

# Aryan Age

PRGI No.- MHENG/25/A0943 | VOL - 1 | ISSUE 267 | 8 PAGES | ₹ 3.00



Indian Engineer Dies in Tanker Attack Near Iraq

PG.3



Bhumi Pednekar: "You don't owe anyone an explanation"

PG.6



Former CSK star suggests ideal position for Sanju Samson

PG.7



India's NavIC Satellite Navigation System faces operational challenges, falling below optimal performance

PG.8

## Gas Shortage Drives Demand for Cow Dung Cakes in Maharashtra

**Pune :** In Maharashtra, reports of LPG cylinders' scarcity have led many households to switch to alternative cooking options such as induction stoves and electric cooktops.

However, the shortage has also affected large establishments and hotel owners who depend heavily on commercial LPG cylinders. With supplies becoming irregular, many eateries have been forced to revert to traditional wood-fired stoves.

In Jalgaon district, the disrupted supply of LPG cylinders has significantly increased the demand for dung cakes made from cow and buffalo dung. Due to the unavailability of commercial gas cylinders,



several hotel owners have started using traditional stoves fueled by wood and dung cakes for cooking.

Along with firewood,

the sale of dung cakes has risen sharply. Since firewood produces heavy smoke, many consumers prefer dung cakes as an

alternative fuel that helps ignite stoves quickly and produces comparatively manageable smoke. Items that were once sold at very

low prices are now witnessing strong demand and rising prices.

Livestock owners say the surge in demand is providing them with an additional source of income. Women labourers produce around 600 to 700 dung cakes a day, of which at least 500 are sold daily. Demand has increased not only from households but also from hotel operators, who often book their supply a day in advance.

Dung cakes are currently being sold for around Rs 7 to Rs 10 per piece. With LPG supply disruptions continuing, these traditional fuel sources made from cow dung appear to be experiencing a sudden revival in demand.

## Mojtaba Khamenei asks regional countries to shut down all US bases they host

**New Delhi :** Iran's Supreme Leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, has called upon all regional countries to shut down US bases as soon as possible, saying Washington's claims of ensuring security and peace to these countries have been nothing but lies.

"I advise the leaders of regional countries to shut down those [US] bases as soon as possible, for they must surely have realised by now that the US's claims of ensuring security and peace have been nothing but lies," Mojtaba Khamenei said on X. The US had negotiated a deal with Saudi Arabia on June 8, 1974, under which Saudi Arabia agreed to invest their vast surplus oil revenues into the US economy. In exchange, the US said Washington would provide military protection, weapons, and technical support to Saudi Arabia. With that intention, the US set up military bases in these countries. On March 7, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian had apologised to these countries for Iran's air and drone strikes on the US assets there.

Mojtaba said the Islamic Republic (Iran) is fully prepared for unity and fostering warm, sincere, reciprocal relations with all its neighbours.

He said shutting down

US bases in the region will enable those governments to strengthen ties with their own people, who are generally dissatisfied with the humiliating behaviour associated with those bases. It will also bring an increase

on February 28. Iranian drones and missiles have hit at least 17 U.S. military sites across West Asia in these two weeks. Key installations attacked by Iran include those in Qatar, Kuwait, the UAE and Bahrain.



in their wealth and power. These regional countries must determine their position on the "aggressors," he added.

The United States maintains a significant military footprint across the Gulf region, with active bases or major military facilities in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. These installations serve as critical hubs for regional air and naval operations, logistics, and missile defence.

As of March 14 (today), Iran has launched hundreds of attacks against the US military bases in the Gulf after the airstrikes on Iran

Although the exact number of casualties or injuries cannot be ascertained, reports said eight US soldiers were killed, and about 140 were injured.

However, defence analysts believe the escalating exchange of strikes between Iran and the United States could further destabilise the already fragile security situation in West Asia. Many regional governments are now closely monitoring developments while urging restraint, as fears grow that continued retaliation could draw more countries into a wider conflict in the Gulf region.

## Fadnavis calls for collective efforts for nation, state's development

**Nagpur :** Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis today urged citizens to work together for the development of the nation and the state while upholding the values enshrined in the Constitution.

Fadnavis unfurled the national flag mounted on a 200-foot-high mast during a ceremony held at Kasturchand Park in Nag-

pur.

Addressing the gathering, he said the towering tricolour would stand as a symbol of patriotism and motivate citizens, especially the youth, to remain committed to the ideals of the nation.

He noted that the national flag reflects the unity, integrity and sovereignty of India, and should continue to inspire a sense of pride

among people.

The installation of the high-mast flag is part of initiatives aimed at promoting respect for the tricolour and strengthening the spirit of nationalism among citizens.

Several officials, public representatives and residents attended the ceremony, which also featured the hoisting of the national flag and the singing of the national anthem.



## North Korea fires over 10 ballistic missiles into sea amid US-South Korea drills

**Pyongyang :** North Korea on Saturday launched more than 10 ballistic missiles into the sea, South Korea's military said, as the US and South Korean forces conducted military drills and US President Donald Trump renewed overtures towards Pyongyang for dialogue.

The Japan Coast Guard announced that at 1:30 pm JST (10 am IST), Saturday, what appeared to be a ballistic missile was launched from North Korea, Japan's public broadcaster NHK reported. It appeared to have fallen outside Japan's exclusive economic zone, NHK quoted defence ministry sources as saying.

Meanwhile, Japan's PM issued an "emergency alert" on social media platform X saying, "North Korea has launched a suspected ballistic missile. More updates to follow." South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said it believed the North fired more than 10 short-range ballistic missiles, launching them from near Sunan, close to the capital Pyongyang, to-

ward the Sea of Japan.

The South Korean military said it is closely sharing information with Japan and the US, while stepping up monitoring and vigilance and maintaining full readiness.

The latest launch came as South Korea and the United States kicked off their annual Freedom Shield exercise Monday for an 11-day run while US and Israel are already engaged in an escalating campaign in the Middle East.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff reported that approximately 18,000 Korean troops are participating in the exercise, named Freedom Shield, which runs through March 19. U.S. Forces Korea has not confirmed the number of American troops involved.

As a result, Pyongyang has been under multiple UN Security Council sanctions since 2006, but it remains defiant despite the severe obstacles the sanctions created to its trade, economy and defence.

## PM Modi launches development projects worth over Rs 23,550 cr in Assam's Silchar

**New Delhi :** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday laid the foundation stone and inaugurated multiple development projects worth around Rs 23,550 crore in Silchar in southern Assam, with a focus on boosting connectivity, strengthening agricultural education and accelerating infrastructure growth in the Barak Valley and the wider Northeast region.

The projects were launched during a public programme in Silchar in Cachar district, where the Prime Minister also performed the Bhoomi Poojan for several major infrastructure initiatives. Modi had arrived in Guwahati on Friday for a two-day visit to the state, during which he inaugurated and laid the foundation for projects worth around Rs 24,250 crore before travelling to Silchar the following morning. A key highlight of the event was the foun-

ation ceremony for the 166-kilometre Shillong-Silchar Corridor, the first access-controlled greenfield four-lane high-speed corridor in Northeast India. Built at an estimated cost of around Rs 22,860 crore, the expressway will connect Shillong in Meghalaya with Silchar in Assam, significantly improving regional connectivity.

According to officials, the corridor will reduce the distance between Guwahati and Silchar and cut travel time from about 8.5 hours to roughly five hours, facilitating faster movement of goods and passengers while promoting trade and economic growth in the region.

Addressing the gathering, Modi said the projects launched from Silchar would strengthen connectivity and improve the agricultural ecosystem in the region. "From Silchar, several projects aimed at strengthening connectivity

and boosting the agricultural education ecosystem in the region are being launched," he said.

The Prime Minister also highlighted the growing strategic and economic importance of the North-



east in India's foreign and trade policy. "Today, the Northeast is at the center of India's Act East Policy. It is becoming a bridge connecting India with South-east Asia," Modi said.

The Prime Minister also performed the Bhoomi Poojan for an elevated corridor on National High-

way 306 from Trunk Road near Capital Point to Rangirhari Point in Silchar. The project is expected to decongest one of the city's busiest routes and improve connectivity with neighbouring states, including

Assam, Tripura and Manipur, while boosting economic activity in the Barak Valley region.

In another initiative aimed at strengthening agricultural education, Modi laid the foundation stone for a new College of Agriculture at Patharkandi in Karimganj district. The

development of border areas, the next phase of the Vibrant Villages Programme was launched from Cachar district itself. This has also ensured that many villages in the Barak Valley will see improvements."

As part of the broader infrastructure push, Modi also performed the Bhoomi Poojan for Asom Mala 3.0, a major road infrastructure programme worth over Rs 3,200 crore. The initiative will involve the construction of more than 900 kilometres of roads across Assam, aimed at improving inter-state connectivity and strengthening links between national highways and rural road networks.

The projects launched during the Prime Minister's visit are expected to significantly enhance connectivity in the Northeast, improve access to education and create new opportunities for trade, tourism and regional economic development.

## West Asia crisis:

## Air India, Air India Express scale up ops to 80 flights

**New Delhi :** Air India and its subsidiary Air India Express added two more flights taking a combined total of 80 scheduled and non-scheduled flights to and from the West Asia region on Saturday to maintain connectivity amid the evolving situation in West Asia. On Friday, it flew a combined total of 78 scheduled and non-scheduled flights on the same sector.

The services are being operated across multiple routes linking Indian cities with key West Asian hubs to accommodate passenger demand and ensure continuity of travel, even as airlines remain cautious and continue to assess developments in the region.

In a statement issued on Saturday, Air India stated that the two carriers con-

tinue to operate their respective scheduled services to and from Jeddah and Muscat on March 14, operating a total of 10 flights



to and from Jeddah, and Air India Express operating 8 scheduled flights to and from Muscat. Additionally, Air India will operate one round-trip from Delhi and two round-trips from Mumbai to Jeddah while Air In-

dia Express will operate one flight each from Kozhikode and Mangaluru to Jeddah and back. Air India Express will also operate its sched-

uled services to Muscat, including one round-trip each from Delhi, Kochi, Kozhikode and Mumbai. In addition to the scheduled services, Air India and Air India Express would operate a total of 62 non-scheduled flights to and from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia, subject to availability of slots and other prevailing conditions at the departure stations at the time. These flights are being operated with the requisite permissions from the relevant Indian and local regulatory authorities. These flights are being operated with the requisite permissions from the relevant Indian and local regulatory authorities.

Air India said it is closely monitoring the situation in the region and will take further operational decisions based on evolving security conditions. Passengers have also been advised to regularly check flight updates and remain in touch with the airline for the latest travel information.

## Rain alert in parts of Maharashtra; Heatwave warning for coastal districts

**Pune :** The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Saturday issued a yellow alert for rainfall in parts of Madhya Maharashtra, Marathwada and Vidarbha, while warning of intense heat in some coastal districts of the state.

According to the weather department, districts including Dharashiv, Beed, Gondia, Gadchiroli, Bhandara, Solapur, Sangli and Satara are likely to witness rainfall accompanied by gusty winds. A yellow alert has been issued for these areas as a precaution.

Meanwhile, hot and humid weather conditions are expected to persist in the Konkan region. The IMD has also warned of a possible heatwave in Mumbai, Thane, Palghar and Raigad districts. Temperature fluctuations were recorded across the state, with the



Rain alert Maharashtra

mercury crossing 40 degrees Celsius in Jalgaon, Washim and Chandrapur.

The state is currently experiencing mixed weather conditions, with scorching heat in some regions and rainfall in others. The IMD has predicted that rainfall

activity may continue in parts of Maharashtra over the next few days. Notably, several states across the country have been witnessing unseasonal rainfall since December, continuing through January, February and now March.

## Taliban Launch Drone Attacks on Pakistan Positions in KP

**Kabul/Islamabad :** The Afghan Taliban said it carried out drone strikes on Pakistani military positions in Kohat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

According to the Taliban, a drone struck a military fort and a command centre in Kohat. Video footage released by the group appeared to show a drone approaching the reported target sites.

The attack was said to be in response to an overnight Pakistani strike in Kabul's Pul-e-Charkhi area that reportedly killed four civilians and injured 14 others.

Taliban officials also claimed that Pakistani aircraft had earlier carried out air strikes in several Afghan provinces, including Kabul, Kandahar, Paktia and Paktika. Pakistan's military has not publicly commented on the Taliban's claims.

# Want this unjust war imposed on Iran to stop: Omar Abdullah

**Srinagar:** Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Saturday said he wants the "unjust war imposed on the people of Iran to stop."

He said any development that helps India keep fuel prices low is beneficial, but stressed that lasting benefit will come only when peace prevails in West Asia.

"Anything that allows us to keep our prices low is a good thing. Whether that means buying oil from Russia or being able to transport our gas and fuel supplies through this strait, which is otherwise closed to everybody else, it's good for us," Omar told reporters in Srinagar when asked about two crude oil tankers allowed by Iran to pass through the tense waters of the Strait of Hormuz.

However, he added that economic benefits should not overshadow the need for peace in the region.

"At the end of the day, what we want is peace. We want this unjust war imposed on the people of Iran to stop," he said.

Omar also criticised attempts by external powers to influence Iran's



leadership.

"As I've said time and again, America and Israel don't get to decide who the leadership of Iran is. Israel and the US do not get to decide who the supreme leader is. That is for the community, that is for the people, that is for the citizens of Iran to decide," he said. Referring to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Omar said he was not only a national leader but also a religious figure respected across the Muslim world.

"The person they assassinated, Ayatollah Khamenei, was not just a leader of Iran. He was an acknowledged religious leader for the entire Muslim Ummah. So this should not be seen as a conflict with Iran. It has far wider implications," he said.

Omar maintained that while India may benefit from stable energy supplies, the larger objective should be the restoration of peace.

"Therefore, no matter what is done for India, fine, we will benefit. But ultimately, we will benefit when

peace reigns. And we want this unjust war to end," he added.

Chief Minister also expressed hope that a large number of tourists will visit Kashmir during the upcoming summer season despite concerns over rising airfares amid the ongoing international conflict affecting fuel prices. The Chief Minister expressed optimism that visitors would arrive in large numbers to experience the natural beauty of Kashmir. "It is expected that a large number of people will come and they will take advantage of the beauty of Kashmir and go back," Abdullah said. When asked whether the ongoing global tensions and rising fuel costs could affect tourist arrivals, Abdullah said there are concerns as airfares have started increasing. "As far as tourism is concerned, there is hope. But the price of tickets is not only going up on international flights. IndiGo has also started applying a fuel surcharge here. Now we will have to see how much effect it will have on our season," he said. Despite these challenges, Omar said the government remains hopeful of a good tourist season.

# LPG shortage worsens in UP; long queues outside gas agencies

**Lucknow:** The shortage of LPG cooking gas cylinders is reportedly worsening across parts of Uttar Pradesh, with long queues forming outside gas agencies in several districts as residents struggle to obtain refills.

According to local reports, large crowds of people have gathered outside LPG distribution centres in cities including Lucknow, Kanpur, Gorakhpur and Kushinagar, reflecting the growing concern among households dependent on cooking gas.

In Siddharthnagar district, several residents reportedly spent the night outside gas agencies in the hope of securing LPG cylinders early the next morning.

Many people were seen carrying empty cylinders and waiting for hours in queues, hoping their turn would come before stocks ran out.

In Kanpur, the situation turned tense after a young woman waiting in line for a cylinder accused an employee of a gas agency of assault-

ing her during an argument related to the queue.

The alleged incident triggered a controversy in the area, drawing attention to the chaotic situation outside distribution centres where large crowds have been gathering.

Several elderly citizens were also seen standing in long queues for hours to obtain LPG refills, highlighting the difficulties faced by vulnerable sections of society during the ongoing shortage.

The crisis has also begun to affect religious and community kitchens. On Saturday, one of the kitchens at the Maa Annapurna Temple in Varanasi remained closed due to the unavailability of LPG cylinders.

Temple authorities reportedly had to suspend cooking operations temporarily, leaving the kitchen unattended as they waited for gas supplies. In districts such as Kannauj and Badaun, residents began lining up outside gas agencies as early as 5 a.m. in anticipation of limited supplies.

The rush was particularly severe in Kushinagar, where nearly 500 people reportedly gathered outside a gas agency with empty cylinders, hoping to receive refills.

The shortage also led to a tragic incident in Farukhabad district on Friday, when a 76-year-old man, Mohammad Mukhtyar, fell ill while waiting in line for a cylinder.

His family members rushed him to a hospital for treatment, but he later died, according to reports. Despite these developments, LPG distributors and gas agencies have denied the existence of any major shortage and claimed that supplies remain adequate. Meanwhile, the state government has begun taking action to address the situation. Following instructions from Yogi Adityanath, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, officials from the Food and Civil Supplies Department along with the district administration conducted raids across the state.

# Telangana BJP burns Rahul's effigy, slams Cong for disrespecting Parliament

**Hyderabad:** Leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Telangana on Saturday staged a protest by burning an effigy of Rahul Gandhi, condemning the Congress leader for allegedly violating parliamentary rules and insulting democratic institutions.

The protest was led by Telangana BJP state president N. Ramchander Rao outside the party's state office, where several party workers gathered to express their anger over the conduct of Congress leaders in Parliament. Addressing the media during the protest, Rao criticised MPs of the Indian National Congress for allegedly sitting on the steps of the Parliament House and drinking tea, despite regulations prohibiting gatherings at the entrance. He said such behaviour was inappropriate and undermined the dignity of Par-

liament, which he described as a sacred institution of the country's democratic system. Rao termed the incident "extremely unfortunate" and said that Parliament should be treated with the highest level of respect by all elected representatives. "They have no courage to debate inside the House and no patience to follow rules outside. For Rahul Gandhi, Parliament has become a picnic spot. This is a disgrace to the temple of democracy," Rao said. He further alleged that Congress MPs treated the Parliament premises casually by sitting together and consuming tea and snacks in areas where such activities are not permitted. According to Rao, these actions reflected a lack of respect for parliamentary decorum and the constitutional framework of the country.

The BJP leader also ac-

cused Congress of spreading misinformation regarding alleged shortages of LPG cylinders across the country. He said Union ministers had already presented official data showing that sufficient fuel stocks were available, dismissing the opposition's claims as politically motivated. Rao further alleged that some Congress leaders, along with suspended MPs, violated parliamentary protocol by drinking tea and eating biscuits within the Parliament premises. Such actions, he said, amounted to disrespect for established parliamentary traditions and constitutional norms. Highlighting the responsibilities of both ruling and opposition parties in a democracy, Rao stressed that healthy debate inside the House is essential for the functioning of the parliamentary system.

# Without naming Mamata, Modi accuses CM of partisan politics at Brigade rally

**Kolkata:** Without naming Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday came down heavily on her at the Brigade Parade Ground, accusing her of taking a partisan stand towards a particular community and fostering a politics of fear in West Bengal. "They are threatening people that a community will destroy you. Sitting on a constitutional post, how can one say this?" Modi said in his speech.

"They are saying that they will kill crores of Bengalis. Who are those people who, under the instruction of the TMC, will kill crores of people? They have created a culture of threat across the state," he said.

The Prime Minister's remarks were seen as a response to a recent statement

by Banerjee at a Dhama Manch, where she had said, "We exist, that is why all of you are safe. If we were not here, when a certain community comes together and surrounds you, they would finish you off in one second."

The comment drew sharp criticism from the BJP, which alleged that it was aimed at instilling fear and appeasing a particular vote bank.

Modi used the issue to sharpen his attack on the ruling Trinamool Congress, alleging that such politics had made Bengal increasingly unsafe.

He claimed that TMC came to power with the slogan of 'Maa Mati, Manus', but now "Roti, Beti and Mati" were under threat and said the state's social fabric had been damaged by ap-



peasement and insecurity.

Linking the matter to the issue of infiltration, Modi alleged that illegal entrants were being protected in the state for electoral gains.

"This is being controlled by the infiltrators. The demography has changed. Bengali Hindus are being made a minority," he said.

The Prime Minister further accused the TMC of opposing citizenship for Hindu

refugees for political reasons.

"When citizenship is being considered for Hindu refugees, TMC protests against it," he said.

"Those Hindus who have always considered undivided Bengal and the country as their motherland are opposed because they are never seen as the TMC's vote bank. They have always preferred their own vote bank,"

he added. According to Modi, the demographic shift in parts of Bengal had deepened insecurity and weakened law and order. He said the situation would change only after a change of government in the state.

"Once the TMC government is ousted, the rule of law will be restored in the state," the Prime Minister said.

Reaching out to women voters, he added, "I assure the mothers and sisters of Bengal that they will be safe under the BJP — this is Modi's guarantee."

Modi's remarks formed part of a broader attack on the ruling party at the BJP's Brigade rally, where infiltration, women's safety and citizenship emerged as key themes in his speech.

# Mirwaiz slams elected representatives for silence over Jamia Masjid restrictions

**Srinagar:** A day after prayers were barred at Srinagar's historic Jamia Masjid on the last Friday of Ramadan, Kashmir's chief cleric, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, criticised elected representatives, including the Chief Minister, for remaining silent on the issue.

Expressing his anguish over the restrictions, Mirwaiz said it was unfortunate that those claiming to represent the people of Jammu and Kashmir in Parliament and the Assembly have chosen to remain silent.

"It is unfortunate that those who call themselves elected representatives of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, whether in Parliament or the Assembly, including the Chief Minister, choose to remain silent, displaying utter insensitivity towards the



sentiments and fundamental rights of the people, when the Valley's central place of worship is repeatedly locked by force and people are denied access even on important religious occasions," Mirwaiz told reporters after a religious function in Srinagar. He said these representatives should do justice to their office and stand up to safeguard the fundamental rights of the people in what-

ever manner they can.

Mirwaiz's criticism came even as the elected government in Jammu and Kashmir does not control law and order, which falls under the direct authority of the Lieutenant Governor.

On Friday, authorities closed the historic Jamia Masjid in Srinagar and placed Mirwaiz under house arrest, preventing him from delivering the sermon and

leading prayers on Jum'at-ul-Vida. This marked the seventh consecutive year that prayers were blocked at the mosque on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan.

Mirwaiz, who is also the chairman of the Hurriyat Conference, also expressed deep concern over the rapidly developing situation in the Middle East.

"In clear violation of all international law, United States and Israeli aggression are pushing the region towards a dangerous and destructive path as an independent country is being invaded, its civilian infrastructure targeted and innocent lives lost while the international community and institutions, including the United Nations, are unable to control their arbitrariness," he said.

# Nitish inaugurates & lays foundation for 400 development projects worth Rs 274 crore in Begusarai

**Patna:** Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Saturday inaugurated and laid the foundation stones for 400 development projects worth Rs 274 crore in Begusarai and instructed for early completion of the ongoing development works in the district.

During his ongoing Samridhhi Yatra, Kumar reviewed the progress of several ongoing development works and directing officials to ensure their timely completion.

During the visit, the Chief Minister inspected the under-construction Government Medical College and Hospital in Begusarai.

He reviewed the progress of the project and sought detailed information from officials regarding the ongoing work.

Kumar directed officials to ensure that the construction of the medical college and hospital is completed within the stipulated time frame.

He also instructed authorities to provide residential facilities for doctors and staff within the hospital campus and ensure smooth connectivity from the main road to the hospital premises.

The Chief Minister said that once completed, the facility would provide better and timely medical treatment to people living in the surrounding areas.

Later, Kumar visited various industrial establishments in the Begusarai Industrial Area.

During the visit, he inaugurated units including Camptee Beverages Private Limited, Mediversal Sim-

ran Multi Super Speciality Hospital and Rishabhraj (Coolplus Platore), and laid the foundation stone for Epic Agro Products Private Limited.

He also inaugurated Nature Polyplast Limited at the Industrial Growth Centre in Begusarai by unveiling a plaque and cutting the ribbon, and inspected the production activities at the unit. The Chief Minister said his government was committed to promoting industrial development across Bihar and was working to establish industrial zones in every district. He noted that the setting up of new industries would generate employment opportunities and contribute to the overall development of nearby areas.

On the occasion, Kumar distributed several benefits to beneficiaries, including a symbolic cheque of Rs 578.09 crore in bank loans to 9,715 self-help groups under the Jeevika programme, a symbolic cheque of Rs 2 crore under the livelihood investment fund for 405 beneficiaries. Farmers were also provided symbolic cheques under the Kisan Credit Card loan scheme.

During the review, the Chief Minister sought detailed updates from officials on the implementation of the projects announced during his previous Pragati Yatra. The Chief Minister remotely inaugurated and laid foundation stones for development projects worth Rs 274 crore in Begusarai district. These include the inauguration of 211 schemes worth Rs 165 crore and the foundation laying for 189 schemes worth Rs 109 crore.

# BJP slams Omar government over 18 pc transport fare hike, says poor being exploited

**Srinagar:** The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Saturday criticised the Omar Abdullah government over the recent 18 per cent hike in transport fares, alleging that the decision will place an additional financial burden on poor and middle-class commuters.

Addressing a press conference in Srinagar, BJP spokesperson Manzoor Bhat said the fare hike would directly impact common people who rely on public transport for their daily travel.

"Mostly poor and middle-class people use buses and other public transport services. Increasing fares by 18 per cent will create serious difficulties for them," he said.

Bhat also criticised the condition of the Parimpora

bus terminal, claiming that the facility remains in a deteriorating state despite being shifted from Batamaloov several years ago.

He said the earlier proposal during the PDP government to convert the Batamaloov area into a mini-secretariat had led to the relocation of transport services to Parimpora.

"Today, the Parimpora bus terminal is in poor condition, while the land at Batamaloov that was proposed for the mini-secretariat remains largely unused," he alleged.

The BJP leader said the shift of the bus stand had also affected the livelihoods of several small traders, street vendors and people associated with transport services who earlier operated around the Batamaloov bus terminal.

Referring to the government's policy of free bus travel for women, Bhat said that while the initiative appears beneficial on the surface, the financial burden is indirectly being passed on to other passengers.

"In many cases, male passengers and family members are forced to pay higher fares. What kind of policy is this where the government claims to provide free services on one side and recovers the cost by charging others more?" he said. Bhat accused the Omar Abdullah government of failing to frame an effective transport policy and alleged that while the government has increased fares for the public, it has simultaneously enhanced salaries and benefits for ministers and MLAs.

# Government committed to creating environment where the youth can thrive: Manipur CM

**Imphal:** Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khechhand Singh on Saturday assured National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets that the government is committed to creating an environment where young people can grow, excel and contribute meaningfully to society, drawing loud applause from the audience. The Chief Minister made the remarks while speaking at a felicitation ceremony organised for NCC cadets from the state at the NCC Ground on the campus of Dhanamanjuri College in Imphal. During the event, seven NCC cadets were honoured for their outstanding achievements and contributions. The ceremony was organised to recognise their dedication, disci-

pline and achievements, which have brought pride to the state. The Chief Minister said that the accomplishments of the cadets have filled the hearts of every Manipuri with pride and joy. He added that their success reflects the strength, determination and potential of the youth of Manipur. The cadets who were felicitated include (CSUO) Swaty Laishram, (CUO) Kansam Moramba Meitei, (CUO) Ningthoujam Pinky Devi, Senior Under Officer (SUO) Leitanthem Chanchan Devi, (SUO) Rojita Waikhom, Cadet Stephen Samu Sampar and Cadet P Silvester. "We are here to celebrate a moment of immense pride for the entire state of Manipur," the Chief Minister said while con-

gratulating the cadets and encouraging them to continue striving for excellence. He also praised the efforts of the NCC Group Headquarters, Imphal for their continuous dedication in shaping disciplined and responsible youth who will contribute positively to the future of the state. According to the Chief Minister, the NCC plays a crucial role in instilling values such as leadership, patriotism and social responsibility among young people. He further stated that the cadets represent the future of the state and described them as the architects of a new Manipur — one that is peaceful, progressive and prosperous. Upon arriving at the NCC Group Headquarters in Imphal, the Chief Minister

inspected a ceremonial Guard of Honour presented by NCC cadets, highlighting the disciplined training that the organisation provides. Later, the Chief Minister, accompanied by Wing Commander Mutum Sandip Singh, Commanding Officer of the 1 Manipur Air Squadron NCC, participated in a flight simulator session at the unit's headquarters, experiencing the training facilities available for cadets. The event was attended by several prominent personalities including Thangmeibam Assembly Constituency MLA Kh. Joykisan Singh, Vice Chancellor of Dhanamanjuri University Dr. W. Chandbabu Singh and Brigadier Vikrant Kulkarni, along with NCC cadets, staff.

## Indian Engineer Dies in Tanker Attack Near Iraq

**Mumbai** : A tragic maritime incident has claimed the life of a 54-year-old marine engineer from Mumbai after the tanker on which he was serving came under attack near the port of Basra. The victim, Deonandan Prasad Singh, was a resident of Kandivli and had been working aboard an international oil tanker when the incident occurred.

According to official information, Singh was serving on the vessel MT Safe-sea Vishnu at the time of the attack. The tanker was operating in waters near southern Iraq when it was reportedly targeted during hostilities in the region.

Authorities stated that the ship sails under the flag of the Marshall Islands, a common registration for many international merchant vessels. Ships operating under such registries often carry multinational crews and transport cargo across global maritime routes.

Officials from the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways confirmed that Singh sustained fatal injuries during the assault on the vessel. The ministry stated that the incident occurred amid escalating tensions in the region that have affected



maritime activity.

The attack reportedly took place close to the busy port zone near Basra, an important hub for oil exports and maritime trade. The area has witnessed heightened security concerns due to recent geopolitical developments.

At the time of the incident, the tanker had a crew of 28 members onboard. The crew consisted of both Indian and Filipino nationals who were performing routine operational duties when the vessel was struck.

Following the attack, rescue operations were launched to evacuate the crew and ensure their safe-

ty. The response was carried out by the Iraqi Coast Guard, which intervened to assist those onboard the vessel.

Authorities reported that the remaining crew members were successfully rescued during the operation. They were taken to safety after the tanker was affected by the assault.

Despite the rescue efforts, Deonandan Prasad Singh could not be saved. Officials said he had suffered severe injuries during the incident, which ultimately proved fatal.

News of the tragedy reached his family in Mumbai soon after the confirma-

tion from maritime authorities. Relatives described the loss as deeply painful, particularly given the circumstances under which he had returned to sea duty. Family members revealed that Singh had spent many years working in the maritime industry as a marine engineer. His professional career had taken him across several international shipping routes over the years. However, in recent years he had moved away from sailing assignments and had been working in a shore-based role for nearly seven years. During this period he remained in Mumbai with his family.

According to relatives,

Singh had only recently agreed to return to active sea duty. The decision was reportedly linked to contractual commitments connected with his employer.

Family members explained that he had been asked to rejoin service on the tanker only a few days before regional tensions intensified. At the time he accepted the assignment, the situation in the area had not yet escalated into open conflict. His sudden return to sea, after several years away from sailing, has made the incident particularly difficult for his family to process. They said the decision had been made mainly due to professional obligations.

Residents in Kandivli, where Singh lived, also expressed shock upon hearing about the incident. Neighbours and acquaintances described him as a dedicated professional who had spent decades working in the maritime sector. Maritime industry observers noted that international shipping routes can become vulnerable during periods of geopolitical tension. Merchant vessels operating in sensitive regions sometimes face risks associated with regional conflicts.

## Poor Accessibility at Dadar Station Sparks Outrage

**Mumbai** : A video circulating widely on social media has sparked strong public criticism over inadequate accessibility infrastructure at Dadar railway station.

The footage shows a wheelchair user struggling to reach a platform despite the presence of a ramp, highlighting serious design shortcomings at one of the city's busiest transit hubs.

The video, shared by the social media page Instagram account "Aamchi Mumbai," quickly gained traction online and drew attention to the difficulties faced by persons with disabilities while navigating railway stations in Mumbai. In the clip, a commuter is seen assisting a wheelchair user by pushing the chair up a ramp that appears to lead toward the platform area.

However, upon reaching the end of the ramp, the path is abruptly blocked by two flights of stairs, making further movement impossible for a wheelchair user without physical assistance.

The video captures the narrator expressing visible frustration over the design flaw.

He questions the purpose of constructing a ramp that ultimately leads directly into a staircase, ar-

guing that such infrastructure defeats the entire purpose of accessibility.

According to the narrator, while the ramp technically allows a wheelchair user to reach a certain point, the absence of a continuous accessible pathway prevents them from reaching the platform independently.

The situation forces individuals with disabilities to rely on others for assistance.

The narrator further criticizes the planning and execution of the infrastructure.

He suggests that those responsible for designing and constructing the facility may not have properly considered the practical mobility needs of persons with disabilities.

The issue has reignited debate about accessibility standards at major railway stations in Mumbai.

Activists and commuters argue that facilities meant to support disabled passengers must be designed in a way that ensures seamless movement from entry points to platforms.

Located in central Mumbai, Dadar railway station is one of the busiest interchange stations in the city. It serves both suburban and long-distance

trains operated by Western Railway and Central Railway.

Because of its strategic location and heavy passenger traffic, the station handles lakhs of commuters every day. Many travelers rely on it as a key transfer point between railway lines as well as other forms of public transport.

Following the viral video, several commuters expressed their dissatisfaction on social media platforms. Many users questioned how such basic design issues could exist at a major public transport hub used by millions.

Disability rights advocates have also voiced concern about the situation. They argue that infrastructure meant to support disabled individuals must be implemented thoughtfully rather than merely as a symbolic feature.

Experts point out that accessibility infrastructure should follow universal design principles. This means creating spaces that can be used safely and independently by people of all physical abilities.

A ramp that ends in stairs without an alternative accessible path fails to meet those principles, as it does not provide complete mobility access for wheelchair users.

## Weekend Rail Blocks to Affect Local Services

**Mumbai** : Local train commuters in Mumbai are likely to face temporary disruptions on Sunday, March 15, as both Western Railway and Central Railway have scheduled major maintenance blocks across key suburban corridors.

The railway authorities have announced that these blocks are necessary to carry out crucial infrastructure work, including track repairs, signal upgrades, and structural maintenance.

Passengers have been advised to plan their travel carefully to avoid inconvenience during the scheduled maintenance period. Officials from Western Railway stated that a jumbo block will be implemented on the fast lines between Borivali and Bhayandar during the early hours of Sunday.

The maintenance block is scheduled to remain in effect from 12:15 am until 3:45 am.

During this time, engineers and technical teams will carry out essential work on railway infrastructure to ensure the safe and smooth functioning of suburban train services.

The authorities explained that the maintenance work requires temporary suspension of normal fast line operations. As a result, several trains normally operating on fast tracks will be diverted to slow lines during the block period.

This diversion is expected to cause minor changes in the schedules of certain local trains running on the Western suburban network.



In addition to the work between Borivali and Bhayandar, another significant operational block has been scheduled at Prabhadevi railway station.

This block will take place between 1:30 am and 6:00 am and is aimed at facilitating the removal of a heavy girder from the local road over bridge located near the station.

Railway engineers said that the girder removal is part of a broader infrastructure improvement project in the area.

The work requires the use of heavy machinery and technical crews, which makes it necessary to temporarily halt train movement through certain tracks while the structure is safely dismantled.

Due to these operations, sever-

al suburban services originating from Churchgate may either be cancelled or short-terminated during the night. Railway officials indicated that some trains will conclude their journeys earlier than scheduled at stations such as Dadar and Bandra. Passengers traveling during the late-night and early-morning hours have been advised to check updated train schedules before leaving for the station.

Railway authorities said that public announcements and digital boards will display revised service information during the maintenance operations.

Despite the night-time disruption, Western Railway has clarified that there will be no daytime maintenance blocks on Sunday.

This decision has been taken to minimize inconvenience to the large number of commuters who rely on local train services during daytime hours.

Railway officials stated that the absence of daytime blocks should provide relief to passengers traveling later in the day.

Most suburban services on the Western line are expected to operate normally after the early morning maintenance work is completed. However, the maintenance activities may still affect some long-distance train operations.

Railway sources indicated that a few intercity and express services running between Surat and Virar could experience delays or minor rescheduling due to the temporary operational changes.

Passengers booked on these long-distance routes have been advised to check train status updates through official railway communication channels before their journey. Authorities said that such delays are sometimes unavoidable when critical maintenance work is carried out on busy railway corridors. Officials explained that these planned maintenance blocks are part of regular infrastructure upkeep carried out by railway engineering teams.

The work includes track repairs, signal upgrades, and structural maintenance aimed at improving reliability and preventing technical failures that could otherwise disrupt services on the heavily used suburban railway system.

## Naigaon Residents to Receive New Flats

**Mumbai**: Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis is scheduled to distribute the keys to 864 fresh rehabilitation apartments on March 16 as part of the massive Naigaon BDD Chawl redevelopment initiative. This MHADA-led project represents one of the most significant urban transformation efforts in Asia, moving residents from aged chawls into contemporary high-rise housing. The official ceremony will take place at 10 am at the Yashwantrao Chavan Centre in Nariman Point. The distribution includes a specific allocation of 423 units for retired police personnel and their families to honor their public service. Now officially named the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar BDD Complex, the site will eventually feature 20 rehabilitation towers. High-profile attendees for the event include Deputy CMs Eknath Shinde and Sunetra Pawar, along with several state ministers and legislative leaders. The broader Naigaon project covers over 6 hectares and aims to rehouse over 3,300 tenants. While the first phase is currently handing over 864 flats across five towers, another 537 units are expected to be ready by April 2026. Eligible residents, many of whom

have lived in 160 sq ft rooms for generations, are being upgraded to 500 sq ft 2BHK homes free of cost. The new township will also include modern amenities like a school, solar power systems, and a welfare center, with MHADA committed to maintaining the complex for 12 years. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis is set to distribute keys to 864 newly constructed rehabilitation flats on March 16 under the Naigaon BDD Chawl redevelopment project. The housing initiative, being executed by Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA), is considered one of the largest urban renewal efforts in Asia and aims to shift residents from ageing chawls into modern high-rise buildings. The key handover ceremony will be held at the Yashwantrao Chavan Centre in Nariman Point at 10 am. The redevelopment site has now been officially renamed the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar BDD Complex.

Out of the total apartments being distributed in this phase, 423 units have been earmarked for retired police personnel and their families in recognition of their public service. The event is also expected to be attended by Deputy Chief

Ministers Eknath Shinde and Sunetra Pawar, along with several ministers and legislative leaders. The larger Naigaon redevelopment covers more than six hectares and seeks to rehabilitate over 3,300 tenants who previously lived in old BDD chawls. Once completed, the project will include 20 rehabilitation towers forming a modern residential complex. In the current phase, 864 apartments across five towers are ready for handover. Officials said an additional 537 units are expected to be completed by April 2026 as construction progresses. For many families who have lived for decades in cramped 160-square-foot chawl rooms, the redevelopment marks a significant upgrade. Eligible residents are being provided free 500-square-foot two-bedroom flats under the rehabilitation scheme. The upcoming township is also planned with several modern facilities, including a school, solar power installations, and a welfare centre. MHADA has stated that it will maintain the complex for 12 years to ensure proper upkeep of the new residential infrastructure.

The Naigaon BDD redevelopment forms part

of the state government's broader strategy to modernize Mumbai's ageing housing

clusters while providing improved living conditions for long-time residents.

## Editorial

# The Strait of Hormuz Crisis

As the conflict in West Asia intensifies day by day, its most significant repercussions have begun to manifest in the global energy supply. Rising tensions among the United States, Israel, and Iran have created profound instability within the Strait of Hormuz—a maritime route considered vital to the world. A massive volume of the world's crude oil is transported through this very channel. Amidst such a tense climate, Iran's decision to grant safe passage to Indian vessels is being hailed as a major relief for India, serving to underscore once again the long-standing bond of trust shared between the two nations.

On the geopolitical battlefield of West Asia, the conflict involving the United States, Israel, and Iran is no longer merely a regional affair; it has now brought the world to the very brink of a global catastrophe. As this conflict has flared up, its most dire repercussions have been felt acutely at the Strait of Hormuz—widely regarded as the world's economic lifeline. Approximately 20 percent of the world's total crude oil trade is conducted through this narrow maritime corridor. Currently, tensions in the region have escalated to such an extreme level that maritime traffic has ground to a near-halt, effectively imposing a global blockade on the supply of petrol, diesel, and natural gas. However, amidst this volatile atmosphere—one overshadowed by the specter of war—Iran granting the "green signal" for the safe passage of Indian vessels through this strait is not merely a source of relief for India; it must be recognized as a major diplomatic triumph on the global stage. This development serves as irrefutable proof that, regardless of how the equations of international politics may shift, the centuries-old cultural and diplomatic ties between India and Iran remain as robust today as ever before.

The friendship between India and Iran is not predicated solely upon modern diplomatic agreements; rather, it is deeply rooted in a historical legacy stretching back to antiquity. Trade and cultural exchange between the Indus Valley Civilization and the ancient Persian Empire form the bedrock of this friendship. For centuries, Persian served as the language of knowledge and administration in Indian royal courts, thereby fostering intellectual affinity between the two regions. Even in the post-independence era, this friendship has continued to blossom. Iran has consistently remained a 'strategic' partner for India, particularly in the energy sector, port development, and in facilitating direct connectivity with Central Asia. Iran has viewed India not merely as a trading partner; rather, it has upheld the true spirit of friendship by supplying oil to India on credit and on interest-free terms during times of adversity. Notably, whenever the Kashmir issue has surfaced on the global stage—at times when many Muslim nations have tended to side with Pakistan—Iran has consistently stood in support of India. Iran played a pivotal role in blocking a resolution regarding Kashmir that Pakistan attempted to introduce at the United Nations in 1994. Iran's stance—that Kashmir is an internal matter for India and should be resolved through bilateral dialogue—has consistently served as a source of strategic strength for India.

The most significant and tangible symbol of this friendship is the 'Chabahar Port' project. By bypassing Pakistan, this port has opened up a direct gateway for India to engage in trade with Afghanistan and the Central Asian nations. Emerging from the very same threads of friendship is another ambitious undertaking: the 'Iran-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline.' Conceived in the 2000s, this concept came to be recognized—quite aptly—as the 'Peace Pipeline.' This pipeline was designed to transport natural gas from the South Pars field in Iran—the world's largest gas field—to India, thereby ensuring the availability of natural gas to India at affordable rates. The government led by Dr. Manmohan Singh had taken earnest and decisive steps toward realizing this project. Regrettably, however, this project ultimately fell by the wayside, ensnared within the complex labyrinth of global geopolitics. This project failed to materialize due to the stringent economic sanctions imposed by the United States in response to Iran's nuclear program, concerns regarding the security of the pipeline traversing Pakistani territory, and disagreements over gas pricing. Although India was compelled to distance itself from the project due to intense opposition from the U.S. and pressure tactics employed by Western nations, these discussions nevertheless served to further underscore the bond of trust within India-Iran relations.

Today, as the flames of war rage across West Asia, Iran's strategy appears clearly aimed at exerting economic pressure on the United States. Disrupting the global oil market by blockading the Strait of Hormuz constitutes a key strategic maneuver in Iran's wartime playbook. Yet, even amidst such grave circumstances, Iran has once again demonstrated its 'soft corner' for India through concrete actions. The safe arrival in Mumbai of Indian vessels—carrying one million barrels of crude oil from Saudi Arabia and two million barrels from Iraq—stands as a monumental event during this period of conflict. Furthermore, two other vital vessels, the 'Pushpak' and the 'Parimal', are also currently en route to India. The safety of these vessels, as well as the security of India's energy supplies, was successfully secured through a series of three consecutive dialogues between India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, and Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister, Abbas Aragchi. Although India receives oil supplies from Russia, the continued flow of supplies through this critical route in the Middle East serves as a lifeline—akin to oxygen—for the Indian economy. From a strategic perspective, the challenges facing India are far from over. Given Iran's intense focus on the Strait of Hormuz, it may take some time before oil transportation returns to complete normalcy. In this conflict involving powerful nations, India is compelled to perform a delicate balancing act—striving to safeguard its own national interests while simultaneously maintaining its stance of neutrality. Indian diplomacy currently stands at a critical crossroads: on one side lies a global superpower like the United States, and on the other, an old and trusted ally like Iran. The special concession granted by Iran during this period of conflict stands as a resounding triumph for India's independent foreign policy and its enduring cultural ties of friendship. In the times to come, India will need to articulate its role not merely as an importer of oil, but also as a global 'peace envoy' dedicated to establishing stability in this region. In essence, the current impasse in the Strait of Hormuz—and the pathway it offers India—serves as a stark reminder of the very core of India-Iran relations. Even amidst the smoke of war, Iran has succeeded in keeping the flame of friendship burning—an act that promises to be a lifeline for India's energy security. However, given the inherent uncertainty of this situation, India must sharpen its diplomatic acumen while simultaneously exploring alternative options. In this grand arena of global economics and strategic maneuvering, India's 'Nation First' stance—combined with Iran's 'Friendship First' policy—currently stands as a formidable shield for India. It is certain that, bolstered by this historic friendship, India is now poised to confront the economic challenges that lie ahead.

# APEDA Showcases India's Agri and Processed Food Export Strength at AAHAR 2026

The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), under the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, participated in the 40th edition of AAHAR 2026 held from 10-14 March 2026 at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi. APEDA presented a pavilion highlighting India's agricultural and processed food export capabilities, bringing together exporters, State representatives and industry stakeholders on a common platform.

The 40th edition of AAHAR – The International Food & Hospitality Fair was inaugurated by Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Shri Piyush Goyal. Organised by the India Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO), the landmark edition of the event features Italy as the Country Partner. The inauguration ceremony was attended by senior officials from the Embassy of Italy, representatives of ITPO, government officials, industry leaders, exhibitors and delegates from India and abroad.

In his keynote address, Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Shri Piyush Goyal said that India's food and agriculture sector is entering a new phase of global opportunity. He noted that with exports of agricultural and processed food products crossing ₹5 lakh crore annually, India today stands among the world's leading exporters. Over the past decade, exports of processed foods, fruits, pulses and vegetables have grown significantly, reflecting the strength and diversity of farmers, fishermen and food processors across the country.

The Minister further said that India's expanding network of Free Trade Agreements has opened significant opportunities for the

country's food and agricultural exports. In recent years, India has concluded trade agreements with countries and regions including the United Arab Emirates, Australia, Switzerland and other EFTA nations, while strengthening engagement with partners such as Japan, Korea, the United Kingdom,

Chairman, APEDA Shri Abhishek Dev and Managing Director, ITPO Shri Neeraj Kharwal in the presence of senior officials from the Government of India, APEDA, participating State Governments, exporters and industry representatives. The pavilion served as an important platform to show-

case India's diverse agri-export basket and facilitate interactions between exporters and buyers from domestic as well as international markets. On the occasion, research reports on cucumber, cashew, pineapple and pomegranate prepared by APEDA in collaboration with ICRIER as the knowledge partner were also released. The reports provide insights on supply chains, export potential and strategies to enhance India's competitiveness in global mar-

kets. APEDA also announced the launch of packaging design solutions and technical standards for selected region-specific agricultural products developed in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Packaging (IIP). The initiative focuses particularly on GI-tagged and

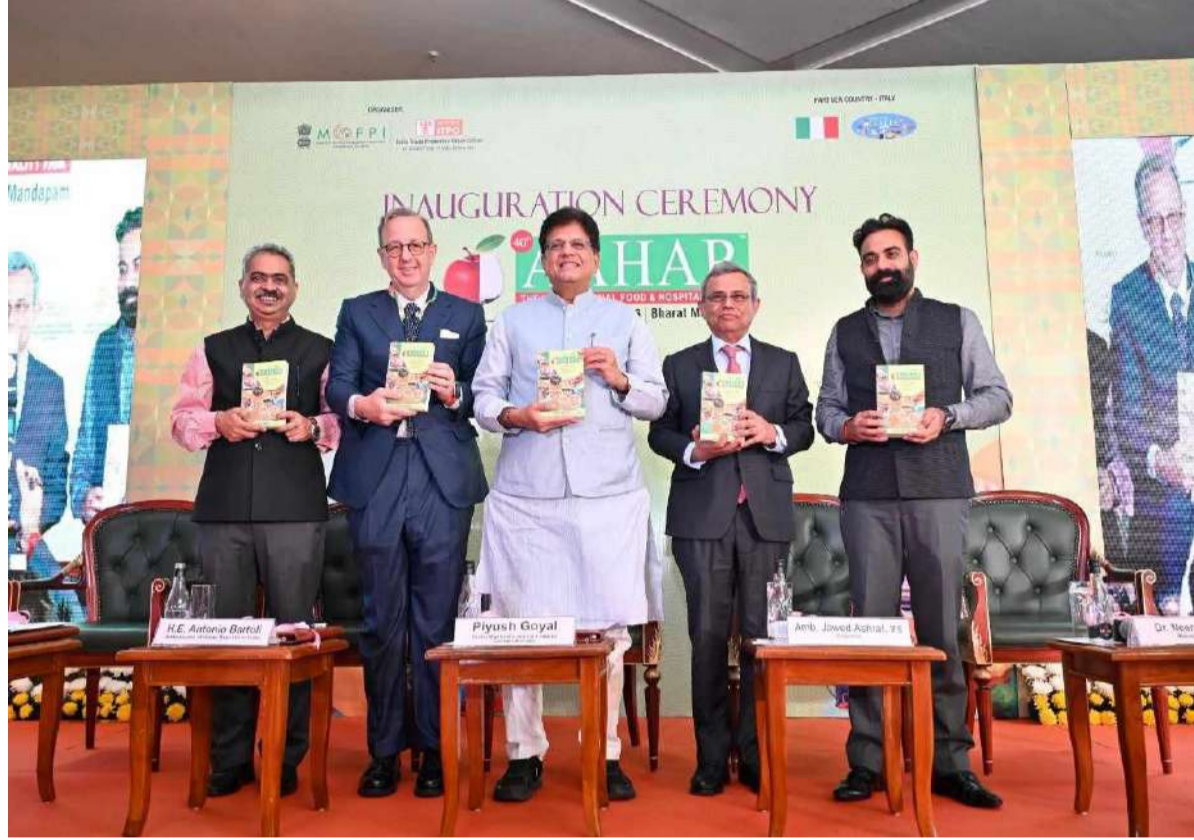
ups and food processing enterprises from across the country. The exhibition provided opportunities for industry stakeholders to explore collaborations, expand market linkages and promote value-added agricultural products. The pavilion highlighted key export segments in-

cluding Basmati Rice, Non-Basmati Rice, Organic Products and Plant-Based Food products, reflecting India's expanding portfolio in global agri-food markets. A special feature on plant-based products showcased innovative and sustainable food alternatives gaining traction in international markets. Several State Pavilions were featured within the APEDA space with participation from Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala,

Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal. These pavilions showcased region-specific products, traditional food items and export-ready agricultural produce, reflecting the diversity and strength of India's agri-food sector. APEDA's participation at AAHAR 2026 attracted significant industry engagement, with over one lakh visitors during the five-day event. The exhibition created opportunities for exporters, food processors and agri-entrepreneurs to interact with buyers, distributors and institutional stakeholders from India and abroad.

A key highlight of the APEDA Pavilion was live wet sampling sessions conducted by a renowned chef presenting innovative recipes and applications using Indian agricultural and processed food products. The pavilion also featured focused displays on Basmati Rice, Non-Basmati Rice, Organic Products and Plant-Based Food products, enabling buyers and visitors to explore India's export-ready offerings.

AAHAR continues to be one of the largest B2B platforms for the food and hospitality industry in South Asia, offering an important interface for business networking, product promotion and knowledge exchange across the agri-food value chain. Through its participation at AAHAR 2026, APEDA showcased India's growing capabilities in high-quality agricultural production, value addition and export-oriented supply chains. The pavilion brought together exporters, startups, State agencies and producer organisations, highlighting opportunities to expand India's presence in international markets.



Oman and Mauritius, and advancing discussions with Canada and the European Union. He noted that these agreements are enabling preferential market access for Indian products across nearly two-thirds of global trade, creating new opportunities for farmers, MSMEs and food processors to expand exports and access high-value markets.

The APEDA Pavilion was inaugurated by Additional Secretary, Department of Commerce Shri Nitin Kumar Yadav along with

organic products and aims to improve product protection, shelf life and market presentation for exports. The products covered under this initiative include Karbi Anglong Ginger (Assam), G4 Chilli and Jalgaon Banana (Maharashtra), Assam Kaji Nemu (Assam) and Prayagraj Surkha Guava (Uttar Pradesh).

Spread across an exhibition area of 2,500 square metres, the APEDA Pavilion hosted over 100 exhibitors representing exporters, producer organisations, start-

ups and food processing enterprises from across the country. The exhibition provided opportunities for industry stakeholders to explore collaborations, expand market linkages and promote value-added agricultural products. The pavilion highlighted key export segments in-

cluding Basmati Rice, Non-Basmati Rice, Organic Products and Plant-Based Food products, reflecting India's expanding portfolio in global agri-food markets. A special feature on plant-based products showcased innovative and sustainable food alternatives gaining traction in international markets. Several State Pavilions were featured within the APEDA space with participation from Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala,

# World's largest grain storage plan

The key criteria for selection of Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) under the World's Largest Grain Storage Plan in the Cooperative Sector include that PACS must be identified and approved through the District Cooperative Development Committees (DCDC). Identification of PACS should be undertaken in such locations identified by agencies such as Food Corporation of India (FCI), National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED), National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India Ltd. (NCCF) etc., where there is an established demand for storage/ storage gap and are suitable for the agencies to provide hiring assurance.

In addition, the net worth of the PACS

should be positive during the last two financial years, the PACS should not be a bank defaulter, the PACS should have been profitable during the last three consecutive financial years, the cumulative profit during the last three years should be more than ₹5 lakh preferably, and the minimum storage capacity of the proposed godown should preferably be 500 MT or above.

The Plan is being implemented at PACS/ other cooperative societies level through convergence of various existing schemes of the Government of India (GoI), such as, Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF), Agricultural Marketing Infrastructure Scheme (AMI), Sub Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM), Pradhan

Mantri Formalization of Micro Food Processing Enterprises Scheme (PMFME), etc. Under the AIF Scheme the benefit of interest subvention is given to the PACS against the loan taken for construction of godowns and under AMI Scheme 33% subsidy is given for the construction of food grain storage.

NABARD is the subsidy channelising agency for the World's Largest Grain Storage Plan projects under AMI and sanctions and releases subsidy under the scheme. State Cooperative Banks (StCBs) and District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCBs) act as the primary lending institutions for PACS under this initiative. They are responsible for sanctioning and disbursing credit to PACS in a time-bound manner, as speci-

fied in the implementation framework.

The Plan utilizes NABARD's special refinance scheme to significantly reduce the financial burden on participating cooperatives.

When combined with the 3% interest subvention available under the AIF, the effective loan interest rate for PACS is reduced to 1% under World's Largest Grain Storage Plan.

Further, some States such as Rajasthan and Gujarat are providing financial support for godown construction under the project through their own State level schemes. This information was given by Union Minister for Home and Cooperation Shri Amit Shah in a written reply in Rajya Sabha.

# ESIC Celebrates International Women's Day 2026 and Concludes Nationwide 'Special Services Fortnight'



The Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) Headquarters in New Delhi celebrated International Women's Day 2026 on 10th March, marking the successful conclusion of the ESIC Special Services Fortnight 2026. The event highlighted ESIC's steadfast commitment to promoting the rights, recognition, and welfare of its women employees and beneficiaries.

The occasion was graced by Shri Ashok Kumar Singh, Director General, ESIC; Ms. T. L. Yaden, Financial Commissioner, ESIC; Shri Manish Kumar Agrawal, Chief Vigilance Officer, ESIC, and Dr. Sappna Mittal, Medical Commissioner (ME), ESIC. They were joined by Guest Speaker Ms. Anju Bahri and Shri Munish Yadav, Program Coordinator of the Ashray

Trust, alongside senior officers and staff of the ESIC Headquarters.

The theme for this year's International Women's Day, 'Give to Gain', beautifully reflects ESIC's core guiding principle of Niswarth Seva (selfless service). Shri Ashok Kumar Singh, Director General, ESIC, remarked that the theme is a powerful testament to the corporation's unwavering dedication to social security. He further emphasized that through its comprehensive healthcare initiatives, ESIC continues to empower women beneficiaries nationwide by ensuring consistent access to quality medical care and robust social protection. Currently, ESIC provides social security and healthcare services to over 3.84 crore insured persons and their families, maintaining a specialized focus on women's health, maternity

benefits, and overall welfare. In her address, Ms. T. L. Yaden, Financial Commissioner, ESIC, said that ESIC remains committed to empowering women beneficiaries across the country and continuously supporting their health, security and welfare.

ESIC officials and staff took the "Purple Ribbon Pledge," an Ashray Trust initiative, committing to ac-

speaker and Life Coach Ms. Anju Bahri encouraged women to value themselves and embrace change with confidence. The event also served as a platform to honour the talent within the organization, as women employees who participated in various competitions and the winners of the poster competition were felicitated for their enthusiastic contributions.



tively oppose the exploitation and abuse of women and girls. Led by Program Coordinator Munish Yadav, the ceremony emphasized collective community responsibility as the foundation for protecting the most vulnerable of the society.

As part of the festivities, guest

The celebration also marked the successful conclusion of the ESIC Special Services Fortnight, which was organised from February 24 to March 10, 2026, as part of the Employees' State Insurance Corporation's landmark 75th Foundation Year milestone. The fort-

night-long initiative was designed to extend important welfare and healthcare services directly to insured workers and their families across the country.

The Special Services Fortnight served as a focused outreach programme aimed at strengthening the connection between the corporation and its beneficiaries. Through a series of structured activities and events, ESIC sought to ensure that insured workers were not only aware of the services available to them but were also able to access them conveniently.

During the fortnight, a wide range of programmes were conducted at ESIC field offices, hospitals and dispensaries. These activities included awareness camps that educated workers about their healthcare rights, available benefits and the procedures to avail medical services under the ESIC scheme.

Health check-up camps formed a major component of the initiative, enabling insured workers to undergo basic medical screening and consultations. Medical professionals conducted examinations and provided guidance on preventive healthcare, lifestyle management and the importance of regular medical monitoring.

In addition to conventional healthcare services, the programme also promoted holistic well-being through Yoga and AYUSH sessions.

## Freedom of Religion Bill should be sent to Joint select Committee , Demands SP MLA Rais Shaikh

**Mumbai:** A day after the Freedom of Religion Bill, 2026 was presented by the state government in the Legislative Assembly, Rais Shaikh, Samajwadi Party legislator from Bhiwandi East, demanded that the bill be sent to a Joint select Committee of the state legislature for review.

He also said on Saturday that a public hearing should be conducted so that objections can be raised against the bill, which infringes on fundamental rights.

Speaking on the issue, MLA Rais Shaikh said that common people are currently unable to get gas, hotels are shutting down, and many people have lost their jobs. "Instead of discussing these issues, the legislature is debating a bill like the Freedom of Religion Bill, which will create divisions in society. Existing laws already address forced religious conversions, and this bill has been introduced to target minority communities," remarked MLA Rais Shaikh.



MLA Rais Shaikh further stated that the bill should not be passed without discussion and requires detailed debate. "Therefore, this bill should be referred to a Joint select Committee of the state legislature with members from both Houses. Representatives from minority communities should be included in the committee, as a thorough discussion is necessary before passing the bill," he added.

Stating that minority representation in the legislature is inadequate, MLA Rais Shaikh said that civil society groups and minority organizations should be allowed to present their views on the bill. "For that purpose, a public hearing must be held. The government should issue a public notice inviting objections and suggestions and conduct hearings on them," said MLA Rais Shaikh, adding that he will write to

the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly regarding this on Monday.

A total of 35 civil and minority organizations in the state have opposed the bill. Social activist Teesta Setalvad criticized the bill, saying it undermines privacy, freedom of religion, and fundamental rights. The People's Union for Civil Liberties stated that the right to religious freedom includes the right to conversion.

Last year, a committee chaired by Director General of Police Rashmi Shukla was formed to draft this bill. According to the proposed law, a 60-day notice would be mandatory before religious conversion, during which objections can be raised, and a police inquiry can be conducted.

Marriages carried out for religious conversion would be considered illegal. The bill proposes up to seven years of imprisonment and a fine of Rs 5 lakh for institutions or individuals involved in illegal religious conversions.

## Maharashtra sees 675 leopard deaths in over five years: RTI data

**Nagpur:** As many as 675 leopards have died in Maharashtra over the past five years, according to information obtained from the state forest department through a right to information (RTI) application. The data covers the period from January 2021 to early February 2026. Accidents accounted for nearly 40 per cent of the fatalities. Among these, 99 leopards were killed in road accidents, while 91 died after falling into open wells or water tanks. The largest share of deaths, 320 cases (47 per cent), was attributed to natural causes. Meanwhile, 30 leopards died due to poaching, including incidents involving electrocution and trapping. The Nashik and Pune forest circles reported the highest number of leopard deaths, indicating growing challenges for the species amid



rapid urban expansion and increased agricultural activity in these regions. Year-wise data shows that 2021 recorded the highest number of deaths at 167, whereas 2023 saw the lowest figure at 77. In addition, 45 leopard deaths were classified as having unknown causes, while 31 cases are still under investigation, prompting concerns among wildlife experts about the possibility of unreported wildlife crimes. Conservationists have called

for urgent preventive measures, including covering open wells, installing escape ramps in water tanks, and constructing wildlife crossings on highways, particularly in high-risk zones such as Nashik, Pune and Mumbai corridors. With 10 leopard deaths already reported in 2026, experts have urged authorities to take immediate steps to curb mortality and strengthen protection efforts for the species across Maharashtra.

## Two fire incidents engulf Mumbai property worth crores; No casualties reported

**Mumbai:** Incidents of fire occurred at two different locations in Mumbai on Saturday, causing damage to properties worth crores of rupees, though no casualties were reported.

According to the Mumbai Fire Brigade (MFB) sources, the first fire broke out in the Govandi area, at a timber godown, prompting the rapid deployment of emergency services. The city police control room received the report at 8:40 am, and firefighting teams were immediately dispatched.

The blaze took place at a timber godown located at Plot No. 2, PL Lokhande Marg, in Chembur Janta Market, near Kuba Mas-

jid in New Gautam Nagar, Govandi. Upon arrival, the Mumbai Fire Brigade assessed the situation and declared it a Level-I fire at 8:56 am.

On the same day, another fire erupted at multiple shops near Bhandup railway station road (West), close to Dreams Mall and the residence of MP Sanjay Dina Patil.

Fire brigade teams, along with local police personnel, rushed to the scene, and the fire was extinguished within half an hour.

Officials confirmed that there were no casualties, but the extent of property damage is still under investigation.

## Chandrakant Patil discusses NEP implementation, higher education quality with Maharashtra Governor

**Mumbai:** Maharashtra Minister for Higher and Technical Education Chandrakant Patil paid a courtesy visit to Jishnu Dev Varma at Lokbhavan in Mumbai on Saturday, where the two leaders discussed key issues concerning the higher and technical education sector in the state.

During the meeting, Patil and the Governor held detailed discussions on various initiatives aimed at strengthening higher education and improving academic standards across universities and institutions in Maharashtra.

A major focus of the discussion was the effective implementation of the National Education Policy 2020, which was introduced under

the leadership of Narendra Modi to transform India's education system.

The leaders reviewed the steps being taken by the state government to align Maharashtra's education framework with the objectives of the new policy, particularly in the areas of curriculum reforms, multidisciplinary education and research development.

They also deliberated on measures to improve the national and international rankings of universities in Maharashtra, with emphasis on strengthening academic excellence, research output and global collaborations.

During the meeting, Patil briefed the Governor about various initiatives be-

ing undertaken by the state government to expand opportunities for students in higher education, skill development and research.

He highlighted efforts to modernise technical education institutions, promote innovation and provide students with better access to advanced learning resources.

The minister also spoke about programmes aimed at encouraging industry-academia collaboration to ensure that students acquire practical skills relevant to evolving employment demands.

Governor Jishnu Dev Varma noted that Maharashtra has traditionally remained at the forefront of education in India and has

played a significant role in shaping the country's academic landscape.

He emphasised the importance of strengthening the quality of universities and educational institutions in the state so that they remain competitive at both national and international levels. According to the Governor, improving research standards, promoting innovation and ensuring quality teaching are essential to maintaining Maharashtra's leadership in higher education.

He expressed confidence that the effective implementation of the National Education Policy would significantly enhance the quality and accessibility of higher education in the state.

## Mitkari raises questions over Ajit Pawar's death, demands release of CCTV footage

**Mumbai :** Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) MLC Amol Mitkari has raised serious allegations regarding the circumstances surrounding the reported accidental death of Ajit Pawar, stating that the case appears to have reached a highly sensitive political and social turning point.

Mitkari has called for the immediate public release of CCTV footage showing Pawar boarding the aircraft, arguing that transparency is crucial even as the official investigation continues.

He said, "If the final investigation report takes time, the footage should be made public without delay to bring clarity to the matter."

The legislator also expressed suspicion about the

possible involvement of certain individuals, including Sumit Kapoor, Sahil Madan, Yash, and V.K. Singh, suggesting that a "wider conspiracy cannot be ruled out."

Expressing concern over reports that the aircraft's black box had been destroyed, Mitkari alleged, "Multiple agencies, including the Mumbai Police, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Criminal Investigation Department (CID), and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), have failed to provide satisfactory answers so far."

He also expressed strong resentment over reports claiming that the aircraft's black box had been burnt and criticised the delay in registering an FIR in the case.

## Launch of 'RickshawMitra Feeder' service for last-mile connectivity

**Pune:** In order to strengthen the public transportation system, the State's Minister for Higher and Technical Education, Chandrakant Dada Patil, has taken another commendable step. Based on Patil's concept and with the cooperation of Pune Metro, the "RickshawMitra Feeder" service was inaugurated by him on Saturday.

Pune Metro Director Shrawan Hardikar, Anilkumar Kokate, Agarwal, Dr. Keshav Kshirsagar from the Baghtoy Rikshawala organization, along with present and former corporators, BJP office bearers, and members of the organization, were present in large numbers at

the inauguration ceremony.

Speaking at the event, Patil said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis are continuously striving to strengthen public transportation systems. The government is focusing on expanding eco-friendly metro networks in metropolitan cities. To encourage citizens to use public transport more, a shuttle bus service was started in Kothrud a year ago, which has proven to be highly successful.

He further said "My association with Pune dates back to 1982, and I have always insisted that citizens should use public transport

instead of private vehicles. With this intention, and with the help of the Baghtoy Rikshawala organization, we started a prepaid rickshaw service at Pune Railway Station, which received an enthusiastic response from the people of Pune. Now, to make travel from homes to metro stations easier, we are launching the RickshawMitra Feeder Service. I am confident that the people of Pune will also respond enthusiastically to this initiative."

Pune Mayor Manjusha Nagpure also praised the initiative. She said,

"The State's Minister for Higher and Technical Edu-

cation quietly plans various initiatives for public welfare and successfully implements them.

The shuttle bus service started earlier by Patil has benefited citizens in the Sinhadag Road area the most. The RickshawMitra Feeder Service will certainly succeed in strengthening public transportation."

Pune Metro Managing Director Shrawan Hardikar said that currently, there is a kind of competition between private and public transport in Pune, which is essentially meaningless. Considering the growing size of the city, it will not be possible to keep widening roads indefinitely.

## Khardekar urges MNGL to prioritise pipeline gas for essential institutions

**Pune:** A case related to the alleged plane crash involving Ajit Pawar has reached the Bombay High Court after a public interest litigation (PIL) was filed on Friday by social activist Hemant Patil, the national president of India Against Corruption.

In the petition, Patil has urged the court to direct authorities to register criminal cases against the aviation company involved and other individuals who may be responsible in connection with the aircraft accident.

He has also requested the Bombay High Court to order a detailed investigation into the incident in order to determine the exact cause of the crash.

According to the plea, it is necessary to establish whether the incident was purely accidental or if there was any possibility of sabotage or negligence linked to the aircraft's operation.

Patil further requested that the court

order a comprehensive probe and seek a detailed report explaining the circumstances that led to the crash.

The petition also asks the court to direct the Baramati Police Station to conduct the investigation and submit findings regarding the matter.

The PIL refers to the tragic accident that occurred on June 28, 2018, when a 12-seater chartered aircraft Beechcraft King Air C90 bearing registration VT-UPZ crashed in the Ghatkopar area of Mumbai. The crash took place in the Jivdaya Lane locality, a busy residential area, causing widespread shock and panic among residents. The accident resulted in the deaths of four people on board the aircraft, including the pilot and a technician, along with one pedestrian who was present at the site when the aircraft crashed.

The aircraft involved in the crash was reportedly owned by U Y Aviation,

a private aviation company.

Following the accident, a case was registered by the police and an initial inquiry was carried out into the circumstances surrounding the crash.

However, the petition claims that despite the passage of several years since the incident, no significant legal action has been taken against the aviation company or its owners.

The plea argues that accountability should be fixed if any negligence or violation of aviation safety norms is found during the investigation.

Through the PIL, Patil has appealed to the Bombay High Court to ensure that strict action is taken against those found responsible after a proper investigation. He also stressed in the petition that a transparent probe would help clarify doubts about the incident and ensure justice for the victims of the crash.

## Actress Prarthana Behere attends Pune auditions of 'The Jewel One Pageant - Miss and Mrs Maharashtra 2026'

**Pune:** The The Jewel One Pageant - Miss and Mrs Maharashtra 2026 state-level beauty pageant held its Pune auditions with great enthusiasm on Saturday at Saffron Banquets. The event witnessed strong participation from women across different age groups who showcased their talent, confidence and personality.

The auditions were organised by Smruti Enterprises, which is hosting the pageant as a platform to encourage women to explore opportunities in modelling, fashion and the entertainment industry.

Popular Marathi actress Prarthana Behere attended the event as the chief guest and interacted with the participants, motivating them to pursue their aspirations with confidence and determination.

Addressing the contestants, Behere encouraged them to believe in their abilities and make the most of platforms that allow women to express themselves and develop their talents.

Several prominent personalities were present at the event, including Swati Pokale, President of the Na-

tionalist Mahila Congress Party, who appreciated the initiative aimed at empowering women across the state.

The event was also attended by Smruti Bonge, Director of Smruti Enterprises, along with Aadhar Shinde, another director associated with the organisation.

The organisers shared the vision behind the beauty pageant, explaining that the competition is designed not only to celebrate beauty but also to focus on personality development, confidence building and professional opportunities.

They said the pageant aims to provide a platform where women can explore careers in modelling, fashion and other areas of the entertainment industry.

The competition features separate categories for married and unmarried women, allowing participants from diverse backgrounds to compete and showcase their skills.

Women between the ages of 18 and 55 are eligible to participate in the pageant, reflecting the organisers' intention to create an inclusive platform for women of different life stages.

More than 80 women participated in the Pune auditions, presenting themselves through different rounds that highlighted their talent, confidence and overall personality.

Following the audition process, selected contestants have qualified for the next round of the competition, moving one step closer to the state-level finale.

Speaking on the occasion, Prarthana Behere said that such platforms offer women across Maharashtra an opportunity to express their individuality and confidence.

She extended her best wishes to all the contestants and encouraged them to continue working hard as they move forward in the competition.

The organisers announced that the grand finale winners of The Jewel One Pageant - Miss and Mrs Maharashtra 2026 will receive prizes worth up to ₹2 lakh. In addition, the top 40 finalists will be given an opportunity to work in a music album titled Jayostute, which will be presented by Smruti Enterprises in collaboration with Pentene Studios.

## Committee Formed in Maha to Grant Autonomy to Medical Colleges and Hospitals

**Mumbai:** The Maharashtra government has constituted a high-level committee to prepare a detailed strategic framework for granting autonomy to some of the state's leading government medical institutions. The move comes following instructions from Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who has emphasised strengthening medical education and healthcare services in the state.

The committee will examine the proposal to grant autonomous status to Grant Government Medical College and the Sir J. J. Group of Hospitals in Mumbai, as well as the Government Medical College and Hospital Nagpur in Nagpur.

Former Chief Secretary of Maharashtra Jayant Kumar Banthia has been appointed as the chairman of the committee that will study and recommend the framework for autonomy.

A government resolution regarding the formation of the committee has been issued by the Medical Education and Drugs Department Maharashtra, outlining the objectives and responsibilities assigned to the panel.

According to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, the primary objective of granting autonomy is to improve academic quality, strengthen research capacity, and enhance healthcare services provided by major government medical institutions.

The committee includes several prominent experts from the medical and academic fields. Among them are Rajendra Badwe, former Director of Tata Memorial Hospital, and Sanjay Oak, former Director of King Edward Memorial Hospital.

Other members include Ranjit Mankeshwar, Associate Dean of Grant Government Medical College, and Rajesh Karyakarte, Professor and Head of Department at B. J. Government Medical College in Pune.

The Registrar of Maharashtra University of Health Sciences will also serve as a member of the committee, while the Registrar of the Maharashtra Medical Council will act as the Member Secretary.

The committee has been tasked with studying the existing administrative and academic structures of government medical colleges in



the state and evaluating the need for granting them autonomous status.

It will also assess the potential benefits that autonomy could bring, including improvements in academic governance, research initiatives, and hospital management systems.

As part of its work, the committee will review successful models from leading medical institutions in India and abroad. These include All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, and Tata Memorial Hospital.

The panel will recommend the structure and powers of key governing bodies for autonomous institutions,

including the proposed Board of Directors and Academic Council.

It will also outline the roles and responsibilities of senior administrative officials such as the Director and Dean, along with the financial and administrative mechanisms necessary for autonomous governance.

Additionally, the committee will examine policies related to financial independence, internal revenue generation, audit systems, and revised service conditions for faculty members and staff. The panel has also been asked to suggest necessary legal, administrative, and policy changes that the state government may need to introduce to implement

the autonomy framework effectively.

While recommending autonomy, the committee will propose mechanisms for transferring administrative and financial powers to improve operational efficiency within government medical colleges.

It will also design systems for monitoring, evaluation, and accountability to ensure that autonomous institutions function effectively while maintaining transparency.

Furthermore, the committee will prepare a phased implementation plan for the proposed autonomy policy so that it can be introduced in a structured and practical manner.

The committee has been directed to submit its detailed report to the state government within three months. Necessary information and technical assistance will be provided through the Directorate of Medical Education and Research Maharashtra. Committee members will receive honorarium, travel expenses, and other allowances in accordance with the rules laid down by the government.

## Siddharth Anand and Abhishek Bachchan join forces for a horror film

**Mumbai:** With shooting for the upcoming action film "King" currently on, filmmaker Siddharth Anand and actor Abhishek Bachchan are already set to extend their collaboration with an untitled horror thriller.

The untitled project will be produced by Siddharth under his banner Marflix Pictures, while a close associate of the filmmaker is expected to take on the directorial responsibilities. The narrative is said to revolve around an emotionally resonant father-daughter relationship set against the eerie tapestry of traditional folklore.

Envisioned as a large-scale, VFX-heavy horror drama, the film aims to deliver a theatrical experience unlike most Indian films within that genre, reports Variety India.



For Abhishek, the project marks a significant departure, as he has not previously explored the horror genre. Siddharth is planning to make this film within a more mainstream commercial space, bringing renewed theatrical attention to the horror genre, which in recent years has largely shifted toward horror-comedies. The film is expected to go on floors in September 2026.

Siddharth and Abhishek have shared a great rapport

for years, with the actor even doing a cameo role in Siddharth's debut film, "Salaam Namaste" (2005). Their relationship is believed to have only grown stronger during "King," with this new horror project

further strengthening their professional collaboration.

Last seen in "Kaalidhar Lapata" (2025), about a middle-aged man experiencing memory loss, Abhishek will next feature pitting against Shah Rukh Khan in Siddharth's most anticipated film, "King."

The action entertainer features a star-studded ensemble cast that includes Deepika Padukone, Suhana Khan, Rani Mukerji, Anil Kapoor, Arshad Warsi, Jaideep Ahlawat, Raghav Juyal and Abhay Varma, among others. The film is slated to release in cinemas during the Christmas 2026 weekend.

Abhishek also has Riteish Deshmukh's historical magnum opus, "Raja Shivaji," scheduled to release in theatres on May 1, 2026.

## Milan Luthria hints at possible reunion with Ajay Devgn

**Mumbai:** Filmmaker Milan Luthria has expressed his desire to collaborate once again with actor Ajay Devgn,

though he said their reunion will happen only when the right script comes along. Luthria and Devgn share a long-standing creative partnership in the Hindi film industry, having worked together on several successful projects over the years. Their collaborations include films such as Kache Dhaage, Chori Chori, Once Upon a Time in Mumbai, and Baadshaho, all of which strengthened their professional association. Speaking in an interview with Variety India, Luthria said he remains keen to work with Devgn again but emphasised that the collaboration will depend on finding the right story. "It should happen soon. We are always discussing ideas and waiting for the right energy to come into the room," Luthria said while



reflecting on their creative partnership. He acknowledged that Devgn has played a significant role in shaping his career and that their working relationship is built on strong mutual trust. According to Luthria, he feels responsible for bringing a project to Devgn that truly excites him and offers meaningful creative value. "And as soon as I find that material, I immediately go reach out to him and we discuss it," the filmmaker added while explaining how their discussions

about future projects often take place. Luthria also spoke about the personal bond he shares with the actor, describing Devgn as someone he genuinely enjoys working with both on and off the film set. "So it's been a while, but he's the one actor that I really love being with on set and off set. We have a great friendship," he said. He further hinted that conversations about potential collaborations are ongoing and that a new project could come together once the right idea emerges.

## Bhumi Pednekar: "You don't owe anyone an explanation"

**Mumbai:** Actor Bhumi Pednekar recently opened up about dealing with burnout and the importance of taking time off when needed, emphasising that stepping back from work can sometimes help individuals reconnect with themselves and reassess their priorities.

The actor, who was last seen in the Daldal on Prime Video, had earlier shared that she took a short break from her professional commitments to spend time with her family after several years of working continuously on film projects.

During an appearance on The Right Angle with Sonal Kalra Season 3, Pednekar spoke about the pressures many young people face while trying to meet societal expectations and professional demands.

The show, produced by Gautam Thakker Films, featured a conversation with host Sonal Kalra, where the actor reflected on the challenges of maintaining balance between personal well-being and career ambitions.

When asked what advice she would give young people experiencing burnout, Bhumi Pednekar said that many pressures arise from expectations imposed by society rather than personal goals.

"The world has set a lot of norms and standards for us to live up to, that we haven't set up for ourselves," she said while discussing the pressures people often feel to constantly remain productive.

She advised that understanding one's personal goals and long-term vision can help individuals make decisions that prioritise their well-being.

"My advice is that when you know what your personal goals are and what your larger vision for life is, it's okay to take a break," she added.

According to the actor, taking a step back from work can sometimes provide the clarity needed to reassess life choices

and future plans. She said that even people who have not clearly defined goals may benefit from taking time to reflect on what they want the next phase of their life to look like. Pednekar added that some individuals may use such breaks to acquire new skills, while others may simply need time to rest and recharge.

"Even if you don't have set goals but have a sense of what the next decade of your life might look like, and you feel you need more skills, more time, or even if you just want to do nothing for a while, that's completely fine," she said.

Speaking about the pressure to justify personal decisions, the actor emphasised the importance of reducing external influences and focusing on one's own priorities. "This can only happen when you cut out the external noise from your life. You don't owe anybody else an explanation but yourself," she noted.

Bhumi Pednekar also shared that her decision to take a break from work was driven by both personal and professional reasons, explaining that the pause gave her an opportunity to focus on self-improvement and reflection.

The actor said stepping away from her busy schedule allowed her to gain new perspectives and return to her craft with renewed energy and clarity.

According to Bhumi Pednekar, taking time off helped her concentrate on personal growth while also preparing herself to perform better in her professional commitments.

"I took a break because I wanted to be better at my work and also grow as a person. People can have different reasons for taking a break, whether professional

or personal," she explained while speaking about the decision. She emphasised that individuals should feel comfortable taking time for themselves if they believe it will benefit their well-being and long-term goals. Encouraging people to trust their instincts, the actor concluded by advising them to listen to their inner voice when making important life decisions. "Always listen to your instinct because it's often wiser than what your mind might tell you," she said. On the professional front, Bhumi Pednekar will

next be seen in an upcoming romantic film alongside Imran Khan and Gurdeep Singh Pirda.



## Jada Pinkett Smith to return in 'A Different World' sequel

**Mumbai:** Actor and producer Jada Pinkett Smith is set to reprise her role as Lena James in the upcoming sequel series to the popular sitcom A Different World, marking her return to a character that became a fan favourite during the show's original run.

Smith hinted at her comeback through a post on Instagram, sharing a photograph of her trailer with the name of her character displayed on the door. Alongside the image, she wrote the caption "She back A Different World," signalling her excitement about returning to the beloved franchise.

The streaming platform Netflix later confirmed the development through its Instagram Stories, adding to the anticipation surrounding the sequel series.

Several other original cast members are also expected to return, including Jasmine Guy, Kadeem Hardison, Cree Summer, and Darryl M. Bell, all of whom played memorable roles in the original series.

The new story will focus on Deborah Wayne, portrayed by Maleah Joi Moon, who is introduced as the youngest daughter of Hillman College's iconic couple Dwayne Wayne and Whitney Gilbert.

As Deborah begins her freshman year at their alma mater, she finds herself navigating the pressures of living up to her parents' legacy while trying to carve out her own identity and experiences on campus.

Set once again at the fictional Hillman College, the sequel aims to capture the spirit of college life while introducing a new generation of students and their unique journeys.

Alongside returning cast members, the show will also feature several



new actors, including Alijah Kai, Chibuikem Uche, Cornell Young Iv, Jordan Aaron Hall, and Kennedy Reece.

Meanwhile, Cree Summer will reprise her role as Freddie Brooks in the upcoming sequel to A Different World, bringing back one of the most memorable characters from the original series. Her return is expected to add familiarity and nostalgia for longtime fans of the show.

Joining her will be Darryl M. Bell, who is set to return as Ron Johnson. Bell's character was a central part of the original series and his presence in the sequel will further strengthen the connection between the new story and the beloved sitcom.

The sequel project has been generating considerable interest as it attempts to revive the world of Hillman College for a new generation of viewers while maintaining ties with its classic roots.

The new series is being developed by Felicia Pride, a writer and producer known for her work on several television projects. Pride is expected to lead the creative direction of the sequel and shape the narrative for modern audiences.

The project also includes contributions from several prominent figures in the entertainment industry, including



Debbie Allen, Mandy Summers, Tom Werner, Gina Prince-Bythewood, and Reggie Bythewood.

Many members of the creative team were involved in the original series, a factor that is expected to help maintain continuity between the two versions of the show.

Their familiarity with the characters, themes, and storytelling style of the original production could play an important role in preserving the spirit that made the sitcom widely popular.

The original A Different World first aired on the American television network NBC and ran for six seasons, becoming one of the most influential sitcoms of its time. The show was produced by the Carsey-Werner Company, a production house known for creating several successful television programmes during that era. Over the years, the sitcom gained widespread recognition for its authentic portrayal of student life at historically Black colleges and universities, commonly referred to as HBCUs. Through its characters and storylines, the show explored issues related to education, identity, relationships and social change, making it both entertaining and socially relevant.

## Mars-themed full-dome 3D film unleashed at Science City

**Mumbai:** India's largest science centre, Science City Kolkata, has introduced a new immersive space-themed attraction with the unveiling of a full-dome 3D digital film titled "One Step Beyond: A Journey to Mars."

The film offers visitors an engaging glimpse into humanity's growing ambitions in space exploration and the possibility of future missions to the Red Planet.

The science centre functions under the National Council of Science Museums (NCSM), which operates several science museums and centres across the country. The new film is part of its efforts to promote public understanding of science and inspire curiosity among visitors, especially students and young learners.

The 25-minute production traces the remarkable journey of human space exploration, beginning with the historic moment when astronauts first stepped on the Moon and extending to present-day efforts aimed at sending humans to Mars.

Through detailed visual storytelling, the film captures the thrill of rocket launches and the challenges astronauts face while living and work-

ing in space. It also explains how advanced technologies and scientific research are shaping the next phase of human space missions.

One of the key themes explored in the film is the global effort to push the boundaries of space exploration, particularly through initiatives such as the NASA Artemis Program, which aims to return humans to the Moon and prepare for future missions to Mars.

The narrative also touches upon the broader scientific quest to discover signs of life beyond Earth. By highlighting ongoing research and exploration, the film encourages viewers to think about humanity's place in the universe and the future of interplanetary travel.

The cinematic experience combines powerful storytelling with breathtaking visuals, creating an immersive journey that allows audiences to feel as if they are part of the mission itself.

Presented by the National Space Centre and produced by NSC Creative, the film represents a collaboration aimed at making complex scientific ideas accessible and exciting for the public.

The production first pre-

miered internationally on June 11, 2025, at the Full-dome Festival Brno held in Brno, a major global event dedicated to immersive dome cinema and planetarium content.

Following its international debut, the film was later screened in the United Kingdom on July 19, 2025, at the National Space Centre, where it attracted significant attention from space enthusiasts and educators.

The film has been rendered in ultra-high-definition 8K full-dome resolution at 60 frames per second, offering audiences a visually striking and technologically advanced viewing experience.

According to A. D. Choudhury, Director General of the National Council of Science Museums, the full-dome 3D digital theatre at Science City Kolkata is designed to screen high-resolution digital content in both 2D and 3D formats, along with planetarium shows.

He explained that the theatre uses six high-end digital projectors that collectively deliver an effective screen resolution of nearly 30 million pixels, ensuring extremely detailed visual output.

## Farah Khan recalls underworld threat during Kuch Kuch Hota Hai premiere: "Karan Johar was very stressed"

**Mumbai:** Filmmaker and choreographer Farah Khan recently reflected on some of the most challenging phases in the Hindi film industry, including the influence of the underworld during the 1990s and the tense atmosphere surrounding film premieres during that time.

Speaking candidly about the evolution of Bollywood, she said the industry has undergone significant changes over the decades. Farah shared her views during a podcast conversation with digital creator Ranveer Allahbadia, where she discussed the cultural and professional shifts that filmmakers and actors have witnessed in the industry.

According to A. D. Choudhury, Director General of the National Council of Science Museums, the full-dome 3D digital theatre at Science City Kolkata is designed to screen high-resolution digital content in both 2D and 3D formats, along with planetarium shows.

He explained that the theatre uses six high-end digital projectors that collectively deliver an effective screen resolution of nearly 30 million pixels, ensuring extremely detailed visual output.

prevalent at the time, she said that many film enthusiasts believed the quality of Hindi films had declined during that decade. As a result, Hollywood films were considered more appealing by a large section of urban youth.

"We used to look down upon Hindi films. When we were in college, we used to only watch Hollywood films. Tabhi woh pura ganda era chal raha tha. The worst era of Hindi films was the 80s," Farah said while recalling that phase.

She added that the Hindi film industry has since undergone major transformation, both in terms of storytelling and production standards. According to her, the industry today enjoys a far more diverse creative environment than it did in earlier decades.

Farah also spoke about the presence of the underworld in Bollywood during the 1990s, describing it as a period when filmmakers occasionally faced threats and intimidation. She recalled how such incidents created a sense of uncertainty within the industry.

While sharing memories from the early days of her career, Farah mentioned



the shocking shooting of film producer Mukesh Duggal, which took place during the 1990s. "That was in the 90s. I remember I was on a set, I had just started my career, maybe '93 or '94, and Mukesh Duggal was shot," she said, describing the atmosphere of fear that sometimes surrounded the industry at the time. During the discussion, Allahbadia also asked whether leading actors of the era—including the three Khans—faced pressure from the underworld. Farah acknowledged that such pressures did exist in the industry during that period. However, she clarified that she did not have knowledge of any specific instance involving Shah

Rukh Khan personally. Still, she remembered an incident related to the premiere of the film Kuch Kuch Hota Hai.

The film marked the directorial debut of Karan Johar and was one of the most highly anticipated Bollywood releases of its time. According to Farah, the premiere of the film was surrounded by tension due to a reported threat. "I know that during Duplicate or Kuch Kuch Hota Hai premiere, Karan had got an underworld threat, and it was very scary. Everyone was discussing whether the premiere should be cancelled or we should go ahead with it," she said. Farah explained that the situation created considerable anxiety among

those involved with the film, especially because it was Johar's first directorial venture and a major milestone in his career. Despite the concerns, the team eventually decided to proceed with the premiere after tightening security arrangements. The event was held with heightened precautions to ensure the safety of everyone attending. "I remember during Kuch Kuch Hota Hai, because the threat had come and everyone was discussing it, security was beefed up and I think we went ahead with the premiere. Karan was very stressed, and imagine it is your first movie, but all you're thinking about is this," she said. Reflecting on those experiences, Farah noted that the industry has gradually moved past such difficult phases and now functions in a far more organised and secure environment. On the professional front, Farah Khan has recently been attracting attention for her growing presence on digital platforms. Through her YouTube channel, she shares behind-the-scenes stories from Bollywood and offers audiences a glimpse into the experiences that shaped her long career in the film industry.

# Former CSK star suggests ideal position for Sanju Samson

**New Delhi:** Former India batter Suresh Raina believes that Sanju Samson should occupy the No.3 position for Chennai Super Kings in the upcoming season of the Indian Premier League in 2026, stating that such a move would bring greater balance and stability to the team's batting order. According to Raina, Samson's experience and current form make him an ideal candidate to anchor the innings and link the top and middle order effectively.

Samson heads into IPL 2026 in impressive form after a strong campaign in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup. The wicketkeeper-batter delivered a series of standout performances during the tournament, particularly in the latter stages when the pressure was at its peak.

During the Super 8s stage of the tournament, Samson scored back-to-back half-centuries against West Indies cricket team, displaying remarkable composure and shot selection. His ability to pace the innings and accelerate when required drew praise from former players and analysts alike.

Samson continued his fine run in the knockout stage as well. He produced another crucial half-century against the England cricket team in the semifinal, helping India post a competitive total and maintain momentum in the high-stakes encounter.

The Kerala-born batter then carried his form into the final against the New Zealand national cricket team, where he once again registered a half-century while opening the innings. His consistent performances throughout the latter half of the tournament significantly boosted India's batting strength.

Given this recent form, Raina



believes Samson can play a key role for CSK if positioned at No.3 in the batting order. Speaking during a discussion on JioHotstar, Raina explained that the role would suit Samson's style and experience.

"He was the captain of the Rajasthan Royals for so many years. I think his role will be clear here. If Sanju plays at number three, it will be good according to me, because then Dewald Brevis will come at number four," Raina said.

Raina further elaborated on how the proposed batting order could strengthen CSK's lineup. According to him, the structure would create a balanced mix of aggression and stability in the middle overs.

He suggested that power-hitter Shivam Dube could slot in at number

five, providing the ability to accelerate the scoring rate and target bowlers during the latter half of the innings.

"For number six, it depends on who you bring in — whether it is Prashant Veer, Akhil Hussain or Noor Ahmad. It will also depend on how many overseas fast bowlers the team decides to play," Raina added while discussing the team combination. Raina also backed Samson to take on wicketkeeping responsibilities for CSK. According to him, this move could allow legendary captain MS Dhoni to focus more on a finishing role with the bat rather than the demanding wicketkeeping duties.

"Sanju will be there as a keeper. We saw the atmosphere he created during the World Cup. His role will

become very important at number three," Raina said while highlighting Samson's leadership and energy on the field.

He further explained that allowing Rituraj Gaikwad and Shaik Rasheed Mhatre to open the innings could give CSK a strong start while ensuring the middle order remains experienced and dependable.

"When Brevis comes in with Sanju and then Shivam Dube after him, it becomes very important to have someone like Sanju who brings experience," Raina added, emphasizing the importance of having a reliable batter to guide the innings.

Samson joined CSK ahead of IPL 2026 in one of the most talked-about player movements before the auction. The franchise secured him through a trade deal with the Rajasthan Royals, which saw Ravindra Jadeja and Sam Curran move in the opposite direction.

The trade generated significant discussion among fans and analysts, as it involved several high-profile players and could potentially reshape the balance of both franchises heading into the new season.

Samson brings considerable IPL experience to the Chennai-based franchise. Over the course of his IPL career, he has played 177 matches and scored 4,707 runs at an average of 30.95, making him one of the most experienced wicketkeeper-batters in the tournament.

With his current form and leadership background, many believe Samson could become a key pillar in CSK's batting lineup. If deployed at No.3 as suggested by Raina, he may play a crucial role in guiding the team through the middle overs and setting up strong finishes in IPL 2026.

## Special Olympics Golfers take centre stage at IGPL invitational Chandigarh 2026

**Chandigarh:** The Indian Golf Premier League (IGPL) scripted a historic moment at its Invitational 2026 Chandigarh Leg, held from March 11 to 13 at the Chandigarh Golf Club, by inviting three Special Olympics golfers; Ranveer Singh Saini, Kushagra Gaur and Mohit Kumar to play alongside professional golfers.

The occasion marked one of the most significant gestures towards inclusive sport.

The event saw Indian Golf legend and defending champion Gaganjeet Bhullar being crowned champion at the IGPL Invitational Chandigarh 2026 event and the special Olympic golfers witnessed the amazing feat.

Ranveer Singh Saini from Gurgaon is the first autistic Indian and a three-time Special Olympics World Games medalist (Gold 2015 at Los Angeles, Silver 2019 in Abu Dhabi, Gold 2023 in Berlin), a 13-time National Champion, and a recipient of the National Award in Sports from the President of India.

Mohit Kumar, 21, from Hisar, is a rising talent who secured second place at the Special Olympics Bharat National Golf Championship and is a probable for the Special Olympics World Summer Games in Santiago, Chile.

Speaking on the momentous occasion, Ranveer Saini's father Kartikeya Saini shares, "IGPL has taken this initiative to invite these young golfers to play



on their tour with some of the finest Indian golfers. The moment you do that you have taken a giant step by playing alongside them."

"Ranveer, Kushagra, and Mohit have bonded very well. IGPL has made them come together high fives, hugging each other after a good putt. It was great camaraderie that IGPL has brought amongst players with disability," added Kartikeya Saini

Kushagra Gaur, also from Gurgaon, is an international gold medalist at the Macau Special Olympics Golf Masters and has been competing on the IGU North India Feeder Tour against mainstream professionals since then. Both Ranveer and Kushagra train at DLF Golf and Country Club and are recognised in the Limca Book of Records.

Kushagra's journey to golf began with cricket. His mother recalls that his natural ability to hit boundaries easily made the family consider a sport where individual focus and technical mastery could shine and golf fit perfectly.

Kushagra's mother speaking on her son's natural transition from cricket to playing golf shared, "He used to hit boundaries very easily during his school days, so we felt golf is all about hitting. And there was nobody to judge him. We never made him feel he had some limitation, we used to say, we can break it. Let's try."

Reflecting on Kushagra's journey from Macau to the IGU North Feeder and expressing her gratitude to IGPL, Shweta Gaur, mother of Kushagra Gaur, shared, "Since 2018 he started playing the IGU Feeder.

He was playing really good golf and competing with regular golfers. His score became from double-digit to single digit. So, if there were 60 or 65 athletes, from that position he went to like 10 or 12. He felt he had the potential."

"The game of 18 holes requires a lot of discipline and a lot of determination. I felt my son Kushagra has the potential, and when IGPL approached us, we couldn't have been happier", shared Kushagra's mother

The Chandigarh Invitational is part of the IGPL's international tour circuit spanning India, Mauritius, Congo, and South Africa. For the families of the Special Olympic athletes, the invitation meant far more than a tee-off slot. The three athletes also formed a visible bond throughout the event

## Mark Wood improving but thinking of life after cricket

**London:** Fast bowler Mark Wood has admitted life after cricket is in his thoughts if recovery from his latest injury "doesn't go well".

The 36-year-old returned to Test cricket in the 2025-26 Ashes series after 15 months out with an elbow injury followed by knee surgery. He returned to bowl just 11 overs in the first Ashes Test in November, which England lost inside two days. He then missed the second Test with swelling in the knee and was subsequently ruled out of the tour, according to BBC sport.

"It's real slow going with the stage I'm at in my career," said Wood as he gave an update on his recovery to the Tailenders podcast.

"It's quite a fine balance, where if I push this too hard then that could be it." The Durham bowler explained there had been improvement in the condition of his knee, with his recovery split into



two phases

"It's six-week blocks, it's not day by day, it's specialists and rescans every six weeks. It's been improving since what I got told had been an explosion in my knee in Australia.

"So every six weeks has been an improvement. I've started running now and I'm hoping by the next block it's in a position where maybe I can start lightly bowling."

Wood has been plagued by injuries during his career - including multiple knee and elbow operations -

which have robbed England for periods of one of their finest strike bowlers.

He spent seven months rehabilitating his knee in order to be fit for the Ashes and lamented not being able to play some games for his county before heading to Australia for the series.

"I tried to get back at certain points but my knee wasn't quite ready," he said.

"It's easy in hindsight, even if I was at 80% then at least the game would have given us an indicator of where I was."

He was thought to have been close to a return in the home summer, but ultimately did not take the field until England's only Ashes warm-up game against the Lions at Lilac Hill in November.

He bowled eight overs but was only cleared to play in the first Test following a hamstring scan.

For now, although focused on his recovery, Wood said he has been thinking about life after cricket: "I've started thinking about other things, doing podcasts, doing my coaching badges."

"I've now started to try and think for the first time about what I should do if this doesn't go well." Wood - regarded as one of the fastest bowlers to play for England - has taken 119 wickets in 38 Tests since making his debut in 2015. He was part of the 2015 Ashes-winning side, lifted the 2019 50-over World Cup and won the T20 World Cup in 2022.

## KKR launch quirky "Lines of Legacy" campaign to unveil 2026 jersey

**Kolkata:** Former India batter Suresh Raina believes that Sanju Samson should occupy the No.3 position for Chennai Super Kings in the upcoming season of the Indian Premier League in 2026, stating that such a move would bring greater balance and stability to the team's batting order. According to Raina, Samson's experience and current form make him an ideal candidate to anchor the innings and link the top and middle order effectively.

Samson heads into IPL 2026 in impressive form after a strong campaign in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup. The wicketkeeper-batter delivered a series of standout performances during the tournament, particularly in the latter stages when the pressure was at its peak.

During the Super 8s stage of the tournament, Samson scored back-to-back half-centuries against West Indies cricket team, displaying remarkable composure and shot selection. His ability to pace the innings and accelerate when required drew praise from former players and analysts alike.

Samson continued his fine run in the knockout stage as well. He produced another crucial half-century against the England cricket team in the semifinal, helping India post a competitive total

and maintain momentum in the high-stakes encounter.

The Kerala-born batter then carried his form into the final against the New Zealand national cricket team, where he once again registered a half-century while opening the innings. His consistent performances throughout the latter half of the tournament significantly boosted India's batting strength.

Given this recent form, Raina believes Samson can play a key role for CSK if positioned at No.3 in the batting order. Speaking during a discussion on JioHotstar, Raina explained that the role would suit Samson's style and experience. "He was the captain of the Rajasthan Royals for so many years. I think his role will be clear here. If Sanju plays at number three, it will be good according to me, because then Dewald Brevis will come at number four," Raina said. Raina further elaborated on how the proposed batting order could strengthen CSK's lineup. According to him, the structure would create a balanced mix of aggression and stability in the middle overs. He suggested that power-hitter Shivam Dube could slot in at number five, providing the ability to accelerate the scoring rate and target bowlers during the latter half of the

innings. "For number six, it depends on who you bring in — whether it is Prashant Veer, Akhil Hussain or Noor Ahmad. It will also depend on how many overseas fast bowlers the team decides to play," Raina added while discussing the team combination.

Raina also backed Samson to take on wicketkeeping responsibilities for CSK. According to him, this move could allow legendary captain MS Dhoni to focus more on a finishing role with the bat rather than the demanding wicketkeeping duties.

"Sanju will be there as a keeper. We saw the atmosphere he created during the World Cup. His role will become very important at number three," Raina said while highlighting Samson's leadership and energy on the field.

He further explained that allowing Rituraj Gaikwad and Shaik Rasheed Mhatre to open the innings could give CSK a strong start while ensuring the middle order remains experienced and dependable. "When Brevis comes in with Sanju and then Shivam Dube after him, it becomes very important to have someone like Sanju who brings experience," Raina added, emphasizing the importance of having a reliable batter to guide the innings.

## Russell beat Ferrari to win Shanghai F1 Sprint

**Shanghai:** Mercedes' George Russell held off a challenge from Ferrari to convert pole position into victory in an entertaining first Sprint race of the 2026 Formula 1 season.

After setting the fastest time in Friday's qualifying session, Russell held his lead into the first corner but was overtaken by Lewis Hamilton on the back straight. The move sparked an early duel between the two Britons, who traded positions while deploying their battery power at different points on the Shanghai International Circuit.

Russell, however, appeared to manage his tyres better and regained a lead he would keep to the chequered flag by lap five. Hamilton then faded and was passed by Ferrari teammate Charles Leclerc, but the Monegasque was unable to close Russell's advantage, which had grown to 4.4 seconds by lap 12.

A safety car on lap 13 briefly threatened to disrupt the order as the leading runners all pitted for fresh tyres. Russell maintained his lead at the restart and crossed the line just 0.6 seconds ahead of a charging Leclerc.

"It was a lot of fun in the end. I hope it was a fun race to watch. Usually Sprint races are pretty boring but then I got everything under control. Really happy to get the win," said Russell.

Behind the two Ferraris, Lando Norris finished fourth for McLaren, ahead of Russell's teammate Kimi Antonelli, who recovered to fifth after an eventful race.

The Italian had dropped into the midfield from second on the grid after a poor start and later made light contact with Red Bull's Isack Hadjar, earning a 10-second time penalty. He then briefly climbed back to second before falling to seventh after serving his penalty during his pit stop.

McLaren's Oscar Piastri finished sixth, ahead of Racing Bulls' Liam Lawson and Haas driver Ollie Bearman, both of whom gambled on staying out during the safety car. Red Bull endured a difficult race, with Max Verstappen finishing ninth and outside the points after starting eighth and losing several positions at the start. Hadjar sustained damage following the early contact with Antonelli and finished 15th.

## Former Kenyan star Steve Tikolo named as Uganda National Cricket head coach

**Kampala:** Uganda has unveiled former Kenyan international Steve Tikolo as the new head coach of the national cricket team.

Cricket Uganda made the announcement on Friday during an official ceremony in Entebbe. The experienced Kenyan replaces India's Abhay Sharma, whose tenure ended in October 2025.

Tikolo has put pen to paper for a three-year deal and this will be his

third coaching stint with Uganda, according to Cricket Uganda.

The cricket body said the recruitment process, which started in January this year, attracted 75 applicants from across the cricket world, including coaches from New Zealand, England, South Africa and India. Tikolo said he was happy to return for the third time to coach the Uganda Cricket Cranes.

He previously served the team



as a batting coach from 2012 to

2013 and later as head coach from 2016 to 2019, according to Xinhua.

"My motivation to apply was that I was here the second time we did well. My goal was to take the team to the World Cup, but that didn't happen. For me that is unfinished business with the Cricket Cranes because I played at the World Cup and I would love to take Uganda there as a coach now," added Tikolo.

Besides playing in five World Cups, Tikolo enjoyed an international career spanning nearly 18 years. During that time, he played 135 One-Day Internationals (ODIs) and 15 Twenty20 Internationals (T20Is) for Kenya national cricket team. His attractive batting, useful part-time bowling and leadership role made him the face of Kenyan cricket during its heyday in the early 2000s.

## Attitude towards women's cricket has changed after World Cup victory: Deepti Sharma

**New Delhi:** Indian cricketer Deepti Sharma has called for greater encouragement and support for young girls in sport, saying that the growing visibility of women athletes is helping change mindsets across the country.

Speaking at the launch of the BBC and Collective Newsroom report on women's participation in sport, Sharma said initiatives that highlight

And celebrate women athletes play an important role in inspiring the next generation.

"It has been a good journey so far. As I have seen, many women in India and around the world are getting support through initiatives like this.

It feels good that so many awardees have come from India," Sharma said.

The study indicates that women's participation in cricket across the 14 Indian states surveyed has doubled since 2020, rising from five percent to 10 percent. Participation among young women aged 15 to 24 has increased even more sharply,

from six percent to 16 percent.

The research, based on a survey of more than 10,000 respondents conducted by Kantar between December 2025 and January 2026, also shows that 26 percent of young women now say they have considered sport as a career, up from 16 percent in 2020.

Sharma said the success and growing visibility of women's cricket and other sports are encouraging more girls to dream of pursuing sport professionally. "After

the World Cup, there have been many changes in everyone's mindset. Whether it is a young girl or an adult, many now dream of becoming a cricketer or participating in sport," she said.

The off-spinner added that athletes also have a responsibility to inspire and support the next generation. "I also want to support and inspire as many young girls and the next generation as possible, so that they get more encouragement and can see a better future in sport," Sharma said.

## Mexico midfielder Ruiz likely to miss World Cup

**Mexico City:** Mexico City: Deportivo Toluca F.C. and Mexico national football team midfielder Marcel Ruiz will undergo surgery after suffering a ruptured anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee, the Liga MX club confirmed.

The 25-year-old sustained the serious injury during Toluca's 3-2 away defeat to San Diego FC in the first leg of the round-of-16 clash in the CONCACAF Champions Cup on Wednesday.

According to reports cited by Xinhua, Ruiz went

down with a knee injury during the match and was later diagnosed with a ruptured anterior cruciate ligament (ACL), one of the most severe injuries for professional footballers.

Toluca confirmed the development in an official statement on Friday, stating that the midfielder will undergo surgery soon as part of the treatment process. "Our midfielder will undergo surgery in the coming days and the recovery time will depend on his progress," the club said in its statement.

## India's NavIC Satellite Navigation System faces operational challenges, falling below optimal performance

**Chennai:** The primary function of the Indian satellite navigation system, called Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC), or simply the Indian GPS, is nearly defunct, as only three satellites are currently operational, and signals from them may not be available for 24 hours.

On Friday, 13 March, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) stated tersely that the IRNSS-1F satellite had completed its design mission life of 10 years on March 10, 2026.

IRNSS stands for Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System. The constellation system was later renamed NavIC.

The satellite's onboard atomic clock stopped functioning on March 13, 2026. However, ISRO said the satellite will continue to operate in orbit for various societal applications, providing one-way broadcast messaging services.

What remains unsaid is that NavIC is not fully effective for its primary function, as experts note that a minimum of four satellites is required to obtain accurate position, navigation, and timing (PNT) signals.

The NavIC system provides accurate PNT services to users in India and to the region extending about 1,500 km beyond the country's landmass.

According to ISRO, NavIC pro-

vides two types of services, namely, Standard Positioning Service (SPS) and Restricted Service – mainly for strategic/defence use.

Of the 11 navigation satellites

rates of these first-generation navigation satellites.

Industry experts believe that for India to fully benefit from NavIC, it should maintain a constellation of



that ISRO orbited, only three are now providing PNT service while five satellites provide messaging services, one is totally lost, one IRNSS-1 F's life is over and ISRO is looking at how to use the NVS-02 satellite that got stuck in geo-transfer orbit (GTO).

Presently, satellites IRNSS-1B, IRNSS-1I and NVS-01 are fully operational.

However, it is unclear how long IRNSS-1B (launched in 2014) and IRNSS-1I (orbited in 2018) will remain functional, given the failure

seven satellites at all times.

Furthermore, satellites should be launched at shorter intervals, not with gaps of several years.

In 2025, Dr. Jitendra Singh, Minister of State for Personnel, Public Grievances, and Pensions in the Prime Minister's Office, told Parliament that the full constellation of seven satellites is expected in the coming years.

However, the exact timeline for this remains unknown.

The first satellite, IRNSS-1A, was launched in 2013, and the last of

the IRNSS series, IRNSS-1I, was orbited in 2018. During this period, six satellites failed, but no replacements were launched.

Most of the IRNSS satellites suffered atomic clock failures, which are critical for accurate PNT services. With these failures, ISRO decided to operate two clocks simultaneously, keeping one as a standby.

It was only in 2023 that the next-generation navigation satellite, NVS-01, a replacement for IRNSS-1G, was launched and is now operational.

Five second-generation satellites (NVS-01/02/03/04/05) were expected to augment NavIC's base constellation with enhanced features to ensure continuity of services, ISRO had earlier stated.

However, the launch of NVS-02 in 2025, intended as a replacement for IRNSS-1E, failed.

ISRO reported that the disengagement of at least one contact in each of the main and redundant paths of a connector prevented signals from reaching the valves, which are needed to fire the thrusters for orbit raising.

Industry experts are of the view that ISRO seems to have bitten more than it can chew, and hence, the basic activities are getting delayed.

Further, the startups in the sector are small and do not have the capability to build big satellites.

## Tredence opens AI, data innovation centre in Hyderabad

**Hyderabad:** Tredence, a global leader in data science and AI-driven solutions, officially inaugurated its new 20,000 sq. ft. Delivery & Innovation Centre in Hyderabad, reinforcing the city's position as a premier hub for AI and life sciences innovation.

The state-of-the-art facility was inaugurated alongside senior Telangana government leaders, including Mr. Shakthi M. Nagapalan, Director & CEO of Telangana Life Sciences, and D. Sridhar Babu, Minister for IT and Industries, here on Friday.

The collaboration underscores a shared commitment to building a robust AI ecosystem that fuels innovation, talent growth, and industry transformation.

"We are proud to grow here in step with the Telangana Rising-2047 vision, and to play a meaningful role in the state's emergence as an AI and Life Sciences hub," said Shashank Dubey, Co-founder & CRO, Tredence.

The Hyderabad hub will anchor enterprise AI delivery across verticals, including Retail, CPG, Healthcare,



and Life Sciences, working seamlessly with Tredence's global teams to deliver advanced analytics, AI-powered solutions, and faster innovation cycles.

"Our Hyderabad teams are already contributing to Life Sciences projects that accelerate drug discovery, optimize operations, and enhance cost efficiencies. The new centre will catalyze our efforts to deliver high-value, AI-driven innovation across industries," added Abhijay Datta, Centre Head – Hyderabad, Tredence.

The facility reflects Hyderabad's growing prominence as a destination for Global Capability Centres (GCCs) and deep tech innovation.

With this expansion, Tredence will more than

double its local workforce, scaling from 400 employees today to 2,200 by 2027, creating high-value employment opportunities while strengthening India's AI leadership globally.

"Tredence's investment is a strong endorsement of Hyderabad's standing as a hub for data and AI innovation. The Telangana government's focus remains on building a supportive ecosystem where technology companies can scale and thrive," said Minister D. Sridhar Babu.

The launch also builds on Tredence's broader GCC strategy, evolving capability centres from execution-focused operations to AI-powered innovation engines that drive measurable business outcomes.

## Budget push and policy reforms to drive growth in India's shipbuilding, recycling sectors

**New Delhi:** India's shipbuilding and ship recycling sectors are poised for significant expansion, supported by policy reforms, large financial commitments and new industrial projects aimed at strengthening the country's maritime ecosystem and reducing dependence on foreign shipping lines.

Addressing industry stakeholders, Susanta Kumar Purohit, Chairperson of the V.O. Chidambaram Port Authority at a PHDCCI summit, outlined a comprehensive roadmap to strengthen India's maritime capabilities, stating that the leadership of Narendra Modi and the strategic direction of union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal have helped create a strong fiscal architecture aimed at transforming India into a major maritime power.

The policy framework guiding the sector is anchored on four strategic pillars—financing, capacity expansion, policy reform and skill development.

Key financial initiatives include the Rs 69,725 crore Maritime Revitalisation Package and the Rs 25,000 crore Maritime Development Fund, along with the

extension of the Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Scheme until 2036.

The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways has also received a significant budgetary push, with its allocation increasing by 48 per cent to Rs 5,164.8 crore.

The measures are aimed at strengthening domestic maritime capabilities and addressing the nearly Rs 6 lakh crore annual freight outgo paid to foreign shipping lines.

A major industrial initiative under the new framework is the proposed National Shipbuilding & Heavy Industries Park in Tamil Nadu.

The project will be executed through a Special Purpose Vehicle named the National Shipbuilding & Heavy Industries Park, Tamil Nadu, as a 50:50 joint venture between the V.O. Chidambaram Port Authority and the State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu (SIPCO).

The facility, estimated to cost Rs 30,000 crore and spread across 2,000 acres, is expected to become a major centre for domestic maritime manufacturing and heavy engineering.

The policy thrust also emphasises integrating a cir-

cular economy into the maritime sector through the Shipbreaking Credit Note Scheme. The scheme offers vessel owners credit notes equivalent to 40 per cent of the scrap value of ships recycled at Indian yards, which can be redeemed against the cost of building new vessels domestically.

India has also strengthened its position in global ship recycling, with 106 ship recycling yards at Alang already compliant with the Hong Kong International Convention, reflecting improved environmental and regulatory standards.

The V.O. Chidambaram Port Authority has been highlighted as a model for the Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047, with major sustainability and infrastructure initiatives underway. The port has become the first in India to produce green hydrogen and the first to exceed one megawatt of rooftop solar generation capacity.

It is also implementing a Rs 15,000 crore Outer Harbour project aimed at developing southern India into a major transshipment hub capable of competing with global ports such as Singapore and Colombo.

Industry representatives

noted that India's shipbuilding and ship-recycling sectors have made notable progress in recent years under the government's 'Make in India' vision.

Public shipyards have delivered major milestones, with Cochin Shipyard Limited delivering nearly 400 vessels, including the indigenous aircraft carrier INS Vikrant.

Meanwhile, Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited and Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Limited have together delivered around 30–40 vessels.

Government-backed financial assistance schemes amounting to nearly Rs 70,000 crore and plans to develop shipbuilding clusters across the country are expected to accelerate private investment and significantly expand India's shipbuilding capacity in the coming years.

Experts also highlighted emerging opportunities in indigenous container manufacturing and ship recycling, alongside the strategic importance of the Rs 25,000 crore Maritime Development Fund and the broader Rs 69,725 crore revitalisation package aimed at strengthening India's maritime industry.

## IT Dept issues clarification on reported emails under Advance Tax e-Campaign for AY 2026-27

**New Delhi:** The Income Tax Department has taken cognisance of taxpayers reporting emails containing inaccurate details regarding 'significant transactions' undertaken by them as part of the ongoing Advance Tax e-Campaign for AY 2026-27 (Financial Year 2025-26).

Income Tax India said

with posting a clarification letter on X. "Kind attention taxpayers! Clarification has been issued regarding certain email communications sent under the Advance Tax e-Campaign for AY 2026-27 (FY 2025-26)."

The letter said, "We are actively working to resolve the matter in coordination with our service provider.

In the meantime, taxpayers are requested to kindly ignore the earlier email communication related to the Advance Tax e-Campaign for AY 2026-27 (Financial Year 2025-26)."

The Department would like to clarify that these communications are intended purely as facilitative reminders to enable taxpayers to review

relevant financial information available on the compliance portal, and where applicable, ensure appropriate advanced tax compliance," it added.

Taxpayers are advised to verify their transaction details through the e-Campaign tab on the compliance portal, accessible via the e-filing portal.

## MIDC partners with Ramky Infrastructure to develop Rs 3,000 Cr Pharma Park in Maharashtra

**Hyderabad:** The Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) has partnered with Ramky Infrastructure Limited, the flagship infrastructure development company of the Ramky Group, to develop a Rs 3,000-crore High-Tech Pharmaceutical Park at the Dighi Port Industrial Area in Raigad district, Maharashtra.

The project will be executed through a concession agreement signed between MIDC and Maha Integrated Life Sciences City Limited (MILeS City), a wholly owned subsidiary of Ramky Infrastructure. It will be developed under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP)

model using the Design, Build, Finance, Operate and Transfer (DBFOT) framework.

According to the Hyderabad-based company, the project carries an estimated cost of Rs 3,000 crore, excluding operational revenues expected during the 90-year operational period.

The overall concession period will span 95 years, including five years of construction. The project will also add to Ramky Infrastructure's order book, taking it to around ₹13,500 crore.

The proposed pharmaceutical park will cover around 1,000 hectares within the Dighi Port Industrial

Area, spanning parts of Manggaon and Roha talukas in Raigad district.

The development aims to create a large-scale integrated life sciences manufacturing hub featuring industrial zones, commercial spaces, utilities, internal road networks, shared infrastructure, and open spaces. It will provide end-to-end facilities for companies in the pharmaceutical, biotechnology, and life sciences sectors. Key components of the project include advanced infrastructure and utilities, innovation-driven research and development centres, incubation hubs, and technology transfer platforms to foster collaboration and sec-

toral innovation.

The park will also incorporate environmentally sustainable infrastructure to ensure regulatory compliance and safe industrial operations.

Under the concession agreement, MILeS City will be responsible for developing, operating, maintaining, and managing the project throughout the concession period.

Commenting on the development, Sunil S. Nair, CEO of Ramky Infrastructure Limited, said the agreement marks a major milestone for industrial growth and for communities expected to benefit from the project.

## Truecaller launches Family Protection bringing shared safety against scams to households

**Lucknow:** As online scams like digital arrests, impersonation fraud and AI voice cloning evolve into direct threats against the security of households, Truecaller, the leading global communications platform, is shifting the narrative from simple identification to proactive family immunity with the launch of Family Protection in India.

This follows its successful rollout in several global markets, including Sweden, Chile, Malaysia, and Kenya.

Truecaller's Family Protection is a sophisticated digital shield, designed to protect the entire household, especially elders, from the rapidly evolving landscape of predatory scams. Every family has a tech-aware individual or CTO (chief technology officer) who manages the digital well-being of their parents, elders and children.

Family Protection gives the CTO real-time fraud alerts and a remote call hang-up feature, allowing them to end suspicious calls for any member of the group instantly.

It also includes shared block lists, customisable se-

curity levels and a dashboard to monitor device safety settings, ensuring seamless protection across both Android and iOS devices.

Importantly, Family Protection is free to use, allowing people to begin safeguarding their family members immediately.

"Just knowing who is calling is no longer enough. Today, the real question is whether the call is safe to answer," said Rishit Hunjunwala, CEO, Truecaller, in a statement here on Saturday.

"As scams become more sophisticated and emotionally manipulative, protection needs to move beyond the individual to the entire household. With Family Protection in India, we're empowering the most digitally aware member of the family to act as a safety anchor, helping ensure that everyone in their circle benefits from the same level of trusted communication," he said.

While Family Protection is free, if the CTO/admin opts for the Premium Family Plan subscription, they gain access to a broader suite of advanced safety

features designed to deliver comprehensive protection for every member of the group.

Crucially, the system is built on a foundation of "safety without surveillance." While the family benefits from a shared security umbrella, individual privacy remains absolute. Members cannot see each other's call logs, messages, or personal data, ensuring that protection does not come at the cost of personal boundaries.

As India continues its rapid digital transformation, the risks associated with mobile communication have evolved from mere nuisances to serious financial and emotional threats.

By transitioning from individual-centric security to a household-wide protection model, Truecaller is reinforcing its commitment to making communication safe for everyone, everywhere.

Family Protection is a necessary evolution in the fight against modern digital fraud, placing the power of advanced AI defence in the hands of the family's most trusted protector.

## Kerala GST issues key compliance advisory for taxpayers ahead of FY 2026–27

**Thiruvananthapuram:** The Kerala State Goods and Services Tax (SGST) Department has issued a detailed advisory to GST-registered traders and businesses ahead of the 2026–27 financial year, highlighting several key compliance requirements. These include the March 31 deadline for opting into the Composition Scheme, mandatory e-invoicing for businesses with aggregate turnover above Rs5 crore, the option to enrol in the QRMP quarterly return scheme, submission of LUT for exporters, tax options for Goods Transport Agencies, and revised GST provisions applicable to hotel and restaurant services.

According to the department, eligible taxpayers who wish to newly opt for the Composition Scheme for the 2026–27 financial year must submit their option on or before March 31, 2026.

However, taxpayers who are already operating under the scheme and intend to continue are not required to file a fresh option, a release said. The department also

directed all taxpayers to ensure compliance with GST Rule 46(b), which requires the use of tax invoices meant for the new financial year. Businesses have been instructed not to continue using invoice formats intended for the previous financial year.

A major compliance requirement relates to e-invoicing. Taxpayers whose aggregate turnover under a single PAN exceeded Rs5 crore in any financial year between 2017–18 and 2025–26 will be required to implement mandatory e-invoicing for all business-to-business (B2B) supplies of goods or services from April 1, 2026.

The department warned that if such taxpayers fail to generate e-invoices, the recipient will not be eligible to claim Input Tax Credit (ITC) on those transactions, and the supplier may face legal and penal action under GST provisions.

The department also pointed out that taxpayers filing GSTR-1 and GSTR-3B returns can opt for the Quarterly Return Monthly



Payment (QRMP) scheme for the 2026–27 financial year. The scheme will take effect from April 1, 2026, and the option to enrol will remain available on the GST portal until April 30, 2026.

Businesses whose aggregate turnover during the 2025–26 financial year does not exceed Rs5 crore will be eligible for this facility. Those already under the QRMP scheme can continue without filing monthly returns.

Exporters supplying goods or services to foreign countries or Special Economic Zone (SEZ) units without payment of Integrated GST (IGST) must submit a Letter of Undertaking (LUT) in Form GST RFD-11 before undertaking

exports for each financial year. For exports during the 2026–27 financial year, the LUT submission facility will be available on the GST portal from April 1, 2026.

The advisory also covers Goods Transport Agencies (GTAs) registered under GST. GTAs opting to pay GST under the forward charge mechanism from April 1, 2026 must submit the prescribed Annexure V under Central Notification 06/2023-CT (R) by March 31, 2026.

Those wishing to continue under the reverse charge mechanism must submit Annexure VI before the same deadline. However, businesses that have already opted for a particular system during the 2025–26

financial year and wish to continue with it need not file the annexure again.

The department further clarified changes relating to the hospitality sector. Hotels that provided accommodation where at least one room was priced at Rs7,500 or more per day during the 2025–26 financial year will be treated as "specified premises". Restaurant services provided in such establishments will attract 18 per cent GST with Input Tax Credit from April 1, 2026.

Hotels where all rooms were priced below Rs7,500 per day during the 2025–26 financial year may voluntarily choose to be classified as "specified premises" and charge 18 per cent GST with Input Tax Credit on restaurant services. For this option, they must file Annexure VII on the GST portal before March 31, 2026.

The State GST Commissioner urged all concerned taxpayers to complete the required procedures within the stipulated deadlines and ensure strict compliance with GST regulations for the upcoming financial year.