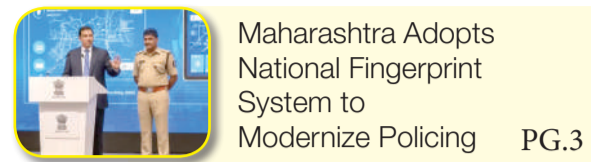


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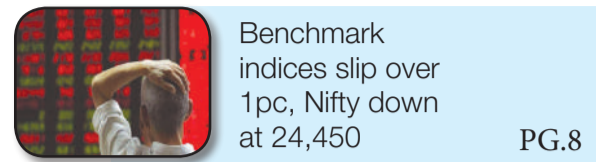
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Big Relief for Farmers and a Push for Millions of Jobs

Mumbai : The Maharashtra government has announced a massive financial plan for 2026 aimed at transforming the lives of rural families and young job seekers. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis presented the state budget on Friday, highlighting a major decision to wipe out farm loans. Under the new Punyashlok Ahilyabai Holkar Scheme, farmers who owe up to Rs 2 lakh on loans taken before September 2025 will have their debts cleared. This move is designed to provide immediate peace of mind to millions of families struggling with agricultural debt.

Beyond financial aid, the state is embracing modern technology to help farmers earn more. More than 30 lakh farmers are already receiving live weather and market updates on their phones, and the

ensure that every part of the rural economy grows together.

The budget also sets an ambitious goal to turn Maharashtra into a global leader for business and entertainment. A new platform

"Film City" in Nagpur. For those in cities like Pune, the government

Travel and tourism will also see a major upgrade across the state. The government plans to build 23,000 kilometers of new roads and bridges, ensuring that any village with more than 1,000 people is connected by a solid concrete road. For travelers, 50 popular tourist spots will receive better facilities, including a new ropeway at Vasota Fort and improved infrastructure at the five holy Jyotirlinga temples. To honor the state's political history, the Chief Minister also confirmed that a special memorial will be built in memory of the former Deputy Chief Minister, Ajit Pawar.

aims to create 4 lakh high-skilled tech jobs, while also developing Mumbai and Pune into a combined \$50-billion economic powerhouse.

Maharashtra announces farm loan waiver scheme up to Rs 2 Lakh

- Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Friday presented the state budget and made a major announcement regarding farm loan waivers for farmers in Maharashtra.
- During the budget presentation, the Chief Minister said that the state government has decided to set up a committee to implement the farm loan waiver scheme for farmers.
- Under the newly announced Punyashlok Ahilyabai Holkar Shetkari Karj Mafi Yojana, farmers with outstanding crop loans of up to Rs 2 lakh as of September 30, 2025, will be eligible for a loan waiver.
- The scheme aims to provide relief to farmers across the state who are struggling with unpaid crop loans.

Maharashtra Budget 2026

government is now bringing Artificial Intelligence into agricultural universities to help improve crop growth. New missions for natural farming and special support for women who raise cattle and goats are also being launched to

called "Invest Maharashtra" is expected to create 50 lakh direct jobs by attracting international companies. The state is specifically targeting the animation and gaming industry, with plans to support over 250 new studios and build a third



aims to create 4 lakh high-skilled tech jobs, while also developing Mumbai and Pune into a combined \$50-billion economic powerhouse.

Budget drives Maha towards bankruptcy, alleges Congress leader Harshwardhan Sapkal

Mumbai : Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee President Harshwardhan Sapkal alleged here on Friday that the Fadnavis government has piled up a mountain of debt on the state, and his budget, with a deficit of approximately Rs 40,000 crore, is driving Maharashtra towards bankruptcy.

Ridiculing the Maharashtra state budget presented by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Sapkal said, "The entire budget is full of big figures and empty promises. The budget is dominated by bullet trains, metros and underground routes, while the poor, tribals, labourers, women, the unemployed and youth living in villages find no place in it. Overall, this budget is geared

towards a few cities and a select few industrialists. The general public will not benefit from it".

Commenting on the budget here on Friday, Sapkal told media persons that the vision of a so-called "Developed Maharashtra 2047" and a USD1-trillion economy are "mere pipe dreams". "For the past few years, the BJP-led government has made lofty claims in its budget, only to later present supplementary demands worth crores of rupees in every assembly session. The Economic Survey Report clearly shows that the state's financial situation is steadily deteriorating," Sapkal said.

"The state is burdened with approximately Rs 12-lakh crore in debt and loan guarantees. Besides, Rs

65,000 crore has to be spent every year only to repay debt installments. This clearly demonstrates the

spent. Even for backward classes, minorities and tribal communities, budgets announce lofty figures, but



vast discrepancy between budget figures and the actual situation on the ground".

"In the previous budget, Rs 22, 658 crore were allocated for Scheduled Caste schemes, but only Rs 6,200 crore were actually

actual expenditures remain elusive," Sapkal said.

"The state's biggest crisis is unemployment. Yet the budget announced recruitment for only 75,000 government jobs. Given the BJP government's previous mega recruitment

experience, this announcement appears to be just another empty promise. It's been stated that the 'Laadki Bahin' scheme won't be discontinued, but the promise of Rs 2,100 crore remains in the air, clearly demonstrating that the government has betrayed women once again," Sapkal said.

"The government has announced loan waivers, but millions of farmers are still deprived of benefits under loan waiver schemes announced previously. Therefore, it's a matter of concern that the new loan waiver announcement may prove to be another fraud on farmers. The government's attitude is like a false invitation to a feast which was never organised. Don't believe it until you get any

food," Sapkal said.

"Some announcements have been made for agriculture and farmers, but after the trade agreement with the United States, it may become far more difficult for Indian farmers to get a fair price for their produce. Farmers' incomes are more at risk of decreasing rather than increasing. Even the measures announced in the budget are not enough to stop farmers' suicides," Sapkal said.

"Despite good rainfall last year, the state's irrigated area has actually declined from 5.6 million hectares to 3.9 million hectares. The amount of cultivable land has also declined. This clearly demonstrates that the government has completely abandoned farmers," Sapkal said.

Where is the Promise to Make Farmers Debt-Free?

Uddhav Thackeray Slams State Budget

Uddhav Thackeray has launched a sharp attack on the Maharashtra State Budget, accusing the current government of misleading farmers, ordinary citizens, and the state's financial system. He reminded the government of their election promise to completely clear the "7/12" land records of farmers by removing all debts. However, he noted that the presented budget failed to make a solid.



"Projects like the Third Mumbai, Fourth Mumbai, Shaktipeeth Highway and the Vadhvan Port are being built purely in the interest of large industrial conglomerates like Adani and Ambani. These will not directly benefit the general public," Sapkal said.

"The government's solar energy policy is also misleading. Instead of providing relief to electricity consumers, it will impose an additional burden of 26 paise per unit on them. Smart meters have already led to a significant

increase in electricity bills," Sapkal said.

"The government claimed that investment agreements worth Rs 50-lakh crore were signed at the Davos Summit between 2022 and 2025, but according to the Economic Survey Report, only Rs 6 lakh crore has actually come to the state. This clearly demonstrates a significant gap between the government's claims and actual reality," Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee President Harshwardhan Sapkal said.

Congress criticises govt over reported US 'waiver' for Russian oil purchases



New Delhi: Senior Congress leader K C Venugopal on Friday criticized the union government over reports related to India's purchase of Russian oil, accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi of compromising the country's energy sovereignty and foreign policy independence.

In a post on X, Venugopal said it was "deeply humiliating" for India to require a waiver from the United States in order to buy oil from Russia, which he described as a long-standing partner of the country.

"In Amrit Kaal, the Indian PM has to beg before other countries to purchase oil from where he wishes to," Venugopal wrote. "It is deeply humiliating for India's sovereignty and international standing that it needs a US 'waiver' to purchase oil from a time-tested partner like Russia."

The Congress leader further alleged that the government was failing to stand up to pressure from United States authorities and accused the prime minister of allowing other nations to influence India's energy choices. "Instead of standing up to the US dictating terms, Compromised PM Modi is handing our energy sovereignty on a platter to other countries," he said.

Calling for an independent foreign policy approach, Venugopal urged the government to prioritize

national interests while making strategic decisions related to energy imports. "India must take a strong independent stance and decide what is in supreme national interest—not allow other countries to dictate our foreign policy and force us to beg them for permission," he added.

India significantly increased its imports of discounted crude oil from Russia following Western sanctions on Moscow after the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine War in 2022. Since then, energy trade between the two countries has become a major component of India's crude import basket.

At the same time, India has maintained diplomatic and economic relations with both Russia and Western countries, including the United States, often emphasizing its strategic autonomy in foreign policy decisions.

The issue of energy security and crude sourcing has remained politically sensitive, with opposition parties frequently questioning the government's handling of international pressure and its implications for India's economic and strategic interests. The government has consistently maintained that its energy policy is guided by national interest and aimed at ensuring affordable supplies for the country.

US grants temporary waiver to India for buying Russian oil

New Delhi: The United States on Friday announced a temporary 30-day waiver allowing Indian refiners to purchase Russian oil currently stranded at sea, a move aimed at stabilising global energy supplies amid rising geopolitical tensions in West Asia.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said the measure was designed as a short-term step to ensure the continued flow of oil into global markets without providing substantial financial gains to Moscow. "President Donald Trump's energy agenda has resulted in oil and gas production reaching the highest levels ever recorded," Bessent said in a statement. "To enable oil to keep flowing into the global market, the Treasury Department is issuing a temporary 30-day waiver to allow Indian refiners to purchase Russian oil. This deliberately short-term measure will not provide significant financial benefit to the Russian government as it only authorizes transactions involving oil already stranded at sea," he added.

Bessent described India as an essential partner of the United States and said Washington expects New Delhi to increase purchases of American crude in the coming months.

"India is an essential partner of the

United States, and we fully anticipate that New Delhi will ramp up purchases of US oil. This stop-gap measure will alleviate pressure caused by Iran's attempt to take global energy hostage," he said. The decision comes as India reviews its energy security amid the growing risk of disruption in the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most critical oil shipping routes.

Earlier this week, India's Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri convened senior officials and executives from state-run energy firms to assess the availability of crude oil, liquefied natural gas (LNG), liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and refined petroleum products.

According to officials, the meeting reviewed contingency plans and decided that India would seek waivers from the United States to continue importing Russian oil if necessary to meet fuel requirements in the event of disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz. Indian officials are believed to have successfully taken up the matter with Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs S. Paul Kapur who visited New Delhi just before the Holi festival.

Roughly half of India's crude oil



imports — estimated at about 2.5 to 2.7 million barrels per day — along with nearly 60 per cent of its LNG supplies transit the strategic waterway between the Gulf and the Arabian Sea. The Strait has once again come into focus amid escalating tensions between the United States and Iran following reports of the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, raising concerns about possible tanker harassment, missile strikes or even temporary closure of the passage.

India imports the bulk of its energy from Gulf producers such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Kuwait. Analysts say the country's vulnerability lies less in a complete cut-off of supplies and more in cascading disruptions such as price spikes, shipping delays and rising freight costs that could affect the competitiveness of its exports. Since 2022, Russian crude has emerged as a crucial buffer for Indian refiners whenever supplies from the Gulf have faced disruptions. Imports from the United States, Guyana and other non-Gulf producers have also expanded, giving Indian refiners greater flexibility to diversify their crude basket.

Rahul Gandhi pays tribute to IAF officers killed in plane crash

New Delhi: Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Friday expressed deep sorrow over the death of two Indian Air Force officers, Squadron Leader Anuj and Flight Lieutenant Purvush Duragkar, who were killed in a plane crash while on duty.

In a post on social media, Gandhi described the loss as "extremely sad and painful" and paid homage to the officers for their service to the nation.

"The news of the martyrdom of brave Indian Air Force personnel, Squadron Leader Anuj and Flight Lieutenant Purvush Duragkar, in a plane crash is extremely sad and painful," he wrote.

Gandhi said the country would always remember the sacrifice made by the two officers and extended his sympathies to their families. "I pay my heartfelt tributes to these brave sons of India and express my deep condolences to the bereaved families," he



added.

Expressing solidarity with the grieving families, the Congress leader said the entire nation stands with them during this difficult time. "In this moment of grief, the entire nation stands with them," he said.

The crash claimed the lives of Squadron Leader Anuj and Flight Lieutenant Purvush Duragkar, both serving officers of the Indian Air Force. Authorities are expected to investigate the circumstances surrounding the incident.

The deaths of the two officers have prompted condolences from political leaders and citizens alike, with tributes pouring in for the personnel who lost their lives in service of the nation.

Government schemes have reduced risks for farmers, strengthened rural economy: PM

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said that various initiatives launched by the union government have reduced risks for farmers and provided them with basic economic security, while emphasizing that agriculture will remain a key pillar of India's long-term development strategy.

Speaking at the third post-Budget webinar focused on agriculture and rural prosperity, the prime minister highlighted the impact of flagship welfare schemes and called for greater efforts to transform the farm sector through diversification, exports and sustainable practices.

"Various government schemes have lowered risks for farmers and given them basic economic security," Modi said, adding that the Centre had disbursed more than Rs 4 lakh

crore to farmers under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme.

The prime minister stressed that agriculture plays a strategic role in India's development journey and said policy efforts would continue to focus on increasing farmers' income and strengthening the rural economy. "Agriculture is a strategic pillar for India's long-term development journey," he said.

Highlighting the government's emphasis on rural prosperity and women's empowerment, Modi said the country aims to significantly expand the number of rural women earning sustainable incomes through self-help groups. "Our government is focused on rural prosperity, and India has set a goal to add another three crore 'Lakshpati Didis' by 2029," he said, referring to the

initiative aimed at helping women from self-help groups earn an annual



income of at least Rs 1 lakh.

Modi also underlined the importance of crop diversification to enhance farmers' earnings and ensure sustainable agricultural growth. "We are focusing on crop diversification and need to encourage states to increase their focus on the farm sector," he said.

Calling for a shift towards environmentally sustainable farming

methods, the prime minister said India must strengthen chemical-free and natural farming practices, particularly with an eye on global markets. "We need to strengthen chemical-free farming and natural farming with a focus on exports," he said.

He further stressed the need to expand high-value agriculture while improving quality, branding and standards of Indian agricultural products. According to the prime minister, these steps would help make the sector more competitive globally and open up new opportunities for farmers.

"India's agriculture sector needs to become more export-oriented," Modi said, urging farmers and stakeholders to take advantage of the country's diverse climate conditions that allow the cultivation of a wide

variety of crops.

The government has been promoting several programmes in recent years aimed at boosting farm incomes, improving rural infrastructure and expanding agricultural exports. Initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme provide direct income support to small and marginal farmers, while other programmes focus on crop insurance, irrigation, digital agriculture and the promotion of natural farming.

The post-Budget webinars are part of the government's efforts to engage stakeholders and discuss the effective implementation of key announcements made in the union Budget, particularly those related to agriculture, rural development and inclusive economic growth.

Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy felicitated for implementing SC categorization

Hyderabad: Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy was felicitated by members of the Madiga Employees Coordination Committee at a programme held at Shilpakala Vedika in Hyderabad on Friday, thanking the government for granting legal backing to the categorisation of Scheduled Castes (SCs).

Ministers Damodar Rajanar-simha and Adhuri Laxman along with MLAs Kale Yadaiah, Vemula Veeresham and Lakshmi Kant Rao, attended the event. Representatives of the Madiga community honoured the Chief Minister for implementing SC categorisation.

Addressing the gathering, Revanth Reddy said the Congress government came to power in the 2023 elections with the aim of establishing people-centric governance and improving the lives of citizens.

He noted that the issue of SC categorisation had remained unresolved for many years and that several activists had sacrificed their lives during the struggle for justice.



The Chief Minister said he had been supporting the demand for categorisation for more than two decades and stood by the Madiga community despite political pressures. He pointed out that Telangana

became the first state to implement SC categorisation following directions from the Supreme Court.

Revanth Reddy said that while categorisation may not resolve all issues, the government would also

address concerns related to promotions, higher education, and land rights.

He emphasised that government employees should act as the "eyes and ears" of the administration and ensure that welfare schemes reach the poor.

Stressing the importance of education, the Chief Minister said socially and economically backward communities could progress through quality education.

He added that the government is taking steps to strengthen the education system and improve facilities in government hostels.

Calling on the community to protect their legally guaranteed rights, Revanth Reddy urged them to actively participate in the rebuilding and development of Telangana.

He assured continued support to disadvantaged sections and said the opportunity to serve as Chief Minister should be used to uplift the poor and marginalised.

JD-U workers concerned over Nitish Kumar's Rajya Sabha decision

Patna: Senior leader of Janata Dal (United) and the party's chief spokesperson Neeraj Kumar on Friday said that the decision of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar to contest the Rajya Sabha election has naturally caused concern among party workers and the public.

Speaking to media persons ahead of the JD-U legislature party meeting in Patna, Neeraj Kumar said that Nitish Kumar enjoys immense public trust and that strengthening this trust remains a challenge.

"Chief Minister Nitish Kumar is also the national president of the party. Filing nomination for the Rajya Sabha is within his authority, but party MPs, MLAs and MLCs are politically apprehensive and disturbed over the development," he said.

He added that the meeting of the legislature party had been convened in view of the prevailing situation, where legislators and parliamentarians would express their views.

Referring to the NDA's electoral slogan, Neeraj Kumar said the alliance had won elections with the call of "2025 to 2030 again under Nitish," underlining that Nitish Kumar remains the moral strength and central leader of the party.

"He is our leader, and protecting his political legacy and the trust he has built among the people is our responsibility," he said.

He recalled that even when Nitish Kumar was not the Chief Minister on an earlier occasion, he had reassured the people of Bihar and party workers with the words "Main hoon na" (I am here), which had strengthened their confidence in his



leadership. The JD(U) spokesperson said the exact political course of action would become clear only after the legislature party meeting.

"It is natural for the public and party workers to feel concerned, and for NDA partners it is a challenge to further strengthen the trust that Nitish Kumar has built," he added.

Neeraj Kumar said that although Nitish Kumar has taken many major political decisions in the past, he has always followed the tradition of consulting senior party leaders before finalising such decisions.

"In the current situation, knowing the opinion of party legislators is an important aspect," he said, adding that Nitish Kumar would ultimately take the final decision.

He also clarified that legislators would express their views in the meeting. "History is a witness that no one can pressurise Nitish Kumar. Everyone knows his style of functioning," he

said. According to him, party workers have become uneasy and their confidence needs to be restored. "There is anger and emotional hurt among workers, and addressing this sentiment is a challenge for the party leadership," he said.

Highlighting Nitish Kumar's political background, Neeraj Kumar said the Chief Minister has upheld the moral values of the socialist movement and has also worked with former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, learning the principles of coalition politics.

He also ruled out any possibility of the party aligning with the Rashtriya Janata Dal under the changed circumstances.

Neeraj Kumar said that Nitish Kumar's decision has generated anger as well as disappointment within the party, and these sentiments are likely to be expressed by leaders during the JD(U) legislature party meeting being held later this evening.

Awareness is essential to reduce dropouts and promote girls education: UP Governor

Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel emphasised the need for effective implementation of the "KG to PG" concept in the field of education, stating that a strong and continuous educational foundation from early childhood to higher education is essential for the overall development of students. She underlined that such an approach would help ensure that children receive quality education at every stage of their academic journey.

The Governor said that coordinated and sustained

efforts are required to achieve the goal of universal enrolment in early childhood education.

She stressed that all children aged three years should be enrolled in Anganwadi centres so that they receive proper nutrition, pre-school education and early childhood care, which play a crucial role in shaping their cognitive and social development.

She further noted that ensuring the enrolment of all six-year-old children in Class I is equally important for strengthening the primary

education system. According to her, early enrolment helps create a structured learning environment for children and reduces the chances of school dropouts in later years.

The Governor made these remarks during an interactive session held at Jan Bhawan, where she met a 21-member delegation of media representatives from the states of Karnataka and Tripura. The interaction provided an opportunity for journalists to engage with her on a wide range of issues related to governance and

social development.

During the session, the Governor shared her experiences and insights on subjects such as education, health services, women's empowerment and social awareness initiatives being carried out across Uttar Pradesh. She highlighted several programmes aimed at improving the quality of life and access to basic services for citizens.

Speaking about the challenge of school dropouts, she emphasised that awareness and encouragement among parents and communities are

essential. She pointed out that when families understand the importance of education, particularly for girls, they are more likely to ensure that children continue their studies without interruption.

The Governor stressed that special attention must be given to promoting girls' education, noting that educated girls contribute significantly to the progress of society. She added that increasing female literacy leads to better health outcomes, economic independence and stronger communities.

Wars and violence are man-made catastrophes that claim innocent lives: Mirwaiz

Srinagar: Kashmir's chief cleric Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, who claimed that he has been placed under house arrest, on Friday said wars and violence are man-made catastrophes that lead to the loss of countless innocent lives.

He also expressed deep concern over the continued restrictions in the Valley, particularly on a Friday during the holy month of Ramadan.

In a post on X, Mirwaiz said that in these greatly blessed days, when thousands of people come to mosques seeking blessings and guidance, the pulpit of the historic Jamia Masjid remains silent while all lanes and by-lanes leading to the mosque have been barricaded. He described the situation as "very sad and unfortunate." Mirwaiz said



that the sorrow being felt in Kashmir today is not only because of these restrictions but also due to the grave developments unfolding in the region. He noted that Muslims across the world are deeply aggrieved and anxious over Israeli and American aggression in the region. He said that Israel and the United States appear intent

on reshaping the region to suit their interests and, in pursuit of this objective, are willing to go to any extent.

Referring to the killing of a head of state and prominent spiritual leader, Ayatullah Khamenei and the attack on the sovereign nation of Iran, Mirwaiz said these developments have plunged the entire region into crisis

and grief.

Mirwaiz noted that people across Jammu and Kashmir, from the Valley to Jammu, Ladakh and Kargil, have expressed strong condemnation of this aggression and have voiced solidarity beyond divisions, standing together as one 'Ummah'.

"The Ummah cannot be divided in moments like this. When injustice is inflicted upon one part, the pain is felt by the entire body," he said.

Expressing solidarity, Mirwaiz said he stands with the people of Iran, the Palestinians, and all those bearing the brunt of aggression in the region and beyond.

Emphasising that every human life is precious, he said wars and violence are man-made catastrophes that lead to the loss of countless innocent lives.

Kalbe Jawad flays attacks on Iran, announces Lucknow protest

Lucknow: Shia cleric Maulana Kalbe Jawad on Friday strongly condemned the recent attacks on Iran allegedly carried out by the United States and Israel, warning that if the aggression continued, the community would organise a massive protest in Lucknow next Friday.

Addressing the media after the Friday prayers at the Asifi Mosque, the prominent Shia cleric criticised the actions of the US and Israel and expressed solidarity with Iran. He also led prayers seeking safety, peace and stability for the people of Iran amid the escalating tensions in the region.

Maulana Kalbe Jawad said that the community was deeply concerned about the situation unfolding in the Middle East. He stated that the ongoing attacks had created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, which could have wider consequences for regional and global peace.

The cleric also announced that, considering the current circumstances, Eid

celebrations this year would be observed with simplicity. He appealed to people to avoid extravagant spending during the festival and instead extend help to the poor and those in need.

He emphasised that the spirit of Eid lies in compassion, charity and solidarity with those who are suffering. In the present situation, he said, it was important for people to show restraint and use their resources to support the underprivileged.

Warning of possible protests, the cleric said that if the attacks on Iran continued, the community would raise its voice strongly from Lucknow itself. He announced that a large demonstration could be organised next Friday to express opposition to the actions of the United States and Israel.

A large number of worshippers were present during the Friday prayers at the Asifi mosque. Security arrangements had been tightened in and around the mosque premises, with a heavy police presence deployed to maintain law

and order during the gathering.

In his statement, Maulana Kalbe Jawad described the attack on Iran as a violation of international law and humanitarian principles. According to him, such actions undermine global efforts aimed at promoting peace and stability. He further blamed the United States and Israel for what he termed a tragic and dangerous situation in the region. The cleric warned that continued military aggression could further fuel instability and lead to serious consequences for international relations. "It is extremely unfortunate," he said, "when countries that speak about peace and justice on global platforms themselves take steps that could push the world towards greater conflict."

Maulana Kalbe Jawad also questioned what he described as India's silence on the issue. Referring to India's longstanding foreign policy position of advocating peace and dialogue, he said the country should express a clear stand on the developments.

'Sarus Circuit' to be developed in Mainpuri and Etawah to promote sarus conservation and eco-tourism in UP

Lucknow: The government of Uttar Pradesh has initiated the development of a Sarus Circuit aimed at conserving the Sarus crane while simultaneously promoting eco-tourism in the region. The project is designed to protect the natural habitat of the Sarus crane, the state bird, while creating new opportunities for sustainable tourism.

The Sarus Circuit is being developed across important wetland regions in Mainpuri district and Etawah district, which are known to host large populations of the Sarus crane. These wetlands serve as crucial breeding and feeding grounds for the species. Under the initiative, several wetland areas in Mainpuri will be included in the circuit. These include Kirthua, Sahas, Kurra Jarawan, Soj and Saman, which are recognised as key habitats for migratory and resident birds. In addition, the Sarus Circuit will also cover important wetland sites such as Sarsai Nawar and Parauli Ramayan in Etawah district. These areas have long been known for their rich biodiversity and are considered favourable environments for Sarus cranes. Officials said on Friday that the project

aims not only to protect the Sarus crane but also to develop eco-tourism activities in these wetland regions. By integrating conservation with tourism, the initiative seeks to generate awareness about wildlife protection while attracting visitors to the region. The main objective of the Sarus Circuit is to promote conservation of the Sarus crane and preserve wetland ecosystems. At the same time, the project aims to encourage responsible tourism that benefits both the environment and local communities. Authorities believe that the initiative will create new sources of income for residents living around the wetlands. By linking tourism with conservation, local communities will be encouraged to actively participate in protecting the Sarus crane and its habitat. The project is being implemented by the state forest department through the Uttar Pradesh Eco-Tourism Development Board. The board is responsible for developing infrastructure, promoting eco-tourism and ensuring that conservation efforts remain central to the initiative. The Sarus crane, known as the tallest flying bird in the world, holds special signifi-

cance in the state as the official bird of Uttar Pradesh. The species is known for its distinctive red head and neck and its strong pair bonding behavior. Large populations of Sarus cranes are found in the wetlands of Mainpuri, Etawah, Etah district and Aligarh district. Recognising the ecological importance of these areas, the state government has prioritised them for conservation under the Sarus Circuit project. As part of the initiative, the forest department is working to conserve shallow water bodies, ponds and wetlands in the region. These natural ecosystems are being restored and maintained to create ideal breeding and feeding conditions for the Sarus crane. Alongside conservation efforts, eco-tourism infrastructure is also being developed to enhance the visitor experience. The aim is to allow tourists to explore the wetlands without disturbing the natural habitat of birds. Several facilities are planned within the Sarus Circuit, including entrance gates, observation viewpoints, decks and boating spots. Butterfly gardens and solar-powered lighting systems will also be established to improve the aesthetic

Bill to regulate transfer and posting of teachers introduced in Assembly

Itanagar: Arunachal Pradesh Education Minister Pasang Dorjee Sona on Friday introduced the Arunachal Pradesh Transfer and Posting of Employees of Education Department (Regulation and Management) Bill, 2026 in the State Legislative Assembly.

The proposed legislation seeks to establish a comprehensive statutory framework to regulate the transfer and

posting of employees (teaching and non-teaching) under the Education Department in the state.

As per the statement of objects and reasons of the Bill, the transfers and postings in the Education Department are currently governed primarily through executive instructions, which often lead to inconsistencies, lack of uniform standards and frequent grievanc-

es, adversely affecting administrative efficiency and continuity in the education sector.

The Bill proposes clear tenure norms, objective and transparent criteria, and institutional requirements for regulating transfers and postings. It also aims to ensure equitable deployment of teachers and staff, particularly in remote and difficult areas of the state.

The legislation further provides for structured humanitarian considerations, digital processing of transfer and posting matters, and an effective grievance redressal mechanism while maintaining necessary administrative flexibility in the public interest. The minister stated that the enactment of the proposed law is intended to promote fairness, transparency and accountability in the

transfer and posting system. It will also strengthen governance in the education sector and enhance the quality, stability and continuity of education across Arunachal Pradesh.

The minister expressed hope that the proposed legislation would streamline administrative processes and ensure a more balanced distribution of teaching personnel throughout the state.

Sinha congratulates Nand Kishore Yadav on Nagaland Governor appointment

Patna: Vijay Kumar Sinha on Friday congratulated senior leader Nand Kishore Yadav on his appointment as the Governor of Nagaland and expressed confidence that his extensive political and administrative experience would provide fresh momentum to the state's development.

Extending his heartfelt congratulations and best wishes, Sinha said that Nand Kishore Yadav had consistently added dignity and prestige to every responsibility he had undertaken during his long public life. He

noted that Yadav's dedication and commitment to public service had earned him respect across political and administrative circles.

The Deputy Chief Minister described Yadav as a seasoned and capable leader whose political experience spans several decades. According to Sinha, his ability to handle complex administrative responsibilities and organisational matters had played a significant role in strengthening governance in Bihar.

Sinha further stated that throughout his career, Yadav had demonstrated exceptional leadership qualities and administrative efficiency. These qualities, he said, had helped improve governance and contributed to the state's overall development in multiple sectors.

Highlighting Yadav's contributions to public life, the Deputy Chief Minister said that he had always worked with sincerity and dedication. His commitment towards strengthening both governance and

organisational structures had made him an important figure in the political landscape of Bihar.

He added that Yadav's ability to connect with people at the grassroots level had enabled him to effectively address public concerns and contribute to welfare-oriented policies and initiatives.

Sinha also emphasised that Yadav had played a vital role in nurturing the government, organisational framework and party structure with great care and responsibility.

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Maharashtra Adopts National Fingerprint System to Modernize Policing

Mumbai: In a major push toward digital policing, the Maharashtra government on Friday officially approved the implementation of the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS) across all police stations in the state. This move is designed to replace or integrate with existing localized systems to create a more robust, centralized database for criminal identification. By adopting this central government framework, Maharashtra joins a unified national network that allows for the rapid digital collection and retrieval of fingerprints, palm prints, and facial data, significantly narrowing the window for identifying suspects.

The implementation of NAFIS is expected to revolutionize how information is shared between Maharashtra and other states. Previously, jurisdictional barriers often slowed down the exchange of forensic data, but the new interoperable database ensures that a criminal's record in one part of the country can be instantly accessed by investigators in another.

State officials have emphasized that this transition is mandatory for enhancing the accuracy and efficiency of criminal investigations, moving away from fragmented storage toward a seamless, national-level intelligence architecture.

To ensure the system functions at peak efficiency, the state government has issued specific



directives regarding infrastructure. Every police station across Maharashtra has been instructed to upgrade their internet capacity to handle the high-bandwidth requirements of the NAFIS workstations.

This technical overhaul is seen as a prerequisite for the "smooth and seamless" operation of the system, ensuring that officers on the ground can upload and cross-reference biometric data in real-time without technical bottlenecks.

The responsibility for overseeing this massive digital migration has been handed to the Criminal Investigation Department

(CID) in Pune. The Additional Director General of Police (ADG) and the Superintendent of Police (Technical) of the CID will supervise the transition and ensure that existing data from the older Automated Multimodal Biometric Identification System (AMBIS) is securely migrated to the NAFIS platform. This coordination with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) aims to operationalize the system in every station at the earliest, marking a new chapter in the state's forensic capabilities.

In a transformative step toward modernizing its law enforcement infrastructure, the

Maharashtra government on Friday formally sanctioned the implementation of the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS) across every police station in the state. This strategic move is intended to phase out or integrate fragmented, localized systems into a single, cohesive powerhouse for criminal identification. By aligning with this central government framework, Maharashtra officially integrates into a unified national grid, enabling law enforcement to collect and retrieve digital fingerprints, palm prints, and facial recognition data with unprecedented speed and accuracy.

Thane Students Secure Last-Minute Approval After Affiliation Crisis

Thane: A group of 27 students at a college in the Kasarvadavali area have narrowly escaped an academic catastrophe after it was revealed that their institution had been operating without mandatory university affiliation for an entire year. The situation, which came to light just as the university examination cycle was set to commence, initially left the students in a state of limbo,

facing the prospect of their academic year being declared null and void. The resolution came only after a tense period of negotiations involving panicked parents, college management, and university officials. The crisis underscored a significant lapse in administrative oversight, as the college continued

to admit and teach students despite lacking the necessary legal recognition to do so. Under standard educational protocols, any coursework completed at an unrecognized institution is considered invalid, and students are typically barred from participating in centralized university examinations.

Multi-Million Stamp Duty Fraud Uncovered in Navi Mumbai

Navi Mumbai: A massive financial scandal has rocked the regional registration department following the exposure of a ₹13.91 crore stamp duty scam in Koparkhairane. Turbhe police have officially registered a case against a former Joint Sub-Registrar and a document agent after an internal inquiry revealed that 141 property documents linked to unauthorized buildings were registered illegally, resulting in a staggering loss to the Maharashtra state exchequer.

The fraudulent activities reportedly occurred between September 2024 and July 2025 at the CIDCO Cooperative Sub-Registrar Office. Investigators allege that the then in-charge Joint

Sub-Registrar, Rajkumar Dahiphale, conspired with a registration agent, Yogesh Chavan, to bypass standard legal protocols. By misusing his official position, Dahiphale allegedly facilitated the registration of properties in unauthorized constructions—a practice strictly prohibited—while intentionally collecting stamp duty far below the government's prescribed rates.

The scale of the irregularities came to light after the District Deputy Registrar of Cooperative Societies in Thane conducted a comprehensive scrutiny of the documents processed during Dahiphale's tenure. The audit found clear violations of the Indian Registration Act, confirming that the

state was systematically cheated out of revenue. Following the submission of the inquiry report to the state government, legal proceedings were initiated to hold the officials and their accomplices accountable.

On March 5, a formal complaint was lodged at the Turbhe police station by Jyoti Raut, the current in-charge Joint Sub-Registrar at Thane.

The police have booked the accused under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Indian Registration Act, focusing on charges of cheating and the misuse of public office. As the investigation deepens, authorities are looking into whether more officials or agents

were part of this wider network of revenue theft.

The exposure of the ₹13.91 crore stamp duty scam in Navi Mumbai marks a major crackdown on white-collar crime and corruption within the state's registration department. Since the case has been filed under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Indian Registration Act, the accused face significant legal consequences.

The charges involve a combination of cheating, criminal conspiracy, and the misuse of official authority. Here is a breakdown of the specific legal provisions cited:

BNS Section 318(4) (Cheating and Dishonestly Inducing Delivery of Property).

Mumbai Prepares for the First Saturday of Ramadan 2026

Mumbai : The city of Mumbai is currently immersed in the spiritual atmosphere of the sacred month of Ramadan, with the Muslim community diligently observing the rigorous daily fasts that define this holy period. As the lunar calendar progresses, Saturday, March 7, 2026, marks a significant day for devotees as they continue their journey of faith from dawn until the evening. The practice of fasting, which is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, requires a high

degree of discipline and devotion, transforming the daily rhythm of the city as millions of residents synchronize their schedules with the rising and setting of the sun.

For those observing the fast in Mumbai on this upcoming Saturday, the day begins long before the first light of dawn touches the Arabian Sea. The pre-dawn meal, traditionally known as Sehri or Suhoor, is a vital part of the ritual, providing the necessary sustenance for the long day ahead. On

March 7, the deadline for concluding this meal is set at precisely 5:40 am. Families across the city's diverse neighborhoods, from the bustling streets of Mohammad Ali Road to the residential pockets of Bandra and Kurla, will be waking up in the quiet hours of the early morning to share this quiet, preparatory meal together.

Following the conclusion of Sehri, the period of absolute fasting begins, during which observers abstain from all food and drink. This commitment

is maintained throughout the daylight hours, requiring not just physical endurance but also a focused mental state. The fast is finally broken in the evening at sunset, an event known as Iftar. For Saturday, the expected time for Iftar in Mumbai is 6:47 pm. This specific moment is eagerly anticipated by worshippers, as it signifies the successful completion of another day of spiritual devotion and brings a sense of communal accomplishment across the city.

Panvel to Honor Women Achievers with 'Nari Samman 2026'

Panvel: In a grand gesture to commemorate International Women's Day, the Panvel Municipal Corporation (PMC) has announced a day-long celebration titled "Panvel Nari Samman 2026." Scheduled for March 9, the event will take place at the Adya Krantiveer Vasudev Balwant Phadke Natyagraha, serving as a dedicated platform to recognize the multifaceted contributions of women to the city's social and economic fabric. The program is designed to be a blend of empowerment, education, and cultural celebration, running from the morning hours well into the evening.

The festivities are set to begin with a ceremonial lamp lighting and Saraswati puja, marking a traditional start to the day's proceedings. The initial sessions will focus on the felicitation of distinguished women achievers from across the Panvel region, including local corporators who have made significant strides in public service. This segment aims to highlight role models with



in the community, showcasing their success stories to inspire the next generation of female leaders and professionals. Education and safety form a core pillar of the "Nari Samman" initiative. Recognizing the modern challenges faced by women, the PMC has organized expert-led guidance sessions covering critical topics such as cybercrime, physical safety, and the legal framework sur-

rounding women's rights. There will also be a focused discussion on social issues like the prevention of female feticide, ensuring that the event serves as a comprehensive resource for information on empowerment and legislative protection.

The afternoon session promises to transition into a more vibrant and celebratory mood with a special segment titled "Jagar Stree Shakticha."

Editorial

A farce of laxity of the institutions?

It has been a month since the untimely death of Ajit Pawar, a fiery leader on the political horizon of Maharashtra and the president of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). However, instead of clearing the fog of suspicion surrounding this incident that has passed behind the curtain of time, it is getting darker day by day. When a senior leader dies accidentally in such a way, the institutions are expected to work on a war footing and transparently to find out the reasons behind it. However, what is going on in the name of investigation in this case, the angry question is now being raised whether this is a real investigation or just a farce of an investigation. Due to the discrepancies in the preliminary report, a series of suspicious incidents and the delay in the investigation, the question is being raised whether this accident was a simple accident or there is some big secret hidden behind it. Ajit Pawar's nephew and MLA Rohit Pawar has done the work of unraveling this entire matter, and the vague answers from the government to the questions raised by him that 'investigation is underway' are sharpening the needle of suspicion. On January 28, at around 8:45 am, Ajit Pawar's plane crashed while landing at Baramati airport, and from there, the discussion started on whether there was a major accident behind it. Rohit Pawar has repeatedly presented evidence, considering the seriousness of the matter, but the shocking thing is that the police have refused to even register his complaint. If the issues and complaints raised by a public representative are being ignored by the police administration, then it cannot be ruled out that the threads of this matter are very deep. The first preliminary report given by the Aircraft Accident Investigation Board (AAIB) is the biggest mockery of this investigation. In this report, a strange conclusion has been drawn that the plane crashed after hitting a tree. Both Rohit Pawar and Chhagan Bhujbal have strongly objected to this claim. Given the height of the bushes on the runway of Baramati airport and the flight altitude of the aircraft, the exact tree it hit is being questioned. More surprisingly, this technical report mentions Baramati as a 'district' and Baramati as a 'municipality'. It is hard to imagine how seriously an agency that lacks basic knowledge of geographical and administrative information would investigate the death of a former deputy chief minister.

The conduct of the airline company 'VSR Venture', which is at the heart of this case, is the height of irresponsibility. A month after Rohit Pawar's persistent allegations, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has banned the company's aircraft, which means that there were definitely serious flaws in the company's procedures. However, the question of why this action was taken so late remains unanswered. According to the sensational revelation made by Rohit Pawar, the aircraft of this same company had violated international rules in January 2023 while carrying the then Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and senior officials of the state administration to Davos. Those countries had warned of shooting down the aircraft for entering the airspace of Iran and Iraq without permission. Why was strict action not taken against the company that had put the life of the Chief Minister of the state in such a state? It has now become imperative to find out whose blessing this company was so brave.

Another incident that raises questions about the credibility of the VSR company is a photograph released by Jai Ajit Pawar. In which the owner of the company himself is seen sleeping comfortably in the pilot's chair in the cockpit of the aircraft. Allowing anyone to behave in such a sensitive place like the cockpit of the aircraft is a clear violation of aviation safety rules. Despite such serious evidence, the DGCA has only grounded a few aircraft and has not taken a complete ban or criminal action against the company. Rohit Pawar is asking the question of what invisible force is working behind the scenes to support this company, and it has also become a question in the minds of the public. Rohit Pawar has so far held four press conferences and connected many links in the context of this accident. According to his latest claim, the airport was reconnoitered before the accident, which is an important thread that gives a criminal twist to this case. Ajit Pawar was a prominent figure in Maharashtra politics, and the government's evasion regarding the investigation into his death is fueling many doubts. Rohit Pawar has demanded a CBI inquiry into the matter, but there has been no positive response from the government so far. It is the responsibility of the government to appoint a high-level agency for any impartial investigation, but here the picture has emerged that the investigation is only a sham. This mystery is increasing due to the political interests of the owner of the VSR company and the discrepancies found at the accident site. When such technical errors and delays are made in the investigation, the message goes out to the public that there is an attempt to hide something behind it. The people of Maharashtra have every right to know the truth about the death of Ajit Pawar. This is not just the death of a political leader, it is a serious matter related to the security of the state and the implementation of aviation regulations. The role of the VSR Venture Company in this case, the suspicious requisition before the accident and the ridiculous errors in the AAIB report, if we combine all these factors, the direction of the investigation seems to be lost. Unless the investigation of this case is handed over to an autonomous body like the CBI, it is impossible to put a complete end to these questions. If the truth about the death of a public leader is being suppressed in the midst of power negotiations and political turmoil, it will be a great tragedy for democracy. Therefore, the government needs to stop its hushed-up stance and take concrete steps to bring the culprits to justice, otherwise the 'farce of the investigation' will be recorded in history as the final truth of this matter. The truth about Ajit Pawar's death is not just the demand of a family or a party, but the right of the people of Maharashtra. The delay in the investigation, technical errors in the report and suspicious developments are all casting a shadow of doubt in the minds of the people. If a fair and thorough investigation is not conducted into this matter, it will not only be a question of the death of a leader, but also the faith in democracy will be shattered. Therefore, it is imperative for the government to take a clear and transparent stance and bring out the truth. Otherwise, history will remember this matter as a 'farce of the investigation'.

National Arogya Fair 2026 concludes in Shegaon



The four-day National Arogya Fair 2026, organised by the Ministry of Ayush in collaboration with the All India Ayurvedic Congress at Shegaon, Buldhana district of Maharashtra from 25-28 February 2026, concluded successfully yesterday, reaffirming India's commitment to holistic healthcare and rural empowerment through its traditional systems of medicine. The Fair, inaugurated by the President of India, Smt. Droupadi Murmu, at the sacred Visava Maidan of Sant Gajanan Maharaj Sansthan, emerged as a vibrant confluence of healthcare outreach, scientific dialogue, farmer engagement and public participation. Over four days, the event witnessed enthusiastic participation from citizens, practitioners, researchers, industry representatives, students and thousands of farmers from Buldhana and the wider Vidarbha region.

In her inaugural address, the President described health as the highest form of happiness and underlined that Ayush systems offer a comprehensive lifestyle framework rooted in harmony between body and mind. She emphasised that preventive and holistic

healthcare is central to reducing disease burden and strengthening the nation. On the occasion, she conferred the Lifetime Ayurvedic Gaurav Samman upon eminent practitioners for their outstanding contribution to Ayurveda, honouring their decades of service in advancing traditional medicine and public health.

The Governor of Maharashtra, Shri Acharya Devvrat, described Ayurveda as a timeless scientific tradition rooted in India's ancient



knowledge systems and stressed the importance of authenticity and quality in practice and medicines.

Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Ayush, Shri Prataprao Jad-

hav, who personally visited the Fair on almost all four days, described the National Arogya Fair as a "Mahakumbh of Indian traditional medicine systems." Interacting extensively with practitioners, farmers, entrepreneurs and members of the public, he reiterated that Ayush is not merely a system of treatment but a nationwide movement for preventive healthcare, rural prosperity and global wellness leadership.

Shri Jadhav highlighted that under the leadership of the Prime Minister, the Ministry is strengthening evidence-based research, quality assurance and global outreach in Ayush systems. He underscored the immense potential of Ayush tourism and stated that India can emerge as the "crown of the world" in holistic wellness through Ayurveda, Yoga and natural therapies, generating employment and boosting rural economies.

A major highlight of the Fair was the extensive healthcare outreach provided free of cost to the public. Dedicated OPD counters across Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Sid-

and authentic Ayush medicines. Visitors appreciated the opportunity to receive expert advice on lifestyle disorders, chronic conditions and preventive care under one roof.

Live Yoga demonstrations and Yoga therapy sessions drew enthusiastic participation from all age groups. A Yoga competition organised during the Fair saw spirited involvement of youth and students, reflect-



ing growing awareness and acceptance of Yoga as a preventive and promotive healthcare tool. The Ayush Aahar segment promoting region-specific, balanced dietary practices based on Ayush principles also received positive response from visitors. The Ministry's pavilion showcased the work of its Research Councils, National Institutes and the National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB), presenting scientific research outcomes, public health initiatives, academic programmes and digital outreach efforts. Interactive displays on medicinal plants, herbal products and simple home-based remedies attracted considerable interest, especially among rural visitors and self-help groups. A distinctive feature of the National Arogya Fair 2026 was its focused engagement with

farmers. Special sessions on "Ayurvedic Farming: Production, Value Addition and Marketing" provided technical guidance on medicinal plant cultivation, post-harvest management and assured market linkages. Approximately 2000 farmers participated in the dedicated workshop organised in coordination with agricultural institutions and experts. The signing of multiple Letters of Intent, including a signifi-

able avenue alongside conventional agriculture. Many described the Fair as a timely intervention that connects healthcare advancement with income enhancement and environmental sustainability.

Throughout the four days, the Fair functioned as a dynamic platform for knowledge exchange, public awareness and direct service delivery. Expert lectures, therapy showcases, industry exhibitions and interactions between policy-makers and grassroots stakeholders reinforced the integrated vision of health and livelihood.

The successful conclusion of the National Arogya Fair 2026 at Shegaon reflects the Ministry of Ayush's continued commitment to bringing traditional systems of medicine closer to the people, while simultaneously strengthening research, quality standards and farmer participation in the Ayush value chain.

By combining free healthcare services, scientific engagement, youth participation through Yoga competitions and structured support for medicinal plant cultivation, the Fair has demonstrated how Ayush systems can contribute simultaneously to public health, rural development and India's emergence as a



dicinal plant cultivation offers a sustainable and profit-

global hub for holistic wellness.

Built for What's Next at Main Stage

Union Minister for Communications Jyotiraditya Scindia will represent India at the Mobile World Congress 2026 scheduled to be held from March 2 to March 5 in Barcelona. The global event is regarded as one of the largest and most influential gatherings in the fields of technology and telecommunications.

Mobile World Congress brings together policymakers, technology leaders, telecom operators, innovators and industry stakeholders from across the world to discuss the future of digital connectivity, emerging technologies and next-generation communication infrastructure.

During his visit, Scindia will inaugurate the Bharat Pavilion at MWC 2026, which will serve as a platform to showcase India's growing telecom manufacturing capabilities and its rapidly expanding

digital innovation ecosystem.

The pavilion will highlight India's progress in areas such as telecom equipment manufacturing, digital infrastructure, 5G technology development and innovative communication solutions developed by Indian companies and startups.

The Union Minister will also unveil the curtain raiser for the India Mobile Congress 2026, India's flagship forum for digital technology and telecommunications. The announcement will promote the upcoming event and invite global participation from technology companies, researchers and policymakers.

As part of the Congress programme, Scindia will deliver an address in the GSMA Ministerial Programme during a Main Stage session titled "Built for What's

Next." The session will bring together global leaders to deliberate on future-ready digital infrastructure and emerging technology frameworks.

The discussion is expected to focus on the evolving telecommunications landscape, including next-generation networks, artificial intelligence integration, digital transformation and the need for resilient and scalable communication systems.

Scindia will also deliver the closing keynote address at the GSMA Ministerial Stage on the theme "Breaking the Cost Barrier." His address will highlight the importance of building affordable, inclusive and scalable digital connectivity models that can be adopted globally.

The keynote is expected to emphasise India's experience in ex-

panding digital infrastructure at scale and providing affordable connectivity to millions of users across urban and rural areas.

During the visit, the Union Minister will also participate in a CEO dinner hosted by India. The event will bring together global telecom leaders and industry executives to explore opportunities for collaboration and innovation.

The interaction with global CEOs is expected to underline India's commitment to building trusted partnerships and promoting international cooperation in the technology and telecommunications sectors.

In addition, Scindia will undertake focused booth visits and attend technology demonstrations organised by leading global and Indian companies participating in the event.

One of the key highlights of his visit will be the launch of the T31600-D3 Hyper-scalable DCI Platform at the booth of Tejas Networks, marking a significant milestone in India's advanced telecom product development.

The launch will showcase India's growing capability in developing high-end telecommunications equipment and strengthening domestic manufacturing in the sector.

Apart from participating in conference sessions, the Union Minister will also hold high-level bilateral meetings with key stakeholders from the global telecom industry. These meetings are expected to explore potential cooperation in areas such as universal connectivity, resilient communication infrastructure and digital technology development.

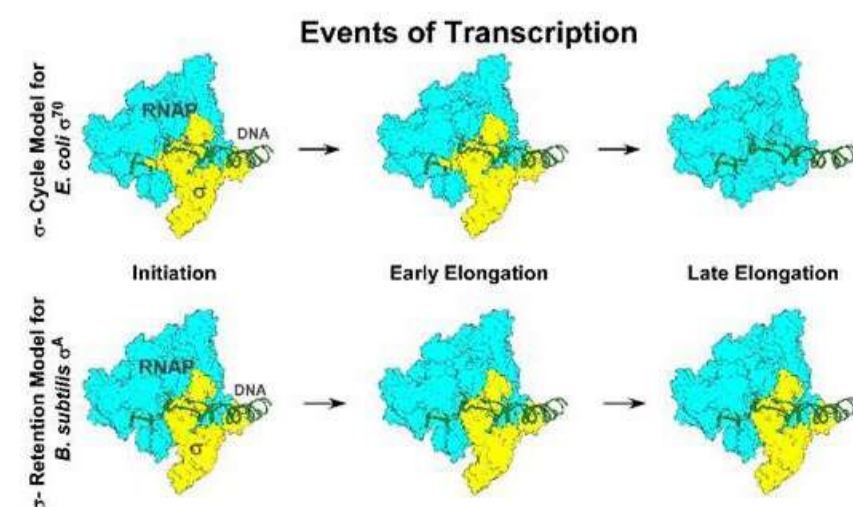
Indian scientists helped rewrite a 50-year-old biological rule

A new study overturns a central textbook model of bacterial gene regulation and unveils new paths for understanding bacterial gene regulation and its evolution.

This could help designing better antibiotics or regulatory inhibitors that block infection mechanism and design microorganisms that produce biofuels, biodegradable plastics, or therapeutic compounds efficiently.

For nearly 50 years, biology has related the story of how bacteria turn their genes on with the help of the so-called "σ (sigma) cycle" – factors that bind RNA polymerase to initiate transcription and then dissociate to allow elongation. This concept was built largely on observations of bacterial strain *E. coli* σ70. However, Researchers from the Bose Institute, an autonomous institute of the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and Rutgers University reveal that the cycle is not a universal phenomenon.

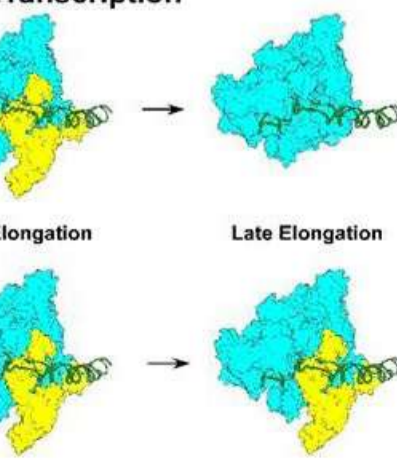
In a study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) they have reported that, contrary to decades of scientific belief, the principal transcription initiation factor in *Bacillus subtilis*—σA—and a modified version of the *Escherichia coli*



σ70 factor remain bound to RNA polymerase throughout transcription, rather than being released after initiation.

"Our work shows that in *Bacillus subtilis*, the σA factor stays attached to RNA polymerase all the way through the transcription

Events of Transcription



process," said Dr. Jayanta Mukhopadhyay, corresponding author from the Bose Institute. "This fundamentally changes how we think about bacterial transcription and gene regulation."

Using a combination of modern tech-

niques like biochemical assays, chromatin immunoprecipitation, and fluorescence-based imaging—the researchers watched the sigma factor's behaviour in real time. They found that *Bacillus subtilis* σA and an *E. coli* σ70 variant lacking a part called 1.1 remain stably associated with transcription complexes. This is in stark contrast to full-length *E. coli* σ70, which is released stochastically during elongation.

"These findings provide compelling evidence that the long-accepted σ cycle does not apply to all bacteria," added co-author Aniruddha Tewari of Bose Institute. "It opens new avenues for understanding bacterial gene regulation and its evolution."

The discovery has broad implications for microbiology, potentially influencing how researchers approach bacterial physiology, stress response, and the development of antibiotics targeting transcription.

The study, was authored by Aniruddha Tewari, Shreya Sengupta, Soumya Mukherjee, Nilanjana Hazra, from Bose Institute and YWE and RHE and Yon W. Ebright, Richard H. Ebright, and Jayanta Mukhopadhyay from Rutgers University, USA.

Former Tripura deputy chief minister Jishnu Dev Varma named Maharashtra Governor

Mumbai: Former Tripura deputy chief minister Jishnu Dev Varma has been appointed Governor of Maharashtra by President Droupadi Murmu as part of a wider reshuffle of Governors across the country.

The notification was issued on March 6. Varma is yet to take oath as the Governor.

Born on Aug 15, 1957, in Agartala, Tripura, Varma belongs to the state's erstwhile royal family. He is the nephew of Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya Bahadur and the uncle of Pradyot Bikram Manikya Deb Barma.

His father Ramendra Kishore Debbarma served as military secretary and home secretary to the Maharaja. Varma completed his BA (Honours) in English Literature from the University of Calcutta.

He is married to Sudha Debbarma and the couple has two sons, Pratik Kishore Dev Varma and Jai-bant Kishore Dev Varma.

Varma has also been associated with sports administration and cul-



tural activities. He earlier headed the Tripura unit of the Badminton Association of India and has maintained interests in literature, photography and cultural preservation.

Some of his photographs were featured in a publication titled 'The Risha, History in a Narrow Weave'. Because of his royal lineage, he is often addressed as "Karta", a term referring to a prince.

In recent years he has authored several books and essays focusing on Tripura's history, culture, language and indigenous traditions.

Varma began his political journey with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during the Ram Janmabhoomi movement in the early 1990s. He later entered electoral politics and represented the Charilam constituency in the Tripura Legislative As-

sembly from 2018 to 2023. He won the seat in 2018 but lost the 2023 election to Subodh Deb Barma of the Tipra Motha Party.

On March 9, 2018, Varma was sworn in as the second deputy chief minister of Tripura under chief minister Biplab Kumar Deb.

During his tenure he handled key portfolios including finance, power, rural development including panchayat, planning and coordination, and science, technology and environment.

His transition to gubernatorial responsibilities began on July 27, 2024, when President Murmu appointed him Governor of Telangana. He assumed office on July 31, 2024.

Varma served in the post until the latest reshuffle, in which Shiv Pratap Shukla was appointed Governor of Telangana.

He now replaces Acharya Devvrat, who had been holding additional charge of Maharashtra since September 2025.

HC Refuses To Allot Space For Namaz Near Mumbai Airport

Mumbai: The Bombay High Court on Thursday refused to allot a space for offering Namaz during the holy month of Ramzan near Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) citing security reasons.

Dismissing a petition from taxi and auto-rickshaw drivers' union, a division bench of Justices B.P. Colabawalla and Firdosh Pooniwalla ruled that "security is paramount" and overrides religious considerations in high-risk zones like airports.

The union has sought permission to use a space which was demolished or be allotted another site in the same area where they could offer namaz. "When there is a security risk...security comes first; irrespective of religion. When it comes to security, we will not com-



promise one bit...religion or otherwise - security comes first. Everybody travels through this airport irrespective of their religion," the bench said.

The Maharashtra government submitted a report after surveying seven alternative sites, concluding that none were suitable due to

security risks, congestion, and ongoing airport development plans.

The court stated that while Ramadan is integral to the petitioners' religion, there is no religious right to offer prayers at any specific public location, particularly one that compromises public safety.

Impact of Middle East War on Farmers; Government Should Intervene

Pune: The escalating tensions in the Middle East involving the United States, Israel and Iran are beginning to impact agricultural exports from Maharashtra, with farmers and traders facing growing uncertainty, social activist Hemant Patil said on Thursday.

Patil, who serves as the national president of India Against Corruption, stated that around 2,000 containers of agricultural produce from the state are currently stranded at the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT), leading to significant financial losses for exporters.

According to him, the containers mainly carry bananas, grapes and onions that were meant for export to international markets, particularly in Gulf countries.

The disruption has oc-

curred as the ongoing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East have affected global shipping routes and logistics networks.

Patil said the situation has created serious challenges for exporters, as shipments are unable to move forward while transportation costs continue to rise. He urged both the Government of India and the Government of Maharashtra to intervene immediately and take steps to support farmers and traders affected by the disruption.

According to Patil, authorities should explore alternative export routes and logistical solutions so that agricultural produce can reach international markets without further delays. He also called on the government to take measures to re-

duce the increased financial burden faced by exporters due to the ongoing conflict.

Patil warned that if the conflict continues for an extended period, the economic impact on farmers and exporters across the country could become even more severe. Referring to India's global diplomatic standing, he said Narendra Modi could play an important role in efforts aimed at reducing tensions and bringing an end to the conflict. "Considering the global reputation and widely accepted leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he could play a significant role in helping to stop the conflict in the Middle East," Patil said.

He further pointed out that international shipping companies have started imposing an additional "Emergency Conflict Surcharge"

on cargo shipments due to the heightened risk in the region.

According to him, the surcharge ranges from 2,000 to 4,000 US dollars per container, significantly increasing the cost of exporting agricultural goods.

Patil said this sudden rise in freight costs is directly affecting traders and farmers who depend on exports for their livelihoods.

Thousands of containers are currently lined up at the port, and the export process has been severely disrupted, he added. Although the conflict is taking place far from India, its economic consequences are being felt by farmers and traders in Maharashtra, particularly those involved in the export of perishable agricultural products.

Officials Misleading Maratha Community and Government: Manoj Jarange Patil

Jalna: Maratha reservation activist Manoj Jarange Patil on Thursday alleged that government officials are misleading both the Maratha community and the state government regarding the statistics of Kunbi caste records found across the state. He urged Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis to take a review of the data and strictly monitor officials.

In a statement, Jarange Patil noted that during a recent meeting of the sub-committee appointed under senior minister Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil to address the Maratha reservation issue, it was claimed that 4.8 million Kunbi records had been found and 1.2 million certificates had already been distributed. However, he alleged that these figures are completely false and differ



significantly from the data previously provided by the government.

According to Jarange Patil, the earlier figures shared with them based on the report of the Shinde Committee had indicated a different number of Kunbi records. He pointed out that there is a discrepancy of nearly one million records between the earlier data and the figures announced in the recent sub-committee meet-

ing, raising questions about where these records have gone.

He acknowledged that some officials are working sincerely, but alleged that in certain districts, some officials are deliberately issuing certificates without proper verification. Such actions, he said, are misleading both the Maratha community and the government, and the Chief Minister must take corrective measures.

Jarange Patil also questioned why one case filed against protesters during the Mumbai agitation has not been withdrawn when seven out of eight cases have already been dropped. He demanded that the remaining case be withdrawn and that cases registered against protesters across the state also be revoked.

Furthermore, he demanded that the families of protesters who died during the Maratha reservation movement be honoured by providing them jobs in government-linked institutions such as the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation and the state power distribution company according to their educational qualifications, without requiring recommendations from the sub-committee.

Anil Ambani-linked company denies ED raids at its premises

Mumbai: The Anil Ambani-linked Reliance Power made a regulatory filing to the stock exchanges here on Friday, denying media reports concerning the Enforcement Directorate (ED) searches at premises linked to the company in Mumbai and Hyderabad. Within hours of the media reporting about the ED raids, the Anil Ambani-linked Reliance Power issued an official statement to the stock exchanges stating, "This is in reference to various media reports alleging that the Enforcement Directorate has conducted raids at locations linked to Reliance Power Limited. In this regard, the company would like to clarify that, to the best of its knowledge, no such action has been carried out at any of the offices or premises of the company".



The official statement dated March 6, 2026, sent to the stock exchanges on a letterhead featuring the address of its Ballard Estate-based Mumbai office also featured the signature of its Company Secretary Ramandeep Kaur.

Earlier on Friday, it was widely reported in the media that the ED had begun search operations at around

12 locations across the city as part of an ongoing investigation.

It was reported that 15 specialised teams of the ED had searched offices as well as residential premises connected with individuals linked to the company, though the ED has not issued any official statement so far. It may be recalled that

recently, the ED had provisionally attached a luxury residential property named 'Abode' in Mumbai's Pali Hill area in Bandra West, valued at Rs 3,716.83 crore, in connection with a bank fraud case involving Reliance Communications Ltd.

According to an earlier official statement issued by the ED, the property was attached under provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002 and a part of the same property, worth Rs 473.17 crore, had already been attached in the case earlier.

Additionally, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had also conducted searches in February at the residence of Anil Ambani and at the offices of Reliance Communications (RCom) after registering another case

against the company.

A case was filed after a complaint filed by Bank of Baroda, which had alleged that it suffered losses exceeding Rs 2,220 crore in connection with loans extended to Reliance Communications.

According to the FIR, the loans were allegedly diverted and misused through fictitious transactions involving related entities. Investigators also alleged that the company's accounts were manipulated to conceal irregularities.

After the case was registered, the CBI had searched the residence of Anil Ambani and the registered offices of Reliance Communications as well as recovered documents related to the loan transactions, the agency had stated.

MSRTC fined Rs 1.5 Crore for speed limit violations by drivers

Mumbai: The Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) has been fined a substantial amount by the Regional Transport Office (RTO) after several state transport bus drivers were found exceeding speed limits on major highways across the state.

According to officials, the total penalty imposed on the corporation has crossed Rs 1.5 crore following repeated instances of speed limit violations recorded by traffic monitoring systems.

In response, MSRTC has appealed to the Maharashtra State Transport Department to waive the entire fine, citing operational challenges faced by the public transport service.

Officials said that many of the violations were detected through automated speed monitoring cameras installed on highways, which captured buses travelling

above the prescribed limits for heavy vehicles.

The highest number of violations were reportedly recorded on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway, one of the busiest and most important transport corridors connecting Mumbai and Pune.

Traffic congestion is a frequent issue on the expressway, particularly during peak travel hours, which often affects the punctuality of long-distance bus services operating on the route.

MSRTC officials said that the corporation operates premium Shivneri Bus Service buses on the Mumbai-Pune route, which are known for their punctuality and comfortable travel experience. These buses are widely used by daily commuters and intercity passengers who rely on the service for timely travel between the two cities. According to MSRTC officials, drivers sometimes

exceed the prescribed speed limits in an effort to compensate for time lost due to heavy traffic congestion and ensure that passengers reach their destinations on schedule. The corporation also pointed out that the nature of passenger transport services differs from freight transportation, and therefore the current classification may not accurately reflect operational realities. At present, ST buses are categorised under the heavy vehicle category, which restricts their speed limit to 80 kilometres per hour on highways. MSRTC has suggested that state transport buses should instead be categorised under passenger transport vehicles rather than heavy vehicles. If this proposal is accepted by authorities, the existing speed limit rules applicable to heavy vehicles would no longer apply to state transport buses.

Two youths arrested for harassing foreigner woman tourist

Mumbai: Police have arrested two youths for allegedly stalking, molesting and harassing a foreign woman traveller in central Mumbai after a video posted by the victim on social media went viral, officials said on Thursday.

The accused have been identified as 22-year-old Mansukh Kumar Chandkishor Sharma and 20-year-old Gulshankumar Naresh Sharma. Both were arrested following a police investigation and later produced before a court. The court remanded the two accused to police custody for three days to facilitate further investigation into the incident. Officials said the police are continuing to gather evidence and question the suspects. According to police officials, the case was registered by the Agripada Police Station after the viral video of the alleged harassment came to

the notice of authorities.

The video, which was reportedly recorded by the foreign traveller herself, showed the accused allegedly following and harassing her in a public area. The clip quickly spread across social media platforms, drawing widespread concern and prompting police to take immediate action.

Based on the complaint, police registered a case under Sections 74, 78(1)(p), and 3(5) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which deal with offences related to harassment, stalking and criminal acts committed by multiple individuals.

Soon after the case was filed, multiple police teams were formed to trace the suspects. Investigators began analysing the viral video in detail to identify the individuals involved. Police also scanned CCTV footage from several locations in the

surrounding area in order to reconstruct the sequence of events and confirm the movements of the accused. In addition to reviewing video footage, officers conducted inquiries with local residents, shopkeepers and workers in the area to gather information that could help identify the suspects.

During the course of the investigation, police identified one of the accused, Gulshankumar Naresh Sharma, as a construction worker employed at a site in the Malabar Hill area. A police team subsequently located him at the construction site and took him into custody for questioning. After verifying his involvement in the incident, he was formally placed under arrest. Meanwhile, investigators learned that the prime accused, Mansukh Kumar Chandkishor Sharma, had fled the city shortly after the incident.

Rohit Pawar alleges VIP treatment to VK Singh in Ajit Pawar crash probe

Mumbai: A fresh controversy has emerged involving the investigation into the aircraft accident that killed former Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on January 28, with MLA Rohit Pawar alleging that a key individual questioned in the case received special treatment from investigators.

Pawar has repeatedly claimed that the accident may have involved a major conspiracy and has held several press conferences in recent days raising questions about the circumstances surrounding the tragedy.

He also met Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis and submitted some documents to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to aid the probe. As part of the investigation, the CID summoned VK Singh, chief of the VSR company, to Pune for ques-

tioning on Thursday (March 5). However, Rohit Pawar has alleged that instead of rigorous interrogation, Singh was treated with extraordinary courtesy by the investigating agency.

According to him, Singh was allowed certain privileges during the questioning, including time in the evening to watch a cricket match.

In a post on social media, Rohit Pawar said doubts had arisen about whether the CID had actually called Singh for interrogation or for what he described as "royal hospitality". He stated that Singh arrived at 11 am and officials claimed he was questioned for eight hours, but Pawar alleged that much of the time was spent attending to him and providing hospitality.

Pawar further claimed that later in the night Singh



was escorted away like a guest in a police vehicle fitted with black-tinted glasses. Questioning the action, Pawar questioned why a person allegedly involved in questionable activities was allowed to leave in such a vehicle.

He added that despite attempts to hide the truth

behind "black curtains", the truth in the matter would eventually come to light.

Rohit Pawar also criticised the authorities for what he described as unequal treatment in the case. He said that despite repeated demands, an FIR on the aircraft accident had still not been registered, while the in-

dividual linked to the aircraft involved in the tragedy was allegedly being given VIP treatment.

Pawar further claimed that journalists who went to cover the development were treated improperly by the police. In this situation, he questioned whether ruling party MLAs who had worked closely with Ajit Pawar and considered themselves his trusted associates would speak up.

Referring to the investigation timeline, Pawar said the CID had earlier assured that an FIR would be registered after the report of the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) into Ajit Pawar's plane crash was submitted. However, he pointed out that four-five days had already passed since that assurance and the FIR had still not been filed.

Talks with Rani Mukherji never progressed for 'Oh My Goddess'

Mumbai : The anticipated on-screen pairing of Rani Mukherji and Akshay Kumar has once again failed to materialise, nearly two decades after a similar opportunity fell through. Mukherji is reportedly no longer attached to the third instalment of the popular "OMG" franchise, tentatively titled "Oh My Goddess."

The development has effectively ended what could have been the duo's first on-screen collaboration. Despite both being among the most prominent actors in Hindi cinema for decades, Rani Mukherji and Akshay Kumar have never appeared together in a film.

Interestingly, the actors were once expected to star together in a 1997 project titled Mulaqat, which was eventually shelved before production could begin. The project's cancellation meant that their on-screen partnership never came to fruition.

According to industry sources, Mukherji had recently been in discussions to join the new film "Oh My Goddess," which is being developed as the next instalment in the well-known franchise that began with OMG – Oh My God! and continued with OMG 2.

In the proposed storyline, Mukherji was expected to play the lead protagonist, while Akshay Kumar would reprise his role in an extended cameo



appearance, continuing the tradition established in the earlier films.

A source familiar with the discussions said that Mukherji had listened to the brief outline of the story and had initially expressed interest in the project. However, the conversations reportedly remained at a preliminary stage and did not develop into a formal agreement.

"Akshay and Rani share a great long-standing relationship and were genuinely excited about teaming up, but those were very early conversations," a source told Variety India.

The OMG franchise is known for its satirical take on themes related to faith, belief systems and religious institutions, often blending humour with strong social commentary.

The upcoming instalment is expected to introduce a new narrative direction, reportedly featuring a divine feminine perspective. The film aims to retain the franchise's signature mix of humour and thought-provoking storytelling while exploring contemporary social issues.

Director Amit Rai, who helmed OMG 2, is set to return to the direc-

tor's chair for the new project. The previous film received positive responses from audiences and critics for its socially relevant theme and performances.

The film is being produced by Vikram Malhotra under the banner of Abundantia Entertainment in association with Akshay Kumar's own production house.

With Mukherji stepping away from the project, the filmmakers have reportedly begun exploring other casting options for the female lead role. An official announcement regarding the new casting is expected in the coming months.

Production of "Oh My Goddess" is tentatively scheduled to begin between May and June 2026, depending on finalisation of the cast and other pre-production arrangements.

Meanwhile, Mukherji has been enjoying a strong phase in her career. Her recent film Mardaani 3 has generated significant attention and reportedly performed strongly at the box office. The actress is also expected to make a special cameo appearance alongside Shah Rukh Khan in director Siddharth Anand's upcoming action film King. The film King is currently scheduled for a theatrical release during the Christmas holiday season in 2026 and is expected to be one of the major Bollywood releases of the year.

Patrick Stewart to narrate all 154 Shakespeare sonnets in new audiobook

Mumbai: Legendary actor Patrick Stewart is returning to the works that shaped his career with a new audiobook in which he narrates all 154 sonnets written by William Shakespeare.

The project blends Stewart's powerful readings with personal reflections on the poetry and his creative process.

Published by Simon & Schuster Audio, the audiobook 'Patrick Stewart Performs the Complete Sonnets of William Shakespeare' will be released on April 7 at a list price of USD 14.99. It is currently available for pre-order on platforms including Audible, Barnes & Noble, and Google Play, according to Variety. In addition to performing the sonnets, Stewart offers commentary on the works and insights into his artistic approach, helping listeners gain a deeper understanding of Shakespeare's poetry. "The works of William Shakespeare have been a vital part of my life since I was 12 years old," Stewart said in a statement, according to Variety. He added, "Performing all 154 of his sonnets has been one of the most rewarding creative endeavours of my career." The veteran actor added that each sonnet



carries its own unique voice and emotion. "The audience will, of course, know the more famous, more beautiful ones, but all are worthy of exploration. There is so much love, humour, heart and, to this day, mystery that can be found in Shakespeare's poetry." Stewart explained that he approached the recordings with a deeply personal tone to help listeners form their own connection with the material.

"I felt compelled to make these recordings deeply intimate and personal, so each listener can forge their own unique relationship with Shakespeare's brilliance and perhaps come away with a richer sense of what it means to be human," he said. The

85-year-old actor's relationship with Shakespeare spans decades. Stewart spent more than 40 years with the Royal Shakespeare Company, beginning in 1966. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Stewart began recording and sharing video performances of Shakespeare's sonnets online — an effort that ultimately inspired the audiobook project. According to Simon & Schuster Audio, the recordings feature "spirited, meticulously crafted performances" of each poem. Stewart also reflects on specific words and phrases throughout the recording, offering candid thoughts on how Shakespeare's work continues to inspire him.

'Lord of the Rings' director Peter Jackson to get honorary 'Palme d'Or'

Mumbai : Filmmaker Peter Jackson, known for directing "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy, "The Hobbit" trilogy, and "King Kong", will be honoured with an honorary "Palme d'Or" at the Cannes Film Festival.

Festival organizers announced the award on Thursday, praising Jackson's career as "a body of work that blends Hollywood blockbusters and films d'auteur with extraordinary artistic vision and technological audacity."

Jackson described the recognition as "one of the greatest privileges of" his career, reflecting on his first Cannes visit in 1988 to promote "Bad Taste" and his return in 2001 to preview "The Fellowship of the Ring."

"This festival has always

celebrated bold, visionary cinema, and I'm incredibly grateful to the Festival de Cannes for being recognised among the filmmakers and the artists whose work continues to inspire me," Peter said.

Cannes festival president Iris Knobloch added, "For its 79th year, the festival welcomes and thanks a filmmaker of boundless creativity who has brought prestige to the heroic fantasy genre."

Last year, legendary actor Robert De Niro received an honorary Palme d'Or, while Denzel Washington was also presented with a surprise honorary award.

Cannes artistic director Thierry Frémaux praised Jackson's impact on cinema. "There is clearly a before and an after Peter Jackson. Large-

er-than-life cinema is his trademark, and his all-encompassing art of entertainment is particularly ambitious.

He has permanently transformed Hollywood cinema and its conception of the spectacle. But Peter Jackson is not only a great technician; he is above all a tremendous storyteller. And an unpredictable artist: what will his next universe be?"

Jackson is widely regarded as one of the most influential filmmakers of the 21st century.

His "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy grossed USD 3 billion worldwide and won a total of 17 Oscars, including 11 for the final installment, "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King," which took home Best Picture.

Kunal Kemmu on work hours Debate: 'If you want control, become a producer'

Mumbai : Actor and filmmaker Kunal Kemmu recently shared his views on the ongoing debate around work hours in the film industry, suggesting that actors who want greater control over their schedules should consider taking on the role of producers.

Kemmu made these remarks during a podcast conversation with Soha Ali Khan and Saif Ali Khan, where the discussion revolved around work-life balance and the realities of working in the entertainment industry. During the conversation, Kemmu said that professionals often choose their careers while being aware of the demands and challenges associated with them. According to him, the film industry is known for its unpredictable schedules and long working hours, which are part of the nature of the profession.

"As adults, when we grow up, we

choose what we want to become in life. Once you sign up for something, you need to understand that it comes with certain expectations," Kemmu said while discussing the responsibilities that come with working in cinema. He added that actors who seek more control over their working hours and schedules may need to take on additional responsibilities within the industry. One way to achieve that, he suggested, is by stepping into the role of a producer. "Sometimes people say they want to work only for limited hours... but then you should choose a job that allows that," Kemmu remarked, explaining that production roles provide more authority over decisions such as scheduling, budgets and production timelines. According to him, producers often have greater influence over how a project is managed, including when shoots take place and how long working days ex-

tend. Taking on such roles could therefore give actors more flexibility in shaping their professional commitments. Kemmu's comments come at a time when discussions around work-life balance in the film industry have been gaining attention, particularly regarding structured working hours for actors and crew members. In recent years, several

industry professionals have spoken about the need to ensure healthier working conditions, including defined shooting hours and better planning during film production. Kemmu, however, emphasised that the issue should not necessarily be viewed through a gender lens. He pointed out that the nature of filmmaking itself often dictates the working schedule, regardless of whether the actor is male or female.



Ravie Dubey on next film with Sargun Mehta: 'A Pan-India story rooted in Punjab'

Mumbai : Actors and producers Ravie Dubey and Sargun Mehta continue to expand their creative ambitions through their production house Dreamiyata Entertainment. Over the years, the banner has built a strong presence with content rooted in relatable storytelling and a strong connection with audiences. The production house is now preparing for one of its most ambitious projects yet — a Pan-India Punjabi film that will feature Sargun Mehta in the lead role. This marks a major step forward for the banner as it aims to take Punjabi cinema to a broader national audience. In a recent interview with Galatta India, Ravie Dubey spoke about the upcoming project and shared the first glimpse into the scale and vision behind the film. According to him, the team is extremely excited about bringing the story to life. "It's a little bit zipped up right now but what I can tell you is that it's a film that comes out of Punjab with Sargun being the protagonist of the film, but it is a

Pan-India film. So we're very, very excited about it," Dubey said during the conversation. He further explained that the makers want to explore a genre that they believe has not yet been fully tapped in Indian cinema. The team is currently working on developing the story and expanding the concept into a larger cinematic experience. "Our intention is, and we also feel, that this genre is an untapped genre—not just in Punjab

but in

many parts of India as well," Dubey said, adding that the team already has several key elements of the narrative mapped out. He revealed that the script development is progressing steadily and that the team is already fairly advanced in the creative process. According to him, the journey of shaping the film has been exciting and creatively fulfilling. Dubey also shared that work has already begun on several aspects of the project, including developing visual assets and planning the music for the film. The enthusiasm

surround-

ing the project has kept the team deeply involved in the creative process. "It's seeming very, very exciting. We have started developing assets. We have started developing music. We are doing all those things. It just keeps us up at night—we are really having a ball," he said. The upcoming project follows a milestone year for Dreamiyata Entertainment. In 2025, the production house delivered the highest-grossing Punjabi film of the year, Saukhan Saukhan 2, further strengthening its reputation in regional cinema. At the same time, Sargun Mehta also appeared in another successful Punjabi film, Sarbala Ji, which performed strongly at the box office and reinforced her position as one of the leading stars of the Punjabi film industry. Beyond films, the duo has also made significant strides in the digital space through their YouTube-first platform Dreamiyata Drama, which focuses on long-format original drama content. The platform has achieved impressive viewership milestones, recording over 1.1 billion views and more than 9 billion minutes of watch time, making it one of the pioneering platforms for long-format original drama content in India.



Akansha Ranjan Kapoor marks 6 years of Guilty, says film gave her confidence to experiment

Mumbai : Actor Akansha Ranjan Kapoor is marking six years since the release of her debut film Guilty, a project that introduced her to audiences and marked the beginning of her journey in the film industry.

Released in 2020, Guilty was a campus drama that revolved around themes of relationships, perception and social issues within a college setting. The film also explored sensitive subjects such as consent, privilege and the complexities of public narratives.

In the film, Akansha portrayed the character of Tanu Kumar, a confident and outspoken college student who navigates friendships and complicated social dynamics within the story. The film was led by Kiara Advani in the central role.

The film was directed by Ruchi Narain and received attention for addressing contemporary social issues while presenting them through a youthful campus narrative.

Reflecting on the film completing six years, Akansha said the project continues to hold a special place in her heart because it marked her first experience of working on a professional film set.

She recalled that stepping onto a film set for the first time was both exciting and intimidating. However, the environment created by the director and the team helped her feel comfortable and confident during the process.

"Guilty will always hold a special place in my heart because it was my first film and my first real experience of discovering myself as an actor," Akansha said while sharing her memories of working on the project.

She added that director Ruchi Narain played an important role in helping her feel secure and open while performing challenging scenes. According to her, Narain ensured that the film set remained a supportive and comfortable space for all the actors involved in the project.

"Walking onto a set for the first time can be intimidating, but Ruchi Narain created

such a safe space that it allowed me to really open up and be vulnerable in my performance," she said while recalling her early days on the film.

Akansha also spoke about her experience of sharing screen space with Kiara Advani. She described the actor as supportive and encouraging throughout the filming process, which helped her settle into her debut role.

"Sharing the screen with Kiara Advani was also wonderful — she was incredibly supportive from day one. We shared such a lovely rapport on set," she added. According to Akansha Ranjan Kapoor, working on the film Guilty helped build her confidence as a performer and encouraged her to continue experimenting with different types of roles and characters in the industry. The actress said that the project served as an important stepping stone in her career, allowing her to better understand the craft of acting and discover her own creative potential.

She noted that the experience of working on her debut film gave her the courage to push herself beyond her comfort zone and take on challenging roles in the years

that followed. Since making her debut, Akansha has taken on a variety of roles across different projects, gradually expanding her presence and establishing herself as a promising performer in the industry.

Over time, she has shown interest in exploring characters from different social and cultural backgrounds, rather than limiting herself to a particular genre or type of role. One of her recent performances came in the project Gram Chikitsalay, where she portrayed a village girl who is also an educated doctor.

The character offered a significant contrast to the urban college student she played in Guilty, allowing her to explore a completely different environment and personality on screen.

Through this role, Akansha was able to portray a more grounded character shaped by rural realities and social responsibilities.

The performance also reflected her growing interest in choosing diverse and layered roles that challenge her as an actor.



Brook hails England fight after semi-final loss to India

Mumbai : England skipper Harry Brook insisted he was "extremely proud" of his side's ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 campaign after they pushed the hosts all the way in a high-scoring contest that ended in a narrow defeat for the visitors at the Wankhede Stadium here.

Chasing a daunting 254, England stayed in the hunt until the final over before eventually falling short by seven runs, ending a spirited run in the tournament as India made their way into the final, where they'll be defending their trophy.

Reflecting on the result, Brook praised the fight his side showed throughout the competition. England almost sealed the win at the Wankhede, ending up with 246/7 on the board, thanks to Jacob Bethell's blind-er of a knock.

"Disappointed, but extremely proud. Couldn't ask



for much more as a captain to be honest. "We haven't been out of any game in this competition all the way until the last over. I'm extremely proud of the way the boys

have stuck to their guns.

"They've done everything that we've asked of them. We've got some extremely good players in there, some extremely tough

characters, to play some of the innings that we have done

in this competition and deliver some of the overs that we have done as well.

"We've had a very good campaign and unfortunately it's not paid off."

England's chase was kept alive by a valiant knock from Bethell, whose explosive innings made

sure England stayed in the hunt until the very end.

Bethell struck a whirlwind 105 off just 48 as he took on the Indian bowlers for a swing over after over, racking up seven sixes and eight fours at 218.75, according to ICC.

Brook hailed the 22-year-old's temperament and predicted a bright future for him in England colours.

"He's a phenomenal player, as we've seen tonight in a high-pressure situation against India on their home turf as well. The way that he played that innings there was just phenomenal."

"He was in his own bubble and it's an amazing feeling.

Ravi Shastri pinpoints key to recent success of Sanju Samson

Mumbai : Former India coach Ravi Shastri has revealed what he thinks is the main reason behind the recent success of Sanju Samson at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup.

Samson has been on the fringes of India's best T20 outfit in recent years and missed selection during the early portion of the T20 World Cup when Ishan Kishan was preferred as opener and Rinku Singh was in favour.

But Samson has contributed consecutive Player of the Match performances to help guide India into the final of the T20 World Cup against New Zealand, with his most recent innings coming in the knockout semi-final with England in Mumbai when he struck seven sixes in a superb knock of 89.

While Samson's upturn in form has surprised many, Shastri has not been taken aback with the recent output of the hard-hitting right-hander as the former India coach has noticed a clear shift with his approach.

Shastri believes Samson is more mentally tough when batting and his recent results at the T20 World Cup have been due to this shift.

"I think finally realising and coming to terms with the fact that he needs to be more consistent," Shastri said on The ICC Review.

"He's got to be wiser with his shot selection and he's got to back his strengths."

"The thing with Sanju is he's got every shot in the book, but lapses in concentration.

"I think he's toughened up mentally and there's never anyone who's doubted his skill or talent ever since he made the side.

"What people have been disappointed is that the run of consistency that should have been there by now isn't there, but he's come of age now."

And while Samson has shown glimpses of his prowess in the past, Shastri believes his best form is still ahead given his role in the India team is now clearly defined.

"He's still just 31 years of age and a genuine match-winner," Shastri noted.

"And when you see shots like (today) that is being played, there's class, there's touch there, there's power there, there's brute force. It's just unbelievable."

While the form of Samson has been a pleasant surprise for India, the recent efforts of fellow opener Abhishek Sharma are of some concern heading into Sunday's final of the T20 World Cup against New Zealand.

Abhishek has managed to score just 89 runs from seven innings at the T20 World Cup to date, but Shastri believes it's too late to make a change to India's XI and the No.1 ranked T20I batter must be persisted with in the tournament decider against the Black Caps.

"I think they've just got to stick with him now," Shastri noted.

"Don't make any changes as the side's having a good run. Stick with that and just tell him believe

Record-breaking 612 athletes qualified for Milan-Cortina Winter Paralympics

Cortina D'Ampezzo: The international sporting community has reached a historic milestone as the world prepares for the commencement of the Milan-Cortina 2026 Paralympic Winter Games. International Paralympic Committee President Andrew Parsons officially announced that a staggering 612 athletes representing 56 national and regional committees have qualified for this prestigious event. This surge in participation highlights the growing global interest in para-winter sports and marks a significant leap forward in the movement's reach across various continents.

The timing of this achievement is particularly poignant as it coincides with the 50th anniversary of the very first Paralympic Winter Games. President Parsons expressed his immense pride in the fact that this golden jubilee will be celebrated with the largest and most diverse field of competitors ever seen in the history of winter para-sports. The growth from the early days of the movement to this record-breaking turnout in Italy serves as a testament to the dedication of athletes and organizers who have champi-

oned accessibility and excellence in winter athletics over the last five decades.

A major contributor to this year's massive scale is the delegation from China, which has arrived with a formidable presence of 167 members. Within this group, 70 athletes are prepared to compete in 71 separate events across all six featured sports. This represents China's largest ever delegation sent to a Winter Paralympics held outside its own borders, following its successful hosting of the previous games. Their extensive participation across such a wide variety of disciplines underscores the nation's rapid development as a powerhouse in the para-winter sports arena. Beyond the established nations, the 2026 Games are being praised for their inclusive expansion into new territories. The IPC has been working diligently to foster para-winter sports in regions where snow and ice activities were previously under-represented. This effort has culminated in the exciting debut of five National Olympic Committees at these games. For the first time, athletes from El Salvador, Haiti, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Portugal will

walk in the parade of nations, marking a truly global shift in the demographics of the competition.

The competitive schedule for the Milan-Cortina Winter Paralympics officially spans from March 6 through March 15, offering a packed itinerary of 79 medal events. These events are distributed across six core sports, ensuring that the best athletes in the world have a platform to showcase their skills. The geographic layout of the games is designed to utilize the natural strengths of the Italian landscape, with multiple venues across the region hosting specialized disciplines according to their unique terrain and infrastructure.

In the host town of Cortina, the focus will be on the high-adrenaline events of para alpine skiing and para snowboard, along with the tactical precision of wheelchair curling. These venues are expected to draw large crowds, as the town has a storied history of winter sports excellence. The challenging slopes and well-maintained rinks in Cortina provide the ideal backdrop for athletes who have spent years training for this singular moment of international competition.

Simultaneously, the scenic Val di Fiemme will serve as the battleground for endurance-based sports, including para biathlon and para cross-country skiing. These disciplines require a unique blend of physical stamina and, in the case of the biathlon, extreme mental focus under pressure. The natural trails of the valley are renowned for their beauty and difficulty, promising a rigorous test for the skiers as they navigate the snowy paths in pursuit of Paralympic gold.

The urban center of Milan will not be left out of the action, as it prepares to host the intense and fast-paced matches of para ice hockey. Known for its physicality and strategic depth, para ice hockey is often a fan-favorite event, and the facilities in Milan are ready to accommodate the large audiences that typically follow the sport. The inclusion of a major metropolitan hub like Milan ensures that the Paralympic spirit reaches a broad and diverse urban demographic.

Adding to the unique structure of these games, wheelchair curling has the distinction of being the very first event to kick off the competitive action.

Santos signs Uruguayan midfielder Oliva

Rio De Janeiro : Santos has completed the signing of Uruguayan midfielder Christian Oliva from Uruguay's Club Nacional, the Brazilian Serie A club said.

The 29-year-old agreed to a deal that runs until the end of 2028, Santos said in a statement on Thursday.

"I come from a big club, with a lot of pressure," Oliva told a news conference. "I know how to handle under pressure. On the field it is more or less like that."

Oliva made 84 appearances in his second spell for Nacional following his 2024 move from Argentina's Talleres. His career has also included spells at Spain's Valencia, Italy's Cagliari

and Mexico's Juarez, according to Xinhua.

"It is a great source of pride to be here, where Pele and Neymar played, among many others," he said. "I will honor this shirt and I want to bring joy to the club. I am in good physical condition, I had been playing and had a good preseason. I played three matches and I am ready for my debut."

Brazilian Serie A giants Santos have officially bolstered their midfield with the



acquisition of Christian Oliva from Uruguay's Club Nacional. The 29-year-old Uruguayan midfielder has committed to the club with a long-term contract that extends through the end of 2028. The announcement, made on Thursday, marks a significant addition to the squad as they look to strengthen their tactical depth for the upcoming season.

During his introductory news conference, Oliva dis-

played a high level of confidence and a readiness to embrace the high expectations of the Brazilian league. He noted that having spent time at a major institution like Nacional, he is well-acquainted with the intense pressure that comes with representing a historic club. He assured fans and management alike that he knows how to translate that pressure into performance on the pitch, emphasizing that he thrives in competitive environments.

Oliva's journey to Santos follows a productive second stint at Nacional, where he featured in 84 matches after transferring from Argentina's Talleres in 2024. His professional resume is notably diverse, featuring experience across some of the world's most competitive leagues, including Italy's Serie A with Cagliari, Spain's La Liga with Valencia, and a tenure in Mexico with Juarez. This international experience is expected to provide Santos with a seasoned presence in the center of the park.

Expressing his deep respect for the club's heritage, Oliva mentioned that playing for the same team that legends like Pelé and Neymar once represented is a tremendous source of personal and professional pride. He pledged to honor the iconic jersey and dedicated himself to bringing success back to the fans.

The midfielder also confirmed that he is in peak physical condition, having completed a full preseason and participated in three recent matches, making him eligible for an immediate debut.

Japan next on India's roster for AFC Women's Asian Cup



Perth : The Indian senior women's national team will face the mighty Japan in their second Group C match of the AFC Women's Asian Cup Australia 2026 at the Perth Rectangular Stadium here in Australia, on Saturday.

India currently stand third in the group despite the 1-2 loss against Vietnam in their first match, after Japan defeated Chinese Taipei 2-0. Historically, Japan, eighth in the FIFA Women's World Rankings, have had a clear advantage over the Blue Tigresses (ranked 67th), having won all three previous meetings. The Nadeshiko have scored 19 times in these three meetings. The last one was a 0-7 loss in the Olympic qualifiers in 2023.

India have had two days to recover from their match against Vietnam, and getting

her players back into prime condition for the Japan encounter is high on head coach Amelia Valverde's list of priorities. She said, "Of course, we will adapt to whatever situations arise. Right now, the first focus has been recovery, because we had a very demanding match physically."

Valverde is wary of the threat that Japan, who have won the Asian Cup in 2014 and 2018, and the World Cup in 2011, pose. "We know Japan are a team that really like to keep possession, with a lot of dynamism. They like to dominate the game, but we have to prepare our own game. We hope to deliver a strong performance, to be very competitive again, as we were last Wednesday," said Valverde.

"At certain moments the game may demand that we be flexible from a tactical

point of view.

"We will try, from the first minute of the game. I've mentioned in the past that the three opponents we face in our group are very different from each other," she said. "We need to focus our energy on our own team. We want to try to manage the game and take it in the direction we believe is best, while adapting to their characteristics."

India midfielder Sangita Basfore was intent on correcting the mistakes made in the Vietnam game, and move forward.

"We made a big effort against Vietnam, we did everything we could on the field, but now we have analysed the game and the mistakes made in it," said Sangita.

"The plan is to improve in the next game and take those learnings forward into the next match against Japan.

From Kho Kho to Hockey, Rutaja's inspiring rise in Indian Women's Hockey Team

Hyderabad : At just 23, Rutaja Dadaso Pisal has already established herself as a regular in the senior Indian Women's Hockey Team, emerging as an influential presence in the midfield and has been included in the squad for the upcoming FIH Hockey World Cup 2026 Qualifiers Hyderabad, scheduled from March 8 to 14.

Hailing from Phaltan, a small village in the Satara district in Maharashtra, Rutaja's journey into hockey began somewhat unexpectedly.

"Before hockey, we

used to play Kho Kho in school. It is very popular in Maharashtra.

Our teachers noticed that we could run well and had good stamina, and they encouraged us to get into hockey. From there my journey began," she shared.

"I started playing when I was around 12 years old. I had to give a fitness and endurance test to get into my academy in Pune. I passed the test and that is where I started playing hockey," she added.

Coming from a village where women playing

sports was uncommon, Rutaja acknowledged the support she received during her early years.

"In my village it was not very common for girls to play hockey. At that time families were still thinking whether they should send their kids outside for sports or not, but a coach in our village supported us and encouraged us to go ahead," she said.

From there Rutaja made her way from state and national level tournaments to the Junior Women's Hockey Team where she helped India win the

Women's Junior Asia Cup in 2023 and earned a spot in the Senior camp.

Rutaja has now been part of the senior national camp for over two years and believes the experience has helped her grow significantly as a player.

"There are many similarities between the junior and senior camps, but the intensity needed to train with senior players is much higher. Being in the camp for the last couple of years has helped me improve a lot," she explained.

Despite operating primarily in the middle of the

park, her intelligent movement inside the circle makes her a constant goal threat, as she has already registered seven goals in her 20 appearances for the senior side. This is majorly because Rutaja also has plenty experience playing as a forward under her belt.

"I am currently playing as a midfielder, but earlier I used to play as a forward. In the team, sometimes there are more players in one position and fewer in another, so we have to be ready to adapt and contribute wherever the team needs us," she explained.

Tasmania skittled, but in hunt for Sheffield Shield chase

Hobart : Tasmania need 278 more runs against Victoria for a crucial win in their quest to make the Sheffield Shield final after earlier being routed for just 91.

Openers Caleb Jewell (24 not out) and Mac Wright (15 not out) had the Tigers 0-47 at stumps on day two at Bellerive Oval in pursuit of a victory target of 325.

Sixteen wickets fell on Friday, with Tasmania losing their first innings at 4-52 before Victoria made 193 all out in their second dig. Victoria's quicks Fergus O'Neill (3-17)



and Sam Elliott (3-22) did

most of the damage.

Elliott started the morning carnage when he trapped Charlie Wakim (15) lbw, before O'Neill bowled Test all-rounder Beau Webster (five) three overs later.

Australia's short-form spinner Matt Kuhnemann top-scored for Tasmania with 23 after being sent in as a nightwatch the previous evening.

Victoria were under the pump early, with first innings century maker and leading Shield season run scorer Sam Harper gone in the second over for a duck.

Wickets fell regularly,

with Peter Handscomb (47) the only member of his side's top six to put up any real resistance.

He shared a 50-run partnership with O'Neill (44) but was out caught in the gully off the bowling of Riley Meredith.

Gabe Bell finished the best of the Tasmanian bowlers with figures of 3-40 that included the scalps of Victoria's top three.

"That last hour was crucial and being none down at stumps. We think the pitch is only going to get better as the game goes on," Bell said.

BSE Sensex		Nifty 50		Nifty 500		Nifty Next 50		Nifty 100		Nifty Bank		Nifty Midcap 100	
Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change
78,918.90	-1.37%	24,450.45	-1.27%	22,481.30	-0.95%	67,476.65	-0.36%	25,134.90	-1.12%	57,783.25	-2.15%	57,393.35	-0.69%
Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open
80,015.90	79,658.99	24,765.90	24,656.40	22,697.80	22,621.55	67,722.20	67,559.05	25,420.10	25,316.20	59,055.85	58,629.60	57,792.55	57,692.15
High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
79,753.03	78,812.18	24,700.90	24,415.75	22,701.60	22,456.45	68,078.30	67,392.90	25,375.20	25,101.70	58,807.15	57,696.40	58,104.50	57,336.55

Top Gainers

Company	Current	% Gain
Bharat Elec	468.45	1.84
Reliance	1,404.80	1.11
ONGC	278.95	0.94
Sun Pharma	1,799.40	0.83
NTPC	380.60	0.67

Top Losers

Company	Current	% Loss
ICICI Bank	1,313.40	-3.26
Eternal	232.57	-3.15
Shriram Finance	1,007.50	-3.08
Axis Bank	1,315.80	-2.47
UltraTechCement	11,987.00	-2.45

Commodities

Commodity	Price	Change (%)
Gold Apr 02	159,930.00	257.00 0.16
Silver May 05	263,620.00	1,429.00 0.55
Crudeoil Mar 19	7,940.00	624.00 8.53
Naturalgas Mar 26	284.00	10.40 3.80

Benchmark indices slip over 1pc, Nifty down at 24,450

Mumbai : Indian stock market on Friday failed to sustain gaining momentum and slipped over 1 per cent. Nifty was down at 24,450 amid selling pressure across the sectors.

At close, the Sensex was down 1,097 points or 1.37 per cent at 78,918.90, and the Nifty was down 315.45 points or 1.27 per cent at 24,450.45. Broader indices outperformed with Nifty Midcap index falling 0.7 per cent, and Smallcap index down 0.2pc.

The overall market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms slipped to Rs 450 lakh crore from Rs 453 lakh crore in the previous session. Among the sectors, most of the indices ended on a mixed note. On the declining side were Auto, realty, PSU Bank, and private bank indices falling 1-2pc. Defence index surged nearly 3pc, while Capital Goods index rose 1.3pc and Power index gained 0.4pc.

On Nifty, the key gainers



were Bharat Electronics, Reliance Industries, NTPC, ONGC, and Sun Pharma among others. ICICI Bank, Eternal, Shriram Finance, Axis Bank, and Ultra-Tech Cement were the top losers. Over 250 stocks touched their 52-week low including Coface Lifesciences, Sonata

Software, Procter and Gamble Hygiene and Health Care, Berger Paints, Alkyl Amines, Cyient, among others. Most of the real estate stocks were on the losing end. Among the key names, Godrej Properties dropped 3.8pc, Raymond Realty declined nearly 3pc, Prestige

Estates fell 2.7pc, Lodha Developers slipped around 2pc. Among the rail stocks, IRCON traded over 11pc higher in the early trade, while those of RVNL climbed 3.17pc. RailTel, RITES, IRFC traded 4.2pc, 3.5pc and 1.5pc higher, respectively.

Cost of vegetarian thali remained stable year-on-year in Feb: Crisil

New Delhi: In February, the cost of a home-cooked vegetarian thali was flat on-year while a non-vegetarian thali declined 3 per cent, said a Crisil report released on Friday.

The premier rating agency in its 'Roti Rice Rate' report noted that despite a decline in the prices of onion, potato, and pulses, the cost of veg thali remained stable as tomato prices rose sharply. "Tomato prices rose 43 pc on-year to Rs 33 per kg in February as mandi arrivals between November 2025 and January 2026 fell 32 pc on-year due to delayed transplantation affecting crop yield and tightening supplies," the report said.

Onion prices fell 24 per cent on-year due to an influx of late kharif onions, while limited shelf life forced immediate market disposal amid subdued exports.

Crisil noted that potato

prices fell 13pc year-on-year as the crop has entered peak harvest phase, coinciding with continued liquidation of cold storage stock from the previous rabi season.

Pushan Sharma, Director of Crisil Intelligence, said, "The cost of vegetarian thali remained stable on-year in February as lower onion, potato, and pulse prices offset a sharp rise in tomato prices. Tomato prices surged due to delayed transplantation, which impacted crop development and yields. This was reflected in a 32pc on-year decline in crop arrivals in mandis between November 2025 and January 2026."

Sharma also noted that the ongoing Middle East uncertainties and potential trade disruptions may soften demand for basmati rice in the near term, exerting downward pressure on onions.

Reliance consumer products inks deal to make Fazer's premium chocolates

Mumbai: The Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Consumer Products Limited (RCPL) officially announced here on Friday that it has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Finland's leading foods company Fazer, to establish a long-term strategic partnership in India to produce, market and distribute branded premium chocolates using Fazer's recipes.

Fazer is a leading FMCG company in Northern Europe, which is renowned for its high-quality chocolates, confectionery, bakery and plant-based products. In

2025, Fazer Group had net sales of 1,200 million Euros.

The partnership with RCPL is expected to combine Fazer's iconic heritage brands, innovative product portfolio, and world's finest chocolates, with RCPL's substantial scale and access to nearly 3 million retail outlets across India, as well as deep expertise in the Indian market.

Commenting on the development, Reliance Consumer Products (RCPL) Director T Krishnakumar said, "Partnering with Fazer is a strategic step towards introducing one of the world's finest

chocolates to Indian consumers. This will also accelerate RCPL's growth in chocolates and confectionery markets. By combining Fazer's globally trusted brands and manufacturing excellence with RCPL's local production capabilities, robust distribution network and deep consumer insights, we are well positioned to bring world-class products to Indian consumers and elevate the overall category experience."

Elaborating on the deal, Fazer President & CEO Christoph Vitzthum said, "This partnership would be a

great opportunity for Fazer to offer our unique products to the fast-growing Indian market. With RCPL handling commercialisation and distribution in India we could establish a premium position in the chocolate market and a foundation for a broader scale, nation-wide roll-out with a leading and highly capable local partner. Entering the sizable Indian chocolate market through this strategic partnership, could have the potential to accelerate our international growth significantly."

Fazer has a focused growth strategy with contin-

uous expansion and significant international growth targets at its core. With operations in the Nordics and Baltics, Poland, and China as well as with exports to more than 40 countries worldwide, Fazer already has an established global presence.

Fazer has been actively pursuing opportunities to expand not only organically but also through mergers and acquisitions (M&A) deals, and it remains committed to exploring all avenues that enable the company to strengthen its position in both existing and new markets.

Silicon Labs expands Hyderabad facility, deepens wireless R&D presence

Hyderabad: Silicon Labs, a global innovator in low-power wireless connectivity, has announced the expansion of its facility in Hyderabad by about 50 per cent, strengthening its global engineering and research capabilities in wireless technologies.

Headquartered in Austin, the company said the expansion reflects its long-term commitment to India's growing technology ecosystem and its increasing reliance on the Hyderabad centre for research and development.

The expanded facility was inaugurated in the presence of Laura E. Williams, highlighting the strengthening economic and technological collaboration between India and the United States. According to the company, the expanded site includes new laboratories and additional operational space designed to support the organisation's rapidly growing engineering workforce in the region. The new infrastructure will help accelerate Silicon Labs' work in low-power wireless solutions, which are widely used in applications such as smart homes, industrial automation, connected devices and Internet of Things (IoT) technologies.

Speaking on the occa-

sion, Matt Johnson said the Hyderabad centre has emerged as a key part of the company's global innovation network.

"Hyderabad has become a critical hub in our global engineering and operations footprint," Johnson said while highlighting the importance of the centre to the company's long-term growth strategy.

He added that the expansion represents a strategic investment in talent, innovation and global collaboration, enabling the company to continue delivering secure and energy-efficient wireless technologies to customers worldwide. The company noted that its workforce in India has more than tripled since it first established operations in Hyderabad in 2020, reflecting the region's strong engineering talent pool and supportive technology ecosystem. Today, the Hyderabad facility supports multiple functions including research and development, engineering, product operations, sales, technical marketing and information technology. Commenting on the expansion, Manish Kothari said the enlarged facility will further enhance the company's ability to innovate and execute complex engineering projects.

"Scaling our Hyderabad

site is about building more capacity for invention and execution," Kothari said, noting that the new infrastructure would strengthen the company's R&D capabilities.

He added that the facility now includes advanced laboratories for wireless design, validation and system integration, which will help engineers test and refine next-generation connectivity technologies.

The expansion also introduces additional collaboration spaces aimed at encouraging cross-functional teamwork among engineers and supporting future hiring plans as the company continues to grow its operations.

Senior executives present during the inauguration ceremony included Dean Butler, Radhika Chennakeshava and Nestor Ho.

Addressing the gathering, Laura E. Williams said that the continued expansion of U.S. technology companies in India reflects the deepening strategic and economic partnership between the two countries. She noted that collaborations in advanced technology sectors such as semiconductors and wireless connectivity are playing an important role in strengthening innovation, investment and job creation across both nations.

India emerging as global business hub due to its policy reforms

New Delhi: India now emerged as a key enabler for ease of doing business in the world due to its policy reforms and regulatory programmes aimed to give a conducive environment to growing businesses.

As per the government data, business registrations in India grew by 27 per cent from 1.55 lakh in 2020-21 to 1.98 lakh in 2025-26 as on February 3.

The RBI's Business Expectation Index which has consistently stayed above the neutral benchmark of 100 through FY 2024-25 and into July to September (Q2) of FY 2025-26 indicates positive sentiment regarding future output.

These indicators suggest the continued resilience of industry sentiment and point towards a business environment where firms remain confident about their growth.

These results are linked with continued efforts of the government and its strategic focus towards making India's business ecosystem conducive. The government's strategic focus on Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) is fundamental to fostering entrepreneurship, innovation, and wealth creation. Recognising the importance of EoDB, the government has made 'improving the business environment' a strategic priority.

India's reform driven growth is

strengthened towards multiple schemes such as Start-up India, Credit Guarantee Scheme, Credit Assessment Model (CAM) launched by public sector banks, Amendment of Insurance laws, RBI Master's Directions, Securities Markets Code 2025 (SMC) and others. Talking about the ongoing business environment trends in the manufacturing sector, Virender Kumar, Vice President of Marketing, Arete Group said in a note, "India's manufacturing sector remains a key pillar of economic growth, contributing 16-17pc to GDP while driving employment exports and industrial expansions. As the country advances its ambition of

becoming a global manufacturing hub, sustained policy reforms are creating a more enabling, investment-friendly environment for businesses to scale." He noted that the initiatives such as Startup-India, Credit Guarantee Scheme, and digital credit assessment models, are building a transparent, tech-enabled and investor-friendly ecosystem. In past years, the government has eased regulatory frameworks for promoting small businesses to start. Initiatives like Startup-India allows companies to obtain recognition as startups from the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).

Education as service has significant potential to contribute to India's export earnings: Piyush Goyal

New Delhi: Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday said that education as a service has significant potential to contribute to India's export earnings and help them take high-quality Indian education to the rest of the world.

Addressing the Vice Chancellor's conclave on 'Reimagining Internationalisation of Higher Education for Viksit Bharat 2047' here, Goyal said that he would like to engage with Vice Chancellors and hear their ideas and thoughts on the future of higher education in India.

"The future growth engines of the world are likely to be countries that are less developed or developing, such as India. Therefore, exposure to India would help students from developed countries in their future careers," said Goyal.

Minister Goyal sees growing recognition of this trend while negotiating service chapters in Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).

"Nearly two-thirds of global trade is now covered by India's FTAs because the country has engaged with

more developed and evolved economies," the minister noted.

"If India is currently contributing around 20 per cent of global growth and has emerged as an engine of growth, then in the future the younger generations across the world will increasingly need to work with countries such as India."

The Minister said that India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was the result of extensive nationwide consultations and reflects the government's vision to align the country's education system with global standards.

Addressing a gathering of Vice Chancellors, the minister said the policy was drafted after wide-ranging discussions with educationists, experts, and stakeholders from India and abroad under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Nearly three lakh suggestions and feedback were received during the consultation process, each of which was carefully examined before the policy was finalised.

Goyal noted that the policy emerged after years of deliberation and reflects the Prime Minister's consulta-



tion style of functioning.

He said the reforms have opened India's education system to global opportunities by encouraging international campuses to set up in the country and enabling collaborations between

foreign and Indian universities for dual-degree programmes.

The policy also promotes cross-border student exchanges so that Indian students can gain exposure to education systems abroad while

international students can experience India's academic environment.

Highlighting the need to attract more foreign students, the minister suggested flexible programme models such as students spending part of their academic tenure in India and the remainder in their home institutions.

According to him, such arrangements would help students from developed nations understand the social, cultural and economic dynamics of developing countries like India.

Describing Vice Chancellors as "architects of India's future", Goyal said higher education leaders play a vital role in shaping the next generation. He stressed that universities must continuously update their curricula and teaching methods to remain aligned with emerging global trends. Teachers, he added, should also undergo retraining and relearning to stay updated with future-oriented knowledge.

The minister emphasised that outdated curricula cannot prepare students for future challenges. Institutions must remain agile and focus on areas such as artificial intelligence,

quantum computing and machine learning, which will drive India's growth as a global technology powerhouse.

Goyal also called for the inclusion of subjects like international trade and India's Free Trade Agreements in academic curricula so that students better understand opportunities in the global economy. He expressed confidence that knowledge of international law and trade rules would help young Indians contribute to the vision of Viksit Bharat during the Amrit Kaal.

He said that with improved teaching standards and modern facilities, India can reverse the current trend where around 28 Indian students go abroad for every one foreign student coming to India. The country, he said, has the potential to attract nearly 1.3 million international students in the coming years.

The minister concluded by urging stronger collaboration between academia, government and industry to internationalise higher education and transform India into a global education hub by 2047.