruti Suzuki	12,622.00	1.45

### Top Losers

Company	Current	%Loss
Shriram Finance	676.90	-2.81
HDFC Life	789.70	-2.49
IndusInd Bank	857.65	-2.44
Bajaj Finserv	2,007.90	-2.23
Larsen	3,596.80	-1.91

### Commodities

Commodity	Price	Change (%)
Gold Aug 05	97,282.00	31.00 0.03
Silver Jul 04	105,901.00	-46.00 -0.04
Crudeoil Jul 21	5,678.00	63.00 1.12
Naturalgas Jul 28	292.50	2.50 0.86

### UP sets benchmark in e-governance-driven industrial growth

**Lucknow:** The Uttar Pradesh government is setting new benchmarks in industrial development, with a strong focus on digital transformation and e-governance.

The Uttar Pradesh State Industrial Development Authority (UPSIDA) is leveraging technology to modernise civic amenities in industrial areas, positioning the state as a leader in the ‘Ease of Doing Business’ initiative.

Officials here on Wednesday said through the Nivesh Mitra portal, entrepreneurs now have access to 37 types of services online. Over the last five years, both the number of online applications and their prompt resolution have seen consistent growth. In 2024–25 alone, 9,719 applications were processed, reflecting a nearly 60% increase from 6,094 in 2020–21.

This progress is further validated by investor satisfaction. In 2024–25, the feedback score for Nivesh Mitra reached 96.63%, a significant improvement from previous years. The land allotment process has also been made more transparent and time-bound, with mega industrial units now receiving allotments within just 15 days. The general e-auction process timeline has also been halved, from 30 days to 15.

### Markets Slip as Investors Brace for Trump’s Tariff Deadline

**Mumbai:** Indian equity benchmarks ended Wednesday's session in the red, weighed down by investor caution ahead of a critical US tariff deadline reaffirmed by President Donald Trump.

Lingering global uncertainty triggered a risk-averse sentiment among market participants, causing indices to retreat from early highs.

The BSE Sensex, which climbed to an intra-day peak of 83,935.29, lost traction later in the session and closed at 83,409.69 — down 287.6 points or 0.34%. Meanwhile, the NSE Nifty also declined, shedding 88.45 points or 0.35% to settle at 25,453.4.

"Investor sentiment is being shaped by global cues, especially with the looming US tariff decision creating unease," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. He noted that while near-term cau-



tion prevails, focus is gradually shifting to the upcoming Q1 earnings season, where expectations are running high.

Nair also highlighted that India's strong macro-economic indicators and rising government spending continue to lend underlying support to the market.

Among the day's major laggards on the Sensex were Bajaj Finserv, L&T, Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank, and Bharat Electronics. In contrast, Tata Steel, Asian Paints, Ultra-tech Cement, Trent, Maruti Suzuki, and Sun Pharma emerged as top gainers.

Broader market indi-

ces mirrored the benchmarks' trajectory. The Nifty Midcap100 slipped 0.14%, while the Nifty Smallcap100 shed 0.41%.

In terms of sectoral performance, metals, consumer durables, auto, IT, pharma, and health-care managed modest gains. However, realty, financials, banks, oil &

gas, and media sector dragged the broader indices down.

The total market capitalisation of companies listed on the NSE stood at ₹5.35 trillion.

Despite the declines, the India VIX — a gauge of market volatility — dipped by 0.66% to 12.44, indicating slightly lower investor anxiety compared to previous sessions.

Meanwhile, gold prices remained range-bound as traders awaited key US economic data. Comex gold fluctuated between \$3,327 and \$3,340, while on the domestic front, MCX gold traded in the ₹97,000–₹97,400 range.

"Gold is likely to stay within ₹96,500 to ₹97,850 as the market factors in potential dollar weakness and key US figures like the Non-Farm Payrolls, ADP jobs data, and unemployment rates," said Ja-teen Trivedi of LKP Securities.

## Coal Ministry to Unveil RECLAIM Initiative for Mine Closures This Week

**New Delhi:** The Ministry of Coal is preparing to roll out a new initiative, titled RECLAIM, later this week. Designed as a framework for community engagement and development during the closure of mines, the initiative seeks to restore local ecosystems and support the livelihoods of communities that have historically depended on mining activities.

Union Minister for Coal and Mines, G. Kishan Reddy, will formally launch the RECLAIM framework on Friday. The programme represents a crucial step towards ensuring a fair and sustainable transition for populations living in mining regions.

Developed by the Coal Controller Organisation in collaboration with the

Heartfulness Institute, the RECLAIM framework is tailored to guide communities through the process of mine closure and beyond. It lays out a structured, practical model to embed community involvement throughout the closure process, offering actionable tools, templates, and proven methodologies specifically adapted to the Indian landscape.

Key aspects of the initiative include promoting gender equality, incorporating the perspectives of vulnerable groups, and co-ordinating with local governance bodies such as Panchayati Raj Institutions. This ensures that the closure process remains inclusive, equitable, and responsive to local needs.

According to the min-



istry, the ultimate goal of the RECLAIM framework is to support communities in navigating the shift from mining-based economies toward ecologically restored environments and sustainable, long-term livelihoods.

In tandem with this framework, the government is tightening regulatory standards for coal mining operations to better safeguard environmental resources. The updated mining guidelines will now require companies to inte-

grate specific actions for environmental restoration, land remediation, and natural regeneration directly into their operational plans. These revised protocols are intended to minimize environmental degradation, address public concerns, and encourage rigorous water quality monitoring. Additionally, public sector coal enterprises have been advancing their sustainability efforts through the effective adoption of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change's Accredited Compensatory Afforestation guidelines. These actions are boosting forest cover and contributing to the country's broader environmental and climate goals while also generating carbon credits.

### India’s ETF Market Sees 5X AUM Surge, Retail Folios Grow 11-Fold in 5 Years: Report

**Mumbai:** The Exchange-Traded Fund (ETF) landscape in India has witnessed explosive growth over the past five years, with (AUM) multiplying over fivefold and retail participation expanding significantly, according to a report released on Wednesday by Zerodha Fund House. Between March 2020 and March 2025, the total AUM in ETFs jumped approximately 5.5 times, reaching ₹8.38 lakh crore. This segment now accounts for nearly 13% of India's ₹65.74 lakh crore mutual fund industry — nearly double the 7% share held in 2020. The data underscores the rising popularity of ETFs among Indian investors. The number of retail folios investing in ETFs saw a dramatic rise during the same period, growing from about 23 lakh to a staggering 2.63 crore — an 11-fold increase. Retail investors now repre-



sent over 97% of all ETF folios, suggesting heightened awareness and confidence in ETF products across the retail segment. "This surge signals a transformational phase for Indian ETFs, driven by increased retail adoption and broader product offerings," said Vishal Jain, CEO of Zerodha Fund House. Retail AUM alone tripled during the five-year span, climbing from ₹5,335 crore to more than ₹17,800 crore. At the same time, the total number of ETF products available to investors has also nearly tri-

pled. Newer offerings, including commodity ETFs such as silver-backed funds introduced in 2022, have expanded the investment landscape, catering to diverse investor preferences. However, equity ETFs remain the dominant category, consistently contributing nearly 80% to the total ETF AUM since 2020. Trading activity has also seen significant acceleration. ETF trading volumes surged from ₹51,101 crore in FY 2019–20 to ₹3.83 lakh crore in FY 2024–25.

### Elon Musk’s Starlink Expands to Sri Lanka, Inches Closer to India Launch

**New Delhi:** Elon Musk's satellite-based internet venture, Starlink, officially commenced operations in Sri Lanka on Wednesday, marking another milestone in its South Asian expansion.

Sri Lanka becomes the third nation in the region — following Bhutan and Bangladesh — to gain access to Starlink's satellite internet services. The development was announced by the company on X (formerly Twitter), where it shared: "Starlink's high-speed, low-latency internet is now available in Sri Lanka!"

This move comes as Starlink edges closer to launching its services in India. Last month, the company secured a critical telecom license from India's Department of Telecommu-

nications (DoT), bringing it one step closer to rolling out operations nearly three years after submitting its initial applicatiThe final hurdle before Starlink can begin providing internet in India is formal clearance from the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe). A draft Letter of Intent (LoI) has already been issued, and service activation is expected once both parties sign the agreement. Reports indicate that Starlink could go live in India within the next two months. Starlink delivers broadband connectivity through a network of low-Earth orbit satellites — currently the largest such constellation in the world, with over 6,750 active satellites.

The service is designed

to deliver high-speed internet with minimal latency, making it ideal for rural and remote regions where conventional broadband infrastructure is limited or unavailable.

In Asia, Starlink is already operational in several countries, including Japan, Mongolia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Jordan, Yemen, and Azerbaijan. On a global scale, the company now serves users in over 100 countries, offering both fixed-location and mobile internet solutions.

Starlink's residential offerings are typically divided into two categories: Residential Lite, aimed at users with lower data consumption, and a standard Residential plan tailored for families or high-usage households.

## Ola, Uber, Rapido Can Now Apply Up to 2x Surge Pricing During Peak Hours

**New Delhi:** Ride-hailing platforms such as Ola, Uber, and Rapido have been granted permission to charge up to twice the base fare during peak hours, under updated regulations issued by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH).

Previously, these aggregators could only levy dynamic pricing up to 1.5 times the base fare. The revised guidelines — titled Motor Vehicle Aggregator Guidelines, 2025 — aim to create a balanced framework that addresses passenger safety, driver earnings, and business viability.

The new rules also al-

low cab aggregators to charge a minimum of 50% of the base fare during non-peak hours. The base fare itself will be defined by each state government based on vehicle category and class, and it must apply to a minimum travel distance of 3 kilometers.

This provision accounts for dead mileage — the distance a driver travels without a passenger to reach the pickup location.

However, passengers will not be charged separately for dead mileage unless the ride distance is less than 3 km. In all other cases, the fare will apply only from the pickup

point to the final drop-off location.

States have been encouraged to implement these updated norms

cles and are registered with an aggregator must receive at least 80% of the fare collected.

The remaining 20%



within the next three monthsTo promote fair compensation, the guidelines stipulate that drivers who own their vehi-

may be retained by the platform.

Payments to drivers can be made daily, weekly, or bi-weekly, depend-

ing on the agreement.

In instances where the vehicle is owned by the aggregator and operated by a driver, the driver's minimum share of the fare is set at 60%, while the aggregator can keep up to 40%.

The guidelines also introduce new rules around ride cancellations.

If a driver cancels a trip after accepting it without a valid justification, a penalty amounting to 10% of the estimated fare — capped at ₹100 — will be imposed. The same penalty will apply to passengers who cancel rides without valid reasons.

## ITI Ltd bags orders worth Rs 88 cr

**Bengaluru :** ITI Limited, India's first PSU established after Independence and a pioneer in telecom manufacturing, has secured multiple contracts worth approximately Rs 88 crore across Odisha and Chhattisgarh to bolster digital infrastructure and e-governance initiatives.

In Odisha, the Cuttack Development Authority has awarded ITI Limited two significant contracts.

The first, valued at Rs 54 crore, involves the procurement and installation of CCTV surveillance systems and traffic signal setups at various locations in Cuttack. This includes supply of cameras, software with analytics and ANPR systems, and maintenance for five years.

The second contract, worth Rs 23.05 crore, is for implementing a Land Intelligence Management

System through GIS-based applications. This includes mapping of properties using Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) in the Bidanasi Development Project Area and CDA Plan Area.

In Chhattisgarh, ITI Limited has won a contract worth Rs 11.72 crore from the Chhattisgarh Infotech Promotion Society (CHIPS) for implementation and upgradation of WLAN/LAN infrastruc-

ture at the Mantralaya and HoD Bhawan in Nava Raipur.

Commenting on the development, ITI Limited Chairman and Managing Director Rajesh Rai said, "We are very glad to bag these new contracts from the Governments of Odisha and Chhattisgarh. These projects will help strengthen digital infrastructure and support efficient citizen services." He added, "Our team

is excited and motivated to deliver ahead of schedule. We believe our work will significantly aid the state governments in delivering best-in-class e-governance."

ITI Limited is also executing several other projects, including the Aaple Sarkar Seva Kendra (ASSK) initiative in Maharashtra and a campus-wide Wi-Fi and LAN deployment for Sambalpur University in Odisha.

### Alekta Solutions unveils ‘Pinaka’, a next-gen AI-powered SaaS platform in Hyderabad

**Hyderabad:** Alekta Solutions, the US-headquartered technology consulting and product development firm, marked a major milestone in its global expansion strategy with the pre-launch celebration of its flagship SaaS platform, 'Pinaka', at the exclusive 'Pinaka Stellar' event held in Hyderabad. Founded in 2016 by seasoned tech entrepreneur 'Shravan Kumar Bele', Alekta Solutions has rapidly emerged as a forward-thinking technology partner, with a strong presence in the US and growing operations in Asia, the IT company said in a release here today. The company's latest innovation, Pinaka, represents a strategic leap in empowering businesses worldwide through technology-led

transformation. Pinaka is a next-generation, AI-powered SaaS platform that seamlessly integrates Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Point of Sale (POS), fintech solutions, and AI-driven business intelligence. Designed to provide business owners and enterprise leaders with unified control, operational efficiency, and real-time insights, Pinaka is poised to serve a diverse range of sectors including retail, hospitality, and multi-location enterprises. Speaking at the event, Mr. Shravan Kumar Bele, Founder & CEO of Alekta Solutions, said "With Pinaka, we are introducing a product that is not only technologically advanced but also deeply aligned with the practical needs of modern businesses.