


Aryan Age

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PM Modi flags 'worrisome' West Asia crisis, calls for Unified National Response in LS

New Delhi : Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday described the escalating conflict in West Asia as "worrisome" and warned that the prolonged hostilities are posing serious economic, security and humanitarian challenges for India, even as the government moves to safeguard supplies and citizens abroad.

Addressing the Lok Sabha, Modi said the crisis now stretching beyond three weeks amid tensions involving the United States, Israel and Iran is already having a "very adverse impact on the global economy and people's lives," while creating "unprecedented challenges" for India. "The current situation in

West Asia is worrying," Modi told the Lower House, noting that External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri had briefed Parliament in recent weeks. "This crisis has now lasted for more than three weeks. It is affecting the entire world." The Prime Minister's address came a day after he chaired a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security to assess the fast-evolving situation and formulate a strategy to shield India from supply disruptions and economic shocks. With key maritime routes under strain, Modi said India is closely monitoring shipping lanes, particularly the crucial Strait of Hormuz, through

which a significant portion of the country's crude oil, gas and fertiliser imports pass. "Attacks on commercial shipping and disruption of the Hormuz Strait are not acceptable," he said, adding that the government is ensuring that shipments of essential commodities continue to reach Indian shores safely. Despite the turmoil, he stressed that supplies of petrol, diesel and cooking gas have remained stable, with efforts focused on minimizing the burden on ordinary households. Highlighting the human dimension of the crisis, Modi said the safety of nearly 10 million Indians living and working in Gulf nations remains the government's

"top priority." He informed the House that around 1,000 Indians have already returned safely from Iran, including over 700 medical students, while others continue to be assisted through diplomatic channels. "I have spoken to leaders in West Asia in two rounds of

phone calls. All of them have assured the safety of Indian nationals," Modi said, even as he acknowledged casualties among Indian citizens and confirmed that the injured are receiving treatment. Calling for political unity, the Prime Minister urged all parties to present a collective

stance on the crisis. "It is essential that a unified and unanimous voice from India's Parliament reaches the world," he said, underscoring India's extensive trade ties with the conflict-hit region and its reliance on these routes for global commerce. Modi also sought to reassure farmers and industry, stating that India has sufficient stocks of fertilisers and food grains. "In the past, even during disruptions like the COVID pandemic, we ensured that farmers did not suffer. I want to assure them that the government will continue to make every effort," he said. He added that the country currently holds 5.3 million metric tonnes of strategic

petroleum reserves and has diversified energy imports from 27 countries a decade ago to 41 today. On energy security, the Prime Minister said coal stocks are adequate to meet rising summer demand and emphasized ongoing efforts to boost renewable and alternative energy capacity. He also warned against black-marketing and urged state governments to closely monitor the supply of essential commodities. Framing India's response within a broader diplomatic approach, Modi reiterated that dialogue remains the only viable path forward. "India has always raised its voice for peace in the interest of humanity.

Dialogue and diplomacy are the solutions," he said. "Our efforts are aimed at reducing tensions and ending this conflict." "The whole world is affected, and we are making efforts to ensure that India feels the impact the least," he added, pointing to the country's strong economic fundamentals as a buffer against global shocks. As the conflict continues to unsettle global markets and strategic corridors, Modi's address signaled a dual-track approach—urgent domestic preparedness alongside sustained diplomatic engagement—while positioning India as a voice for de-escalation on the world stage.



West Asia war poses unprecedented challenges for India: PM Modi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said the ongoing conflict in West Asia has posed "unprecedented challenges" for India, with significant economic, national security and humanitarian implications. Addressing the Lok Sabha, Modi said, "The situation in West Asia is worrisome. This conflict has been going on for more than 3 weeks. It has a severe impact on the global economy and the lives of the people, and that is why the world is urging all sides for an early resolution to this conflict." He noted that the government has been closely monitoring the situation, with S. Jaishankar and Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri regularly briefing Parliament on developments. Highlighting India's response

to the situation and stressing that government remains committed in assisting Indians in Gulf nations, the Prime Minister said all necessary assistance has been extended to Indian nationals in affected regions. "Since this war began, every Indian in the affected countries has been provided assistance. I have spoken over the phone with the heads of state of most West Asian countries for two rounds. All have assured the safety of Indians," he said. Modi added that while some Indians have lost their lives and others have been injured during the conflict, efforts are ongoing to ensure their safety and well-being. He underscored that the crisis has wide-ranging consequences, affecting global markets as well as human lives, and reiterated the

need for an early resolution through collective international efforts. He pointed out the Indian missions in the affected countries are continuously engaged in helping Indians. "Whether it's Indians working there or tourists who have gone there, everyone is being provided with all possible assistance. Our missions are regularly issuing advisories. 24/7 outreach rooms and emergency helplines have been established in India and other affected countries. Through these, all affected people are being provided with the latest information. In times of crisis, the safety of Indians in India and abroad is crucial," PM Modi said.

Jairam Ramesh slams PM Modi's Lok Sabha speech, raises concerns on foreign policy and economy

New Delhi, Mar 23 (UNI) Senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Monday launched a sharp critique of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address in the Lok Sabha, accusing him of avoiding key national and international issues while focusing on self-praise. In a post on X, Ramesh described the Prime Minister's speech as "uncharacteristically short" and alleged that it was "a master class in self-boasts, cowardice and partisan dialogue-baazi." He expressed particular concern over what he called the Prime Minister's silence on the escalating tensions in West Asia, especially the ongoing conflict involving Iran.

"Not a single word was uttered in condemnation of the continued US-Israeli air assaults on Iran," Ramesh said, adding that while Iran's actions in targeting Gulf countries and the strategically critical Strait of Hormuz were "completely unacceptable," so too was "the relentless bombing of Iran with the objective of regime change and state collapse." The Congress leader also took aim at the government's economic narrative, challenging the Prime Minister's claims about India's growth performance. He pointed to recent remarks made by a former Chief Economic Advisor, who reportedly warned that economic growth

figures during Modi's tenure may have been significantly overestimated. "The PM seems to believe that if he doesn't engage with this very credible and disturbing report, he can wish it away," Ramesh said. Ramesh further criticised the Prime Minister's reference to the COVID-19 pandemic during his speech, calling the government's handling of the crisis "uniquely catastrophic." He invoked images of widespread distress during that period, including migrant workers walking long distances to return home, deaths linked to oxygen shortages, and large-scale unemployment. "The nation cannot forget the deeply depressing scenes



which became all too normal then," he said, adding that the country must ensure better preparedness in the future. The remarks come amid heightened political exchanges between the government and the opposition, with debates in Parliament increasingly reflecting broader disagreements over foreign policy, economic management, and the legacy of the pandemic response.

"Govt spends over Rs 10,000 crore under SWAMIH Phase 1," says Finance Minister in Lok Sabha



New Delhi : Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday informed the Lok Sabha that Rs 10,037.5 crore has been spent under the first phase of the SWAMIH Fund, a key government initiative aimed at reviving stalled housing projects. Replying to a question in the Lok Sabha, she said, "Final closure for this phase was achieved in December 2022. To date, 63,200 units have been completed out of a total portfolio of 1.14 lakh homes targeted for completion." The SWAMIH Fund (Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing) is a government-backed initiative launched in November 2019 to provide last-mile funding support to stalled, RERA-registered residential projects that are net-worth positive. The Finance Minister highlighted that the fund has played a crucial role in unlocking delayed housing projects and providing relief to thousands of homebuyers who were waiting for possession. She further stated that following the success of Phase 1, the second phase of the SWAMIH Fund has been launched and is currently underway, with a continued focus on resolving pending projects across the country. "Our intention is to complete as many stalled projects as possible to provide redressal to the middle-income group, which has been severely affected," she said. The government expects that the ongoing phase will accelerate the completion of remaining housing units and further boost confidence in the real estate sector while addressing long-standing concerns of homebuyers.

Govt may supply partially filled LPG cylinders amid shortage

Mumbai : In a significant move triggered by ongoing global tensions and supply constraints, the government has reportedly decided to introduce a major change in the distribution of domestic LPG cylinders across the country. As per the new development, households may now receive partially filled LPG cylinders instead of the standard full-capacity supply. Traditionally, domestic cylinders carry 14.2 kilograms of gas; however, under the revised arrangement, consumers are likely to receive cylinders containing only 8 to 10 kilograms of LPG. Officials indicate that the decision has been taken in response to a growing

shortage of cooking gas, largely attributed to disruptions caused by international conflicts impacting fuel supply chains. The move aims to ensure that a larger number of households continue to receive at least a minimum quantity of LPG, rather than facing complete unavailability. Importantly, consumers will not be charged for the full cylinder. Instead, they will be billed strictly based on the actual quantity of gas

filled in the cylinder. This proportional pricing model is expected to provide some relief to consumers while helping authorities manage limited resources more effectively. While the decision is seen as a temporary measure, it has raised concerns among citizens about the practicality of reduced gas supply and the frequency of refills. Experts believe the policy may help balance demand and supply in the short term, but a long-term solution will depend on stabilization in global energy markets. Further clarity from the government regarding implementation timelines and monitoring mechanisms is awaited.



Uproar in Maharashtra Legislature Over Satara ZP Poll Chaos; Council Chairperson directs SP's suspension

Mumbai : The chaos during the Satara Zilla Parishad Presidential election last week triggered an uproar in the Maharashtra Legislature on Monday, with the issue escalating into a heated debate in the Legislative Council. Taking serious cognisance of the developments, Council Chairperson Neelam Gorhe directed the immediate suspension of Satara Superintendent of Police Tushar Doshi. The directive came after members raised strong objections over the handling of the situation during the election process. The controversy intensified as leaders from the Shinde-led faction of the Shiv Sena adopted an aggressive stand, prompting intervention from the Chair.

Shiv Sena Shinde faction and NCP (Ajit Pawar) group had formed an alliance for the election and had a majority in the ZP but the BJP candidate emerged victorious allegedly due to a partisan role played by the police preventing some members from voting and allowing the situation to get out of hand leading to chaos. Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde outlined the sequence of events and questioned police conduct. He alleged that cases dating back several years were registered against two voters just a day before the election, allegedly to prevent them from casting their votes. Shinde said he had personally contacted the SP and the Director General of Police, instructing them to allow the voters to exercise

their franchise and defer any action until after polling. He further claimed that Minister Shambhuraj Desai was stopped at the Zilla Parishad entrance, alleging that the police disregarded established protocols for elected representatives and treated them "like accused persons." Calling the incident unprecedented, Shinde said such obstruction of voting rights had never occurred before in Maharashtra's history. Responding to the concerns, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis termed the allegations serious and assured a comprehensive inquiry. He stated that strict action would be taken against those found guilty following the investigation.

Three more cases registered against controversial godman Ashok Kharat

Nashik : With the registration of three new cases of alleged sexual exploitation and fraud against self-proclaimed 'godman' and astrologer Ashok Kharat, the total number of such cases filed against him have now gone up to 6. Meanwhile, police have announced a dedicated helpline number for female victims urging more women to come forward and file complaints against Kharat. The helpline numbers are 9503270224 / 7775816389. With the registration of three more cases against fake godman, there is a likelihood of the case count rising further due to new complaints. With more women victims coming forward, the SIT and the city police have widened the scope of investigation against the fake godman.

Trump says US held 'productive talks' with Iran, postpones strikes on power plants

New Delhi: US President Donald Trump said the United States and Iran have held "very good and productive" discussions over the past two days aimed at resolving hostilities in the Middle East, and announced a temporary pause on planned military strikes. Donald Trump's latest message moments ago appeared to be his most conciliatory since the launch of Operation Epic Fury, though it leaves several key questions unanswered. In a post, Trump said he had instructed the department of war to postpone "any and all" military strikes on Iranian power plants and energy infrastructure for five days, citing the positive tenor of ongoing talks. He said the discussions were "in depth, detailed and

constructive" and would continue throughout the week, with the pause in strikes subject to the outcome of the negotiations. The development comes amid heightened tensions in the region, with the US and Iran engaged in a prolonged standoff involving attacks on key infrastructure and strategic assets. Trump did not provide details on the nature or location of the talks but expressed optimism about a "complete and total resolution" of hostilities. Tehran is yet to confirm regarding the talks with US. It also remains unclear whether the discussions included Iran's ballistic missile programme, nuclear enrichment, or a broader ceasefire. This comes after Iran on Monday warned to mine key

communication routes in the Persian Gulf if its coastline or islands are attacked. Iran's National Defence Council said any attempt to target its territory would result in "all communication lines in the Persian Gulf" being mined, adding that vessels would only be able to transit the Strait of Hormuz in coordination with Tehran. "Any attempt by the enemy to attack Iranian coasts or islands will naturally, and in accordance with common military

practice, cause all access routes and communication lines in the Persian Gulf and the coasts to be mined with various types of naval mines, including floating mines that can be released from the coasts," the statement said. "In that case, the entire Persian Gulf will practically find a situation similar to the Strait of Hormuz for a long time. This time, along with the Strait of Hormuz, the entire Persian Gulf will be practically blocked, and the responsibility for it will lie with the threatening party." Meanwhile, the United States is reportedly considering plans to occupy or blockade Iran's strategically important Kharg Island in a bid to pressure Tehran to reopen the vital route, a move that could significantly escalate the ongoing US-Israeli conflict.

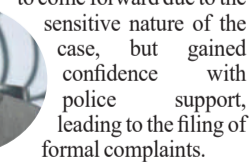


The warning comes amid heightened rhetoric following threats by US President Donald Trump to strike Iranian infrastructure if the strait is not reopened. Kharg Island, a critical hub through which the bulk of Iran's oil exports flow. Also, Iran Iran has allowed China, India and Pakistan, to secure safe passage for their vessels through the strait. However, it has effectively restricted access for others by targeting ships and reportedly laying mines in the waterway, triggering a major disruption in global energy markets. Meanwhile, Israeli forces continue to attack Lebanon and blew up the Qasimiyah Bridge in southern Lebanon, an action President Joseph Aoun described as a "prelude to a ground invasion."

No one will be spared in Kharat case, says CM Fadnavis

Mumbai : Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday told the Legislative Assembly that strict action would be taken in the Ashok Kharat case, asserting that "no one found guilty will be spared" amid mounting pressure from the Opposition and Congress leaders. Describing the case as "extremely serious," Fadnavis said the accused, Ashok Kharat, had allegedly misused claims of "supernatural powers" to exploit and commit serious offences against several women. He emphasised that the nature of the allegations made the case deeply concerning. The Chief Minister said police had been working on the case for some time and had laid a strategic trap as part of the investigation. He revealed that a Look Out Circular (LOC) was issued as early as March 10, based on a complaint registered in another district, to prevent

the accused from leaving the country. Fadnavis noted that many victims were initially reluctant to come forward due to the sensitive nature of the case, but gained confidence with police support, leading to the filing of formal complaints. Responding sharply to the Opposition's demand for resignations, the Chief Minister remarked that he does not grant a "clean chit" indiscriminately, but only to those who are genuinely innocent. He indicated that anyone found responsible during the investigation would face appropriate consequences. Given the seriousness and complexity of the matter, Fadnavis announced that he would present a detailed official statement in the House on March 24, providing further clarity on the case and the government's actions.



Shield protecting terror elements crumbling in J&K: LG Sinha

Jammu: Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Monday issued a stern warning to the remaining elements of the terror ecosystem, saying their "era of terror is over" and that there is no longer any safe haven for terrorists or their supporters in the union Territory.

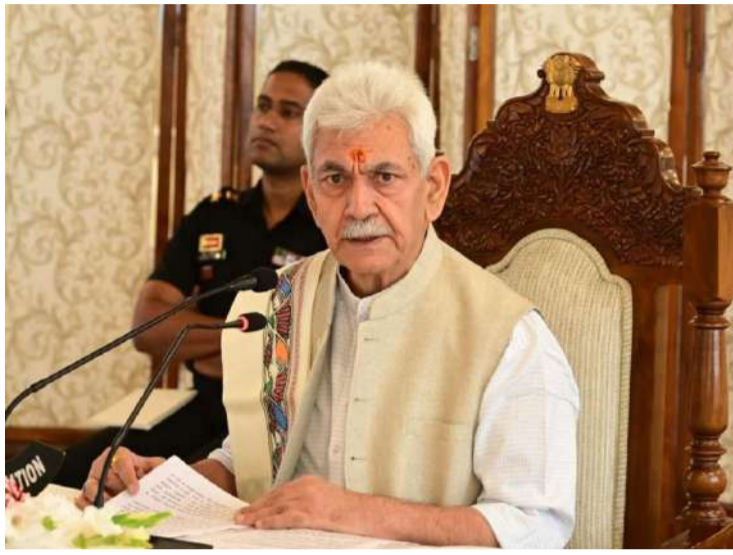
"The people of Jammu Kashmir know fully well who shielded such terror elements, but that shield is now crumbling. I warn them that there is no longer any safe haven in Jammu Kashmir for terrorists or the networks that support them," he said while addressing a function at the Convention Centre, where he handed over appointment letters to 37 Next of Kins (NoKs) to families of terror victims.

Appointment letters were also handed over to 29 NoKs of government employees who lost their lives in service, and beneficiaries in Age relaxation cases, under Jammu and Kashmir Rehabilitation Assistance Scheme-2022 and SRO 43.

Paying tribute to the victims of terrorism, the Lieutenant Governor vowed the strongest action against terror ecosystem and terrorist supporters.

"I pledge to the families of terror victims that we will work with full commitment to secure their dignified and honourable lives. We will discharge every duty towards them with utmost seriousness, and we will not rest until justice reaches every family," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor observed that justice to terror victim families is not limited to only punish-



ments but also healing the wounds and restoring dignity.

"Justice also lies in which stories society chooses to remember. Justice also means wiping the tears of grieving families, acknowledging their pain, and healing the wounds inflicted on their souls. Justice also means that the stories of terror-victim families, once forgotten, are now being rewritten with renewed memory and honour.

"We stand at a decisive turning point in J&K today. The youth of the union Territory and terror victim families aspire to a bright future and wish to live a better life. It is our shared responsibility to make that future a reality and create the opportunities they deserve," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor reiterated that it is his commitment to ensure that every terror victim's family receive the justice, jobs, recognition and support they deserve after years of suffering.

"Terror victim families remained erased from society's memory for decades. Among all these stories, the most painful and bitter truth is that these families were let down by the very system whose duty and primary obligation was to protect them.

"I do not see this merely as an administrative lapse but it was a civilisational failure of that time," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor said that the terror victim families were harassed by elements of terror ecosystem and the situation was not sim-

ply injustice but it was the complete collapse of social morality.

"The elders of the society must ask themselves some tough questions- what kind of society we had become a few decades ago? How did Jammu Kashmir evolve into a system where the victim became a burden that time and those linked to terror were turned into beneficiaries?"

"I am confident that these questions will shake our conscience, because such practices hollowed out every value that makes a society just. Such darkness had extinguished the very spirit of law, trust, and coexistence," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor said those who were part of this terror ecosystem and managed to infiltrate government machinery in the past will face the law and they will be systematically removed from government jobs and punished as per the law.

"Those directly linked to terrorism are being dismissed from service, while decades-long neglected terror-victim families are being given government jobs to secure their economic and social dignity. I see this not merely as a policy correction, but as a new moral declaration for a new Jammu Kashmir.

"This is a clear message that a new order has arrived, one that will punish mercilessly those tied to terrorism and will firmly fulfil its duties to restore the dignity of victims. This moral declaration is the announcement of a system that defines justice not only in words, but in deeds," the Lieutenant Governor further said.

Karnataka HC refuses to intervene in hotel LPG shortage

Bengaluru: The Karnataka High Court on Monday declined to entertain a petition seeking uninterrupted supply of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) cylinders to hotels and restaurants across the state, leaving the issue to be handled by the government amid ongoing global supply concerns.

The matter was heard by Justice Sachin Shankar Magadam, who observed that the situation involves complex and evolving factors that are better addressed by the executive rather than the judiciary.

During the hearing, the judge remarked that the government is already making efforts to manage the crisis effectively. He stated that courts should refrain from intervening in such matters, particularly given the "war-like situation" influencing global supply chains.

The petition had been filed by the Bangalore Hotels Association along with several of its members. It highlighted concerns over disruptions in LPG supply that have been affecting hotel and restaurant operations.

The association argued that the shortages were linked to escalating geopolitical tensions involving the United States, Iran, and Israel, which have impacted global energy markets and supply chains.



Petitioners urged the court to keep the matter pending until further clarity emerged from ongoing government-level discussions. They contended that interim judicial oversight could help mitigate the crisis.

They also suggested that Karnataka could adopt supply management practices similar to those followed in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, which they claimed were experiencing relatively smoother LPG distribution.

Representing the Union government, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta informed the court that the situation remains fluid and subject to rapid changes due to external factors beyond the government's control. He emphasized that the government is actively working to minimize disruptions and ensure that LPG supplies continue with as little interruption as possible. However, he noted that prioritisation decisions may be necessary depending

on the evolving scenario.

Mehta pointed out that it is difficult to determine whether commercial establishments like hotels should be prioritised over domestic consumers, as multiple variables must be considered in allocation decisions.

Responding to a query from the bench regarding any positive developments for the hospitality sector, Mehta candidly stated that there was no immediate relief in sight for hotels and restaurants. He further clarified that the Union government is in constant coordination with state governments to streamline LPG distribution and address emerging challenges on the ground.

Addressing allegations of uneven supply across states, Mehta rejected claims of political bias. He stated that differences in supply between states such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala were based on valid and rational considerations.

Solar capacity increased from 400 MW to 5000 MW in 9 years

Lucknow: Over the past 9 years, Uttar Pradesh has made remarkable progress in the field of solar energy, establishing itself as one of the leading green energy states in the country.

Before 2017, solar capacity in state was limited to around 400 MW, but today it has increased to more than 5000 MW. With effective policies, large-scale solar projects and public participation, over 4 lakh rooftop solar installations have been completed, promoting clean and affordable energy.

Initiatives like "PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana" have accelerated this transformation by bringing solar energy to the masses. Additionally, by entering emerging sectors like green hydrogen, state is progressing strongly toward energy self-reliance and its goal of becoming a trillion-dollar economy.

Officials here on Monday said before 2017, development of solar energy in UP was limited. Total installed solar capacity was around 400 MW. Due to lack of policy clarity, limited investment and absence of large projects, the sector struggled to gain momentum. Rooftop solar programs were in their early stages and public awareness was low, resulting

in minimal participation in clean energy.

After 2017, implementation of solar energy policies completely transformed the state's energy landscape. With effective execution of Uttar Pradesh Solar Energy Policies of 2017 and 2022, solar capacity has now exceeded 5000 MW.

Large solar parks, ground-mounted projects and especially rooftop solar programs have been key drivers of this transformation. Over 4 lakh rooftop solar systems have been installed, placing Uttar Pradesh among leading states in the country.

"PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana" has played a significant role in turning this sector into a mass movement. With attractive subsidies under the scheme, lakhs of consumers have installed solar systems on their rooftops.

These systems are helping consumers save approximately ₹1500 to ₹3000 per month and through net metering, they can also earn additional income by selling surplus electricity.

Under the Solar Energy Policy-2022, state government has set an ambitious target of developing 22,000 MW solar capacity. To achieve this, focus is being

given to large solar parks, ultra-mega projects and solarization of government buildings. At the same time, innovation in green energy is being encouraged, with work already underway on green hydrogen projects.

A 0.5 MW green hydrogen pilot project is being set up in Gorakhpur by Torrent Power, with a production capacity of approximately 9 kg per hour.

Similarly, Zero Footprint Industries Pvt. Ltd. is establishing a 22.5 kg per hour capacity green hydrogen plant in Rampur.

The expansion of solar energy has led to a reduction in carbon emissions and promoted clean energy production in the state. It has also generated employment opportunities for thousands of youth in installation, operation and maintenance of solar systems.

At the household level, solar energy has transformed lifestyles. Its use is no longer limited to lighting and appliances but has expanded to induction cooking, charging electric scooters and electric cars, reducing dependence on petrol, diesel and gas. With advancements like green hydrogen, Uttar Pradesh is steadily moving forward to meet future energy demands.

Telangana Govt committed to employees' welfare, says Dy CM Bhatti Vikramarka

Hyderabad: Telangana Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka on Monday informed the assembly that the present government is committed to the welfare of government employees and is taking concrete steps to address long-pending issues.

Replying to questions raised by the members of the house during the question hours, he said that unlike the previous BRS regime—when salaries were often credited after the 15th of every month—the current government has ensured that employees receive their salaries on the 1st of every month without delay.

Highlighting key measures, the Deputy Chief Min-

ister stated that three pending Dearness Allowances (DAs) left unpaid by the previous government have been cleared.

He also noted that the earlier regime had increased the retirement age—from 58 to 61 years, and from 60 to 65 years for Class IV employees—to defer the burden of retirement benefits. As a result, the financial liability of providing retirement benefits to around 17,000 employees has now fallen on the present government.

Vikramarka informed the House that all pending medical bills of employees have been cleared. He further revealed that the previous government had left be-

hind arrears amounting to Rs 40,150 crore, including Rs 4,575 crore related to employee dues, as detailed in a White Paper presented in the



Assembly.

The government is currently paying ₹700 crore every month to clear these pending dues and is considering increasing this amount to Rs 1,000 crore to expedite the process. Since assuming office, the government has cleared approximately

₹6,146 crore towards employee-related liabilities, he added.

Emphasising a "humane approach," he said the government is introducing cashless medical treatment cards for employees—an issue for which unions had been agitating for nearly a decade. Additionally, an accident insurance scheme providing Rs 1.25 crore to the family of a deceased government employee is being implemented. On pending issues, the Deputy Chief Minister said that a decision on implementing the new Pay Revision Commission (PRC) will be taken once the report is received. He also acknowledged that four DAs are cur-

rently pending and assured that a policy decision will be taken on them.

He further stated that, unlike the previous regime, the current government maintains constant dialogue with employee unions and has given them complete freedom to meet the Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister, and Ministers at any time.

Alleging that the previous BRS government had weakened the state's financial system, Vikramarka said the present administration is working to restore stability and ensure that employees' concerns are addressed in a systematic and transparent manner.

BJP Telangana chief Ramchander Rao arrested during 'assembly siege' protest

Hyderabad: Telangana BJP President N Ramchander Rao was arrested on Monday while staging a protest against the Congress government, accusing it of failing to fulfil its election promises and betraying public trust.

Rao, along with party leaders and workers, participated in the BJP's "Assembly Siege" programme aimed at highlighting what the party described as unfulfilled assurances made by the ruling Congress.

The protest sought to

draw attention to alleged lapses in delivering welfare measures and guarantees promised to various sections, including farmers, women, youth, employees and pensioners. The BJP alleged that the Congress came to power on the promise of "Praja Palana" (people's governance), but claimed that, over the past two years, governance had instead reflected "Praja Mosam" (deception of the people). According to the party, key commitments remain unimplemented,

leading to growing dissatisfaction among the public.

Condemning the arrest, BJP leaders termed the action as undemocratic, alleging misuse of state machinery to curb dissent. They said the protest was intended to represent public anger against what they called the government's "failures and broken promises." Police intervened during the demonstration and detained Rao along with several party workers to prevent escalation of the protest.

Rural roads boost access to education, healthcare in Bihar

Patna: The construction of all-weather rural roads across Bihar has brought about a significant transformation in village life, improving access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and markets, while accelerating overall rural development.

According to official sources, the Rural Works Department Bihar has been actively working to strengthen infrastructure in remote and previously inaccessible areas. Its focus on improving connectivity has become a cornerstone of the state's development strategy.

Guided by the vision of "strong roads, easy connectivity, and holistic development," the department has undertaken large-scale construction of paved rural roads. These efforts are aimed at bridging the urban-rural divide and ensuring inclusive growth.

Improved road connectivity has made it easier for villagers to access schools, hospitals, agricultural markets, banking services, and government offices. This enhanced accessibility is contributing to the broader socio-economic development of Bihar.

To connect remote habitations, the government has been implementing key schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, Mukhyamantri Gram Sampark Yojana, and Gramin Tola Sampark Nishchay Yojana. These initiatives have played a crucial role in expanding rural road networks.

The state has set an ambitious target of connecting 1,29,990 habitations with paved roads. So far, 1,21,151 previously unconnected habitations have been successfully linked through all-weather roads, marking substantial progress toward

this goal.

In total, more than 1,20,177 kilometres of rural roads have been constructed, significantly improving mobility and connectivity across the state. This extensive network is helping integrate rural areas with mainstream economic activities.

During the current financial year 2025-26, 1,467 new habitations have been connected through the construction of 1,874 kilometres of paved roads. These developments reflect the continued momentum in infrastructure expansion.

Under the Mukhyamantri Gram Sampark Yojana, special emphasis has been placed on reaching areas that were previously left out of development initiatives. This has ensured more equitable distribution of infrastructure benefits.

Officials noted that around 86.42 percent of the allocated funds for the scheme have been utilised in the current fiscal year, indicating efficient implementation and execution of projects.

In addition to new construction, significant work has been carried out on the reconstruction, upgradation, and renovation of existing rural roads that have exceeded their maintenance period. So far, 16,331 such roads have been completed this year. The improved road infrastructure has had a profound impact on healthcare delivery in rural areas. Ambulances can now reach even the most remote villages, enabling timely medical intervention and saving lives.

This development has been particularly beneficial for pregnant women and critically ill patients, who can now access healthcare facilities without delays caused by poor road conditions.

Siddaramaiah assures minorities, confident of Davangere South win

Davangere: Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday sought to calm rising resentment among minority communities after the Congress party's decision to nominate Samarth Mallikarjun Shamanur for the upcoming Davangere South by-election to the Assembly sparked widespread protests.

Addressing the media here, Siddaramaiah said the party will work to mitigate the discontent among minorities and expressed full confidence in winning the by-election.

"We will try to dispel the discontent among the minorities.

We are confident of winning 100 per cent in both by-elections" he said, asserting that the poor, minorities and other sections of society remain with the Congress. He also took a swipe at the BJP's claim on the polls being a referendum, saying past predictions by the Opposition had failed to materialise.

The ticket for Davangere South, a seat long held by the Shamanur family, was allotted to Samarth, grandson of the late veteran Congress leader Shamanur Shivashankarappa.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said the candidates for both Davangere South and Bagalkot were selected by consensus after discussions with party leaders, including minority representatives. He said the high command communicated the decision late at night and emphasised unity in contesting the by-elections.

Despite assurances, the decision triggered anger among sections of the minority community, with protesters gathering at Akhtar Raza Circle carrying black flags and placards accusing the Congress of snubbing community aspirations and treating them as a vote bank. Some participated in the protests despite being Congress members.

CM Reddy hands over Rs 1 cr insurance cheques to families of deceased power staff

Hyderabad: Revanth Reddy on Monday handed over accident insurance cheques of ₹1 crore each to the families of two Electricity Department employees who lost their lives while on duty, reaffirming the government's focus on employee welfare and financial security.

The cheques were presented at the Assembly premises to the families of Orsu Suresh and Mukhtar Beg, in a gesture aimed at supporting them during a time of immense loss and hardship.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said the initiative reflects the government's commitment to standing by employees and their families, particularly in times of crisis. He noted that such measures are essential to instill confidence among government workers.

Reddy emphasized that ensuring financial protection for employees is not just a policy decision but a moral responsibility. He added that the government is determined to create a support system that safeguards families against unforeseen tragedies.

He also highlighted that such initiatives help boost the morale of employees working in critical sectors like electricity, where risks are often part of the job. Providing security to their families, he said, allows workers to perform their duties with greater confidence.



The Chief Minister lauded Electricity Minister Bhatti Vikramarka for taking proactive steps to support the families of the deceased employees. He appreciated the minister's efforts in ensuring timely assistance and compassionate outreach.

Reddy further stated that the government has been consistently working to strengthen welfare measures across sectors, particularly for employees engaged in essential and high-risk services. Highlighting healthcare initiatives, he said that coverage under the Rajiv Aarogyasri scheme has been significantly enhanced. The insurance limit has been increased from ₹5 lakh to ₹10 lakh, expanding access to quality medical care.

Bus Shortage Crisis Hits Mumbai Commuters

Mumbai : The public transportation network in Mumbai is under intense pressure as the BEST bus fleet continues to shrink, leading to the cancellation of nearly 100 routes. This reduction has left approximately 23 lakh daily passengers with fewer travel options. Currently, the operational fleet consists of 2,676 buses, but the lack of frequency has resulted in commuters waiting at stops for up to 50 minutes.

The unreliability of the bus service has forced many residents to opt for shared taxis and auto-rickshaws, particularly in the eastern and western suburbs. While these private alternatives offer a faster commute between railway stations and office hubs, they are significantly more expensive. A standard bus fare starts at ₹12, but shared rickshaws charge at least ₹15, while shared taxis can cost up to ₹25 per person.

This shift is placing a heavy financial burden on families who rely on public transport for work and schooling. In South Mumbai, shared taxis have become the primary mode for reaching business districts like Nariman Point and Colaba. While the expansion of the



Metro network has provided some relief on specific corridors like CSMT to BKC, the public continues to demand the restoration of bus routes to ensure an affordable and dependable transit system.

The public transportation landscape in Mumbai is currently navigating a period of significant strain as the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking grapples with a diminishing fleet. Reports indicate that the number of operational buses has seen a steady decline, leading to the unfortunate cancellation or curtailment of nearly 100 established routes across the city. This reduction in

service capacity has directly impacted approximately 23 lakh daily commuters who rely on these red buses as their primary and most affordable means of navigating the metropolis. Currently, the active fleet hovers around 2,676 vehicles, a number that many experts and citizens believe is insufficient to meet the demands of a growing population.

The most immediate consequence of this shortage is the drastic increase in waiting times at bus stops, with many passengers reporting delays of 45 to 50 minutes during peak hours. These prolonged intervals have disrupted the daily

schedules of office-goers, students, and laborers, turning a routine commute into a source of significant stress.

The lack of predictability in the bus schedule has eroded public confidence in the system, forcing a large segment of the population to look for alternative, often more expensive, modes of transit to ensure they reach their destinations on time. In the absence of a reliable bus service, shared auto-rickshaws and taxis have surged in popularity, particularly in the eastern and western suburbs where they bridge the gap between railway stations and residential or commercial hubs. While these pri-

ivate players offer a quicker and more flexible solution to the "last-mile" connectivity problem, they come at a higher financial cost to the average citizen. A standard BEST bus ticket starts at a nominal rate of ₹12, whereas shared rickshaws typically charge a minimum of ₹15, and shared taxis can go up to ₹25 per passenger.

For many middle and lower-income families, this forced shift to shared private transport is creating a noticeable dent in monthly budgets. The cumulative effect of these higher daily fares adds up to a substantial financial burden over time, especially for households with multiple members traveling for work or education. In South Mumbai, the reliance on shared taxis has become almost mandatory for those heading toward business districts like Nariman Point, Colaba, and Cuffe Parade, as bus frequencies in these premium corridors have also seen a dip. While the phased expansion of the Mumbai Metro—specifically the newer corridors like the stretch from CSMT to BKC—has provided some relief to long-distance commuters, it has not yet replaced the granular connectivity provided by the bus network.

Luxury Flats Unsold in MHADA Mumbai Lottery

Mumbai : The Mumbai Board of MHADA is struggling to find takers for its high-end residential units despite implementing more flexible eligibility criteria and a "first come, first served" sales model. While low-cost housing options were claimed almost instantly, many properties valued at over one crore rupees remain vacant. This trend underscores a significant disconnect between current real estate pricing and the actual purchasing power of city residents.

Data suggests that two weeks into the current scheme, 54 out of 118 premium apartments are still available. Only 64 units have been successfully booked, a figure that has sparked concern among housing officials. While historical MHADA lotteries were known for overwhelming demand, the sharp rise in property costs has pushed these homes beyond the reach of the intended income brackets. Current market friction is most visible in areas like Tardeo, Juhu, Powai, and Byculla, where homes priced between one

and eight crore rupees are failing to attract buyers. This stagnation is reportedly affecting the board's projected revenue. In stark contrast, affordable units in Wadala, priced around ₹42 lakh, were sold out within the first few minutes of the portal opening. While some interest has been shown in the expensive properties, the board notes that sales are only finalized once the full payment is processed. The Mumbai Board of the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA) is encountering an unusual hurdle as its luxury residential inventory remains stagnant. Despite pivoting to a "first come, first served" allocation strategy and relaxing several eligibility requirements to broaden the applicant pool, high-ticket units continue to sit empty. This lack of momentum highlights a growing disparity between the escalating market prices of premium real estate and the actual financial capacity of Mumbai's middle and upper-middle-class residents. Statistical reports from the first two weeks of the cur-

rent sales cycle indicate that nearly half of the premium stock is yet to be claimed. Out of 118 high-value apartments offered, 54 units remain available, with only 64 finding takers. This is a significant departure from the historical performance of MHADA lotteries, which were once synonymous with massive over-subscription. The current trend suggests that the aggressive pricing of these homes has finally pushed them out of the feasible range for the very income groups they were intended to serve. The most pronounced friction in the market is being felt in upscale localities such as Juhu, Tardeo, Powai, and Byculla. In these neighborhoods, flats priced between ₹1 crore and ₹8 crore are failing to generate the expected interest, a situation that is beginning to impact the housing board's anticipated revenue streams. While the high-end segment remains cold, the appetite for genuine affordability is as strong as ever; units in Wadala priced at approximately ₹42 lakh were fully booked within minutes of the online portal's launch.

Technical Glitch Halts Mumbai Metro 3

Mumbai : Commuters on the Mumbai Metro's Aqua Line experienced significant distress on Monday when a train suffered an unexpected delay between Bandra Colony and Santa Cruz stations. Passengers reported that the train slowed to a crawl before stopping completely several times. The disruption continued as the train reached the Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) station, where it remained stationary for an extended period.

The atmosphere inside the carriages became tense as automated emergency messages played repeatedly in various languages without providing specific details regarding the nature of the problem. Passengers expressed frustration on social media, noting that the lack of clear communication from the

driver or transit authorities led to unnecessary anxiety and confusion among those stuck on board.

Upon arriving at their destinations, many travelers sought answers from station personnel, who were reportedly unable to explain the cause of the 30-minute delay. This breakdown in information sharing has sparked calls for better real-time updates and more transparent protocols during service interruptions. While operations eventually returned to normal, the incident highlighted the need for improved coordination within the city's expanding metro infrastructure.

Commuters traveling on the newly operational Mumbai Metro Aqua Line (Line 3) faced a harrowing experience on Monday after a technical malfunction



resulted in significant transit delays. The disruption began during the peak evening hours as a train

underground to board momentum. Passengers on board reported that the rake

slowed to a walking pace before

coming to a complete standstill on multiple occasions within the tunnel, leading to an atmosphere of mounting unease among the hundreds of stranded travelers.

The technical snag persisted as the train eventually managed to limp into the Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) station, where it remained docked for an unusually long period. Inside the coaches, the situation was further complicated by a series of automated emergency announcements that played on a loop in Marathi, Hindi, and English. While these messages alerted passengers to an "emergency situation," they failed to provide any specific details regarding the nature of the fault or an estimated time for the resumption of services. This lack of concrete information contributed to a sense of panic, with

many commuters taking to social media to document the ordeal and criticize the transit authority's crisis management.

Frustration peaked when the train finally reached its destination and passengers attempted to seek clarification from the on-ground station staff. Reportedly, the frontline personnel at the stations were as uninformed as the commuters, unable to offer any explanation for the 30-minute halt. This breakdown in internal communication between the operations control center and the station teams has sparked a wider debate about the maturity of the Metro 3 infrastructure. While the Aqua Line is a technological marvel for the city, critics argue that the "human element" of passenger safety and real-time updates requires urgent refinement.

Students Conduct Cleanliness Drive at Kharghar Hills

Navi Mumbai : In an effort to champion environmental preservation, students from the K. J. Somaiya School of Engineering organized a major cleanup operation at Kharghar Hills. The event, spearheaded by the IETE Students Council, focused on the removal of litter and raising public awareness about the dangers of plastic pollution in natural habitats. Participants gathered large quantities of discarded bottles, paper, and plastic waste from across the hillside. The students used the platform to advocate for biodiversity, carrying banners with slogans like "Save Hills, Save Nature."

The drive was supported by local environmental organizations, including the Nisarg Friendship Society and the Kharghar Hills Welfare Association, who provided expert guidance on the ecological importance of the area.

College leadership, including Director Dr. Suresh Ukarande, praised the students for their commitment

to civic duty and sustainability. The initiative was designed to align with global sustainable development goals, fostering a sense of responsibility among the youth. The institution has expressed its intent to make such conservation efforts a regular part of its community outreach program to protect the local ecosystem from urban encroachment.

In a commendable display of environmental stewardship, students from the K. J. Somaiya School of Engineering recently conducted an extensive cleanliness and conservation operation at Kharghar Hills. Organized by the IETE Students Council, the initiative was specifically designed to tackle the growing menace of litter in one of the city's most vital green lungs. The drive focused not only on the physical removal of waste but also on educating the visiting public about the long-term ecological damage caused by plastic pollution within natural moun-

tainous habitats.

Equipped with gloves and collection bags, the student volunteers successfully gathered a massive quantity of discarded materials, ranging from single-use plastic bottles and food wrappers to abandoned paper debris scattered across the hiking trails. By clearing these pollutants, the participants aimed to restore the aesthetic beauty of the hills and prevent the ingestion of toxic waste by local wildlife. To amplify their message, the students marched through the area carrying placards with slogans such as "Save Hills, Save Nature," turning the cleanup into a mobile awareness campaign for biodiversity. The success of the project was bolstered by the active participation of veteran environmental groups, including the Nisarg Friendship Society and the Kharghar Hills Welfare Association. These organizations provided the students with expert insights into the unique flora and fauna of the

region, explaining why the hills are a critical ecological asset for Navi Mumbai. This collaboration between the youth and seasoned conservationists helped bridge the gap between academic learning and practical environmental action, fostering a deeper understanding of the threats posed by rapid urban encroachment.

The institution's leadership, headed by Director Dr. Suresh Ukarande, lauded the participants for their dedication to social responsibility and sustainable living. The drive was officially aligned with global sustainable development goals, aiming to instill a permanent sense of environmental ethics in the next generation of engineers. Following the success of this event, the college has announced plans to integrate such conservation activities into its permanent community outreach schedule, ensuring that the protection of the local ecosystem remains a consistent priority for the student body.

Encroachment Drive Clears Land in Kamothe

Mumbai : The Parel Municipal Corporation (PMC) recently executed a major operation to remove illegal structures near the Mansarovar Railway Station. The drive, led by the civic body's Encroachment Department, successfully reclaimed public land that had been unlawfully occupied. A key focus of the mission was clearing a specific plot that has been officially reserved for the construction of a new Fire Brigade station.

Using heavy machinery, including bulldozers, officials dismantled various unauthorized roadside shops, sheds, and temporary dwellings. The PMC stated that the action was vital to protect land designated for essential civic infrastructure and to maintain order in the rapidly growing Kamothe and Kharghar sectors. This follows a similar large-scale cleanup effort conducted by the corporation roughly one month ago.

The crackdown also



extended to other areas, including the removal of illegal street vendors in Kamothe Sector 34 and the demolition of unauthorized huts in the Kopra region of Kharghar.

Additionally, vendors operating illegally along Belapur Road were cleared. Authorities have signaled that they will continue to monitor these sites closely

to ensure that illegal occupants do not return and that public spaces remain accessible.

The Parel Municipal Corporation (PMC) recently concluded a significant enforcement operation aimed at reclaiming public land from illegal occupants in the Kamothe region. Executed by the civic body's Encroachment Department,

the drive focused primarily on the high-traffic areas surrounding the Mansarovar Railway Station. A major objective of this specific mission was to secure a plot of land that has been officially designated for the construction of a new Fire Brigade station, an essential piece of safety infrastructure for the rapidly expanding neighborhood.

Smart Bus Service Launching in Maharashtra

Mumbai : Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik has announced the debut of the 'Rajmata Jijau' smart ST bus service, scheduled for inauguration on March 24. The ceremony will take place at the Vidhan Bhavan premises with Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis leading the event alongside Eknath Shinde and Sunetra Pawar.

The initiative aims to modernize the state's public transit while honoring Maharashtra's cultural heritage.

The Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) plans to introduce 3,000 of these high-tech vehi-

cles into its fleet. Named after the mother of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, the buses are designed to enhance both safety and efficiency.

They feature a 56-seat configuration, which offers significantly more capacity than older models, and come equipped with GPS tracking, CCTV surveillance, emergency panic buttons, and digital information boards.

Initially, the service will focus on high-traffic intercity routes to minimize travel duration and help manage road congestion.

The first phase of operations will begin in Nagpur



with a batch of 50 buses. Officials believe this project will set a new standard for passenger-centric travel in the state by combining modern amenities with increased operational frequency.

The Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) is set to usher in a new era of public transit with the official launch of the 'Rajmata Jijau' smart bus service on March 24. The inauguration

ceremony, scheduled to take place at the Vidhan Bhavan premises, will be led by Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, alongside Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Sunetra Pawar.

This initiative, announced by Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik, aims to blend the state's deep cultural heritage with cutting-edge technology to provide a superior travel experience for millions of passengers.

The ambitious project involves the phased induction of 3,000 high-tech vehicles into the existing state transport fleet. Named in honor of the

mother of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, these buses are specifically engineered to address modern safety and efficiency standards.

Each vehicle features a spacious 56-seat configuration, providing a 40% increase in passenger capacity compared to traditional models.

Beyond comfort, the buses are equipped with a suite of advanced features including real-time GPS tracking, 360-degree CCTV surveillance, emergency panic buttons for passenger safety, and synchronized digital information boards for real-time route updates.

In its initial phase, the service will prioritize high-density intercity corridors to help mitigate road congestion and reduce overall travel time for commuters.

The first deployment will see a batch of 50 smart buses beginning operations in Nagpur, serving as a pilot for the statewide rollout.

Transport officials are confident that the 'Rajmata Jijau' fleet will redefine the standards for government-run transport in India by offering a passenger-centric model that emphasizes reliability, modern amenities, and increased operational frequency.

Editorial

The Frenzy of Power and the Wildfire of Rage

When the allure of power, the intoxication of ego, and the fury of personal vengeance converge, the resulting human chemistry stands poised on the very brink of destruction. If one turns the pages of history, the horrific riots of 1984—which Delhi witnessed in the aftermath of the 1947 Partition—emerged precisely from this interplay of rage and the game of power. Amidst the power vacuum created by the assassination of the then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and fueled by a spirit of retribution, the very air of Delhi hung heavy for three days with the acrid stench of burning human flesh. Today, a similarly horrific and spine-chilling situation has arisen in the Middle East, where the conflict between Iran and the United States is no longer confined merely to the realm of military strategy. This conflict has now reached an extreme and critical juncture, characterized by personal vengeance, familial trauma, and a global economic blockade. Iran's new Supreme Leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, lost four of his closest kin—his parents, his wife, and his own son—in the very first day of the American offensive. Khamenei—a leader who now possesses nothing left to call his own, and who senses the looming sword of his own mortality at every step—is today driving the entire world into the abyss of a Third World War through his reckless decisions.

The epicenter of this conflict has now shifted away from Iran's nuclear facilities and settled instead upon the 'Strait of Hormuz'—a vital global waterway. With Iran having blockaded this crucial strait, global trade—and the fuel supply chain in particular—has completely collapsed. The American administration's assertion that "we did not anticipate Iran closing this strait" serves as a stark indicator of either their strategic ignorance or their sheer political naivety. In reality, any strategic expert should have anticipated that when a country like Iran faces an existential crisis—specifically a direct military attack—it would leverage its geographical advantage to attempt an economic blockade of the world. However, President Donald Trump's actions suggest that he had not even contemplated this possibility. Former U.S. President Bill Clinton has raised precisely this critical and incisive point. According to Clinton, during his tenure—when military action against Iran was under consideration—the CIA issued a clear warning that, in the event of any conflict, Iran would first and foremost block the Strait of Hormuz. Consequently, the question of why the current Trump administration entered this conflict—without a concrete strategy, without taking its allies into confidence, and without obtaining formal approval from the U.S. Congress—is a matter of grave concern for global peace.

The United States surmised that launching airstrikes against Iran would prompt the country's beleaguered populace to take to the streets in opposition to their government, thereby facilitating a regime change. However, the U.S. appears to have learned nothing, even from its past experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. In Iran, the reality presents a starkly different picture; the people have indeed taken to the streets—not to oppose their government, but to condemn the United States and to rally in support of their wounded nation and administration. Compounding this situation, a single, heart-wrenching tragedy has added fuel to the fire. Mistaking a building in Iran for a military installation, the U.S. obliterated it with a Tomahawk missile; in reality, however, it was a school, and the attack resulted in the deaths of 170 innocent female students. This horrific blunder occurred due to outdated military records maintained by the U.S. armed forces. The structure—which had once served as a military facility—had subsequently been converted into a school, yet this change had not been updated within the U.S. intelligence systems. This single incident has turned the entirety of Iranian public opinion, as well as the sympathies of the wider Muslim world, firmly against the United States. Now, not content with mere airstrikes, the U.S. is preparing to land thousands of American troops on Iranian soil, deploying massive warships such as the USS Tripoli for the operation. This move is widely perceived as a suicidal attempt to directly invade Iran and seize power—a strategy that is highly likely to intensify local resistance and render it even more violent.

In an effort to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, President Trump has now appealed to China, Britain, and France, urging them to dispatch their respective warships to join this mission. However, the most significant complication in this scenario is the strong possibility that Iran closed the strait in the first place precisely because of China's covert backing. China's long-term strategy may be to leverage any potential turmoil in the global economy to bolster its own economic recovery while simultaneously destabilizing the United States. Rather than seeking global peace, China desires economic chaos to facilitate its own hegemonic ambitions. Iran is currently targeting the U.S. banking system—as well as critical infrastructure belonging to America's allies—through both cyber and military means; a development that indirectly works to the advantage of Russia and China. Although the Russia-Ukraine war impacted global markets, its effects were relatively contained, as the primary cost was borne almost exclusively by the two nations directly involved. However, the ongoing conflict in the Middle East has caused crude oil prices in the international market to skyrocket from \$73 to well over \$110 per barrel. This has dealt a direct blow to every developing nation across the globe—including India—triggering a massive surge in inflation.

For India, this crisis presents a particularly complex and dual-pronged challenge. Yielding to U.S. pressure and insistence, India ceased purchasing oil from its long-standing ally—Iran; a decision that has now led Russia to refuse to supply oil to India at concessional rates. Capitalizing on the global supply crunch and surging demand, Russia, too, has drastically inflated its oil prices. Russia is displeased with India for having aligned itself with the U.S. stance, and this diplomatic fallout is now directly impacting India's energy security.

The current conflict appears to be completely upending long-standing global geopolitical equations. The very United States that once tacitly supported Iran during the Iran-Iraq War is now bent on wiping that same nation off the map, while Russia and China—driven by their own global ambitions—are actively fanning the flames of this conflict. Even the most seasoned experts today are unable to envision precisely how the world of tomorrow will emerge from the smoldering flames of this war, or where the new centers of power will ultimately reside. The ultimate conclusion to be drawn from this cataclysmic conflict is that whenever the intoxication of power and the impulse for personal vengeance take precedence over strategic decision-making, it is humanity that is forced to pay the price. The ordinary citizen is being crushed between the fury of Khamenei's personal loss and Trump's battle for prestige. The bloodshed unfolding in Iran and the disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz are not merely a crisis confined to the Middle East; rather, they serve as a harbinger of an economic blockade facing the modern world. Peace is no longer merely a necessity; it has become an indispensable condition for the very survival of the world.

AAHAR 2026: The International Food & Hospitality Fair

The steady buzz of conversations, the aroma of freshly brewed coffee, and the sight of innovative food displays filled the halls of Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, as the 40th edition of AAHAR - The International Food & Hospitality Fair took place from 10-14 March 2026. Jointly organized by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) and the India Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO), AAHAR has emerged as one of South Asia's most prominent B2B platforms for the food and hospitality sector. What makes the exhibition stand out is not just the scale of participation, but the way it has evolved into a trusted name and source for businesses in the food and hospitality industry to grow, scale, and expand.

AAHAR brings together hotels, restaurants, catering institutions, importers, distributors, and suppliers, creating a platform where interactions frequently develop into business partnerships. Over the years, the exhibition has witnessed an interesting trend: several entrepreneurs who once attended as visitors or buyers now return as exhibitors with their own brands. Their journeys illustrate how continued participation in the fair can yield business insights, build market connections, and ultimately drive entrepreneurial growth.

Among the vibrant state pavilions at AAHAR 2026, the Kerala pavilion showcased how regional businesses are using the platform to expand their product reach. One of the participating companies, RG Foods, traces its origins back to 1940 in Calicut, Kerala. Known for its diverse product line, including edible oils (gingelly oil, mustard oil, coconut oil), rice varieties (Palakkadan Vadi Matta rice), breakfast powders, traditional Kerala snacks (such as frozen foods), and Ready-to-use cooking pastes (ginger paste, ginger-garlic paste, garlic paste), the company has gradually expanded its presence beyond regional markets. At this year's exhibition, the company showcased authentic Kerala snacks, including banana chips, spicy mixtures, murukku, and other traditional delicacies. Mr. Swagath, a representative of RG Foods at the fair, spoke vividly about how participation



in AAHAR has helped the company connect with both national and international clients. Today, our products are available in more than 31 countries, including markets in Europe, New Zealand, Australia, and Qatar. Through interactions at the fair, it has strengthened distribution channels in Delhi and initiated discussions to expand into three new international markets. Mr. Swagath mentioned that the company holds approximately 65 percent market share in the edible oil sector across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) regions and operates an extensive distribution network, reaching about 1.5 lakh retail outlets across Kerala, supported by over 450 distributors. Their participation was supported through the state government's state pavilion initiative, which provides free exhibition space to well-performing enterprises from the state. According to Mr. Swagath, extensive preparation, such as targeted digital outreach and pre-scheduled meetings with potential distributors before the event, helps the company maximise the business opportunities at AAHAR.

A similar story of growth

was shared by Mr. Dhyaan Mehta from Ahmedabad, Gujarat. His company, TGR Foods, produces cake and bread mixes used as raw materials by bakeries, confectioneries, and dairy industries. For nearly ten years, Mehta attended AAHAR as a customer, exploring suppliers and learning about industry trends. This year marked a milestone for him as he participated for the first time as an exhibitor, showcasing his own products. His journey shows how entrepreneurs often learn from the AAHAR ecosystem before launching their own ventures. Another entrepreneur who shared a similar journey is Mr. Soberpreet Singh, founder of Packmold, a company that manufactures beverage cups for hot and cold drinks. His business primarily supports small and emerging beverage brands that often struggle to meet the high minimum order requirements of large packaging manufacturers. Packmold produces cups with an aqua coating rather than a conventional plastic coating, offering a more environmentally responsible, government-compliant alternative. Within just six months of operations, the company has secured orders

from major clients such as Reliance Retail's Wild Bean Cafés and Adani Airports, while also supplying packaging to growing beverage brands like Slay Coffee.

Mr. Singh shared that years of visiting AAHAR as a buyer helped him understand the industry and identify market gaps. These experiences eventually inspired him to launch Packmold. This year marks his first participation in the exhibition as an exhibitor.

The exhibition floor at AAHAR witnessed a vibrant mix of innovation, enterprise, and global participation, bringing together emerging entrepreneurs alongside some of the most recognized names in the food and hospitality industry. The presence of both new entrants and established brands created a dynamic environment that reflected the evolving landscape of the sector. Among the major highlights were stalls by globally renowned and Indian brands such as Nescafé, Barry Callebaut, Go Cheese, Morde, Haldiram's, Cremica, and MTR. These well-known names drew significant attention from visitors throughout the event.

The stalls of these brands

became major crowd-pullers, offering engaging live demonstrations that showcased the versatility and application of their products. Visitors were not only able to witness culinary techniques firsthand but also participate in tasting sessions that enhanced their overall experience.

One of the standout attractions at the exhibition was the stall of Barry Callebaut, where chocolatier Chef Ghosh captivated audiences with his creativity and expertise. His live sessions featured intricate chocolate preparations and artistic designs that highlighted both technical skill and innovation.

Chef Ghosh's demonstrations quickly became a focal point for attendees, especially those with a keen interest in confectionery and chocolate artistry. His ability to blend technique with creativity left a lasting impression on the audience.

Students from various culinary institutes and hospitality colleges gathered in large numbers around the demonstration area. They were particularly enthusiastic about observing professional techniques and gaining insights directly from an

industry expert. The interactive nature of the sessions allowed students to engage with Chef Ghosh, ask questions, and understand the finer nuances of chocolate-making. For many, it was an opportunity to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

Beyond individual brand stalls, AAHAR continued to establish itself as a significant learning platform for aspiring chefs and hospitality professionals. The event provided exposure that goes far beyond traditional classroom education.

Students attending the exhibition had the chance to interact with a wide range of industry stakeholders, including chefs, business owners, and brand representatives. These interactions offered valuable perspectives on career opportunities and industry expectations.

From sourcing ingredients to understanding advanced equipment, the exhibition covered multiple aspects of the food and hospitality ecosystem. It also shed light on crucial areas such as packaging, branding, and distribution strategies.

Such comprehensive exposure helped students gain a holistic understanding of how the industry operates in real-world settings. It also allowed them to appreciate the complexities involved in running successful food businesses.

As AAHAR celebrates its 40th edition, it stands as a testament to its long-standing contribution to the industry. Over the years, it has evolved into a trusted platform for networking, innovation, and growth.

The stories emerging from the exhibition floor reflect its continued relevance. For many participants, the event serves as a space to connect with new suppliers, distributors, and potential collaborators.

For others, it opens doors to new markets and business opportunities, enabling brands to expand their reach both domestically and internationally. The platform plays a crucial role in fostering business development.

Interestingly, several entrepreneurs who once attended AAHAR as visitors or buyers have now returned as exhibitors. This transition marks a significant milestone in their entrepreneurial journey.

“A Strategic Framework for Doubling Cotton Productivity and Augmenting Quality Fibre”

The Ministry of Textiles organised a Chintan Shivir titled “A Strategic Framework for Doubling Cotton Productivity and Augmenting Quality Fibre” in Nagpur, bringing together key stakeholders from across the cotton ecosystem. The event aimed to chart a roadmap for enhancing productivity, improving fibre quality, and strengthening India's standing in the global cotton value chain.

The forum witnessed participation from policymakers, scientists, industry leaders, and agricultural experts, all of whom engaged in detailed discussions on strategic interventions. The collaborative platform enabled cross-sector dialogue, fostering a shared vision for the future of India's cotton industry.

Addressing the gathering, Neelam Shami Rao, Secretary of the Ministry of Textiles, stressed the importance of converting discussions into tangible and actionable outcomes. She underlined that policy intent must translate into on-ground impact for farmers and industry stakeholders alike.

She highlighted that the future of India's cotton sector depends on a holistic transformation driven by the guiding principles of Reform, Perform, Transform, and Inform. These pillars, she noted, are essential to building a resilient and globally competitive cotton ecosystem.

The Secretary further pointed out that significant improvements in cotton productivity can be achieved through the expansion of drip irrigation systems. She also



emphasized the importance of strengthening agricultural extension networks to ensure that farmers receive timely and relevant guidance.

Improved farmer advisories and district-level soil mapping were identified as critical tools in helping farmers select the most suitable cotton varieties. Such targeted interventions can lead to better yields and more efficient use of resources.

Highlighting another key area, she underscored the need for greater innovation and healthy competition in the cotton seed ecosystem. This, she said, would encourage the development of high-quality seeds tailored to diverse agro-climatic conditions.

She also called for the creation of region-specific Cotton Calendars to guide farmers on best agronomic practices. These calendars would provide structured timelines

for sowing, irrigation, pest control, and harvesting, thereby improving overall farm management.

Speaking at the event, Padmini Singla, Joint Secretary (Fibre) at the Ministry of Textiles, emphasized the need for a coordinated and integrated approach across the cotton value chain. She noted that isolated efforts would not be sufficient to address the sector's challenges.

She highlighted that improving productivity, enhancing fibre qual-

ity, and increasing farmer incomes must go hand in hand. According to her, a unified strategy involving all stakeholders is essential to achieve sustainable growth in the sector.

The Chintan Shivir featured four thematic sessions, each focusing on critical dimensions of the cotton value chain. These sessions provided a structured platform for in-depth discussions and knowledge exchange.

The first session, titled “Prosperous Farmers – Doubling Productivity, Doubling Income,” explored strategies such as soil-based crop planning and High Density Planting Systems (HDPS). It also highlighted the role of farm mechanization in improving efficiency and reducing labour costs.

In addition, the session discussed the use of AI-based pest monitoring systems and strengthened digital advisory platforms. These technological interventions are expected to help farmers make informed decisions and minimize crop losses.

The second session focused on “Precision Ginning and Quality Assurance,” emphasizing the adoption of modern ginning technologies. Discussions also covered contamination control measures and improved fibre testing systems to ensure high-quality output.

Participants highlighted the importance of robust traceability mechanisms, which can enhance transparency and boost the credibility of Indian cotton in global markets.

Nashik SIT Intensifies Probe in 'Godman' Kharat Case; Focus on Fear-Free Environment for Victims

Nashik: A Special Investigation Team (SIT) led by senior IPS officer Tejaswi Satpute has stepped up its probe into the high-profile case against self-styled godman Ashok Kharat, who faces serious allegations of sexual exploitation and large-scale financial fraud.

The SIT, constituted by the state government, is being headed by Satpute, currently serving as Commandant of the State Reserve Police Force (SRPF) in Pune. Known for handling sensitive investigations, she arrived in Nashik on March 19 to take charge of a 12-member team tasked with conducting a comprehensive inquiry.

On March 21, the SIT carried out an extensive seven-hour interrogation of Kharat. During the session, he was confronted with his



alleged accomplice Neeraj Jadhav as part of a detailed cross-examination process.

Search operations at Kharat's farmhouse and residence led to the seizure of crucial evidence, including 58 objectionable videos, two laptops, an illegal

firearm with live cartridges, and rupee 8 lakh in cash. Officials said the digital material has been sent for cyber forensic analysis to strengthen the case.

Preliminary financial investigations indicate that Kharat allegedly amassed

assets worth between Rs.1,500 crore and 2,000 crore.

These include more than 52 land holdings across Nashik, Ahilyanagar, and Shirdi. Authorities have initiated proceedings to attach and seize these proper-

ties as part of the ongoing probe.

Kharat has been booked under provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) for rape and sexual exploitation, along with charges under the Maharashtra Anti-Superstition and Black Magic Act.

Officials said the SIT's strategy—often referred to as the "Satpute pattern"—places strong emphasis on creating a fear-free environment for victims. Measures have been taken to ensure strict confidentiality and protect the identity and dignity of complainants, encouraging more survivors to come forward.

The investigation is ongoing, with officials indicating that further revelations are likely as forensic analysis and financial tracking progress.

Satara ZP election row: Stopping voters is an attack on democracy, says Eknath Shinde

Mumbai: Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde has said the episode of some Satara Zilla Parishad members being obstructed from voting in the recent presidential election there was unprecedented in the electoral history of the state and amounted to "the killing of democracy".

Raising the issue during the state Assembly's budget session on Monday, Shinde said the incident has raised serious questions over democratic values. He pointed out that any interference in the voting process undermines the very foundation of a fair electoral system.

He informed the House that ahead of the election, Shiv Sena minister Shambhuraj Desai and NCP MLA Makrand Patil had alerted him that cases were suddenly registered against two voters, creating apprehension that the electoral process could be influenced.



Shinde had then expressed suspicion that such actions might have been intended to affect the outcome of the election. He had immediately contacted Satara Superintendent of Police Tushar Joshi and gave clear instructions that no voter should be stopped until the voting process was completed. However, despite these directions, two voters were taken into custody, raising serious doubts about the transparency of the entire election process.

Condemning the incident, the Deputy Chief Minister reiterated that such prevention of voting went against the basic spirit of democracy. He asserted that depriving voters of their right to vote under any circumstances would not be tolerated. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis assured the Assembly that a thorough investigation would be conducted into the matter and strict action would be taken against those found guilty.

Satara ZP Poll Row Reaches Council: SP Suspension Ordered, Probe Announced

Mumbai: The controversy surrounding the Satara Zilla Parishad (ZP) President election echoed in the Maharashtra Legislative Council on Monday, with Deputy Chairperson Neelam Gorhe directing the immediate suspension of Satara Superintendent of Police Tushar Doshi and ordering a detailed probe into the incident.

The election, marked by high drama and clashes between ruling and opposition members, has intensified the political atmosphere in the state. The Pune Divisional Commissioner has been tasked with conducting a comprehensive inquiry into the sequence of events, particularly scrutinising the role

of the police administration.

Raising the issue in the Council, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde alleged serious irregularities during the polling process. He claimed that cases from previous years were registered against two voters a day before the election to prevent them from casting their votes. Shinde said he had personally instructed the police, including the Director General, to allow voting to proceed unhindered and to investigate any complaints only after the process was completed.

He further alleged that even senior leaders, including Minister Shambhuraj Desai, were stopped at the Zilla Parishad entrance, with

police allegedly disregarding established protocols for public representatives. Calling the incident "unprecedented," Shinde said preventing voters in such a manner had no precedent in Maharashtra's political history. The BJP, meanwhile, managed to secure the ZP President post amid allegations from the opposition of misuse of administrative machinery. Responding to the developments, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis termed the allegations "serious" and assured the House that a thorough and impartial inquiry would be conducted.

He said strict action would be taken against those found guilty based on the probe findings.

BJP hits back at Sanjay Raut over Godman case, questions Thackeray's role

Mumbai: A political storm intensified in Maharashtra on Monday as the BJP mounted a sharp counterattack against Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut over the alleged "godman" case, with the party questioning whether former chief minister Uddhav Thackeray should also be treated as a co-accused.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP state office, party chief spokesperson Navnath Ban accused Raut of applying "selective logic" by demanding that nine ministers from the ruling Mahayuti government be named co-accused based solely on their photographs with the controversial figure.

"If that is the standard, should Uddhav Thacker-

ay also be made a co-accused?" Ban asked, asserting that the same yardstick must apply to all.

Ban alleged that the activities of the godman date back to 2003, but successive governments, including those led by the Congress and the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), failed to act. He further claimed that during Thackeray's tenure as Chief Minister, the MVA government had indirectly supported the godman's ashram.

He credited Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis for taking strict action against the godman. Ban also pointed out that Raut had praised Fadnis just days ago but is now accusing him of politicizing the issue, calling it contradictory.



Ban accused Raut of indulging in "petty politics" by making baseless allegations and said that anyone found supporting the godman's illegal activities would face strict action after investigation under the current government.

Ban further claimed that dissatisfaction among MPs in the opposition, particularly within the Uddhav

Thackeray faction, stems not from lack of funds but from Thackeray's leadership style.

He alleged that Thackeray and his son Aaditya Thackeray rarely meet party representatives or tour constituencies, leading to growing resentment.

The BJP leader also hinted at an internal rift, stating that despite being

invited to the Delhi launch of Raut's book, Thackeray chose to skip the event. According to Ban, this indicates a growing conflict between Raut and the Thackeray leadership, which could intensify in the coming days.

Ban went on to criticize Thackeray's tenure as both Chief Minister and MLC, calling him ineffective and claiming he failed to raise or address key issues concerning Maharashtra. He also recalled past remarks by Sharad Pawar, who had allegedly mocked Thackeray's limited presence at the state secretariat.

The political war of words over the godman case continues to escalate, with both sides trading sharp accusations.

Minister Allegedly Assaulted by Police: Heated Clash in Maha Legislative Council Over Satara ZP Row

Mumbai: A political storm erupted in the Maharashtra Legislative Council on Monday after Shiv Sena (Uddhav Thackeray faction) leader Anil Parab alleged that a minister was assaulted by police during the Satara Zilla Parishad President election chaos last week.

Raising the issue, Parab questioned the government's ability to ensure public safety.

He remarked that if a minister could be beaten by police, it raises serious concerns about the security of ordinary citizens. He also took a swipe at ruling alliance leaders, accusing them of avoiding naming the BJP and compromising their self-respect for power.

Parab further targeted the Shinde-led Shiv Sena, daring its leaders to step out of power if they truly stood for self-respect.

He criticized the silence of ministers during the incident and alleged that both Shiv Sena and NCP ministers were



assaulted, yet were now seeking protection within the House.

Responding to the attack, Minister Uday Samant hit back, recalling past statements made during the Shiv Sena rebellion and accusing Parab of hypocrisy. The exchange quickly escalated into a war of words, reflecting deep divisions within the state's political landscape.

Minister Shambhuraj Desai also addressed the House, terming the inci-

dent unprecedented in his four-decade political career. He alleged that despite having a majority in the Satara Zilla Parishad, their members were obstructed, cases were filed against them, and arrests made just before entering the polling hall.

Desai claimed he was physically stopped by police just feet away from the venue and suffered injuries, adding that even blood stains were visible on their clothes.

Parab also demanded a detailed discussion on the alleged "godman" controversy and called for a thorough probe before the end of the session. The government assured that an official statement would be made on the matter.

The incident, which occurred on March 18, has intensified tensions within the ruling alliance and friction with the Opposition, raising serious questions about law enforcement and political stability in Maharashtra.

Satara ZP Poll Row a 'Warning Bell' for Allies, Says Rohini Khadse

Mumbai: Rohini Khadse, Maharashtra State Women's Chief of the Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar faction), on Monday termed the chaos during the Satara Zilla Parishad president's election as a "warning bell" for ruling alliance partners.

Speaking to reporters, she said the developments surrounding the election should serve as a lesson for the parties currently in power in the state.

Khadse pointed out that despite a pre-poll alliance between the Nationalist Congress Party (Ajit Pawar faction) and the Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde faction),

which together had 35 members compared to the Bharatiya Janata Party's 27, the president's post eventually went to the BJP.

She alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party made aggressive efforts to secure the position, raising concerns over the methods used during the election process.

According to Khadse, administrative and police machinery were allegedly deployed to track rival members, which she described as an example of undue pressure being exerted.

She further claimed that members of the alliance were kept at undisclosed locations for nearly a month as

a precautionary measure to prevent poaching.

In a serious allegation, she said that relatives of some members were allegedly pressured to file missing complaints, adding to the tension surrounding the election. Describing the events on the day of voting, Khadse said senior leaders like Shambhuraj Desai and Makrand Patil faced significant challenges in ensuring that their party members reached the polling venue.

She claimed that Desai sustained injuries during the chaos, while Patil was surrounded by police personnel, highlighting the intensity of the situation.

Khadse accused the ruling party of using its influence across levels—from local bodies to the national stage—to secure even a Zilla Parishad president's post.

Calling the incident a sign of what lies ahead, she described it as a "teaser" for the 2029 Maharashtra Assembly elections. She urged alliance partners to reflect on the situation and decide their future course of action, questioning whether they would resist such pressures or concede. Alluding to lines from poet Piyush Mishra, Khadse invoked a broader message about courage and resistance, framing the episode as a test of political resolve.

"Untold Marches" Offers a Realistic Glimpse into Military Life: Sumit Malik

Pune: The book Untold Marches: Journeys Between Service and Self, authored by retired Colonel Nandkishor Kulkarni, offers a vivid portrayal of military life through the lens of an experienced soldier, said retired IAS officer Sumit Malik.

The book was officially released at a held at the Poona Club, drawing the presence of several distinguished guests from the armed forces and literary circles. Among those in attendance were V. P. Singh, Vikrant Srivastava, and publisher Venkatesh Kalyankar, who shared their perspectives on the book and its significance. Speaking at the launch, Sumit Malik underscored that the book is not a work of self-glorification but rather a thoughtful exploration of human experiences and emotions. He highlighted that the narratives reflect multiple shades of human nature, enriched by the author's keen observation skills and deep understanding of life in the armed forces.

The book captures a wide range of experiences, from bustling urban settings in Vietnam to serene tiger reserves in Maharashtra, presenting them in an engaging and relatable manner.

Sharing his journey as a writer, Nandkishor Kulkarni credited inspiration from Sumit Malik for helping him transform his life experiences into meaningful stories.

He said the book is a collection of memories, observations, and experiences drawn from his service in the armed forces as well as his travels. Nandkishor Kulkarni announced that the proceeds from his book Untold Marches: Journeys Between Service and Self will be donated to the Anish Jadhav Memorial Foundation, underlining his commitment to contributing to meaningful social initiatives. This gesture reflects the author's intent to extend the impact of his literary work beyond storytelling, channeling its success toward supporting community welfare and charitable causes.

The announcement was met with appreciation from

attendees, who lauded the decision as a thoughtful way to give back to society while honouring the spirit behind the foundation's work.

During the event, V. P. Singh shared his reflections on the book, highlighting its authenticity and the realistic depiction of military life that resonates with both defence personnel and civilians.

Similarly, Vikrant Srivastava praised the depth of the narratives, noting that the book successfully captures the emotional and experiential aspects of a soldier's journey. Both speakers emphasized that the book stands out for its honest storytelling and the way it brings out the human side of life in the armed forces. Publisher Venkatesh Kalyankar remarked that the work goes far beyond recounting the experiences of a soldier, offering readers a deeper understanding of the author's beliefs, values, and life lessons. He added that the narrative seamlessly blends personal experiences with broader reflections, making it relatable and engaging for a wide audience.

Race Heats Up for Pune Zilla Parishad Committee Chairposts; Milind Walunj Emerges as Frontrunner

Pune: After the election of the President and Vice President of the Pune Zilla Parishad, focus has now shifted to the crucial selection of subject committee chairpersons. With leadership positions already filled, discussions are intensifying over maintaining regional balance in the next round of appointments.

Following the appointment of Virbhawal Jagdale as President and Vivek Walase-Patil as Vice Pres-

ident, there is a growing possibility that areas like Mulshi and Maval talukas may receive representation in the committee chairperson posts. In this context, young member and architect Milind Walunj from the Paud group has emerged as a leading contender.

The Zilla Parishad is currently dominated by the Ajit Pawar-led faction of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), and strong lobbying has begun for key commit-

tees such as Public Works, Social Welfare, Women and Child Development, and Agriculture and Animal Husbandry.

These committees are considered vital for rural development, and with senior leaders occupying the top posts, there is a strong likelihood that younger faces will be given opportunities at the committee level. Alongside Walunj, names like Santosh Raut, Tushar Thorat, and Amol Nalawade are also being

discussed.

Milind Walunj, an architecture graduate by profession, is seen as a technically sound and dynamic candidate. His background in infrastructure planning and construction, combined with social engagement and a cultural connection to the Warkari tradition, is being viewed as a strong advantage.

Party workers believe that his appointment could accelerate pending infrastructure projects, particular-

ly in roads and public buildings, by bringing technical expertise into governance.

There is also a growing sentiment within party ranks to promote educated and capable youth leaders to strengthen grassroots support.

With the NCP traditionally emphasizing opportunities for young and competent leaders, all eyes are now on the party leadership to see who will be entrusted with these key positions in the coming days.

Some villagers alleged that there were attempts to intimidate locals during certain land dealings, creating an atmosphere of fear among residents. The allegations have sparked concern in the local community, with many calling for a thorough investigation into the matter.

They further stated that his associate, Deepak Londhe, was frequently seen accompanying him during these visits.

Some villagers alleged that there were attempts to intimidate locals during certain land dealings, creating an atmosphere of fear among residents. The allegations have sparked concern in the local community, with many calling for a thorough investigation into the matter.

Son Goes Missing After Land Deal with Self-Styled Godman Ashok Kharat; Serious Allegations Surface

Ahilyanagar: A serious allegation has surfaced against self-styled godman Ashok Kharat, with a farmer claiming that his son went missing shortly after a land transaction involving the accused.

Shivaji Dhage, a resident of the Pathardi area, stated that his son has been untraceable since the day he sold land to Kharat, raising concerns over the circumstances surrounding the deal.

According to Dhage, the disappearance occurred soon after the land sale was completed, and despite efforts, there has been no trace of his son since then.

He further alleged that several farmers in the region have sold land to Ashok Kharat but have not received full payment, leaving many families facing financial hardship.

Dhage expressed suspicion that something unusual may have influ-

enced his son's actions, though he admitted that the exact reason behind the disappearance remains unclear.

Local residents in the Pathardi area claimed that Kharat owns land worth crores in the region, much of which has been fenced off.

Villagers also alleged that Kharat would visit the property only on specific occasions such as new moon and full moon days, adding to the mystery surrounding his activities.

They further stated that his associate, Deepak Londhe, was frequently seen accompanying him during these visits.

Some villagers alleged that there were attempts to intimidate locals during certain land dealings, creating an atmosphere of fear among residents. The allegations have sparked concern in the local community, with many calling for a thorough investigation into the matter.

There is a particular weight that comes with delivering a finale: Vin Diesel on 'Fast & Furious'

Mumbai : Vin Diesel has reflected on the legacy of the long-running Fast & Furious series, emphasizing the responsibility of delivering a meaningful conclusion as the saga gears up for its final instalment, scheduled for release on March 17, 2028.

In an emotional post shared on Instagram, Diesel looked back on the journey of the blockbuster franchise, highlighting the collective effort that has sustained it over the years.

He also shared a picture with screenwriter Michael Lesslie, confirming his addition to the creative team for the concluding chapter of the series.

Diesel hinted that the story will come full circle, revealing that the final instalment will return to the place "where it all began," underscoring the importance of ending the saga on a fitting note.

Reflecting on the franchise's journey, Vin Diesel wrote about the 25-year legacy of the series, which has involved multiple directors, writers, crew members, and performers contributing to its success.

He credited the longevity of the franchise to the dedication and passion of everyone involved, stating that

such enduring success is the result of collective commitment rather than chance.

Diesel expressed confidence in the final chapter, noting that discussions with



Michael Lesslie about the script have brought renewed excitement and depth to the project.

He described the upcoming film as having "something real beating inside it," suggesting a strong emotional core to complement its action-packed narrative. The Fast & Furious series originally began as a story centered on illegal street racing in Los Angeles but gradually evolved into a global action saga.

Over the years, it has expanded into a high-stakes narrative involving espionage, international missions, and confrontations with powerful criminal organisations. The films are known for their large-scale action sequences, ambitious stunts,

and themes of family and loyalty, which have resonated with audiences worldwide.

Beyond the franchise, Diesel also drew parallels with his upcoming project Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots, being developed in collaboration with Mattel Studios.

He noted that both projects share a common thread of collaborative storytelling and creative partnerships, which he believes are key to building compelling narratives.

The final instalment of the Fast & Furious saga is expected to bring closure to long-running character arcs and storylines developed across multiple films.

Fans are anticipating an emotional and action-packed conclusion that honours the legacy of the franchise while tying together its many narrative threads.

With its planned return to the roots of the story and the addition of fresh creative input, the concluding chapter aims to deliver a memorable finale. As the countdown to 2028 begins, Vin Diesel and his team are focused on crafting an ending that lives up to the expectations of a global audience and does justice to one of cinema's most enduring franchises.

Neutrality by itself is also prejudice: Film director Srijit Mukherji

Mumbai : Leading Bengali director-screenwriter Srijit Mukherji, who has bagged five National Film Awards to date, says the idea of neutrality in art is often misleading, arguing that avoiding a position can itself amount to prejudice.

Interacting with UNI, Mukherji said he has never approached filmmaking with the intention of appearing politically neutral. "Neutrality by itself is also prejudice," he said, explaining that each project demands its own ethical and narrative response.

The 48-year-old engaging conversationalist, born and brought up in south Kolkata's cosmopolitan Bhowanipore, said he took a clear stand in "Gumnaami", which deals with the mystery surrounding revolutionary leader Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's disappearance.

"My stand was based on the hearings of the Mukherjee Commission (constituted in 1999 to probe Netaji's disappearance) and the book 'Conundrum' after one theory emerged that seemed logically compelling," he said.

In contrast, the ending was deliberately kept open-ended in one of his latest films, "Lawho Gouranger Naam Re", which explores the life of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, a leading figure of the Bhakti movement and founder of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. "That's because the evidence seemed inconclusive to me. You see, each



film demands its own approach," he said.

Responding to criticism about the portrayal of women in his films, such as "Rajkahini" (Tale of Kings), which delves into the tumultuous lives of 11 women in a brothel during the partition of August 1947, Mukherji said he does not engage directly with such debates.

He has a similar take on the grimaces related to the allegedly "frivolous" portrayal of the female characters in "Mishawr Rawhoshyo" (The Mysteries of Egypt), which follows the story of disabled sleuth Kakababu or Raja Roychowdhury and his nephew Shontu in the mystic land of the Pharaohs. "My job is to tell stories, exactly those stories I want to tell, on my own terms. That's all that I do. I make films and responses should come from film critics, film buffs,

and audiences," said Mukherji, adding that his stories feature characters shaped by varying degrees of strength, vulnerability and historical circumstance. Queried about how he dealt with social media pressure, the director explained, "I try to keep myself insulated from social media. In this sense, social media, for me, is a platform to communicate, on my page, my professional stuff and my profile, my personal feelings. So I just shut out all negativity." Mukherji dismisses the notion that he gives shape to his creative choices with an eye on the box office. Rather, he claims to have never tailored his films to market expectations and has always pursued stories and genres of his own choosing. At this point, Mukherji is excited about his upcoming Indo-British project "Elementary, My Dear Holmes," that dissects

the life beyond fiction of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of the ever-green sleuth Sherlock Holmes, focusing on his use of deductive logic in real-world battles against injustice. "So this film is a part biopic, part courtroom drama which deals with that. I'm obviously very excited."

Culturally versatile, one who has also written and directed plays, acted in both stage and screen, and penned lyrics, Mukherji shot to fame with his first film as director, "Autograph" (2010), which received both box office success and critical acclaim. Among his other memorable films are "Chotushkon" (which had three other directors), "Baishe Sraban", "Jaatishwar" and "Ek Je Chhilo Raja".

Looking back on his career, Mukherji advised young filmmakers to trust their instincts. "Go with your heart, just follow your heart. Tell your stories exactly the way you want to tell them, because that is you. Don't attain greed for a larger audience, change your signature, or do things which you wouldn't like to do or tell stories you wouldn't like to tell." Mukherji, who has completed his MA and MPhil in Environmental Economics from the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru University, said he stands by all his past work. "But if given a chance, I would like to make 'Rajkahini' and 'Zulfikar', which revolves around the Syndicate and underworld of Kolkata, as web series."



Sanya Malhotra: "It pushes me into an unexplored space as an actor"

Mumbai : Sanya Malhotra is set to headline the upcoming romantic thriller Sundar Poonam, a project that promises to showcase her in a never-seen-before avatar. Backed by Abundantia Entertainment and announced at the 'Prime Video Presents' event, the film marks Sanya's reunion with the studio after their successful collaboration on Shakuntala Devi. Opening up about the film, Sanya highlighted the emotional depth and complexity of her role, calling it one of the most demanding performances of her career. "Sundar Poonam is an incredibly exciting film for me as it brings me face-to-face with one of the most challenging roles I've taken on so far. It pushes me into an unexplored space as an actor. The character is layered, intense, and emotionally demanding, which instantly drew me in. Collaborating with Vikram and Abundantia Entertainment has always been incredibly fulfilling, and after Shakuntala Devi, I'm excited to begin a new chapter with them and Prime Video. Pulkit is an exceptionally talented director, and his sensitivity towards storytelling adds so much depth to the narrative. I'm looking forward to starting this journey and sharing a new side of myself with the audience."

Sharing insights into the film's vision, Vikram Malhotra, Founder and CEO of Abundantia Entertainment, emphasised the studio's ongoing collaboration with Prime Video and their focus on distinctive storytelling. "Our partnership with Prime Video has consistently enabled us to tell stories that are distinctive, disruptive, and resonate with a wide audience. With Sundar Poonam, we are further strengthening this partnership by bringing a gripping romantic thriller that features Sanya Malhotra, one of my favourite actors, in a never-seen-before avatar.

Inspired by chilling true events, the story is both compelling and entertaining, and I am excited to collaborate with Pulkit, whose work I have deeply admired, to bring this brilliant story to life."

Sundar Poonam will be shot across visually contrasting landscapes, ranging from the snow-capped terrains of Kashmir to the deserts of Rajasthan, adding scale and texture to its narrative. The film also features Aditya Rawal, who has recently gained attention for his performances in Daldal and Subedaar, both backed by Abundantia, along with Aditya Seal in a key role. Directed by Pulkit, the project is inspired by true incidents and is expected to blend romance with a gripping, suspense-driven narrative. Written by Jyotsana Nath and Pulkit, the film is produced by Kumar Taurani and Vikram Malhotra under Tips Films Limited and Abundantia Entertainment.

With a strong creative team and a performance-driven narrative at its core, Sundar Poonam is shaping up to be one of the most intriguing additions to the upcoming slate of streaming releases.

Filmmaker B. Unnikrishnan clears the air on the story of 'Prathichaya'

Mumbai : B. Unnikrishnan has revealed that his upcoming Malayalam film Prathichaya, starring Nivin Pauly, will primarily explore the emotional relationship between a father and son, with politics serving only as a narrative backdrop.

The director, known for films like Grandmaster and Pramani, emphasized that the project goes beyond the framework of a conventional political thriller.

According to B. Unnikrishnan, the story is rooted in human emotions and focuses on the bond between a son and his father, who is portrayed as an influential political figure.

He explained that the protagonist is a devoted son who deeply admires his father, and the film examines how their relationship evolves amid power struggles and political circumstances.

"The central theme of the film is the dynamics of their relationship. All I've done is put them in the context of politics and power struggles," he said, underlining the emotional core of the narrative. The filmmaker also

penned the screenplay himself, ensuring that the storytelling remains closely aligned with his vision of blending personal relationships with a larger socio-political setting.



Prathichaya marks the first collaboration between B. Unnikrishnan and Nivin Pauly, a pairing that has generated considerable interest among Malayalam cinema audiences.

Unnikrishnan praised Pauly for his performance, describing it as nuanced and spontaneous, suggesting that the actor brings emotional depth to the character.

The film features a strong supporting cast, including Balachandra Menon, Sharaf

U Dheen, Harisree Ashokan, and Vishnu Agasthya in key roles.

Their presence is expected to add layers to the narrative, contributing to both the emotional and dramatic elements of the story.

The film is being produced by Sree Gokulam Movies in association with RD Illuminations LLP. With its blend of emotional storytelling and political context, Prathichaya is shaping up to be a character-driven drama rather than a typical political thriller. The project is likely to appeal to audiences looking for narratives that explore personal relationships within larger societal frameworks.

Siddhant Chaturvedi shows off his swag at Lakme Fashion Week

Mumbai : Bollywood actor Siddhant Chaturvedi turned his ramp walk into a memorable moment at the Lakme Fashion Week with his effortless swag, cool demeanor and impressive stage presence.

Walking the runway with his signature ease, Chaturvedi commanded at-

tention from the moment he stepped on stage. But what made the moment special was his walk on a track he composed himself, which added a personal, slightly rebellious touch to the entire show.

With each step, the actor displayed rhythm and attitude, turning the runway

into an energetic performance space.

The ramp also displayed attitude, rhythm, and the raw energy that sets them apart from the crowd. It wasn't just fashion, it was a whole vibe.

Donning a bold and contemporary outfit, Siddhant not only exuded style

but also a stunning presence, a look that was effortless, confident and completely cool.

Siddhant, with his powerful acting, is continually pushing the boundaries of fashion, music, and performance, and his evergreen style at Lakme Fashion Week has shown this.

Sreeleela on co-star Kartik Aaryan, "Holistically, he's very sorted and smart person"

Mumbai : Sreeleela is set to collaborate with Kartik Aaryan in an upcoming untitled romantic film directed by Anurag Basu. The project will mark the first on-screen pairing of the two actors and is already generating significant buzz among audiences.

The film, which is currently in development, is expected to be a major romantic release, although further details regarding its storyline and release schedule are yet to be officially announced. Speaking about her co-star in a recent interview on the show Honest Townhall, Sreeleela expressed admiration for Kartik Aaryan's personality and career journey.

"I think holistically, he's a very sorted and smart person. I have lots of respect for his body of work and his journey till now," she said, acknowledging his growth and achievements in the film industry. She further added that there is much to learn from Kartik Aaryan and expressed excitement about working together on the project. "There's a lot to learn from him and I am looking forward to shoot with him," said Sreeleela. The collaboration is being helmed by Anurag Basu, who is known for his distinctive storytelling style and emotionally rich narratives, a factor that has significantly heightened expectations from the film. The untitled project has already emerged as one of the most anticipated films of 2026, with audiences eagerly waiting to witness the fresh on-screen pairing of Sreeleela and Kartik Aaryan. This film will also mark the Bollywood debut of Sreeleela,

making it a crucial milestone in her career as she transitions into the Hindi film industry.

Despite being new to Bollywood, she has already gained recognition among Hindi audiences through her appearance in the song "Kissik" from Pushpa 2: The Rule.

The film Pushpa 2: The Rule, starring Allu Arjun, continued the narrative of its predecessor Pushpa: The Rise and achieved massive commercial success.

This success further enhanced Sreeleela's visibility and helped her establish a growing fan base among Hindi-speaking audiences.

Meanwhile, Kartik Aaryan was last seen in the romantic comedy Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri, where he starred opposite Ananya Pandey. His recent projects and consistent performances have contributed to his strong presence in the Hindi film industry. With a fresh pairing, an acclaimed director, and increasing anticipation, the upcoming film is expected to draw considerable attention from audiences and industry observers alike. The collaboration brings together emerging and established talent, adding to the excitement surrounding the project.

tion for Kartik Aaryan's personality and career journey.

"I think holistically, he's a very sorted and smart person. I have lots of respect for his body of work and his journey till now," she said, acknowledging his growth and achievements in the film industry. She further added that there is much to learn from Kartik Aaryan and expressed excitement about working together on the project. "There's a lot to learn from him and I am looking forward to shoot with him," said Sreeleela. The collaboration is being helmed by Anurag Basu, who is known for his distinctive storytelling style and emotionally rich narratives, a factor that has significantly heightened expectations from the film. The untitled project has already emerged as one of the most anticipated films of 2026, with audiences eagerly waiting to witness the fresh on-screen pairing of Sreeleela and Kartik Aaryan. This film will also mark the Bollywood debut of Sreeleela,

making it a crucial milestone in her career as she transitions into the Hindi film industry.

Despite being new to Bollywood, she has already gained recognition among Hindi audiences through her appearance in the song "Kissik" from Pushpa 2: The Rule.

The film Pushpa 2: The Rule, starring Allu Arjun, continued the narrative of its predecessor Pushpa: The Rise and achieved massive commercial success.

This success further enhanced Sreeleela's visibility and helped her establish a growing fan base among Hindi-speaking audiences. Meanwhile, Kartik Aaryan was last seen in the romantic comedy Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri, where he starred opposite Ananya Pandey. His recent projects and consistent performances have contributed to his strong presence in the Hindi film industry. With a fresh pairing, an acclaimed director, and increasing anticipation, the upcoming film is expected to draw considerable attention from audiences and industry observers alike. The collaboration brings together emerging and established talent, adding to the excitement surrounding the project.

Karan Johar calls out "clickbait headlines" after talent loyalty remarks linked to Janhvi Kapoor

Mumbai : Karan Johar has responded to what he described as "clickbait headlines" after his remarks on talent management and actor loyalty sparked widespread discussion online.

The clarification comes in the wake of a podcast conversation with content creator Sarthak Ahuja earlier this year, where Johar spoke candidly about the challenges associated with managing talent in the film industry.

During the interview, Karan Johar described talent management as a "thankless job," pointing to the complexities and pressures involved in nurturing and sustaining artists' careers.

He highlighted how actors often move between agencies, leading to a lack of long-term loyalty despite years of effort invested in building their careers.

Without naming any individuals, Johar also spoke about how agencies

dedicate time, resources, and strategic planning to shape talent, only to see some artists eventually change their representation.

His remarks quickly gained traction online, triggering speculation and debate among fans and industry observers.

Some social media users linked his comments to Janhvi Kapoor's recent move from Dharma Cornerstone Agency Company to Collective Artists Network.

However, Johar had not mentioned any specific actor during the conversation, and his comments were intended as a broader observation about industry dynamics.

Addressing the reactions, he clarified that his statements were being taken out of context and amplified through sensational headlines.

On the professional front, Karan Johar was last associated with the production of Tu Meri Main Tera Main

Tera Tu Meri, starring Kartik Aaryan and Ananya Pandey.

The film received a modest response at the box office, though it continued to keep Johar active in the production space.

He is currently backing several upcoming projects, including Chand Mera Dil, featuring Lakshya Lalwani and Ananya Pandey.

Another major project in his lineup is Naagzilla, which stars Kartik Aaryan in the lead role.

Meanwhile, Janhvi Kapoor is set to appear next in Peddi alongside Ram Charan.

The film is scheduled for release on April 30, 2026, and is expected to be a significant addition to her filmography.

Despite the online buzz, Johar's clarification underscores that his remarks were aimed at highlighting broader industry challenges rather than targeting any individual.



Kohli relives 18-year journey as RCB end title drought in IPL

Bengaluru: "The whole journey for 18 years flashed before my eyes," said Virat Kohli, capturing the emotional peak of Royal Challengers Bengaluru's long-awaited maiden title triumph in the Indian Premier League.

For Kohli, who has been with the franchise since its inception, the victory was more than just a trophy — it was the culmination of nearly two decades of persistence, heartbreak, and unwavering loyalty.

Reflecting on the final moments after the win over Punjab Kings, Kohli said the magnitude of the occasion was difficult to put into words as years of memories came rushing back all at once.

"All in all, it was an amazing night for all of us. It was quite surreal for me honestly, quite unbelievable when it was all unfolding in the end. So many things flashed in front of your eyes — the whole journey for 18 years. All the ups and downs, all the good moments, bad moments,"



he said. The veteran batsman highlighted that the triumph carried special meaning for those who had been part of the RCB setup from the very beginning, recalling his long association with the franchise alongside support staff members like Ramesh Mane. "It was a very special night for all of us at RCB. I have been here

since day one and so has Ramesh Mane. We are probably the oldest members of the RCB group," he noted.

Kohli revealed that despite the enormity of the occasion, the team entered the final with a sense of composure, built on consistent performances throughout the season.

"When we reached the

finals, I felt a sense of calm confidence. But you also understand it's not going to be a cakewalk. It's a Final and there is another team who has played really well to get there," he said, acknowledging the challenge posed by Punjab. He added that the scars of past near misses in the league played a crucial role in shaping the

team's mindset, helping them stay focused under pressure.

"Given the history of the near misses and the almost moments of the past where we reached the finals and we could not win, I think that gave us extra motivation to hold our nerve," Kohli said, stressing that the team had earned its place through strong performances against top sides. As the match drew to a close, Kohli admitted the final over tested his nerves despite the result appearing certain.

"Especially the last over where you know the game is sealed. Hoping that Josh doesn't bowl a no ball which he never does. There was quite confidence but still you are hoping for the perfect result," he said, adding that waiting for the final few deliveries was "probably the toughest part of the night. For Kohli and RCB, the victory was not just about winning a title, but about finally completing a journey that had defined a generation of players and fans alike.

Pakistan opener Sahibzada Farhan named ICC Men's player of month for February

Dubai: Sahibzada Farhan has been named the ICC Men's Player of the Month for February 2026 following a remarkable campaign in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 held in Sri Lanka.

The Pakistan opener emerged as the highest run-getter of the tournament, amassing 383 runs in seven matches (six innings) at an impressive average of 76.60. His outstanding tally included two centuries and two half-centuries, underlining his consistency at the top of the order.

Farhan's aggressive batting approach was a key highlight of his performance, as he maintained a striking rate of 160.25 throughout the tournament. His ability to dominate bowlers across conditions made him one of the standout performers of the event. In the process, he surpassed a longstanding record held by Virat Kohli for the most runs scored in a single edition of the T20 World Cup, marking a significant milestone in his career. This is the first time Farhan has received the ICC Player of the Month award, making him the first Pakistani male cricketer to win the honour since Haris Rauf in November 2024.



Reacting to the achievement, Farhan expressed immense and gratitude, calling it an "incredible feeling" to be recognized on the global stage. He emphasized that performing in a World Cup, where fans from around the world are watching, made the award even more special.

He described the tournament as one he would always cherish and said he is determined to carry forward the momentum into future series and competitions. Farhan also credited his teammates for their constant support and belief. The opener also etched his name in the record books by becoming the first batter to score two centuries in a single T20 World Cup edition, with his hundreds coming against Namibia and Sri Lanka.

His performances propelled him to a career-high

rating in the ICC Men's T20I Batting Rankings, where he climbed to the second position following a brilliant century in Pallekele.

Farhan was also part of a historic partnership with Fakhar Zaman, as the duo put together a record 176-run stand—the highest partnership for any wicket in T20 International history.

Despite his individual brilliance and a narrow five-run victory against the co-hosts, Pakistan failed to qualify for the semi-finals due to an inferior net run rate, a disappointing outcome for the team. Nevertheless, Farhan's consistency and impact earned him a place in the ICC Team of the Tournament. His scores across the seven games—47, 73, 0, 100*, DNB, 63, and 100—highlight his dominance throughout the competition.

East Bengal push for top four spot as Mohammedan SC look for first ISL points

Kolkata: The Indian Super League 2025-26 season continues with a highly anticipated Monday night fixture as East Bengal FC lock horns with local rivals Mohammedan SC in a Kolkata Derby at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan here.

The Red and Gold Brigade currently sit sixth in the table with eight points, but will be looking to bounce back from the frustration of their last three matches.

Despite a highly promising start to the season, they were most recently forced to share the spoils in a 1-1 draw against Kerala Blasters FC, after conceding a 92nd-minute stoppage-time goal.

They will face a Mohammedan Sporting side that is searching for a turning point in their season. The Black and White Brigade, navigating their season in the top flight with an all-Indian squad, currently sit at the bottom of the table without a point after suffering four consecutive defeats.

Mehrajuddin Wadoo's men arrive on the back of a narrow 1-2 away defeat to Bengaluru FC, where

a spirited second-half fightback featuring a 51st-minute strike from Mahitosh Roy was ultimately

not enough to overcome first-half goals from Ryan Williams and Ashique Kuruniyan.

While the two iconic clubs share a century-old rivalry in Indian football, clashing countless times in historic domestic tournaments, their recent battles in the Indian Super League have seen East Bengal hold

the upper hand.

In their two previous ISL meetings, the Red and Gold Brigade have secured a victory and a draw. Their last encounter in February 2025 saw East Bengal claim a commanding 3-1 victory at the VYBK, courtesy of strikes from Naorem Mahesh Singh, Saul Crespo, and David Lalhansanga, which overpowered a lone goal from Mohammedan's Franco.

East Bengal will hope to leverage this recent dominance and their stable form, while Mohammedan SC will look to use the immense emotion of the derby to secure their much-needed first victory of the campaign and avenge their previous defeat.

Speaking ahead of the marquee clash, East Bengal FC head coach Oscar Bruzon addressed the team's recent late setbacks while warning against complacency.

"Probably lack of concentration in the last minutes and in set pieces has made us drop points. But inside the dressing room, inside the team, our determination, our focus, our commitment is there," Bruzon stated.

Refusing to underestimate their local rivals, he added, "Mohammedan will try everything to collect their first point. I have full respect for them." East Bengal goalkeeper Prabhsukhan Gill echoed his coach's unwavering confidence, emphasising the team's overarching ambitions despite recent frustrations. "We have dropped some points, but that doesn't mean that we are not aiming for the top spot still," Gill explained.

Pointing to their strong structural foundation, he noted, "This year in the ISL, we are one of the teams that have scored the most goals and conceded one of the fewest. So we are playing some of the best football this season. It's just a matter of time before results start to come."

For Mohammedan Sporting, the objective is to channel their underdog status into a historic performance.

Head coach Mehrajuddin Wadoo demanded fearlessness from his young Indian contingent.

"We have faced challenges this season, but this is the perfect stage to show our character," Wadoo explained.

"East Bengal are a strong team with experienced players, but in a derby, passion and effort can level the playing field. I want my players to go out there without fear, play with their hearts, and fight for our identity in the ISL. We are looking for points as it is a question of our survival in the top tier of Indian football. We will give our absolute best to keep the club alive in the Indian Super League," he said. Mohammedan Sporting forward Md Fardin Ali Molla highlighted the squad's relentless motivation. "Results haven't gone our way, but the morale inside the dressing room is still strong. We are united as a family. A positive result in a match of this magnitude can change our entire season. We are ready to give our 100 per cent, fight until the final whistle, and bring home our first points of the season," he said.

All-format international Renshaw puts focus on Test recall

Brisbane: Matt Renshaw says returning to the Test team remains his top priority despite having a career-best year in the limited-overs formats.

Renshaw, who turns 30 at the end of the week, became an all-format international over the summer, making his ODI debut against India in October and his T20I debut against Pakistan in January.

Those two events bookended his most productive Big Bash season to date in which he scored 444 runs for the Brisbane Heat which included a century against Perth Scorchers.

However, Renshaw is desperate to add to his 14 matches in the Baggy Green, the most recent of which came during Australia's tour to India in 2023.

"When I was going through what

I wanted to achieve in the preseason ... I wouldn't have told you that I would debut in two different formats," Renshaw said to reporters at the announcement of Australia's 2026-27 schedule at Gold Coast's Burleigh Beach. "It's something (I'll be able to) reminisce now having a bit of a break ... to see how successful that year was." Trying to get back in the Test team is a priority of mine, but anytime you play for Australia is pretty special. And now to have played in the T20 World Cup is pretty awesome. "The tall left-hander was added to Australia's T20 World Cup squad despite having made his international debut only days earlier in Pakistan, but emerged as his side's best performing batter with 37 against Ireland and 65 against Zimbabwe.

Although controversially left out of the XI for the decisive clash with Sri Lanka, which Australia lost, Renshaw's stocks have risen dramatically in one of the few silver linings from a tournament the Aussies would otherwise prefer to forget. He puts his recent success down to a "mindset shift" that he implemented over the pre-season that helped him enjoy his cricket more. And while his mental clarity, combined with a few "little technical changes" have helped the Queensland flourish in white-ball cricket, the flow-on effects have been a net positive for his longer-form game too. "With my one-day cricket specifically, I'm able to manipulate the game a bit more," Renshaw said.

"We're seeing it a little bit more around the world, trying to change the way that bowlers are bowling." In

the past in red-ball cricket, (as the bowlers are locking in for top of off (stump), you've got to try and leave as well as you can. But now, just walking down the wicket changes the angle (and) gets him thinking what you're trying to do." Renshaw, who became the 63rd man to represent Australia in all three formats, says he feels physically and mentally ready to become a full-time all-format player if the selectors give him the nod. He will have a quiet off-season, opting against an overseas T20 deal or another county contract in the UK. Australia's next assignment is yet-to-be-announced back-to-back ODI and T20I tours of Pakistan and Bangladesh in late-May and early-June while the Test team will return to action in August when they host Bangladesh in Darwin and Mackay.

Defending champion Sabalenka into Miami Open last 16

Florida (USA): Aryna Sabalenka's bid to complete the 'Sunshine Double' continued as she swept past Caty McNally to reach the last 16 of the Miami Open.

World number one Sabalenka is aiming to become only the fifth woman to win at Indian Wells and Miami in the same year. Having lifted the first of those titles in California this month, Belarusian Sabalenka extended her winning streak to eight matches with a 6-4 6-2 victory over American McNally. They twice exchanged breaks of serve before Sabalenka broke again to take the opening set, then won

four straight games from 2-2 in the second, according to BBC sport. The defending champion will face China's Zheng Qinwen on Monday. Zheng beat American 15th seed Madison Keys to claim her first win over a top-20 player since having elbow surgery in July. Sabalenka has won seven of her eight meetings with Olympic champion Zheng. Third seed Elena Rybakina cruised into the last 16 with a 6-3 6-4 victory over Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk. Kazakhstan's Rybakina will play Australian qualifier Talia Gibson, who knocked out another seeded player courtesy of a 6-2 6-2

win over 18th seed Iva Jovic.

Gibson, who reached the Indian Wells quarter-finals, beat former world number one Naomi Osaka in the second round in Miami. Fifth-seeded American Jessica Pegula, runner-up to Sabalenka last year, needed only an hour and six minutes to beat Canada's Leylah Fernandez 6-2 6-2. Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko, runner-up in Miami in 2018, fought back to claim a 5-7 6-2 7-5 win over seventh seed Jasmine Paolini of Italy. Ostapenko will next play American world number 45 Hailey Baptiste, who beat Ukrainian ninth seed Elina Svitolina 6-3 7-5.

PSL to start without fans as result of Gulf conflict

Karachi: Pakistan's T20 league will start without crowds and take place at only two venues because of the fuel crisis that has resulted from the US and Israel's war with Iran.

The eight-team PSL is scheduled to take place between March 26 and May 3.

The US and Israel launched strikes on Iran on February 28 and it has triggered [Pakistan] response that has choked off the Strait of Hormuz, which is used to take oil and gas from the Gulf to Asian countries and the rest of the world, according to BBC sport. "The [Pakistan] Prime Minister [Sheh-

baz Sharif] has requested restricted movements of people because of the fuel crisis so we have decided that the PSL (Pakistan Super League) would continue as per the original schedule but without crowds," said Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Mohsin Naqvi.

"All PSL matches will now take place in Lahore and Karachi and we hope the league could be held with crowds but that would be contingent on the crisis in Iran ending." The decision means Faisalabad, Multan, Rawalpindi and Peshawar will miss out on hosting matches.

Hockey India announces nominees for 8th Annual Awards 2025

New Delhi: Hockey India on Monday revealed the nominees for the Hockey India 8th Annual Awards 2025 which will be held on March 27 here.

The awards will recognise outstanding performances and contributions to Indian hockey during the 2025 season.

Among the most prestigious honours of the evening will be the Hockey India Balbir Singh Sr. Award for Player of the Year, presented to the top male and female players.

The awards will also highlight emerging talent through the Hockey India Jugraj Singh Award for Upcoming Player of the Year (Men - Under 21) and the Hockey India Asunta Lakra Award for Upcoming Player of the Year (Women - Under 21).

Excitement across playing positions will be recognised through the Hockey

India Baljit Singh Award for Goalkeeper of the Year, the Hockey India Pargat Singh Award for Defender of the Year, the Hockey India Ajit Pal Singh Award for Midfielder of the Year, and the Hockey India Dhanraj Pillay Award for Forward of the Year. A total of 32 nominees across these eight categories have made the final shortlist.

In addition to these categories, the ceremony will include special recognitions such as the Hockey India President Award for Outstanding Achievement and the Hockey India Jaman Lal Sharma Award for Invaluable Contribution. Officials will also be recognised at the Hockey India Annual Awards through special honours such as the Hockey India President Award for Umpire/Umpire Manager of the Year, the Hockey India President Award for Technical Offi-

cial of the Year, and the Best Member Unit Award. The ceremony will further celebrate team achievements, including the gold medal-winning Indian Men's Hockey Team from the Asia Cup Rajgir 2025 held in Rajgir, as well as the bronze medal-winning Indian Junior Men's Hockey Team from the FIH Hockey Men's Junior World Cup Tamil Nadu 2025.

In addition, member units will be acknowledged for their outstanding performances in the 15th Hockey India National Championships, highlighting grassroots and state-level contributions to the sport. Dilip Tirkey, President of Hockey India, emphasised the importance of recognising excellence as Indian hockey enters a crucial phase. He noted that the awards serve as a platform to honour players and officials who have consistently



raised the bar in the sport. He added that the annual awards reflect the dedication, discipline, and achievements of individuals who continue to contribute to the growth and success of Indian hockey, and expressed optimism about the sport's progress.

Bhola Nath Singh, Secretary General of Hockey India, highlighted that the awards acknowledge the collective efforts of players, coaches, officials, and

member units. He stated that their commitment has played a significant role in strengthening the hockey ecosystem in India and expressed enthusiasm about bringing the hockey fraternity together to celebrate these accomplishments.

The nominees for the Hockey India 8th Annual Awards 2025 span multiple categories, showcasing top performers across positions and age groups.

For the Hockey India Baljit Singh Award for Goalkeeper of the Year 2025, nominees include Prince Deep Singh, Krishan Bahadur Pathak, Bichu Devi Khariabam, and Suraj Karkera.

In the Hockey India Pargat Singh Award for Defender of the Year 2025 category, the nominees are Sanjay, Amit Rohidas, Jugraj Singh, and Harmanpreet Singh.

The Hockey India Ajit Pal Singh Award for Midfielder of the Year 2025 features nominees Hardik Singh, Sumit, Raj Kumar Pal, and Nilakanta Sharma.

For the Hockey India Dhanraj Pillay Award for Forward of the Year 2025, the shortlisted players are Sukhjeet Singh, Abhishek, Navneet Kaur, and Shilank Lakra.

In the women's junior catlin the women's junior category, the Hockey India

Asunta Lakra Award for Upcoming Player of the Year 2025 (Under 21) features promising talents such as Sakshi Rana, Jyoti Singh, Sunelita Toppo, and Kanika Siwach, all of whom have showcased exceptional potential at the junior level.

For the men's junior category, the Hockey India Jugraj Singh Award for Upcoming Player of the Year 2025 (Under 21) includes nominees Prince Deep Singh, Manmeet Singh, Anmol Ekka, and Arshdeep Singh, highlighting the depth of young talent emerging in Indian men's hockey.

The prestigious Hockey India Balbir Singh Sr. Award for Player of the Year 2025 (Women) will see top contenders such as Navneet Kaur, Salima Tete, Lalremsiami, and Savita competing for the honour, each having delivered standout performances over

the past year. Meanwhile, the men's Player of the Year category features leading names including Hardik Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Sanjay, and Abhishek, all of whom have played pivotal roles in India's recent successes on the international stage.

The Hockey India 8th Annual Awards 2025 will thus serve as a grand celebration of excellence, recognising not only individual brilliance but also the collective contributions of players, officials, and member units who continue to drive Indian hockey forward.

By honouring achievements across categories and levels, the awards underline the sustained progress of the sport in the country and reinforce the commitment of Hockey India to nurturing talent and strengthening the hockey ecosystem in India.

BSE Sensex		Nifty 50		Nifty 500		Nifty Next 50		Nifty 100		Nifty Bank		Nifty Midcap 100	
Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change
72,696.39	-2.46%	22,512.65	-2.60%	20,664.25	-3.11%	61,414.90	-3.83%	23,098.25	-2.81%	51,437.75	-3.72%	52,717.55	-3.9%
Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open
74,532.96	73,732.58	23,114.50	22,824.35	21,327.90	21,079.60	63,862.30	63,236.75	23,766.10	23,478.80	53,427.05	52,576.10	54,855.50	54,242.40
High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
73,732.58	72,558.44	22,851.70	22,471.25	21,090.05	20,611.80	63,238.65	61,272.25	23,504.20	23,054.30	52,665.30	51,323.60	54,242.40	52,573.55

Top Gainers

Company	Current	% Gain
HCL Tech	1,358.60	1.87
Power Grid Corp	302.10	1.51
Infosys	1,256.80	0.07
ONGC	265.45	0.02
Infosys	1,255.90	2.88

Top Losers

Company	Current	% Loss
Shriram Finance	877.70	-6.49
Titan Company	3,853.10	-6.17
Trent	3,356.70	-5.70
Jio Financial	226.10	-5.52
UltraTechCement	10,362.00	-5.23

Commodities

Commodity	Price	Change (%)
Gold Apr 02	139,815.00	-4,677.00 -3.24
Silver May 05	221,921.00	-4,851.00 -2.14
Crudeoil Apr 20	8,589.00	-669.00 -7.23
Naturalgas Mar 26	277.30	-10.80 -3.75

Gold, Silver prices fall over 7pc amid West Asia tensions

New Delhi: Gold and silver prices in the domestic market witnessed a sharp decline of more than 7pc on Monday, driven by ongoing tensions in West Asia, global economic uncertainty, and a strengthening US dollar that has shifted investor interest away from precious metals.

Gold prices fell steeply during the trading session, dropping from Rs 1,40,158 in early trade to a low of Rs 1,29,595. The metal later recovered slightly and was trading around Rs 1,34,000 levels, still marking a significant decline of over 7pc.

Silver prices mirrored the trend, falling more than 7pc to trade at Rs 2,09,797 per kg, after hitting an intraday low of Rs 1,99,643. The sharp swings highlight heightened volatility in the bullion market.

Market experts believe the decline was largely due to profit booking after a strong rally in recent weeks. Prices of both metals

had surged significantly during the early phase of the West Asia conflict, as investors rushed to safe-haven assets, leading to elevated price levels and tight physical supply in some markets.

With prices at record highs, investors are now locking in gains, triggering a correction, analysts noted.

Another key factor weighing on gold and silver is the shift in global interest rate expectations. With crude oil prices remaining above USD 110 per barrel, concerns over rising inflation have intensified.

This has reduced the likelihood of interest rate cuts and increased expectations of possible rate hikes by central banks.

Higher interest rates typically dampen demand for gold and silver, as these assets do not offer fixed returns like bonds or interest-bearing instruments, making them less attractive in a high-rate environment.

Sensex down nearly 1,900pts, Nifty below 22,500

Mumbai: The Indian Stock Market on Monday came under renewed pressure with Nifty falling below 22,500, intraday, for the first time since April 9, 2025.

At close, the Sensex was down 1,836.57 points or 2.46 percent at 72,696.39, and the Nifty was down 601.85 points or 2.60 percent at 22,512.65.

Nifty Mid and smallcap indices also slipped nearly 4pc each. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies fell to Rs 414.75 lakh crore against Friday's Rs 429.11 lakh crore.

Among the sectors, all the indices ended in the red. Sectors like realty, capital goods, consumer durables, metal, telecom, PSU Bank lost 4 to 5pc, while auto, energy, media, private bank, oil & gas down 3pc each.



On Nifty, the key losers were Shriram Finance, Trent, UltraTech Cement, Titan Company, Jio Financial. On the gaining side were HCL Technologies, ONGC, Power Grid Corp, Infosys.

Over 1000 stocks touched their 52-week low on the BSE. These included IDBI Bank, Petronet LNG, Aditya Birla Fashion, Re-

laxo Footwear, Sterling Wilson, New India Assurance, Inox Wind, PCBL Chemical, Gujarat State Petro, Gravita India, Lodha Developers, Network 18, BLS International, Interglobe Aviation, HPLC, Gujarat Gas, Wockhardt, REC, among others.

Indian Rupee also fell 33 paise to fresh all-time low of 93.86 against US dollar.

Among the banking stocks, HDFC Bank remained the key loser as the stock fell about 2.5pc. Shares of State Bank of India (SBI) also fell 3% after the lender got a Rs 6,337-crore tax demand from the Income Tax Department for the assessment year 2024.

Reliance Power shares came under renewed selling pressure, falling 7.3% while Paytm shares cracked 6pc.

In the Asian market, Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 dropped 3.5pc to finish at 51,515.49 while in Taiwan, the Taix shed 2.5pc to 32,722.50.

Further, Australia's S&P/ASX 200 fell 0.7pc to 8,365.90, South Korea's Kospi dove 6.5pc to 5,405.75, and Hong Kong's Hang Seng slipped 3.5pc to 24,382.47.

AI platform Cognavi enables global placements for Indian engineers with Rs 42 lakh average package

New Delhi: Cognavi India Pvt. Ltd. has facilitated international placements for 13 engineering students from premier Indian institutes, with an average annual compensation of Rs 42.15 lakh, highlighting the growing role of artificial intelligence in global talent hiring, according to a company statement on Monday.

The placements were enabled through the company's proprietary AI-based "Skill Tree" technology, which maps candidates' technical capabilities directly to global employer requirements, moving beyond traditional resume-based screening.

Among the top offers, the highest package stood at Rs 56.27 lakh for a data scientist role, while two students from the Indian Institutes of Technology secured



pre-placement offers of Rs 46.78 lakh in technical and product development roles.

The selected candidates have been placed across a wide range of high-value roles, including data science, system engineering, electrical development, application engineering, product development, and design engineering.

These opportunities span sectors such as technol-

ogy, electronics, and advanced manufacturing, reflecting strong global demand for skilled Indian engineers. Out of the 13 candidates, 11 are from institutions ranked among the top 100 in India under the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), while the remaining two are from IITs. The hiring organizations have not been disclosed due to confidentiality agree-

ments, but are said to be leading global enterprises.

Managing Director and CTO Varun Modgill said the global engineering talent shortage is more about matching skills with demand rather than lack of talent, adding that AI is helping bridge this gap at scale.

The company noted that AI-driven recruitment focuses on real-world technical competencies rather than

academic scores or institutional pedigree, improving hiring efficiency and long-term outcomes.

Cognavi, which has a presence across more than 300 engineering colleges in India, is also working closely with institutions to build a strong pipeline for cross-border recruitment.

The platform aims to expand opportunities beyond traditional IT roles and connect Indian engineers with global careers in core engineering and emerging technologies.

Industry experts believe that AI-led hiring platforms are gaining traction among multinational companies, especially in sectors requiring niche engineering expertise, and are likely to play a key role in shaping the future of global recruitment.

Polymatech secures land in Tamil Nadu, plans Rs 550 cr in medical devices

New Delhi: Polymatech Electronics Limited on Monday announced that it has secured additional land in the SIPCOT Medical Devices Park, located near its existing facility in Oragadam, to accelerate its expansion in the medical devices segment.

The company has executed a 99-year lease for a 4.45-acre land parcel and plans to invest approximately ₹550 crore to develop advanced medical device manufacturing infrastructure at the new site.

This expansion comes at a time when Polymatech's current facility in Oragadam is operating at full capacity, reflecting strong and growing demand for its advanced manufacturing capabilities in high-precision electronics.

The company's recent

innovations, which were showcased at global platforms in Las Vegas, have received a positive market response, further encouraging its expansion plans.

Once completed, the new facility is expected to manufacture a wide range of advanced medical devices, strengthening India's position in both electronics and healthcare manufacturing sectors.

The project is also set to generate employment opportunities for around 100 engineers, contributing to regional industrial growth and enhancing technical skill development in the workforce. Eswara Rao Nandam, Managing Director and CEO of Polymatech Electronics Limited, stated that acquiring additional land near the existing facility reflects the company's commitment to

scaling up its manufacturing capabilities.

He emphasized that the expansion will enable the company to meet increasing market demand more efficiently while strengthening its footprint in the medical devices sector.

In a parallel development, the Government of Chhattisgarh has also allotted land to the company and recommended Special Economic Zone (SEZ) status for its proposed operations in the state.

The formal notification process for the SEZ status is currently underway, which is expected to further boost the company's expansion and investment plans. Polymatech acknowledged the support of SIPCOT and the Government of Tamil Nadu for facilitating the land allotment in a timely manner.

Bosch and Tata AutoComp Systems in JV for eAxle systems, electric motors

Chennai: Bosch Limited, a leading supplier of technology and services, has announced an equal joint venture with Tata AutoComp Systems Limited (TACO), one of India's largest automotive components manufacturers, to drive innovation in the electric mobility space.

The joint venture will focus on the engineering, manufacturing, and sales of advanced eAxle systems and electric motors in India, marking a significant step toward strengthening the country's electric vehicle ecosystem. Both partners will hold equal stakes in the venture, which is expected to commence operations by mid-2026, subject to the necessary regulatory approvals.

According to Gurusprasad Mudlapur, President of the Bosch Group in India and Managing Director of Bosch Limited, battery electric technology is emerging as the most viable solution for achieving low emissions in passenger cars and certain commercial vehicle segments. He noted that the collaboration with Tata AutoComp Systems Limited is aimed at accelerating the adoption of efficient and state-of-the-art e-mobility solutions tailored for the Indian market. The joint venture will be headquartered in Pune and is expected to play a key role in promoting sustainable and future-ready mobility technologies in the region.

By combining their



strengths, the two companies aim to expand their footprint in India's rapidly growing e-mobility sector while catering to increasing demand for locally manufactured electric vehicle components.

Sandeep Nelamangala, Joint Managing Director of Bosch Limited and President of Bosch Mobility India, highlighted that the global mobility market is undergoing a major transformation, with India being no exception. He emphasized that e-mobility is a strategic focus area for the company, and customers are increasingly seeking advanced global technologies that are manufactured locally in India.

The joint venture aims to address this demand by delivering cutting-edge solutions while leveraging local engineering and manufacturing capabilities. Globally, Robert Bosch mbH has invested over €6 billion in e-mobility, underscoring its long-term commitment to electrification and sustainable transportation. Through this partnership, Bosch plans to bring its advanced eAxle systems and electric motor technologies to India, further strengthening its presence in

the domestic market.

Karsten Müller, Executive Vice President, Manufacturing and Quality, Electrified Motion at Robert Bosch GmbH, stated that India's position as the world's third-largest automotive market presents significant growth opportunities.

He added that the collaboration with TACO will enable Bosch to deliver globally benchmarked solutions tailored to local needs, while enhancing its engineering and manufacturing capabilities in India. The joint venture is expected to contribute significantly to the localisation of advanced EV technologies, reducing dependency on imports and boosting domestic production. It also aligns with India's broader push toward clean energy and sustainable mobility, supporting the transition to electric vehicles across passenger and commercial segments. With this strategic move, Bosch Limited and Tata AutoComp Systems Limited aim to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of mobility in India, driving innovation, efficiency, and sustainability in the automotive sector.

EKA Mobility, GreenCell Win LOA for 915 E-Buses in Hyderabad under PM E-DRIVE

Hyderabad: EKA Mobility, a leading electric vehicle and technology company, in consortium with GreenCell Mobility, on Monday said it has secured a Letter of Award (LOA) for the supply and deployment of 915 electric buses in Hyderabad under the Government of India's PM E-DRIVE scheme.

The project, to be implemented under the CESL-led PM E-DRIVE (Electric Drive Revolution in Innovative Vehicle Enhancement), involves rollout of 100 nine-metre and 815 twelve-metre standard-floor non-AC electric buses aimed at strengthening urban public transport.

In a release, the compa-

nies said the buses are fully electric and zero-emission, designed to deliver efficient, reliable.

And commuter-friendly services across the city.

The latest LOA builds on earlier contracts secured by EKA Mobility under CESL's PM E-Bus Seva initiative for deployment of electric buses in multiple

states, including Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Puducherry and Meghalaya.

Commenting on the development, Rohit Srivastava, Business Head and Chief Growth Officer of EKA Mobility, said the award reflects the company's technological strength and execution capability.

He added that the proj-

ect will support Hyderabad's transition towards cleaner and smarter mobility in line with the national electric vehicle push.

The PM E-DRIVE scheme is a flagship initiative of the Government of India aimed at accelerating EV adoption, boosting domestic manufacturing and reducing urban pollution.

Morocco Tourism targets Indian movie industry and corporate sector

Chennai: The Moroccan National Tourism Office is increasingly focusing on the Indian market, particularly targeting the film industry and corporate sector to promote the North African nation as a preferred destination for movie shoots, meetings, and conferences.

According to Jamal Younes Kilito, Country Manager for India, the strategy includes engaging with Indian filmmakers and production houses to position Morocco as an attractive shooting location.

He highlighted that India is currently one of the fastest-growing markets for Moroccan tourism, even as Western Europe continues to remain its primary source of visitors.

Kilito said that discussions will be initiated with Indian producers and directors to encourage them to consider Morocco for film projects, given its diverse landscapes and production-friendly ecosystem.

To further attract filmmakers, the



Moroccan government offers a 30 percent tax rebate on eligible expenditures, making it financially appealing for large-scale productions.

Neeti Sharma, Director of Intrepid Marketing and Communications Pvt Ltd, which represents Moroccan tourism in India, noted that the coun-

try also provides access to modern filmmaking equipment locally.

This eliminates the need for Indian production teams to transport heavy equipment from India, thereby reducing logistical challenges and costs.

It is understood that to qualify for the tax rebate, production houses must spend approximately \$1 million and undertake filming in Morocco for at least 18 days. Tourism data reflects a steady rise in Indian visitors to Morocco. Around 40,960 Indian tourists visited in 2024, which increased to 53,697 in 2025, indicating strong growth momentum. The tourism office is now aiming to increase this number to one lakh (100,000) Indian tourists annually in the near future. Kilito also pointed out that Morocco offers a unique cultural experience for Indian travellers, including its distinctive cuisine as well as the availability of several Indian restaurants catering to familiar tastes.