



# Aryan Age

The Age of Truth

Year 14, Issue 271 | Delhi, Thursday 2 April 2026 | 8 PAGES | ₹ 2.00



<p>PG 02</p> <p><b>Odisha government vows to preserve Odia identity: CM Majhi</b></p>	<p>PG 03</p> <p><b>Delhi CM gives Rs 1 crore each to families of Covid warriors</b></p>	<p>PG 06</p> <p><b>Bahadurgarh police bust interstate newborn trafficking ring</b></p>	<p>PG 07</p> <p><b>KKR's home advantage meets SRH's power-hitting in IPL duel</b></p>	<p>PG 08</p> <p><b>Stock market kicks off new fiscal on positive footing, Sensex up nearly 1200 pts</b></p>
---	---	--	---	---

## War with Iran near conclusion

### US could end Iran war in two to three weeks even without a deal: Trump

**Washington :** US President Donald Trump suggested Tuesday that the war with Iran could be nearing its conclusion, asserting that Tehran does not need to strike a deal with Washington for hostilities to end. The President's comment, delivered at the White House, indicated a shift in the US approach to the conflict, now in its fifth week, after having given mixed and conflicting statements and shifting goalposts since the beginning of the war on February 28.

"We'll be leaving very soon," Trump told media, adding that the exit could occur "within two weeks, maybe three." When asked if a successful diplomatic agreement was necessary for ending 'Operation Epic Fury', Trump replied, "Iran doesn't have

to make a deal, no. No, they don't have to make a deal with me." Trump emphasized that the objectives of the US military campaign have largely been achieved. Speaking from the Oval Office, he claimed that the Iranian military has been significantly degraded, stating, "It will take 15 to 20 years for them to rebuild what we've done to them."

He added that Tehran's naval, air, and anti-aircraft capabilities, as well as its telecommunications infrastructure, have been degraded to such an extent that Iranians will take 20 years to rebuild.

"If they come to the table, that will be good. But it doesn't matter if they come to the table or not," Trump said, noting that the United States is prepared to

conclude the conflict without a formal negotiated settlement. He also reiterated that the primary goal of ensuring Iran does not possess nuclear weapons has been met.

The White House announced that Trump will address the nation on Wednesday at 9 p.m. EDT to provide a further update on the Iran situation after he said that the conflict may soon enter its final phase.

US Secretary of State, supporting Trump's agenda of winding down the war, indicated that Washington is exploring both direct talks with Tehran and a phased end to military operations, even in the absence of a formal agreement.

During interview with Fox

news, Rubio claimed that Iran has been a threat for 47 years because of the nuclear weapons. He highlighted Iran's nuclear ambitions: "They enriched uranium to 60 percent... from 60 to 90 per cent... takes 12 to 14 days... the only reason to have 60 per cent enriched uranium is to be able to enrich it to 90 per cent and put it in a bomb."

The remarks contrast with earlier US threats to intensify operations if Iran rejected a 15-point ceasefire framework, which demanded Tehran halt uranium enrichment, commit not to pursue nuclear weapons, and fully reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

Rubio told Fox News that a meeting between US and Iranian officials could happen "at some point" and that the United States may "see the finish line, although

not immediately," he said. As Trump talks to end the war, attacks were reported on both sides early on Wednesday, with drones hitting fuel tanks at Kuwait's international airport causing a big blaze and authorities in Bahrain reporting a fire at an undisclosed company facility from an Iranian attack.

The Israeli military said it successfully targeted a person it described as the head of engineering for the Lebanon Corps in IRGC's Quds Force.

It said Mahdi Vafa'i was killed in the central city of Mahallat. It claimed that Vafa'i advanced "underground projects" in Lebanon and Syria for two decades as part of the elite Quds Force, including establishing infrastructure for Hezbollah and managing weapons storage.



### Bharat Ratna sought for national flag designer Pingali Venkayya

**Hyderabad :** Former Rajya Sabha member V Hanumantha Rao has urged the Central Government to confer the Bharat Ratna on Pingali Venkayya, the designer of the Indian National Flag.

Marking the anniversary of the National Flag's creation, Hanumantha Rao hoisted the Tricolour at his residence in Amberpet and paid floral tributes to a



portrait of Pingali Venkayya. Speaking on the occasion, he recalled that Venkayya had designed the flag following a suggestion by Mahatma Gandhi.

Stating that Venkayya's contribution to the nation remains unparalleled, Hanumantha Rao said it is the responsibility of the Central Government to honour such a distinguished figure with the country's highest civilian award.

He also suggested that Telangana Chief Minister A Revantha Reddy and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu should write to the Centre, recommending that Bharat Ratna be conferred on Pingali Venkayya.

### Lok Sabha Grants Statutory Status to Amaravati

**New Delhi:** The Lok Sabha passed the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2026, on Wednesday, officially designating Amaravati as the sole capital of Andhra Pradesh. Union Home Minister Amit Shah stated that the amendment provides necessary statutory clarity, following a state assembly resolution passed on March 28. The 2014 Act had originally designated Hyderabad as a shared capital for ten years, a period that has now concluded.

Shah highlighted that significant infrastructure has already been developed in Amaravati to serve as the state's administrative and legislative hub. The voice-vote approval grants legal certainty to the city's status, effective retrospectively from June 2, 2024, to support ongoing developmental initiatives.

### Delhi CM rejects rumors & claims over Pink Cards

**New Delhi :** Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta has rejected all the claims and rumours with regard to the Pink Card and its functioning, and its single time usage within an hour's time, asking women to freely use the card and travel as many times they want.

In a video message released on her social media handle, Ms Gupta stated that there are some political people who are spreading misinformation as part of political propaganda regarding the Pink Cards, claiming that after using it in one bus, it does not work on another for some time.

The CM has categorically rejected such false claims,

and has asked the women of the national capital to use the Pink Card without any stress

**Asks women to travel without worry**

properly noted so that the government pays as per the trips taken and not based on any rough estimate or any such unaccounted manner.

Taking a dig at the AAP, the CM said that now they are irked with the city's daughters being provided bicycles, then how will the Pink Card be easily accepted by them.

For the women of Delhi, the CM said that "just tap the card for free travel and stay worry free".

She emphasized that the women travellers can use the Pink Card freely, like if they need to change the bus, that they had boarded, they can just take the other one and again tap the card, and it will work.

She alleged that the false propaganda is being spread because now there is no space left for any corruption in this domain as well, and the trips taken in the buses will be



### PM Modi to Launch Southern Poll Campaign on April 3

**New Delhi:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to visit Chennai and Puducherry on April 3 and 4 to spearhead the NDA's election campaign. Landing in Chennai on Friday afternoon, the PM will travel to Puducherry for a 2-km roadshow and a rally supporting Chief Minister N. Rangasamy's AINRC-led alliance. To ensure security, Puducherry Collector Kulothungan has declared the region a drone-free zone. On April 4, the Prime Minister will campaign in Chennai's Mylapore for BJP candidate Tamilisai Soundarajan. The visit aims to consolidate the NDA coalition, which includes the BJP, AIADMK, and PMK, before the Prime Minister departs for his next round of electioneering in Kerala.



### Putin Envisions Russia Leading New Global Logistics

**Moscow:** President Vladimir Putin stated on Wednesday that Russia is uniquely positioned to shape a new architecture for global logistics and international trade. In a video address to the International Transport and Logistics Forum, Putin argued that Russian transit routes offer economic benefits through shorter transportation times and increased sustainability. He noted that as the global economy faces geopolitical shifts, more countries are seeking secure, diversified transportation flows. Putin emphasized that Russia is ready to share its technological expertise to help partners navigate the long-term challenges of the technological revolution in transportation, positioning the nation as a vital hub for future global trade stability.

### Ramesh Warns of Regional Imbalance in LS Expansion

**New Delhi:** Senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh has raised an alarm over a proposal to increase the Lok Sabha's size by 50%, warning it would severely disadvantage southern and northeastern states. Ramesh

argued that a uniform increase is "deceptive"; for example, Uttar Pradesh's seats would jump from 80 to 120, while Tamil Nadu would only reach 59. Under this plan, northern states would gain 200 seats

compared to just 66 for the south. Ramesh accused Prime Minister Modi of pushing the move unilaterally without consulting smaller states. He cautioned that this shift would dilute the political



influence of states that successfully implemented population control, creating a deep representational crisis in national decision-making.

### Over 3,100 J&K Schools Report Near-Zero Enrollment

**Srinagar:** Education Minister Sakina Itoo revealed that 3,192 government schools in Jammu and Kashmir have either zero or fewer than 10 students enrolled, despite 2,518 teachers being stationed there. In the Jammu division, 1,494 such schools employ 1,934



teachers, while the Kashmir division has 1,698 schools with 584 teachers. Districts like Kathua and Baramulla reported the highest numbers of low-enrollment institutions. Critics, including former minister Naem Akhtar, blamed the data on administrative insensitivity

and mismanagement. Educationists suggested that the government's teacher transfer portal should be used for urgent "teacher rationalization" rather than just transfers to ensure that staff are distributed according to actual student needs across the Union Territory.

### Truecaller Hits 500 Million Global Users Milestone

**Lucknow:** Global communication platform Truecaller announced it has surpassed 500 million monthly active users worldwide, with India alone accounting for over 350 million. CEO Rishit Jhunjhunwala noted that the milestone reflects a

growing global need for protection against scams and spam, as the platform added 50 million users in 2025 alone. Truecaller has also grown its premium base to 4 million paying subscribers. Operating with a lean team of 470 employees, the company aims to reach one billion users next. Jhunjhunwala emphasized that the platform has evolved into an essential "trust layer" for digital interactions, helping half a billion people verify identities and avoid fraud in their daily communications.



### Congress Vows to Block FCRA Amendment Bill

**Thiruvananthapuram:** AICC General Secretary K.C. Venugopal declared that the Congress will strongly oppose the proposed Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) amendment, labeling it "unconstitutional." Venugopal claimed the bill is a tool to pressure non-governmental organizations and community groups, particularly those serving minority and Christian institutions in Kerala. He criticized the government for introducing the legislation while many MPs are away for election campaigns. The Congress has directed all its members to rush to Delhi to resist the bill, which Venugopal argues would grant the government excessive control over charitable and social service activities. The party plans to hold protests outside Parliament to protect the autonomy of civil society organizations from state interference.

### 'Fake Baba' case; Probe extends to two more leaders

**Nashik :** The controversy surrounding alleged godman Ashok Kharat has intensified, with new demands for investigation bringing two additional political figures under scrutiny.

The case, which already threatens the political career of former Maharashtra State Women's Commission Chief Rupali Chakankar, is now drawing attention to former Nashik MP Hemant Godse and former Sangola MLA Deepak Solunke Patil.

A video has surfaced reportedly showing Godse consulting Kharat for predictions, allegedly seeking guidance by showing his palm.

Shiv Sena (Uddhav Thackeray faction) spokesperson Sushma Andhare alleged on Wednesday that Godse approached Kharat in a bid to secure a Lok Sabha election ticket. The Anti-Superstition Committee has

urged the police Special Investigation Team to question Godse, accusing him of promoting superstitious practices.

Moreover, Solunke Patil also faces allegations of financial links with Kharat. While he initially denied any association and claimed he did not know the godman, a photograph showing him felicitating Kharat with a veena and a tulusi garland, allegedly alongside Rupali Chakankar, has raised further questions.

These developments have sparked a political stir in Solapur district, with growing calls for a wider probe into the matter.



### Commercial LPG Prices Surge by ₹195.50

**New Delhi:** State-owned oil marketing companies increased the price of 19-kg commercial LPG cylinders by ₹195.50 on Wednesday, bringing the cost in Delhi to ₹2,078.50. The hike is attributed to a 44% jump in the Saudi Contract Price amid supply disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz. While

commercial rates have climbed, domestic LPG prices remain unchanged at ₹913 for general households and ₹613 for

PMUY beneficiaries. Officials noted that the government is absorbing significant losses, with under-recoveries projected to reach ₹40,484 crore by May. Despite the global volatility, the Ministry emphasized that India's domestic LPG rates remain lower than those in neighboring countries like Sri Lanka and Nepal.



In a major update in the self-proclaimed godman 'Captain' Ashok Kharat case, the Special Investigation Team (SIT) has now taken Kharat's son into custody. In a dramatic, "filmy style"

### SIT takes Kharat's son into custody

operation, the SIT team, comprising three female officers and one male officer, went to 'Truptbala'—Kharat's bungalow located in Karmayogi Nagar— and knocked on the gate. Upon receiving no response, the officers ultimately sealed the wall from an adjacent bungalow to gain entry into Kharat's bungalow. After entering the house, they conducted a thorough search of the entire premises for Kharat's wife, Kalpana Kharat; however, despite a comprehensive search of both the house and the garden area,

Kalpana Kharat could not be found on the premises. Subsequently, investigative agencies took Ashok Kharat's son into custody. Kharat's son has been brought to the Maharashtra Police Academy for further interrogation. The SIT has been conducting rigorous questioning of Ashok Kharat himself for the past 13 days. Now, it has also taken his son into custody. Consequently, it remains to be seen what new details will emerge from the SIT's interrogation and in which direction the investigation will proceed.

### 'Godman' Ashok Kharat sent to 14 days of judicial custody

Ashok Kharat, the self-styled godman from Nashik, has been remanded to 14 days of judicial custody. Today (April 1), Kharat was produced before the Nashik District Sessions Court. His hearing took place in the court of District Sessions Judge B.N. Ichpurani, during which the judge ordered his custody.



# Odisha government vows to preserve Odia identity: CM Majhi

**Bhubaneswar:** Celebrating Odisha Day 2026 at the birthplace of Utkalmani Pandit Gopabandhu Das in Suando village, Puri district, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi reaffirmed the state government's commitment to preserving and promoting the Odia identity.

"The rise of a nation depends on its identity. Without it, a nation is like a soulless machine," he said.

Majhi announced initiatives to honor the legacy of Gopabandhu Das, including the development and beautification of his birthplace. Projects worth Rs. 585 crore have been planned, with Rs. 495 crore allocated for Satyabadi to construct a heritage corridor and Rs. 90 crore for the redevelopment of the Bakulaban community.

Plans are also underway for the overall development of the Satyabadi region and its forest school.

During the celebrations, the Chief Minister visited Gopabandhu Das's ancestral home and offered prayers to the family deity, Lord Radha Binod Bihari. He laid a wreath at Utkalmani's statue in Gopabandhu Park and toured the Gopabandhu Museum.

Later, he participated in a general assembly at Sakshigopal Utkal-



mani Gopabandhu Smriti Mahavidyalaya, emphasizing that Odisha's potential can make it a growth engine for India and a prosperous state globally.

Majhi outlined ambitious plans to develop Puri into a world-class tourism hub. These include establishing a World Tourism Centre and a cruise terminal, modernizing Chilika Lake as an ecotourism des-

tinuation, and creating a Rs. 1,000 crore Jagannath museum and library.

Historic and spiritual sites, such as Gundicha Temple, Emar Math, and Raghunandan Library, will be restored, while a 1,500-acre Shyamuka project will blend natural beauty with modern infrastructure.

Highlighting infrastructure development, Majhi said that under

Prime Minister Modi's leadership, nearly Rs. 80,000 crore has been invested in national highways. Three major expressways, new airports including a proposed Puri airport, and a mega port cluster worth Rs. 25,000 crore in Kendrapara, along with smaller ports, are in progress.

Reflecting on two years of progress, Majhi said 109 projects worth Rs. 2.4 lakh crore have been launched, creating nearly 1.76 lakh jobs. Odisha's vision targets a \$500 billion economy by 2036 and \$1.5 trillion by 2047.

For women's empowerment, the Chief Minister introduced the Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana, which deposits Rs. 20,000 for girls born into economically weaker families, with Rs. 1.01 lakh provided upon graduation to ensure educational completion. In healthcare, 4,000 doctor positions have been filled, with plans for 5,000 more, alongside three new Ayurvedic and two homeopathic medical colleges. The celebration was attended by dignitaries including Puri MP Sambit Patra, Brahmagiri MLA Upasana Mahapatra, Utkalmani Smriti Parishad President Dharendra Das, and District Collector Divyajyoti Parida.

# JDU demands apology from Tejaswi for "Poor State" remark about Bihar

**Patna:** The political temperature in Bihar has risen after Tejaswi Yadav, Leader of the Opposition, allegedly described Bihar as a "poor state" during an election campaign in Kerala, drawing sharp criticism from the Janata Dal (United).

Reacting strongly, Bihar JDU president Umesh Singh Kushwaha termed the remark "insulting" and demanded an immediate public apology.

He said making such a statement about Bihar on another state's soil was "extremely shameful" and hurt the dignity of its people.

Kushwaha alleged that Yadav has repeatedly made statements for political gain that harm the image of Bihar and its residents. According to him, such comments undermine the state's progress and the efforts of its people.

He further pointed out that during earlier election campaigns, Yadav had shared the stage with leaders of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, some of whom had made objectionable remarks about Bihar. He claimed that the latest statement adds to



pattern of behavior that disrespects the state.

"By calling Bihar a 'poor state' in Kerala, he has hurt the self-respect of nearly 140 million people," Kushwaha said, emphasizing the emotional and political sensitivity surrounding such remarks.

Taking a swipe at Yadav's political lineage, the JDU leader said he should introspect and clarify how, during the tenure of his parents, the state's resources were allegedly misused.

Kushwaha also used the opportunity to highlight the development trajectory under Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, crediting him with transforming Bihar's image from a BIMARU state into one focused on governance

and growth.

He cited economic data to support his claim, stating that Bihar's growth rate has risen significantly—from around 7.78 percent in 2004-05 to approximately 13.09 percent in recent years.

The JDU leader also pointed to a substantial increase in the state's budget, which has expanded from about ₹23,000 crore in 2005 to over ₹3.47 lakh crore today, reflecting enhanced fiscal capacity.

In addition, he highlighted improvements in key social indicators such as per capita income, literacy rate, and poverty reduction, asserting that Bihar has made notable progress across sectors.

# Massive drug hauls across Mizoram; heroin, Yaba worth crores seized

**Aizawl:** Mizoram Police have intensified their crackdown on narcotics trafficking, seizing large quantities of heroin and methamphetamine tablets worth several crores in multiple operations across the state over the past week, officials said on Wednesday.

In the latest operation on Tuesday night, a team of the Aizawl District Special Branch intercepted two Myanmar nationals near Tawngthlaim in the Zema-bawk area.

The duo — Thangliangmung (26) and Mangliangthang (23), both from Tidim District of Myanmar — were found in possession of 104 grams of suspected heroin concealed in nine soap cases. The contraband is valued at approximately Rs 20.4 lakh.

A case has been registered at Bawngkawn Police Station under relevant provisions of the NDPS Act and the Immigration and Foreigners Act, and further investigations are underway.

In a separate case on March 29, a special team of Saitual Police seized 242.79 grams of suspected heroin, packed in 20 soap cases, during vehicle checking at the outskirts of Keifang. The drugs, estimated to be worth over Rs 48.5 lakh, were recovered from Md Eliyach

Hussain (46), a resident of Barpeta district in Assam, who was driving a Hyundai Grand i10 from Manipur towards Aizawl.

A case has been registered and investigation is in progress. Two major seizures were reported on



March 28 and March 27 in the same belt near Keifang and Kualmawi, underscoring the route's vulnerability to drug trafficking.

On March 28, Saitual Police recovered 1.927 kg of suspected heroin, valued at around Rs 3.86 crore, from two individuals from Churachandpur district of Manipur — Mangminlun (26) and Ginlemlal (24) — who were travelling in a Kia Seltos.

Earlier, on March 27, another operation at Kualmawi led to the seizure of 2.298 kg of suspected heroin, packed in 200 soap cases, with an estimated value of Rs 4.596 crore. The contraband was recovered from a Bolero Neo vehicle driven by Zamchindam (27), accompanied by Dothanglen (36), both hailing from

Churachandpur district in Manipur. Separate cases have been registered in connection with both seizures under the NDPS Act.

In one of the biggest recoveries, the CID (Special Branch) Operation Team intercepted a truck near Tuirial Bridge on March 25 and recovered 19,836 kg of suspected methamphetamine tablets (Yaba), valued at over Rs 15.86 crore.

The drugs were concealed in a specially fabricated chamber inside the vehicle. During the search, police also recovered a SIG SAUER P320SP handgun along with two magazines and 40 rounds of live ammunition from another hidden compartment.

The driver of the truck, identified as Lalnehzova (23) of Zokhawthar in Champhai district, was arrested on the spot. A case has been registered at the Special Narcotics Police Station under provisions of the NDPS Act and the Arms Act.

Police said investigations are ongoing in all cases to establish forward and backward linkages of the drug networks. The series of seizures highlights sustained enforcement efforts by Mizoram Police to curb drug trafficking and related criminal activities in the state.

# Jan Suraaj Party announces 15 state general secretaries in organisational reshuffle

**Patna:** The Jan Suraaj Party on Wednesday announced the appointment of 15 State General Secretaries as part of a major organisational restructuring exercise aimed at strengthening its grassroots presence and accelerating party programmes across Bihar.

State party president Manoj Bharti said the newly appointed leaders will take on key responsibilities and play a crucial role in expanding the party's organisational network.

He emphasised that all General Secretaries will work in close coordination

with the party's state core committee as well as district-level executive bodies to ensure smooth implementation of policies and initiatives.

According to Bharti, the restructuring has been carefully planned to enhance efficiency, strengthen communication channels, and improve outreach at the grassroots level.

He also noted that the appointments were made after considering regional representation and organisational requirements, ensuring a balanced leadership structure across differ-

ent parts of the state.

The move is seen as part of the party's broader strategy to consolidate its base and prepare for upcoming political challenges in Bihar.

Among those appointed as State General Secretaries is Surendra Mohan Yadav from Darbhanga, a region considered politically significant in north Bihar.

Naval Kishore Singh from Saharsa has also been included, bringing representation from the Kosi region.

Hasmuddin Khan from Siwan and Shatrughan Sahni from Muzaffarpur are among other key appoint-

ments aimed at strengthening the party's hold in central Bihar.

From eastern parts of the state, Arvind Sah from Bhagalpur and Vijay Kumar from Kishanganj have been entrusted with responsibilities. Brijendra Kumar Singh alias Munna Bhawani from Saran and Naresh Manjhi from Gaya are expected to play important roles in their respective regions.

Other appointees include Suresh Patel from Vaishali and Hemant Chaubey from Kaimur, further strengthening the party's regional spread.

Amit Sagar from Lakhisarai and Subodh Yadav from East Champaran have also been appointed to key organisational roles.

Additionally, Md. Itfaq Alam from Purnea, Sanjay Gautam from Begusarai, and Samiullah Shamim from Darbhanga complete the list of new General Secretaries.

The party leadership expressed confidence that the newly appointed team will help strengthen its organisational framework and ensure more effective execution of its programmes across Bihar.

# Bomb threat email triggers security alert at Lucknow collectorate

**Lucknow:** A bomb threat sent via email to the District Magistrate's office in Lucknow sparked panic on Wednesday, prompting heightened security measures at the Collectorate premises and immediate action from law enforcement agencies.

Soon after the alert was received, senior police officials, including the ACP (West) and personnel from the Wazirganj police station, rushed to the location and began a comprehensive search operation.

Authorities quickly moved to secure the area,

temporarily restricting entry and exit within the Collectorate to ensure the safety of employees, visitors, and nearby residents.

The Bomb Detection and Disposal Squad (BDDS), assisted by a trained dog squad, conducted an extensive sweep of the premises, checking offices, open spaces, and adjoining areas for any suspicious objects.

Despite the intensity of the search, officials confirmed that no explosive material or suspicious item was found, suggesting that the threat was likely a hoax.

Following the incident, police have initiated a de-

tailed investigation to trace the origin of the threatening

email and identify those responsible.

# Saharanpur-based ex-BSP MLC Mohammad Iqbal declared fugitive economic offender

**Lucknow:** A special court under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act in Lucknow has declared former BSP MLC Mohammad Iqbal a Fugitive Economic Offender, marking a significant development in the ongoing financial investigation against him.

The order was issued by Special Judge Rahul Prakash, enabling the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to initiate further action against Iqbal's assets, both within India and abroad.

According to ED officials, properties worth more than ₹5,000 crore linked to Iqbal have already been attached as part of the investigation. With the latest court directive under the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, authorities are now set to seize additional assets estimated at around ₹1,000 crore.

The court has specifically ordered the attachment of three sugar mills associated with Iqbal, collectively valued at approximately ₹1,000 crore. These properties are considered significant in the overall asset portfolio under scrutiny.

Iqbal, who has reportedly been residing in Dubai for several years,

faces allegations of large-scale financial irregularities and illegal mining activities, which have been under investigation by multiple agencies. Authorities have indicated that various investigative bodies across the country have examined his business dealings, particularly in connection with mining operations and financial transactions.

Among the major assets already attached is Glocal University in Saharanpur, which is linked to Iqbal and forms a key part of the case.

Local police have also taken action against several of his properties, citing his alleged role as a major mining operator in the region, further strengthening the case against him.

The declaration of a fugitive economic offender allows authorities to confiscate assets more comprehensively, including those held overseas, thereby tightening legal action against individuals who evade Indian jurisdiction.

In a related development, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) had earlier initiated similar proceedings under the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act against Rashid Nas-

cem, the alleged mastermind behind the Shine City scam.

## Briefs :

**Ahead of Punjab polls, former AAP leader HS Phoolka joins BJP**

**New Delhi :** Ahead of the upcoming Punjab elections, former AAP leader and senior advocate HS Phoolka on Wednesday joined the Bharatiya Janata Party, alleging that the situation in Punjab is rapidly deteriorating, with rising crime, drug abuse, and governance concerns. Phoolka, widely known for representing victims of the 1984 Anti-Sikh riots, formally joined the BJP at the party's Delhi office in the presence of union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva, along with other senior leaders. After joining the party, Phoolka said he has been fighting for justice for the 1984 riot victims for nearly four decades and credited the BJP for consistently supporting him during this period. He added that he had worked closely with the party on several legal matters over the years. Reflecting on his political journey, Phoolka noted that he was associated with the Aam Aadmi Party from 2014 to 2017, but maintained that his ideological and professional proximity to the BJP existed even during that time. Raising serious concerns about Punjab, he claimed that the state is facing a worsening law and order situation, with increasing incidents of extortion calls and a growing drug menace. He also warned about long-term environmental degradation, suggesting that Punjab's land could turn barren in the next 13-14 years if corrective measures are not taken.

**Delhi records surge in property tax collection, driven by SUNIYO scheme**

**New Delhi (MCD)** has reported a record-breaking rise in property tax collection for the financial year 2025-26, signaling improved compliance and stronger enforcement. According to official data, the civic body collected Rs 3,116.62 crore by March 31, marking a significant 46.12% increase compared to Rs 2,132.89 crore in the previous financial year. Officials credited the achievement to administrative reforms and leadership under Delhi Mayor Raja Iqbal Singh, alongside sustained efforts by the Assessment and Collection Department. The number of taxpayers also rose notably, with 13.52 lakh contributors this year against 11.33 lakh last year—an increase of 19.36%. A major driver of this growth has been the Property Tax Amnesty Scheme, popularly known as the SUNIYO scheme. The initiative alone contributed Rs 1,236.03 crore, with over 2.06 lakh taxpayers availing its benefits. Notably, more than 1.11 lakh individuals paid property tax for the first time under the scheme, contributing Rs 448.89 crore and expanding the tax base.

**Nurse alleges rape, forced conversion in Nuh, FIR registered**

**New Delhi:** A 30-year-old nurse from West Bengal, currently working in New Delhi, has alleged that she was raped and coerced into religious conversion by a man in Nuh, prompting police to register a case under multiple legal provisions. According to the complaint, the accused, along with his father and brother, has been booked under the (BNS) as well as the Haryana Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Act, 2022. The woman, who was living as a tenant in Nuh city, alleged that the accused initially befriended her and lured her into a relationship. She claimed that over time, he recorded objectionable videos of her and used them to blackmail her.

## Delhi CM gives Rs 1 crore each to families of Covid warriors

**New Delhi:** Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Wednesday provided financial assistance to the families of six government employees who lost their lives while on duty during the COVID-19 pandemic, calling it an expression of gratitude, empathy and respect towards them, and not just a government formality.

She personally handed over Rs 1 crore cheques each to the families of the six government employees on Wednesday at the secretariat.

Gupta said, "At a time when the world was gripped by fear and uncertainty, these brave individuals put duty above everything else and continued to serve people without worrying about their own lives."

Interacting with the families, CM Gupta listened to their concerns and experiences with sensitivity, and said the sacrifice made by the employees could never be forgotten, while she described them as heroes not just for their families, but for society as a whole.

She assured them that the Delhi government would continue to stand by them like an extended family and offer all possible support.

The CM also took note



of the hardships faced by these families during the past, particularly the delays they had to face regarding support during the previous government's tenure.

She said that many had to wait for long periods due to procedural delays and late disbursement of compensation, assuring that such cases are now being treated as a top priority, and steps are being taken to ensure that no eligible family has to face unnecessary delays in receiving assistance.

According to officials, the six beneficiaries were associated with various government bodies, including the MCD, DTC, Delhi Jal Board, Indian

Spinal Injuries Centre, NDMC and Maulana Azad

Medical College.

Paramedical staff risked their lives working in hospitals and testing centres, while personnel from other departments ensured uninterrupted delivery of essential services such as water supply, sanitation and transport during the lockdown.

Expressing regret over the delay in disbursing assistance, Gupta said no amount of compensation could make up for the loss suffered by the families, and described the financial aid as a support mechanism to help ease their day-to-day struggles.

Recalling the difficult days of the pandemic, she said many people fulfilled their duties with extraordinary courage and dedication.

She also paid tribute to

those who lost their lives and extended her condolences to their families, praying for strength to help them cope with their loss.

In addition, the family of late ASI Radhey Shyam from the Delhi Police traffic unit was also given Rs 1 crore. He had lost his life in the line of duty.

The Chief Minister also extended financial assistance to the family of a deceased child in Dwarka, reiterating that the government stands firmly with every affected family and will provide all necessary support.

In a bid to strengthen social welfare efforts, Gupta also handed over a cheque of Rs 1 crore to 'Apna Ghar Ashram' in Budhpur under the CSR initiative of the Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (DSIIDC).

Praising the work of such institutions, Gupta said organisations like Apna Ghar Ashram set an example by providing shelter, food, medical care and dignity to the destitute and vulnerable.

CM urged capable members of society to contribute to such initiatives, adding that service is not just a duty but a commitment and a shared responsibility.

## Delhi Crime Branch arrests 'Mukhiya Gang' kingpin after years on the run

**New Delhi:** Delhi Police has arrested a 38-year-old man identified as the alleged kingpin of an interstate burglary racket, bringing an end to years of evasion from legal proceedings.

The accused, Rahul Mukhiya, also known by aliases Dahur and Raju Mukhiya, is a native of Madhubani and was apprehended from the Nangli area of Dwarka.

According to police officials, Mukhiya is believed to be the leader of the Mukhiya gang and has been linked to at least four criminal cases spanning Delhi and Haryana.

Deputy Commissioner of Police Harsh Indora stated that the accused had been declared a proclaimed offender in three cases after repeatedly failing to appear in court despite being granted bail.

Police investigations revealed that the gang operated through a highly organised network involving domestic workers, making their crimes particularly difficult to detect.

Members of the gang would allegedly infiltrate affluent households by securing jobs as maids or servants, carefully observing daily routines and identifying valuable assets.

Once sufficient informa-



tion was gathered, the insiders would pass on details to accomplices, who would then execute thefts at moments when the houses were most vulnerable.

The arrest was the result of sustained surveillance by the Anti-Gangster Squad (AGS) of the Crime Branch, which had been tracking Mukhiya's movements for some time. Acting on specific intelligence inputs, a police team laid a trap and successfully apprehended him on Monday, ending his prolonged run from law enforcement.

Officials said Mukhiya's involvement in criminal activities dates back over a decade, indicating a long-standing and well-established network. In one notable case from Rajouri Garden in 2016, valuables worth ₹25-30 lakh were stolen after insiders allegedly provided critical information to the gang.

In another incident in Gurugram in 2014, a victim was reportedly drugged before jewellery and cash worth nearly ₹1 crore were looted. During the investigation, police uncovered that Mukhiya had built a wide-spread interstate network, recruiting domestic workers to assist in carrying out burglaries. Despite being arrested multiple times in the past, he managed to evade conviction by absconding during trial proceedings, complicating efforts to bring him to justice. His arrest is being seen as a significant breakthrough for law enforcement agencies working to dismantle organised burglary networks operating across state lines. Police officials have indicated that further investigations are underway to identify other members of the gang and uncover additional cases linked to the accused.

## Two held in East Delhi for illegal gambling, cash seized

**New Delhi :** A late-night police operation in East Delhi led to the busting of an illegal gambling racket in Trilokpuri, with two men apprehended and cash seized, an officer said on Wednesday.

According to the police, the action came after they acted on an intel received. The special staff of the East District conducted a raid on Sunday in a park located in the 23-block area of Trilokpuri.

"Around 10 PM, the police team caught two individuals allegedly engaged in gambling activities and

detained them on the spot," said Rajeev Kumar, Deputy Commissioner of Police (East District).

The accused, Manoj and Himesh, both aged 34, were residents of Trilokpuri.

"During the search operation, our officers confiscated Rs 13,200 in cash, which is believed to be stake money, along with a writing pad used to record gambling transactions," the officer said in his statement. The DCP added that the probe was a part of an ongoing drive to curb illegal activities such as gambling

and bootlegging in vulnerable areas.

"The operation was carried out under the leadership of Inspector Jitendra Malik, with a team comprising Head Constable Amit and Constable Rajeev," the officer said.

ACP (Operations) Pawan Kumar supervised the overall operation.

A case has been registered under relevant sections of the Gambling Act at Kalyanpuri Police Station, and further investigation is ongoing to determine whether more individuals are linked to this matter.

## AAP leader alleges inaction by Delhi govt over private school fee disputes

**New Delhi:** Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Delhi president Saurabh Bharadwaj on Tuesday launched a sharp attack on the BJP-led Delhi government, alleging inaction against private schools accused of pressuring parents over fee hikes.

Bharadwaj claimed that several private schools in New Delhi were resorting to coercive measures, including withholding students' results and removing their names from school rolls, while the government remained a "mute spectator."

He questioned why Education Minister Ashish Sood

had not ordered FIRs against schools accused of violating fee regulations and harassing parents.

According to the AAP leader, despite earlier assurances from the government, no concrete action has been taken against the institutions involved in such practices.

Bharadwaj said that the situation has escalated to the point where parents are now protesting outside schools, demanding justice and intervention from authorities.

He noted that many of these parents had initially supported the government's law regulating private school

fees but are now facing difficulties due to alleged non-compliance by school managements.

Parents who insist on paying only the officially approved fees are reportedly being subjected to pressure tactics, including threats of academic penalties for their children. The AAP leader alleged that in some cases, schools have taken extreme steps such as barring students from classes, withholding academic results, or even striking off their names from enrolment records. Referring to past allegations involving a prominent public

school, Bharadwaj claimed that students were made to sit in libraries instead of attending classes and that bouncers were deployed on campus to manage dissent. He further stated that legal assurances of action against such institutions have not been fulfilled, raising questions about the government's commitment to enforcing its own policies. Bharadwaj also flagged concerns about other schools facing similar accusations, asking why stricter measures such as cancellation of recognition had not been initiated.

## Zero tolerance for corruption in Delhi, strict action, no exceptions & protection: CMO

**New Delhi :** The office of Rekha Gupta on Wednesday reiterated the government's firm commitment to a zero-tolerance policy against corruption in the national capital, stressing that strict action is taken wherever wrongdoing is detected.

In an official communication shared on the social media platform X, the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) emphasised that no individual found guilty of corruption would be spared, regardless of position or influence.

The statement was accompanied by a news alert regarding the arrest of a senior government official in New Delhi by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in a bribery case, reinforcing the administra-

tion's stance on accountability.

"Zero tolerance for corruption in Delhi. Strict action. No exceptions. No protection for anyone. We are unwavering in our commitment to clean and transparent governance," the CMO said in its post.

The government highlighted that since assuming office, the Chief Minister has consistently made it clear that there is no room for corruption or irregularities within the administration.

Officials noted that several measures have been introduced to strengthen transparency and ensure that complaints from citizens are addressed promptly and effectively.

These include mechanisms that allow people to

directly approach the CMO with grievances, making the complaint redressal process more accessible and efficient.

The administration has also focused on tightening internal systems to identify and eliminate loopholes that could enable corrupt practices within government departments.

By reinforcing checks and balances, the government aims to create a system where accountability is embedded at every level of governance.

The CMO reiterated that its anti-corruption drive is not limited to punitive action but also involves preventive reforms designed to improve overall functioning. Efforts are being made to streamline processes, reduce bureaucratic delays,

and enhance transparency in decision-making. The government believes that such structural changes are essential to build public trust and ensure efficient service delivery.

Officials added that strict vigilance is being maintained across departments to detect and act against any irregularities at the earliest stage.

## Mahavir Jayanti not just festival, but divine call to introspect: Vijender Gupta

**New Delhi:** Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta today said that a person who practices compassion towards all creatures truly, is the one who walks on the path of Mahavir with these eternal principles of Lord Mahavir.

On the occasion of Mahavir Jayanti, Gupta took part in a commemorative programme organized in Rohini, his assembly constituency, where he appealed that there be non-violence in every home, truth in business, and the spirit of Anekant (pluralism) in politics, and simplicity in lifestyle.

The event organized by the Digambar Jain Mahasabha was marked by deep spiritual fervour and a collective call for global peace.

During the ceremony, Gupta received blessings from revered Jain saints and was formally honoured for his dedicated service to the citizens of the national capital. In the speech delivered by Gupta, while addressing the large gathering of devotees, he translated the ancient wisdom of the 24th Tirthankara into a roadmap for modern governance and social harmony. The Speaker emphasized that Mahavir Jayanti is not merely a festival, but a "divine call to introspect and test one's soul." Reflecting on the life of Prince Vardhaman, who renounced the throne for the eternal truth, Gupta noted that Lord Mahavir proved that true bravery does not lie in the edge of a sword, but in con-

quering one's own mind, victory over anger, greed, and ego. He redefined Ahimsa Paramo Dharma, stating that non-violence is not cowardice, but the pinnacle of courage.

He highlighted the principle of Anekantavada (the multiplicity of viewpoints), calling it a "healing balm" for the present day society which is slowly becoming fragmented, noting that "my truth is not the absolute whole; there is light in your truth as well."

Highlighting the principle of Aparigraha (non-attachment/non-consumption), he noted that Lord Mahavir provided the solution to the global climate crisis centuries ago by teaching us not to exploit nature or indulge in mindless accumulation.

## Delhi govt to work with IARI for improving soil health and expanding green cover: CM

**New Delhi:** Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Wednesday highlighted the role of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute in strengthening the country's farmers, and stated that with its research and bridging the gap between farms and the laboratories, the institution has supported agriculture.

Gupta, who attended the 122nd Foundation Day celebrations of the IARI here as the chief guest, paid tributes to the scientists, researchers, and experts.

Addressing the gathering on the occasion, she said that the institution has shaped Indian agriculture, starting from the Green

Revolution to modern technologies.

And has reinforced food security and self-reliance. Gupta also released two publications titled 'Improved Crop Varieties for Food, Nutrition and Livelihood Security' and 'Precision Floriculture and Landscape Design.'

## Editorial

### A Decisive End to a Violent Chapter

Naxalism—the greatest and bloodiest challenge that has confronted the internal security of Indian democracy for decades—now stands on the threshold of its end. Union Home Minister Amit Shah's assertion that India has become 'Naxal-free' is not merely a political statement; rather, it is the collective outcome of the blood shed by security forces over the past decade, their sustained operations, and the Central Government's steely strategy. While there may be differing opinions from a technical standpoint regarding the bold and ambitious objective set by the Central Government to render the country completely Naxalism-free by March 31, 2026, any impartial observer must acknowledge that the backbone of this violent and destructive movement has now been completely broken. Thanks to the mounting pressure exerted by security forces within the forests, the intricate intelligence network that has been woven, and the effective rehabilitation schemes implemented to bring Naxalites into the mainstream, the roots of Naxalism have now been uprooted. The information revealed in the Home Ministry's latest and detailed report is astounding. Over the past ten years, a staggering number—more than ten thousand Naxalites—have chosen to abandon the path of violence and join the democratic mainstream. Notably, a record number of Naxalites surrendered in 2025, while in just the first three months of 2026, 630 Naxalites have surrendered. These are not merely statistics; they constitute an event that bears witness to the moral defeat of a bloody and anachronistic ideology.

If one examines the history and trajectory of the Naxalite movement, the spark that ignited it originated in Naxalbari—a small and remote village in West Bengal. In its nascent stages, this movement possessed a robust ideological foundation and emerged primarily to raise a voice against the exploitation of farmers, landless agricultural laborers, and the destitute. When tribal communities in remote regions were confronted with administrative apathy, the stranglehold of moneylenders, and systemic exploitation, the Naxalite leadership stepped forward to articulate their grievances and took the stance of taking up arms against injustice. Consequently, the movement initially garnered significant support from the local populace within the dense forest tracts of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Odisha, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh—an area that rapidly expanded to form what came to be known as the 'Red Corridor.' However, with the passage of time, the movement completely deviated from its original social and economic objectives. The seeds of its eventual downfall were sown the moment this movement—which harbored the impossible dream of overthrowing the democratic order through armed revolution—embraced an extreme path of violence. The very tribal communities whose rights the movement had pledged to defend became the victims of its brutality, as Naxalites began ruthlessly killing these impoverished tribals on mere suspicion of being 'police informers.' By disrupting road construction, blowing up school buildings, and actively opposing development initiatives, the Naxalites witnessed a rapid erosion of their popular support base. The very people who had once offered them shelter eventually grew weary of their reign of terror.

Since 2014, the Central Government has adopted an extremely strict 'zero tolerance' policy against Naxalism. Naxalites traditionally employed a method of attack involving the planting of IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) beneath police vehicles, primarily within remote forest areas—a tactic that has, to date, claimed the lives of thousands of brave police personnel. However, to break this stalemate, the government significantly increased the number of police stations and security bases in Naxal-affected regions to 586; consequently, the Naxalites' so-called 'safe strongholds' began to crumble one after another. Rather than relying solely on military or police operations, the government established an unprecedented network of infrastructure across these Naxal-affected areas. By undertaking the construction of thousands of kilometers of roads and bridges within the 'Red Corridor' on a war footing, the government effectively eliminated the operational space—for both concealment and movement—that Naxalites had previously enjoyed. To accelerate this campaign and facilitate the logistical support of security forces, 68 state-of-the-art helipads were constructed; this enabled security forces to maintain a radar-like surveillance over Naxalite movements and to deploy immediate reinforcements during emergencies. The surrender of Bhupati—a highly significant and senior leader within the Naxalite movement—along with 60 of his hardcore associates, stands as a major testament to the mounting pressure exerted by security forces and the efficacy of their evolving strategies. A movement that had originally pledged itself to the cause of social justice eventually became plagued by corrupt ideologies, extortion, the plundering of forest resources, and anti-social activities orchestrated with the aid of external forces. Today, as this movement breathes its last, it would be erroneous to attribute this success solely to the power of the gun. The ideological allure of Naxalism has completely dissipated, thanks to the options offered by the government to bring Naxalites into the mainstream—specifically, the opportunity to live with dignity, packages of financial assistance, and the opening of avenues for education and employment for their children. Young people in these remote regions now envision their future in pens and laptops rather than in guns. The sight of the Tricolor fluttering proudly in what were once Naxalite strongholds—and of people casting their votes with enthusiasm during elections—stands as the greatest testament to a changing India and the triumph of democracy. However, while Naxalism may have been militarily neutralized, the next major and most challenging task facing the government is to uproot the fundamental causes that originally gave birth to this movement. Even though the military threat of Naxalism has been eliminated, the Central and State governments must prioritize addressing poverty, unemployment, the lack of education, and the land, forest, and water rights of tribal communities in these remote areas to ensure that the Naxalite mindset does not rear its head again. Peace will not be sustainable until development reaches the very farthest corners of the forests and every young person in those regions finds gainful employment. The foundation of peace laid by Amit Shah must now be further strengthened by the edifice of inclusive development. The dark chapter of violence and bloodshed has now come to a close; a new era of development and progress has begun. It is now our collective responsibility to integrate every citizen of these regions into the mainstream of development. It is equally essential to honor the sacrifices of the soldiers who were martyred during this entire struggle against Naxalism, for it is solely due to their supreme sacrifice that these remote regions have become safe today. A Naxal-free India implies not merely erasing the 'red dots' from the map, but rather wiping away the fear from the eyes of the indigenous communities residing there and bringing a smile of trust to their faces. The next objective must now be to weave a network of industrial, educational, and healthcare facilities across these now-peaceful regions, thereby making their inhabitants partners in the nation's progress. This was not merely a battle for a single district or state, but a battle for the integrity of the entire nation—one that India has won through a combination of diplomacy and strength. It is now the paramount duty of the administration to make sustained efforts to preserve this atmosphere and to consistently uphold the trust of the local populace.

# Government gives highest priority to ensuring safety and security of women

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) compiles and publishes data on crimes, including crimes against women, in its publication "Crime in India", which provides detailed State-wise and category-wise statistics is available on the NCRB's official website (<https://ncrb.gov.in>).

The latest report of National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), provides data for the period 2019-2021, which reveals that the percentage of ever-married women aged 18-49 years who have ever experienced spousal violence (physical and/or sexual violence) has reduced to 29.3% as compared to 31.2% reported in NFHS-4 for the period 2015-2016.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005 has been enacted keeping in view the rights guaranteed under Article 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution of India to provide for a remedy under the civil law which is intended to protect the women from being victims of domestic violence and to prevent the occurrence of domestic violence in the society. "Police" and "Public Order" are State subjects under the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India. The responsibility to maintain law and order, protection of life and property of the citizens including investigation and prosecution in crimes against women and children rests with the re-

spective State Governments and UT Administrations; they are competent to deal with such offences under the extant provisions of laws.

Nevertheless, the Central Government gives highest priority to ensuring safety and security of women and has taken several legislative

to report the cases of domestic violence to the Magistrate upon receipt of complaints and to assist the Magistrate in the discharge of his functions. The PWDVA provides to women remedies such as protection order, residence order, custody order, monetary relief and compensation

and those in distress, both in private and public spaces all across the country. It provides services like medical aid, legal aid and advice, temporary shelter, police assistance and psycho-social counselling to needy women. As on date, 926 One Stop Centres have been made op-

about government schemes and services all across the country. Women Helpline is operational in 35 States and Union Territories and also integrated with Emergency Response Support System (ERSS-112). Till 28th February 2026, WHLs have assisted over 99.09 lakh wom-

ble justice.

Under the Samartha vertical of Mission Shakti, Shakti Sadan has been established as an Integrated Relief and Rehabilitation Home for women in distress, including victims of trafficking and domestic violence. It has been formed by merging the earlier schemes of Swadhar Greh and Ujjawala. It aims at creating a safe and enabling environment for the women in difficult situations, to enable them to overcome the adverse circumstances. As on 23.03.2026, 416 Shakti Sadans are operational across the country.

In order to strengthen transparency and accessibility in service delivery with respect to reliefs and rehabilitation to women in distress, the Ministry of WCD launched Mission Shakti Portal (<https://missionshakti.wcd.gov.in/>) on 22.01.2025. The Mission Shakti Portal data is now accessible via the Mission Shakti Mobile Application with multi lingual feature thereby expanding outreach and convenience for users. The Portal provides a publicly accessible list of Protection Officers under the PWDVA. As on 23.03.2026, details of 2,428 Protection Officers have been updated by States and UTs.

This information was given by the Minister of State for Women and Child Development Smt. Savitri Thakur in Lok Sabha in reply to a question.



order under it. Section 8 of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005 mandates the States and UTs to appoint such number of Protection Officers in each district as it may consider necessary and also to notify the area(s) within which a Protection Officer shall exercise the powers and perform the duties conferred. It is the duty of the Protection Officer

order under it.

Under the umbrella scheme Mission Shakti, integrated services are provided for safety, protection and empowerment of women through its two verticals; Sambal and Samartha. One Stop Centre (OSC) is a component of the Sambal vertical that provides integrated and immediate support and assistance under one roof to women affected by violence

erational across the country. Till 31st December 2025, OSCs have assisted over 13.37 lakh women in the country.

Women Helpline (WHL-181) provides 24-hour toll-free telecommunication services to support women in both emergency and non-emergency situations. It offers assistance to women affected by violence and provides information

en in the country.

Nari Adalat scheme provides a platform for alternative grievance redressal for women at the gram panchayat level. The Adalats are mandated to help women in distress at the panchayat level in resolving smaller issues relating to domestic violence and other gender-based violence by negotiation, mediation and reconciliation with mutual consent for accessi-

## 'Poshan Tracker' for Anganwadi Services

Mission Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 is an umbrella scheme under the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD) to strengthen nutrition services and address the challenge of malnutrition in the country. It is a Centrally Sponsored scheme where the responsibility for implementation of various activities lies with the States and UTs. This Mission includes beneficiaries: children under 6 years of age, pregnant women, lactating mothers and adolescent girls (age 14-18 years in Aspirational Districts and North-Eastern region) in the country.

The 'Poshan Tracker' digital application has been rolled out as an ICT based governance tool for monitoring and tracking of all activities in the Anganwadi Centres (AWCs), Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) and beneficiaries on defined indicators. It has facilitated near real time data collection for Anganwadi Services. It has substantially reduced the administrative work by simplifying manual data entry in physical registers and

reducing operational challenges. The frontline functionaries are equipped with smartphones to enter the data related to services available under the Mission Poshan 2.0. An amount of ₹2000 per annum is provided to all AWWs across the country as internet connectivity charges. To support AWWs and address network-related issues such as low or no internet connectivity, the Poshan Tracker application has been specifically designed to allow data entry in offline mode. Reporting of daily activities like - opening of AWCs, daily attendance of children, THR and Hot Cooked Meal (HCM) distribution, activities conducted at AWC (Pre-school education, Personal Hygiene sessions) etc. are available in offline mode, independent of server availability. This creates ease of living for the beneficiaries to avail the Anganwadi Services and ease of doing business for AWWs to ensure uninterrupted service delivery.

Block and District coordinators provide on-ground handholding support to AWWs and supervisors



for effective usage of the Poshan Tracker Application and resolution

of technical glitches.

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) is further ensuring stable broadband/internet connectivity and addressing disparities in telecom penetration in rural & remote areas and bridging the digital divide through the Digital Bharat Nidhi (DBN) in the country. Key initiatives include:

The BharatNet project provides broadband to Gram Panchayats (GPs) and villages (on demand). Various schemes for high-speed internet/broadband and mobile services (including 4G) in remote areas, such as the North-East, Islands, LWE (Left-Wing Extremism)-affected regions, Aspirational Districts, and border villages.

Further, under Amended BharatNet Program (ABP) priority has been given to cover Government institutions including schools, PHCs, Anganwadi centres, Panchayat offices etc. This information was given by the Minister of State for Women and Child Development Smt. Savitri Thakur in Lok Sabha in reply to a question.

## Consensus-based decision-making is the bedrock of WTO's legitimacy

The second day of the WTO Ministerial Conference 14, currently being held in Yaoundé, witnessed intensive deliberations among trade ministers from member countries on critical issues surrounding reform of the World Trade Organization. The discussions reflected growing urgency among member nations to address longstanding challenges within the multilateral trading system while adapting to evolving global economic realities.

India's delegation at the high-level gathering is being led by Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, who played a prominent role in articulating India's position on several key reform issues. His interventions highlighted India's consistent advocacy for a fair, transparent, and inclusive global trade framework.

Addressing the theme of "decision-making including past mandates," Goyal underscored that consensus-based decision-making remains the cornerstone of the WTO's legitimacy. He asserted that any attempt to dilute this principle would undermine the trust and

confidence of member nations, particularly developing economies that rely on equal participation in global rule-making.

He further emphasized that each member country retains its sovereign right to decide whether or not to bind itself to specific trade rules. According to India, respecting this sovereignty is crucial for preserving the integrity of the multilateral system and ensuring that agreements reflect genuine consensus rather than imposed obligations.

India also stressed the need to rebuild trust among member nations, noting that the current impasse in WTO negotiations stems from deeper structural and political challenges. Goyal called for a comprehensive stock-taking exercise to identify the root causes of these issues, while ensuring that reform discussions remain transparent, inclusive, and driven by the members themselves.

Highlighting concerns about fragmentation within the institution, India warned that the multilateral trading system cannot function effectively if divisions persist

within its own framework. A cohesive and integrated approach, India argued, is essential for maintaining the WTO's relevance in a rapidly changing global trade environment.



On the issue of creating a "level playing field," India pointed out the enduring asymmetries that originated during the Uruguay Round. These imbalances, India noted, continue to disadvantage developing countries, making it imperative to address them before introducing new trade issues into the agenda.

India strongly reiterated the importance of resolving long-pending concerns such as public stockholding for food security, special safe-

guard mechanisms, and cotton-related issues. These matters, according to India, are critical for protecting the livelihoods of farmers and ensuring food security in developing nations.

Another major concern raised by India was the continued dysfunction of the WTO's dispute settlement system. Goyal highlighted that without an effective and operational adjudication mechanism, trade rules lose their enforceability, disproportionately affecting smaller and less powerful economies. India also cautioned against the misuse of transparency requirements as tools for trade retaliation or for challenging legitimate domestic policies. Instead, it

advocated for transparency measures to be accompanied by sustained capacity-building support, enabling all member countries to meet their obligations fairly.

Emphasizing inclusive growth, India underlined the importance of providing all members with a fair opportunity to build productive capacity, generate employment, and integrate meaningfully into global trade networks. This, India argued, is essential for achieving equitable and sustainable development.

The day concluded with a ministerial plenary session on WTO reform and transparency, where India's Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal reiterated the country's commitment to constructive engagement. He called for a time-bound restart of reform efforts, supported by clear milestones and evidence-based analysis. Agrawal also cautioned against "cherry-picking" issues or advancing preconceived positions, stressing that reform discussions must remain balanced and comprehensive. He highlighted the valuable role of WTO committees, suggesting that

their practical experience can contribute to a more grounded, bottom-up approach to reform.

India further expressed concerns about the rise of plurilateral agreements, warning that such arrangements could fragment the multilateral trading system. Instead, it advocated for consensus-driven processes rooted in openness, inclusivity, and member participation. On the sidelines of the conference, Goyal held a series of bilateral meetings with his counterparts from several countries, including the United States, China, South Korea, Switzerland, New Zealand, Canada, Morocco, and Oman. These discussions focused not only on the MC14 agenda but also on strengthening bilateral trade relations. Overall, India's interventions at the conference reinforced its long-standing position of advocating for a balanced, development-oriented, and inclusive global trading system. As discussions at MC14 continue, the outcomes of these deliberations are expected to play a crucial role in shaping the future direction of the WTO and global trade governance.



Briefs :

## Minority scholarship uptake sees sharp decline in Haryana and Punjab

**Gurugram :** Recent data released by the Ministry of Minority Affairs reveals a widening gap between the funds allocated for minority scholarships and the amount actually reaching students. In a parliamentary response, Minister Kiren Rijju noted that expenditure has consistently fallen short of the budget, with billions of rupees remaining unutilized over the last several fiscal cycles.

The statistics highlight a dramatic drop in beneficiaries; for instance, Haryana saw its pre-matric scholarship recipients plummet from over 25,000 to fewer than 1,000 in just one year. Critics argue that the restriction of elementary scholarships and the merging of various aid programs have created administrative barriers. While the government maintains that the Right to Education covers basic schooling, advocates point to the data as evidence of a systemic failure to support minority education.

Recent data released by the Ministry of Minority Affairs has exposed a widening chasm between the funds earmarked for minority welfare and the capital actually reaching the student population. In a detailed response provided to the Rajya Sabha on March 16, 2026, Minister Kiren Rijju acknowledged that budget utilization has remained remarkably low across several fiscal cycles. Despite a marginal increase in the Ministry's overall budget allocation to ₹3,400 crore for the 2026-27 period, actual expenditure on key scholarship schemes has plummeted, with billions of rupees reportedly returning to the treasury unspent.

## Bastara toll plaza implements rate hike and cashless system

**Karnal :** Travelers using the National Highway-44 must now pay higher user fees at the Bastara toll plaza following a scheduled revision by the NHAI. Under the new rates, a single journey for a private car costs ₹190, while heavy oversized vehicles with seven or more axles are being charged ₹1,240. In a major operational shift, the plaza has also transitioned to a 100% cashless environment, completely discontinuing manual cash collections at booths. Authorities stated that this move is intended to eliminate traffic bottlenecks and enhance financial transparency. While monthly passes remain available for frequent commuters, the NHAI confirmed that only digital payments via FASTag or other electronic modes will be accepted moving forward. Travelers navigating the National Highway-44 must now account for higher transit costs as the Bastara toll plaza has officially implemented its scheduled annual fee revision. Following the latest National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) directive, the cost for a single journey in a private car has risen to ₹190. The hike scales significantly for commercial transport, with heavy oversized vehicles (seven or more axles) now being charged ₹1,240 per pass.

## High Court halts tree felling across Haryana to protect forest cover

**Chandigarh :** In a landmark ruling aimed at environmental preservation, the Punjab and Haryana High Court has imposed a blanket ban on the felling of trees across the entire state of Haryana without prior judicial approval. This directive follows a similar order issued for Punjab three months ago, effectively placing the green assets of both states under the court's direct supervision. The division bench, led by Chief Justice Sheel Nagu, noted with concern that Haryana currently holds the lowest forest cover in India, necessitating immediate intervention to prevent further ecological depletion.

The court's decision was prompted by a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by a group of 21 concerned citizens.

The petition specifically challenged the environmental clearances granted for a major infrastructure project: a 19.2 km, six-lane Zirakpur bypass and access-controlled spur connectivity project undertaken by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI). This project, a key component of



the Tricity Ring Road, is slated to cut through some of the region's last remaining green belts, including ecologically sensitive riverine zones and urban forests.

At the heart of the legal challenge is the proposed diversion of over 17.57 hectares (approximately 43 acres) of forest land. Petitioners argued that the project would necessitate the axing of more than 5,000 mature trees, many of which are between 20 and 30 years old. The affected areas in-

clude notified forest patches in Punjab, the Ghaggar riverine belt, and the lush green landscape of the Panchkula Golf Course.

The plea emphasized that the Golf Course alone serves as a vital "urban lung," housing nearly 14,000 trees, of which over 2,200 are currently at risk.

The petitioners also raised technical objections to the project's design, labeling the "partially elevated" corridor as a flawed solution. They pointed out that the

proposed height of the corridor (5.5 to 6 meters) is significantly lower than the height of the mature trees in its path (8 to 15 meters), making large-scale felling inevitable despite the elevation.

Furthermore, they argued that the alignment would slice through five fairways of the Panchkula Golf Course, potentially rendering the facility dysfunctional for its 2,500 members and destroying a major ecological asset.

## Federal tax rebate extension provides boost for textile exporters

**Gurugram :** Indian garment and apparel exporters received a significant fiscal boost as the government extended the Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL) scheme through September 30, 2026. The move is designed to maintain the global competitiveness of the textile sector by reimbursing non-GST taxes through transferable duty credit scrips.

This extension is particularly vital for industrial hubs in Haryana and Punjab, such as Panipat, which has emerged as a national leader in textile production. By ensuring a seamless transition into the new financial year without a break in coverage, the Ministry of Textiles aims to provide stability for exporters. A specialized committee will conduct quarterly reviews of the scheme to manage fiscal liabilities while ensuring that compliance remains streamlined for the industry.

Indian garment and apparel exporters have received a major strategic advantage as the Union Government officially extended the Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL) scheme until September 30, 2026. This move is designed to bolster the global competitiveness of the Indian textile sector by ensuring that "taxes are not exported." By reimbursing

various non-GST state and central taxes—such as electricity duties, value-added tax on fuel used for transportation, and mandi taxes—the government aims to level the playing field for Indian manufacturers against international competitors in the US and European markets.

The extension is particularly significant for the industrial belts of Haryana and Punjab, where the textile sector is a primary economic driver. Cities like Panipat, often referred to as the "Textile City," stand to benefit immensely from this continuity.

As a national leader in home textiles and floor coverings, Panipat's export-oriented units rely on the RoSCTL scheme to maintain thin margins in a highly price-sensitive global market. The assurance of a multi-year extension allows these hubs to invest in technology and capacity expansion without the looming fear of a sudden withdrawal of fiscal support.

Under the RoSCTL framework, the rebate is issued in the form of transferable duty credit scrips. These scrips can be used by exporters to pay basic customs duty on the import of equipment or raw materials, or they can be sold in the open market to other importers for cash. This mechanism provides much-needed liquidity to

garment manufacturers, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that often face working capital crunches. By keeping the scheme seamless through the transition into the 2026-27 financial year, the Ministry of Textiles has eliminated the typical "policy gap" that often causes administrative delays for exporters.

To ensure that the scheme remains fiscally sustainable while meeting industry needs, the government has established a specialized committee to conduct quarterly reviews. This oversight body will monitor the fiscal liabilities incurred and ensure that the rebate rates remain aligned with the actual tax burdens faced by the industry. This data-driven approach is intended to streamline compliance, making it easier for exporters to claim their dues through a digitized, transparent process that minimizes human intervention and reduces the "cost of doing business."

Industry leaders have welcomed the move, noting that the textile sector is one of India's largest employers, particularly for women in rural and semi-urban areas. By providing a stable fiscal environment for the next 18 months, the government is not only protecting export volumes but also safeguarding millions of livelihoods.

## MP slams BJP for Haryana's shrinking share in assembly building

**Chandigarh :** Ambala MP Varun Chaudhary has formally challenged the Union Government over the diminishing physical space allotted to Haryana within the joint assembly complex. Raising the matter in the Lok Sabha under Rule 377, the MP characterized the current distribution as a blatant injustice, noting that while the legal framework mandates a 60:40 split between Punjab and Haryana, the latter is currently operating with less than its 40 percent entitlement.

Chaudhary highlighted that the lack of space has reached a critical point, leaving the state without sufficient room for ministerial offices, lounges for members, or adequate space for the Leader of the Opposition. He criticized the ruling party for failing to secure the state's rights despite holding power at both the state and central levels.

The MP called upon Home Minister Amit Shah to resolve the deadlock and provide the necessary land for a legislative extension to ensure smooth democratic proceedings.

Ambala Member of Parliament Varun Chaudhary has escalated a growing dispute over the division of the joint Legislative Assembly complex in Chandigarh, for-

## Free pilgrimage train to Sri Hazur Sahib scheduled for May

**Chandigarh :** Under the auspices of the Mukhyamantri Tirth Yatra Yojana, the Haryana government has announced a special free rail service for senior citizens traveling to Sri Hazur Sahib in Nanded. Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini is set to flag off the journey from Kurukshetra on May 5, offering eligible residents an opportunity for a fully sponsored religious pilgrimage.

The scheme is specifically designed for residents over the age of 60 whose annual family income remains below Rs 1.80 lakh. Registration remains open on the SARAL portal until April 15, and the government has committed to covering all costs related to travel, food, and lodging. While senior citizens can bring an attendant, those companions must pay the full fare. To ensure coordination with the Railways, applicants must report their registration to their local district information office by April 16. Under the "Mukhyamantri Tirth Yatra Yojana," the Haryana government has finalized plans to provide a free pilgrimage service for senior citizens to Sri Hazur Sahib in Nanded, Maharashtra. Chief Minister

Nayab Singh Saini is scheduled to officially flag off the special train from Kurukshetra on May 5, 2026. This initiative is part of the state's broader effort to facilitate religious travel for those who might otherwise be unable to afford the logistics of a long-distance journey.

The scheme is carefully targeted toward the state's most economically vulnerable elderly residents. To be eligible for the fully sponsored trip, applicants must be over 60 years of age and have a verified annual family income of less than 1.80 lakh, as documented in the Parivar Pehchan Patra (PPP) system. The government has committed to an all-inclusive package, meaning that the costs for train fare, high-quality meals, and comfortable lodging during the stay at Nanded will be entirely borne by the state exchequer.

For those interested in participating, the registration window is currently open on the SARAL portal and will remain active until April 15. Following the online application, the government has mandated a secondary step: all registered applicants must report their details to their respective

District Information Office by April 16. This coordination is essential for the Haryana administration to finalize the passenger manifest with the Indian Railways and ensure that all necessary medical and security arrangements are in place for the travelers.

While the primary pilgrim travels for free, the policy also accounts for the physical needs of senior citizens by allowing them to bring an attendant or a younger family member for assistance. However, it is important to note that these companions are not covered under the subsidy and will be required to pay the full fare for the journey. This ensures that the state's resources remain focused on the primary beneficiaries—the elderly citizens from low-income households.

Sri Hazur Sahib is one of the five Takhts (seats of temporal authority) in Sikhism and holds immense historical and religious significance as the place where Guru Gobind Singh Ji breathed his last. By facilitating this journey, the Haryana government aims to promote social welfare and spiritual inclusivity.



mally challenging the Union Government's management of the shared space. Speaking in the Lok Sabha under Rule 377, the MP characterized the current spatial distribution between Punjab and Haryana as a "blatant injustice."

He pointed out that while the Punjab Reorganisation Act mandates a 60:40 split of the heritage building's assets, Haryana is currently operating with significantly less than its legally entitled 40 percent share of the total area.

According to Chaudhary, the shortage of physical

space within the Vidhan Sabha has reached a critical bottleneck, hindering the day-to-day functions of the state's democratic machinery.

He highlighted that the Haryana segment of the building lacks sufficient room for ministerial offices, proper lounges for members to deliberate, and even adequate office space for the Leader of the Opposition. The MP argued that these constraints are not merely logistical inconveniences but are actively impeding the efficiency of legislative pro-

ceedings and the ability of elected representatives to serve their constituents.

The Ambala MP directed sharp criticism toward the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), noting that despite the party being in power at both the Center and the State level for several years, it has failed to secure Haryana's rightful administrative territory. He characterized this as a failure of political will, suggesting that the state's interests have been sidelined in the broader federal dialogue. Chaudhary's remarks have reignited a sensitive debate regarding the "double engine" government's ability to resolve interstate deadlocks that have persisted for decades.

In a formal appeal to the Union Home Minister, Chaudhary called upon Home Minister Amit Shah to intervene and resolve the spatial deadlock. The MP proposed that the central government provide the necessary land or approvals for a dedicated legislative extension for Haryana. Such an expansion, he argued, is the only sustainable way to ensure that the state assembly can operate with the dignity and resources required for a modern legislative body, free from the cramped conditions of the current shared heritage structure.

## Nurse files complaint of sexual assault and forced conversion in Nuh

**Gurugram :** Authorities in Nuh have registered a First Information Report after a 30-year-old healthcare professional alleged she was subjected to rape and pressured to change her religion. The victim, a nurse originally from West Bengal, stated that a local man used compromising videos to blackmail her and coerce her into converting to Islam over a period of several months.

The Nuh police have booked the primary accused, along with his father and brother, under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the Haryana Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Act. Investigators are currently examining claims of extortion and physical assault linked to the case. While the suspects remain at large, police officials have stated that arrests are expected imminently as the probe into the nurse's allegations continues.

Authorities in Nuh have registered a comprehensive First Information Report (FIR) following a harrowing complaint filed by a 30-year-old nurse. Originally from West Bengal and currently working in the healthcare



sector in Haryana, the victim has alleged that she was subjected to repeated sexual assault and systematic pressure to renounce her faith. According to the complaint, a local man established contact with her several months ago and subsequently used recorded compromising videos to blackmail her into submission.

The victim stated that the harassment escalated from physical assault to a coordinated effort to force her into converting to Islam. She alleged that over a period of several months, the primary accused, along with his family members, used threats of social defamation and physical harm to coerce her into a religious conversion. These allegations have brought the case under the strict purview

of the Haryana Prevention of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Bill, which was designed to penalize conversions achieved through misrepresentation, force, undue influence, or coercion.

The Nuh police have booked the primary suspect, his father, and his brother under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), including charges related to rape and criminal intimidation. Additionally, charges have been framed under the state's specific anti-conversion statutes. Investigators are also looking into claims of extortion, as the victim alleged that significant sums of money were taken from her under the threat of releasing the private videos to the public.

As of Wednesday, the ac-

cused family members remain at large, having reportedly fled their residence shortly after the FIR was lodged. Special teams from the Nuh police have been formed to conduct raids at suspected hideouts across the district and neighboring areas. Police officials have stated that they are prioritizing the safety of the complainant and that arrests in the case are expected imminently. Forensic teams are also working to recover the digital evidence mentioned in the complaint to strengthen the prosecution's case.

This case has drawn significant attention from local advocacy groups, who are calling for a fast-track trial and stringent punishment if the allegations are proven true. The Nuh administration has assured a transparent and impartial probe, emphasizing that no individual, regardless of their background, will be allowed to bypass the law through coercion or violence.

The nurse is currently receiving counseling and remains under police protection as the investigation moves into its next critical phase.

## Inter-state shootout and extortion plot foiled by Sonapat police

**Sonapat :** The Special Unit for Anti-Gangster (SUAG) has successfully prevented a series of high-profile shootings across Haryana and Delhi by arresting five hired sharpshooters. The suspects, linked to overseas-based gangsters Randeep Malik and Deepak Boxer, were reportedly planning to target six different business establishments to enforce extortion demands worth crores of rupees. The first attack was slated for a nutrition store in Bahalgarh before the police intervention disrupted the network. Interrogations revealed that the shooters were recruited through intermediaries and had specific targets mapped out in Panipat, Rohtak, and Delhi. While the immediate threat has been neutralized, local authorities are conducting parallel probes to identify the middlemen who facilitated the recruitment of these gunmen. The Special Unit for Anti-Gangster (SUAG) of the Sonapat Police has successfully thwarted a major coordinated criminal conspiracy, arresting five sharpshooters allegedly hired to execute a series of high-profile hits across Haryana and Delhi. The sus-

pects are reportedly linked to notorious overseas-based gangsters Randeep Malik and Deepak Boxer, who have been orchestrating extortion rackets from abroad. The police intervention has effectively neutralized a "hit list" that targeted at least six prominent business establishments, where the gang intended to use gunfire to intimidate owners into paying extortion demands amounting to several crores of rupees. The investigation revealed that the syndicate's first planned strike was a nutrition store located in the Bahalgarh area. According to senior police officials, the shooters had already conducted a reconnaissance of the site and were awaiting a final signal to open fire when the SUAG team moved in. Beyond the Bahalgarh target, the group had mapped out specific business locations in Panipat, Rohtak, and several neighborhoods in Delhi. The foiled plot suggests a highly organized attempt by international fugitives to re-establish a climate of fear among the regional business community. Interrogations of the five arrested individuals have shed light on the recruitment patterns

of these modern gangs. The shooters were not direct associates of the kingpins but were recruited through a chain of intermediaries and digital communication channels. This "gig economy" style of contract crime makes the network harder to trace, as the gunmen often have limited knowledge of the top-tier leadership. The suspects were provided with weapons, stolen motorcycles, and specific GPS coordinates for their targets, indicating a level of logistical planning usually associated with more established militant groups. While the immediate threat of the shootouts has been eliminated, local authorities are now shifting their focus toward the middlemen who facilitated the recruitment and arming of these hitmen. Parallel probes are currently underway in coordination with the Delhi Police and Haryana's Special Task Force (STF) to identify the "handlers" operating on Indian soil. These intermediaries act as the bridge between the overseas masterminds and the local recruits, managing the transfer of funds and illegal weaponry required for such operations.

# Bahadurgarh police bust inter-state newborn trafficking ring

**Bahadurgarh:** In a significant breakthrough against organized crime, the Bahadurgarh police have dismantled an inter-state syndicate dedicated to the illegal trafficking of infants. During the operation conducted on Wednesday, law enforcement officials successfully rescued a three-day-old baby and arrested three key members of the gang, including a woman. The child, who is reported to be in good health, has been placed under professional medical supervision while authorities work to trace his biological parents and ensure his long-term safety.

The arrested suspects have been identified as Salim and Akil, residents of Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh, and a woman named Baint from Muktsar, Punjab. According to Mayank Mishra, DCP of Bahadurgarh, the group is part of a larger five-member network that operates across several states, including Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, and Maharashtra. Preliminary



investigations suggest that the rescued infant was brought from Faridkot and was in the process of being transported to Delhi to be handed over to a childless couple.

The financial scale of the operation highlights the predatory nature of the syndicate. The gang reportedly purchased the newborn for approximately ₹2.25 lakh and had negotiated a final sale price of ₹9.25 lakh with

the prospective buyers. To find their targets, the traffickers utilized popular social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, posing as facilitators for child adoption to lure desperate, childless couples into illegal and highly expensive transactions. The bust occurred during a strategic vehicle checkpoint operation at Sector 9 Mor in Bahadurgarh. Special police teams intercepted the suspects and seized two ve-

hicles along with various incriminating documents. These papers are currently being analyzed by forensic experts, as they are expected to provide vital leads regarding other active members of the network and previous successful "sales" conducted by the group. DCP Mishra emphasized that this was a highly sophisticated operation, with at least five similar cases already linked to this specific gang. The three ar-

rested individuals will be taken into police remand for intensive interrogation to uncover the full extent of their reach and identify any medical professionals or middlemen who may have assisted them. The police have reiterated that bypassing legal adoption channels is a grave criminal offense and have vowed to continue their crackdown on such human trafficking networks.

A major crackdown on organized crime, the Bahadurgarh police have successfully busted a sophisticated inter-state syndicate involved in the illegal trafficking of newborns. During a targeted operation on Wednesday, law enforcement officers rescued a three-day-old baby boy and arrested three primary suspects. The infant, currently reported to be in good health, has been placed under specialized medical care as authorities begin the process of identifying his biological parents and ensuring his future security.

# Families hit as CHEERAG scheme income cap slashed to 1.8 lakh

**Rohtak:** Thousands of families in Haryana face a sudden hurdle in securing private school education for their children following the government's decision to tighten eligibility for the CHEERAG scheme. In a significant reversal of a January policy update, the annual income ceiling for the Equal Education Relief, Assistance and Grant initiative has been dropped back down to Rs 1.8 lakh from the previously proposed Rs 8 lakh.

The Directorate of Elementary Education confirmed that the 2026-27 academic session will strictly adhere to the lower income limit, using Parivar Pehchan Patra (PPP) data for verification. This move effectively excludes a large segment of the lower-middle class who had hoped to move their children from government to recognized private institutions under the state-sponsored grant. Local education officers have been directed to process applications based solely on the revised criteria.

Thousands of families across Haryana are facing an unexpected obstacle in their pursuit of private school edu-

cation following a significant government reversal regarding the CHEERAG scheme. In a major policy U-turn, the annual income eligibility limit for the "Chief Minister Haryana Equal Education Relief, Assistance and Grant" (CHEERAG) initiative has been reduced back to 1.8 lakh, effectively scrapping a January update that had briefly raised the ceiling to 8 lakh.

The Directorate of Elementary Education has officially confirmed that for the 2026-27 academic session, the lower income threshold will be strictly enforced. Eligibility will be verified using the state's Parivar Pehchan Patra (PPP) database, ensuring that only those firmly within the economically weaker section (EWS) bracket can avail of the state-sponsored grants for private school admissions.

This decision has immediate ramifications for the state's lower-middle-class demographic. Many families with annual incomes between 1.8 lakh and 8 lakh had already begun the process of identifying and applying to recognized private institu-

tions, hoping to leverage the scheme to provide their children with broader educational opportunities. With the criteria reverting to the original limit, a significant number of these applicants now find themselves ineligible for the financial assistance.

Local education authorities and District Elementary Education Officers have been formally instructed to process all new applications based solely on the revised 1.8 lakh cap. The scheme is designed to facilitate the transition of students from government schools to private ones by reimbursing a portion of the tuition fees, but this narrowed scope means the program will now focus exclusively on the most financially distressed households.

While the government's intent appears to be prioritizing the most disadvantaged families, the suddenness of the change has left many parents in a difficult position as the new school year approaches. For those who fall just outside the new limit, the dream of a private education for their children may now be financially out of reach.

# PGIMS Rohtak returns held documents to graduates on holiday

**Rohtak:** Ending a period of significant stress for young doctors, the Pandit BD Sharma PGIMS opened its administrative offices on a public holiday to return original academic certificates to 170 MBBS graduates. The documents had been retained by the institution under the State Service Incentive Bond policy, a move that recently drew widespread protest from the 2020 batch.

The swift action by the college administration allowed many graduates to meet the final deadline for the UPSC Combined Medical Services Examination. While the students expressed gratitude for the holiday service, they continue to seek further clarity from the state government regarding the long-term implications of the bond policy. The Dean of Academic Affairs confirmed that all pending applications for document retrieval have now been processed.

The administrative corridors of Pandit Bhagwat Dayal Sharma Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences (PGIMS) witnessed an unusual level of activity this

Tuesday as the institution took the extraordinary step of opening its doors on a public holiday. This decision was specifically aimed at resolving a mounting crisis involving the original academic credentials of its recent medical graduates. By choosing to operate during a scheduled break, the university demonstrated a rare level of administrative agility, directly addressing the anxieties of young doctors who had been caught in a bureaucratic deadlock for weeks.

The primary objective of this special holiday session was to return the original Class 10 and Class 12 certificates, along with other essential admission documents, to approximately 170 graduates from the MBBS batch of 2020. These documents had been held in the institution's custody under the contentious State Service Incentive Bond policy, which has been a point of significant friction between the medical fraternity and the Haryana government. For these young professionals, the possession of their original marks sheets and certificates is not merely a matter of re-



cord-keeping but a vital requirement for their immediate career progression and legal standing.

The retention of these documents had become a source of immense psychological and profes-

sional stress for the graduates, who felt their future opportunities were being held hostage by state regulations. The 2020 batch had recently concluded their rigorous medical course and completed

their internships, yet they found themselves unable to move forward without the physical proof of their basic educational qualifications. This situation led to widespread protests within the

campus, as students argued that withholding personal documents was an overreach of the bond agreement and hindered their constitutional right to pursue further education.

The timing of the document release was particularly critical due to the looming deadline for the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) Combined Medical Services Examination. Tuesday marked the final date for candidates to submit their applications for this prestigious national-level test, which serves as a gateway to various central government medical roles. Had the PGIMS administration not acted with such urgency, scores of qualified doctors from Haryana would have been effectively barred from competing for these positions simply because they lacked access to their own academic papers.

In the days leading up to this resolution, the atmosphere at the institute was charged with uncertainty as graduates made repeated appeals to the Directorate of Medical Education and Research (DMER). The government even-

tually issued a directive on March 27, instructing four major state-run medical colleges to release the retained documents to the 2020 batch. This order provided the necessary legal cover for PGIMS to bypass standard holiday closures and mobilize its student branch staff to handle the massive influx of retrieval requests.

Dr. Ashok Chauhan, the Dean of Academic Affairs at the institute, personally oversaw the operations to ensure that the process remained streamlined and transparent. He confirmed that the staff worked extended hours despite the holiday to verify identities and hand over the original files to every single graduate who had submitted an application. According to the Dean, the institution has successfully cleared all pending requests, ensuring that no student is left behind as they prepare for the next phase of their medical careers.

The graduates themselves expressed a profound sense of relief as they walked out of the administrative block with their original folders in hand.

# Biometric-based rabi procurement begins across Haryana mandis

**Chandigarh:** The annual rabi grain procurement season officially kicked off in Haryana on April 1, featuring new technology-driven measures to streamline the process for farmers. In a significant policy shift, the government has removed the requirement for farmers to be physically present at the mandi, allowing verified nominees to complete the biometric authentication instead.

To prevent fraud and the entry of unauthorized produce, all procurement centers have been geo-fenced, and crop verification is being cross-referenced with satellite imagery from the Haryana Space Application Centre. Minister Rajesh Nagar stated that gate passes will only be issued if the transport vehicle is physically within the designated zone. The procurement window will remain open until May 15, focusing on farmers registered under the 'Meri Fasal Mera Byora' portal.

The annual rabi grain procurement season has offi-



cially commenced across Haryana this April 1, ushering in a series of high-tech reforms designed to modernize the state's agricultural supply chain. This year's rollout is characterized by a significant departure from traditional methods, as the state government integrates advanced digital verification to enhance the transparency

of crop sales. By moving toward a more automated system, authorities aim to reduce the administrative burden on the farming community while ensuring that the financial benefits of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) reach the genuine tillers of the land without interference from middlemen.

In a move that offers sub-

stantial logistical relief to landowners, the government has officially waived the mandate requiring farmers to be physically present at the grain markets during the transaction process. Recognizing that many farmers balance multiple responsibilities during the peak harvest season, the new policy allows for biometric authentication to be completed by any one of three pre-authorized nominees.

This flexibility ensures that the procurement process does not come to a standstill if the primary registrant is unavailable, provided the digital identity of the representative matches the records stored on the state's centralized agricultural database.

To safeguard the integrity of the procurement drive and eliminate the risk of "paper sales" or the entry of produce from outside the state, the Haryana government has implemented a sophisticated geo-fencing protocol for all designated procurement centers.

# Long-time ATM thief arrested by Nuh police after years on the run

**Gurugram:** A notorious criminal wanted for a string of high-value ATM thefts across North India has finally been apprehended by the Nuh police. The accused, identified as Aashiq, had been a proclaimed offender since 2018 and is allegedly responsible for stealing over ₹95 lakh by hacking cash machines in Rohtak, Jhajjar, and Rewari.

Aashiq's criminal record extends into the national capital, with multiple cases registered against him in Delhi under the Arms Act and for robbery.

Police officials believe his arrest is a significant breakthrough that will help solve several cold cases involving electronic bank theft. The suspect has been handed over to the Rohtak police for detailed interrogation regarding his technical methods for breaching ATM security.

The Nuh Police have successfully apprehended a highly sought-after criminal, bringing an end to a multi-year manhunt that spanned

several districts and the national capital.

The arrested individual, identified as Aashiq, a resident of Gogjaka village, had been operating under the radar as a proclaimed offender since 2018. His capture is being viewed as a major victory for regional law enforcement, as he is allegedly the mastermind behind a series of sophisticated electronic heists that targeted Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) across Haryana and Delhi.

Initial investigations suggest that Aashiq was involved in stealing a staggering total of over ₹95 lakh through high-tech hacking methods.

His crime spree included a massive ₹40 lakh theft from an SBI machine in Rohtak, followed by separate heists in Jhajjar and the Brass Market area of Rewari, where he allegedly made off with ₹23 lakh and ₹32 lakh, respectively.

These were not simple physical break-ins; police reports indicate that the suspect utilized specialized

hacking techniques to bypass the digital security of the machines, a skill set that had previously made him difficult to track.

Aashiq's criminal profile is not limited to financial crimes; his record in New Delhi reveals a history of violence and illegal weaponry. He faces multiple charges in the capital, including cases registered under the Arms Act and several counts of robbery at the Uttam Nagar and Chhawla police stations. By the time of his arrest, he had accumulated at least six major cases of robbery and theft against his name, making him one of the most prominent fugitives in the Mewat region specializing in banking infrastructure.

The breakthrough came following a tip-off received by the Tauru city police station, which indicated that the suspect had surfaced in their jurisdiction.

A specialized team was quickly mobilized to intercept him, resulting in a successful arrest without any reported injuries.

Following his apprehension, the Nuh Police processed the initial paperwork before handing the suspect over to the Rohtak Police. This transfer is critical, as Rohtak was the site of one of his largest alleged hacks, and investigators there are eager to begin a deeper probe into his operations.

Law enforcement officials believe that the interrogation of Aashiq will yield vital intelligence regarding the broader network of ATM hackers operating in North India. By understanding the specific technical vulnerabilities he exploited, the police hope to provide banks with the information necessary to upgrade their security protocols.

His arrest is expected to lead to the resolution of several "cold cases" involving unexplained electronic bank thefts that have remained unsolved for years.

As the investigation moves into its next phase, the focus remains on identifying his accomplices and recovering the illicitly gained funds.

# Yamunanagar bans fuel sales in loose containers to stop hoarding

**Yamunanagar:** In a bid to maintain market stability, the district administration has prohibited petrol pumps from selling fuel in bottles, cans, or other loose containers. The directive follows a high-level meeting with oil marketing companies and petrol pump associations aimed at preventing artificial shortages and hoarding by consumers or industrial units.

Deputy Commissioner Preeti assured the public that fuel supplies remain robust and there is no cause for panic buying. Commercial entities such as stone crushers and plywood factories requiring large quantities of diesel must now submit formal written requests on their official letterheads. Pump operators have been tasked with providing daily stock and sales reports to the Food

and Civil Supplies Department to ensure a transparent distribution chain.

The district administration has moved decisively to stabilize the local fuel market by imposing a strict ban on the sale of petrol and diesel in loose containers. Effective immediately, petrol pump operators across Yamunanagar are prohibited from dispensing fuel into bottles, cans, or any other

non-vehicular containers. This proactive measure was formalized following a high-level coordination meeting chaired by District Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Controller Nitish Kumar Singla, which included representatives from major oil marketing companies like BPCL, HPCL, and IOCL.

The directive is primarily aimed at curbing the prac-

tice of hoarding, which often leads to artificial shortages and panic among the general public. By restricting sales to direct vehicle tank filling, the administration seeks to ensure that the available supply is used for immediate transportation needs rather than being stockpiled. Authorities noted that such hoarding not only disrupts the supply chain but also poses significant safety

risks, as storing highly flammable fuel in unauthorized domestic containers can lead to catastrophic accidents.

To balance the needs of the region's industrial sector, the administration has introduced a regulated procurement process for commercial entities. Large-scale consumers, such as plywood units, stone crushers, and various factories that rely on diesel for machinery, are no

longer permitted to buy fuel in bulk without oversight. These businesses must now submit formal, written requests on their official letterheads, detailing their specific requirements and operational capacity. This ensures that legitimate industrial needs are met while preventing any single entity from cornering the market's supply.

Deputy Commissioner

Preeti has reached out to the citizens of Yamunanagar to provide reassurance regarding the state of fuel reserves. She emphasized that the district's supply chain is functioning normally and that there is absolutely no shortage of petroleum products. The ban on loose sales is described as a preventive strategy to maintain this stability rather than a reaction to a scarcity.



## New Zealand clinch record chase in second ODI against South Africa

**Wellington:** New Zealand captain Melie Kerr delivered a sensational performance to guide her team to a historic victory in the second ODI against South Africa women's national cricket team, pulling off a record-breaking run chase that stunned the cricketing world.

Chasing a daunting target of 347, the New Zealand women's national cricket team showcased remarkable composure and belief as they surpassed the total with just two balls remaining, setting a new benchmark in women's ODI cricket.

At the heart of this extraordinary chase was Kerr, who remained unbeaten on a magnificent 179 off just 139 deliveries. Her innings was a masterclass in controlled aggression, blending elegant stroke play with calculated risk-taking under immense pressure.

Reflecting on the victory, Kerr described the moment as "pretty special," admitting that the team had been disappointed with their fielding effort in the first innings. However, she emphasized that belief never wavered, especially given the batting-friendly nature of the pitch.

Despite being under pressure at the halfway stage of the innings, New Zealand's dressing room remained optimistic. Kerr highlighted that the team's confidence played a crucial



role in scripting one of the greatest chases in the history of the format.

A turning point in the match came through a vital 120-run partnership between Kerr and Izzy Gaze. Gaze walked in at a challenging moment, with the scoreboard reading 130/4, and counter-attacked brilliantly to shift momentum back in New Zealand's favour.

Gaze's quickfire 68 proved invaluable, as her aggressive approach allowed Kerr to settle into her innings while keeping the required run rate in check. Kerr praised her teammate, noting that Gaze's fearless batting reduced pressure and enabled a match-defining stand. The partnership came after the loss of key batters Maddy Green and Brooke Halliday, making their recovery even more impressive under high-stakes conditions.

This remarkable chase eclipsed the previous highest successful run chase in women's ODIs, which was held by India women's national cricket team. India had chased down 338 during the final of the ICC Women's

Cricket World Cup in Navi Mumbai last year, finishing at 341/5.

Kerr also reflected on the evolution of women's cricket, noting how dramatically the game has progressed. She recalled a time when scores around 220 were considered competitive, contrasting it with the modern era where totals exceeding 300 are now within reach.

She credited the team's belief not only to the players but also to the support staff and coaching unit, who have instilled confidence in the squad's ability to chase down even the biggest targets.

Kerr's innings was also significant on a personal level, as she brought up her fifth ODI century in style. She maintained control throughout the chase and ensured that New Zealand stayed within striking distance as the innings approached its climax. The final over, bowled by Nadine de Klerk, required 11 runs. Kerr showed nerves of steel, smashing boundaries off the first two deliveries to effectively seal the match and bring the crowd to its feet.

## KKR's home advantage meets SRH's power-hitting in IPL duel

**Kolkata:** The IPL 2026 meeting between Kolkata Knight Riders and Sunrisers Hyderabad at Eden Gardens arrives with the sort of quiet inevitability that seasoned observers of the game have come to recognise - one side trusting its familiarity with conditions, the other banking on the recklessness of raw firepower.

The question, stripped of all embellishment, remains simple. Can Hyderabad's explosive batting overwhelm Kolkata's spin-heavy control at home, or will Kolkata's balance and local advantage assert themselves once again?

At Eden Gardens, a ground that has witnessed both batting feasts and calculated collapses, the pitch seldom behaves as a passive bystander. It offers runs, yes, but it also rewards patience and punishes impatience with equal measure. Under lights, the ball comes on nicely, encouraging stroke play, though spinners have long found enough grip to make the middle overs a test of temperament rather than technique alone.

Kolkata, for their part, present a study in controlled aggression. Ajinkya Rahane brings order at the top, a batsman who values time as much as runs, while Finn Allen and Angkrish Raghuvanshi inject



youthful urgency. Cameron Green offers a sense of assurance as a genuine all-round contributor, and Rinku Singh remains the kind of finisher who can alter the complexion of an innings in a handful of deliveries.

Kolkata's strength, however, lies as much in their bowling as in their batting. Sunil Narine and Varun Chakravarthy form a spin partnership that thrives on subtle variations, supported by Vaibhav Arora and Kartik Tyagi, who will be expected to provide early discipline and late control.

Across the pitch, Hyderabad carry a more volatile

promise. Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma at the top can turn a cautious start into a spectacle within overs, while Ishan Kishan and Heinrich Klaassen lend both muscle and intent to the middle order. Nitish Kumar Reddy and Aniket Verma extend that aggression deeper, ensuring that the innings rarely loses its forward momentum.

Hyderabad's bowling unit is led by Harshal Patel, who brings variation at the death. David Payne and Jaydev Unadkat provide seam movement with the new ball, while Eshan Malunga and Harsh Dubey add pace and spin options. The

attack is capable, but consistency remains a concern in supporting their batting-focused approach.

In the end, the match is less about reputation and more about restraint. Hyderabad will attempt to impose themselves early and often, while Kolkata will look to absorb pressure and tighten the game in the middle overs. The toss, as is often the case at Eden Gardens, may tilt the balance slightly, particularly if dew enters the equation and eases the chase.

It is, therefore, not merely a contest between two teams, but between two temperaments - one that seeks to

dominate through audacity, and another that prefers to prevail through structure. And as history has shown, cricket at this level seldom rewards excess for its own sake, nor does it forgive hesitation when intent is required.

**Teams:**  
Kolkata Knight Riders squad: Ajinkya Rahane, Manish Pandey, Rovman Powell, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Rinku Singh, Finn Allen, Rahul Tripathi, Sarthak Ranjan, Ramandeep Singh, Anukul Roy, Cameron Green, Rachin Ravindra, Sunil Narine, Daksh Kamra, Tim Seifert, Tejasvi Dahiya, Vaibhav Arora, Umran Malik, Varun Chakravarthy, Prashant Solanki, Kartik Tyagi, Matheesha Pathirana, Blessing Muzarabani, Saurabh Dube, Navdeep Saini.

Sunrisers Hyderabad squad: Travis Head, Smaran Ravichandran, Aniket Verma, Abhishek Sharma, Kamindu Mendis, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Liam Livingstone, Harsh Dubey, Shivang Kumar, Ishan Kishan, Heinrich Klaassen, Salil Arora, Brydon Carse, Pat Cummins, Eshan Malunga, Jaydev Unadkat, Harshal Patel, Zeeshan Ansari, Sakib Hussain, Onkar Tarmale, Amit Kumar, Praful Hinge, Krains Fuletra, Shivam Mavi, David Payne.

## New faces rewarded as South Africa name contracted squads

**Cape Town:** A number of fresh faces earning maiden contracts across both the men's and women's setups in the latest list.

The Proteas Men's squad features 18 contracted players alongside one hybrid contract. The upcoming season is a pivotal one for the men's team as they look to continue their ICC World

Test Championship title defence, while simultaneously laying the groundwork for the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2027, which will be held on home soil.

The headline additions to the men's contract list include maiden national contracts for seam bowler Otneil Baartman and all-rounder Corbin Bosch. They are joined by promising batters Matthew Breetzke and Dewald Brevis, who also secure their first full national contracts. Additionally, veteran spinner Simon Harmer has been awarded a

hybrid contract for the season, according to ICC.

Structurally, this season also marks the introduction of "Players of National Interest" (PONIs). This newly formed group consists of Division I Men's players who have been identified as part of the national succession pipeline, ensuring depth across all formats for upcoming international and South Africa A tours.

On the women's side, wicketkeeper-batter Karabo Meso has been rewarded with her first national contract. Her promotion comes after an impressive 12 months in which she featured in all Proteas Women's tours, including a notable appearance at last year's ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2025 in India.

CSA has confirmed that previously contracted players who missed out on the core squads remain available for selection in both men's

and women's bilateral cricket and upcoming ICC events.

The new contracts will run from June 1, 2026, to May 31, 2027. The men's calendar during this period is packed with bilateral home tours against Australia, Bangladesh, and England, as well as an away series in Sri Lanka.

The Proteas Women, meanwhile, are gearing up for the highly anticipated ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2026 in England this June, followed by inbound tours against India and Australia later in the season.

**Proteas Men's Contracted Squad 2026/27:**

Temba Bavuma, David Bedingham, Otneil Baartman, Corbin Bosch, Matthew Breetzke, Dewald Brevis, Tony de Zorzi, Marco Jansen, Keshav Maharaj, Kwenza Maphaka, Aiden Markram, Wiaan Mulder, Senuran Muthusamy, Lungi Ngidi, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan

Rickelton, Tristan Stubbs, Kyle Verreynne.

**Hybrid Contract 2026/27:** Simon Harmer

**Proteas Women's Contracted Squad 2026/27:** Anneke Bosch, Tazmin Brits, Nadine de Klerk, Anerie Dercksen, Ayanda Hlubi, Sinalo Jafta, Marizanne Kapp, Ayabonga Khaka, Masabata Klaas, Suné Luus, Karabo Meso, Nonkululeko Mlaba, Tumi Sekhukhune, Chloé Tryon, Laura Wolvaardt. **Players of National Interest (PONIs) 2026/27:** Marques Ackerman, Nandre Burger, Okuhle Cele, Gerald Coetzee, Connor Esterhuizen, Dian Forrester, Bjorn Fortuin, Zubayr Hamza, Jordan Hermann, Ruben Hermann, Nqobani Mokoena, Lhuan-dre Pretorius, Nqaba Peter, Sinethemba Qeshile, Lesego Senokwane, Lutho Sipamla, Jason Smith, Prenelan Subrayen, Tiaan van Vuuren, Codi Yusuf.

## Iraq, DR Congo qualify for FIFA World Cup

**Monterrey (Mexico):** Iraq and Democratic Republic of the Congo scripted memorable victories to secure their places at the FIFA World Cup finals, emerging triumphant in their respective playoff clashes against Bolivia and Jamaica.

Iraq ended a 40-year wait to return to football's biggest stage with a hard-fought 2-1 win over Bolivia in Monterrey. The result marked a historic moment for the Asian side, whose last appearance at the World Cup dates back to 1986. The match began with Iraq showing attacking intent, and they were rewarded when Ali Al-Hamadi, currently playing for Luton Town, opened the scoring with a well-timed header from a corner. His goal gave Iraq an early advantage and set the tone for a tightly contested encounter. Bolivia responded strongly and found an equaliser through Moises Paniagua, who struck a powerful shot from close range after being set up by Ramiro Vaca. The goal reignited Bolivia's hopes of returning to the World Cup for the first time since 1994. However, Iraq regained control early in the second half thanks to their talisman Aymen Hussein. The striker timed his run perfectly to meet a cross from Marko Farji, finishing clinically with a first-time volley to restore his team's lead in the 53rd minute. As the match progressed, Bolivia pushed forward



in search of another equaliser, creating a tense finish. Despite sustained pressure, Iraq's defense held firm, showcasing resilience and determination to protect their narrow advantage until the final whistle. Head coach Graham Arnold praised his players for their commitment and fighting spirit. He highlighted their defensive discipline and willingness to put their bodies on the line as key factors behind the victory. Arnold, who previously managed Australia national football team at the 2022 World Cup, also acknowledged

Bolivia's strong performance, describing the match as a tough contest that required maximum effort from his side.

With qualification secured, Iraq now look ahead to a challenging group stage, where they will face Norway, France, and Senegal in Group I.

In another playoff final, DR Congo made history by qualifying for their first World Cup in 52 years with a narrow 1-0 victory over Jamaica at Estadio Guadalupe. The African nation last appeared at the tournament in 1974, when it was known as Zaire.

## Williams shows the way in a year of gloom for Indian football

**New Delhi:** Ranked alongside footballing minnows like Singapore, Hong Kong and Bangladesh, India endured a disappointing run, managing just two points from its first five matches in the competition. The campaign exposed familiar weaknesses in consistency, structure, and long-term planning within Indian football.

At a time when expectations were already low, the emergence of Williams provided a rare bright spot. The 37-year-old midfielder, who made the bold decision to relinquish his Australian citizenship to represent India, has quickly become both a symbol of hope and a reflection of deeper systemic issues.

Williams' journey is unique. Born and developed within Australia's well-structured football ecosystem, he benefited from a professional pathway that emphasizes grassroots development, coaching quality, and competitive exposure from a young age. Despite having strong ties to India through his Anglo-Indian mother from Mumbai and a grandfather who once played in the Santosh Trophy, Williams' footballing education was shaped abroad—something that became evident in his composed and tactically aware performance against

Hong Kong. His display in midfield during India's victory over Hong Kong drew widespread praise, not just for its effectiveness but for its clarity



and discipline. However, beyond the applause, it also highlighted a more uncomfortable truth about Indian football's current state.

Williams' performance served as a subtle indictment of the domestic system. It underscored how a player trained in a structured football environment can stand out so distinctly, even at the twilight of his career, in a national setup still searching for consistency.

This contrast brings into focus a longstanding issue: India's inability to develop a coherent and sustainable footballing ecosystem. While there is no shortage of talent in the country, the absence of a structured pathway often prevents players from reaching their full potential. Over the years, there has been considerable rhetoric surrounding the growth of football in India. Adminis-

trators and stakeholders have repeatedly spoken about long-term visions and grassroots expansion, yet meaningful implementation has remained limited.

One of the most critical gaps lies in coaching. While high-profile foreign coaches are often appointed for the national team at significant cost, the grassroots level—where foundational skills are developed—continues to suffer from neglect and underinvestment.

India's vast school network represents perhaps its greatest untapped resource. Schools could serve as the bedrock of a thriving sporting culture, offering early exposure, structured training, and access to qualified coaches for millions of children across the country.

However, institutions such as the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, the Indian Olympic Association, and the All India Football Federation have yet to implement a sustained and unified strategy to integrate quality coaching into the school system. Without such an initiative, the gap between India and more developed footballing nations will continue to widen. The lack of early-stage nurturing means that even talented individuals often plateau before reaching elite levels.

## Italy misses third straight World Cup after playoff loss to Bosnia

**Berlin:** Four-time champion Italy has failed to qualify for a third consecutive FIFA World Cup after losing to Bosnia and Herzegovina in a dramatic playoff decided by penalties.

The match, held in Zenica on Tuesday, ended 1-1 after extra time before Bosnia triumphed 4-1 in the shootout, securing its first World Cup appearance since 2014.

"We still can't believe it," said Italy defender Leonardo Spinazzola. "It's upsetting for everyone."

Head coach Gennaro Gattuso apologized after the match, saying the team had

fallen short of expectations, according to Xinhua.

Italy appeared on course early in Zenica when Moise Kean capitalized on a major error by Bosnia goalkeeper Nikola Vasilj to give the visitors a 15th-minute lead. But the match turned sharply before halftime when Italy center-back Alessandro Bastoni was sent off for a last-man foul, forcing the visitors into a prolonged defensive battle.

Reduced to 10 men, Italy retreated deep and tried to protect the lead, but Bosnia piled on the pressure and finally found a breakthrough

in the 79th minute when Harris Tabakovic leveled the score at 1-1.

Neither side could find a winner in extra time, sending the contest to a penalty shootout that ultimately sealed Italy's fate. Sandro Tonali was the only Italian player to convert from the spot. Pio Esposito fired over, while Bryan Cristante struck the underside of the bar and saw his effort bounce out. Bosnia converted all four penalties, with Esmir Bajraktarevic dispatching the decisive kick. The defeat means Italy will miss the World Cup for the third consecutive time, having also failed to come through the playoffs for the 2018 and 2022 editions.

The Azzurri last appeared on football's biggest stage at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, where they were eliminated in the group phase. Elsewhere on Tuesday, the Czech Republic also advanced via a penalty shootout after a 2-2 draw with Denmark after extra time.

The Czechs prevailed 5-3 on aggregate scoring in the shootout to book their place at the 2026 finals. Sweden secured qualification with a 3-2 victory over Poland. The Swedes twice surrendered the lead before Viktor Gyokeres struck in the 88th minute to send his side through.

Turkiye also punched its ticket to the World Cup, edging Kosovo 1-0 thanks to Arda Akturkoglu's 53rd-minute winner. With the European playoffs completed, all 16 of UEFA's places at the 2026 FIFA World Cup have now been decided. The tournament will be held in the United States, Canada and Mexico from June 11 to July 19, with 48 teams set to compete.

## Esterhuizen grabs limelight in ICC Men's T20I player rankings

**Dubai:** South Africa's rising star Connor Esterhuizen has emerged as the standout performer in the latest ICC Men's T20I Player Rankings, delivering a remarkable start to his international career following a successful tour of New Zealand.

The 24-year-old batter has accumulated 551 rating points after just five matches, placing him second among South African players at this stage of their careers. He trails only former captain Graeme Smith, who had amassed 617 points, while current stars Temba Bavuma and Aiden Markram recorded 540 and 530

points respectively. Esterhuizen's meteoric rise in the rankings has been nothing short of extraordinary. He has surged 64 places to reach 39th position, underlining the impact of his performances in his debut T20I series.

His consistency with the bat played a crucial role in South Africa national cricket team securing a 3-2 series victory. Across the five matches, Esterhuizen registered scores of 45 not out, eight, and 15, before producing match-winning innings of 57 and 75 in the final two games.

These back-to-back impactful

knocks not only sealed victories for his team but also earned him two Player of the Match awards, highlighting his ability to perform under pressure in decisive moments.

With an aggregate of 200 runs in the series, Esterhuizen was deservedly named Player of the Series, marking a dream start to his international T20 career and cementing his place as a key figure in South Africa's batting lineup. In historical context, his ranking position after five matches is the fourth-best for a South African batter. While Smith had already reached the top of the rankings at that

stage, both Bavuma and Markram were placed 30th early in their careers.

Globally, Hazratullah Zazai still holds the record for the highest rating points after five matches in T20Is, with a remarkable tally of 697. His explosive performances, including scores of 74, 82, and an unbeaten 162, had propelled him to 10th position in the rankings. Meanwhile, South Africa's bowling unit also saw notable gains in the latest rankings update. Fast bowler Gerald Coetzee made a significant leap, climbing 36 places to joint-52nd position.



# MARKET

BSE Sensex		Nifty 50		Nifty 500		Nifty Next 50		Nifty 100		Nifty Bank		Nifty Midcap 100	
Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change
73,134.32	1.65%	22,679.40	1.56%	20,935.15	1.95%	61,912.75	2.59%	23,272.75	1.74%	51,448.65	2.33%	53,819.15	2.22%
Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open
71,947.55	74,212.47	22,331.40	22,899.00	20,528.05	21,067.15	60,349.80	62,118.05	22,875.50	23,472.25	50,275.35	51,433.90	52,650.00	52,650.00
High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
73,964.58	72,971.68	22,941.30	22,618.60	21,153.25	20,867.40	62,477.25	61,677.40	23,528.00	23,206.00	52,025.85	51,133.55	54,519.60	53,582.95

## Top Gainers

Company	Current	% Gain
Trent	3,526.50	7.00
Interglobe Avi	4,180.80	6.02
Adani Ports	1,385.40	5.55
Adani Enterpris	1,842.50	4.76
Bharat Elec	418.70	4.51

## Top Losers

Company	Current	% Loss
Dr Reddys Labs	1,209.60	-3.61
HDFC Life	572.95	-2.99
Cipla	1,195.90	-2.31
Sun Pharma	1,728.50	-1.63
NTPC	364.65	-1.62

## Commodities

Commodity	Price	Change (%)
Gold Apr 02	149,200.00	2,281.00 1.55
Silver May 05	240,593.00	-299.00 -0.12
Crudeoil Apr 20	9,336.00	-231.00 -2.41
Naturalgas Apr 27	270.90	-3.40 -1.24

## CBIC notifies one-time relief for SEZ units to sell in DTA at concessional duty

**New Delhi:** The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) on Wednesday introduced a one-time relief measure allowing eligible manufacturing units in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to sell their products in the Domestic Tariff Area (DTA) at concessional customs duty rates, addressing concerns arising from ongoing global trade disruptions. The relief, announced in the Budget 2026-27, has been implemented through an exemption notification issued under Section 25 of the Customs Act, 1962. The measure will remain in force from April 1, 2026, to March 31, 2027, according to a Finance Ministry statement here. The CBIC has prescribed a revised concessional duty structure across multiple slabs. Goods currently attracting 7.5 per cent duty will now be taxed at 6.5 per cent, while the 10 per cent slab has been reduced to 9 per cent. Items in the 12.5 per cent and 15 per cent categories will be subject to a 10 per cent duty under the scheme. Similarly, goods attracting 20 per cent duty will face a

reduced rate of 12.5 per cent, while those in the 20-30 per cent bracket will be taxed at 15 per cent. Products currently attracting duties between 30-40 per cent will be charged at a concessional rate of 20 per cent. To ensure that the benefit reaches genuine manufacturers, CBIC has specified that only SEZ units that commenced production on or before March 31, 2025, will be eligible. Further, goods cleared under this relief window must have undergone a minimum value addition of 20 per cent over input costs. Maintaining the export-oriented character of SEZs, the Board has capped DTA sales at concessional rates at 30 per cent of the highest annual Free on Board (FOB) value of exports achieved by the unit in any of the three immediately preceding financial years. The relief measure will be implemented through CBIC's automated system, with assessment of Bills of Entry for DTA clearances being carried out under the faceless assessment mechanism to enhance efficiency and transparency.

## Stock market kicks off new fiscal on positive footing, Sensex up nearly 1200 pts

**New Delhi:** Indian stock market on Wednesday snapped its two-day losing streak and kicked off the new financial year on a positive footing. The market was supported by signs of de-escalation in the ongoing tensions between the US and Iran.

At close, the Sensex was up 1,186.77 points or 1.65 percent at 73,134.32, and the Nifty was up 348 points or 1.56 percent at 22,679.40. Nifty Midcap index added 2.2 percent and smallcap index rose 3.3pc. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies surged by nearly Rs 10 lakh crore to Rs 422.23 lakh crore, up from Rs 412.41 lakh crore.

Among the sectors, all the indices ended in the green except pharma which was down by 1pc. Defence index surged more than 5pc, capital goods, media, PSU Bank indices rose 3pc each, while auto, consumer dura-



bles, IT, metal, realty, FMCG, telecom, Private Bank up 1-2pc.

On Nifty, the key gainers were Interglobe Aviation, Adani Ports, Adani Enterprises, Trent, Bharat Electronics while the losers were Dr Reddy's Labs, HDFC Life, Cipla, NTPC, Sun Pharma.

Over 200 stocks on the

BSE touched their 52-week low, including Blue Star, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Yes Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank rose between 1.5 percent and 3 percent while Punjab National Bank was the top gainer, rising nearly 4 percent. AU Small Finance Bank and Axis Bank advanced 3.73 percent and 3.72 percent, respectively.

State Bank of India, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Yes Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank rose between 1.5 percent and 3 percent while Punjab National Bank was the top gainer, rising nearly 4 percent. AU Small Finance Bank and Axis Bank advanced 3.73 percent and 3.72 percent, respectively.

## India to import semi-cryogenic engines to boost LVM3 heavy-lift rocket capability

**Chennai:** India is set to procure semi-cryogenic rocket engines to enhance the performance of its heavy-lift launch vehicle LVM3, marking a significant step in strengthening its space capabilities. The move has been confirmed in a report by a parliamentary committee.

The department-related parliamentary standing committee on science and technology, environment, forests and climate change made this announcement in its report on the demands for grants for the Department of Space for 2026-27.

The report was presented to the Rajya Sabha and tabled in the Lok Sabha on March 25. The committee noted that the total budget allocation of Rs 13,705.63 crore for the Department of Space includes new initiatives such as the induction of procured semi-cryogenic engines to enhance LVM3's payload capacity, and the Space Docking Experiment-2 (SPADEX-2) mission.

Funding has also been earmarked for major developmental efforts, including semi-cryogenic engine and stage development, re-entry technologies, and related programs.

While the report does not specify the supplier, Russia is widely expected to be the source.

The country has expressed interest in strengthening aerospace cooperation with India by offering its RD-191 semi-cryogenic engine along with technology transfer for domestic manu-

facturing. Russian space agency Roscosmos' Director General Dmitry Bakanov had earlier indicated that such a deal was under discussion, along with potential collaboration in human spaceflight and space station development.

India and Russia have been engaged in talks on semi-cryogenic engine technology for several years.

As early as 2019, former ISRO Chairman K. Sivan had confirmed to this correspondent Russia's willingness to support India under the Make-in-India initiative. The RD-191 engine is significantly more powerful and could substantially increase LVM3's lifting capability.

Combined with an upgraded cryogenic stage, it could enable the rocket to carry payloads of up to 7 tonnes to geostationary transfer orbit (GTO), compared to its current capacity of about 4 tonnes.

Enhancements already underway aim to raise this to 5 tonnes using improved indigenous systems.

These upgrades are critical for India's long-term ambitions, including human missions to the Moon, development of a national space station, and expansion of commercial launch services.

A more powerful semi-cryogenic engine would also support clustered engine configurations required for future heavy-lift missions.

India plans to integrate the semi-cryogenic engine into LVM3 by replacing its second-stage liquid engine,

significantly improving performance.

This would strengthen the rocket's role in major national missions and enhance its commercial viability through NewSpace India Limited.

If finalised, the engine deal would mark the second major Indo-Russian aerospace collaboration after the successful BrahMos missile joint venture.

It would also be the second time India has procured rocket engines from Russia, following earlier purchases of cryogenic engines for the GSLV programme.

Meanwhile, ISRO continues to develop its own semi-cryogenic engine (SE2000), powered by liquid oxygen and kerosene.

The programme has reached an advanced stage, with several subsystems already built and integrated engine hot tests targeted by the end of 2026.

Semi-cryogenic engines offer several advantages over cryogenic ones. They use kerosene, which is easier to store and handle than liquid hydrogen, while still delivering high thrust. Their higher fuel density allows for smaller tanks and makes them ideal for booster stages in heavy-lift rockets.

ISRO's Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre is leading this development, with the SC120 stage expected to replace the current L110 stage of LVM3. The use of non-toxic propellants like liquid oxygen and kerosene also improves operational safety and efficiency.

## Hyderabad to host 13th Asian textile conference on April 3

**Hyderabad:** The 13th Asian Textile Conference (ATEXCON 2026) will be held at HICC here on April 3.

Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy will deliver the keynote address at the conference. Union Minister of Textiles Additional Secretary Rohit Kansal, Handlooms Development Commissioner Dr. M. Beena, Telangana Textiles Minister Tummala Nag-eswara Rao, Minister for IT and Industries D. Sridhar Babu, and Telangana Chief Secretary K. Ramakrishna Rao are among those to participate in the event.

The conference, organised by the Confederation of Indian Textile Industry (CITI) in collaboration with the Government of Telangana, will bring together key

stakeholders from the global textile and apparel industry.

With the theme "Re-imagining the Future of Global Textiles," the event aims to address transformative changes in the sector, including shifting global supply chains, sustainability challenges and the growing role of technology in manufacturing and design.

The conference is expected to witness participation from leading manufacturers, global brands, policymakers, investors, technology providers and entrepreneurs from across the textile ecosystem.

According to the organisers, ATEXCON will provide a platform for discussions on evolving trade dynamics, sustainable production practices and inno-

vation-led growth, while also facilitating networking and business opportunities.

The event will feature inaugural sessions by government and industry leaders, keynote addresses, panel discussions and expert-led interactions through the day.

As outlined in the event flow on page 3, the programme includes morning inaugural sessions, mid-day keynote discussions, afternoon panels and a closing plenary.

A startup pitch showcase featuring 15 curated startups and a networking gala are also scheduled as part of the conference. Organisers said the event is expected to play a key role in shaping conversations around the future of the textile industry at both national and global levels.

## TVS Industrial & Logistics to invest Rs 200 cr in Karnataka

**Chennai:** TVS Industrial & Logistics Parks (TVS ILP), a corporate developer in warehousing, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) worth Rs 200 crore with the Government of Karnataka, the company said.

The proposed investment will be directed towards developing tech-enabled industrial and logistics parks in Karnataka.

This strategic signing aligns with TVS ILP's focus on expanding its footprint in southern India, a region witnessing sustained growth in consumption and industrial

activity.

Karnataka offers a strong environment for industrial development, supported by an extensive network of national highways, rail corridors, ports and air infrastructure. The state is further strengthening its connectivity backbone through large-scale initiatives such as the Bengaluru-Mumbai Economic Corridor, which is expected to enhance industrial linkages and freight move-

ment. Coupled with progressive industrial policies, these developments continue to position Karnataka as a prime destination for logis-



tics and industrial infrastructure, TVS ILP said.

Dr. Ramnath Subramaniam, Joint Managing Director said: "Karnataka is one of India's top-performing states when it comes to in-

dustrial growth and attracting both domestic and international investments and we are excited to be part of the state's growth trajectory. The state also serves as a strategic connectivity hub, offering

excellent access to South and West India's key markets. With sectors such as e-commerce, manufacturing, FMCG/FMCD, automobiles, 3PL, and startups continuing to establish and expand their presence, our focus remains on developing Grade-A and Built-to-Suit industrial and logistics parks that meet their evolving business needs in the periphery of Bangalore city."

TVS ILP currently operates 14 industrial and logistics parks across South India, with tenants from leading brands across diverse sectors.

# PMAY-G gathers momentum as rural housing mission moves towards saturation

**New Delhi:** India's flagship rural housing scheme, Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G), is witnessing rapid progress, with the government stepping up efforts to achieve universal housing coverage in rural areas while significantly improving living standards for millions of families.

The latest official update shows that the scheme has made substantial headway since its launch in 2016.

A total of 4.15 crore houses have been allocated under various phases, of which 3.90 crore houses have been sanctioned.

Out of these, 2.99 crore

houses have already been completed, reflecting strong implementation on the ground and a steady narrowing of the rural housing gap.

The programme was designed to provide pucca houses to houseless families and those living in kutcha or dilapidated structures, with a focus on dignity, safety and improved quality of life.

Each house under the scheme is built with a minimum area of around 25 square metres and includes provisions for basic amenities, ensuring that beneficiaries are not just given shelter but a better standard of living.

Financially, the scheme

represents one of the largest public investments in rural infrastructure.

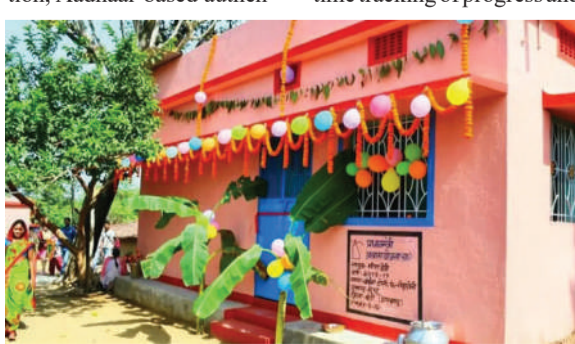
The government has transferred over Rs 4.03 lakh crore directly into the bank accounts of beneficiaries, leveraging direct benefit transfer systems to ensure transparency, reduce leakages, and accelerate construction timelines.

This approach has empowered beneficiaries to take ownership of the construction process while maintaining accountability.

A defining feature of PMAY-G has been its technology-driven governance framework.

The government has in-

tegrated advanced tools such as geo-tagging of houses at different stages of construction, Aadhaar-based authentication for beneficiaries,



and AI-based systems to detect anomalies and irregularities, ensuring that benefits reach the intended recipients.

These measures have strengthened monitoring mechanisms, enabling real-time tracking of progress and

ensuring that benefits reach the intended recipients. The scheme has also been implemented through a

convergence model with other flagship initiatives, ensuring holistic rural development.

Beneficiaries of PMAY-G are linked with schemes that provide toilets, drinking water, clean cooking fuel, and electricity.

This integrated delivery ensures that a newly constructed house becomes a fully functional and dignified living space rather than just a standalone structure.

In addition to improving housing conditions, the programme has had a significant economic impact on rural areas. The large-scale construction activity has generated employment opportuni-

ties for both skilled and unskilled workers, while also boosting demand for local materials and services. This has contributed to rural economic activity and supported livelihoods across multiple sectors.

Looking ahead, the government has set an ambitious target of 4.95 crore houses by 2029, following the approval of an additional two crore houses for the current phase.

With nearly three crore houses already completed, the focus is now on accelerating construction in the remaining regions and achieving saturation coverage for all eligible households.

Officials emphasise that PMAY-G is not merely a housing initiative but a transformative social programme.

Access to a permanent home is seen as a foundation for improved health, education, and economic outcomes, enabling families to move out of vulnerability and into a more secure and stable living environment.

As implementation gains pace, PMAY-G continues to play a central role in reshaping rural India, bridging infrastructure gaps, and advancing the government's broader vision of inclusive and sustainable development.