



Aryan Age

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PG 02

Telangana Govt aims to make farmers 'Kings'; Rythu Bharosa funds on March 22: CM

PG 03

Delhi Cong chief writes to LG, demands constitution of committee to probe Palam fire

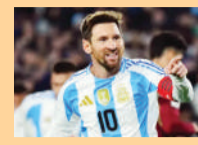
PG 6

Notices Issued to Congress Lawmakers Over Voting Breach



PG 7

Messi headlines Argentina squad for Guatemala friendly



PG 8

Stock markets dive over 3% as boiling crude oil prices, weak global trends weigh on sentiments

Iran-Israel War Hits Major Gas Facilities, Raises Global Energy Crisis Concerns

New Delhi: The ongoing war between Iran and Israel in the Gulf region has started creating serious concerns about a global energy crisis. This conflict, which has been going on for the past 20 days, is no longer limited to missiles and drone attacks. It has now directly affected major energy resources that are important for the entire world. Two of the world's biggest gas-producing regions, which together can meet global energy needs for the next 13 years, have come under attack and suffered damage.

Israel carried out a major strike on South

Pars, one of the largest natural gas fields in the world, located in southern Iran. In response, Iran launched counterattacks on Ras Laffan in Qatar. A large fire broke out in Ras Laffan due to the attack, although it was quickly brought under control. Ras Laffan is part of the North Dome gas field, which is closely connected to South Pars. Both these regions are extremely important for global gas supply. Because both sides are now targeting energy infrastructure, the conflict has become more serious and dangerous.

India is also worried because it depends

heavily on Qatar for gas imports. Around 38 to 40 percent of India's total LNG (liquefied natural gas) needs are fulfilled by imports from Qatar, mainly from the Ras Laffan region. Any disruption in this area can directly affect India's energy supply and increase costs.

Ras Laffan is known as the world's largest LNG hub. It exports gas and other petrochemical products to many countries and plays a key role in Qatar's economy. If operations in Ras Laffan are affected, it can disrupt the global gas supply and impact the

economies of many countries around the world.

The effects of this war are now being felt globally. There is a strong possibility that crude oil prices could rise up to 200 dollars per barrel. The situation has become worse due to concerns around the Strait of Hormuz and attacks on major gas fields like South Pars. Experts have warned that energy prices may rise sharply if the conflict continues. Even after three weeks of fighting, there are no clear signs that the war will end soon, which is increasing concerns across the world.



Foreign Ministers from 12 Islamic countries condemn Iran's attacks on neighbouring States, call for end to such strikes



Riyadh/New Delhi: Foreign Ministers from twelve Arab and Islamic countries strongly condemned Iranian attacks on regional States, saying such attacks cannot be justified under any pretext.

The Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, who held a meeting in Riyadh, called for an immediate end to hostilities and respect for international law, reaffirming the right of States to self-defence in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

In a statement issued after the meeting, the Foreign Ministers denounced the "deliberate" Iranian attacks using ballistic missiles and drones targeting residential areas and civilian infrastructure, including oil facilities, desalination plants, airports, housing sites and diplomatic missions.

They called on Iran to immediately halt its attacks, respect international law and international humanitarian law, and adhere to principles of good neighbourliness as a first step toward de-escalation and restoring regional stability, according to the Saudi Gazette, the second English-language daily newspaper in Saudi Arabia.

The Foreign Ministers emphasised that the future of relations with Iran depends on respect for the sovereignty of States, non-interference in their internal affairs, and refraining from using military capabilities to threaten neighbouring countries, according to the

Saudi Gazette.

They also urged Iran to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 2817 (2026), cease all attacks immediately, and avoid any provocative actions, including threats to close or disrupt international navigation in the Strait of Hormuz or undermine maritime security in Bab al-Mandeb.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, who held a press conference after the Ministerial meeting, said trust in Iran has been "completely shattered" and Tehran cannot be considered a partner in its current behaviour. He said Iran's actions demonstrate that it does not believe in genuine dialogue with neighbouring countries, but instead relies on pressure and political and security coercion.

He described Iranian attacks on neighbouring countries and maritime navigation as a dangerous escalation and a clear violation of international law, reflecting a persistent strategy aimed at undermining regional security and stability.

Prince Faisal said Iran had "pre-planned" these attacks, indicating they were not isolated incidents but part of a systematic policy of escalation and said Iran continues to adopt a hostile approach toward its regional neighbours.

According to the Saudi Gazette, the Minister dismissed Iranian justifications as unconvincing, describing them as attempts to cover up a broader policy of coercion. He said continued miscalculations would carry political and broader consequences for Tehran.

Prince Faisal warned that Saudi Arabia reserves the right to take necessary measures when needed, emphasising that appropriate decisions will be made at the right time. "Iran is mistaken if it believes Gulf states are incapable of responding," he said. Accusing Iran of pushing the region toward further escalation and rising tensions, he said Iran "will not stop" unless confronted with a firm position.

Prince Faisal also dismissed Iran's arguments linking attacks to US presence in the region, saying such claims are not credible given that targets included countries and facilities unrelated to that justification.

Ever since the war began on February 28, Iran has launched retaliatory missile and drone strikes against all six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States.

In multiple strikes on Abu Dhabi and Dubai, eight civilians were killed, and more than 150 were injured. Those killed included nationals from Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Palestine.

In Kuwait, six people were killed, and several were injured. The strikes targeted a site near the US air base.

In Oman, three people were killed, and about 15 were injured in drone strikes at two ports.

In Bahrain, targets included the US Navy's 5th Fleet headquarters.

In Saudi Arabia, projectiles fell in residential areas in Al Kharij and the Ras Tanura refinery.

In Qatar, multiple strikes were carried out on Al Udeid Air Base and Ras Laffan (Thursday morning)

Iran strikes gulf energy sites, oil surges past \$119 as markets roil

New Delhi: As Tehran hit oil infrastructure in Gulf nations on Thursday in retaliation to earlier Israeli strikes on Iran's South Pars gas field, energy markets went into an overdrive with the benchmark Brent crude prices jumped to over USD 119 a barrel before settling down to around USD 114 a barrel.

The Indian basket or the average price at which India imports crude also shot up to USD 114.08 a barrel as against USD 69 a barrel last month, as desperate Indian buyers contracted purchase of crude from Russia's shadow fleet which lies in the Baltic and in the Indian Ocean which after selling at a discount for most months last year is now trading at a premium.

"Our fears of oil prices shooting up to USD 130 are now almost a reality. Gas

prices have also shot up considerably from about USD 11-12 earlier to USD 19 per metric million Btu," said Sandeep Johri, a commodities trader.

With oil on the boil, India's Rupee traded at a new low of Rs 93.25 at close of Thursday's trading against the dollar as Indian importers faced with higher prices bought more dollars and as nervous foreign investors old off stock bringing the Sensex down by 2,496.89 points.

Oil prices started shooting skywards after news spread early Thursday that Iran targeted energy infrastructure across the Gulf, including Qatar's Ras Laffan LNG facility and the Habshan gas facility and Bab field in the United Arab Emirates.

These attacks were apparently in retaliation to

Wednesday night's Israeli strikes on Iran's South Pars gasfield.



Qatar's state-owned energy company, QatarEnergy, confirmed that several of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) facilities were hit by missile attacks in the early hours of Thursday. No casualties were immediately reported, though emergency services were deployed to extinguish fires.

Possibly fearing the fall-

out on global markets, US President Donald Trump said on his social media



platform that the US had no prior information on Israel's strikes against Iranian oil infrastructure and promised that there would be "no more attacks will be made by Israel" on the South Pars field unless Iran again strikes Qatar's LNG facilities.

"In that instance," Trump warned, "the United States, with or without

Israel's consent, will massively blow up the entirety of the South Pars gas field with a level of force Iran has never seen before.

Markets are betting that given the present belligerent mood and lack of any visible signs of a peace reconciliation bid, the war will drag on. "In which case oil is likely to hit USD 150 to the barrel," said Johri. For every USD 10 rise in global crude oil prices, India's annual import expenditure increases by about USD13-14 billion.

"This war is extracting more than its pound of flesh from non-combatant nations. We will have to brace for a current account deficit an inflationary pressure on our economy even after the peace pipe is smoked," said Biswahit Dhar, former WTO chair at the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade.

Trump warns of "Massive" strike on South Pars after Iran's retaliatory strikes on Qatar energy hub

Washington/ Tehran: US President Donald Trump on Thursday threatened to "massively blow up" the entire South Pars gas field with a "level of force" Tehran has never seen before after Iran carried out retaliatory attacks on Qatar's liquefied natural gas (LNG) facilities.

The escalation came a day after Israel struck the South Pars field, hours after Israeli forces killed Iran's intelligence minister in strikes and coincided with some of the most intense airstrikes in Beirut in decades.

Masoud Pezeshkian confirmed that Israel killed Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib in an overnight attack, marking the third assassination of a high-ranking Iranian official in two days.

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Thursday. No casualties were immediately reported, though emergency services were deployed to extinguish fires.

In a statement, the company said the strikes caused "sizeable fires and extensive damage." A day earlier, QatarEnergy had also reported a

missile strike and fire at the Ras Laffan industrial hub in the country's north, home to its largest LNG production complex.

Iran had warned it would target energy infrastructure in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates in retaliation for Israeli and US strikes on its South Pars gas field.

Trump also said on his social media platform, Truth Social, that the United States "knew nothing" about Israel's Wednesday strike on the South Pars field, which Iran shares with Qatar, and claimed Qatar was also unaware.

He added that Israel had "violently lashed out" at the South Pars gas field, noting that only a relatively small section of the facility had been hit.

Trump emphasised that Qatar "was in no way, shape, or form involved" and had no prior knowledge of the attack. He argued that Iran, lacking full information, "unjustifiably and unfairly" targeted part of Qatar's LNG infrastructure in

response.

Trump further declared that "no more attacks will be made by Israel" on the South Pars field unless Iran again strikes Qatar's LNG facilities. "In that instance," he warned, "the United States, with or without Israel's consent, will massively blow up the entirety of the South Pars gas field with a level of force Iran has never seen before."

The president added that he does not prefer to authorise such a level of violence due to its long-term consequences for Iran, but stressed he would not hesitate if Qatar's LNG facilities were attacked again.

The UAE said operations at Habshan and Bab were shut down following interceptions over the sites, while Qatari officials confirmed that fires at the Ras Laffan hub had been contained.

The South Pars/North Dome field is the world's largest natural gas reserve, holding an estimated 1,800 trillion cubic feet (51 trillion cubic meters) of in-situ gas.

India must become global drone manufacturing hub soon: Rajnath Singh

New Delhi: India must work in mission mode to emerge as a global hub of indigenous drone manufacturing within the next few years, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Thursday, underlining that a robust domestic drone ecosystem is critical to ensuring strategic autonomy, enhancing defence preparedness and achieving self-reliance amid prevailing geopolitical uncertainties.

Addressing a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including MSMEs, start-ups, innovators, policymakers, academia, and industry leaders, at the inaugural session of the National Defence Industries Conclave 2026 held at Manekshaw Centre, Singh emphasised that indigenous capabilities in advanced manufacturing technologies will play a decisive role in

strengthening India's defence industrial base.

The minister asserted that the ongoing conflicts, ranging from the Russia-Ukraine war to the tensions between Iran and Israel, are proof that drones and counter-drone technologies are destined to play a pivotal role in future warfare, and self-reliance in drone manufacturing is essential not merely at the product level, but at the component level as well.

"From the drone's moulds to its software, engines, and batteries, everything must be manufactured in India. This is no easy task. In most countries where drones are manufactured, a significant number of critical components are currently imported from China," he said.

Singh added that while the creation of any nation's defence industrial ecosystem relies on the

contributions of large industries, MSMEs, start-ups, and innovators, it is equally driven by a clear policy push from the government, tailored to meet the country's specific defence requirements.



As part of the inaugural session, Singh launched the 14th edition of Defence India Start-up Challenge (DISC-14) and the 4th edition of ADITI challenges under the iDEX framework. A total of 107 problem statements, including

82 under DISC-14 and 25 under ADITI Challenges 4.0, from the Defence Forces, Indian Coast Guard and Defence Space Agency were launched to promote breakthrough innovations in

various domains. A new initiative featuring 101 innovation challenges from DPSUs was also launched. Singh described iDEX and ADITI (Acing Development of Innovative Technologies with

iDEX as game-changer initiatives, through which start-ups, innovators, and MSMEs are provided with the opportunity to develop novel solutions to meet the specific

requirements of the Defence Forces. "As of February 2026, approximately 676 start-ups, MSMEs, and individual innovators have joined the defence innovation ecosystem since the inception of iDEX in 2018. 548

contracts have been signed, and 566 challenges launched. Of these, 58 prototypes have received clearance for procurement, valued at around Rs 3,853 crore. Furthermore, 45 procurement contracts have already been signed, worth nearly Rs 2,326 crore. These figures demonstrate that innovation is gradually materialising into tangible products & technologies, and the role played by our start-ups and MSMEs in this transformation is steadily gaining strength," he said.

The defence minister emphasised that MSMEs are today actively engaged in fields such as Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, Automation, and Advanced Manufacturing, representing a monumental and positive transformation. He termed it as imperative for the

MSMEs and start-ups to embrace and integrate these technologies to ensure the optimal utilisation of their resources and capabilities.

During the event five publications of Department of Defence Production, were also released. These included Samarthya, Indian Defence Industry-Going Global, Sanklan, Enabling Provisions to integrate MSMEs in Defence PSU ecosystem, and AI Maturity Assessment Model.

Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi, Chief of the Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi, Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh, Secretary, Department of Defence R&D and Chairman, DRDO Dr Samir V Kamat and other senior officials were present on the occasion.



Telangana Govt aims to make farmers 'Kings'; Rythu Bharosa funds on March 22: CM

Hyderabad: A. Revanth Reddy on Thursday reaffirmed that the state government is committed to transforming agriculture into a profitable profession and elevating farmers to the status of the "kings" of all occupations.

Addressing the gathering during the Ugadi celebrations held at Ravindra Bharathi, he said that the new Telugu year would be dedicated entirely to the welfare and prosperity of farmers across the state.

The Chief Minister emphasised that agriculture remains the backbone of Telangana's economy and that sustained efforts are being made to strengthen the sector through financial, institutional, and policy support.

He announced that financial assistance under the 'Rythu Bharosa' scheme will be released and credited directly into farmers' bank accounts on March 22, ensuring timely support ahead of the agricultural season.

Reddy noted that the government has already spent around ₹18,000 crore



under the scheme, reflecting its strong commitment to supporting farmers and enhancing their financial stability.

In addition to the scheme, the government is also providing bonuses over and above the remunerative prices for agricultural produce. This move, he said, is aimed at ensuring better income for farmers and protecting them from market fluctuations.

Highlighting another major relief measure, the

Chief Minister said that farm loans up to ₹2 lakh have been waived, significantly reducing the financial burden on farmers and enabling them to focus on productivity.

He further claimed that Telangana currently has one of the lowest farmer debt burdens in the country, attributing this to consistent government intervention and farmer-centric policies.

Pointing out the demographic importance of agriculture, Reddy said that nearly 70 per cent of families

in the state are dependent on farming and allied activities for their livelihood.

The Chief Minister also spoke about the 'Bhu Bharati' initiative, which has been introduced to resolve long-pending land ownership issues faced by farmers across the state.

He stated that the initiative replaces the earlier Dharaani portal, which had created several operational and accessibility challenges for farmers. According to him, the new system aims to bring

greater transparency, simplify processes, and ensure that land-related disputes are resolved efficiently.

Reiterating his broader vision, Reddy said that the government is determined to position Telangana as a leading state in agriculture as well as overall development.

He also assured that the administration remains alert and proactive in addressing natural calamities, with mechanisms in place to protect farmers from unforeseen losses.

On the auspicious occasion of Ugadi, the Chief Minister prayed for peace, prosperity, and protection from natural disasters for all citizens of the state.

The event was attended by several prominent leaders, including Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka, Ministers Jupally Krishna Rao, Konda Surekha, and Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy.

Also present were Mahesh Kumar Goud and senior government officials, who participated in the celebrations and reaffirmed their commitment to the state's development agenda.

TMC worker found brutally murdered in North 24-Parganas; probe underway

Kolkata: Amid the ongoing election atmosphere in West Bengal, the body of a worker affiliated with the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) was recovered from North 24 Parganas on Thursday morning, triggering tension in the area.

The deceased has been identified as Mashiur Kazi (38), a resident of Gangnia village under Chapatala panchayat in the Deganga area.

His blood-soaked body was found lying by the roadside at Jhujurgachha village, which falls under the jurisdiction of Haroa police station.

According to local sources, villagers first noticed the body early in the morning.

It was reportedly wrapped in a blanket, raising suspicion, after which the police were immediately alerted.

Eyewitnesses claimed that the body bore multiple injury marks, indicating a violent assault.

The condition in which the body was found suggested extreme brutality.

They further alleged

that both of Kazi's hands had been severed at the wrists, while one of his legs appeared to be broken, pointing to the severity of the attack.



A team from Haroa police station rushed to the spot soon after receiving the information, recovered the body, and initiated preliminary investigation procedures.

The body was later sent to Haroa Rural Hospital for postmortem examination, which is expected to confirm the exact cause and nature of the injuries.

Police officials suspect that Kazi may have been hacked to death using sharp weapons, although they have stated that the final conclusions will depend on the autopsy report.

Family members of the deceased revealed that Kazi had received a phone call on Wednesday, following which he left home. He did

not return thereafter.

Repeated attempts by the family to contact him over the phone were unsuccessful, leading to growing concern before they were informed by police about the recovery of his body.

Motaleb Kazi, the victim's elder brother, alleged that the attackers had mutilated the body in an attempt to prevent identification.

He claimed that, apart from severing both hands, the assailants inflicted multiple injuries.

And even poured acid on the victim's face, further intensifying the brutality of the crime.

The family has alleged that the murder could be politically motivated, given the victim's association with the TMC, and has demanded swift action.

They have called for the immediate arrest of those responsible and sought exemplary punishment to ensure justice.

Police have initiated a detailed investigation to ascertain the motive behind the killing and to identify and apprehend those involved in the brutal murder.

KTR attends Ugadi Panchanga Sraavanam; Scholars flag governance concerns

Hyderabad: Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) Working President and MLA K T Rama Rao (KTR), along with party MLAs, MLCs, MPs and senior leaders, attended the Sri Parabhava Nama Ugadi Panchanga Sraavanam held at Telangana Bhavan on Thursday, marking the Telugu New Year with traditional rituals and scholarly predictions for the year ahead.

The Panchangam was presented by noted scholars Mrutyunjaya Sharma and Phanindra Sharma, who outlined a mixed outlook for the coming year, highlighting both opportunities and challenges across governance, economy and agriculture.

According to their predictions, administrative shortcomings and policy lapses could trigger public dissatisfaction and strengthen opposition forces, while concerns were also raised over changes in education policy and their potential impact on students and youth employment.

They observed that failure to address public issues may create conditions for the opposition to emerge as a strong alternative.



Concerns were also expressed over changes in the education policy, which may adversely impact students, while warning that youth could be led astray.

They further noted that unemployment may rise if corrective measures are not taken.

On the agriculture front, the scholars predicted good rainfall during the year, leading to abundant crop yields, including paddy, cotton and maize.

They also indicated that reservoirs and water bodies are likely to fill up, and farmer distress may be reduced.

However, they cautioned that prices of gold, silver and food grains may rise, while vegetable prices could see some moderation.

The scholars also flagged

the possibility of increased fire accidents, road mishaps and thefts. They said India is likely to gain greater global recognition and perform well in trade, with improvements in living standards and human values.

Opportunities for women in higher positions are expected to increase, they said.

They further noted the possibility of natural calamities such as cyclones and earthquakes in some regions, though authorities may handle them effectively.

Tensions with neighbouring countries could arise, and incidents involving transport accidents may occur, the scholars said.

The scholars added that eclipses during the year are unlikely to have a significant impact on India.

BJP MLA Dr Rajeshwar Singh launches sharp attack on Akhilesh Yadav over his remarks concerning 'Maa Ganga'

Lucknow: BJP MLA Dr Rajeshwar Singh has expressed a strong reaction to the recent statement made by the SP Chief Akhilesh Yadav regarding "Maa Ganga" (Mother Ganga). He stated, "Maa Ganga is the soul of India and in the Sanatan tradition, her status is not merely that of a liberator and a life-sustaining force."

"To make such sacred subjects a part of political rhetoric is completely unacceptable. This constitutes a direct assault on the faith of millions of Hindus and on Sanatan values—an act that is both deeply unfortunate and insensitive," he told reporters here on Thursday. He further added, "This is the

very same mindset that has previously hurt the sentiments of devotees of Lord Ram, opposed the construction of the Ram Temple, and is now attempting to instrumentalise the sanctity of Maa Ganga for political ends. It reflects a persistent mentality aimed at undermining Sanatan traditions."

MLA from Lucknow Dr Rajeshwar Singh clarified that Maa Ganga is not a subject for politics of any kind; rather, she serves as the very foundation of the reverence and faith held by millions of people. He remarked, "This is not merely a statement; it is an insult to the sentiments of millions. Such insensitivity fosters division within society—something that



cannot be tolerated under any circumstances."

Appealing to the citizens of the nation, he urged, "The time has come for every Hin-

du to become vocal in upholding the dignity of their faith. The people of this country will never accept a mindset or a brand of politics that disparages our traditions and beliefs." He affirmed, "Upholding the honor of Maa Ganga and preserving her sanctity is a collective responsibility that rests upon us all."

"The controversy started after some youths were arrested by Varanasi police after they threw left over food in Ganga river after observing Iftar recently. SP president Akhilesh Yadav had commented during an Iftar party in Lucknow questioning whether holding Iftar party on Ganga is not allowed and alleged that such action by the administration was done to create division in the society. Yadav also charged that action was taken as police did not get bribe.

Bihar to develop green corridor along Patna-Gaya-Dobhi NH

Patna: In a major push towards environmental conservation, the Bihar government has decided to develop a green corridor along the Patna-Gaya-Dobhi National Highway.

Speaking about the ambitious project, official sources said on Thursday that the project aims to transform the highway stretch into an eco-friendly zone with large-scale plantation along both sides.

The plan was reviewed by environment, forest and climate change Minister Pramod Kumar during a meeting with senior officials.

The sources said that under the project, around 21,500 saplings will be planted over a 65-km stretch in the Gaya forest division

between the financial years 2026-27 and 2028-29. The plantation will mainly include fruit-bearing trees such as mango, guava, litchi, jackfruit, jamun, amla and lemon, along with other species like neem, banyan and peepal.

A key feature of the initiative is community participation, said the source adding that the government plans to involve local representatives, including village heads, panchayat members, district councillors, MLAs and district officials, in implementation.

Farmers will also be encouraged to plant trees on their private land under a "community farming" approach, which is expected to enhance their income alongside increasing green

cover. Meanwhile, officials concerned have been directed to prepare a detailed guideline for effective execution, stressing proper planting techniques, farmer training and maintenance of saplings.

Financial incentives will also be provided to farmers to encourage participation.

To ensure uniformity, a single variety of fruit tree will be planted within every five-kilometre stretch. Plantation will also be carried out on vacant land near petrol pumps along the highway.

According to the source, the initiative is expected to not only beautify the roadside environment but also boost local markets through fruit production.

Rs 594 cr sanctioned for Khammam road expansion; 5 corridors to be upgraded

Hyderabad: The Government of Telangana has sanctioned ₹594 crore for the expansion and upgradation of five key road corridors in Khammam district, marking a significant push towards improving infrastructure in the region.

The projects will be executed under the Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM), a model that combines public and private sector participation to ensure timely completion and efficient maintenance of infrastructure projects.

The sanction comes following sustained efforts by Deputy Chief Minister Malu Bhatti Vikramarka, who has been actively advocating for improved connectivity and development in Khammam district.

The initiative is aimed at strengthening transport

infrastructure while also enhancing connectivity between rural and urban areas, which is expected to benefit both residents and businesses in the region.

According to official sources, the identified road stretches will be expanded into four-lane corridors, covering a total length of approximately 100 kilometres across Khammam, Wyra, and Madhira constituencies.

One of the major components of the project is the Wyra-Jaggayyapeta road, which spans 25.2 km and has been allocated ₹151.20 crore for its expansion and improvement. Another key stretch is the Madhira-Thootikuntla road, measuring 13.50 km, for which ₹81 crore has been sanctioned to upgrade it into a wider and more efficient corridor.

Calcutta HC CJ reviews situation ahead of the first set of updated voters' list

Kolkata: The office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) is expected to publish the first set of names from the additional voter list following the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process, with indications that the updated electoral roll could be released as early as Friday.

This anticipated development comes at a time when administrative preparedness has been heightened, amid concerns over potential law and order issues that may arise once the revised voter names are made public.

In view of the situation, Sujoy Paul, Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court, convened a high-level meeting to assess the prevailing security scenario in the state.

The meeting was attended by senior officials, including Sanghamitra Ghosh, Director General of Police Siddhanath Gupta, and Kolkata Police Commissioner Ajay Nanda. Held at 10 am on Thursday, the meeting lasted for about half an hour. The schedule had already been finalised a day earlier, and the proceedings were conducted as planned without any delay. The timing of this review is being seen as particularly significant, as it comes just ahead of the likely publication of the additional voter list after the completion of key stages of the SIR exercise.



Earlier, the Election Commission of India had released a revised voter list on February 28. However, it was acknowledged at the time that the list was not comprehensive. Official data revealed that 6,44,52,609 voters were categorised as 'eligible' in that list, while as many as 60,06,675 names were placed under the 'under consideration' category pending further scrutiny.

Sources indicate that the process of adjudicating these pending cases has accelerated in recent days, with administrative machinery working at a faster pace to clear the backlog. As of Wednesday, decisions had reportedly been taken on approximately 23.3 lakh such cases, reflecting steady progress in finalising the voter rolls. More than 700 judicial officers appointed by the High Court are currently engaged in examining and verifying these entries to ensure accuracy and fairness in the process.

Officials from the CEO office have expressed confidence that, if the current pace of work continues, the disposal of all pending names could be completed ahead of the upcoming elections.

However, concerns persist in certain quarters that a significant number of names may be excluded when the first list of adjudicated voters is published. Such apprehensions have raised fears of possible law and order disturbances in some parts of the state following the release of the updated electoral rolls. Against this backdrop, the proactive review conducted by the High Court highlights the administration's alertness and readiness to deal with any emerging challenges. Authorities are maintaining close surveillance on the situation and are expected to deploy necessary measures to ensure that any fallout from the publication of the revised voter list is effectively managed and public order is maintained.

Members of the BJD and Congress created a ruckus from the very start of the Question Hour, demanding the resignation of Health Minister Mukesh Mahaling and raising concerns about hospital safety across the state.

Holding placards and shouting slogans, they stormed into the well of the House and continued their protest near the Speaker's podium.

Speaker Surama Pad-

Odisha Assembly paralysed amid uproar over SCB Hospital fire tragedy

Bhubaneswar: The Odisha Assembly remained paralysed for the third consecutive day as persistent protests by the Opposition disrupted proceedings over the tragic fire at SCB Medical College and Hospital, which has claimed 13 lives so far.

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hy attempted to maintain order and urged the protesting members to return to their seats and allow the House to function.

Despite her appeals, the Opposition intensified its agitation, forcing repeated adjournments. The House was first adjourned until 11:30 AM, then till 1 PM, and later until 4 PM, without transacting any business during the pre-lunch session.

In an effort to break the deadlock, the Speaker convened an all-party meeting in her chamber. However, the meeting failed to yield any consensus, prolonging the stalemate.

The Opposition stood firm on its demand for accountability.

Briefs :

Prisoner serving life sentence dies in Gurugram jail

New Delhi : A 35-year-old prisoner serving life imprisonment under the POCSO Act at Bhandsi Jail here died on Wednesday night. His health suddenly deteriorated and he was rushed to the civil hospital here. According to jail authorities, Bharat Patel was a native of Panna in Madhya Pradesh and a daily-wage labourer in Gurugram. An FIR was registered against Bharat on August 10, 2022 at Bhandsi police station and he was arrested for raping a teenage girl. He was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2025. According to the police, he was first taken to the jail dispensary but later referred to the Civil Hospital. Bhandsi police station SHO Suren Singh said, "We have sent the body for post-mortem. According to the doctors, a heart attack or a drug overdose is suspected to be the cause of his death."

Panic grips outer Delhi's Sultantpuri area after firing over social media feud

New Delhi : Panic gripped outer Delhi's Sultantpuri area after a group of individuals allegedly opened fire in the air following a heated altercation linked to a social media dispute, police said on Thursday. According to police, a PCR call was received at around 10:44 pm on Wednesday at Sultantpuri police station regarding a firing incident. A police team rushed to the spot and found Irfan (29), a resident of Sultantpuri, present at the scene. Irfan, who runs a momos stall in the A-4 Block area, told the police that a few individuals suddenly arrived at his food stall, began throwing food items, and created a ruckus. During the incident, one of the accused allegedly fired a shot in the air before all of them fled the spot. The police recovered one empty cartridge from the scene. No injuries were reported in the incident. Preliminary inquiry suggests that the firing was triggered by an ongoing personal rivalry between two groups, which had recently escalated on the social media platform Instagram. The accused and the complainant are known to each other and have reportedly shared a long-standing enmity. An FIR has been registered under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita at Sultantpuri police station. The police said the identities of the accused have been established, and multiple teams have been deployed to nab them.

Fight over garbage ends with teenager stabbing neighbour to death in Delhi's Model Town

New Delhi: A 24-year-old man was allegedly stabbed to death by his neighbour over garbage in north Delhi's Model Town area, police said on Thursday. The incident took place late Wednesday night during a fight over garbage being dumped in a staircase. The police got a call at 11:08 pm, and a team was rushed to the spot. Upon arrival, the police found the victim, Sumit, a resident of the same building, with multiple stab injuries. He was taken to Hindu Rao Hospital, where doctors declared him dead. Preliminary investigations revealed that Sumit had a fight with his 18-year-old neighbour Suraj over garbage being thrown in the staircase of the building. "During the altercation, the accused allegedly went to his room, brought a knife and stabbed Sumit multiple times in the back," a police officer said. The victim's brother, Amit Kumar, who witnessed the incident and was injured while trying to intervene, was the one who called the police.

Delhi Cong chief writes to LG, demands constitution of committee to probe Palam fire

New Delhi: Devender Yadav, chief of the Delhi Congress, on Thursday raised serious concerns over the recent fire tragedy in Palam, stating that the loss of lives could have been prevented with timely and efficient rescue operations.

In response to the incident, Yadav wrote a letter to Delhi's Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu, urging the constitution of a high-level committee to investigate the devastating fire that occurred on Wednesday.

He emphasized that the proposed committee should not only probe the causes of the incident but also prepare a comprehensive report outlining preventive measures to curb the rising number of fire accidents across the city, especially in vulnerable areas like slums.

Yadav stressed that immediate and long-term interventions are necessary to address systemic gaps in fire safety and disaster response mechanisms in the national capital.

Highlighting alarming statistics, he claimed that between 2016 and 2025, nearly 4,652 people lost their lives in fire-related incidents in Delhi. He further pointed out that in just the first two-and-a-half months of 2026, at least 24 people have already died in similar incidents.



According to Yadav, many of these deaths could have been avoided with better preparedness, faster response times, and improved coordination among emergency services.

He went on to allege that Delhi is increasingly turning into an "accidents capital," citing not just fire incidents but also fatalities caused by people falling into open drains, building collapses, and other preventable mishaps.

The Congress leader argued that the rising number of such incidents

reflects administrative negligence and a failure in governance, accusing authorities of not prioritizing public safety.

Yadav also criticized the current leadership, stating that the Chief Minister and her Cabinet colleagues are focused more on future announcements and plans rather than addressing pressing issues on the ground.

He claimed that if fire engines had reached the Palam site in time and if the equipment had functioned properly, several lives—including

those of children—could have been saved.

The incident, he said, has exposed significant shortcomings in the fire department, including a shortage of manpower and inadequate equipment to handle emergencies effectively.

Yadav further alleged that the number of fire tenders available is far below the required capacity, severely hampering rescue operations during critical situations.

Expressing concern, he stated that the fire services department has been reduced to a "namesake" entity due to lack of resources and proper planning.

He also claimed that there has been no recruitment of new Fire Station Officers since 2012, which has further weakened the department's operational strength.

Calling for urgent reforms, Yadav urged authorities to strengthen fire safety infrastructure, ensure adequate staffing, and improve emergency response systems to prevent such tragedies in the future.

The Palam fire incident has once again brought the issue of urban safety into sharp focus, with increasing calls for accountability and concrete action to protect lives in the city.

Jamia joins youth exchange programme

New Delhi: Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) has, for the first time, participated in the Ministry of (DoNER)'s Ashtalakshmi Youth Exchange Programme, sending a 20-member student

delegation on a tour to North-east India from March 15 to 28. The fully-funded programme covers air travel, accommodation and other logistics, with the JMI delegation currently hosted at the IIT-Guwahati. Students are taking part in academic interactions, institutional visits and cultural activities as part of the exchange.

MCD nears completion of legacy waste clearance along railway track

New Delhi: The City SP Zone of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) is in the final phase of its extensive drive to remove legacy waste accumulated along railway tracks, marking a significant push toward urban cleanliness and environmental safety.

The campaign, covering nearly 6.5 kilometres, has made substantial progress despite unexpected challenges.

Officials noted that while initial assessments suggested surface-level waste, excavation revealed deposits extending up to 1-1.5 metres deep at several locations, complicating the operation.

As of March 18, a total

stretch of 2,185 metres has been cleared, with approximately 1,388.6 metric tonnes of waste removed.

Authorities estimate that only 350 to 450 metric tonnes remain, with a target to complete the entire operation within the next week, possibly ahead of schedule given the current pace.

To maintain efficiency, the MCD has mobilised substantial manpower and equipment for the operation. Nearly 20 to 30 sanitation workers are engaged daily, supported by three JCB machines, five refuse compactors, five Hyva trucks, ten auto tippers, and three e-rickshaws.

The entire exercise is being carried out under the close supervision of engi-

neering officials.

The drive is being carried out in coordination with railway authorities, allowing simultaneous operations at four different locations.

Officials credited this collaboration, along with effective resource deployment, for accelerating progress. Despite logistical and on-ground challenges, civic authorities said the dedication of field staff has ensured steady advancement.

The MCD reiterated its commitment to maintaining cleanliness and improving environmental conditions, with the ongoing campaign expected to make areas along the railway tracks cleaner and safer for residents.

Delhi HC orders Tamil media outlet to take down 'defamatory' content against Sadhguru's Isha Foundation

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court on Thursday directed Nakkheeran Publications to delete and take down allegedly defamatory content published against Isha Foundation.

The order comes in connection with a defamation suit filed by Isha Foundation, founded by Jaggi Vasudev, against the publication in 2024. The foundation alleged that certain videos aired on Nakkheeran's YouTube channel, Nakkheeran TV, contained content that damaged its reputation.

In its plea before the court, Isha Foundation sought damages amounting to ₹3 crore and requested the removal of the conten-

tious videos, arguing that they were misleading and defamatory in nature.

The legal battle has also extended to the Supreme Court of India, where Nakkheeran Publications filed a transfer petition seeking to move the defamation case from Delhi to Chennai.

The publication argued that Chennai would be a more appropriate jurisdiction for the matter, given its operational base and regional context.

In response, Isha Foundation filed an application within the transfer proceedings, urging the court to restrain Nakkheeran from publishing or broadcasting any further defamatory material against it.

Interstate illicit liquor supplier arrested with 2,500 quarters in Delhi's Dwarka

New Delhi : Delhi Police on Thursday arrested an interstate supplier and seized a large consignment of illicit liquor being transported into the national capital, an official said.

The accused was identified as 22-year-old Mohd. Naushad, a resident of Inder Puri.

According to the police, the operation was carried out by the Anti-Auto Theft

Squad (AATS) of Dwarka district as part of the ongoing campaign "Nasha Par Lagam, Desh Ko Salaam," aimed at curbing drug abuse and illegal liquor circulation.

Kushal Pal Singh, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka), said that, acting on a specific tip-off backed by technical surveillance, the police team intercepted a Bolero pickup vehicle near Shyam Vihar Road on the night of March 9.

Mayor lays foundation stone of 'Arogya Mandir' in Shakarpur

New Delhi : In a move aimed at enhancing local healthcare services, Mayor Sardar Raja Iqbal Singh on Thursday laid the foundation stone of an 'Arogya Mandir' at Sanjay Park, Shakarpur. The event was attended by Member of Parliament Harsh Malhotra, MLA Abhay Verma, Shahdara South Zone Chairman Councillor Ram Kishore Sharma, senior municipal officials, and numerous local residents. Addressing the gathering, Mayor Singh highlighted the importance of accessible healthcare, stating that initiatives like Arogya Mandir are designed to bring quality medical services closer to residents. "Our goal is to ensure that every citizen has access to primary healthcare within their locality, reducing the need for long-distance travel for minor treatments," he said. The mayor also instructed municipal officials to

ensure the construction is completed in a time-bound, transparent, and quality-driven manner, emphasizing the corporation's commitment to public welfare projects. Other public representatives present at the event welcomed the initiative, noting that the Arogya Mandir would serve as a milestone in the area's development. They lauded the corporation's efforts to improve civic amenities and enhance the standard of living for local residents. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi continues to prioritize urban healthcare and public welfare, with projects like the Arogya Mandir playing a central role in strengthening local healthcare infrastructure. "Residents of Shakarpur can look forward to improved healthcare facilities in the near future, marking a significant step toward a healthier community," the mayor said.

PNG push gains pace: 1.25 lakh new connections, 5,600 shift from LPG

New Delhi : Amid intensified efforts to expand the fuel access, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Sujata Sharma, on Thursday said around 1.25 lakh new domestic, commercial and industrial PNG connections have been provided over the past two weeks, while more than 5,600 LPG consumers have shifted to PNG in the last three days.

During the inter-ministerial briefings held in the national capital today, the government asserted that India's fuel supply chain remains stable and fully operational despite ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia, even as it urged citizens to refrain from panic buying and rely only on official information.

"Crude situation and refinery operation is normal. No dry out has been reported on retail pumps and all the retail outlets are operating normally," she said, adding that "domestic PNG and CNG for transport, 100 per cent supply is ensured without any cut."

Sharma noted that the government has stepped up efforts to ease pressure on LPG supplies by encouraging a shift towards piped natural gas (PNG).

"We have been appealing to our LPG commercial operators to shift from LPG to CNG. Many companies have also announced in-

centives in this regard," she said.

To accelerate PNG expansion, the Centre has asked states to fast-track approvals. "All the new requests are also to be approved within 24 hours," she said, adding that states have also been directed to allocate 10 per cent additional commercial LPG to support PNG network expansion.

Highlighting the impact of these measures, Sharma said, "In the last two weeks, around 1.25 lakh new domestic, commercial and industrial connections have been provided. In addition, in the last three days, more than 5,600 LPG consumers have shifted to PNG."

While acknowledging concerns around LPG availability amid global disruptions, she maintained that supply remains under control. "LPG situation is still worrisome due to the ongoing war... but there is no dry out on any distributorship." She further pointed to stabilising consumption trends, noting that panic buying has eased. "There is a drop in panic booking. Yesterday, around 5.7 lakh refills were made," she said, adding that online bookings have risen to 94 per cent with 83 per cent deliveries authenticated digitally. On the supply front, Sharma said commercial LPG alloca-

tions have been ensured nationwide. "Around 17 state governments have issued allocation orders... supplies have been given to all states and union Territories," she said, adding that 15 states and UTs have also issued additional kerosene allocation orders as an alternative fuel measure.

Addressing concerns over hoarding and black marketing, Sharma stressed strict enforcement measures. "It is very important to stop the black marketing and hoarding," she said, noting that the Centre had written to states on March 13 directing activation of enforcement teams.

According to data shared, around 6,000 raids were conducted across states on Wednesday alone. In Uttar Pradesh, about 1,100 raids led to seizures and FIRs, while Madhya Pradesh reported 1,632 raids, and Telangana nearly 1,000 raids.

"All the district collectors, food and civil supplies officials have a prime role in controlling black marketing and hoarding," Sharma emphasised, urging states to maintain regular public communication. "States and union Territories are also requested to give daily press briefing... and establish helpline numbers... so that panic or rumours can be controlled."

Editorial

Changing Equations in the Rajya Sabha

The importance of the Rajya Sabha has always been decisive in the politics of the Indian Parliament. The recently concluded Rajya Sabha elections have given a new direction to the power equations within the country. These results have made it clear that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has now reached a decisive stage where it is poised to secure a majority not merely on the strength of its alliances, but on its own independent strength. This shifting political landscape is likely to have significant repercussions on the processes of policymaking and the passage of bills at the Centre.

In the parliamentary structure of Indian democracy, the position of the Upper House—the Rajya Sabha—is of paramount importance. The recent elections held for 37 Rajya Sabha seats have provided clear indications regarding the country's political trajectory and future power equations. The most significant takeaway from these elections is the BJP's rapid march toward securing a majority in the Rajya Sabha on its own strength. When the transfer of power took place at the Centre in 2014, the BJP lacked sufficient numerical strength in the Rajya Sabha; consequently, the government often had to engage in political maneuvering to get various crucial bills passed. However, thanks to consistent performance over the past few years and shifting power dynamics across various states, the BJP now stands on the very threshold of achieving a majority on its own. Out of these 37 seats, candidates for 26 seats were elected unopposed; this included 13 candidates each from the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the opposition 'INDIA' alliance. In the keenly contested battles for the remaining 11 seats, the NDA asserted its dominance by capturing 9 seats, while the opposition had to settle for just two seats.

A meticulous analysis of the statistics from these elections clearly highlights the success of the BJP's strategy. Out of the total 37 seats, the NDA has won 22 seats, 13 of which belong to the BJP alone. On the other hand, within the 'INDIA' alliance—which won a total of 15 seats—the Congress secured 6 seats, the Trinamool Congress 4, and the DMK 3 seats. As a result of these elections, the BJP's strength in the Rajya Sabha has now reached 107. The total membership of the Rajya Sabha stands at 245, and the 'magic figure' of 123 is required to secure a majority. The BJP is now just 16 seats away from reaching this milestone. When considered as the NDA, the government is already well-positioned and holds a majority in the Rajya Sabha; however, the BJP's aspiration to attain a majority on its own strength is now merely a few months away. In these elections, the NDA has secured a net gain of 10 seats, while the opposition has suffered a corresponding loss. Notably, in Bihar—where the BJP did not have a single vacant seat—the party demonstrated its strength by winning two seats.

During this electoral process, instances of 'cross-voting' (voting against party lines)—as anticipated—occurred in Bihar and Odisha, directly benefiting the BJP and the candidates supported by the party. Similar political upheavals had been witnessed previously in Himachal Pradesh and Haryana, and a repetition of this trend was observed to some extent this year as well. Although the voting process in Haryana was marked by significant mutual allegations and counter-allegations, both major parties—the BJP and the Congress—succeeded in securing one seat each. However, for certain regional parties, this election proved to be an existential blow. The sole seat held by the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) faction has now dropped to zero, while the CPI(M), Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), and the RJD have also lost their respective seats. The DMK and the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) also suffered the loss of one seat each. Speaking specifically of Maharashtra, all seven seats were won unopposed; the BJP maintained its dominance by securing four seats, while the Shinde faction, the Ajit Pawar faction, and the Sharad Pawar faction each secured one seat.

This round of Rajya Sabha elections has not only altered the numerical balance of power but has also reshaped the roles and future political trajectories of several key leaders. BJP National President Nitin Navin has been elected to the Rajya Sabha from Bihar. Consequently, two political stalwarts—former President J.P. Nadda and incumbent President Nitin Navin—will now be seen together in the Upper House. Nadda currently serves as the Leader of the House, while Congress National President Mallikarjun Kharge shoulders the responsibility of the Leader of the Opposition. The political dynamics in Bihar—a state where the BJP, despite being a partner in the ruling coalition, had hitherto been unable to install a Chief Minister of its own—now appear to be undergoing a transformation. Nitish Kumar has expressed his willingness to step down as Chief Minister to move to the Rajya Sabha, a move that effectively clears the path for the BJP to appoint its own Chief Minister in Bihar. This development could prove to be a historic milestone for the BJP in North India. Nitish Kumar's recent decision is poised to trigger significant changes not only within the state's political landscape but also within his own family. His son, Nishant Kumar, is set to make his debut in active politics, and speculation is rife that he may eventually assume the responsibility of the state's Deputy Chief Minister. Until now, in an effort to steer clear of accusations of dynastic politics, Nitish Kumar had kept his son away from the political arena; however, it has now become evident that he has chosen Nishant Kumar as his political successor. Furthermore, the post of Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha is also set to fall vacant, as the incumbent Deputy Chairman, Harivansh Narayan Singh, has not been renominated by the JD(U). Consequently, in the near future, the Rajya Sabha will welcome not only new members but also a new Deputy Chairman.

This year, elections for a total of 72 Rajya Sabha seats are being conducted in three phases. Following the declaration of results for the 37 seats in the first phase, political parties have now geared up for the contest over the remaining 35 seats. In the current composition of the House, apart from the NDA and the INDIA alliance, there are approximately 28 members belonging to parties that are not aligned with any coalition—a segment in which the Aam Aadmi Party (10 seats) and the YSR Congress (7 seats) hold a significant share. However, as the BJP's own numerical strength continues to rise, its reliance on these neutral parties is expected to diminish. This growing strength of the BJP is poised to prove instrumental in enabling the government to secure the passage of crucial and constitutionally significant bills in the times to come.

Overall, these Rajya Sabha elections have painted a new picture regarding the balance of power in Indian politics. While the BJP's steady march toward a majority on its own strength may be a cause for concern among the opposition, this mandate—derived through the democratic process from the people's representatives (the Members of Legislative Assembly)—underscores the success of the BJP's strategic approach. The political realignment in Bihar, the emergence of new national leadership, and the diminishing influence of regional parties are all factors that are set to play a pivotal role in the context of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. There is no doubt that these changes in the Rajya Sabha will bring greater coherence to parliamentary proceedings and lend added strength to the government in making policy decisions. This election is not merely an exchange of seats; rather, it heralds the beginning of a new chapter in Indian politics. It is certain that upcoming elections and political developments will further clarify this new balance of power.

100 crore Integrated Aqua Park Project in Anantnag, J&K



Shri Rajiv Ranjan Singh, Hon'ble Union Minister Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying (FAH&D) and Panchayati Raj announced the sanction of a ₹100 crore Integrated Aqua Park Project to be established in District Anantnag, J&K and released the "Model Guidelines for the Development of Cold-Water Fisheries" during the National Conference on Cold Water Fisheries organized by Department of Fisheries, Government of India today at the Sher-e-Kashmir International Conference Centre (SKICC), Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir. The event was graced by Shri Manoj Sinha, Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor, Jammu & Kashmir; Shri Omar Abdullah, Hon'ble Chief Minister, Jammu & Kashmir; Prof. S.P. Singh Baghel, Minister of State, FAHD and Panchayati Raj; and Shri Javid Ahmad Dar, Hon'ble Minister, Agriculture Production Department, J&K. The Integrated Aqua Park Project to be established in District Anantnag, J&K will strengthen aquaculture infrastructure, boost cold-water fisheries development, increase fish production and create employment opportunities in the region.

Hon'ble Union Minister FAH&D Shri Rajiv Ranjan Singh and Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor, Jammu & Kashmir Shri Manoj Sinha, along Hon'ble Chief Minister, Jammu & Kashmir Shri Omar Abdullah have presented awards to Best Fisheries Cooperative Societies, Progressive Fish farmers, KCC beneficiaries, Fisheries start-ups, and other scheme benefits to stakeholders across Jammu & Kashmir.

Best Fisheries Cooperative Society category, awards were presented to Jehlum Fisherman Cooperative Ltd, Mahrajpora Sopore (Baramulla), Affarwat Trout Fish Farmers Cooperative Ltd, Tangmarg (Baramulla) and Bandi Trout Fish Cooperative Limited (Kupwara) were honoured for their leadership in collective fish farming and value-chain strengthening.

In the category of Progressive Cold-water Fish Farmers, Shri Shakeel Mohd Teeli (Anantnag), Shri Mehjoor Sultan Mir (Kupwara), Shri Umer Akbar Dar (Pul-

wama), Shri Zaid Ul Ahad (Srinagar) and Smt. Sara Bano (Srinagar) for their contributions to sustainable trout farming.

In the Kisan Credit Card (KCC) category, Smt. Nusrat Jan W/o Shabir Ahmad Ganie (Trout Raceway, Srinagar), Shri Abdul Rashid Ganie, S/o Late Gul Ganie (Trout Raceway, Srinagar), Shri Bilal Ahmad Malik, S/o Ali Mohammad Malik (Net/Boat, Srinagar) and Shri Asif Ahmad Malik, S/o Hafizullah Malik (Net/Boat, Srinagar) were honoured for adopting scientific and credit-enabled practices in aquaculture.

Further in Fisheries Start-ups category, M/s Sheeshang Trouts, represented by Shri Manzoor Ahmad Bhat (Live Fish Vending Centre, Anantnag), M/s Springvalley Feed Mill, represented by Shri Gowhar Rasool Reshi (Feed Mill, Srinagar), M/s Fisheries Paradise, represented by Miss Neha Atri (Carp Unit, Samba), M/s Rakesh Bio-floc, represented by Shri Rakesh Kumar (Biofloc Unit, Jammu), M/s Kashmir Trout (Cold Storage Unit, Srinagar) and M/s Raina Trout Farm, represented by Shri Reyaz Ahmad Raina (Trout Unit, Ganderbal) were honoured for demonstrating enterprise leadership in feed, farming, processing and value addition. In addition, under the Smt. Sara Bano (Srinagar) received approval for the establishment of a new RAS unit under FIDF scheme.

Refrigerated Vehicles were distributed to Shri Arsalan Ali (Pulwama), Shri Muzafar Ahmad Dar (Baramulla), Shri Mohd Iqbal Malik (Kulgam), Shri Shakir Ahmad Mir (Shopian) and Shri Umar Akbar Dar (Pulwama) to enhance post-harvest handling. Three-Wheeler Vehicles were distributed to Shri Farooq Ahmad Akhoo, Shri Gh Nabi Kaloo (Budgam), Shri Umar Farooq Dar (Baramulla), Shri Irshad Ahmad Khuroo (Anantnag) and Shri Muddasir Ahmad Khanday (Kupwara) to support last-mile transport and local market access. Hon'ble Union Minister FAH&D and Panchayati Raj Shri Ra-

jiv Ranjan Singh, Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor of Jammu & Kashmir Shri Manoj Sinha, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir Shri Omar Abdullah and other dignitaries jointly re-



leased the Model Guidelines for Reservoir Fisheries & Aquaculture Management. The Guidelines provide a comprehensive framework covering scientific seed stocking, cage-and pen-based aquaculture, leasing and governance mechanisms, biodiversity conservation, value-chain linkages and monitoring systems. Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor Shri Manoj Sinha, in his address highlighted that the sanction of the Integrated Aqua Park in J&K that will serve as a major catalyst for the region's growth. He noted that under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, fish farmers and sectoral stakeholders are being empowered through dedicated welfare schemes, leading to accelerated growth, and technological advancement. Emphasizing that the Himalayan region is the natural hub of India's cold-water fisheries, he underlined the progress through systematic interventions in broodstock development, hatcheries, feed mills and RAS units. He underlined that improving market linkages and enhancing fish farmers' incomes must remain central to future strategies and reaffirmed that with the support of the Government of India, Jammu & Kashmir will continue to move decisively toward sustainable and inclusive growth in cold-water fisheries. Shri Rajiv Ranjan Singh, Hon'ble Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying (MoFAH&D) and Pan-

availability of FIDF funding will enable local enterprises to scale.

Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Omar Abdullah, in his address, underscored the importance of sustainably harnessing Jammu & Kashmir's rich cold-water resources and noted the need to adopt technologies and scientific practices that allow cold-water aquaculture to expand without ecological compromise. He emphasized the need for continuous innovation, closer collaboration with academic institutions and adoption of best practices from regions such as the NER to strengthen productivity and resilience. He remarked that with modern technologies, cold-water fisheries can be developed across diverse parts of the Union Territory, offering new livelihood op-

portunities. Prof. S.P. Singh Baghel, Hon'ble Minister of State, FAH&D and Panchayati Raj in his address underlined the vast potential of India's cold-water fisheries and He expressed gratitude to Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for establishing a dedicated Ministry noting that this focused attention has enabled targeted interventions and visible growth across the sector. Highlighting the Government's sustained investments over the past decade, he highlighted the ₹100-crore Aqua Park in Jammu & Kashmir, which will serve as hubs for innovation, training, processing and aggregation. He emphasized the critical role of the fisheries sector in employment generation and community development, particularly in remote and high-altitude regions.

Shri Javid Ahmad Dar, Hon'ble Minister for Agriculture Production, Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, Cooperative and Election Departments, in his address noted that J&K contributes nearly 90 percent of India's trout production with regions such as Ganderbal and Anantnag renowned for their production. Highlighting the initiatives taken by the UT Government, he referred to the expansion and modernization of hatcheries, strengthened post-harvest management, all of which have elevated the sector into a technology-driven source of employment.

Dr. Abhilaksh Likhi, Union Secretary, Department of Fisheries highlighted the significance of cold-water fisheries in preserving India's rich indige-

nous germplasm, with more than 278 species contributing to national production, eco-tourism and niche market potential. He underscored that targeted interventions have enabled scientific stocking, climate-suitable culture practices, improved cold-chain connectivity and direct market linkages for start-ups, women-led groups and FFPOs. He added that nationally 34 clusters, including those in Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttarakhand, have been notified to pro-



DPIT; Ministry of Food Processing Industries; Department of Animal Husbandry; Ministry of Power and other line Ministries and Departments. The event also saw the presence of representatives from MPEDA, EIC, NFDB, NCDC, NABARD, senior scientists from ICAR institutions, faculty and students of SKUAST-Kashmir, fisheries cooperatives, progressive fish farmers, Industry representatives, Startups and Entrepreneurs engaged in the Fisheries value chain.

note integrated and region-specific development. He commended the exhibition showcasing value-added products and appreciated the highly interactive deliberations during the Technical Sessions, which will guide states in implementing sustainable and climate-resilient cold-water fisheries development.

Shri Sagar Mehra, Joint Secretary, Department of Fisheries, in his address highlighted that investments of ₹230 crore in the segment have significantly improved value-chain efficiency and productivity. Emphasising improvements required across the entire value chain from pre-production to production, post-harvest and integrated development he proposed need to ensure altitude-aligned seed availability through a seamless network of brood banks, hatcheries and grow-out farms supported by modern logistics such as drones. He stressed the need to scale advanced production systems such as RAS, raceways and cage culture, deploy IoT-enabled monitoring, strengthen genetic improvement and feed ecosystems, modernise post-harvest and cold-chain systems for premium products, and operationalise clusters.

A short film showcased the growth story and sustainable initiatives in the segment.

The Conference witnessed participation of more than 10,000 attendees in hybrid mode, bringing together senior officials from the Department of Fisheries, Government of India; Department of Fisheries, Jammu & Kashmir; Ministry of Commerce and Industry;



to adopt technologies and scientific practices that allow cold-water aquaculture to expand without ecological compromise. He emphasized the need for continuous innovation, closer collaboration with academic institutions and adoption of best practices from regions such as the NER to strengthen productivity and resilience. He remarked that with modern technologies, cold-water fisheries can be developed across diverse parts of the Union Territory, offering new livelihood op-

Tele-Law Programme under DISHA Scheme

A Regional Workshop on Tele-Law Programme Activities under the Designing Innovative Solutions for Holistic Access to Justice (DISHA) Scheme of the Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India, was held today at Kalaivanar Arangam, Chennai. The workshop aimed to strengthen technology-enabled justice delivery and deepen stakeholder engagement in ensuring last-mile access to justice.

The event was graced by Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar, Governor of Tamil Nadu; Sushrut Arvind Dharmadhikari, Chief Justice of the Madras High Court; and Arjun Ram Meghwal, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Law and Justice, along with senior officials, members of the judiciary, advocates, representatives of Common Service Centres (CSCs), law schools, students and civil society representatives.

Delivering the keynote address, Governor Shri Arlekar highlighted the importance of integrating technology, legal awareness and community participation to ensure effective justice delivery. He emphasised that citizens must understand and respect the law, and that justice must reach even those in remote villages. Strengthening public faith in the judiciary, he noted, is essential for achieving the vision of a Viksit Bharat.

Chief Justice Dharmadhikari J stated that access to justice is a fundamental constitutional obligation rooted in Articles 14, 21 and 39A. He appreciated initiatives such as Tele-Law, Nyaya Bandhu and legal awareness programmes, observing that technology-enabled platforms can significantly strengthen citizen engagement with legal institutions. He also described the DISHA initiative as a legal first-aid kit that moves the country from legal aid

towards legal empowerment.

Addressing the gathering, Union Minister Shri Meghwal underscored the importance of leveraging technology to make justice more accessible, affordable and citizen-centric. He highlighted that initiatives such as Tele-Law, Nyaya Bandhu and legal literacy programmes are strengthening the justice delivery ecosystem and expanding legal services at the grassroots level.

The Secretary of the Department of Justice, while addressing the gathering, began by outlining the key objectives of the DISHA framework. He highlighted that the initiative is aimed at strengthening access to justice by making legal services more inclusive, transparent, and accessible to all sections of society. He emphasised that awareness plays a crucial role in ensuring empowerment. According to him, citizens can only exercise their le-

gal rights effectively when they are informed about the mechanisms available to them. He noted that spreading legal awareness is therefore the first and most essential step toward achieving inclusive justice delivery.

The Secretary further underlined the importance of bridging the gap between citizens and legal institutions. He stated that initiatives like DISHA are designed to ensure that even those in remote and marginalised communities can access legal support without barriers.

A detailed presentation on the Tele-Law programme in Tamil Nadu was also delivered during the session. The presentation highlighted the significant progress made in expanding legal services through digital and community-based platforms. It was noted that Tele-Law services are currently being delivered through more than 12,560 Common Service Centres.

These centres are operational across all 38 districts of Tamil Nadu, ensuring widespread coverage and accessibility.

In addition to district-level coverage, the programme has also been extended to 16 aspirational blocks. This expansion reflects a targeted approach to reach underserved and backward regions where access to legal assistance is often limited.

The presentation further explained the role of the toll-free helpline 14454, which serves as an important tool for citizens seeking legal advice. The helpline enables individuals to connect with legal professionals without the need for physical travel.

The Tele-Law mobile application was also highlighted as a key innovation. It allows users to access legal services conveniently through their smartphones, making the system more user-friendly and efficient.



Briefs :

Disciplinary Action Looming for Congress Defectors

Chandigarh: The Haryana Congress has announced it will serve show-cause notices to five of its MLAs who cross-voted during the Rajya Sabha elections. The group reportedly includes two Muslim legislators, two women, and one representative from a reserved seat. State general secretary BK Hariprasad confirmed that these members will be required to explain their conduct, which nearly cost the party its seat.

The party had initially filed a complaint regarding alleged bribery attempts with the Himachal Pradesh Police but decided to set it aside following the successful election of their candidate. However, the leadership remains focused on internal accountability to prevent future betrayals. Senior leaders emphasized that the defiance of the party mandate is a serious matter and that the explanation provided by the implicated MLAs will determine further disciplinary actions, including potential suspension.

The political atmosphere in Chandigarh has intensified as the Haryana unit of the Indian National Congress moves towards disciplinary action against its own legislators following the recent Rajya Sabha elections.

The party has decided to issue show-cause notices to five MLAs accused of cross-voting, an act that nearly jeopardized the party's electoral prospects in the closely contested polls.

According to party insiders, the group of legislators includes two Muslim representatives, two women, and one member from a reserved constituency, making the issue both politically and socially sensitive.

Congress Triumphs in Narrow Rajya Sabha Battle

Chandigarh: In a high-stakes political drama that concluded after midnight, Congress candidate Karamvir Singh Boudh secured a victory for the Rajya Sabha seat, overcoming intense strategic maneuvers by the BJP. The victory was achieved by the narrowest of margins despite five Congress MLAs cross-voting and four party votes being declared invalid.

The win is seen as a major success for Leader of Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda, who personally managed the operation to keep the party's flock together.

To prevent a repeat of past defections, Hooda launched "Operation Himachal," moving 31 legislators to secluded hotels in Kufri and Kasauli. The operation involved strict surveillance, the seizure of mobile phones, and the installation of signal jammers to block any external influence.

Despite the tight vigil, internal divisions remained evident as several MLAs skipped the trip or defied the party line.

Following the win, Hooda accused the ruling party of attempting to "steal" votes, while party leaders credited the win to their disciplined oversight.

The political corridors of Chandigarh witnessed high drama as the Indian National Congress clinched a hard-fought victory in the Rajya Sabha elections after an intense contest that stretched well past midnight.

Congress Alleges Election Irregularities and BJP Interference

Chandigarh: The Congress Legislature Party has formally approached the Haryana Governor to lodge a protest against the conduct of the recent Rajya Sabha polls. Led by Bhupinder Singh Hooda, the party submitted a memorandum alleging that the ruling BJP used unethical means, including horse-trading and institutional pressure, to influence the election outcome in favor of an Independent candidate.

The memorandum specifically targets the Returning Officer, IAS officer Pankaj Aggarwal, accusing him of acting as a partisan agent for the ruling party. The Congress claims that valid votes were unfairly rejected and that the counting process was tampered with. The party has called for a high-level review of the conduct of the election, labeling the events a "murder of democracy."

The political temperature in Chandigarh has risen further after the Indian National Congress formally raised serious objections over the conduct of the recent Rajya Sabha elections.

The Congress Legislature Party, led by senior leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda, approached the Haryana Governor with a detailed



memorandum outlining its concerns.

In the submission, the party alleged that the electoral process was compromised through unethical practices aimed at influencing the outcome.

The Congress accused the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party of engaging in horse-trading to sway legislators during the tightly contested poll.

It further claimed that undue institutional pressure was exerted to tilt the balance in favour of an Independent candidate backed by the BJP. According to party leaders, these actions under-

mined the fairness and transparency expected in a democratic election.

A significant part of the memorandum focused on the role of the Returning Officer, Pankaj Aggarwal.

The Congress alleged that the officer acted in a partisan manner and failed to maintain neutrality during the voting and counting process.

The party claimed that several valid votes cast by its MLAs were rejected without proper justification.

These alleged irregularities, it argued, directly impacted the final outcome of the election.

The counting process itself was also questioned, with accusations that it was deliberately manipulated.

Congress leaders stated that procedural norms were not followed, raising doubts about the credibility of the entire exercise.

The memorandum described the events as a serious blow to democratic principles.

Party representatives went as far as calling the episode a "murder of democracy," reflecting the depth of their dissatisfaction.

They have demanded a high-level inquiry into the conduct of the election to en-

sure accountability. The Congress has urged authorities to examine the role of officials involved and take corrective action where necessary.

Leaders emphasized that free and fair elections are the cornerstone of a functioning democracy.

They warned that any deviation from established norms could erode public trust in democratic institutions.

The development has further intensified the ongoing political confrontation between the Congress and the BJP in Haryana.

While the BJP has dismissed such allegations in the past, the Congress remains firm in its demand for a thorough review.

Political observers note that such disputes are not uncommon in closely fought elections.

However, the seriousness of the accusations has added to the already charged atmosphere in the state.

The issue is likely to remain a focal point in Haryana's political discourse in the coming days.

As the matter unfolds, attention will be on whether the authorities initiate any formal investigation.

Dismissal of Officials Following Large-Scale Grain Fraud

Yamunanagar: Four officials from the Food, Civil Supplies, and Consumer Affairs Department have been terminated from service following a massive paddy embezzlement scandal. The dismissal orders were issued after a physical verification revealed a shortage of over 16,000 metric tonnes of paddy at several rice mills, causing a loss of approximately ₹41.89 crore to the state treasury. Those sacked include an assistant officer and three inspectors who were found guilty of gross negligence in monitoring grain arrivals and storage. The fraud, which surfaced in late 2025, has already led to several FIRs and the arrest of a prominent mill owner and a senior HAFED official. A Special Investigation Team continues to probe the depth of the irregularities in the procurement process.

A major administrative crackdown has taken place in Yamunanagar after a large-scale paddy embezzlement scandal exposed serious lapses in the procurement system.

Four officials from the Food, Civil Supplies, and Consumer Affairs Department have been dismissed from service following the findings of a detailed investi-

gation. The action comes after a physical verification uncovered a massive shortage of over 16,000 metric tonnes of paddy across multiple rice mills.

This discrepancy has resulted in an estimated financial loss of around ₹41.89 crore to the state exchequer.

Among those terminated are an assistant officer and three inspectors who were responsible for overseeing procurement operations.

Investigators found that these officials failed in their duty to properly monitor grain arrivals and maintain accurate storage records.

Their negligence is believed to have enabled the large-scale diversion or misappropriation of paddy stocks.

The probe has already led to the arrest of a prominent rice mill owner suspected of playing a central role in the embezzlement.

These arrests indicate that the irregularities extended beyond field-level staff to higher levels of the procurement chain.

Officials believe the scam may involve a broader network, including private millers and government personnel.

Youth Recounts Terror in Russian Detention

Phagwara: A 25-year-old man from Haryana, Deepak, has returned home with stories of systemic torture after being trapped in a Russian jail for over three months. Deepak had traveled to Moscow on the promise of a high-paying job but was instead dismissed without pay and eventually handed over to the police by a landlord who kept his passport. He described a brutal detention environment where he was subjected to electric shocks and denied proper sustenance.

Deepak's rescue was made possible through the efforts of Rajya Sabha MP Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal, who interceded on behalf of his family. The youth revealed that he and approximately 150 other Indians were forced to survive on bread because the meat provided was religiously prohib-

ited to them. Following the reunion, MP Seechewal issued a public appeal for youth to avoid illegal travel agents, warning that the dream of working abroad often turns into a nightmare of physical and mental suffering.

The town of Phagwara witnessed an emotional homecoming as a 25-year-old from Haryana, Deepak, returned after enduring a traumatic ordeal in a Russian jail.

Deepak had travelled to Moscow with hopes of securing a well-paying job, lured by promises made by agents offering overseas employment opportunities.

However, soon after his arrival, the situation took a grim turn when he was allegedly dismissed from work without receiving any payment.

Stranded in a foreign land without support, his troubles

deepened when his landlord reportedly confiscated his passport, leaving him vulnerable and unable to return home.

According to Deepak, the landlord later handed him over to local police authorities, leading to his detention in a Russian jail.

He recounted that his time in custody lasted for more than three months, during which he faced extremely harsh conditions. Deepak alleged that he was subjected to severe physical abuse, including electric shocks, during his detention. He also claimed that basic necessities such as adequate food and proper living conditions were denied to him. The food provided, he said, often included items that were religiously unsuitable, forcing him and others to survive mainly on bread.

Deepak revealed that he was

not alone in this suffering, stating that around 150 other Indians were also trapped in similar circumstances.

These individuals, like him, had travelled abroad in search of better opportunities but ended up facing exploitation and hardship.

The ordeal highlights the risks associated with unverified overseas job offers and illegal recruitment channels.

Deepak's return to India was made possible through the intervention of Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal, a Rajya Sabha MP. Acting on a request from Deepak's family, the MP took up the matter and facilitated communication with the concerned authorities. The reunion with his family was marked by relief and emotion after months of uncertainty and distress.

Following the incident, Seechewal issued a strong public warning to young people aspiring to work abroad.

He urged them to avoid falling into the trap of illegal travel agents who often make false promises.

The MP emphasized that such ventures can lead to severe consequences, including exploitation and legal troubles in foreign countries.

He pointed out that many youths, driven by the dream of better earnings, unknowingly step into dangerous situations.

The case has once again brought attention to the need for stricter regulation of overseas recruitment practices. Authorities are being urged to take stronger action against fraudulent agents who prey on vulnerable job seekers.

Families have also been advised to thoroughly verify employment offers before allowing members to travel abroad.

Deepak's experience serves as a cautionary tale about the darker side of migration for work.

It underscores the importance of awareness and vigilance when dealing with international job opportunities.

As he begins to recover from his ordeal, his story stands as a stark reminder of how quickly aspirations can turn into distress.

The incident has sparked wider conversations about safeguarding Indian citizens working or seeking work overseas.

For now, Deepak's safe return offers relief, but his account continues to raise serious concerns about exploitation beyond borders.

Massive Financial Fraud Exposed at Chandigarh Bank

Chandigarh: A sophisticated scam involving the embezzlement of ₹590 crore in government funds has been uncovered at the Chandigarh branch of IDFC First Bank.

The Haryana Anti-Corruption Bureau has registered an FIR and established a Special Investigation Team to probe the illegal diversion of money belonging to eight different state departments. Investigators found that the prime suspects utilized a network of fake companies to channel public funds into private accounts.

Authorities have arrested 11 individuals so far, including six bank employees and a government official. During extensive raids across several cities, the police recovered electronic evidence and seized six luxury vehicles, including Mercedes and Fortuners, allegedly purchased with the stolen money.



Over 100 bank accounts have been frozen, and ten properties have been identified as proceeds of the crime.

While the bank is cooperating with the probe, the case has highlighted significant vulnerabilities in the over-

sight of government accounts, leading to a state-wide audit of similar holdings.

Supreme Court Clears YouTuber in Wildlife Protection Case

New Delhi: The Supreme Court has quashed the FIR and all legal proceedings against YouTuber Elvish Yadav in connection with a 2023 case involving the alleged use of snake venom at a party. A bench comprising Justices M M Sundresh and N Kotiswar Singh ruled that the case could not be sustained because the complaint under the Wildlife (Protection) Act was not filed by an authorized individual.

The court further noted that the substances recovered during the investigation were not listed under the prohibited schedules of the NDPS Act. Previously, the Allahabad High Court had refused to dismiss the charges, but the apex court found the legal basis for the prosecution to be insufficient. This ruling effectively ends the high-profile legal battle that began with Yadav's arrest in March 2024.

The legal battle involving popular YouTuber Elvish Yadav has come to a decisive end after a major ruling by



the Supreme Court of India in New Delhi.

In a significant judgment, the apex court quashed the FIR and all related legal proceedings against Yadav in connection with a 2023 wildlife protection case.

The case had alleged the use of snake venom at a party, drawing widespread public and media attention at the time.

A bench comprising Justices M M Sundresh and N Kotiswar Singh examined the matter in detail before delivering its verdict.

The court ruled that the FIR could not be sustained

due to a key procedural lapse in how the complaint was filed.

In this case, the complaint did not meet that requirement, making the legal proceedings invalid.

The bench emphasized that adherence to due process is essential for any prosecution to stand in court.

Apart from procedural issues, the court also looked into the nature of the substances allegedly recovered during the investigation.

It noted that these substances were not listed under the prohibited schedules of the NDPS Act.

Legislative Tempers Flare Over Rajya Sabha Election Conduct

Chandigarh: The final day of the Haryana Budget Session was marked by intense shouting matches as members of the BJP and Congress clashed over the legitimacy of the recent Rajya Sabha elections. The debate turned personal and heated as lawmakers traded barbs over who was responsible for "murdering democracy" in the state.

While the Congress accused the BJP of using unfair tactics to secure votes for an Independent candidate, the ruling party hit back, suggesting that the

Congress should look inward at its own internal friction. Despite the uproar, the Speaker disallowed a formal discussion on the matter, ruling that the specific details of the election were beyond the purview of the House. The session concluded amidst loud protests and slogans from both sides.

The atmosphere inside the Haryana Assembly in Chandigarh turned extremely tense on the final day of the Budget Session, as legislators from rival parties engaged in heated

confrontations over the recent Rajya Sabha elections.

Members of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Indian National Congress were involved in loud shouting matches that repeatedly disrupted proceedings. What began as a political disagreement soon escalated into a personal war of words, with leaders from both sides trading sharp accusations.

The phrase "murder of democracy" echoed across the chamber as each side attempted to blame the other for alleged irregularities in the

election process.

Congress legislators alleged that the ruling BJP had resorted to unfair tactics to influence voting in favour of an Independent candidate.

They claimed that the integrity of the election had been compromised through methods that undermined democratic norms.

In response, BJP members strongly rejected the and countered that the Congress was trying to deflect attention from its own internal divisions. Ruling party leaders ar-

gued that cross-voting within the Congress ranks exposed a lack of unity rather than external interference.

As tempers flared, several members moved into the well of the House, raising slogans and protesting loudly. The disruptions made it difficult for the Speaker to maintain order and continue with the scheduled business. He disallowed any formal discussion on the Rajya Sabha election controversy within the Assembly. The decision was based on the view that

specific electoral matters fall outside the jurisdiction of the legislative proceedings. Opposition legislators continued to protest, expressing dissatisfaction over being denied a platform to raise the issue.

On the other hand, BJP members maintained that the Assembly should focus on governance rather than political disputes.

The shouting and slogan-raising created a charged and disorderly environment throughout the session. Observers note that

such confrontations highlight the growing intensity of political rivalry in the state.

The inability to hold a structured debate on the issue has also raised concerns about legislative functioning.

As tensions continue to simmer, the fallout from the election controversy is expected to influence future political discourse.

For now, the final day of the session will be remembered more for its uproar than for any legislative achievements.

Notices Issued to Congress Lawmakers Over Voting Breach

Chandigarh: The Congress party has officially served show-cause notices to four of its MLAs following allegations of cross-voting during the recent Rajya Sabha elections. The legislators—Shalley Chaudhary, Renu Bala, Mohd Ilyas, and Mohd Israil—have been given a seven-day window to provide an explanation for their actions.

The party's disciplinary committee noted that the MLAs allegedly cast their ballots in a manner that violated official instructions, nearly costing the Congress candidate his seat. According to the notice, such behavior is viewed as a deliberate attempt to undermine party unity and violates the organization's constitution. Failure to respond within the stipulated time will result in ex parte proceedings against the individuals.

The political developments in Chandigarh continue to unfold as the Indian National Congress has initiated formal disciplinary action against several of its legislators over alleged cross-voting in the recent Rajya Sabha elections.

The party has issued show-cause notices to four MLAs—Shalley Chaudhary, Renu Bala, Mohd Ilyas,



and Mohd Israil—seeking explanations for their conduct during the crucial.

According to party officials, the legislators have been given a period of seven days to submit their responses. The notices were issued following allegations that these MLAs voted in a manner that went against the official party directive.

The Congress disciplinary committee has taken a serious view of the matter, describing the alleged actions as a breach of party discipline.

In the official communication, the committee stated that the conduct of the MLAs appeared to undermine party

unity at a critical moment.

It also emphasized that adherence to the party line during elections is a fundamental expectation from all elected representatives.

The notices suggest that the alleged cross-voting was not merely incidental but could be interpreted as a deliberate act.

Party leaders have indicated that such behavior violates the constitution and internal code of conduct of the organization.

The move reflects the leadership's intent to enforce accountability and prevent similar incidents in the future.

The MLAs concerned

are now required to justify their actions and clarify the circumstances under which they cast their votes.

Their responses will be carefully examined before any further steps are taken.

The party has made it clear that failure to reply within the stipulated time-frame will have serious consequences.

In such a scenario, the disciplinary committee may proceed with ex parte action against the individuals.

This could lead to penalties ranging from suspension to expulsion, depending on the severity of the findings.

The controversy stems

Major Administrative Shake-up in Haryana Bureaucracy

Chandigarh: In a significant administrative overhaul, the Haryana Government has ordered the transfer of 23 IAS officers to new roles across the state. The reshuffle sees Anurag Agarwal taking over as the Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) for the Town and Country Planning Department, marking a shift in top-level leadership for urban development.

Other notable appointments include AK Singh, who has been designated as the ACS for Higher Education as well as the Public Works and Architecture Departments. Additionally, the district administration of Sonapat will now be headed by Neha Singh, who has been appointed as the new Deputy Commissioner. These moves are aimed at streamlining governance across various key sectors.

In a significant move, the government has transferred 23 IAS officers, assigning them new responsibilities across multiple departments and districts.

The reshuffle is being viewed as a strategic effort to improve governance and enhance administrative efficiency in key sectors.

Among the most prominent changes is the appointment of Anurag Agarwal as the Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) for the Town and

Country Planning Department.

This role places him at the forefront of urban development policies and infrastructure planning in the state.

The shift signals a renewed focus on managing rapid urbanization and improving city planning frameworks.

Another key appointment is that of AK Singh, who has been given charge as ACS for multiple important portfolios. He will oversee the Higher Education Department along with the Public Works and Architecture Departments. These departments play a crucial role in shaping educational infrastructure and executing major government construction projects.

The consolidation of responsibilities under one officer is expected to bring better coordination between sectors.

In district-level administration, Neha Singh has been appointed as the new Deputy Commissioner of Sonapat.

Her role will involve overseeing law and order, development projects, and public service delivery in the district.

Such district-level appointments are critical for implementing government policies on the ground.

Officials indicate that the reshuffle has been carefully planned to align expertise with departmental needs.

The government aims to bring fresh perspectives and renewed energy into administrative functioning.

Transfers of this scale are often undertaken to address performance gaps and improve accountability.

They also help in preventing administrative stagnation by rotating officers through diverse roles.

The Town and Country Planning Department, in particular, is expected to gain momentum under new leadership.

Urban development remains a priority area as cities in Haryana continue to expand rapidly.

Similarly, the Higher Education and Public Works sectors are likely to benefit from streamlined decision-making.

The appointment of a new Deputy Commissioner in Sonapat reflects the importance of strong district governance.

Local administration plays a vital role in ensuring that policies translate into tangible benefits for citizens.

Government sources suggest that more such administrative adjustments may follow in the coming months.

Court Demands Merit-Based Department Allocation for Recruits

Chandigarh: The Punjab and Haryana High Court has issued a stern directive to the Haryana Staff Selection Commission (HSSC) regarding the arbitrary allocation of departments to successful candidates.

Justice Harpreet Singh Brar criticized the current "opaque and capricious" process, where candidates with lower marks were sometimes granted more desirable posts than those with higher merit scores.

The court has ordered the Chief Secretaries of both Punjab and Haryana to establish a transparent and rational framework for departmental allocation within three months.

The ruling emphasizes that merit must be rewarded and that high-performing candidates should have priority in choosing their departments.

The bench warned that any deviation from this meritocratic principle violates constitutional guarantees of equality in public employment.

The judicial spotlight has turned toward recruitment practices in Chandigarh, where the Punjab and Haryana High Court has raised serious concerns over how government departments are being allotted

to selected candidates.

In a strongly worded order, Justice Harpreet Singh Brar criticized the existing system followed by the Haryana Staff Selection Commission.

The court described the current method of department allocation as "opaque and capricious," pointing to inconsistencies that undermine fairness.

During the proceedings, it was observed that candidates with lower marks were, in some cases, assigned more desirable posts than those who had performed better in the selection process.

Such discrepancies, the court noted, raise serious questions about transparency and accountability in public recruitment.

The bench emphasized that merit should be the primary criterion in determining departmental postings.

It stressed that candidates who score higher should be given priority when it comes to selecting or being assigned preferred departments.

The ruling underscores the importance of maintaining fairness in government employment processes.

The court has directed the Chief Secretaries of both Punjab and Haryana to

take corrective action.

They have been instructed to formulate a clear, transparent, and rational framework for departmental allocation.

This new system must be developed and implemented within a period of three months.

The directive aims to eliminate ambiguity and ensure that the allocation process is consistent and justifiable.

According to the court, arbitrary decisions in such matters can erode trust in public institutions.

The judgment also highlighted that fairness in recruitment is not just an administrative requirement but a constitutional obligation.

It pointed out that deviation from merit-based allocation violates the principles of equality guaranteed under the Constitution.

The court made it clear that public employment must adhere strictly to these foundational principles.

Legal experts believe the ruling could have far-reaching implications for recruitment policies in the state.

It may prompt a broader review of existing procedures to align them with meritocratic standards.

The decision is also expected to benefit candidates who may have previously been disadvantaged by unclear allocation practices.

Authorities will now need to ensure that future recruitment exercises are conducted with greater transparency.

The move could also lead to the introduction of digital or automated systems to reduce human discretion in allocation decisions.

Such measures would help in maintaining consistency and minimizing the scope for bias.

The ruling serves as a reminder that administrative efficiency must go hand in hand with fairness.

It reinforces the idea that merit should remain the cornerstone of all public sector appointments.

As the deadline approaches, attention will be on how effectively the states implement the court's directive.

The outcome is likely to shape the future of recruitment and posting practices in Haryana and Punjab.

Overall, the judgment marks a significant step toward strengthening transparency and accountability in government hiring processes.

Unusual Western Disturbance Triggers Cold Snap and Rain

Chandigarh: An atypical weather system is sweeping across North India, prompting meteorologists to issue alerts for unseasonal rain and a sudden return of winter-like chill. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) noted that a rare, linear western disturbance stretching thousands of kilometers is responsible for the intense cloud development currently impacting the region.

Residents in Delhi NCR, Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan should prepare for a significant temperature drop, with daytime highs expected to hover between 18°C and 24°C. While the higher altitudes are set to receive heavy snowfall, the plains will experience thundershowers and gusty winds. Officials have advised citizens to keep their winter gear handy as this "sweater weather" spell persists through the end of the week.

The weather in Chandigarh and across North India has taken an unexpected turn as an unusual atmospheric system brings back winter-like conditions in the middle of the season. According to the India Meteorological Department, a rare and elongated western disturbance is currently influencing weather



patterns across a vast region. This system, stretching thousands of kilometers, has led to intense cloud formation and widespread atmospheric instability.

Meteorologists describe it as atypical due to its linear structure and extended reach, which is not commonly seen in such disturbances.

As a result, several northern states are witnessing sudden weather changes, including cloud cover, rainfall, and a noticeable dip in temperatures.

Regions including Delhi NCR, Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan are expected to be significantly affected by this development.

Daytime temperatures in these areas are likely to drop sharply, ranging between 18°C and 24°C.

The cooler conditions are a stark contrast to the warmer weather that had been prevailing in recent weeks.

In higher altitude regions, the system is expected to bring heavy snowfall, further intensifying the cold conditions.

Meanwhile, the plains will experience intermittent thundershowers accompanied by gusty winds. These weather events could lead to temporary disruptions in daily activities, including travel and outdoor work.

Residents have already begun noticing a chill in the air, reminiscent of winter months.

The IMD has issued advisories urging people to stay prepared for fluctuating weather conditions.

Citizens have been advised to keep warm clothing accessible as temperatures may continue to remain low for several days.

The return of "sweater weather" has brought both relief and inconvenience, depending on individual perspectives.

While some welcome the cooler climate, others are concerned about its impact on health and agriculture.

High Court Slams States Over Non-Compliance with Arrest Guidelines

Chandigarh: The Punjab and Haryana High Court has expressed strong dissatisfaction with the "false affidavits" submitted by the states of Punjab and Haryana regarding the implementation of Supreme Court guidelines on arrests. Justice Sudeepti Sharma noted that the 2014 Armesh Kumar judgment, intended to curb arbitrary arrests in matrimonial disputes, is still being ignored on the ground.

The court remarked that the compliance reports appeared to be mere "paperwork" without any evidence of actual training or awareness among police officers.

The Chief Secretaries and DGPs of both states have been warned of potential contempt charges if they fail to provide verified records of compliance, including a list of officials penalized for ignoring the guidelines. The bench has demanded a "black and white" record of all measures taken since the



2014 ruling.

The judiciary has once again taken a firm stance on law enforcement practices in Chandigarh, with the Punjab and Haryana High Court expressing sharp displeasure over the lack of compliance with arrest guidelines.

Justice Sudeepti Sharma criticized the states of Punjab

and Haryana for submitting what the court described as "false affidavits."

The court noted that the reports filed by both states did not reflect the actual situation on the ground.

At the center of the issue is the landmark 2014 judgment in Armesh Kumar vs State of Bihar, delivered by

the Supreme Court of India.

This ruling was intended to prevent arbitrary arrests, particularly in matrimonial disputes, and to ensure that due process is followed.

However, the High Court observed that despite clear directions, the guidelines continue to be ignored in practice.

Human Rights Commission Probes Corporal Punishment Incident

Hisar: The Haryana Human Rights Commission (HHRC) has taken suo motu cognizance of a disturbing incident at a government school in Jagan village.

The footage reportedly showed female students being subjected to humiliating punishment as a form of discipline.

According to the reports, the girls were forced to perform repeated squats within the school premises.

In addition, they were allegedly paraded around the campus, making the punishment not only physical but also publicly humiliating.

The incident has triggered widespread concern over the treatment of students in educational institutions.

The Commission, headed by Justice Lalit Batra, characterized the act as a "grave violation of dignity" and noted that corporal punishment is strictly prohibited under the Right to Education and Juvenile Justice Acts.

Authorities, including the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police, have been directed to submit detailed reports on the matter. The HHRC stressed that such public humiliation is contrary to national initiatives aimed at girl-child empowerment.

The issue of student safety and dignity has come under scrutiny in Hisar after

a troubling incident of corporal punishment surfaced from a government school in Jagan village.

The footage reportedly showed female students being subjected to humiliating punishment as a form of discipline.

According to the reports, the girls were forced to perform repeated squats within the school premises.

In addition, they were allegedly paraded around the campus, making the punishment not only physical but also publicly humiliating.

The incident has triggered widespread concern over the treatment of students in educational institutions.

The Commission, headed by Justice Lalit Batra, described the act as a serious violation of basic human dignity.

It emphasized that such practices are unacceptable and have no place in modern education systems.

The HHRC pointed out that corporal punishment is explicitly banned under multiple laws.

These include provi-

sions of the Right to Education Act, which guarantees a safe and supportive learning environment for children.

The Commission also referred to protections under juvenile justice laws that safeguard minors from abuse and mistreatment.

Officials noted that such actions can have long-lasting psychological and emotional impacts on young students.

The case has raised questions about the enforcement of child protection norms in schools.

In response, the Commission has directed senior district authorities to take immediate action.

The Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police have been asked to submit detailed reports on the incident.

These reports are expected to include facts of the case, identification of responsible individuals, and steps taken to prevent recurrence.

The Commission has made it clear that accountability must be established in such cases.



Messi headlines Argentina squad for Guatemala friendly

Buenos Aires: Lionel Messi is set to lead Argentina national football team in their World Cup warm-up friendly against Guatemala national football team later this month, according to the Argentine Football Association.

The fixture will serve as a crucial preparatory match for the reigning world champions as they gear up for the upcoming FIFA World Cup. With Messi at the helm, expectations remain high for Argentina to carry forward their winning momentum.

Head coach Lionel Scaloni has named a 28-man squad for the friendly, blending experience with fresh talent. Notably, two new faces have earned call-ups, signaling a potential shift toward building squad depth ahead of the global tournament.

Among the newcomers are Tomas Palacios, a center-back from Estudiantes de La Plata, and Gabriel Rojas, a left-back representing Racing Club. Their inclusion re-



flects Scaloni's intent to test emerging talent on the international stage.

However, the squad will miss several key players due to injuries. Star striker Lautaro Martinez, who plays for Inter Milan, is sidelined with a calf issue. Defensive mainstay Lisandro Martinez of

Manchester United is also recovering from a calf injury, leaving a gap in Argentina's defensive lineup.

Midfielder Giovanni Lo Celso, currently with Real Betis, will miss out as well due to a quadriceps strain, further impacting the team's midfield options.

The match against Guatemala is scheduled to take place on March 31 at the iconic La Bombonera in Buenos Aires, promising an electrifying atmosphere for fans. Originally, Argentina was expected to play the "Finalissima" against Spain national football team, but the

match was canceled due to ongoing conflict in the Middle East, prompting the arrangement of this friendly instead.

This game will be Argentina's only scheduled fixture ahead of the upcoming FIFA World Cup 2026, making it a vital opportunity for final preparations.

As defending champions, Argentina will enter the tournament with high expectations. They are set to begin their campaign against Algeria national football team on June 16.

Following their opening match, Argentina will also face Austria national football team and Jordan national football team during the group stage.

With a mix of seasoned stars and promising newcomers, and under the leadership of Lionel Messi, Argentina will look to fine-tune their strategy and squad cohesion as they prepare to defend their world title on football's biggest stage.

Barcelona runs riot against Newcastle to reach Champions League last eight

Madrid: FC Barcelona delivered a stunning performance to storm into the quarterfinals of the UEFA Champions League, thrashing Newcastle United 7-2 at Camp Nou for an emphatic 8-3 aggregate victory.

After a tightly contested 1-1 draw in the first leg in England, the tie had remained finely balanced heading into the return fixture. However, Barcelona produced a ruthless second-half display that completely blew the contest wide open.

Midfielder dynamo Fermin Lopez, veteran striker Robert Lewandowski, and winger Raphinha were at the heart of the demolition, combining brilliantly to dismantle Newcastle's defense.

The match began at a frenetic pace in front of nearly 60,000 fans, with both teams creating chances and finding the net in an electrifying first half that produced five goals.

Barcelona struck early when Raphinha opened the scoring in just the sixth minute, finishing calmly after a precise through ball from Fermin Lopez.

The early goal set the tone for an attacking specta-



cle. Newcastle responded quickly, with Anthony Elanga leveling the score after finishing from a tight angle, following a well-placed diagonal pass from Lewis Hall.

The hosts regained the lead in the 18th minute through Marc Bernal, who poked the ball home from close range after a clever knockdown by Gerard Martin exposed Newcastle's defensive lapses.

Newcastle refused to back down, and Elanga struck again to make it 2-2, capitalizing on a deflected cross from Harvey Barnes that fell kindly into his path for a simple finish.

The intensity remained high, with chances at both ends. Dan Burn made a cru-

cial block to deny Lewandowski, while young star Lamine Yamal missed a clear opportunity from close range.

Yamal, however, redeemed himself in first-half stoppage time by converting a penalty after Kieran Trippier fouled Raphinha, giving Barcelona a 3-2 lead heading into the break.

If the first half was evenly matched, the second half was completely dominated by Barcelona. Their intensity, movement, and clinical finishing left Newcastle struggling to cope.

Fermin Lopez extended the lead to 4-2 after a clever flick from Lewandowski sent him through on goal, allowing him to finish with composure.

Allan, Arias lift Palmeiras to Brazil's Serie A summit

Sao Paulo: Palmeiras climbed to the top of the Campeonato Brasileiro Série A standings with a hard-fought 2-1 victory over Botafogo at home on Wednesday.

Midfielder Allan and playmaker Jhon Arias were the standout performers, scoring in each half to secure Palmeiras' fifth win of the campaign.

The hosts made a strong start and broke the deadlock when Allan latched onto a well-timed pass from Andreas Pereira before striking a first-time shot into the bottom left corner, giving Palmeiras an early advantage.

Botafogo's situation worsened just before halftime when Cristian Medina was shown a straight red card for a reckless challenge on Arias, leaving the visitors with 10 men for the remainder of the match.

Palmeiras capitalized on their numerical advantage in the second half, with Andreas Pereira once again playing a key role. He combined effectively



with Arias, who dribbled into the penalty area and finished calmly past goalkeeper Raul Steffens.

Despite being a man down, Botafogo showed resilience and pulled a goal back in the 59th minute through Danilo, setting up a tense final phase of the match.

However, Palmeiras managed the closing stages well, maintaining composure and defensive discipline to pre-

serve their narrow lead and secure all three points.

With this result, Palmeiras now sits at the top of the table with 16 points from seven matches, edging ahead of Sao Paulo FC on goal difference.

Botafogo, meanwhile, continues to struggle this season. The defeat leaves them in 18th place in the 20-team league, having registered just one win from their opening five matches.

Elsewhere in the Campeonato Brasileiro Série A, Bahia secured a 2-0 home victory over Red Bull Bragantino in a confident performance.

Athletico Paranaense edged past Cruzeiro with a 2-1 win at home, continuing their steady run in the competition.

Atletico Mineiro claimed a narrow 1-0 victory against Sao Paulo FC in a tightly contested encounter.

Coritiba also registered a 1-0 away win against Mirassol, showcasing their defensive solidity.

Zhou sets timeline for F1 return as Cadillac role takes shape

Beijing: China's Zhou Guanyu has not given up on returning to the F1 grid. But after two seasons on the sidelines, the Cadillac reserve driver now admits there is a point at which he may explore other opportunities.

"I think at the end of this year or the end of next year, if there's still no drive in F1, then there will be other series I'll be looking for," Zhou said during the Chinese Grand Prix weekend. It is the first time Zhou has openly placed a timeline on his future, in a subtle but telling shift for a driver who has spent the past two years insisting his focus remains fixed on F1.

Zhou made history in 2022 when he joined Alfa Romeo to become China's first F1 race driver. Two more seasons followed, before he lost his



seat after a difficult 2024, according to Xinhua. The Shanghai native then took on a reserve role with Ferrari in 2025 before joining the nascent Cadillac squad for 2026, where he combines standby duties with a development position. "One of the reasons I joined the team is because I feel like with Ca-

dillac there is a big opportunity for my future, hopefully to get back on the grid," he said. His role extends beyond simply waiting in the wings in case regular drivers Valtteri Bottas or Sergio Perez are indisposed. Zhou is also involved in developing the car for the new rules cycle, drawing on experience

gained across multiple teams. "It's about waiting if the team needs me to step into the race car, and then helping with development for the entire 2026 season," he said. "New regs, new engine, everything is new." Yet even that opportunity comes with limitations. With more than 60 Grands Prix to his name, Zhou is no longer eligible for mandatory rookie appearances in Friday practice sessions, while Cadillac's status as a new entrant means it lacks a previous car for private testing programs. He is expected to drive during the season, but opportunities may be limited. "I will do a good amount of seat driving, not as much as the race drivers, but as normal," Zhou said, with timings still to be confirmed.

ITTF launches Doubles World Cup in 2027

Beijing: The International Table Tennis Federation has officially announced the launch of the ITTF Doubles World Cup, set to debut in 2027, marking a significant expansion of the sport's global competitive calendar.

The new tournament will feature men's doubles, women's doubles, and mixed doubles events, bringing all doubles formats together on a single prestigious World Cup stage for the first time. This move is aimed at elevating the profile of doubles disciplines within international table tennis.

With this addition, every event in the table tennis program of the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games will now have a corresponding World Cup competition. The existing ITTF Men's World Cup and ITTF Women's World Cup cover singles, while the ITTF Mixed Team World Cup addresses the team format.

The announcement comes at a pivotal time for the sport, as doubles events are set to make a long-awaited return to the Olympic stage.

At LA28, men's and women's doubles will fea-

ture once again after being absent since the Athens 2004 Olympic Games.

These events will join mixed doubles, which was first introduced at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, completing a full lineup of doubles competitions at the Olympics for the first time in decades.

ITTF President Petra Sorling emphasized the importance of this development, stating that the return of doubles to the Olympics creates a need for a dedicated global platform to showcase top talent in these formats.

IGI and Shyam Lal College secure big wins in PSPB Baba Deep Singh Hockey tournament

New Delhi: The third day of the PSPB Baba Deep Singh Hockey Tournament witnessed dominant performances across both men's and women's categories, with several teams registering emphatic victories and showcasing their attacking prowess.

In the men's category, Shyam Lal College delivered one of the most commanding performances of the tournament, thrashing hosts Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Khalsa College 8-0 on their home turf.

Shyam Lal College set the tone early, netting five goals in the first half and con-

tinuing their relentless attack with three more in the second half. Their dominance was evident throughout the match, leaving the hosts with little opportunity to respond.

Among the standout performers for Shyam Lal College were Naveen and Pan-kaj, who scored two goals each, leading the charge in a comprehensive team effort.

They were well supported by Pratyush Singh Jaggi, Bhupendra, Yash, and Nandkishore, each of whom contributed a goal to complete the rout.

In addition to the attacking brilliance, Shyam Lal College's defense remained

rock solid, with goalkeeper Mohammad Kamil delivering an assured performance to keep a clean sheet. His efforts earned him the 'Player of the Match' award.

Another dominant display came from Indira Gandhi Institute of Physical Education and Sports Sciences (IGIPSS), which secured a convincing 7-0 victory over St. Stephen's College.

The match was largely one-sided, with IGIPSS controlling possession and creating multiple scoring opportunities. Their clinical finishing ensured that the scoreboard reflected their superiority. Chander emerged

as the star performer for IGIPSS, scoring two goals and playing a pivotal role in the team's attacking movements. Additional goals came from Yash, Amandeep, Dhruv, Sheeshnath, and Soren Aman, each contributing to the emphatic win.

Chander's all-round performance earned him the 'Player of the Match' honors, highlighting his influence on the game. In the women's category, the Delhi University Alumna Team registered a comfortable 5-0 victory over Vivekananda College.

The alumna side dominated proceedings from the outset, displaying strong co-

ordination and effective finishing to secure a convincing win. Meena led the scoring with two goals, while Sonu, Zehra, and Indrepreet added one goal each to complete the tally. Despite being on the losing side, Ekta from Vivekananda College delivered a commendable performance and was named 'Player of the Match' for her efforts.

Overall, the third day of the PSPB Baba Deep Singh Hockey Tournament highlighted the competitive spirit and emerging talent across teams, with dominant victories underlining the high level of play in the tournament.

Ashleigh Gardner winding back the clock ahead of milestone match

St Vincent, Mar 19 (UNI) Ashleigh Gardner is summoning her fearless teenage self ahead of her 100th T20I appearance, as she looks to recapture her best with the bat in the shortest format.

Gardner will become the seventh woman to play 100 T20Is in the green and gold when Australia take the field against West Indies in St Vincent on Thursday (9:30am Friday AEDT), in what looms as a pivotal series ahead of the T20 World Cup.

The 28-year-old arrived on the international scene in 2017 with a reputation as an explosive batter, picked to play for her country aged 19 after a breakthrough WBBL campaign.

Across the nine years since, Gardner has evolved into a true all-rounder and one of the world's leading off-spinners, particularly in the one-day game, where she

sits at No.1 in the ICC's all-rounder rankings.

She has also developed into one of the world's leading ODI batters, and since the start of 2024 has averaged 45.94 in the middle-order for Australia, scoring three centuries and three fifties.

Speaking in St Vincent on Wednesday, however, Gardner admitted to a degree of frustration that she had not been able to produce the same success with the bat in T20Is across the same period, which saw her score 217 runs at an average of 18 and strike rate of 108.5, passing fifty once.

"In this format, my role within the middle-order is challenging at times, you might come in when the team's on top, or you come in when we're not on top," Gardner said. "It's summing up the situation really quickly, and finding my gears really fast as well, and it's probably something that I

haven't done overly well in this format for a prolonged period of time.

"It's just trying to find my feet really quickly, assessing conditions... making sure that I'm sticking to what the team needs from me in those situations as well and also just not shying away from what my strengths are, and just keep being brave with the decisions that I make."

To help unlock that free-flowing approach, Gardner has cast her mind back to the budding Australian player who hammered a record-breaking 47-ball ton at North Sydney Oval in WBBL03.

"I was someone that had no fear, and I guess as I've gotten older and more mature, I've gained more fear in the way that I approach life and just cricket in general," she continued. "It's trying to harness a little bit of that (fearlessness) - not stepping over the line to just being



completely reckless - but for me, the brand of cricket that I play, I try and take the game on.

"So when I'm under the pump, really trying to harness that and channel that, which at times is really hard to do, because if you don't have a lot of confidence, that's the last thing you want to do... but for me, that's when I'm playing my best

cricket."

Reflecting on her T20I debut against New Zealand at the MCG in 2017, Gardner admitted to feeling raw and unsure of her readiness for international cricket.

One hundred matches later, she is now Australian co-vice-captain alongside Tahlia McGrath and helping to usher in a new era under the leadership of Sophie

Molineux. The trio had a taste of their new roles in the three T20Is against India last month, before handing the reins back to Alyssa

Healy for her international swansong across the ODIs and the Test.

"It's obviously a different dynamic, having two vice-captains, and then working with Soph - I've never played under Soph before, but I've known her for a very long time so it's seemed pretty seamless in a lot of ways, knowing that I've got a friendship that's already built for that," Gardner said.

"For me, it's just about, how do I support her, what does the team need from me, both on and off the field, and it's being able to work really closely with her.

"She had her own little imprint on the team through that Indian series, but now that she takes full reins, I'm super excited to see where she's going to take the team."

"If I look back at that 2017 World Cup that we lost, we were just playing really timid cricket, and then we had that evolution of, 'let's try and take the game on, let's be really fearless'.

"And we've bought into that ever since then, and it's almost an unwritten rule when you come into this side, that's the brand of cricket that you play.

"It's probably trying to harness that (again) and just win those small moments.

"Reflecting on the couple of semi-finals that we lost (in 2024 and 2025), when a player got going, we just found it really hard to pull back and whether that comes down to skills, I don't think so.

"When we've had our backs up against the wall and we've won those games, we've just won those small moments, so it's probably just trying to do that for longer periods of time."



MARKET

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	
74,207.24	-3.26%		23,002.15	-3.26%		21,225.80	-3.16%		63,573.80	-3.19%		23,651.95	-3.25%		53,451.00	-3.39%		54,492.30	-3.19%	
Previous close	Open		Previous close	Open		Previous close	Open		Previous close	Open		Previous close	Open		Previous close	Open		Previous close	Open	
76,704.13	74,750.92		23,777.80	23,197.75		21,917.40	21,466.40		65,668.50	64,706.75		24,446.45	23,890.10		55,326.05	53,474.55		56,289.85	55,391.20	
High	Low		High	Low		High	Low		High	Low		High	Low		High	Low		High	Low	
75,354.18	73,950.95		23,378.70	22,930.35		21,562.80	21,156.20		64,706.75	63,319.75		24,043.40	23,575.15		54,150.30	53,240.60		55,419.85	54,253.70	

Top Gainers

Company	Current	% Gain
ONGC	269.10	1.55
Eternal	242.54	3.37
Tech Mahindra	1,385.20	3.23
Infosys	1,267.10	2.77
M&M	3,214.60	2.74

Top Losers

Company	Current	% Loss
Shriram Finance	949.80	-7.03
Eternal	228.74	-5.69
Bajaj Finance	832.20	-5.44
HDFC Bank	798.20	-5.32
M&M	3,045.40	-5.26

Commodities

Commodity	Price	Change (%)
Gold Apr 02	145,123.00	-7,902.00 -5.16
Silver May 05	227,200.00	-20,994.00 -8.46
Crudeoil Apr 20	9,055.00	62.00 0.69
Naturalgas Mar 26	303.10	19.80 6.99

Stock markets dive over 3% as boiling crude oil prices, weak global trends weigh on sentiments

Mumbai : Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty plummeted by over 3 per cent on Thursday as a sharp jump in crude oil prices and weak global trends, amid escalating strikes on energy infrastructure in West Asia, unnerved investors. The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 2,496.89 points or 3.26 per cent - its biggest single-day plunge since June 2024 -- to settle at 74,207.24. During the day, it dived 2,753.18 points or 3.58 per cent to 73,950.95.

The 50-share NSE Nifty tumbled 775.65 points or 3.26 per cent to end at 23,002.15.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Eternal, Bajaj Finance, Mahindra & Mahindra, HDFC Bank, Larsen & Toubro and Bajaj Finserv were among the major laggards.

HDFC Bank dropped 5.13 per cent after its chairman, Atanu Chakraborty, resigned, citing ethical concerns. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, soared 6.75 per cent to USD 114.8 per barrel after Iran



attacked a key natural gas facility in Qatar as well as two oil refineries in Kuwait.

Iran intensified its attacks on its Gulf Arab neighbours' energy sites on Thursday, hitting a Saudi refinery on the Red Sea and setting Qatari LNG facilities and two Kuwaiti oil refineries ablaze as it struck back fol-

lowing an Israeli attack on its main natural gas field.

In Asian markets, South Korea's benchmark Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended significantly lower.

Markets in Europe were trading with deep losses. The

US market ended sharply lower on Wednesday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,714.35 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs), however, bought stocks worth Rs 3,253.03 crore.

Mankind Pharma acquires Rivortril Brand for India

Hyderabad: Mankind Pharma Limited on Wednesday announced the acquisition of the Rivortril brand from Roche for the Indian market, securing exclusive rights to manufacture, market, and distribute the product across the country. Rivortril, the original innovator brand of clonazepam, is widely prescribed for a range of neurological and psychiatric conditions. Over the years, it has built a strong clinical reputation and is often regarded as a "textbook" brand among specialists due to its reliability and long-standing usage. The acquisition marks a strategic move by Mankind Pharma Limited to strengthen its foothold in the (CNS) therapy segment, an area witnessing steady growth driven by rising awareness and diagnosis of mental health and neurological disorders. The company stated that the deal aligns with its broader vision of expanding into chronic and specialty therapies, which

are increasingly contributing a larger share to its overall business. This shift reflects evolving healthcare needs and a growing demand for long-term treatment solutions. In recent years, Mankind Pharma has been actively enhancing its portfolio through new product launches, in-licensing agreements, and targeted acquisitions across key therapeutic areas. The addition of Rivortril is expected to complement these efforts. Senior President, Sales and Marketing, Atish Majumdar highlighted that the acquisition would significantly deepen the company's presence in CNS therapies. He also pointed to the potential for future growth through line extensions and expanded offerings tailored to patient and physician needs. The CNS segment, which includes treatments for conditions such as anxiety, epilepsy, and sleep disorders, remains a critical area for pharmaceutical innovation.

Sunny Beaches Beer sells 12 lakh bottles in two months

Bengaluru: SOM Group of Companies has launched its premium beer brand "Sunny Beaches" in Karnataka, reporting strong early traction with sales of over 12 lakh bottles within two months of entry into the market.

The company said the brand, produced by its subsidiary Woodpecker Distilleries and Breweries, has captured over three per cent market share in the state within a short span, positioning itself as a fast-growing challenger in a segment traditionally dominated by legacy beer labels.

According to the company, Sunny Beaches recorded sales of more than 12 lakh bottles in February

2026 alone, with availability expanding across key markets including Bengaluru, Mangaluru, Mysuru and Belagavi. It is currently present in around 8,000 outlets such as bars, wine stores, social clubs and premium retail points.

The company attributed the rapid growth to a combination of pricing strategy, product positioning and consumer response.

The beer is priced at around Rs 100 for a 650 ml bottle, Rs 90 for a 500 ml can and Rs 65 for a 330 ml pint, targeting consumers seeking premium quality at relatively accessible price points.

Officials said repeat purchases, strong word-of-mouth and faster offtake at

retail outlets indicate sustained demand beyond initial trials.

A key feature of the product is a ready-to-serve chill indicator using thermochromic ink, which signals when the beer reaches an optimal serving temperature of 0-5 degrees Celsius.

Commenting on the launch, Chief Operating Officer Diwakaran Suryanarayana said the response from across Karnataka has validated the company's focus on taste, balance and drinkability, adding that the brand's acceptance reflects evolving consumer preferences towards quality home-grown offerings.

The company plans to expand distribution to

11,000-12,000 outlets during the upcoming summer season to further increase market penetration.

In addition to the premium lager, SOM Group has also introduced "Sunny Beaches Strong Premium Beer" to cater to the larger strong beer segment in Karnataka.

The variant is priced at Rs 105 for a 650 ml bottle, Rs 90 for a 500 ml can and Rs 70 for a 330 ml pint.

Headquartered in Bhopal, SOM Group of Companies manufactures a range of alcoholic beverages, including beer, spirits and ready-to-drink products, and has a presence across multiple states as well as select international markets.

Direct tax collections rise over 7pc in FY26; advance tax growth remains strong: Govt

New Delhi: India's direct tax collections have maintained a steady growth trajectory in the current financial year, reflecting resilience in revenue generation and improved compliance across sectors.

According to the latest official data, net direct tax collections for FY 2025-26 stood at ₹22,80,236.73 crore as of March 17, 2026, marking a growth of 7.19 per cent compared to ₹21,27,375.42 crore in the corresponding period last year.

Gross direct tax collections also recorded a healthy increase of 4.86 per cent, reaching ₹27,14,748.29 crore, indicating consistent inflows despite evolving economic conditions.

A major driver of this growth has been corporate tax collections, which continue to play a significant role in overall revenue performance.

Net corporate tax collections rose to ₹10,91,801.32 crore, up from ₹9,68,271.99 crore a year ago, highlighting improved profitability among

companies and stronger tax compliance.

Non-corporate tax collections, which include taxes paid by individuals, professionals, and other entities, also registered growth during the period.

These collections increased to ₹11,32,394.07 crore, reflecting a broad-based contribution from taxpayers outside the corporate sector.

One notable factor supporting higher net collections was a decline in refunds issued during the period.

Refunds fell by 5.86 per cent to ₹4,34,511.56 crore, compared to ₹4,61,573.72 crore in the previous year, thereby boosting the overall net tax figures.

Advance tax collections, which are an important indicator of expected income and economic activity, also showed positive momentum.

Total advance tax receipts grew by 6.42 per cent to ₹11,13,106.15 crore, underscoring confidence among tax-

payers and stable income expectations.

Within this segment, corporate advance tax collections witnessed a sharp rise of 9.54 per cent, reaching ₹8,29,877.61 crore.

This increase suggests improved earnings among companies as well as better compliance with advance tax obligations.

However, advance tax collections from non-corporate taxpayers showed a marginal decline of 1.78 per cent, standing at ₹2,83,228.54 crore.

This dip indicates some variation in income patterns or tax planning among individual taxpayers and non-corporate entities.

Overall, the data points to sustained strength in tax buoyancy, driven largely by corporate performance and efficient tax administration.

The steady rise in collections highlights the government's stable revenue position in the ongoing fiscal year, even as trends in individual tax contributions remain somewhat mixed.

RBI nod for Bain Capital's Rs 4,385 crore stake in Manappuram Finance



Thrissur: In a major development for its growth strategy, Manappuram Finance Ltd has secured all necessary regulatory approvals, including a crucial nod from the Reserve Bank of India, paving the way for global private equity firm Bain Capital to acquire joint control of the company and its subsidiaries.

The approvals granted by the RBI also extend to key subsidiaries such as Asirvad Micro Finance Limited (AMFL) and Manappuram Home Finance Limited (MHFL). This allows for an indirect change in ownership and management structure following Bain Capital's proposed investment through its affiliates.

With these clearances in place, the path has been opened for Bain Capital's planned investment of approximately ₹4,385 crore into Manappuram Finance. The transaction will also trigger a mandatory open offer in compliance with regulations laid down by the Securities and Exchange Board of India.

Both parties are aiming to complete the capital infusion by March 31, 2026, while the open offer will proceed as per the regulatory timelines specified under takeover norms.

Following the completion of the transaction, Bain Capital is expected to hold a stake ranging between 18 per cent and 41.66 per cent on a fully diluted basis, depending on the level of subscription to the open offer.

Despite the stake dilution, the existing promoters of Manappuram Finance will retain a significant holding of 28.9 per cent, ensuring continued involvement in the company's operations and governance.

As part of the agreement, Bain Capital will be designated as a promoter and will share joint control of the company alongside the current promoters.

The governance structure will also see changes, with the boards of Manappuram Finance and its subsidiaries being reconstituted to include nominee directors from Bain Capital.

India's outward FDI falls to USD 2.76 bln in Feb: RBI Data

New Delhi: India's outward foreign direct investment (FDI) declined to USD 2.76 billion in February 2026, down from USD 4.30 billion in the same month last year, according to data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). On a sequential basis, outbound FDI also slipped from nearly USD 3.60 billion recorded in January 2026.

Outbound FDI, measured as financial commitment, comprises three components—equity, loans, and guarantees. Among these, equity commitments saw a sharp moderation, falling to USD 1.11 billion in February from USD 2.61 billion a year ago. Month-on-month, equity flows also declined from USD 1.71 billion in January.

Debt disbursements in the form of loans dropped to USD 714.30 million in February 2026, compared with

USD 803.08 million in the corresponding period last year. However, they were higher than USD 424.51 million recorded in January. Meanwhile, guarantees issued by Indian firms stood at USD 936.93 million in February, lower than USD 1.46 billion in the previous month, though slightly higher than USD 891.83 million in February 2025.

Data on major overseas commitments showed that Anupam Rasayan India Ltd led activity with guarantees worth USD 200 million extended to Batam S.A.R.L., its joint venture in Luxembourg. The company also committed an additional USD 25 million in guarantees to Doriath S.A.R.L., its wholly owned subsidiary in the same jurisdiction.

In the financial sector, Power Finance Corporation Ltd announced an equity in-

fusion of USD 44.24 million into its wholly owned subsidiary, PFC Infra Finance IFSC Ltd, based in IFSC GIFT City.

Real estate firm Sunteck Realty Ltd committed guarantees worth USD 21.25 million for its Mauritius-based subsidiary, Sunteck Lifestyle International.

In the energy space, Oil India Ltd extended loans amounting to USD 21.15 million to Beas Rovuma Energy Mozambique Ltd, its wholly owned subsidiary incorporated in the British Virgin Islands.

The decline in outbound FDI reflects moderation in overseas expansion by Indian companies amid evolving global and domestic economic conditions, even as select firms continue to invest strategically in subsidiaries and joint ventures abroad.

Tata Chairman Natarajan Chandrasekaran awarded honorary knighthood for boosting UK-India business ties

New Delhi: Natarajan Chandrasekaran, Chairman of the Tata Group, has been presented with the insignia of the Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (KBE) in recognition of his services to UK-India business relations.

The honour was conferred on March 18 at the British High Commissioner's residence in New Delhi in the presence of his friends and family.

According to a statement from the British High Commission, the Tata Group is a long-standing investor in the United Kingdom, with operations spanning the automotive, steel, technology, and consumer sectors. The conglomerate has played a significant role in supporting UK employment, advancing manufacturing capabilities, and contributing to the transition towards clean technologies.

British High Commissioner to India Lindy Cameron praised Chandrasekaran's leadership, describing him as a "friend of the UK" and an "iconic figure in India's corporate world."

She said his honorary knighthood reflects his impact on global business and his efforts in strengthening economic ties between the two countries.

"Tata Group is among the biggest Indian employers in the UK, with 19 subsidiaries based there," Cameron noted, highlighting the group's deep commercial footprint in the country.

Accepting the honour, Chandrasekaran expressed gratitude to His Majesty King Charles III and dedicated the recognition to Tata Group employees worldwide.

"I humbly accept this honour from His Majesty,

King Charles III. This honour is not mine alone. It belongs equally to all colleagues in the Tata Group," he said, adding that with over 70,000 employees, the Tata Group has shared a strong and enduring relationship with the United Kingdom across technology, consumer, hospitality, steel, chemicals, and automotive sectors, as well as iconic British brands like JLR and Tetley.

He further reaffirmed Tata Group's commitment to continued investment in the UK, including Jaguar Land Rover's transition to electric mobility, advancements in battery technology, green steel production, and strengthening innovation ecosystems.

"Our resolve is to deepen the partnership, to build, to serve, and to create a future of shared prosperity between the UK, India and Tata Group," he added.

HDFC Bank Chairman Atanu Chakraborty resigns citing concerns over 'certain happenings and practices'

New Delhi: In a significant development, the HDFC Bank part-time chairman and independent director, Atanu Chakraborty, has resigned from his position citing concerns over "certain happenings and practices" at the bank. He said the certain happenings were not aligned with his personal values and ethics.

In his resignation letter,

Chakraborty wrote, "Developments over the past two years were not in congruence with my personal values and ethics", which led him to step down with immediate effect. He also clarified that there were no other reasons behind his decision. Reacting to the development, the stocks of HDFC Bank faced one of the biggest hits. Its share price opened 8.7 per cent down at

after the resignation of Chairman Atanu Chakraborty, and the development made investors jittery about management stability. The recovered quickly from the opening lows as it was trading 4.23 per cent down around 10 am. In his resignation letter, Chakraborty thanked the board and management for their support, and also



praised the energy and verve of the bank's middle and ju-

nior-level employees, saying they could help build a reimagined organisation. On the crisis, the management of HDFC Bank has emphasised that its board oversight remains fully operational and unwavering. Further, the CEO of HDFC Bank, Sashidhar Jagdishan said the bank will continue to maintain stakeholder trust and address any issues or omissions

as they arise. Chakraborty had joined the HDFC Bank board in May 2021 and was part of a key phase in the bank's journey. He was also pivotal in the bank's merger with HDFC Ltd. The Reserve Bank of India has approved the appointment of Keki Mistry as interim part-time chairman for three months starting March 19, 2026.