

# Aryan Age

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## Military conflict cannot resolve issues

### India, Finland back peace efforts in Ukraine and West Asia, says PM Modi

**New Delhi:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said India and Finland agree that military conflict alone cannot resolve global disputes and reiterated their support for efforts aimed at bringing peace to regions affected by war, including Ukraine and West Asia.

Addressing a joint press meet with Finnish President Alexander Stubb during his visit to India, Modi said both countries shared a commitment to dialogue, diplomacy and the rule of law while calling for an early end to ongoing conflicts.

"India and Finland both believe in the rule of law, dialogue and diplomacy. We agree that military conflict alone cannot resolve any issue," Modi said. "Whether it is Ukraine or West Asia, we will continue to support every effort aimed at bringing a swift end to the conflict and achieving peace."

Welcoming Stubb on his first

visit to India as Finland's President, Modi described him as "a well-known global leader" and "a respected thinker and author," adding that it was an honour for India that the Finnish leader was the chief guest at this year's Raisina Dialogue.

The Prime Minister said the world was currently passing through a period of instability and uncertainty, with conflicts continuing in several regions. "From Ukraine to West Asia, many parts of the world are witnessing conflict. In such a global environment, India and Europe, two major diplomatic powers, are entering a golden phase of their relationship," he said, adding that military conflict alone cannot resolve any issue.

Highlighting economic ties, Modi referred to the recently concluded India-European union Free Trade Agreement earlier this

year, calling it a historic development that would further strengthen trade, investment and technology collaboration between India and Finland.

"At the beginning of 2026, a historic India-European union Free Trade Agreement was concluded. This agreement will further strengthen trade, investment and technology cooperation between India and Finland," he said.

The Prime Minister said the two countries were working to elevate bilateral ties into a future-oriented partnership focused on emerging technologies and sustainability. "We are shaping India-Finland relations into a strategic partnership in digitalisation and sustainability," Modi said. "This partnership will accelerate and energise our cooperation in several high-tech sectors, ranging from AI to 6G telecom, and from clean energy to quantum computing."

He also highlighted existing cooperation between the two countries in technology and infrastructure. Modi noted that



telecom equipment and mobile devices produced by Finnish company Nokia had connected millions of Indians, while Finnish architects had contributed to the construction of the world's highest railway bridge over the Chenab River. He added that Finland had partnered with India

in setting up the world's largest bamboo-to-bioethanol refinery at Numaligarh.

According to Modi,



cooperation between the two countries will also deepen in sectors such as defence, space, semiconductors and critical minerals. He said the partnership between two democratic and responsible countries would contribute to building trustworthy technology ecosystems and

resilient global supply chains.

The Prime Minister also announced a comprehensive Migration and Mobility Agreement aimed at strengthening links between the innovation ecosystems of the two countries and facilitating opportunities for students and skilled professionals. Finland, he said, was increasingly becoming a preferred destination for Indian students and talent.

"Finland is a role model in the field of education. Today we also agreed to expand cooperation in teacher training, school-to-school partnerships and research on the future of education," Modi said, adding that collaboration would span from schools to industry to strengthen human development.

Modi described Finland as an important partner for India in the Nordic region and said the two countries were expanding cooperation in Arctic and polar research. He also announced that India would host the World

Circular Economy Forum this year in partnership with Finland, which he said would generate new ideas and momentum for sustainability initiatives.

Referring to the growing global challenges, Modi emphasised the need for reforms in international institutions and collective efforts to address threats such as terrorism. "We also agree that reform of global institutions is not only necessary but urgent to address growing global challenges. Eliminating terrorism in all its forms is our shared commitment," he said.

In a lighter remark, Modi referred to Stubb's participation in the Ironman Triathlon and said the two countries could achieve a new "triathlon" of innovation, digitalisation and sustainability through their partnership.

"Let us begin a new golden chapter in this futuristic partnership between India and Finland," the Prime Minister said.

### BMC Elects Chairpersons for 6 Ward Committees; BJP, Congress and Shiv Sena Win Posts



**Mumbai:** Elections for the chairperson posts of 6 out of the 17 ward committees of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) for the year 2026-2027 were held on March 5, 2026. In three committees, only one nomination was received and the candidates were elected unopposed, while voting was held in the remaining three committees where more than one nomination was filed.

In the election for the chairperson of the 'C' and 'D' ward committees, Bharatiya Janata Party candidate Akash Raj Purohit was elected unopposed as he was the only person to file a nomination.

In the election for the chairperson of the 'R Central' and 'R North' ward committees, Bharatiya Janata Party candidate Prakash Yashwant Darekar was also elected unopposed because his was the only nomination received.

Similarly, in the election for the chairperson of the 'R South' ward committee, Bharatiya Janata Party candidate Leena Patel-Deherkar was elected unopposed.

In the election for the chairperson posts of the 'A', 'B' and 'E' ward committees, Indian National Congress candidate Gyanraj Nikam won the election. Nikam received 7 votes, while his opponent Rohidas Lokhande

from the Bharatiya Janata Party received 5 votes.

In the election for the chairperson of the 'F South' and 'F North' ward committees, Shiv Sena candidate Mansi Mangesh Satamkar won with 8 votes. Her opponent Shradha Shridhar Jadhav from the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) party received 7 votes. Members from the Indian National Congress and the Samajwadi Party were absent during this election.

In the election for the chairperson of the 'P East' and 'P West' ward committees, Indian National Congress candidate Haiderali Aslam Sheikh won the election with 10 votes. His opponent Ajit Balkrishna Rawrane from the Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar faction) received 8 votes.

The elections for the chairperson posts of the 'A', 'B' and 'E'; 'C' and 'D'; and 'F South' and 'F North' ward committees were conducted under the supervision of Mayor Ritu Tawde as the presiding officer.

The elections for the chairperson posts of the 'R Central' and 'R North'; 'R South'; and 'P East' and 'P West' ward committees were conducted under the supervision of Deputy Mayor Sanjay Ghadi as the presiding officer.

## Seven File Nominations For RS Polls From Maharashtra

**Mumbai:** Political activity intensified in Maharashtra on Thursday as seven candidates submitted their nomination papers for the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections from the state at the Vidhan Bhavan in Mumbai.

Six candidates have been fielded by the ruling Mahayuti alliance, while one nominee represents the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi. The filing process concluded at 3 pm on the final day for submission of nominations.

Among the prominent candidates are Union Minister of State for Social Justice Ramdas Athawale and Bharatiya Janata Party leader Vinod Tawde. Veteran leader Sharad Pawar has entered the contest as the joint candidate of the Maha Vikas Aghadi alliance.

The BJP has nominated four candidates for the election — Vinod Tawde, Ramdas Athawale, former Nagpur mayor Maya Chintaman Ivnate and former Nationalist Congress Party MLC Ramrao Wadkute. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis accompanied the party nominees while filing their papers.

Vinod Tawde previously

served as Maharashtra's education minister after winning the 2014 assembly election. Though he did not contest the 2019 polls, he later moved to an



important organisational role as the BJP's national general secretary.

Ramrao Wadkute, who earlier had close ties with Sharad Pawar during his time in the undivided Nationalist Congress Party, represents the Hatkar community from the Marathwada region. He had entered the legislative council earlier with Pawar's support before joining the BJP.

Maya Chintaman Ivnate, another BJP nominee, previously served as the mayor of Nagpur and is recognised as the city's first mayor from a tribal



background.

From the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, party spokesperson Jyoti Waghmare has been nominated for the Rajya Sabha. Her selection came amid speculation that former Lok Sabha MP Rahul Shewale might receive the ticket.

The Nationalist Congress Party faction led by Ajit Pawar has nominated his son Parth Pawar as its candidate for the

Upper House.

Meanwhile, 85-year-old Sharad Pawar filed his nomination as the joint candidate of the Maha Vikas Aghadi after the Congress formally extended support. The announcement was made by AICC general secretary Ramesh Chennithala following discussions within the opposition alliance.

Voting for the seven Rajya Sabha seats from Maharashtra will be held on March 16 between 9 am and 4 pm, with counting scheduled later the same evening.

Members of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly will vote through the system of proportional representation using a single transferable vote. Based on current numbers in the assembly, the ruling Mahayuti alliance is expected to win six of the seven seats, while the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi is likely to secure one seat unless cross-voting changes the outcome.

The elections form part of a nationwide exercise announced by the Election Commission of India for 37 Rajya Sabha seats across ten states.

### Amid speculation, Nitish Kumar expresses desire to enter Rajya Sabha

**Patna:** Amid growing political speculation about his possible move to the Rajya Sabha, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday expressed his desire to become a member of the Rajya Sabha in the upcoming election.

In a message shared on social media account X, Kumar said that for more than two decades, people have consistently placed their trust and support in him, which enabled him to serve Bihar with dedication. He said that the faith of the people has been the driving force behind the state's progress and growing sense of dignity.

The Chief Minister said in the message that it had been his long-standing wish since the beginning of his parliamentary career to become a member of both Houses of the Bihar Legislature as well as both Houses of Parliament. In this context, he indicated that he now wishes to enter Rajya Sabha in the election being held this time.

Kumar also reassured the people that his relationship with them would remain strong in the future as well. He said he would continue to work with them towards the goal of building a developed Bihar.

He further stated that the new government that will be formed in the state will receive his full cooperation and guidance.

As it is, Kumar's statement comes at a time when political circles in Bihar are abuzz with speculation about a possible shift in his political role, particularly in connection with the forthcoming Rajya Sabha elections.

## Raut Claims Nitish's RS Move Proves His Prediction

**Mumbai:** Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut on Thursday reacted to Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's decision to move to the Rajya Sabha, saying the development supports his earlier claim that Kumar would remain in office only for a short period.

Speaking to reporters, Raut said he had predicted soon after the election results that Nitish Kumar would serve as Chief Minister only

for a few months. According to him, the latest development appears to confirm that assessment.

Raut alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party may now be preparing to install one of its own leaders as the next Chief Minister of Bihar. He described the development as part of the ruling alliance's internal political strategy.

He also referred to discussions suggesting that



Kumar's family members could be accommodated in the state government. Raut claimed that there are talks about Nitish Kumar's son



potentially being appointed as Deputy Chief Minister.

During his remarks, the Shiv Sena leader also mentioned concerns about

Kumar's health. He suggested that the veteran politician's medical condition might have influenced the decision to shift him to the Upper House of Parliament.

According to Raut, leading a large state like Bihar requires strong health and constant engagement with governance. He said a Chief Minister must be in a position to protect the interests of both the state and the country.

At the same time, he added that the decision ultimately remains a matter for the ruling alliance in Bihar. Political parties have their own methods of making leadership decisions, he said.

Nitish Kumar filed his nomination papers for the Rajya Sabha on Thursday. His move to the Upper House has been widely interpreted as a possible step toward changes in the state's political leadership.

## Shiv Sena nominates Prof Jyoti Waghmare for Rajya Sabha; Sharad Pawar set to be elected unopposed

**Mumbai:** Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and Shiv Sena leader Eknath Shinde on Thursday nominated Prof Jyoti Waghmare as the party's candidate for the forthcoming Rajya Sabha elections from Maharashtra, representing the BJP-led Mahayuti ruling alliance. Thursday marked the last day for filing nominations.

Earlier in the day, Shinde had sparked political speculation by indicating that the Shiv Sena might field two candidates - Prof Jyoti Waghmare and Rohit Tilak, the great-grandson of freedom fighter Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak - in an apparent attempt to

challenge the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi's (MVA) lone candidate, NCP founder Sharad Pawar.

However, in a last-minute change of strategy, only Professor Waghmare filed her nomination papers at the Vidhan Bhavan. Rohit Tilak did not submit his candidature, effectively clearing the path for Sharad Pawar's unopposed election to the Upper House.

With this development, the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance has now fielded six candidates for the Rajya Sabha polls. The Bharatiya Janata Party has nominated four candidates, while the Ajit Pawar-

led Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) has fielded Parth Pawar, son of Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar. The Shiv Sena's sole nominee is Prof Jyoti Waghmare.

The Mahayuti had announced its nominees a day earlier, including Vinod Tawde, Maya Chintaman Ivnate, Ramrao Wadkute and Republican Party of India president and union Minister of State Ramdas Athawale alongside Parth Pawar.

Scrutiny of nomination papers will take place on Friday, while March 9 is the last date for withdrawal of candidature. The Rajya Sabha election is scheduled

for March 16, with voting from 9 am to 4 pm. Results will be declared later the same evening.

Political observers noted that Shinde had explored the possibility of fielding an additional candidate against Sharad Pawar, banking on surplus votes within the ruling alliance.

The Shiv Sena reportedly had around 20 additional MLA votes, while the Ajit Pawar-led NCP had three extra votes, potentially enabling a contest. Nevertheless, the plan was abandoned at the final stage.

Professor Jyoti Waghmare, Shinde's nominee, has roots in the Ambedkarite movement and

holds a PhD in English literature. Fluent in Marathi and Telugu, she resigned from her professorship in Solapur to enter active politics.

She previously served as president of the Solapur City Mahila Congress in 2014 before joining the Shinde-led Shiv Sena in 2022, where she was later appointed the party's Maharashtra state spokesperson.

Meanwhile, Sharad Pawar filed his nomination as the MVA candidate on Thursday but could not appear in person due to health concerns. In an unprecedented move, election officials visited his South Mumbai residence, 'Silver Oak', to complete the required

formalities.

The procedure was carried out in accordance with a 1968 Supreme Court ruling in the Pashupatinath vs Harihar Prasad Singh case, which allows nomination filing through authorised procedures if a candidate is unable to be physically present due to valid reasons, including health issues.

Following medical certification by JJ Hospital Superintendent Dr Sanjay Suravase, Pawar's proposer Jayant Patil submitted the nomination documents to the Election Officer at the Maharashtra Legislative



Assembly. Senior leaders of the Maha Vikas Aghadi were present during the filing process, including Supriya Sule, Sanjay Raut, Jayant Patil, Rohit Pawar, Maharashtra Congress president Harshvardhan Sapkal and Congress leader Vijay Wadetiwar. However, the absence of Aadiya Thackeray from the occasion triggered political speculation.

## KTR alleges 'conspiracy' behind Musi project, warns against demolition of poor people's houses

**Hyderabad:** Bharat Rashtia Samithi (BRS) Working President K T Rama Rao on Thursday inspected areas along the Musi River that were developed during the previous BRS government and interacted with families who claim they may lose their homes under the Congress government's proposed Musi development plan.

Speaking to the media after the visit, KTR said the Musi river could be beautified without demolishing houses or displacing poor families.

He stated that during the BRS regime the riverfront was developed in areas such as Nagole without damaging a single house.

Alleging that the present government was planning



large-scale demolitions, KTR claimed that nearly 1.5 lakh houses were under threat in the name of the Musi project. He accused the Congress government of

marking houses with red signs and creating fear among residents living along the river.

KTR further alleged that the project cost was being

inflated from Rs 16,000 crore to around Rs 1.5 lakh crore and warned of a possible large-scale corruption attempt in the name of river development. "Musi is not

beautification... it is turning into luteification," he remarked.

The BRS leader said his party supports the development of the Musi but strongly opposes the demolition of houses belonging to the poor. He warned that the party would resist any attempt to use bulldozers on people's homes and said the issue would be raised in the Assembly.

KTR also alleged that the government was preparing to proceed with demolitions without a Detailed Project Report (DPR) and criticised the Congress for failing to reassure affected families. "If corruption is carried out by demolishing the houses of the poor, we will definitely stop it," he said.

## Mamata assures Matua community of protection amid voter list concerns on Boroma's death anniversary

**Kolkata:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday, on the death anniversary of Binapani Devi, popularly known as Boroma, assured the Matua community that her government would not allow any injustice against them and would fight attempts to deprive them of their rights.

The chief minister, while paying tribute to Boroma through a social media post, also accused the BJP-led central government of creating confusion and uncertainty among Matua voters by allegedly removing their names from the electoral rolls during the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR).

Her remarks come amid allegations that nearly 63 lakhs names have been deleted from the final voter list released recently by the Election Commission, with several people from the Matua community in districts such as North 24 Parganas and Nadia reportedly affected.

Many names have also been placed in the "under consideration" category, triggering anxiety among community members over their citizenship status.

In her message, Banerjee paid rich tribute to Boroma and highlighted the contribution of the Matua Mahasangha to social reform in Bengal.

Referring to the legacy of Harichand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur, she said the movement led by them played a key role in protecting the rights of Dalits and marginalised people and in promoting education and an egalitarian society.

"Following the path shown by Harichand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur, the Matua Mahasangha has been an inseparable part of Bengal's social reform and renaissance. Boroma cherished these ideals throughout



her life and under her leadership the organisation became a pillar of social equality and brotherhood," Banerjee wrote.

The chief minister also recalled her personal bond with Boroma, saying, "My relationship with Boroma was personal and spiritual. I received her motherly affection closely — that is one of the greatest blessings of my life. Whenever she called me for any need, including medical treatment, I rushed to her. It is a matter of pride that our government honoured her with the state's highest award, Banga Bibhushan, for her immense social contribution."

Banerjee also listed several welfare and development initiatives undertaken by the state government for the Matua community, including the formation of the Matua Development Board and the Namasudra Development Board.

She noted that a government holiday had been declared on the birth anniversary of Harichand Thakur.

The chief minister further mentioned the establishment of the Harichand-Guruchand University at Thakurnagar and the upcoming extension campus at Krishnanagar, along with the P.R. Thakur Government College at Gaighata.

She also highlighted infrastructure projects such as the Jaltripti drinking water project, bridges over the

Ichamati river and Baldenghata canal, as well as new IIT and Polytechnic colleges and a farmers' mandi in Gaighata. According to her, Thakurnagar has also undergone major development.

However, Banerjee strongly criticised the alleged deletion of Matua voters' names from the electoral rolls.

"It is extremely unfortunate that due to the conspiracy of the BJP-led central government, our Matua brothers and sisters have been pushed into a situation of instability and confusion. Politics is being played in the name of granting citizenship, and even their identity is being questioned," she said.

She further alleged that the SIR process was being used to deliberately remove their names from the voter list.

"Those who have been citizens of this country for generations, whose votes elect governments, are now being pushed into uncertainty in the name of granting them citizenship again," she said.

The chief minister asserted that such actions would not be accepted. "We will not accept this injustice. Our struggle will continue against any attempt to snatch away the rights of my Matua brothers and sisters and the people of Bengal. We will not allow any harm to come to the people of Bengal," she added.

## Nitish files nomination for Rajya Sabha, ending speculation

**Patna:** Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday filed his nomination papers for the biennial elections to the Rajya Sabha, putting an end to speculation about whether he would step down from the chief minister's post to enter Parliament as a member of the Upper House. The development had sparked political discussion in recent days, with several observers speculating that Kumar might shift to national politics. However, his decision to file the nomination while continuing as chief minister clarified that he would remain actively involved in the state's governance. Along with Kumar, several leaders from the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) also submitted their nominations for the Rajya Sabha elections from Bihar. The candidates included JD(U) leader and sitting Rajya Sabha member Ramnath Thakur, Bihar BJP president Nitin Nabin, BJP leader Shivesh Kumar and Upendra Kushwaha. The NDA leaders arrived together at the Bihar Legislative Assembly complex in Patna to complete the nomination process. The event was marked by the presence of several senior leaders from the alliance, reflecting the importance the coalition attaches to the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections. Union Home Minister Amit Shah also accompanied the candidates during the filing of nominations. His presence underscored the BJP's strong support for the NDA candidates in Bihar and highlighted the coordination within the alliance. After reaching the assembly premises, Kumar and the other candidates completed the required procedural formalities before submitting their nomination papers to the returning officer. Following the completion of documentation and verification steps, Kumar and the four other NDA nominees officially filed their papers to contest the Rajya Sabha elections from the state. The biennial Rajya Sabha elections are being held as the terms of several sitting members from Bihar are set to expire next month.

## Karnataka heading for bankruptcy due to Congress guarantees: Vijayendra

**Hubballi:** Karnataka BJP president B. Y. Vijayendra on Thursday alleged that the Congress government in the state was facing a severe financial crisis and struggling to mobilise adequate resources to fulfil its poll promises, particularly the five guarantee schemes announced ahead of the assembly elections. He claimed that the financial burden of these schemes had pushed the state government into a difficult fiscal position.

Targeting the government led by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Vijayendra said the repeated increase in the prices of fuel, essential commodities and electricity reflected the financial strain faced by the administration. According to him, the government's inability to generate additional revenue had



forced it to resort to price hikes affecting the common public.

Speaking to reporters in Hubballi-Dharwad, Vijayendra said the Congress government was finding it increasingly difficult to meet the commitments it had made to the people during the election campaign. He argued that the ruling party had made ambitious promises without clearly outlining

sustainable financial plans to support them.

"The Congress government headed by CM Siddaramaiah is unable to raise the resources to fulfil its promises. Because of this, over the last three years, the chief minister has repeatedly gone back to price hikes," Vijayendra said while addressing the media.

He pointed out that the

government had first increased the prices of petrol and diesel, which directly impacted transportation costs and triggered a ripple effect on the prices of other goods and services across the state.

According to Vijayendra, the rise in fuel prices was followed by an increase in the prices of essential commodities, which placed additional financial pressure on households, particularly those belonging to middle- and lower-income groups.

"It started with petrol and diesel prices. Then essential commodities — those prices were also hiked. And now electricity prices have also been increased," he said, adding that these measures were clear indicators of the state government's fiscal difficulties.

## Partial curbs continue in parts of Kashmir for fourth day over Khamenei killing protests

**Srinagar:** Partial restrictions on the movement of people and public assembly continued in several parts of Kashmir for the fourth consecutive day on Thursday as authorities sought to prevent further protests over the reported killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. The curbs were imposed on Monday, a day after large protests erupted in various areas of the Kashmir Valley following reports that Khamenei had been killed in joint strikes carried out by the United States and Israel. The demonstrations drew hundreds of people in several locations, prompting the administration to impose restrictions to maintain law and order.

Officials said that while the restrictions were not a complete lockdown, movement in sensitive areas was being regulated to prevent large gatherings and possible clashes between protesters and security forces.

Despite these measures, sporadic protests have been reported from different localities over the past three days.

In some places, small groups of demonstrators assembled to express their an-

ger over the developments, raising slogans and calling for protests.

Minor clashes between protesters and security personnel were also reported during this period. According to officials, several individuals sustained injuries during these confrontations, including a few members of the security forces deployed in the region.

Authorities said that partial restrictions remained in place in certain sensitive areas on Thursday as a precautionary measure. Security officials are closely monitoring the situation to ensure that protests do not escalate into widespread unrest.

Mobile internet services also continue to remain temporarily suspended in parts of the Valley. Officials said the step was taken to prevent the spread of rumours and inflammatory content on social media that could potentially trigger further protests.

A heavy deployment of police and paramilitary forces has been maintained in many parts of Kashmir. Personnel from the Central Reserve Police Force have been stationed in several key locations to assist the local police in maintaining order.

## Minor apprehended within 36 hours in birthday party firing case in Lucknow

**Lucknow:** In a swift breakthrough, the Uttar Pradesh Police have solved a firing incident that occurred during a birthday party within 36 hours of the crime by taking a minor into protective custody.

The minor in conflict with the law has been sent to a juvenile reform home today. According to official information, on March 3, a written complaint was filed by Jamir Khan, a resident of Behsa village under Amausi Airport area in Sarojini Nagar, Lucknow. Based on the complaint, a case (Crime No. 100/2026) was registered at Krishnanagar Police Station under relevant sections 103(1), 351(2), and 3(5) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. Considering the seriousness of the incident, two police teams were immediately constituted under the direction of the Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) and the supervision of senior officers including the Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police and the Assistant Commissioner of Police, Krishnanagar. The teams conducted a thorough inspection of the crime scene with the assistance of foren-

sic experts. Electronic evidence and other physical clues were carefully collected and preserved.

Based on electronic evidence, detailed investigation, and technical analysis, the police identified and apprehended a minor involved in the incident today. After completing the necessary legal formalities, the minor was produced before the competent authority and subsequently sent to a juvenile reform home for further proceedings. Further investigation in the matter is ongoing. It may be mentioned that a 13-year-old boy died after being shot during a birthday gathering in Lucknow on Monday. Police have registered a case in connection with the incident on Tuesday.

The accused is reportedly a minor and said to be related to Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Brijesh Pathak. The accused minor went to pick up his friend, identified as Unaiz, from his home around 3:30 pm to celebrate his birthday. Two other friends and a driver were also in the car. Investigators said the group parked the vehicle outside the accused's residence and began cele-

brating inside the car when a bullet was fired, hitting Unaiz in the middle of his forehead. The injured boy was rushed to Lokbandhu Hospital by the driver and the three minors, where doctors declared him dead. The victim's father, Jameer Khan, has filed an FIR (first information report) alleging murder. The revolver used in the incident is reportedly licensed in the name of Sanjeev Tripathi, a businessman who is said to be brother-in-law of Deputy CM Brijesh Pathak. The accused boy's uncle, Guddu Tripathi, is a former Member of the Legislative Council (MLC).

Jameer Khan has alleged that the shooting was not accidental. He claimed that the bullet was fired at close range and suggested that his son may have been restrained before being shot. He also alleged that Sanjeev Tripathi had previously threatened him during a parent-teacher meeting. On Tuesday, RK Chaudhary, Member of Parliament from Mohanlalgarh representing the Samajwadi Party, visited the family and said that if all accused were not arrested within two days, protests would be launched.

## Youth stabbed to death after dispute with neighbour in Lucknow

**Lucknow:** A shocking murder case has come to light from the Dubagga area of Lucknow, where a minor dispute between neighbours allegedly escalated into a violent attack that claimed the life of a 22-year-old man, police said on Thursday.

According to officials, the victim, identified as Suraj Gautam, was allegedly stabbed to death by a neighbour along with the neighbour's mother and sister following a heated argument. The incident has created panic in the locality and left the victim's family in deep shock.

The incident took place in the Begariya locality of Dubagga on Wednesday evening at around 5 pm. Residents said the situation quickly spiralled out of control after a verbal altercation between neighbours turned into a physical confrontation.

As per initial reports, Rajendra Gautam was standing outside his house and speaking with his neighbour Nishu when Mohit, who lives in the same village, arrived at the spot on a motorcycle. Police said Mohit alleg-

edly began abusing Rajendra and Nishu without any apparent provocation. When Rajendra objected to the abusive language, a heated argument broke out between the two men.

The argument soon escalated into a physical fight, drawing the attention of nearby residents. Hearing the commotion, Mohit's mother Ranjana and his sister Shivani rushed to the scene to intervene.

During the altercation, Rajendra's son Suraj Gautam stepped forward in an attempt to defend his father and calm the situation. However, the confrontation allegedly intensified instead of subsiding.

Police said Shivani then went inside her house and returned with a knife. It is alleged that she, along with her brother Mohit and their mother Ranjana, attacked Suraj during the scuffle.

According to the complaint, Shivani allegedly stabbed Suraj multiple times with the knife, leaving him seriously injured.

The brutal assault caused panic among family members and local residents who gathered at the scene.

## Nearly 4.5 lakh pending voter cases settled as EC scrutiny continues in Bengal

**Kolkata:** In the past five days, judicial officers tasked with examining cases of "logical discrepancies" in the electoral rolls have disposed of over 4.5 lakh disputed voter entries in West Bengal till Wednesday evening, raising concerns over the more than 56 lakh cases that still remain pending and need to be resolved in the coming days.

According to Election Commission sources, the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise has so far led to the deletion of nearly 63 lakh names from the voter list across the state.

The names were removed on various grounds, including death of voters, migration, prolonged absence, or duplication where the same person was found to be registered in more than

one location.

At present, 60,06,675 names remain under 'adjudication', meaning their eligibility is still being examined.

Judges assigned to the SIR process are scrutinising documents submitted by these voters before taking a final decision on whether their names should remain on the electoral rolls.

Sources said that till Wednesday evening, nearly 4.5 lakh such disputed entries had been disposed of.

However, with more than 56 lakh cases still pending, officials remain uncertain about how long the entire exercise will take to complete.

The Commission remains cautiously optimistic that the pace of disposal will increase soon.

To accelerate the pro-

cess, around 200 additional judges are being brought in from neighbouring states such as Bihar and Jharkhand.

Once they join the exercise, officials expect that the verification and adjudication work will gain momentum.

Despite these steps, there is still no clear estimate on the timeline for completing the scrutiny of the remaining cases.

Whether the process can be finished within the desired timeframe remains uncertain, and much attention is now focused on the next hearing of the case related to the SIR process in the Supreme Court on March 10.

During the hearing, the Election Commission is expected to present an update before the court, detailing how many disputed entries have been resolved so far,

how many remain pending, and the operational challenges as well as benefits of the process.

After the publication of the first-phase final electoral roll under the SIR exercise, it



has emerged that the highest number of voters under adjudication are in Murshidabad and Malda districts.

In Malda alone, the total number of voters in the pub-

lished roll stands at 29,86,203, of which 8,28,080 names are currently under scrutiny.

Compared with the progress made so far across the state, the number of

pending cases in Malda alone is nearly equivalent to half of the disputes already resolved statewide. Meanwhile, the Election Commission is also reviewing overall

poll preparedness in the state ahead of the forthcoming Assembly elections.

A virtual review meeting is scheduled to be held on Thursday at the office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO).

The review assumes significance as the full bench of the Election Commission is expected to visit West Bengal on March 9 and 10 to assess poll preparations.

During the visit, the Commission is likely to hold meetings with district magistrates, additional district magistrates, election officials, the state Director General of Police, the Additional Director General (Law and Order), the Kolkata Police Commissioner and other senior police officers. As per convention, the announcement of the Assembly elec-

tion schedule may follow within days of the Commission's return to New Delhi.

Earlier, the Commission had indicated that the election schedule could be announced even before the final electoral roll was completely published, in compliance with directions of the Supreme Court, though that did not eventually happen.

In a related development, the CEO's office has also decided to drop the plan for fresh booth rationalisation ahead of the polls.

Officials said the existing 80,681 polling booths across the state will remain unchanged, as the SIR exercise has not yet been completed. Even before the official announcement of poll dates, Central armed police forces have already begun

arriving in the state.

In several areas, personnel have started conducting route marches to instil confidence among voters and maintain law and order.

A total of 480 companies of Central forces (one company may have around 100 personnel) are expected to be deployed across West Bengal. Of these, 240 companies have already reached the state in the first phase, while another 240 companies are scheduled to arrive in the second week of March.

Sources said that in the initial phase, 12 companies of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) are expected to arrive in Kolkata from Chhattisgarh. Arrangements are being made to accommodate the personnel in various schools and colleges across the city.

# BJP consistently betrays alliance partners across States: Congress

**Mumbai** : Congress MLA Nana Patole on Thursday accused the Bharatiya Janata Party of repeatedly betraying its alliance partners in different states, citing recent political developments in Maharashtra and Bihar as examples of what he described as a pattern of political deception.

Speaking to reporters, Patole claimed that the BJP has consistently plotted against parties that contest elections alongside it and later sidelines their leaders after forming governments. He alleged that such political strategies have become a recurring feature of the party's functioning.

The Congress leader referred to the political situation in Maharashtra and said the state serves as a major example of this alleged trend. According to him, the assembly elections in the state were fought under the leadership of Eknath Shinde, but the outcome of the power arrangement after the elections was different from what many had expected.

Patole said that despite the alliance winning power, Shinde did not become the Chief Minister. Instead, he was made the Deputy Chief Minister, which Patole



claimed reflects how the BJP deals with its partners once the elections are over.

He further argued that the situation in Bihar also reflects a similar political pattern. Referring to the recent developments there, he said that the assembly elections in the state were fought under the leadership of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

According to Patole, the alliance secured victory in Bihar under Kumar's leadership, but the current political developments indicate that he is now being asked to move

to the Rajya Sabha.

He alleged that this move suggests the BJP may be preparing to shift leadership in the state government, reinforcing the Congress party's claims that the ruling party sidelines its allies after gaining power.

Patole said the BJP has consistently deceived partners who have contested elections with it, alleging that such behaviour has become a repeated political strategy.

The Congress party has intensified its criticism of the developments in Bihar, describing them as

a form of political manipulation that disregards the mandate given by voters.

Senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh also reacted strongly to the developments and claimed that the party had earlier warned about such a possibility during the Bihar election campaign.

Ramesh, who serves as the Congress general secretary in charge of communications, said recent events appear to confirm the concerns raised by the party during the elections.

In a message posted on the social media platform X, he described the developments as a leadership change engineered by powerful political forces.

He wrote that the Congress had repeatedly cautioned voters during the campaign that a leadership shift might occur after the elections.

According to Ramesh, what he termed a "leadership coup" and regime change has now taken place in Bihar.

He further claimed that such a move represents a major betrayal of the public mandate given during the elections.

Ramesh referred to the development as being orchestrated by

what he described as "G2", though he did not elaborate on the exact meaning of the term in his remarks.

The Congress leader's comments come amid intense political activity in Bihar, where speculation has increased following reports that Nitish Kumar has expressed interest in becoming a member of the Rajya Sabha.

The move has triggered discussions about possible leadership changes in the state government.

## Two youths arrested in Mumbai woman tourist harassment case

**Mumbai** : Police have arrested two youths for allegedly stalking, molesting and harassing a foreign woman traveller in central Mumbai after a video post of the victim went viral, officials said here today.

The accused, identified as 22-year-old Mansukhkumar Chandkishor Sharma and 20-year-old Gulshankumar Naresh Sharma, were arrested and later produced in the court which remanded them into police custody for three days.

Local Agripada police station has registered the offence after the video of the alleged incident came to its notice.

Based on the complaint, the police have

registered a case under Sections 74, 78(1)(p) and 3(5) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) Act. Multiple police teams were formed to trace the suspects. Investigators analysed the viral video, scanned CCTV footage from the area, and conducted local inquiries.

During the probe, police identified one of the accused as a construction worker employed at a site in the Malabar Hill area. Gulshankumar was taken into custody and was later arrested after his involvement in the offence was confirmed.

Meanwhile, the prime accused, Mansukhkumar, had allegedly fled to his native village in Bihar. A police team tracked

him down and arrested him.

## Varsha Usgaonkar, Mrinalini Jambhale duped of Rs 47 lakh; cheating case filed in Mumbai

**Mumbai** : A major fraud case has surfaced in Mumbai, where noted actresses Varsha Usgaonkar and Mrinalini Jambhale were allegedly cheated of nearly Rs 47 lakh.

The incident has created a stir in the film and theatre fraternity. A case has been registered at Shivaji Park Police Station, and an investigation is currently underway. Director and builder Avinash Jadhav has been booked on charges of cheating.

According to police sources, the complaint was filed by actress Mrinalini Jambhale, who has worked in Marathi theatre and

films. She reportedly had a professional acquaintance with Jadhav.

As per the complaint, Jadhav introduced himself as a film producer and builder and allegedly persuaded Jambhale and her associates to invest in a project in Dombivli, promising high returns. He also assured them that the principal amount would be returned within a year. Between November 2019 and February 2020, Jambhale, along with Varsha Usgaonkar and three others, invested a total of rupees 47 lakh through cheques and online transactions.

## Editorial

### Gulf War and the 'ordeal' of the economy

The horrific repercussions of the war that has broken out across West Asia after the US and Israel's brutal military attack on Iran are no longer limited to the borders. While missiles are raining down on the battlefield, the global economy and trade have been disrupted. Iran's retaliatory attacks on the Gulf countries that have American military bases for its defense and resistance have cast a shadow of instability over the entire region. The restrictions on air travel and threats to waterways have completely disrupted the global supply chain. The current era is one of globalization, where every country depends on each other for fuel, food, technology and raw materials. In such a situation, when the scope of the war increases, it is inevitable that an emerging economy like India will be hit hard. This is not just a war between two countries, it is a blow to the economic pulse of the modern world, the consequences of which have now reached the doorsteps of the common citizen and the farmers.

This war has come as a major crisis for an agricultural state like Maharashtra. The condition of onion and grape farmers, who contribute a large share of exports to the state's economy, has become very miserable. Onions, which are exported in large quantities to Dubai and other Gulf countries, are now stuck in the JNPT port. With more than 150 containers lying at the port and water transport being disrupted, export routes have been closed. As the month of Ramadan is currently underway in the Gulf countries, there is a huge demand for fruits like pomegranates, bananas, dragon fruit and watermelon during this period. However, this opportunity seems to be slipping away due to the war. Sangli's world-famous grapes are capturing the Gulf markets via Dubai, but shocking information has come to light that 3900 tons of grapes are currently lying at the port. The goods picked for export are now rotting in cold storage or are being sold at a low price in the local market. The financial risk taken by farmers and traders has now paid off, and they are suffering huge financial losses due to the fall in market prices. Not only fruits, but also exports of basmati rice, sugar, tea and coffee have been hit hard. Iran is a major customer of India's basmati rice, but the trade chain has been disrupted due to the closure of air and sea transport. According to the Maharashtra State Cooperative Sugar Association, exporting sugar to the Gulf countries has become impossible at present. A situation has arisen in global politics where 'Trump's mind is in order, no one can do anything there'. The attempt by US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to subdue Iran seems to be failing. Although Iran's military capabilities are inferior to those of the US or Israel, the covert support it receives from countries like North Korea and its geographical location make the possibility of a quick end to this war slim. The grim truth is that as long as this conflict continues, this dark shadow on global trade will not disappear.

The biggest and most direct consequence of this war is the fuel crisis. West Asia or the Gulf countries are the world's energy hubs. OPEC member countries like Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar control the global oil prices. If oil wells and oil tankers are targeted due to the war, it is inevitable that the prices of petrol and diesel will increase sharply. Although Indian oil companies are currently said to have enough reserves to last a few months, if the war lasts longer, India will have to turn to new and expensive alternatives for fuel. The Trump administration has already imposed tariffs and conditions on the supply of cheap oil from Russia. Since India is not self-sufficient in fuel even today, instability in the Gulf countries will directly feed into its domestic inflation. It will not be easy for the Indian economy, which runs on fuel, to absorb these shocks, so it has become a matter of order for the government to make alternative sources of energy and long-term provisions from now on.

Along with trade, domestic industries are also likely to be hit hard by the war. Pune, the industrial hub of Maharashtra, is in the shadow of this war. A survey conducted by the 'Maratha Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Agriculture' has revealed that as many as 47 percent of industries in Pune will be directly affected by this war. Of these, 21 percent will face a severe economic impact, while 25 percent will be mildly affected. Although these figures are only for Pune, this will have an adverse impact on industrial production and exports across the country. Due to shortage of raw materials and obstacles in the export of finished goods, production costs will increase, hitting the profits of industries. To survive in such a difficult situation, the Indian industry will now have to be flexible in its policies and explore new markets. One of the great strengths of the Indian economy is its inherent flexibility. We have successfully faced global recessions, regional wars and the aggressive policies of superpowers in the past. Even during the Russia-Ukraine war, India maintained its economic momentum. However, this war in the Gulf is closer to India's geographical and economic interests. The trade cycle, which was already disrupted by Trump's tariff policies, has been further disrupted by this war. This crisis is not only India's but also global, but for India, the challenge is twofold because we have to fight on both the fronts of farmers and entrepreneurs. Even though the clouds of this war have darkened the atmosphere, we will have to find a way out of this crisis by following strategic diplomacy and economic discipline. After all, victory in a war is not only determined on the battlefield, but also depends on the country's economic resilience. As much as peace in the Gulf is necessary for the global economy, it is also necessary for the Indian farmers to get the price of their hard work. In such difficult times, the big challenge for the government will be to provide not only fuel, but also alternative markets for agricultural products. I am confident that India, which has survived the waves of the global recession, will overcome this war-like situation; But for that, meticulous planning and tough economic decisions will have to be made from now on. This war has once again demonstrated that peace is not just a humanitarian issue, but the backbone of the world's economy and its core.

# Advancing Self-Reliance and Export Resilience: India's Growing Global Footprint

In the post-pandemic period, India has emerged as a fast-growing major economy, leveraging domestic strengths to navigate global uncertainties. The Economic Survey 2025-26 notes that India's growth rates are "the envy of the world," backed by healthy banking system, credit intermediation, ample foreign reserves and a comfortable current account balance.

The global trade landscape has been undergoing adjustments as reflected in UNCTAD Trade Policy Uncertainty (TPU) Index and the Global Economic Policy Uncertainty (GEPU) Index in April 2025. At the same time, these developments have accelerated India's efforts to strengthen resilient supply chains, expand diversified trade and investment partnerships worldwide.

Against this backdrop, India has been able to pursue targeted import substitution in critical sectors, pairing it with an export-oriented approach to stay competitive over the long run.

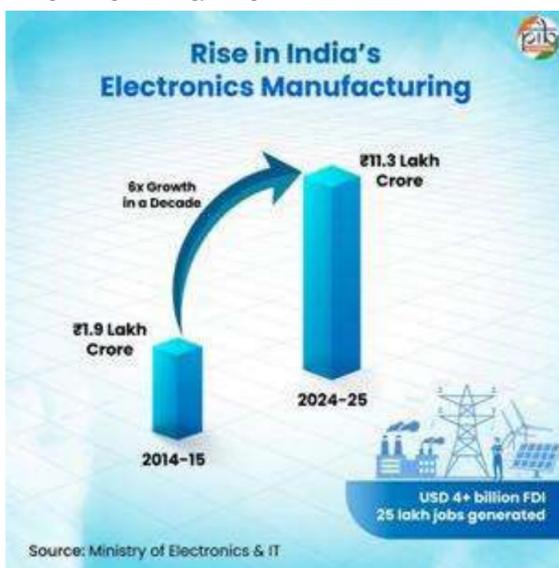
#### Manufacturing Renaissance: Building Domestic Capabilities

India's quest for import substitution is powered by themes of swadeshi and atmanirbharta and has translated into targeted policies across industries. The government has focused on sector-specific incentives, investments, and reforms in scaling domestic manufacturing capabilities. Over the past decade, bold reforms and visionary policies like Make in India initiative and Production-Linked Initiatives have transformed the country into a global manufacturing hub.

The Union Budget 2026-27 places a sharp focus on scaling domestic manufacturing in strategic and labour-intensive sectors, thereby strengthening export competitiveness and reducing critical import dependence. The Government announced a wide range of measures spanning the services sector, manufacturing, Special Economic Zones (SEZs), infrastructure, ease of doing business, and sector-specific reforms.

Flagship initiatives include Bipharma SHAKTI, the launch of India Semiconductor Mission 2.0, expansion of the Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme, development of Rare Earth Corridors, establishment of Chemical Parks, and targeted support for capital goods and container manufacturing.

It proposes facilitation measures to enable customs duty reductions on aviation parts, lithium-ion cell manufacturing, and parts for defence and civil aviation that will help to lower manufacturing costs for engineering sub-segments such as aerospace components, electronics engineering, and energy storage



hardware. A direct outcome of the import substitution efforts is clearly visible in the striking performance of India's electronics manufacturing. With a target of building a \$500 billion domestic electronics ecosystem by 2030-31, India is now firmly on track to become a global leader in electronic design, manufacturing, and exports. Electronics production in India rose from ₹1.9 lakh crore in 2014-15 to ₹11.3 lakh crore in 2024-25, nearly a six-fold increase. India has attracted over USD 4 billion in FDI in electronics manufacturing since 2020-21, reflecting rising global investor confidence. The electronics manufacturing sector has generated around 25 lakh jobs in India over the last ten years. Today, India is one of the world's fastest-growing electronics manufacturers, particularly in mobile phones. India has now achieved near self-reliance in mobile production, moving from importing most of its requirements a decade ago to manufacturing almost all devices domestically.



Production in the mobile manufacturing segment has increased from ₹18,000 crore in 2014-15 to ₹5.45 lakh crore in 2024-25, a 28-fold rise.

India is now the world's second-largest mobile phone manufacturer, with more than 300 manufacturing units operating today compared to just two units in 2014.

A similar thrust is visible in other high-value sectors. Semiconductors and electronics components are critical areas where import substitution is strategically important, as seen during global chip shortages. Acknowledging this, Budget 2026-27 announced the launch of India Semiconductor Mission 2.0 to produce equipment and materials, design full stack Indian IP, and fortify supply chains, alongside expanding the Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme with an increased outlay of ₹40,000 crore.

In August 2025, India inaugurated one of its first end-to-end OSAT (Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test) facilities in Sanand, Gujarat, strengthening the Atmanirbhar Bharat push in semiconductors. Earlier, in May 2025, two state-of-the-art semiconductor design facilities were inaugurated to focus on advanced 3-nanometer chip design, marking a significant milestone in the nation's semiconductor innovation journey.

India has also approved 10 semiconductor projects across six states, including its first commercial Silicon Carbide fab in Odisha on the anvil and an advanced packaging unit, with total investments of about ₹1.6 lakh crore, further strengthening the country's position in the global semiconductor value chain. Recognising that electronics manufacturing requires large capital investments, economies of scale, long gestation periods, access to advanced technologies, and a highly skilled workforce, the Government has undertaken a series of strategic interventions to

FY 2026-27 provides ₹1,000 crore for ISM 2.0, focusing on industry-led research, technology development, and skilled workforce creation.

Other key initiatives include the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing, PLI Scheme 2.0 for IT Hardware, Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC and EMC 2.0) Scheme, Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors (SPECS), and the Modified Programme for Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystem.

The automotive industry, including both vehicles and auto



components, continues to be a key pillar of the economy owing to its significant contribution to economic growth, employment generation, and strong linkages with multiple sectors.

India has emerged as the world's largest market for two-wheelers and three-wheelers, and the third-largest globally for passenger and commercial vehicles. Supported by a vast manufacturing and auto component ecosystem, the sector provides direct and indirect employment to over 30 million people.

Performance trends also reflect sustained growth: total production increased from 22,652 thousand units in FY21 to 31,028 thousand units in FY25, while domestic sales rose from 18,620 thousand units to 25,607 thousand units during the same period, reflecting strong growth and rising domestic demand. Overall, the industry has recorded nearly 33% growth in production over the last decade (FY15-FY25), accompanied by greater innovation and technology adoption, along with increased localisation and value addition. Over the past decade, policy reforms, targeted fiscal incentives, and infrastructure development have strengthened India's position as a global automotive hub.

PLI Scheme for Automobile & Auto Components Industry: Approved in September 2021 with an outlay of ₹25,938 crore, the PLI-Auto Scheme promotes high-value Advanced Automotive Technology (AAT) vehicles and products and has attracted cumulative investments of ₹35,657 crore as of September 2025. PM E-DRIVE Scheme: Launched in September 2024 with an outlay of ₹10,900 crore, the scheme offers demand incentives for e-2W and e-3W while extending support to new categories such as e-trucks and e-ambulances, along with funding for charging infrastructure and upgrades to testing facilities. Other key policy initiatives supporting this transformation include the PLI Scheme for Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery Storage, the PM e-Bus Sewa-Payment Security Mechanism (PSM) Scheme, and the Scheme to Promote Manufacturing of Electric Passenger Cars in India (SMECI). India's pharmaceutical industry is widely recognised for large-scale manufacturing of affordable medicines. Often referred to as the "Pharmacy of the

World," India plays a crucial role in ensuring access to cost-effective generic drugs while building strong domestic manufacturing capabilities. Today, India ranks as the world's third-largest pharmaceutical producer by volume and the eleventh largest by value, with the sector recording an annual turnover of ₹4.72 lakh crore in FY25.

In this context, given their critical vulnerability and high strategic importance, strengthening domestic manufacturing of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) has become a priority. India is already the world's third-largest producer of APIs, and domestic production has increasingly begun substituting imports.

This momentum is now being reinforced through initiatives aimed at strengthening supply chain resilience and domestic production.

PLI for Bulk Drugs: To mitigate reliance on imported Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs), Key Starting Materials (KSMs), and Drug Intermediates, the PLI scheme for Bulk Drugs has mobilised investments of ₹4,763 crore as of September 2025 and created an annual manufacturing capacity of 55,000 MT for 26 critical products, with focus on fermentation-based synthesis for KSMs like Penicillin G Potassium.

PLI for Medical Devices: The Government launched the PLI Scheme for Promoting Domestic Manufacturing of Medical Devices

While strengthening domestic production, India has simultaneously worked to ensure that its exports remain robust and diversified. Recent data highlights this resilience: cumulative exports (merchandise & services) during April-January 2025-26 is estimated at USD 720.76 billion, up from USD 679.02 billion in April-January 2024-25, implying an estimated 6.15% growth. In a period marked by global uncertainties, this growth reflects India's resilience, with high-value commodities, widening global partnerships, and policy reforms supporting a more balanced and globally integrated trade trajectory.

A key aspect of resilience is export diversification. It helps navigate uncertain global trade environments, demand volatility, and supply chain disruptions. By expanding across products and markets, countries reduce overdependence on limited partners and build resilience against external shocks. Under UNCTAD's trade diversity indices for the Global South, India ranks among the top five economies for the diversity of its traded products and among the top three for the diversity of its trade partners, reflecting a broad export basket and an increasingly wide range of trading relationships.

India's continued efforts to negotiate trade agreements have helped diversify trade partnerships and bolster the economy amid external challenges. Over the last three years, India concluded nine FTAs covering 38 countries, expanding market access to an estimated ~70% of global GDP, at mostly zero duty. These agreements are widening opportunities for Indian goods and services, with more deals currently under negotiation. The objective is to spread trade ties across regions and reduce overdependence on any single market.

To further strengthen export competitiveness, especially for MSMEs, first-time exporters and labour-intensive sectors, the Government approved the Export Promotion Mission (EPM). With a total outlay of ₹25,060 crore for FY 2025-26 to FY 2030-31, EPM aims to strengthen India's export ecosystem, improve access to affordable trade finance and enhance global market readiness and competitiveness across sectors and regions. It operates via two integrated sub-schemes- Niryat Protsahan and Niryat Disha. Services exports, India's core strength, have remained a steady growth engine even amid global uncertainty. In FY25, services exports reached an all-time high of USD 387.5 billion, registering 13.6% (YoY) growth, and reinforcing India's position as a global hub for technology, business, and professional services. During this period, the services trade surplus also widened to an all-time high of USD 188.8 billion. This strength has carried into FY26. During April-January 2025-26, services exports are estimated at USD 354.13 billion, up from USD 320.28 billion a year earlier (+10.57%). Market diversification is also improving: while the US remains the largest export destination for India, Europe's share rose from 30.8% to 32.8% between FY24 and FY25.

India's defence sector has witnessed a major shift towards self-reliance, ensuring that every procurement strengthens national industry, reduces import dependency, and enhances operational preparedness. At least 65% of India's defence equipment is now manufactured domestically, marking a significant shift from the earlier import dependence of nearly 65-70%.

Indigenous defence production rose from ₹46,429 crore in FY 2014-15 to ₹1,27,434 crore in FY 2023-24, and further reached a record ₹1.54 lakh crore in FY 2024-25. Reforms under Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020 and Defence Procurement Manual (DPM) 2025 have ensured speed, transparency, innovation, and self-reliance across both capital and revenue procurements. The government now targets defence manufacturing worth ₹3 lakh crore and defence exports of ₹50,000 crore by 2029, positioning India as a growing global defence manufacturing hub. To realise this vision, the Government has undertaken several measures, including:

Development of the Uttar

Pradesh Defence Industrial Corridor (UPDIC) and Tamil Nadu Defence Industrial Corridor (TNDIC), which together have attracted investments exceeding ₹9,145 crore, with 289 MoUs signed and potential investment opportunities worth ₹66,423 crore as of October 2025.

Strengthening defence innovation through DRDO-led initiatives, including a ₹500 crore corpus approved under the Technology Development Fund (TDF) for deep-tech and cutting-edge projects, along with Technology Transfer programmes and 15 Defence Industry-Academia Centres of Excellence (DIA-CoEs) linking academia, start-ups, and industry.

Expanding private sector and MSME participation, with nearly 16,000 MSMEs now contributing across areas such as drones and avionics, strengthening the defence manufacturing ecosystem.

Supporting domestic manufacturing through liberalised FDI norms, PLI schemes, and defence industrial corridors, creating opportunities for both domestic manufacturers and global investors.

Accelerating procurement momentum, with the Ministry of Defence signing a record 193 contracts worth ₹2,09,050 crore in FY 2024-25, the highest ever in a single financial year.

Together, these developments signal India's steady transition from a major defence importer to an emerging global hub for defence manufacturing and innovation.

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## Sanjay Raut Now Taking Decisions in Uddhav Thackeray's Group, Claims BJP Spokesperson Navnath Ban

**Mumbai:** State BJP chief spokesperson Navnath Ban on Thursday claimed that key decisions in the Shiv Sena faction led by Uddhav Thackeray are now being taken by its spokesperson Sanjay Raut rather than the party chief. Speaking at a press conference at the BJP state office, Ban alleged that despite the numerical strength being in favour of the Thackeray faction for the Rajya Sabha seat, the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) eventually announced the name of Sharad Pawar under pressure from Raut. According to Ban, Raut "played a clever political game" to secure his own position in the Rajya Sabha. Ban said the decision highlights that the voices of Uddhav Thackeray and Aadiya Thackeray no longer hold importance in the party's decision-making



process, and that decisions are being taken according to Raut's preferences. He further alleged that through this political strategy, Raut tried to establish himself as the de facto leader of the opposition within the group, po-

litically sidelining Uddhav Thackeray as well as Aadiya Thackeray and Priyanka Chaturvedi, both of whom were in the reckoning for a Rajya Sabha seat.

Ban also claimed that Raut had floated Sharad

Pawar's name for the Rajya Sabha seat nearly a month ago and that the same decision was later imposed on both the Congress and the Thackeray faction within the MVA alliance. According to him, the move was not driv-

en by admiration for Pawar but was aimed at curbing the growing influence of Priyanka Chaturvedi within the party and spoiling her prospect of re-nomination as the party's candidate for the Rajya Sabha. He pointed out that despite having the lowest numerical strength, Pawar's candidature was announced, which reflects the weakened position of the Congress within the alliance. Commenting further, Ban said the decision on whether to merge the two factions of the Nationalist Congress Party would now depend on the leadership of Sunetra Pawar. Expressing confidence in her leadership, he said the party would progress under her and claimed that the NCP (Ajit Pawar) would not need the faction led by Sharad Pawar in the future.

## 111 Citizens Return Safely to Pune from Dubai; Efforts Underway to Bring Back Remaining 54

**Pune:** Amid escalating tensions in several parts of the Middle East, the Pune district administration has confirmed that a large number of stranded residents have safely returned to India.

Pune District Collector Jitendra Dudi informed on Thursday that 111 out of the 184 citizens from the district who were stranded in Dubai have now safely returned to Pune. The return of these citizens has brought relief to families who had been anxiously awaiting news about their relatives amid growing instability in parts of the Middle East. According to the district administration, arrangements were made in coordination with various authorities to facilitate the safe travel of the stranded residents back to India.

Officials further stated that the flight schedules of 19 citizens have been rescheduled due to logistical

constraints, and efforts are currently underway to ensure their return at the earliest.

Meanwhile, the administration is continuing its efforts to facilitate the safe return of the remaining 54 individuals who are still abroad.

Authorities said they are in constant touch with the affected citizens and their families to provide updates and necessary assistance during the process. As part of precautionary measures, advisories have been issued by the Government of India and the Government of Maharashtra to ensure the safety of Indian nationals currently residing in different countries across the region. Citizens have been urged to remain vigilant, avoid unnecessary travel or movement, and strictly follow instructions issued by local authorities as well as Indian

diplomatic missions.

The advisory specifically applies to Indian nationals residing in cities such as Ramallah, Doha, Riyadh, Tel Aviv, Tehran and Baghdad.

In addition, the advisory also covers Indian nationals living in Kuwait, Bahrain, Muscat, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, including Abu Dhabi. Officials said that in case of emergencies, Indian citizens have been advised to immediately contact the respective Indian embassies through their 24-hour helpline services. Diplomatic missions across the region are closely monitoring the evolving situation and are extending assistance to Indian nationals wherever required. The Government of Maharashtra has also appealed to residents currently living abroad to remain calm and rely only on verified information issued by official sources.

## Transport Unions Protest Against E-Challan in Pune; Warn of Intensifying Agitation

**Pune:** Various transport unions representing rickshaws, taxis, buses and trucks staged a protest in Pune on Thursday against the e-challan system. They are agitating against increase in fines, levy of multiple fines on the same vehicles for single offences and use of common CCTV footage showing a line of parked motorcycles among other issues.

The demonstration was held outside the Pune RTO office near Sangam Bridge and the District Collector's



office, where a memorandum was also submitted to the authorities.

Around 200 vehicles, including buses, rickshaws and

taxis, participated in the protest rally which began from Sarasbaug. Some members of the unions also travelled to Mumbai to take part in the

agitation at Azad Maidan. Union leaders appealed to the Chief Minister to take immediate note of their demands. They warned that the protest would be intensified from tomorrow if the issue is not addressed. School transport vehicles and company staff buses are also expected to join the agitation from Friday. The protesters further cautioned that if the government fails to take a prompt decision, the transportation of essential goods such as food grains and vegetables could also be suspended.

## Heatwave Intensifies Across Maharashtra; Yellow Alert Issued for Mumbai and Konkan

**Pune:** A heatwave has intensified across Maharashtra, with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Thursday issuing a Yellow Alert for Mumbai and the Konkan region due to hot and humid conditions.

The department has forecast a further rise in temperatures across the state, along with possible fluctuations over the next few days.

Akola recorded the highest temperature in the state at 38.8 degrees Celsius, while Dhule registered the lowest at 13.5 degrees Celsius.



In the Konkan region, hot and humid weather is expected to persist throughout

the day. The weather department has advised citizens to take necessary precautions

while stepping outdoors.

Meanwhile, in Pune, temperatures are hovering around two degrees Celsius above normal. Koregaon Park recorded the highest temperature in the city at 37 degrees Celsius while Shivajinagar has reported temperatures above 35 degrees Celsius for two consecutive days. A steady rise in temperatures has been observed across nearly all districts of Maharashtra over the past few days, and the IMD has indicated that the heat conditions are likely to continue.

## UDYAMI Awards 2026 Honours 350 Entrepreneurs in Pune

**Pune:** In a significant celebration of grassroots entrepreneurship and wealth creation, the UDYAMI Awards 2026, led by entrepreneur mentor and import-export expert Dr Omkaar Hari Maali, felicitated 350 entrepreneurs from across Maharashtra at Buntara Bhavan, Baner, Pune on Thursday.

The mega awards ceremony recognised entrepreneurs who have built sustainable and revenue-generating businesses, reflecting the growing economic influence of regional entrepreneurs in India's business landscape.

Awards were presented across multiple achievement categories, including Hall of Fame, Udyami Lakhpati, Udyami Dashlakhpati, Udyami Crorepati, Udyami Warrior, and Udyami Game Changer. The Awards were presented by Dr Omkaar Hari Maali and Mrs Aakanksha Omkaar Maali, a release stated. A major highlight was the Crorepati

Felicitations Ceremony, celebrating entrepreneurs who have successfully crossed significant revenue benchmarks, symbolising the emergence of a new generation of Marathi wealth creators.

Addressing the gathering, Dr Omkaar Hari Maali emphasised the importance of entrepreneurship as a vehicle for economic empowerment and employment generation.

"Entrepreneurship is no longer limited to metropolitan cities. Today, entrepreneurs from towns and districts across Maharashtra are building global businesses and contributing meaningfully to the nation's economy. I am so proud of all the entrepreneurs who have built businesses ranging from 1 lakh to 50 crore in turnover — many of them, starting with zero prior experience," he said. Adding industry perspective to the event, Hanmantrao Gaikwad, Chairman and Managing Director

of BVG Group, attended as the Special Speaker and shared insights on enterprise growth and nation-building through entrepreneurship.

The event also featured several key announcements, including the launch of 24 chapters of the Federation of Marathi Entrepreneurs, aimed at building a structured statewide entrepreneurial ecosystem. The platform further unveiled Maharashtra Connect, an initiative designed to enable collaboration, mentorship, and market access for emerging businesses.

Dr Omkaar Hari Maali also launched his upcoming book 'Marathi te Millionaire', featuring 51 entrepreneurial success stories, in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Hanmantrao Gaikwad, his parents, and senior leaders of Udyami Maharashtra, including co-founder Mrs. Aakanksha Omkaar Maali, CEO Mrs. Dolly Ritesh Dave, and CTO Mr. Shivam Thakur, the release added.

## Husband, wife kill youth over alleged love affair in Nagpur

**Nagpur:** A youth was allegedly stabbed to death by a husband and wife in Maharashtra's Nagpur district on Thursday over a suspected love affair, police said.

The incident took place around 11:30 am on the Khaperkheda-Koradi road.

The deceased has been identified as Sagar Wankhede, a resident of Sawangi village in Narkhed taluka of the district. Police have taken Raju Gajbhiye and his wife Sonali Gajbhiye, residents of Khaperkheda, into custody in connection with the murder.

According to a preliminary investigation, Sonali and Sagar were reportedly acquainted since their school days and were allegedly in contact even after Sonali's marriage to Raju. The couple has two children.

Police said Sagar, who was working in Pune, had recently come to his native village for Holi celebrations.

He reportedly contacted Sonali through social me-

dia and asked her to meet him. On Thursday morning, Sagar reached Khaperkheda on a motorcycle, and Sonali accompanied him.

After dropping the children off at school, Raju allegedly followed them. Near the Kolar river bridge on the Khaperkheda-Koradi road, Sonali reportedly dropped her purse intentionally.

When Sagar stopped the motorcycle to pick it up, she attacked him with a knife. Raju, who had reached the spot, also stabbed the youth multiple times.

Sagar sustained severe injuries and died on the spot, police said.

The attack took place in full public view, but passers-by did not intervene as the assailants were armed with knives.

Police later detained the couple and registered a case of murder at the Koradi police station.

The body has been sent for post-mortem examination, and further investigation is underway.

## Iran-Israel war disrupts grape exports to Gulf, Sangli farmers face heavy losses

**Pune:** The ongoing tensions arising from the Iran-Israel conflict have severely impacted grape exports from Maharashtra's Sangli district, pushing growers and traders into a deep financial crisis. The disruption of major maritime and air trade routes across the Gulf region has nearly halted export operations, leaving large consignments stranded and threatening heavy losses for farmers.

With hostilities escalating in the Middle East, shipping companies and exporters have become cautious about transporting goods through the region. As a result, several grape consignments meant for international markets remain stuck, while uncertainty over shipping schedules has forced exporters to pause fresh shipments. Sangli district is one of Maharashtra's key grape-producing regions, supplying large quantities of the fruit to overseas markets every year. Gulf countries such as the United Arab

Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are among the major buyers of grapes from the region.

However, this season has turned difficult for exporters. Nearly 350 containers of grapes are currently lying unsold in cold storage facilities across Sangli, as exporters struggle to find shipping options to send them abroad.

Cold storage units in the district are now running out of space as more consignments arrive from vineyards. Traders say they are unable to move the produce quickly enough due to disruptions in transport routes and logistical bottlenecks.

Apart from the grapes already packed for export, around 700 containers' worth of grapes remain in vineyards awaiting harvest. If these are not shipped in time, farmers fear that the fruits may spoil, leading to additional financial losses. At the country's largest container port, the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority in Mumbai, around 300 containers of

grapes are reportedly stranded as shipping schedules collapse amid the regional instability.

Exporters have also pointed to the sharp rise in insurance premiums for shipments passing through the Gulf region. The higher costs have forced many traders to temporarily suspend new export consignments.

The issue has now reached the political stage as well. During the state Budget session, BJP MLA Atulbaba Bhosale raised concerns about the growing distress among grape and raisin producers in Sangli and neighbouring Tasgaon.

He alleged that cheap raisins from China are entering India through Afghanistan in large quantities, severely affecting the domestic market for raisins produced in Sangli and Tasgaon. Bhosale urged the government to conduct a thorough investigation into these import routes and demanded strict action from the Central Board of Indirect Taxes.

## Review meeting to audit Kumbh Mela works held in Nashik

**Nashik:** A review meeting to assess the progress and quality of works being executed through a third-party organization in the city was held under the chairmanship of Divisional Commissioner and Authority Chairman Praveen Gedam.

During the meeting, Dr. Gedam directed officials to ensure that all ongoing projects are completed within the prescribed timeline while strictly adhering to quality standards. He emphasized that there should be no compromise on workmanship, particularly as the works are linked to preparations for the upcoming Kumbh Mela.

He stated that infrastructure and civic development works being undertaken by multiple departments must follow approved technical norms and contractual obligations. The Divisional Commissioner stressed that strict monitoring mechanisms should be implemented to ensure accountability in the execution of projects.

Among the officials present at the meeting were Joint Director of the Planning Department Babul Patil and Yogendra Chaudhary, along with Additional Commissioner of the Municipal Corporation Pradeep Chaudhary.

Superintendent Engineer of the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation Shri Baravkar and Superintendent Engineer of the Public Works



Department Arundhati Sharma also attended the meeting to review infrastructure-related works.

Executive Engineers Navnath Sonawane and Rahul Patil, along with Deputy Engineers Abhijit Shelar and Vijay Lakshmi Babiskar, were present during the discussions and presented updates regarding the ongoing projects. Other officials including Salunke, Sharda Sonawane, Executive Engineer of the Water Resources Department Sonal Shahane and Narayan Daware also participated in the review. To ensure transparency and quality assurance in all projects linked to the preparations for the Kumbh Mela, a third-party quality control organization, TUV SUD South Asia Pvt. Ltd., has been appointed. The organization will verify the

quality of works being undertaken by various departments, including checking measurement records, project agreements, financial transactions and payment processes. Officials said that the quality assessment process will also involve cooperation from reputed expert institutions such as Indian Institute of Technology Bombay and other technical bodies. Dr. Gedam directed all implementing agencies and departments to provide necessary documents and project records to the auditing organization in a timely manner to facilitate an efficient verification process. He further clarified that payments for completed works will not be released unless the third-party quality report confirms that the projects meet the required standards.

## Pickup falls into Purna river from narrow Yeldari dam bridge, youth drowns

**Hingoli:** A 31-year-old man lost his life after a pickup vehicle plunged into the Purna river from a dangerously narrow bridge near the Yeldari dam under the Purna irrigation project, an official said on Wednesday.

The accident occurred around 9 PM on Tuesday, triggering anger among residents who blamed the Public Works Department (PWD) for alleged negligence in maintaining the bridge.

The deceased has been identified as Ankush Rameshwar Shinde, a resident of Shinde Takli village in Sengao taluka. According to reports, Shinde was travelling towards his village from Jalna in a pickup vehicle between 8 PM and 9 PM.

While crossing the narrow bridge near Yeldari, the driver reportedly lost control of the vehicle because the bridge has no protective railings, causing the pickup to fall directly into the Purna river.

At present, water is being released from the dam, resulting in a strong current in the river. After the pickup

fell into the water, it got stuck against the bridge structure. However, due to the heavy flow of water, Ankush Shin-

de could not escape from the vehicle and drowned. As the accident occurred at night, it initially went unnoticed. The incident came to light only on Wednesday morning when people travelling across the bridge spotted the vehicle in the river.

Residents said that the bridge had already become dangerous after its railings were washed away last year due to the strong water flow released from the Yeldari dam.

Since then, the old bridge has effectively turned

into a death trap. Locals allege that the Public Works Department has completely ignored the

issue despite repeated concerns, resulting in frequent minor and major accidents at the spot.

Villagers also criticised the administration for not opening a newly constructed bridge in the area. The state government has spent several crores of rupees to build a modern bridge using advanced sealing techniques on the border of Vidarbha and Marathwada. However, the bridge has remained unused for nearly a year because the approach roads on both sides have not yet been

completed. As a result, motorists are still forced to risk their lives by crossing the old narrow bridge.

The accident also led to heavy traffic congestion in the area. Since Wednesday is the weekly market day in Yeldari, the bridge usually witnesses a large number of vehicles and pedestrians. As the incident occurred near the middle of the bridge and rescue operations were underway, long queues of vehicles formed on both sides, causing traffic disruption for nearly four hours.

Police from Jintur rushed to the spot and, after strenuous efforts, managed to retrieve the body of the deceased from the river.

Angry residents of Shinde Takli and nearby Yeldari villages have questioned the administration, asking why the approach roads to the new bridge have still not been completed despite the bridge being ready.

Villagers said the tragedy raises a serious question: how many more lives will be lost before the authorities finally act.

## Traditionally women are portrayed as morally flawless in Indian cinema, wonderful it's changing: Konkona

**Mumbai:** After more than two decades in Indian cinema portraying some of its most introspective female characters, acclaimed actor and filmmaker Konkona Sen Sharma has spoken out about what she sees as the industry's long-standing hypocrisy in writing women characters as nearly flawless individuals striving to embody unrealistic ideals. Ahead of the release of her upcoming film *Accused*, the National Award-winning actor reflected on how her perspective on roles has evolved over the years and why portraying flawed, morally complex women has felt liberating at this stage of her career. Speaking to *Variety India*, Sen Sharma said that in the early phase of her career she was often offered roles that portrayed women as earnest, morally upright and almost impossibly virtuous.

While those roles were meaningful in their own way, she admitted that the pattern eventually became repetitive. "I've already worked for more than 20 years. In the early

part of my career, I was offered a lot of very earnest and morally upright characters; women of substance, very proper and all that, which is great. But it can also get a little boring," she said during the conversation. According to the actor, many scripts still confine young female characters to limited narrative arcs, most often revolving around romantic relationships rather than exploring their inner conflicts or complex moral dilemmas.

She pointed out that in many mainstream stories, a woman's primary role is to serve as the hero's love interest, leaving little room for exploring her internal struggles, contradictions or ethical ambiguity. Sen Sharma said that this trend has slowly begun to change for her in recent years, allowing her to experiment with more layered and unconventional characters. "That shift has been liberating," she noted, explaining that in the latter

part of her career she has had the opportunity to portray women who are flawed,

impulsive or even irresponsible — qualities that make them feel more authentic and human.

"I have found that liberation now, in the latter part of my career. And that's wonderful because, of late, I've been playing some quite interesting, irresponsible characters," she said.

The actor added that the film industry often places unrealistic moral expectations on female characters, expecting them to consistently embody goodness and virtue. "Just because you're a woman doesn't mean you have to always be correct and good. And God forbid you're a bad mother, that's really not allowed, by a n d

large," she remarked, highlighting the limited emotional range often permitted to women on screen. In *Accused*, Sen Sharma takes on the role of Geetika, a woman caught in a complex situation involving allegations of sexual misconduct that remain unresolved within the

film's narrative. Beyond the central controversy, the story explores an intimate relationship between two individuals where affection exists alongside deep dysfunction, creating a layered portrait of love intertwined with conflict. As the narrative unfolds, the film examines the complexities of that relationship, questioning the boundaries between companionship, manipulation and emotional dependence.



## I was quite excited to be PC's voice in *Bluff*: Sayani Gupta

**Mumbai:** In an unexpected yet intriguing creative crossover, actor Sayani Gupta has voiced Priyanka Chopra Jonas in the Hindi-dubbed edition of "The Bluff".

The decision has piqued curiosity among audiences, particularly because Chopra is known for personally recording her Hindi dialogue for her projects.

For Gupta, the call itself came with instant excitement. "When they approached me to be PC's voice, I was quite excited. I absolutely adore her — she's someone I deeply admire," she said.

Voice work, she explained, has been a lifelong discipline rather than a recent pivot. Since she was very little, she was trained as a voice artist.

In fact, her very first pay cheque was for an All India Radio ad when she was five years old and there she earned Rs 500. Gupta recalled, "Elocution, recitation, voice modulation and diction are things my father trained me in since I was a kid, so I enjoy it a lot. There's immense scope in performance just through voice and breath."

Even so, stepping in for another actor carries its own



pressures. Dubbing for someone else is very tricky. She highlighted that both she and PC have husky, grainy voices with a deeper timbre, so it was a voice match.

That match, she added, gave her room to play within the performance rather than merely replicate it.

"She's amazing in the film, which gave me a great range to work with.

PC is a force of nature, and so is Ercell, her character in *The Bluff* — a total boss. But I had to do justice to her performance and every nu-

ance that she so intricately etched."

She previously fronted campaigns for the Apple iPhone 6s across Southeast Asia during 2015–16, an engagement she had been contractually unable to acknowledge at the time, reports *Hollywood Reporter India*.

Looking forward, Gupta has expressed a desire to venture into expansive cinematic universes, particularly within the superhero and animation genres, where voice artistry often assumes a central narrative function.

## Bhumi Pednekar admits to past career missteps: 'I diluted my agency'

**Mumbai:** Actor Bhumi Pednekar has candidly reflected on cer-

tain decisions in her career, acknowledging that there were moments when she accepted roles that, in hindsight, felt like missteps. The actor shared these thoughts during an interaction at the We The Women event, where artists and public figures discuss issues related to creativity, gender and representation.

During the conversation, Bhumi was asked whether she had any regrets about some of her film choices over the years. Responding with honesty, the actor admitted that the pressures of ambition and the lure of box-office success had occasionally influenced her decisions. "I have made mistakes," she said, reflecting on certain projects that she now believes did not fully align with the

kind of artistic space she had worked hard to build for herself in the industry. According to Bhumi, one of her biggest professional missteps occurred when she felt she had diluted the agency and identity she had established as a performance-driven actor. "At times you are just tempted because you want that ₹200 crore hit," she said, referring to the commercial appeal of big box-office successes that often influence choices in the film industry. Despite acknowledging those moments of compromise, Bhumi made it clear that there are certain professional boundaries she has never crossed and does not intend to cross in the future. "What I would not compromise on is that I would not do a character where there is disrespect to my gender. I wouldn't do that," she said firmly, stressing that roles portraying women in a degrading or disrespectful manner are non-negotiable for her. The actor, however, chose not to name any specific films or roles while discussing the projects she now considers mistakes, explaining that she prefers to avoid unnecessary controversy or speculation around her past work. Bhumi also emphasised that every actor goes through a learning process and that such experiences have helped shape her approach to selecting roles more carefully.

Since making her debut with the acclaimed film *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*, Bhumi has built a reputation for choosing roles that are rooted in strong performances and socially relevant narratives.

Her filmography includes critically appreciated projects such as *Saad Ki Aankh*, *Sonchiriya* and *Badhaai Do*, all of which showcased her versatility and commitment to character-driven storytelling.

Reflecting on her journey, Bhumi said she values meaningful work over frequent appearances on screen and would rather take fewer roles if they align better with her artistic vision.

"I have worked very, very hard to create a space which is led by performance," she said, underlining the effort she has invested in building a career defined by strong acting rather than commercial formulas.

She added that moving forward, she intends to remain more mindful about the kind of stories and characters she associates herself with, ensuring that they contribute positively to her creative identity.

For Bhumi, the experience of occasionally making the wrong choice has ultimately reinforced her commitment to selecting roles that respect both her craft and the broader representation of women in cinema.

## Siddhant Chaturvedi eyes film on Ballia with director Abhishek Chaubey

**Mumbai:** Actor Siddhant Chaturvedi has revealed that he is working on a new film inspired by his hometown of Ballia, marking what he describes as a deeply personal project rooted in his own life experiences. The actor also shared that the film is being developed in collaboration with filmmaker Abhishek Chaubey. Siddhant, who rose from the small town of Ballia to establish himself in mainstream Hindi cinema, said he now feels it is the right time in his career to tell stories that reflect his background and personal journey. According to the actor, the project aims to capture the essence of life in Ballia, a place that has played a crucial role in shaping his personality and outlook. "It's not official yet, but I feel like this is the stage where I want to say it. I want to go back to my roots. I want to tell the story of Ballia," Siddhant said while speaking about the project. He explained that having grown up in the town and experienced its social and cultural environment firsthand, he wants to translate those memories and observations into a cinematic

narrative. "I've seen life there and I want to bring that experience to the screen," he added, suggesting that the film will reflect the realities and emotions associated with small-town life. Siddhant first gained widespread recognition with his breakthrough performance in *Gully Boy*, where he portrayed the character of MC Sher alongside Ranveer Singh. The film not only introduced him to a wider audience but also established him as a promising actor capable of delivering layered performances. Since then, Siddhant has continued to explore diverse roles in films such as *Gehraiyaan*, where he starred alongside Deepika Padukone, as well as *Kho Gaye Hum Kahan*, which explored themes of friendship and digital-age relationships. He also appeared in *Dhadak 2*, further demonstrating his interest in choosing unconventional and emotionally layered characters. Over the years, Siddhant has built a reputation for selecting roles that prioritise strong storytelling and character depth rather than simply following mainstream commercial formulas.

## Aamir Khan on streaming vs theatrical Releases: 'Right now, it's not a graceful compromise'

**Mumbai:** Hollywood star Leonardo DiCaprio has recently voiced concerns about the future of theatre-based film releases, highlighting how the shrinking theatrical window and the rapid rise of streaming platforms could reshape the way audiences experience cinema.

During a conversation related to the film *One Battle After Another*, DiCaprio stressed that watching films in a cinema hall offers a unique communal experience that cannot easily be replicated through home viewing.

He noted that the shared atmosphere of a theatre — where audiences collectively react to storytelling, performances and visuals — plays a crucial role in preserving the cultural and emotional magic of moviegoing.

DiCaprio's concerns have also found resonance within the Indian film industry, where filmmakers and actors are increasingly debating how to balance traditional theatrical releases with the growing dominance of streaming platforms.

Speaking to *Variety India*, Hindi film actor Aamir Khan addressed the challenges that producers currently face in navigating this shifting landscape. When asked whether Indian cinema could

protect the big-screen experience or find a compromise with the economic realities of streaming platforms, Aamir said that the industry is currently struggling to strike the right balance.

"Right now, it's not a graceful compromise. That's



not a good situation to be in. So, I think a graceful compromise is much better, but at this point of time, it doesn't look graceful to me from any angle," he said.

According to Aamir, the issue is not limited to Hindi cinema alone but affects producers across different regional industries in India.

"A lot of producers are facing that and not just in Hindi. In the South as well, a lot of producers I've spoken to are facing this problem," he said, noting that the financial pressures surrounding distribution strategies are be-

ing felt widely across the industry.

Aamir also expressed agreement with DiCaprio's view that the theatrical window — the period during which a film is exclusively screened in cinemas before moving to digital platforms

account the scale, budget and audience expectations of individual films.

"Well, I think you need to work on different models. Mainstream films, which have a lot at stake, need a slightly longer window," he explained, suggesting that big-budget productions depend heavily on theatrical revenue.

He added that smaller films or experimental projects might benefit from shorter theatrical runs before moving to digital platforms, allowing them to reach wider audiences more quickly.

"A film like *Dhurandhar* benefited from it. I think some really big films can have longer theatrical windows. Maybe small, experimental films need shorter ones. So, we need to have a flexible model," Aamir said.

The actor's latest release, *Sitaara Zameen Par*, directed by RS Prasanna and also starring Genelia Deshmukh, hit theatres in June 2025 and reportedly earned close to ₹200 crore at the box office. As streaming platforms continue to expand their global reach, both DiCaprio and Aamir believe that maintaining a healthy balance between theatrical releases and digital distribution will be essential to preserving the cultural and economic ecosystem of cinema.

## Ulka Gupta after *The Kerala Story 2* trailer; says "I lost my sleep"

**Mumbai:** Actress Ulka Gupta has opened up about the intense backlash that followed the release of the trailer of *The Kerala Story 2: Goes Beyond*. In an exclusive interview with *Mid-Day*, the actress spoke about the emotional toll, the political noise surrounding the film, and the online hate she faced after the trailer went live. Ulka, who stars alongside Aditi Bhatia and Aishwarya Ojha in the social drama, admitted that the subject matter itself had a deep impact on her. "Initially, I lost my sleep. I felt second-hand trauma after learning about their experiences," she shared. Reflecting on the preparation process, she added, "As actors, you have to live the part to portray it truthfully. I had to tap into the bravest parts within me." However, the aftermath of the trailer release proved equally overwhelming. Ulka revealed that her social media accounts were flooded with hostility. "After the trailer release, every time I opened my DMs, there were hate messages," she said. She further added, "People would even post beef recipes under my photos. And it was difficult for me to deal with it because, I'm somebody who confronts, but I had to keep myself low-key."

Actor Ulka Gupta has responded to the criticism that emerged from sections of the public in Kerala following the release of the trailer of her upcoming film, saying that while she understands the concerns raised, audiences should watch the full movie before forming an opinion about its intent.

Speaking about the reaction to the trailer, Ulka acknowledged that some viewers in Kerala felt uncomfortable with certain scenes and expressed their concerns on social media and other plat-

forms. "The response was quite strong from Kerala," she said, explaining that some people felt "triggered" by moments in the trailer and interpreted them in a way that sparked debate about the film's themes.

"I got a lot of criticism from Kerala. They did feel very triggered by a few scenes in the trailer," the actor said while addressing the controversy surrounding the film.

However, Ulka maintained that she stands by the way she approached her role and the character she portrays in the film. According to her, the intention behind the story has been misunderstood by some viewers who have only seen the promotional material.

"And I still stand by my perception and the character that I've portrayed," she said, adding that her performance was shaped by her understanding of the story and the psychological journey of the character.

She urged critics and viewers alike to watch the film in its entirety before drawing conclusions about its message or intent.

"If it has triggered anyone in the wrong way, I only request them to kindly watch the movie and understand what the motive is," Ulka said, emphasising that the narrative has deeper layers that may not be fully reflected in a brief trailer.



## Excitement, not sadness, as Healy readies for caareer fina-

**Sydney:** While excitement and gratitude are the overbearing emotions as Alyssa Healy prepares to lead Australia out on the field one final time, the retiring captain has unfinished business to tackle in Perth.

Australia have ensured they will at the very least retain the multi-format series trophy after taking an 8-4 lead over India with a clean sweep in the ODIs, but Healy has made her side's intention to finish with an outright win in the Test match at the WACA Ground clear.

Healy's final walk out for the toss will be in her Baggy Green and matching captain's blazer, and she has vowed to relish every moment of her last outing.

"I've been very aware that not everybody gets to retire on their own terms, and this is kind of just a really cool opportunity to finish here at home and in a Baggy Green," Healy told reports in Perth on Thursday.

"It's not something I would have chosen to have



done, but I guess to have that opportunity is very special, very unique.

"So looking forward to that, and obviously with the series, the way it's placed at the moment, to be able to push for a win and be extra special."

After a fairytale finish to her run in her favourite 50-over format with a rollicking 158 in the final ODI in Hobart on Sunday, the 35-year-old also has one final opportunity to chase down an elusive hundred in the whites.

She is back at the venue where she fell just a run short of the milestone two years back against South Africa but Healy downplayed any questions on the subject, insisting the fixture would be less about her and more about the result.

"I'm not going out there to make a duck," she said. "So, if three figures come up, then so be it."

"But at the end of the day, I just want to contribute to a team success, and what that looks like, we'll wait and see."

## Satwik-Chirag suffer first-round exit at All England Open

**Birmingham:** India's top men's doubles pair Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty suffered a first-round exit at the All England Open Badminton Championships after going down in straight games to Malaysia's Kang Khai Xing and Aaron Tai on Wednesday. Competing at the Utilita Arena Birmingham, the fourth-ranked Indian duo lost 23-21, 21-12 to the world No. 33 Malaysian pair, as per Olympics.com.

Satwik-Chirag started strongly and built an 11-6 lead at the interval of the opening game before the Malaysians fought back to level the scores at 16-all. Kang and Aaron, the 2024 junior world champions, then edged ahead and, despite the Indians saving two match points, eventually sealed the game in a tie-break.

Carrying the momentum



into the second game, the Malaysian duo dominated proceedings, leading 11-7 at the break and conceding

only five more points to wrap up the match comfortably.

The defeat also marked the end of India's men's dou-

bles campaign at the prestigious tournament.

In other results, India's Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika

Gadde lost 21-12, 21-15 to France's fifth-seeded pair Thom Gicquel and Delphine Delrue in the mixed doubles event.

Meanwhile, 2025 US Open champion Ayush Shetty bowed out of the men's singles draw after losing 21-19, 9-21, 17-21 to Indonesia's world No. 14 Alwi Farhan.

India's women's singles campaign had already ended earlier after both Malvika Bansod and Unnati Hooda suffered opening-round defeats.

Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu had withdrawn from the tournament after being unable to reach Birmingham in time due to travel disruptions in Dubai. However, India had a bright moment on the opening day when Lakshya Sen stunned world No. 1 Shi Yuqi to advance to the second round.

## Labuschagne in rare air to again be crowned One-Day Cup's best

**Sydney:** Marnus Labuschagne was on the outer of both Australia's Test and ODI teams entering the 2025-26 domestic season.

Having been dropped for the three-Test series against West Indies a few months earlier, Labuschagne was soon to be left out of Australia's one-day squad as well to face India last October (he was later recalled following a side injury to Cameron Green but didn't play in the three-match series).

But back-to-back Sheffield Shield hundreds to open the season, as well as two one-day centuries in three knocks for Queensland, had the right-hander swiftly reinstated as Test No.3 for the Ashes.

And his form across the entire One-Day Cup campaign could have him on his way to an ODI recall ahead of a World Cup year in 2027.

Labuschagne produced a career-best 468-run domestic 50-over season this summer and has today been crowned the competition's best player for 2025-26.

The 31-year-old has now won the One-Day Cup player of the season award for a record third time since it was

introduced in 1998-99, and he's only the fourth batter to score four centuries in a single season, sealing his place on the list alongside Phil Jaques (2005-06), Brad Hughes (2009-10) and Daniel Hughes (2022-23) with 126 in Queensland's final game last month.

"Once I get the rhythm and feeling of one-day cricket, I feel like I can compile pretty consistent performances," Labuschagne said following his third 50-over century of the season, 101 against NSW in November.

"When you don't play one-day cricket for a while... you might be 30 off 50 (balls)... and you start panicking."

"That's how I sort of felt at the start of pre-season. We played pre-season games and that's exactly how I felt; I felt like I had to go."

"I got a few starts and that just got that process rolling and that rhythm and feeling (heading into the season)." Labuschagne earned two player-of-the-match awards in his six one-day appearances for Queensland this season, polling 20 votes to finish one ahead of NSW batter Kurtis



Patterson, who edged the Bulls captain as the tournament's leading run-scorer with 513 at an average of 102 in seven games.

The pair finished well ahead of Tasmania's Beau Webster (12 votes) in third place. Voting was determined by both on field umpires individually awarding a 3-2-1 for each match.

Labuschagne's top score for the tournament came in Queensland's first match when he slammed

130 from 118 balls with 17 fours and a six to power his side to 55-run season-opening win.

He struck his second ton (105 from 91) in their third match, but it went in vain as eventual ladder-leaders Tasmania overhauled Queensland's 311 with five

wickets and 10 balls to spare.

Though his third (101 v NSW) and fourth (126 v South Australia) centuries of the season both came in wins, Queensland missed the final by one point as Patterson's stunning 68-ball hundred helped NSW chase down 275 in 31 overs against Tasmania last month to secure bonus-point victory and a rematch with the Tigers in next Wednesday's decider at Bellerive Oval. Labuschagne's 468 runs at an average of 78 is the most prolific domestic one-day season of his career, eclipsing his 2019-20 tally of 364 at 61, in which he shared the player of the season award with teammate Usman Khawaja.

Notably, he lifted his strike rate from 81 in his preceding 20 List A matches (in-

cluding internationals) since the end of the last ODI World Cup to almost a run-a-ball (96.5) this summer.

Australia are slated to play Pakistan, Bangladesh, Zimbabwe, South Africa and England in ODI series later this year where Labuschagne will almost certainly get a chance to push his case to be a factor in the side's World Cup planning ahead of the next 50-over global showpiece in southern Africa late next year.

Labuschagne was instrumental in Australia's 2023 ODI World Cup triumph but lost his middle-order spot to state teammate Matthew Renshaw for the series against India last October, with Matt Short, Cooper Connolly and Mitch Owen also performing strongly in the 2-1 series win.

Australia's 50-over batting line-up is in a period of transition following the ODI retirements of Steve Smith, Glenn Maxwell and Marcus Stoinis last year, with Cameron Green and Alex Carey among the others in the middle-order mix as the competition for spots heats up ahead of the next World Cup.

## Australia wait on Perry to make final call on Test XI

**Perth:** Ellyse Perry is looking promising for the day-night Test at the WACA, captain Alyssa Healy says, revealing the quadriceps injury that's threatening to keep the veteran out of the pink-ball encounter "wasn't exactly straightforward".

The balance of the Australia XI to take on India will rest on Perry's availability, but signs were positive as the 35-year-old got through a second training session in Perth on Thursday afternoon.

"We've got a very rough idea about what it's going to look like," Healy told reporters in Perth of Australia's likely XI. "Obviously, Ellyse Perry is the key one, and we'll just assess her as we go." She trained really well yesterday, so it's looking really promising. "For her to be able to take part in this series again (would be) huge - from all reports, it wasn't exactly a straightforward niggles that she had, so her ability to get back up for this game is pretty remarkable."

"Playing Test cricket for us girls is few and far between at times. So I think she'll be champing after the bit to get out there."

If Perry does not get up, Australia could bring in un-



capped Tasmania top-order batter Rachel Trenaman or reshuffle their deep batting line-up to fit in an extra bowling option. If Perry gets the go ahead, Healy said she expected Australia to line up similarly to their last Test, against England at the MCG last January.

That would see Healy slot into the middle-order with Phoebe Litchfield and Georgia Voll opening the batting, a deep batting line-up that could see Tahlia McGrath batting as low as No.8, two frontline quicks and two spinners in Ashleigh Gardner and Alana King. If that was the case, the only change would likely see left-arm quick Lucy Hamilton come into the side to replace the injured Kim Garth, with Darcie Brown retaining her spot in the attack.

If Perry plays, it will be

as a specialist batter, but Healy said she was not concerned about a lack of options with the ball, with all-rounders McGrath and Annabel Sutherland also in the line-up. "I daresay there'll be a debutant, so we'll have to wait and see who that will be," Healy said. "I think the line-up will look pretty similar to what the Ashes Test was last year, so I'll probably slot down in the middle-order, but (that depends) on balance, and probably Pez's is availability." Trenno's has made a bulk of runs in domestic cricket and would be a perfect slide in for Ellyse Perry if she doesn't get up."

"We've got so many options with ball in hand that fill a role there, and then people asking for more opportunities with the ball, so we won't struggle in that department."

## Indian youth team leaves for World Boxing Futures Cup 2026 in Bangkok

**New Delhi:** India's promising young boxing talents are set to compete on the international stage as the Indian Youth boxing team departs tomorrow for the World Boxing Futures Cup 2026, scheduled to be held in Bangkok, Thailand from March 8 to March 15.

The tournament will bring together some of the most talented youth boxers from across the world, offering them a key platform to gain international exposure and test themselves against top competition in their age group.

The Indian team will compete in the Youth Olympic weight categories, making the tournament an important step in the pathway toward qualification and preparation for the Youth Olympic Games. The Futures Cup serves as a key developmental event in the global boxing calendar, providing young athletes valuable international competition experience.

India will field a 10-member squad across both men's and women's divisions. The women's contingent includes Gunjan (48kg), Chandrika Bhoreshi Pujari (51kg), Joyshree Devi Chirom (54kg), Radhamani Longjam (57kg), and Prachi (60kg).

The men's team features Ambekar Meetei Lairenlakpam (50kg), Udhham Singh Raghav (55kg), Sahil Duhan (60kg), Aman Siwach



(65kg), and Priyansh Sehrawat (70kg).

Speaking ahead of the tournament, Boxing Federation of India President Ajay Singh said, "The World Boxing Futures Cup is an important platform for our young boxers to gain international exposure and compete against top talent from across the world. Competing in the Youth Olympic weight categories makes this tournament even more significant, as it provides our athletes valuable experience and preparation on the pathway to the Youth Olympic Games. We are confident this team will compete with determination and make the most of this opportunity."

The competition will be hosted by the Thailand Boxing Association under the aegis of World Boxing, with bouts scheduled to take place at the Indoor Stadium Huamark in Bangkok.

Preliminary bouts will begin on March 8, followed by quarterfinals and semi-

nals, before the tournament concludes with the finals on March 15.

Indian youth boxers had delivered a historic performance last year at the 3rd Asian Youth Games in Bahrain, clinching seven medals including four gold, two silver and one bronze marking India's best-ever showing in youth boxing at the continental stage.

The Indian contingent will look to gain valuable international experience while showcasing the strength of the country's youth boxing programme on the global stage.

Indian Squad - World Boxing Futures Cup 2026

Women: Gunjan (48kg) Chandrika Bhoreshi Pujari (51kg) Joyshree Devi Chirom (54kg) Radhamani Longjam (57kg) Prachi (60kg) Men: Ambekar Meetei Lairenlakpam (50kg) Udhham Singh Raghav (55kg) Sahil Duhan (60kg) Aman Siwach (65kg) Priyansh Sehrawat (70kg).

## BCCI hails J&K after record-breaking Ranji Trophy win

**Jammu:** The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Thursday congratulated Jammu and Kashmir after their historic triumph in the Ranji Trophy, describing the achievement as a proud milestone for cricket in the region.

"The historic triumph of Jammu & Kashmir in the Ranji Trophy will remain a proud milestone for cricket in the region."

After their memorable victory, the players expressed a heartfelt desire to meet Hon. ICC Chair Jay

Shah and share this special moment with him, acknowledging the role his leadership played in strengthening cricket in Jammu & Kashmir during his tenure as BCCI Secretary," the BCCI said in a post on X.

"We sincerely thank Mr. Shah for taking the time to meet the team and for sharing his words of encouragement with the players as they celebrate this historic achievement. Congratulations to the entire J&K team and the cricket fraternity for script-

ing a remarkable chapter in Indian domestic cricket," it added.

Jammu and Kashmir were crowned champions by 291 runs in the first-innings lead over Karnataka, led by Devdutt Padikkal.

A brilliant 121 from Shubham Pundir led the charge, supported by key contributions from Yawer Hassan (88), captain Paras Dogra (70), Abdul Samad (61), Kanhaiya Wadhawan (70), and Sahil Lotra (72) as J&K piled up a massive first-innings total of 584.

Despite the onslaught, Karnataka pacer Prasidh Krishna impressed with figures of 5/98 in 34.1 overs.

Karnataka, featuring international stars such as KL Rahul, Mayank Agarwal, Padikkal, and Karun Nair, struggled under scoreboard pressure. Only Agarwal mounted significant resistance with a valiant 160 as Karnataka were bowled out for 293, conceding a huge 291-run deficit.

Auqib Nabi claimed 5/54 in 23 overs to dismantle Karnataka's middle order

and put the match firmly in J&K's control by Day 4.

In their second innings, J&K were powered by an unbeaten 160 from Qamran Iqbal before captain Dogra declared at 342/4 on Day 5, setting Karnataka a target with a lead of 633 runs. Both captains eventually agreed to shake hands.

Pundir was named Player of the Match, while Nabi was adjudged Player of the Series after taking 55 wickets in eight matches during the 2025-26 Ranji Trophy season.

## Head falls late but SA take day-one honours over NSW in Sheffield Shield

**Sydney:** Travis Head (5) fell late on day one of South Australia's Sheffield Shield clash with New South Wales, but the hosts still hold the advantage thanks to a maiden five-wicket haul from fast bowler, Henry Thornton.

Opening the batting in the competition for the first time this season, Head was dismissed by fellow Australian T20 World Cup squad member Sean Abbott (1-8) in some late drama at Karen Rolton Oval.

The Australian Test opener copped a blow to the finger from Liam Hatcher (0-12) in the over prior to his dismissal, before Abbott found the edge of Head's bat with the first ball he bowled to him.

Lachlan Shaw snaffled the catch at second slip to give the visitors a much-needed breakthrough, as SA ended day one at 1-20 in reply to

NSW's 269.

Returning to Shield cricket for the first time since November, Thornton (5-71) was the star of the show for SA, taking wickets in every session to help his side gain the ascendancy in Adelaide.

Earlier in the day, NSW won the toss and chose to bat before losing four wickets in the first session of play.

In an eventful start to the day, Sam Konstas (37) was dropped by SA skipper Nathan McSweeney at third slip off the fourth ball of the innings.

The 20-year-old and Will Salzmann (6) put on 19 runs for the first wicket, before Jordan Buckingham (1-74) bowled Salzmann with a ball that nipped back sharply and rattled his stumps.

Coming off three hundreds in his

last four outings for NSW in domestic cricket, Kurtis Patterson (12) joined Konstas in the middle and hit his first ball to the rope.

The left-hander looked in ominous touch, but he was caught by Manenti at second slip to give Thornton his first scalp.

Four balls later, Lachlan Shaw (4) found Henry Hunt at point to give Liam Scott (1-29) his first breakthrough of the match as NSW slipped to 3-72.

Nathan McAndrew (2-55) was then brought back into the attack with immediate success, as Konstas feathered the first delivery of his second spell through to the wicketkeeper, Alex Carey.

Matthew Gilkes (24) and Josh Philippe (29) safely took NSW to the major interval at 4-98. New South Wales' wicketkeeper pushed on after

lunch, but Thornton found a way through his defence

to give SA their fifth wicket of the day.

McAndrew made it 6-126 when he bowled a brutal bouncer that was too quick for Gilkes. The left-hand batter couldn't evade McAndrew's short ball that hit his gloves and spooned up to Manenti who took his second catch of the day.

Buckingham should have picked up the wicket of Charlie Doba (25) when Manenti put him down at 6-158.

Together with Joel Davies (47), the two produced a vital 63-run partnership to help resuscitate New South Wales' innings, before Thornton struck again. The right-arm speedster had Stobo trapped in front with the last ball of the session, as NSW entered tea at 7-189.

BSE Sensex			Nifty 50			Nifty 500			Nifty Next 50			Nifty 100			Nifty Bank			Nifty Midcap 100		
Close	Percent change		Close	Percent change																
80,015.90	1.14%		24,765.90	1.17%		22,697.80	1.29%		67,722.20	1.38%		25,420.10	1.20%		59,055.85	0.51%		57,792.55	1.52%	
Previous close	Open		Previous close	Open		Previous close	Open		Previous close	Open		Previous close	Open		Previous close	Open		Previous close	Open	
79,116.19	79,530.48		24,480.50	24,615.95		22,409.80	22,536.75		66,799.40	67,102.85		25,118.25	25,253.10		58,755.25	59,008.25		56,925.15	57,330.60	
High	Low		High	Low		High	Low		High	Low		High	Low		High	Low		High	Low	
80,303.83	79,201.69		24,854.20	24,529.40		22,760.85	22,468.20		67,893.40	67,036.70		25,505.10	25,175.20		59,274.35	58,506.40		57,946.45	57,014.70	

## Top Gainers

Company	Current	% Gain
Adani Ports	1,499.30	4.52
Larsen	4,038.70	4.02
Hindalco	954.95	3.60
NTPC	378.05	3.35
Reliance	1,389.40	3.30

## Top Losers

Company	Current	% Loss
Tech Mahindra	1,333.30	-1.32
HCL Tech	1,354.10	-0.73
ICICI Bank	1,357.60	-0.57
SBI	1,169.50	-0.43
TCS	2,578.80	-0.35

## Commodities

Commodity	Price	Change (%)
Gold Apr 02	161,830.00	305.00 0.19
Silver May 05	267,404.00	1,844.00 0.69
Crudeoil Mar 19	7,066.00	129.00 1.86
Naturalgas Mar 26	272.40	0.00 0.00

## CPI new series veritable storehouse for robust data-based policy signals: SBI Report

**New Delhi:** CPI new series is a veritable storehouse for robust data-based policy signals and is important for inflation nowcasting, corporate pricing, scenario analysis, public distribution system (PDS) and changing patterns of urbanisation across states, said the SBI report released here on Thursday.

The report noted that if the CPI 2012 classification system were followed, the share of food and beverages would have declined from 45.86 per cent to 40.10 per cent and not 36.75 per cent as is the current weight for the 2024 series.

The new CPI series reveals disproportional coverage with 90 per cent of the weights covered by 148 items, and it is extremely useful for inflation nowcasting, corporate pricing strategy, and scenario analysis.

"State-wise core CPI reveals that apart from Kerala, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Goa and Mizoram, all other states reveal a higher Core Inflation CPI than headline CPI. In the new series, Telangana is the state with the highest rate of inflation," the report said.

SBI noted that Public Distribution System (PDS) beneficiaries mapped with the state's food inflation rate compared with earlier data reveal that the exclusion of PDS items is likely to have a positive bias on food inflation across states.

"We believe the new CPI series has appropriately incorporated the changing patterns of urbanisation and Telangana, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Haryana are the top states in terms of urbanisation trends over the last decade," the report said.

A comparison of heat maps across states in terms of disaggregated level analysis reveal the transformative impact of changing patterns of Indian consumption in both rural and urban areas.

Sectorally, the report noted that housing, water, electricity, gas, and fuels show the maximum drift across states. Small divisions such as Furniture, Information & Communication, Recreation and Personal Care show tight ranges.

The report said that this indicates the importance of digital and discretionary spending across the spectrum of states.

# Stock market ends higher amid strong buying

**Mumbai:** The Indian stock market ended Thursday's trading session on a strong note, with benchmark indices recording significant gains amid broad-based buying across key sectors such as metals, infrastructure, energy and automobiles.

The rally was led by strong investor participation in heavyweight stocks, which pushed the benchmark indices higher by more than one per cent during the day's trade. The BSE Sensex surged 900 points, or 1.14 per cent, to close at 80,015, reflecting renewed investor optimism in several major sectors.

Similarly, the Nifty 50 gained 285 points, or 1.17 per cent, to settle at 24,765 by the end of the session.

Among the top gainers on the Nifty index was Adani Ports & Special Economic Zone, whose shares jumped

4.52 per cent during the day's trading session and construction giant Larsen & Toubro also witnessed strong buying interest, with its

shares rising 3.27 per cent, along with Bharat Electronics, Shriram Finance, JSW Steel and InterGlobe Aviation, all of

which posted gains between roughly 2.7 per cent and 2.9 per cent. On the losing side, IT stocks saw mild selling pressure, with Tech Mahindra emerging as the biggest loser of the day, declining 1.32 per cent. Shares of HCLTech slipped 0.73 per cent, while ICICI Bank fell

0.57 per cent and State Bank of India declined 0.43 per cent. Other stocks such as Tata Consultancy Services, Hindustan Unilever, ONGC, Axis Bank and ITC also ended the session marginally lower.

Sector-wise, metal stocks led the rally, with the Nifty Metal index gaining 2.21 per cent during the session. The Nifty Consumer Durables index also performed strongly, rising around 2 per cent. Other sectoral indices, including Nifty Auto, Nifty Realty, Nifty Oil & Gas, Nifty Pharma, Nifty Chemicals and Nifty Media all ended the day with gains of over one per cent. In the currency market, the Indian Rupee strengthened against the US dollar, ending the session at 91.60 per dollar compared with 92.15 in the previous trading session.



Shares of Hindalco Industries climbed 3.60 per cent, reflecting positive sentiment in metal stocks.

In the energy sector, NTPC advanced 3.35 per cent, while Reliance Industries gained 3.30 per cent.

Other notable gainers in-

cluded Coal India, which rose 3.27 per cent, along with Bharat Electronics, Shriram Finance, JSW Steel and InterGlobe Aviation, all of which posted gains between roughly 2.7 per cent and 2.9 per cent. On the losing side, IT stocks saw mild selling pressure, with Tech Mahindra emerging as the biggest loser of the day, declining 1.32 per cent. Shares of HCLTech slipped 0.73 per cent, while ICICI Bank fell

## CCI approves stake hikes in Generali JV, Balaji Wafers Investment, and Bagmane REIT acquisition

**New Delhi:** The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has approved a series of corporate combinations involving the banking, consumer goods and real estate sectors, including stake acquisitions in insurance joint ventures, packaged food company Balaji Wafers, and commercial real estate assets. The regulator cleared the acquisition of additional shareholding in Generali Central Insurance Company Limited (GCICL) and Generali Central Life Insurance Company Limited (GCLICL) by Central Bank of India. The proposed transaction involves the bank acquiring an additional 1.09 per cent equity in GCICL and 0.82 per cent equity in GCLICL. The Central Bank of India provides a range of banking services in the country, including deposit-taking, lending, and other financial services. GCICL operates in the general insurance seg-

ment, while GCLICL offers life insurance products in India.

In a separate approval, the CCI cleared the acquisition of a stake in Balaji Wafers Private Limited by General Atlantic Singapore BWP Pte. Ltd. (GASBWP) from the existing shareholders of the company. GASBWP, an investment holding company incorporated in Singapore, is affiliated with global investment firm General Atlantic and invests in businesses across sectors such as technology, healthcare, financial services, consumer, climate, and infrastructure. Balaji Wafers is an Indian snack food manufacturer engaged in producing and selling packaged food products, including salted and non-salted snacks, biscuits, ready-to-eat foods, and conDIMENTS. The company distributes its products through an extensive network of distributors and retailers, with a

strong presence in western and central India.

The CCI also approved a proposed transaction involving Bagmane Prime Office REIT, which includes the direct acquisition of Bagmane Developers Private Limited (BDPL) and its wholly owned subsidiary Bagmane Green Power LLP (BGPL).

The deal also involves the indirect acquisition of Bagmane Rio Private Limited (BRPL) and the property Luxor @ Bagmane Capital Tech Park from Bagmane Construction Private Limited. Under the arrangement, the sponsor group of the REIT and certain third-party shareholders of the target entities will receive units of the REIT in exchange for transferring their shareholding. The target entities are engaged in the development and leasing of commercial real estate, hospitality operations, and renewable power generation.

# West Asia tensions raise risks to global energy supply: Goldman Sachs

**New Delhi:** A spike in risks to global energy supply chains is anticipated amid the escalating tensions in West Asia linked to the conflict involving Iran, particularly around the strategic Strait of Hormuz, said a report by Goldman Sachs.

The waterway remains one of the most critical chokepoints in global energy trade, with roughly one-fifth of the world's oil supply and a significant share of liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments passing through the strait, the report noted.

The Goldman Sachs report highlighted that nearly 20 million barrels per day of oil supply and about 19 per cent of global LNG trade typically transit the route, making it vital for energy-importing nations, especially in Asia. Countries such as

China, India, Japan, and South Korea depend heavily on shipments that pass through the strait.

Goldman Sachs said tanker traffic in the region has already shown early signs of disruption, with shipping companies, oil producers, and insurers adopting a cautious stance following reports of damaged vessels. Some ships are also avoiding the route amid rising security concerns.

Markets have already begun factoring in geopolitical risks. According to the report, oil prices currently include an estimated risk premium of around USD 18 per barrel, reflecting the potential impact if flows through the Strait of Hormuz were halted for about a month. This estimate accounts for the limited alter-



native pipeline capacity that could bypass the strait.

Even without direct damage to oil infrastructure, disruptions to maritime shipping alone could significantly affect supply chains. Goldman Sachs estimates that around 16 million barrels per day of oil flows could be exposed in the event of a full closure of the strait.

The risks also extend to natural gas markets. Approx-

imately 80 million tonnes per year of LNG exports, largely from Qatar, pass through the strait. A sustained disruption could tighten global gas supplies and potentially push European benchmark gas prices back to levels seen during the 2022 energy crisis.

Recent developments in the region have already slowed tanker movements and led to sharp increases in

shipping insurance premiums and freight rates. Some vessels have reportedly begun avoiding the region, raising concerns about broader supply disruptions.

While global oil inventories and spare production capacity may provide a short-term buffer, the report warned that prolonged disruptions in the Gulf could trigger significant volatility in global energy markets and push up prices of oil, gas, and refined products.

Market participants and policymakers are now closely monitoring tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz as well as diplomatic and military signals from the United States, Iran, and Gulf nations to assess whether the situation remains temporary or evolves into a broader energy supply shock.

## Women increasingly taking charge of financial decisions independently

**New Delhi:** DSP Mutual Fund on Thursday released its latest report, DSP Investor Pulse 2025-26, highlighting a significant shift in financial behaviour among women investors in India, with more women taking independent control of their investment decisions.

According to the report, about 56 per cent of women now make their investment decisions independently, marking a notable increase from 44 per cent recorded in 2022.

The findings indicate a steady rise in financial confidence and awareness among women investors over the past few years.

## QBE to become sole owner and shareholder of Raheja QBE General Insurance Company Limited

**Mumbai:** QBE Insurance Group, an international general insurance and reinsurance firm headquartered in Australia, is set to become the sole owner and shareholder of Raheja QBE, subject to regulatory approval.

This move follows 18 years of joint ownership



with Prism Johnson Limited and underscoring QBE's commitment to the Indian

insurance market.

Operations and service standards will be maintained as the transaction is reviewed by the Insurance

Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) and further details will be provided in due course.

## Petronet issues force majeure after Qatar Energy stops production due to Iran crisis

**Mumbai:** Petronet LNG Limited (PLL), India's largest importer of liquefied natural gas (LNG), on Thursday informed the stock exchanges that it has issued a force majeure notice to its supplier QatarEnergy amid escalating geopolitical tensions affecting maritime routes in the Gulf region.

The company also notified its downstream supply partners — GAIL (India) Limited, Indian Oil Corporation and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited — that its LNG shipments may be disrupted due to the ongoing conflict-related risks.

A force majeure notice is a formal contractual provision invoked when extraordinary and uncontrollable events — such as wars, natural disasters or major geopolitical crises — prevent a company from fulfilling its contractual obligations.

When such a clause is triggered, the affected company can temporarily suspend its contractual responsibilities without legal liability, provided the disruption is external, unforeseen and makes normal business operations impossible. In a regulatory filing, Petronet LNG said the decision to invoke the clause was taken due to mounting risks to maritime navigation in the Gulf region amid the ongoing conflict involving



Iran.

"Considering the prevailing security situation and the material risks posed to maritime navigation, Petronet LNG Limited has issued a Force Majeure Notice to QatarEnergy in respect of its LNG tankers, namely Disha, Raahi and Aseem," the company stated in its disclosure to the stock exchanges.

The company further explained that its LNG tanker vessels are currently unable to safely transit through the strategically crucial Strait of Hormuz.

These tankers typically use the Strait of Hormuz to reach Ras Laffan, which serves as the LNG loading port operated by QatarEnergy. The Strait of Hormuz is considered one of the most critical maritime chokepoints in the world, located between Iran and Oman.

Nearly 30 per cent of global seaborne petroleum and liquefied natural gas trade passes through this narrow waterway, making it

vital for global energy supply chains.

Petronet LNG said the financial implications of the force majeure declaration cannot be assessed immediately, as the situation continues to evolve.

The company also noted that acts of war are generally excluded from business interruption insurance coverage, which limits the possibility of compensation claims arising from the supply disruption.

Meanwhile, QatarEnergy confirmed the development in a statement posted on the social media platform X. The company said it had suspended production of LNG and associated products due to the deteriorating security situation in the region. "Further to the announcement by QatarEnergy to stop production of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and associated products, QatarEnergy has declared Force Majeure to its affected buyers," the company said in its statement.

# South Indian Bank to offer loan against mutual funds to its customers

**Chennai:** Private mortgage lender South Indian Bank (SIB) on Thursday announced the launch of its digitally integrated Loan Against Mutual Funds (LAMF) offering, enabled by smallcase's technology infrastructure.

The partnership allows SIB to extend secured credit against mutual funds at an interest rate of 9.99 percent p.a., in compliance with regulatory guidelines, to both its existing customer base and to customers of digital wealth platforms through its Lending Service Provider (LSP) network. Using smallcase's secured credit stack, SIB has built a native, API-led integration that enables an end-to-end digital journey for the user that includes pledging, disbursal, and release of mutual fund units.

With this launch, SIB becomes among the first banks to offer a fully inte-

grated LAMF solution to its LSP partners, enabling digital ecosystems and fintech apps to embed secured credit seamlessly within their offerings. "At South Indian

more accessible to investors. South Indian Bank has announced a strategic collaboration with fintech investment platform smallcase to strengthen its digital

seamless and fully digital manner, reflecting the growing trend of technology-driven financial services in India. According to the bank, the partnership will allow customers to pledge their mutual fund holdings and obtain instant credit, without the need to liquidate their investments, thereby preserving long-term wealth creation opportunities.

Officials at South Indian Bank said the integration with smallcase forms part of the bank's broader strategy to expand its secured lending portfolio while leveraging digital platforms to enhance accessibility and efficiency.

Sony A, Senior General Manager and Chief Information Officer at South Indian Bank, said the bank is planning to broaden the scope of the offering in the coming months. "We are looking forward to expand-



Bank, expanding access to responsible and transparent credit solutions is central to our priorities. Our partnership with smallcase enables us to offer a Loan Against Securities offering on mutual funds in a fully digital workflow, making credit

lending ecosystem through the introduction of loans against mutual funds (LAMF) and other securities.

The initiative is aimed at enabling customers to access liquidity against their existing investments in a