

# Aryan Age

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## Eight killed in stampede at Sheetalashtami Temple in Nalanda district

**Nalanda :** At least eight women devotees were killed in a tragic stampede at a Sheetalashtami temple at Madhda village under the Deepnagar police station area in Nalanda district on Tuesday.

Confirming the incident, police said here that a large number of devotees had gathered to offer prayers on the occasion of Sheetalashtami.

The situation spiralled out of

control due to huge overcrowding, leading to panic among devotees and triggering a stampede. All eight victims were women. Authorities have identified five of them as Devanti Devi, Rekha Devi, Malo Devi, Chinta Devi and Kanti Devi, while efforts are underway to ascertain the identities of the remaining three.

Several injured persons were immediately rushed to nearby

healthcare centres, where they are undergoing treatment. The condition of some of the injured is stated to be serious.

Senior police and district administration officials reached the spot soon after the incident and were monitoring the rescue and relief operations. The area has been secured to prevent further mishaps.

Preliminary reports suggest that

lack of crowd control arrangements and sudden surge of devotees may have contributed to the tragedy. However, officials said a detailed inquiry will be conducted to determine the exact cause of the incident. The administration is also working to ensure proper identification of the victims and to provide assistance to the affected families.



### PM Modi expresses condolences after tragic mishap in Bihar's Nalanda district

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed deep sorrow over a recent mishap in Nalanda district, Bihar, describing the incident as "deeply painful" and extending his condolences to the families who lost their loved ones.



Speaking on X, the Prime Minister also offered prayers for the speedy recovery of those injured in the tragedy. Announcing financial assistance for the victims, PM Modi stated that an ex-gratia of Rs. 2 lakh from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF) would be provided to the next of kin of each deceased, while the injured would receive Rs. 50,000.

### Nitish announces Rs 6 lakh ex gratia for Nalanda stampede victims

Expressing sorrow over the loss of lives in a stampede at the Sheetal Devi temple in Bihar's Nalanda district, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Tuesday announced an ex gratia of Rs 6 lakh for the families of the deceased. Calling the incident "deeply distressing," the Chief Minister said he was profoundly saddened by the tragedy and extended his condolences to the families of the victims. Announcing the relief, Kumar said the amount includes Rs 4 lakh from the Disaster Management Department and an additional Rs 2 lakh from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund.



Kumar also directed senior officials to reach the site of the stampede to oversee relief and rescue operations. The Chief Minister instructed authorities to ensure proper medical treatment for those injured in the incident and wished them a speedy recovery. Officials said the state government is closely monitoring the situation and all necessary assistance is being extended to the affected families.

### President Droupadi Murmu expresses grief

President Droupadi Murmu today expressed deep sorrow over the tragic loss of lives in a stampede at a temple in Nalanda district of Bihar. In her condolence message, the President, who is in Nalanda on a day-long tour, said that the news of the death of several devotees in the incident was "extremely distressing."



She conveyed her heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and prayed for strength for them in this hour of grief. "I express my deep sympathies to all the bereaved families. I also pray for the speedy recovery of those injured," the President said.

### UP CM Yogi expresses grief over Nalanda accident

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has expressed deep sorrow over the stampede at the Shri Sheetal Mata Temple in Nalanda, Bihar. He said the loss of lives in this incident was extremely sad and painful. In his condolence message, the Chief Minister expressed his condolences to the bereaved families. He prayed to Mother Shitala Devi for the peace of the departed souls, strength to the families to bear this loss, and a speedy recovery for the injured.



### Delhi CM expresses grief over loss of lives in temple accident in Bihar

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Tuesday expressed grief over the death of several devotees in a stampede at the Sheetal Mata temple premises in Bihar's Nalanda. She expressed her deepest condolences to the bereaved families and prayed that may God grant peace to the departed souls, and bestow strength upon their families to bear this boundless sorrow.



Taking to social media platform X on Tuesday, Delhi CM said that the news was extremely heartbreaking. She also wished for a swift recovery of all those who were injured in the mishap. Meanwhile, Bihar's Deputy CM Samrat Choudhary also expressed sorrow over the tragic incident, adding that the stampede which occurred at the Temple in Nalanda is extremely heart wrenching. According to the Deputy CM, the government is providing every possible assistance and relief to the affected families, adding that arrangements have been made for the proper treatment of the injured. According to reports, a sudden rush of devotees at a temple fair in Bihar's Nalanda turned into a tragic affair, claiming several lives in a stampede, and leaving several injured after the barricades reportedly collapsed.

## PM Modi Launches ₹20,000-Cr Gujarat Projects and Targets Congress

**Gandhinagar :** Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched development projects worth over ₹20,000 crore in Gujarat on Tuesday, covering sectors like railways, solar energy, and water supply. A major highlight was the inauguration of the Kaynes Semicon Plant in Sanand, India's second semiconductor unit to start commercial production.

Modi also dedicated the Ahmedabad-Dholera Expressway to the nation, calling it a catalyst for regional industrial growth. During his address in Vav-Tharad, the Prime Minister shifted to a sharp political tone, accusing the Congress party of acting like "vultures" by trying to exploit global energy crises for domestic gain. He asserted that while other nations hiked

fuel prices due to West Asia tensions, India protected its citizens by maintaining stable rates and ensuring uninterrupted supplies.

### PM Inaugurates Samrat Samprati Museum in Gandhinagar

On the occasion of Mahavir Jayanti, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Samrat Samprati Museum in

Gandhinagar. Named after the Mauryan ruler known for spreading Jain philosophy and non-violence, the museum serves as a cultural bridge between India's ancient heritage and its technological future. Modi emphasized that the institution is a "sacred center of knowledge" that harmonizes multiple belief systems, which is a unique trait of Indian civilization. He

highlighted the "Gyan Bharatam Mission," an initiative using modern technology to digitize and preserve ancient manuscripts that were scattered or destroyed over centuries. The Prime Minister noted that this balance of preserving roots while advancing in high-tech fields like semiconductors defines the path toward a developed India.



## Sr IAS Ashwini Bhide Appointed As Mumbai Municipal Corporation Commissioner

**Mumbai:** Senior IAS officer Ashwini Bhide has been appointed as the first woman Commissioner of the Mumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), marking a historic moment in the city's administrative landscape. She succeeds Bhusan Gagrani, who

completes his tenure today. Bhide will be taking charge today. The decision was made last night during a meeting held between Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Deputy CM Eknath Shinde. While other candidates, including Sanjay Mukherjee

and Aseem Gupta, were considered, Bhide was appointed to the post due to her experience and administrative approach. Bhide is currently serving as Additional Chief Secretary in the Chief Minister's Office, A 1995-batch IAS

officer, Bhide is widely recognised in Mumbai's administrative and infrastructure circles as the "Metro Woman of Mumbai." The title stems from her role in driving the ambitious Mumbai Metro Line 3 project, also known as the Aqua Line.



## Sapkal accuses Women's minister of being missing amid rising atrocities

**Mumbai:** The case of the self-proclaimed godman Ashok Kharat from Nashik has sparked a major political row in Maharashtra.

Following the shocking revelations of over 100 sexual assault videos and financial fraud, a heated exchange of words has broken out between State Congress President Harshvardhan Sapkal and Minister for Women & Child Development Aditi Tatkare.

Sapkal today slammed Ms Tatkare for her perceived "silence" on the matter. He accused the Minister of being "missing" while cases of atrocities against women (such as the Kharat case and the Adarsh Mhatre case) are rising across the state. He questioned why the Minister had not issued a statement, held a departmental meeting, or met with the Director General of Police regarding these grave incidents. Sapkal remarked that if the Minister



does not understand her responsibilities, she should resign and sit at home rather than just "occupying the ministerial chair". Responding to these allegations, Minister Tatkare took to social media to defend the government's stance and clarify her position. She claimed that the government has been proactive from the start. Under the leadership of Chief Minister, Home Minister Devendra Fadnavis, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) was promptly formed, and Ashok

Kharat was arrested, she said. She highlighted that the investigation is being led by a capable female police officer, Tejaswi Satpute. Responding to the "missing" claim, Ms Tatkare asserted that she has expressed her intense feelings as a woman and a minister on 3-4 different occasions and shared links to those reactions as proof. She reiterated that the Department of Women & Child Development is committed to justice and will not tolerate any injustice against women.

### Sion Hospital X-ray unit fire triggers panic in Mumbai

**Mumbai:** A fire broke out in the X-ray department of Sion Hospital in Mumbai on Tuesday, triggering panic among patients and hospital staff. The blaze was quickly brought under control by the fire brigade, and no casualties were reported, officials confirmed.

According to police, the incident occurred at around 12 noon, following which emergency services were immediately alerted. Fire brigade personnel reached the spot promptly and extinguished the fire. Cooling operations were underway thereafter, and a detailed investigation has been initiated by the Sion Police Station to ascertain the exact cause.

Hospital authorities said the fire is suspected to have originated from an air conditioning unit in the X-ray department. Dean Dr Pramod Ingle stated that a sudden explosion in the unit led to thick smoke engulfing the area, causing temporary chaos within the facility.

Despite the panic, all patients were safely evacuated from the affected section. Officials further confirmed that no medical equipment was damaged although minor structural damage to the building was observed.

### Family hit by back-to-back accidents, 1 son dies, another critical after separate crashes

**Balapur (Washim):** Two consecutive road accidents in Balapur have devastated a single family, leaving one son dead and another critically injured, triggering grief and concern across the locality.

The victims are sons of Shaikh Subhan, a resident of Alipura in Karanja, whose family has been struck by tragedy within a span of just two days.

According to available information, the elder son, Shaikh Sohail Sheikh Subhan (30), lost his life in a road accident that occurred around 11:15 pm on March 30 on the Akola Naka Road. The incident plunged not only the family but also the local community into mourning.

Just a day earlier, on the night of March 29, the younger son, Aamir, had met with a separate road accident and sustained serious injuries. He was immediately admitted to a private hospital, where he continues to undergo treatment. His condition is reported to be critical. The back-to-back incidents have caused immense emotional and psychological trauma to the family.

Following the incidents, relatives, friends and a large number of local residents gathered at the family's residence to offer

condolences and express their support.

Meanwhile, frequent accidents on the Akola Naka-Balapur Road have led to growing anger among local residents and social activists. They allege that overspeeding vehicles on this stretch have significantly increased the risk of accidents.

Particular concern has been raised about the T-point connecting Akola Road and Wadegaon Road, where the movement of heavy vehicles at high speed poses a serious threat to pedestrians. Students, elderly citizens and daily commuters use this route regularly, but reckless driving has made it increasingly unsafe.

Residents and activists have demanded that the authorities immediately install speed breakers at the T-point near Akola Naka to control vehicular speed and prevent further accidents.

Social activist Asif Shah has warned that if the highway department fails to take prompt and concrete action, a protest movement will be launched with the support of local citizens. Residents have urged the authorities to prioritise public safety and implement necessary measures at the earliest to safeguard both pedestrians and motorists.

### Rahul Gandhi Alleges Secret LDF-BJP Alliance in Kerala

**Kannur:** Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi alleged on Tuesday that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is secretly supporting the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) in the upcoming Kerala assembly elections. Addressing a rally in Kannur, Gandhi claimed an "unprecedented" partnership exists between the CPI(M) and the BJP, suggesting that Modi prefers an LDF victory because the BJP cannot influence a

Congress-led UDF government. He questioned how the Left could abandon its ideological values to align with the "extreme right." Gandhi also criticized Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan for targeting the Congress instead of the Prime Minister. To counter this alleged alliance, Gandhi announced five UDF guarantees, including ₹3,000 monthly social security pensions and free bus travel for women, aimed at uplifting the common citizen.

## BJP halts Eknath Shinde's 'Operation Tiger' campaign

**Mumbai:** While political grapevine is ripe in Maharashtra about Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's reported attempt to win over opposition MPs through his 'Operation Tiger' campaign, information has surfaced that the BJP high command has put a 'break' on this strategy. It is reported that the BJP has suggested that rather than inducting MPs from the Sharad Pawar faction directly into the Shinde-led Shiv Sena, they have been advised to induct into the NDA fold through Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar's party instead.

According to sources, Eknath Shinde had prepared to bring six MPs from the Sharad Pawar faction and six from the Thackeray faction into

his party to shore up the numbers for his faction. Currently, the Shinde faction has seven MPs. Had these 12 joined, their strength would have risen to 19.

This would have significantly bolstered the Shinde faction's influence within the state's political equations. There were discussions that the Shinde faction intended to use this strength to claim at least 19 seats in the 2029 Lok Sabha elections.

However, the BJP has not yet given a green light to this plan. Adding a twist to these developments, reports suggest that union Home Minister Amit Shah did not meet Eknath Shinde during his recent visit to Delhi, signaling a potential shift in the political alignment.

Several reasons are being discussed behind the possibility of



Thackeray and Pawar faction MPs leaning toward the Shinde group. Many MPs feel that the strong Mahayuti governments at both the

State and Central levels guarantee future political stability. Additionally, MPs feel that proximity to the power would be advantageous for securing funds for developmental work in their constituencies.

There is a growing sentiment among some MPs that benefiting from current power is more crucial than sticking to a specific party or election symbol.

While Shinde's leadership was previously validated by voters during the elections, it remains to be seen whether the direction of 'Operation Tiger' will change following the advise from the BJP high command. All eyes are now on how these internal dynamics within the Mahayuti alliance unfold.

## Siddaramaiah sees strong support for Congress in Bagalkote bypoll

**Bagalkote:** Siddaramaiah on Tuesday expressed strong confidence in the Indian National Congress party's chances in the Bagalkote Assembly bypoll, stating that the party is witnessing "unexpectedly strong" public support across the constituency.

Campaigning in Bagalkote, the Chief Minister said the political atmosphere in the region appears favourable for the Congress. He highlighted that feedback from grassroots outreach programmes indicates growing enthusiasm among voters.

Addressing a public gathering at Mugulolli village, Siddaramaiah campaigned in support of Congress candidate Umesh Meti. He urged voters to back the candidate, citing the positive response the party has been receiving during its campaign.

During the event, the Chief Minister also released a booklet titled "Progress Perspective," which documents the developmental con-



tributions of late HY Meti. He said the publication serves as a reminder of the late leader's work for the people of the region.

Siddaramaiah noted that HY Meti had earned respect across communities for his inclusive ap-

proach to governance. He appealed to voters to ensure continuity of that legacy by supporting his son, Umesh Meti, in the bypoll.

The Chief Minister was joined by several senior leaders during the campaign, including Minister RB

Timmapur and former Legislative Council Chairman SR Patil, among others.

Responding to media queries, Siddaramaiah reiterated that the Congress is in a strong position in the by-election. He attributed this to the party's organisational strength and consistent engagement with voters at the grassroots level.

He emphasized that Congress workers have been actively reaching out to people, listening to their concerns, and presenting the party's vision for development in the constituency. Taking a swipe at the opposition, Siddaramaiah alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is making statements out of fear of defeat. According to him, such remarks reflect the party's anxiety over the shifting public mood. He further said that the Congress remains focused on its campaign and will not be distracted by political rhetoric or speculation from opponents.

## UP IAS officer resigns, raising questions on the system

**Lucknow:** Rinku Singh Rahi, a 2022-batch IAS officer of the Uttar Pradesh cadre, resigned from his post on Tuesday, citing prolonged sidelining and lack of meaningful responsibilities. His decision has sparked a wider debate about the functioning of the administrative system and the treatment of officers perceived as upright and outspoken. In his resignation letter, Rahi stated that he had been attached to the Uttar Pradesh Revenue Council, but was not assigned any substantial work. He pointed out that while he continued to receive a salary, he had no opportunity to contribute to public service, which he described as deeply unsettling. Calling his resignation a "moral decision," Rahi said that remaining in a position without responsibilities was against his personal and professional ethics. He emphasized that public service

should be driven by accountability and purpose, not merely by holding a designation. Rahi further alleged the existence of a "parallel system" within the bureaucracy, where honest officers are often denied key roles. According to him, such a system discourages integrity and prevents committed individuals from functioning effectively within the administrative framework. He stated that despite his willingness to work with honesty and dedication, he was not given the platform to do so. This, he said, ultimately compelled him to step down from the prestigious civil service.

Rahi's journey to becoming an IAS officer has been marked by extraordinary resilience and courage. In 2009, he exposed a major corruption scam, an act that put his life at risk and changed the course of his career. Following the exposure,

he was brutally attacked and shot seven times. Despite sustaining severe injuries, Rahi survived the incident and continued his pursuit of justice and public service. Determined to overcome adversity, he later cleared the Union Public Service Commission examination under the disabled quota and joined the IAS in the 2022 batch, earning admiration for his perseverance. His first posting was as Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) in Powayan tehsil of Shahjahanpur. During his tenure, he took a strict stance on sanitation and administrative discipline. In one incident, he reportedly asked a clerk to perform sit-ups over poor sanitation conditions. When lawyers protested against his actions, Rahi publicly responded by doing sit-ups himself while holding his ears, signaling accountability and humility.

## Green signal for procurement of pulses, oilseeds at MSP in UP: Farmers to receive increased support price

**Lucknow:** The Uttar Pradesh government has prepared a comprehensive strategy for the procurement of Rabi season crops. State Agriculture Minister Surya Pratap Shahi stated that with the additional exemptions received from the central government, large-scale procurement of pulses and oilseeds, along with wheat, will now be ensured in the state.

In a press conference, the Minister said the Centre has approved the procurement of 6.77 lakh metric tonnes of lentils, 2.24 lakh metric tonnes of gram, and 5.30 lakh metric tonnes of mustard. This will provide farmers with the opportunity to sell their produce at the Minimum Support Price (MSP).

The Agriculture Minister stated that the MSP has been increased this year, with the price of gram fixed at Rs 5875 per quintal, which is Rs 225 more than last year.

He said that the MSP for lentils has

been fixed at Rs 7,000 per quintal, an increase of Rs 300, while the MSP for mustard has been fixed at Rs 6,200 per quintal, an increase of Rs 250 from last year.

The Agriculture Minister stated that the Minimum Support Price acts as a safety net for farmers, and the government is committed to strengthening this system.

He stated that central agencies NAFED and NCCF will be involved in the procurement process, while four agencies, including the PCF and UPSS, will handle the state procurement. Payments to farmers will be made directly into their bank accounts.

Shahi stated that before 2017, the procurement of pulses and oilseeds was neglected in the state, but the current government has taken effective steps in this direction.

He stated that the Agriculture Department has spent 82.9 per cent of its budget. Out of a total budget of Rs

7,051 crore, Rs 5,788 crore has been spent, which is a remarkable achievement so far.

Mr. Shahi stated that to provide relief to farmers, seeds were provided to 11.25 lakh farmers at a 50 per cent subsidy this year, with ₹314.31 crore transferred directly to their accounts. Additionally, 54,847 quintals of seeds were distributed free of charge to 12.73 lakh farmers.

He stated that farmers are also receiving relief under the Crop Insurance Scheme. The Minister stated that compensation of Rs 532.17 crore has been transferred to the accounts of 5.39 lakh farmers so far this Kharif season. The process is ongoing, and an additional Rs 150-160 crore will soon be disbursed to approximately 1.5 lakh more farmers. He stated that since 2017, compensation of Rs 5660.33 crore has been disbursed to 67.52 lakh farmers under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.

## Rupee fall hurting households, Centre must act: Karnataka DCM Shivakumar

**Bengaluru:** Rising volatility in global currency markets and the weakening of the rupee are increasingly impacting the common man across sectors, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said on Tuesday, while urging the Centre to take corrective measures.

Addressing media, Shivakumar made a series of points highlighting the economic implications of currency fluctuations. He said the dollar has been rising and the rupee has been falling, noting that such movements, even when described in simple terms, have a direct bearing on the economy.

Shivakumar stressed that currency instability affects both imports and exports, thereby influencing

the overall cost structure of goods and services in the country. He pointed out that essential and everyday items become more expensive due

tends to households, where rising prices reduce purchasing power. He cited culturally significant purchases, including traditional items



to increased import costs, adding that the burden ultimately falls on ordinary citizens. Shivakumar observed that the impact is not limited to large industries but ex-

such as mangalsutra (tali), to illustrate how inflation linked to currency movements is affecting even routine and social expenditures. He said the situation re-

flects a broader economic strain in which "everything is affected," reiterating that the common man is bearing the consequences of macro-economic shifts. He added that he is not fully aware of the specific Central government policies but emphasised that the issue requires attention and intervention at the national level.

Shivakumar demanded that the Central government take responsibility to stabilise the currency and restore normalcy in prices, stating that controlling volatility should be a priority.

He concluded that bringing the situation under control is necessary to prevent further hardship to the public and called it a clear expectation from the Centre.

## Congress slams Centre for 'overburdening citizens' across multiple sectors

**Bengaluru:** The Congress on Tuesday accused the Centre of overburdening citizens through simultaneous price hikes across multiple sectors, alleging a widespread rise in costs of toll, medicines, fuel, construction materials and essential services.

Congress leader Ran-deep Singh Surjewala, while addressing the media, claimed that toll collections from Karnataka have witnessed a steady increase over the years, citing figures rising from ₹1,866 crore in 2020-21 to ₹2,350 crore in 2021-22, ₹2,351 crore in 2022-23, ₹3,517 crore in 2023-24, ₹4,086 crore in 2024-25, and ₹4,320 crore in 2025-26, with estimated collections of around ₹4,600 crore in 2026-27 and projections of ₹5,000 crore by the end of that fiscal.

He alleged that a proposed 5% toll hike would

further increase revenue by ₹250-300 crore, adding to the burden on commuters. Referring to the Bengaluru-Mysuru highway, he claimed that toll collection began even before the project was fully completed, and stated that around ₹900 crore has already been collected from the 118-km stretch.

On healthcare, Surjewala alleged that prices of around 900 essential medicines are set to increase, including life-saving drugs and medicines used for treating diabetes, hypertension and infectious diseases. He cited antibiotics such as Meropenem in different dosages as part of the list of medicines seeing price revisions, and criticised repeated annual hikes in drug prices since 2022, including increases of 10.76% in 2022 and 12.12% in 2023.

He also raised concerns over taxation on essential

medicines, pointing out that GST continues to be levied on life-saving drugs, which he claimed adds to the financial burden on patients.

Expanding his criticism to industrial inputs, Surjewala said prices of petrochemical products such as polyethylene and polypropylene have increased significantly, impacting packaging, FMCG goods and household items.

He added that PVC prices have also risen, affecting construction, irrigation systems and agricultural infrastructure.

He further alleged that bitumen prices have increased by 30% to 50%, rising from about ₹45,000 per ton to ₹65,000 per ton, which would impact road and building construction activities. Cement prices, he said, are expected to rise by ₹50 to ₹100 per bag, while steel prices have also surged, with

hot rolled steel coils increasing from ₹43,717 per ton to ₹55,900 per ton and steel rebar from ₹47,615 per ton to ₹59,800 per ton.

Surjewala claimed that essential petrochemical derivatives used in detergents, dyes and pharmaceuticals have also seen price increases, and warned that consumer durables such as air conditioners, refrigerators and coolers may see price hikes of 5% to 15% in the coming months.

On fuel and transport, he said airfare has increased by 10% to 15% in March-April 2026, affecting travel for students and the general public. He also alleged that domestic LPG cylinder prices have risen from around ₹400 during the Congress regime to ₹913 currently, with two hikes in the past 30 days, while commercial LPG cylinders are priced at around ₹1,958 for a 19-kg cylinder,

with reported higher rates in some markets due to shortages.

He further cited a reported increase in petrol and diesel prices, stating that Nayara Energy raised petrol prices by ₹5.30 per litre and diesel by ₹3 per litre on March 26, 2026, and alleged that further hikes may follow after electoral phases.

Surjewala also pointed to a reported 34% increase in speed post charges, claiming that postal services have not been spared from rising costs.

He argued that the simultaneous increase in toll, healthcare, fuel, construction materials and essential goods is creating a compounded financial burden on households and small businesses, and urged the Centre to explain and address the widespread price rise affecting citizens across the country.

## PM Modi laid foundation for powerful nation: J&K LG

**Jammu:** Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha today said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India stands resolute today.

"PM Modi has laid foundation for a powerful nation which is inspiring the world with its message that true peace is not weakness but unwavering courage and this is a time to build bridges, not battlefields," the Lieutenant Governor said in his address while attending the Mahavir Jamma Kalyanak, a special event organized by S.S Jain Sabha, to celebrate Mahavir Jayanti here.

The Lieutenant Governor extended his felicitations and best wishes to all on the auspicious occasion.

He spoke on Lord Mahavira's teachings of Ahimsa and Anekantavada, emphasizing right faith, knowledge, and conduct in today's

world, which urgently needs compassion, peace, and brotherhood.

The Lieutenant Governor said that amid global conflicts and strife, humanity must draw lessons from Lord Mahavira's teachings, which foster enduring peace and unbreakable brotherhood.

"True progress stems from responsibility and accountability for one's actions.

To envision a better future, we must bridge divides among people, fostering trust through understanding diverse cultures, ideas, and experiences," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor observed that Lord Mahavira focused on introspection, individual transformation, and his teachings of discipline, faith, and awareness can elevate society.

"By internalizing Ahim-

sa, restraint, austerity, Anekantavada, non-possession, and truth, we can contribute meaningfully to nation-building. Our impact depends on the character we cultivate," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor called upon the young generation to infuse non-violence into its mindset and reform attitudes toward nature, long exploited as mere utility.

"True Ahimsa transcends ethics, becoming the sharpest environmental strategy," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor emphasized that Lord Mahavira's legacy is a refined guidebook for navigating complexity.

He affirmed truth's multifaceted nature; no single viewpoint captures it fully. Today, amid echo chambers, people mistake opinions for absolute truth, eroding balance, he added.

## Telangana Minister Uttam seeks Centre's intervention over LPG shortage affecting auto-rickshaws

**Hyderabad:** Uttam Kumar Reddy, Telangana's Civil Supplies Minister, has written to Hardeep Singh Puri, urging immediate intervention to address the acute shortage of Auto LPG in the state, particularly in Hyderabad.

In his letter, Reddy highlighted that the shortage is severely impacting thousands of LPG-run auto-rickshaws, which form a crucial part of the city's public transport system. He stressed that the issue has become urgent as it directly affects daily commuters and the livelihoods of drivers.

The Minister pointed out that Telangana has been strictly complying with the Centre's directives amid the ongoing Middle East crisis. This includes ensuring uninterrupted supply of domestic LPG and regulating commercial LPG distribution.

However, he noted that while priority has been given

to household and commercial segments, the Auto LPG sector has been disproportionately affected. This has resulted in a significant supply-demand gap across the state.



According to Reddy, nearly one lakh auto-rickshaws in Telangana run on LPG, making the fuel essential for affordable urban transport.

The current disruption has therefore created widespread inconvenience.

He stated that the state is facing a daily shortfall of approximately 55 metric tonnes of Auto LPG. This deficit has led to dry-outs at a majority of private fuel outlets, leaving drivers struggling to find fuel.

The shortage has had a cascading impact on public transport services, with fewer auto-rickshaws operating on roads. This, in turn, has increased waiting times and travel difficulties for commuters.

Reddy also highlighted the structure of the Auto LPG distribution network in Telangana.

Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) such as Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL), and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) operate only 33 outlets, accounting for roughly 20 percent of the market.

In contrast, private operators dominate the sector with over 110 outlets, contributing nearly 80 percent of the supply network. Despite this, they remain heavily dependent on PSUs for LPG supplies.

## Proposed Metrolite project limited to Jammu urban corridor between Bantalab to Bari Brahmana: J&K CM

**Jammu:** Omar Abdullah on Tuesday clarified that the proposed Metrolite project in Jammu will, for now, operate only between Bantalab and Bari Brahmana, covering a total of 22 stations. The announcement outlines the current scope of the urban transit plan aimed at improving mobility within the Jammu region.

Responding to a starred question raised by MLA Mohan Lal, the Chief Minister stated that the present proposal is limited to Jammu's urban corridors. He confirmed that Akhnoor town has not been included in the current Metrolite alignment.

The clarification comes amid growing demands for extending the proposed transit system to Akhnoor, a region witnessing rapid urbanisation and increased daily commuter traffic. However, the government has indicated that such expansion is not

part of the current plan.

Omar Abdullah noted that the corridor between Bantalab and Bari Brahmana has been prioritised due to its high traffic density and urban connectivity needs. The 22-station network is expected to serve key areas within Jammu city.

In response to another query, the Chief Minister confirmed that proposals for Metrolite or Light Metro projects in both Jammu and Srinagar have been submitted to the Government of India and are currently under consideration.

He added that the approval process is underway, and the final decision will depend on appraisal and clearance by the central authorities. These projects are seen as crucial for modernising urban transport infrastructure in the Union Territory.

Providing details on the



groundwork completed so far, Omar Abdullah said that in Jammu, comprehensive surveys and feasibility studies have already been conducted. These include traffic assessments, engineering analysis, and preparation of a Detailed Project Report (DPR). The DPR for Jammu has been prepared by RITES Ltd, a government-owned consultancy firm. The report includes alignment planning, ridership projections, cost estimates, and land requirements. According to Re-

turn (EIRR) for the Jammu Metrolite project has been assessed at 18.92 percent, indicating strong economic viability and potential long-term benefits. For Srinagar, the Chief Minister said that similar preparatory work has been completed. This includes topographical surveys, traffic and ridership studies, and engineering feasibility assessments. The DPR for the Srinagar project has been prepared by NTES Ltd, covering alignment planning, financial structuring, and economic analysis. Both DPRs have been finalised and submitted for central appraisal. Addressing the possibility of extending the Metrolite network to Akhnoor, Omar Abdullah stated that no such proposal is currently under active consideration. He clarified that any future expansion would require a separate feasibility study.

# Generic Medicine Push Faces Roadblocks

**Mumbai** : The Centre's efforts to boost the use of generic medicines are facing resistance from doctors, even as rules mandate prescriptions by salt names instead of branded drugs.

Despite directions from the National Medical Council, many doctors continue to favour branded medicines, leading to low acceptance of generics among patients. People often hesitate to switch to cheaper alternatives suggested by chemists due to strong trust in prescribed brands.

The government has expanded Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana outlets from just 80 before 2014 to nearly 18,000 now, offering over 2,100 medicines at heavy discounts. This initiative has reportedly saved citizens around Rs 38,000 crore.

However, generics still make up only 4-5% of India's Rs 1.4 lakh crore pharmaceutical market. Medical



bodies like the Indian Medical Association have raised concerns about inconsistent quality and lack of uniform testing standards.

Experts also point to the dominance of "branded generics," where companies market the same drug under different labels. Incentives to doctors and higher margins for chemists further compli-

cate the system, while PCD firms are accused of influencing prescriptions through promotional tactics.

The central government's ambitious push to make healthcare more affordable by prioritizing generic medicines is currently navigating a complex landscape of professional resistance and systemic inertia.

While the mandate from the National Medical Council (NMC) explicitly requires doctors to prescribe drugs by their "salt" or pharmaceutical names rather than specific brand names, the transition on the ground remains sluggish. This move was intended to break the monopoly of expensive pharmaceutical brands, yet

the deep-rooted habits of the medical fraternity and the long-standing relationships between practitioners and drug manufacturers continue to serve as significant roadblocks to widespread adoption.

A primary hurdle in this transition is the psychological barrier of trust that exists between patients and their physicians. When a doctor identifies a specific brand, patients often view that recommendation as a guarantee of quality and efficacy; consequently, they are frequently hesitant to accept a cheaper generic alternative suggested by a pharmacist at the counter. This "trust deficit" regarding generics is often reinforced by a lack of public awareness about the fact that generic drugs contain the exact same active ingredients as their branded counterparts, leading many to mistakenly equate lower costs with inferior medical standards.

# BMC Nears Full Property Tax Recovery

**Mumbai** : The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation is on track to achieve complete property tax recovery for 2025-26, having already collected over Rs 6,900 crore.

Officials said this accounts for 94.12% of the Rs 7,341 crore target, with the remaining amount expected by the end of March as last-minute payments come in. The target was raised this year following record collections in the previous fiscal.

To boost compliance, the civic body extended payment hours at facilitation centres and kept them open even on holidays. Strict action has also been taken against defaulters, with over 6,900 properties attached for unpaid dues.

As a result, thousands of defaulters cleared significant amounts, while several properties remain under seizure or are set for auction if dues are not paid within the deadline.

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC)

is currently on the verge of a historic financial milestone as it nears the total recovery of its property tax targets for the 2025-26 fiscal year. With the deadline fast approaching, the civic body has already successfully funneled more than ₹6,900 crore into the city's treasury, demonstrating a high level of fiscal discipline and administrative efficiency.

This massive collection represents the lifeblood of Mumbai's infrastructure projects, directly funding the maintenance of roads, water supply systems, and the various civic amenities that millions of Mumbaikars rely on every day.

The current collection figures indicate that the BMC has already achieved approximately 94.12% of its ambitious ₹7,341 crore target for the year. Officials are expressing high confidence that the remaining gap will be closed by the midnight bell on March 31, as the final wave of last-minute payments typically surges during the last 48 hours of

the financial year.

This year's target was notably higher than previous years, a strategic decision made by the administration following record-breaking collections in the last fiscal cycle, reflecting the city's growing real estate value.

To ensure that the "last-mile" recovery is as smooth as possible, the BMC has significantly upgraded its service infrastructure.

In a rare move to accommodate taxpayers, the civic body extended the operating hours of its citizen facilitation centers across all 24 wards.

These centers have remained operational even on public holidays and weekends throughout the month of March, removing any logistical excuses for non-payment.

This "service-first" approach has been credited with reducing the friction for honest taxpayers who might otherwise struggle to visit government offices during standard working hours.

# MP Pushes for Konkan Train Revival

**Mumbai** : Member of Parliament Ravindra Waikar has urged Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw to restore the Dadar-Ratnagiri passenger train and extend it to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus.

The service, which operated for decades, was curtailed to Diva during the COVID-19 pandemic, causing inconvenience to daily commuters travelling between Mumbai and the Konkan region.

Waikar said passengers now face longer travel times and added costs due to additional local train journeys. He stressed that the issue particularly affects women, elderly passengers and students.

Highlighting poor road conditions on the Mumbai-Goa highway, he called for immediate restoration of the service, saying it remains a vital lifeline for lakhs of commuters.

The recent appeal by Member of Parliament Ravindra Waikar to Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw highlights a growing demand for the restoration of a vital transport link between Mumbai and the Konkan region. At the center of this request is the Dadar-Ratnagiri passenger train, a service that for decades served as a dependable and affordable connection for thousands of commuters. The MP has not only called for the return of the original route but has also proposed extending the service to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT) to better serve the heart of South Mumbai's business and administrative district.

The disruption of this long-standing service traces back to the COVID-19 pandemic, a period during which many railway operations were either suspended or significantly modified to

manage health risks. In the case of the Dadar-Ratnagiri passenger, the route was curtailed, with the train now terminating at Diva station instead of reaching the central hubs of Mumbai. While these changes were initially framed as temporary emergency measures, the failure to restore the original schedule years later has become a major point of contention for those who rely on the Konkan Railway network for their daily livelihoods.

The shift to Diva as a terminus has introduced a series of logistical hurdles that have significantly complicated the lives of regular travelers. Commuters traveling from the Konkan region toward Mumbai's main business districts now find themselves forced to alight at Diva and navigate the often overcrowded Mumbai suburban local train system to complete their journey.

This "broken link" in the journey has added layers of stress and exhaustion to a commute that was already physically demanding, turning a direct trip into a multi-stage ordeal. Beyond the physical toll, the current arrangement has imposed a clear financial burden on a demographic that is often highly price-sensitive. By forcing passengers to switch from a long-distance passenger train to local services, the total cost of travel has increased due to the purchase of additional tickets or passes. For many low-income workers and small-scale traders who move goods between Ratnagiri and Mumbai, these added daily expenses represent a significant portion of their earnings, making the current railway policy feel like an indirect tax on their mobility.

The Member of Parliament underscored that the inconvenience is most

acutely felt by the more vulnerable sections of society, including women, senior citizens, and students. Navigating the chaotic transition at Diva station, which involves climbing stairs and boarding packed local trains with heavy luggage, is particularly grueling for the elderly and those with mobility issues. Similarly, students who travel for higher education and women who commute for work are finding their travel times extended by hours, leaving them with less time for rest, study, or family responsibilities. The urgency of the rail revival is further heightened by the deteriorating condition of the Mumbai-Goa highway, the primary road alternative for those traveling to the Konkan coast. Persistent issues with road quality, including potholes and unfinished expansion projects, have made bus and private car travel slow,

unpredictable, and often hazardous. In this context, the railway remains the only truly viable and safe "lifeline" for lakhs of commuters, making the restoration of a direct, city-centered train service a matter of public safety as much as it is one of convenience. Historically, the Dadar-Ratnagiri passenger was known for its accessibility, providing a middle ground between the faster, more expensive express trains and the slow road journeys. It allowed people from smaller stations in the Konkan belt to reach the heart of Mumbai at a fraction of the cost of other transport modes. By extending the train to CSMT, the MP argues that the railway can significantly decongest the suburban lines, as thousands of passengers would no longer need to clog the local platforms at Diva or Dadar to reach the city's southern tip.

# IIT Bombay Turns Leaf Waste Into Fuel

**Mumbai** : Indian Institute of Technology Bombay has developed an innovative system that converts dry leaf waste into cooking fuel, reducing dependence on LPG in its campus kitchens.

The project, led by professor Sanjay Mahajani, began in 2014 and was successfully implemented in 2024. It uses a biomass gasification process to convert leaves into pellets, which are then transformed into low-emission fuel.

The gas produced, mainly carbon monoxide and hydrogen, is used to generate steam for cooking and other thermal needs. The system has helped cut LPG usage by 30-40% while also lowering emissions. The initiative faced early challenges such as smoke and operational issues, but improvements—including contributions from Sandeep Kumar—led to a refined and patented design. The project is now a key example of sustainable energy use on campus.

The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay has reached a significant milestone in sustainable engineering by successfully turning a campus nuisance—dry leaf waste—into a functional energy source. For years, the vast, green campus struggled with the disposal of massive quantities of fallen leaves, which were often either left to rot or unsustainably burned. The breakthrough, led by Professor Sanjay Mahajani from the Department of Chemical Engineering, has transformed this waste management challenge into a sophisticated "waste-to-fuel" pipeline that now powers the very kitchens that feed the institute's students and faculty.

The journey toward this green energy solution was nearly a de-

cade in the making, having first been conceptualized in 2014. It took ten years of rigorous prototyping, testing, and refining before the system was fully integrated into the campus infrastructure in 2024. This long-term commitment highlights the complexity of moving an idea from a laboratory setting to a high-demand, real-world environment like a commercial-scale kitchen. The project stands as a testament to the "circular economy" philosophy, where the campus's own organic output is used to meet its internal energy requirements. At the heart of this innovation is a technical process known as biomass gasification. Instead of simply burning the leaves, which would release high amounts of smoke and pollutants, the system first processes the dry foliage into high-density pellets. These pellets are then fed into a specialized gasifier where they undergo a thermochemical transformation. This process breaks down the organic matter into a combustible gas, commonly referred to as "syngas," which serves as a much cleaner alternative to traditional solid fuels or even certain fossil fuels.

The resulting gas is a potent mixture primarily composed of carbon monoxide and hydrogen. While these gases are hazardous in their raw form, when captured and burned within the controlled environment of the IIT system, they provide a steady and high-temperature flame. This energy is currently being utilized to generate steam, which is then piped into the campus kitchens for large-scale cooking, water heating, and other thermal needs. By tapping into this "homegrown"

gas, the institute has managed to create a decentralized energy grid that functions independently of external supply chains.

The environmental and financial impact of the project has been immediate and measurable. Since its full-scale implementation, IIT Bombay has reported a 30% to 40% reduction in its overall Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) consumption. For a massive institution with dozens of hostels and dining halls, this translates into a significant reduction in operational costs. Furthermore, the low-emission nature of the syngas means that the campus's carbon footprint has shrunk, proving that large institutions can significantly lower their environmental impact through localized innovation.

Like most pioneering research, the project was not without its initial setbacks. In the early stages, the gasification units suffered from operational inconsistencies and produced excessive smoke, which was counterproductive to the goal of clean energy. The team had to go back to the drawing board to address issues such as tar formation and the efficient filtration of the gas. These technical "growing pains" were essential for the team to understand the unique chemical properties of Indian leaf varieties and how they behave under high-pressure gasification. A turning point in the project came through the collaborative efforts of the research team, including significant technical contributions from Sandeep Kumar. Together, they refined the design of the gasifier to ensure a more complete combustion of the biomass, effectively eliminating the smoke issues that plagued the early ver-

sions.



## Editorial

### Farming in the hands of brokers!

Agriculture—the very backbone of the Indian economy—finds itself in a grave crisis today. The farmer, who is the actual producer, possesses no authority to determine the price of his own produce; instead, middlemen have established an overwhelming dominance over the marketplace. As a result of this system, the 'Annadata' (the provider of food) is becoming increasingly economically vulnerable. The agricultural sector—widely regarded as the fundamental pillar of the Indian economy and the nation's true economic spine—is currently navigating through a crisis that is both extremely severe and deeply complex. Even though nearly 80 percent of the country's economy depends, directly or indirectly, on agriculture, the farmer—upon whose toil this entire nation stands—remains, to this day, a mere puppet in the hands of middlemen. It is the greatest irony of our democracy that, even 75 years after independence, the simple, natural principle of "he who owns the produce sets the price" has failed to take root in the agricultural sector. While the producer of virtually every other commodity in the world holds the right to determine its price, the rates for the produce of a farmer—who toils under the scorching sun, shedding blood and sweat day and night to cultivate crops—are instead dictated by middlemen and traders sitting comfortably in air-conditioned rooms. We take great pride in proclaiming India as an agrarian nation; yet, in reality, the economic lives of farmers and agricultural laborers remain trapped within a perpetual cycle of uncertainty. Due to a dearth of financial services in rural areas and the inability to meet urgent, unforeseen needs, the farmer has remained perpetually dependent on others. Whether it is a daughter's wedding or a sudden medical emergency, whenever a farmer faces an urgent need for funds, he finds himself compelled to knock on the doors of moneylenders or middlemen, rather than finding the doors of banks open to him. In such situations, the opposing party exploits the farmer's helplessness, compelling him to sell his produce at whatever meager price is offered. The extensive chain of intermediaries that has emerged within this agricultural market is so entrenched and organized that, despite decades of effort, breaking it remains an arduous task. The farmer possesses not even the faintest idea of the rate at which his produce ultimately reaches the end consumer, for he exercises absolutely no control over this entire trade chain. In the modern era, the growing intrusion of the corporate sector has rendered the challenges confronting agriculture even more acute. Farming—once reliant on the benevolence of nature—has now been pushed into a state of complete unprofitability by the relentless onslaught of climate change. The deteriorating ecological balance and the inherent unpredictability of natural cycles have become, for the farmer, akin to adding insult to injury. At times, unseasonal rains cause standing crops to rot right in the fields; at other times, prolonged dry spells cause the crops to wither away. This constitutes a double-edged predicament—a vicious cycle from which the farmer, no matter how desperately he attempts to extricate himself, finds himself ensnared ever more deeply. In contemporary times, the costs of agricultural inputs—ranging from seeds to fertilizers—have skyrocketed, resulting in a massive surge in production costs. Whether it is the recurring crisis regarding onions, the plummeting prices of leafy vegetables, or the distressing sight of heaps of tomatoes being discarded on the streets—these are scenes that leave us utterly numb. At the political level, issues concerning agriculture and farmers have invariably been politicized. The Congress government, which held power for a prolonged period, has frequently faced criticism for having abandoned farmers to their fate. When Sharad Pawar served as the country's Agriculture Minister, the hopes of farmers in Maharashtra were rekindled; however, even during his tenure, policy flaws prevented farmers from achieving the anticipated success, and the shadow of despair persisted. Following the National Democratic Alliance's (NDA) ascent to power at the Centre, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took concrete steps aimed at understanding the plight of farmers and providing them with direct assistance. Unfortunately, however, these efforts too fell victim to political animosity. Due to the belligerence of the opposition and a negative propaganda campaign driven by anti-Modi sentiments, obstacles were deliberately created in the implementation of numerous schemes designed for the welfare of farmers. Nevertheless, utilizing technological tools such as (DBT), the government has made a sincere effort to ensure that financial assistance reaches the farmers' bank accounts. In the specific context of Maharashtra, schemes such as the Central Government's 'PM Kisan Samman Nidhi' and the State Government's 'Namoo Shetkari Mahasamman Nidhi' have provided farmers with a measure of financial support. According to official statistics, the Central and State governments—working in tandem—have so far deposited a total of ₹54 lakh crore into the bank accounts of approximately 90 lakh farmers across Maharashtra. While this assistance is significant, it serves merely as a temporary stopgap measure. The fundamental issue remains this: until the farmer is liberated from the impenetrable nexus of trade intermediaries and middlemen, he cannot attain true economic freedom. Rather than merely distributing a largesse of subsidies, the government must prioritize ensuring a Guaranteed Minimum Price for agricultural produce while simultaneously focusing on how to enhance the farmer's direct participation within the market ecosystem. Unless this parallel system dominated by middlemen is dismantled, we cannot absolve ourselves of the sin of reducing the very providers of our food to the status of mere supplicants. In light of this grim reality, it has become imperative to view agriculture not merely as a way of life, but to approach it with a professional and commercial mindset. The government's responsibility must not remain confined merely to announcing schemes; rather, the need of the hour is to ensure that the benefits of these schemes reach the last farmer in the chain, while simultaneously eliminating the interference of middlemen. The true transformation of this agrarian nation's landscape will occur only when the farmer—who battles on two fronts: against the vagaries of nature and against a man-made economic chain—begins to emerge victorious. To live with dignity, the 'provider of food' requires not just a helping hand, but a transparent system that ensures a fair return for his arduous labor. The farmer is not merely a tool for garnering votes; he constitutes the very foundation of this nation's existence.

Therefore, it is essential for political parties—including the opposition—to set aside their petty self-interests and animosities, and to unite in the effort to make agriculture a profitable enterprise. If we fail to stand firmly by the farmers today, the looming crisis of future food security will assume a formidable and severe form. Curbing the organized exploitation perpetrated by middlemen and traders is not merely an administrative reform; it is, above all, a moral imperative. As long as the hands toiling in the fields do not receive a just return for their sweat and labor, any claims regarding the nation's progress will remain hollow and unsubstantiated. Consequently, it has now become imperative that 'Save the Farmer' transcends the status of a mere slogan and evolves into a full-fledged national movement. Rather than relying on temporary stop-gap measures to address farmers' issues, it is absolutely essential to establish a robust, long-term, and transparent systemic framework. At this critical juncture, saving the 'Annadata'—the provider of food—stands as the true guarantee for the nation's future.

# Mission Vatsalya scheme

Ministry of Women and Child Development is implementing a Centrally Sponsored Scheme namely 'Mission Vatsalya' in all States and Union Territories on predefined cost sharing basis between the Central and the State Governments to deliver various services for children in difficult circumstances including orphan children. The scheme provides institutional care and non-institutional care. Child Care Institutions (CCIs) established under the Mission Vatsalya scheme provide, inter-alia, age-appropriate education, access to vocational training, recreation, health care, counselling etc. Under Non-Institutional Care Service, support is provided through Sponsorship, Foster Care, Adoption and After Care.

During revision of centrally sponsored schemes in 15th Finance Commission, financial norms were appropriately increased to ensure basic needs, care, protection, development, treatment, rehabilitation and social re-integration of children living in Child Care Institutions.

The TrackChild Portal is implemented with support and involvement of various stakeholders namely Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Railways, State Governments/ UT Administrations, Child Welfare Committees, Juvenile Justice Boards, National Legal Services Authority, etc. Advisory have been issued to all States and UTs including Director General of Police of all States & UTs and other stakeholders regarding providing information of missing children on the TrackChild portal.

Under Mission Vatsalya, States and Union Territories are supported to conduct awareness and capacity-building programmes for strengthening child protection systems at the grassroots level. Further, the Ministry also organizes zonal conferences and sensitization/dissemination workshops under Mission Vatsalya Scheme to create awareness and strengthen implementation among stakeholders.

This Ministry has developed an integrated unified Mission Vatsalya Portal in consultation and coordination with States and UTs. The TrackChild portal for Missing/Found Children, and Khoya-Paya application for Missing/Sighted Children have been integrated with this unified Mission

Governments to appoint designated nodal officers for Missing children at State Level and District levels. The details of these nodal officers have been uploaded on Mission Vatsalya portal.

Under the JJ Act 2015 (Sections 27-30), the Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) have been empow-

Further, Section 144 of BNS, 2023, deals with the exploitation of trafficked persons, including sexual exploitation. The section outlines different punishments for exploiting trafficked children and adults including women, with distinct terms of imprisonment and fines. Section 95 of BNS

provided financial assistance to all States and Union Territories, for upgrading/setting up Anti Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs) covering all Districts of the States and UTs. Currently, 827 AHTUs are functional including 807 in States and UTs, 15 in Border Security Forces (BSF) and 5 in Sa-

vestigation Agency (NIA) to investigate cases of human trafficking having interstate, national and international ramifications.

14,653 Women Help Desks (WHDs) have been established in Police Stations with financial assistance under Nirbhaya Fund focus on making the Police Stations more women friendly and approachable.

vi. Investigation Tracking System for Sexual Offences (ITSSO), an online analytical tool, has been launched to monitor and track police investigations in sexual offences as per Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2018 (now included in BNSS). It enables a regular review by the States and UTs concerned to monitor the progress of case investigation.

National Database on Sexual Offenders (NDSO) is a database available exclusively to police. It was Launched on 20.09.2018 to facilitate investigation & tracking of sexual offenders, which allows Investigating Officers to track habitual sex offenders along with initiating preventive measures against sexual offences.

National Database of Human Trafficking Offenders (NDHTO), facilitates the LEAs to search the trafficker's portfolio which provides crime history, personal details, movement, court actions, appeals, visitors, etc. Trafficker's data search provides details for prevention/detection and investigation of such crimes. The Government of India is committed to enhancing inter-agency collaboration at the national and international levels and strengthening public awareness campaigns to prevent trafficking. The NIA, in conjunction with the new criminal laws and the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (ITPA), coupled with the initiatives of the Ministry of Women and Child Development constitute a more robust framework for handling trafficking offences. 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.



Vatsalya Portal. The TrackChild portal is implemented with support and involvement of various stakeholders namely Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Railways, State Governments and UT Administrations, Child Welfare Committees, Juvenile Justice Boards, National Legal Services Authority, etc. Standard operating procedure have been issued in this regard. Advisory have also been issued to all States and UTs including Director General of Police of all States & UTs and other stakeholders regarding providing information of missing children on the TrackChild portal.

It is also integrated with the Crime and Criminal Tracking & Network Systems (CCTNS) of the Ministry of Home Affairs which allows interoperability in terms of matching of F.I.Rs of missing children with data base of TrackChild to trace and match missing children by the State and UT police concerned. Further, through Khoya Paya module any citizen can report about any missing or sighted children.

Further, This Ministry has directed all State and UT

related to take decisions with regard to the children in need of care and protection, keeping their best interest in mind. They are also mandated to monitor the function of the Child Care Institutions (CCIs). Similarly, the Juvenile Justice Boards are empowered to take decisions regarding the welfare of children in conflict with law (Sections 04-09). At the national and state level, the JJ Act provides the National/State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights to monitor the implementation of the Act (Section 109).

The Ministry regularly follows up with the State and Union Territory Governments and various advisory have been issued so as to ensure the effective implementation of Mission Vatsalya Scheme.

Section 143 of BNS defines trafficking as recruiting, transporting, harbouring, transferring, or receiving a person for exploitation using various coercive means. The section outlines severe punishments for trafficking, with higher penalties for trafficking multiple persons or children.

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However, the Government of India supplements the efforts of the States and Union Territories by providing them guidelines on preventing and countering the crime of human trafficking, in the form of various advisories issued from time to time. Some of the initiatives of the Central Government are as under:

The Government has

shastra Seema Bal (SSB). SSB has also established dedicated helpline number 1903. The Ministry of Home Affairs also provides financial assistance to the States and UTs in holding 'State level conferences' and 'Judicial Colloquiums', which are aimed at sensitizing the Police/ Law officers of the States and UTs about the latest initiatives/developments relevant in addressing the issue of human trafficking in a focused and efficient manner.iii. A national level communication platform-Crime Multi Agency Centre (CriMAC) was launched by Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on March 12, 2020 for online sharing of information on crime & criminals on 24x7 basis among various Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) and ensure seamless flow of information between them. It facilitates dissemination of information about significant crimes including human trafficking cases across the country on a real time basis and enables inter-State coordination.

The Government has mandated the National In-

## Nirbhaya Fund : Safety and security for women

The Ministry of Women and Child Development does not maintain centralized data on the number of women who have turned to prostitution and women beggars apprehended in the National Capital and other metropolitan cities.

'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 crime against women rests with the respective State Governments and UT Administrations; they are competent to deal with such offences under the extant provisions of laws.

The Government of India has enacted the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (ITPA) to address trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation and related offences. The Act defines prostitution in the context of commercial sexual exploitation and provides for penal action against those who facilitate, abet or profit from such exploitation. Implementation of the Act is primarily the responsibility of State Governments and UT Administra-

tions.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) implements 'Mission Shakti', a scheme in mission mode which aims to strengthen interventions for women safety, security and empowerment across the country. Mission Shakti comprises of two verticals 'Sambal' for safety and security of women and 'Samarthya' for empowerment of women. Under 'Sambal', One Stop Centres (OSCs), provide integrated support and assistance under one roof to women affected by violence and those in distress, both in private and public spaces. It also provides an integrated range of services including medical aid, legal aid and advice, temporary shelter, police assistance, psycho-social counselling to needy women. Further, Women Helpline (WHL) under 'Sambal', aims to provide 24x7x365 emergency and non-emergency response through telephonic short-code 181 to women, both in public and private spaces by linking them with appropriate authorities such as Police, One Stop Centres, Hospitals, Legal Services Authorities etc. Additionally, it provides information about women welfare

schemes and programs. Women Helpline is operational in 35 States and Union Territories and also integrated with Emergency Response Support System (ERSS-112). Under 'Samarthya', Shakti Sadan provides an Integrated Relief and Rehabilitation Home for women in distressful situations including trafficked women. It aims at creating a safe and enabling environment for the women in such difficult situations, to enable them to overcome the adverse circumstances. In order to strengthen transparency and accessibility in service delivery with respect to reliefs and rehabilitation to women in distress, MWCD launched Mission Shakti Dashboard, on 22.01.2025 (<https://missionshakti.wed.gov.in/>). The dashboard hosts updated lists of Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs), Nodal Officers of various schemes including OSCs, WHL, Shakti Sadan etc. The portal also consolidates all major helplines for easy public access. The Mission Shakti Dashboard data is also accessible via the Mission Shakti Mobile Application. A woman in distress can now book an appointment with her nearest OSC through both the portal and

the mobile application.

The Government of India has set up a dedicated fund called the "Nirbhaya Fund" for implementation of initiatives aimed at enhancing the safety and security for women. All projects/ schemes under Nirbhaya Fund are demand driven. The fund provides financial assistance to Ministries, Departments, States and UTs for implementation of various projects such as ERSS-112, Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC), Safe City Project in 8 major cities namely Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow and Mumbai, Women Help Desks (WHDs) in police stations, Anti Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs), Strengthening of DNA analysis, cyber forensic and related facilities in State Forensic Laboratories (SFLS), Setting up Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs) including exclusive POCSO courts to dispose of cases pending trial under rape and POCSO Act, 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.

## NHAI Awards Contract for Construction of Flyovers and Underpasses at Jaipur Bypass Junction on NH-48

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has issued a Letter of Award (LoA) for a major infrastructure upgrade at the Jaipur Bypass Junction along the Delhi-Jaipur-Ajmer Expressway (NH-48) in Rajasthan. The project aims to address long-standing traffic congestion issues at one of the busiest intersections in the region.

The contract for the development has been awarded to M/s Maruti Infracreation Pvt. Ltd., with a total project cost of Rs. 130.65 crore. The work will be executed under the Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) mode, ensuring a streamlined approach to design and implementation.

Jaipur Bypass Junction, often referred to as the 200 Feet Junction, plays a crucial role in con-

necting key routes between Delhi, Jaipur, and Ajmer. Due to its strategic importance, the junction witnesses a heavy influx of vehicles throughout the day.

The area surrounding the junction is densely populated, with major residential and commercial localities such as Mansarovar, Shyam Nagar, and Vaishali Nagar contributing to high local traffic volumes. This mix of highway and city traffic has resulted in frequent bottlenecks.

Currently, vehicles from multiple directions must pass through signal-controlled intersections, leading to long waiting times. This situation often results in traffic snarls, especially during peak hours, affecting daily commuters and long-distance travelers alike.

The proposed project seeks to resolve these challenges through

the construction of modern, grade-separated infrastructure. This includes the development of two underpasses and two flyovers designed to streamline traffic movement.

One of the underpasses will cater to vehicles traveling from Delhi towards Mansarovar, ensuring uninterrupted movement for this route. The second underpass will facilitate traffic moving from Mansarovar towards Delhi, reducing dependency on traffic signals.

In addition to the underpasses, two flyovers will be constructed to improve connectivity between Jaipur and Ajmer, as well as from Ajmer towards Delhi. These elevated structures will allow vehicles to bypass congested intersections entirely.

The segregation of local and through traffic is expected to sig-

nificantly ease congestion at the junction. By eliminating the need for vehicles to cross conflicting traffic streams, the project will enhance both efficiency and safety.

At present, frequent stoppages at traffic signals not only delay journeys but also contribute to higher fuel consumption. This leads to increased costs for commuters and adds to environmental pollution in the area.

With the implementation of this project, travel time is expected to reduce considerably. Smoother traffic flow will also minimize wear and tear on vehicles, offering long-term benefits to road users. Road safety is another critical aspect that the project aims to improve. By reducing congestion and eliminating risky crossing movements, the likelihood of accidents at the junction

will decrease.

The project also reflects a broader effort by NHAI to modernize key highway corridors across India. Enhancing infrastructure along NH-48 is particularly important due to its role as a major economic and transport lifeline.

Once completed, the upgraded junction will not only benefit local residents but also improve connectivity for interstate travelers. It will strengthen the overall efficiency of the Delhi-Jaipur-Ajmer corridor.

Overall, this development marks a significant step towards improving urban mobility in Jaipur. By addressing congestion at a critical junction, the project is set to deliver long-term gains in traffic management, safety, and commuter convenience.

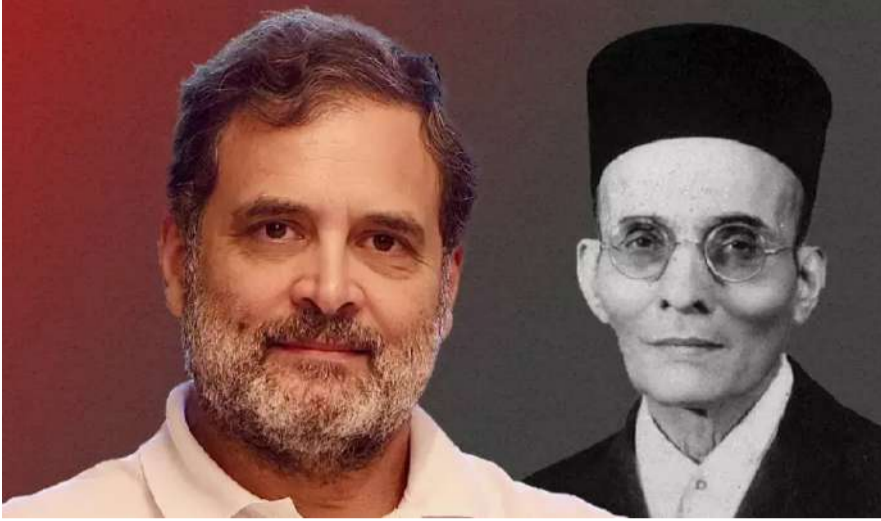
## Witness Admits that Savarkar's Correspondence with the British Was Criticized

**Pune :** The hearing in the defamation case filed against Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, over his alleged defamatory statements about Swatantryaveer Vinayak Damodar Savarkar continues before the Special Court in Pune.

In the said case, the cross-examination of the complainant Satyaki Savarkar, was conducted on Tuesday by Advocate Milind Dattatray Pawar, counsel for Rahul Gandhi.

During the cross-examination, Satyaki Savarkar admitted that he had not verified whether Rahul Gandhi was a Member of Parliament on the day he delivered his speech in London, and he does not remember the same, said Adv Milind Pawar.

Adv Pawar said that



Satyaki Savarkar also acknowledged that many political leaders publicly criticize the writings and ideology of Swatantryaveer Savarkar.

He further stated that

he does not know whether local journalists in London were present at the time of the said speech, and admitted that he does not know whether Vishrambag Police in Pune conducted any

investigation into whether Rahul Gandhi had actually gone to London.

Satyaki Savarkar also said that he does not know whether any newspapers or news channels in India re-

ported the said speech.

During cross-examination, he also said that Swatantryaveer Vinayak Damodar Savarkar wrote approximately 35 books. However, he does not know how many authors in India or abroad have written books on the subject, said Adv Pawar.

Adv Pawar said that Satyaki Savarkar agreed that the correspondence between Savarkar and the British Government during the British period has been criticized by many people. He further admitted that there has also been criticism on several occasions regarding references to Vinayak Damodar Savarkar as "Swatantryaveer".

The Court adjourned the hearing and further cross-examination is scheduled on April 8.

## Congress hits back at Amit Shah over remarks on its inaction on Naxalism

**Nagpur:** Atul Londhe Patil on Tuesday hit back at Union Home Minister Amit Shah over his remarks criticising the Indian National Congress for its alleged inaction on Naxalism.

Responding to Shah's statement, Patil said that Congress-led governments had taken several measures over the years to curb Naxalism and accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of making politically motivated claims. He emphasised that Naxalism is a long-standing and complex issue that cannot be attributed to the actions or inaction of any single political party. According to him, efforts to tackle Left-wing extremism have been ongoing across multiple administrations.

Patil further alleged that the BJP is attempting to take sole credit for the reduction in Naxal activities, while overlooking the groundwork laid by previous govern-



ments, including those led by the Congress. He maintained that policies, security operations, and development initiatives initiated during earlier regimes have contributed significantly to weakening extremist networks over time. The Congress leader's remarks came in response to statements made by Amit Shah in the Lok Sabha, where the Home Minister strongly criticised the Congress party's track record on dealing with Naxalism.

During his address, Shah claimed that the Congress

failed to take adequate action to eliminate the menace during its tenure in power, suggesting that stronger measures could have been implemented earlier. He also asserted that the current government has made substantial progress in curbing Left-wing extremism across affected regions in the country. Declaring India "Naxal-free," Shah said that the Maoist leadership structure has been almost completely dismantled through sustained security operations and policy interventions.

## BJP allays fears of foul play in godman Kharat case

**Mumbai:** Maharashtra BJP chief spokesperson Navnath Ban on Tuesday allayed fears expressed by some opposition leaders that the controversial godman Ashok Kharat could become a victim of foul play in custody to prevent him from implicating some ministers, legislators and highly placed officials.

Criticizing Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut for his remark "everyone is exposed in the bathhouse" in the Ashok Kharat case, Ban said at a media conference that it was due to the support of the Maha Vikas Aghadi government and then Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray—who provided water supply and patronage to Kharat's ashram—that the godman thrived.

He questioned who exactly was "exposed" in this situation. He further alleged that Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Milind Narvekar had met the godman and hinted that Narvekar might have made a prayer to him for blessings to make Uddhav Thackeray Chief Minister. He challenged Narvekar to clarify what vow, if any, was made in this regard.



Ban also slammed Raut for demanding that the President and Prime Minister speak on the godman issue, calling it absurd. He questioned why Uddhav Thackeray has remained silent and demanded answers as to why farmers' rightful water supply was diverted to the godman's ashram during his tenure.

He asserted that the Mahayuti government under Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, will not rest

until the full truth about the godman's crimes is uncovered and he is punished. He pointed out that the government has taken action against the godman accused of sexual exploitation of women and amassing wealth, by getting him arrested and ordering a SIT probe, something the previous MVA government lacked the courage to do.

He reiterated that there would be no foul play in custody and that the ac-

cused would face legal punishment.

Ban asserted that 1.4 billion Indians are neither timid nor cowardly and under the strong leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the people had nothing to fear. He was responding to Raut's allegation that while Americans took to the streets against US President Donald Trump in protest against the war against Iran and were praised, in India the BJP has made people timid and cowardly.

Ban further countered that the BJP has empowered the people who have defeated the opposition MVA alliance in Assembly, municipal, and district council elections, rendering the Shiv Sena Uddhav Thackeray faction and the party's Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut weak and ineffective.

On Raut's comments regarding "instability" in central forces, administration, and the military, Ban dismissed the claims as baseless and mocked them as "daydreams." He stated that under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, the country is stable and strong.

## An all new Police Chowki to come up at Ramtekdi

**Pune:** Responding to long-standing public demand, a groundbreaking ceremony for a new police chowki (outpost) was held in the Ramtekdi area, marking a significant step toward strengthening local law enforcement infrastructure.

The ceremony was led by Amitesh Kumar, Commissioner of Pune Police, and was facilitated by the city-based Naiknavare family, known for their active role in the real estate sector and community initiatives.

Several dignitaries attended the event, including Chetan Tupe, MLA from Hadapsar constituency, along with senior police officials such as Ranjankumar Sharma, Pankaj Deshmukh, and Rajlaxmi Shivankar. Also present were Satishkumar Khadke, CEO of the Slum Rehabilitation Authority, corporator Hemlata Magar, and members of the Naiknavare family including Hemant Naiknavare, Ranjit Naiknavare, and Gauri Naiknavare.

Speaking at the event, Amitesh Kumar highlighted that the state government had approved the establishment of 12 new police sta-



tions in Pune last year. He also noted that the city is currently witnessing one of the largest police recruitment drives in the state, with around 1,800 new personnel being inducted.

He added that once recruitment and training are completed, the police force will have adequate manpower to effectively operate the new facilities and maintain law and order across expanding urban zones.

Focusing on the Ramtekdi locality, Kumar pointed out that nearly 30,000 residents live in slum areas, making it essential to adopt a targeted policing approach. He directed officials to map the region, identify individuals involved in illegal activities, and monitor

juvenile offenders.

He stressed the importance of rehabilitation, especially for minors, stating that young offenders should be given opportunities to reform. However, he also warned that repeat offenders who fail to improve could face strict public accountability measures.

Recalling a past incident in October, Kumar said that after meeting a delegation of local residents, the police had set up a temporary chowki in a shipping container within 24 hours, demonstrating swift action in response to public concerns.

He reiterated that the long-term goal is to eliminate crime in the area and establish peace and order,

envisioning a "Ramrajya"-like environment in Ramtekdi.

The Commissioner also urged elected representatives to develop focused plans to make their wards free from drugs and illicit activities, emphasising the need for coordinated governance. The upcoming police chowki, planned as a three-storey structure, is expected to significantly strengthen policing capabilities and improve response times in the area.

Speaking on the occasion, Chetan Tupe suggested that organisations like CRE-DAI should contribute to upgrading local infrastructure, including the renovation of municipal schools in Ramtekdi.

## HC orders FIR against journalist Pushpedra Kulshrestha over Mahatma Gandhi remark

**Nagpur:** In connection with the controversial statement made about Mahatma Gandhi, the Bombay High Court's Nagpur Bench on Monday ordered the police to register an FIR against journalist Pushpedra Kulshrestha.

The case pertains to remarks made during a programme recently organized in Nagpur, where Pushpedra Kulshrestha had made an objectionable statement about Mahatma Gandhi at a Hindu conference.

According to the petition, Kulshrestha stated that "Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi had stolen the song 'Ishwar Tero Naam', and therefore he cannot be the Father of the Nation of this country."

It is also stated that he made other objectionable remarks about Gandhi.

Following this, a petition was filed seeking legal action.

The Congress had strongly condemned this statement and had demanded that a case be registered against the concerned individual.

Taking cognizance of the matter, the bench of Justice Anil Pansare and Justice Nivedita Mehta has issued notices to the Maharashtra Home Department, Nagpur Police Commissioner, Pushpedra Kulshrestha, and event organiser Nishant Gandhi, directing them to submit their responses.

During the hearing, the court questioned why no action had been taken by the police so far. It observed that regardless of whether the complaint had political motives or not, it was the responsibility of the police to act.

The court directed that available evidence, including audio recordings of the speech, be submitted to the police as well as to the court.

The controversy erupted after Kulshrestha allegedly referred to Mahatma Gandhi in derogatory terms and questioned his status as the "Father of the Nation," triggering political and social backlash.

During the hearing, several Congress leaders were present in court wearing Gandhi caps as a mark of protest.

## Rohit Pawar alleges conspiracy to eliminate "Bhondhu" Ashok Kharat in custody

**Mumbai:** Nationalist Congress Party (NCP-SP) MLA Rohit Pawar has alleged a conspiracy to eliminate "Bhondhu" (fake godman) Ashok Kharat while in police custody, potentially by framing it as a suicide or another incident.

He claimed that Kharat, who reportedly possesses sensitive information about several people, has links reaching high-ranking leaders. Consequently, there are concerns regarding Kharat's safety following these claims.

Ashok Kharat, the self-styled godman, faces charges of sexual exploitation involving several wom-

en. A total of 10 cases have been registered against him by the Nashik Police—eight related to sexual exploitation and two regarding financial fraud. Due to alleged links with Kharat, Rupali Chankar of the ruling NCP had to resign first from the post of Chairperson of the State Women's Commission and subsequently as the State President of the NCP Women's Wing. She is now set to face an SIT (Special Investigation Team) probe.

Names of other prominent leaders, including Sunil Tatkare (NCP) and Deepak Kesarkar (Shinde camp), have also surfaced, raising the possibility of investiga-



tive scrutiny against them as well.

In a post on Tuesday, Pawar highlighted a perceived double standard in the current political strategy. On the one hand, there are discussions about elim-

inating Kharat—who holds

information on many big leaders—by showing it as a suicide. On the other hand, there are efforts to save V.K. Singh, who reportedly has complete information regarding Ajit Dada's acci-

dent, at any cost. Pawar further emphasised that while the guilty must be punished, it is wrong to take a life or protect someone from charges just to suppress the truth.

He warned that such political strategies would not be tolerated by the people of Maharashtra and would erode public trust in the system.

"Why such attempts to hide the truth? Will the truth remain hidden this way?" he questioned, adding that many seem to have forgotten that "no matter how hard one tries, the truth cannot be hidden; it eventually comes out."

## MIT-ADT University Pune becomes first in Maharashtra to earn DASCAs accreditation for AI, data science programmes

**Pune:** MIT Art, Design and Technology University (MIT-ADT), located in Loni-Kalbhori, Pune, has secured accreditation from the Data Science Council of America, becoming the first institution in Maharashtra to receive this recognition across a comprehensive portfolio of artificial intelligence and data science programmes.

The accreditation spans undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programmes, covering key domains such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, cloud computing, cybersecurity, blockchain, and intelligent systems. These areas collectively

form the backbone of modern data science education.

By aligning its curriculum with these advanced fields, the university aims to equip students with capabilities in data engineering, algorithmic modelling, secure digital infrastructure, and real-world technology deployment.

DASCA accreditation is awarded to degree-granting institutions that meet globally benchmarked standards in curriculum design, academic rigour, and industry relevance. The recognition signifies that MIT-ADT's programmes adhere to international best practices in AI and data science education.

University officials stated that the accreditation reflects an integrated academic approach that blends theoretical knowledge with practical application, preparing graduates for the rapidly evolving global digital economy. Vishwanath D Karad, Founding President of MIT-ADT University, said the milestone aligns with the institution's vision of creating an education ecosystem that combines technological advancement with human values. He emphasised that the university is focused on nurturing globally competent professionals who can contribute meaningfully to society while staying ahead

in technological innovation.

Mangesh Karad, Executive President and Pro-Chancellor, noted that the achievement underscores MIT-ADT's commitment to innovation-driven education and adherence to global academic standards. Vice-Chancellor Rajesh S added that the accreditation strengthens the university's emphasis on interdisciplinary and future-ready programmes that are aligned with industry requirements and research advancements. Virendra V Shete, Dean—NEP, Ranking and Accreditation, described the recognition as both an honour and a responsibility, highlighting the need to con-

tinuously advance globally aligned AI and data science education. The accreditation is also expected to facilitate deeper engagement with international initiatives such as the World Data Science & AI Initiative, opening avenues for collaboration and innovation. This includes opportunities for faculty development, joint research projects, and the establishment of Centres of Excellence in emerging technologies. With the growing importance of data-driven decision-making across industries, such recognitions are likely to enhance the employability of graduates and strengthen the university's global standing.

## Gunshot fired at sweet mart employee in Nashik

**Nashik:** A sensational incident unfolded in the Jai Bhavani Road area on Monday night when an unidentified individual allegedly opened fire at an employee of a sweets shop, triggering panic across the locality.

According to reports, the well-known Savata Mali Sweets shop was operating as usual around 10 pm when the incident occurred. The situation took a dramatic turn following a sudden power outage that plunged the entire area into darkness.

Taking advantage of the blackout, the accused reportedly entered the shop

unnoticed. Before anyone present could react, he allegedly fired a shot from a country-made pistol at one of the employees.

The sound of the gunshot created immediate chaos, with customers and nearby residents rushing to escape the scene in fear. The sudden violence led to confusion and panic in the surrounding area.

After firing the shot, the assailant used the darkness as cover to flee from the spot. His identity remains unknown, and no immediate arrests have been reported. The injured employee was

promptly taken to a nearby hospital, where he is currently undergoing treatment. Details about his condition have not yet been officially disclosed. Local residents expressed shock over the incident, stating that such acts of violence are rare in the area. The episode has raised concerns about safety and security, particularly during power outages. Police teams reached the scene soon after receiving information about the firing and began preliminary inquiries. The area was inspected for evidence, and statements from witnesses are being recorded.

## Suniel Shetty teams up with Tiger Shroff for Murad Khetani's action thriller

**Mumbai:** Suniel Shetty is set to share the screen with his son Tiger Shroff in an upcoming action thriller, marking a significant collaboration between the father-son duo for the first time.

The film will be directed by Sachin Ravi and produced by Murad Khetani under the banner of Cine1 Studios. The project is expected to be a high-octane entertainer with a strong emotional core.

This collaboration comes after Suniel Shetty previously shared screen space with Jackie Shroff, Tiger Shroff's father, making this new project particularly special for fans of both families.

Director Sachin Ravi is best known for his Kannada film *Avane Srimannarayana*, which starred Rakshit Shetty and gained recognition for its unique storytelling and visual style.

The upcoming film marks Sachin Ravi's long-awaited debut in Hindi cinema. He had earlier attempted to direct *Ashwatthama: The Saga Continues* star-



ring Shahid Kapoor, but the project was shelved due to budget constraints.

Sources suggest that Suniel Shetty's role in the film will be central to the narrative, although specific details about his character are being kept under wraps to maintain intrigue.

The makers are planning to begin shooting on April 10 in Mumbai, with a significant portion of the film being shot

on elaborate sets constructed in Goregaon and Malad.

The production schedule is expected to continue through multiple phases and is likely to conclude by July 2026. The film aims to deliver a visually grand and action-packed cinematic experience.

Tiger Shroff, known for his action-heavy roles, was last seen in *Baaghi 4*, continuing his association with

high-energy performances and martial arts-driven storytelling.

He is currently working on *Lag Jaa Gale*, a romantic revenge drama directed by Raj Mehta. The film also stars Lakshya and Janhvi Kapoor.

In addition, Tiger has another ambitious project lined up with Ram Madhvani titled *Vajra*, which is described as a large-scale spiritual action film.

"*Vajra*" is expected to go on floors around September 2026, after the completion of the current action thriller with Suniel Shetty, indicating a packed schedule for the actor.

Meanwhile, Suniel Shetty will next be seen in *Welcome to the Jungle*, which is slated for a theatrical release on June 26, 2026.

The upcoming father-son collaboration is generating significant buzz, as it combines two generations of action stars known for their physicality and screen presence.

Fans are particularly excited to see the dynamic between Suniel and Tiger Shroff, as the film promises a mix of intense action sequences and emotional storytelling.

Overall, the project is shaping up to be a major addition to the action genre in Bollywood, with a strong team, high production values, and the unique appeal of a real-life father-son pairing on screen.

## After rocking silver screen, 'Dhurandhar' is set to put the small screen on fire

**Mumbai:** A coordinated and innovative on-air campaign spanning nearly 20 channels across the JioStar Network has been rolled out to announce the world television premiere of the film *Dhurandhar*, creating a buzz among viewers nationwide.

The campaign comes at a time when the sequel, *Dhurandhar: The Revenge*, is performing strongly at the box office. Building on this momentum, the makers are now preparing to capture television audiences with equal intensity.

As part of the unique promotional strategy, a "glitch" effect was broadcast simultaneously across around 20 prominent channels under the JioStar umbrella. This included popular networks such as Star Gold, Star Gold 2, Star Gold Romance, Star Gold Thrills, Star Gold Select, Star Utsav Movies, Colors Cineplex, Colors Cineplex Bollywood, Colors Cineplex Superhits, Star Plus, Colors, MTV, Disney, Nick, Sonic, and Hungama.

The unexpected glitch, which appeared as flickers and disturbances on screens,



immediately grabbed viewers' attention. The unusual interruption sparked curiosity and speculation among audiences watching different channels at the same time.

On March 27 at 9:12 pm, the synchronized disruption reached its peak, making it clear that the event was not a technical fault but a carefully orchestrated promotional stunt. The timing and scale ensured maximum visibility.

Moments after the glitch, a unified announcement followed across channels, revealing that the world TV premiere of *Dhurandhar* would take place on May 30 at 7 pm. The film is set to air simultaneously on Star Gold, Star Gold 2, and Colors Cineplex.

This multi-channel reveal strategy amplified the excitement surrounding the premiere, ensuring that the message reached millions of households in one coordinated burst. It also reinforced the scale and ambition associated with the film. A spokesperson from the JioStar Network explained the intent behind the campaign, stating that the goal was to make the television premiere as grand and distinctive as the film itself. The approach was designed to break through the clutter of conventional promotions. By leveraging multiple channels at once, the network succeeded in creating a shared viewing moment, something rarely seen in traditional TV marketing.

## Arjun Rampal says "I am over the moon" as fans and industry shower praise

**Mumbai:** Arjun Rampal is currently basking in widespread appreciation for his performance as a menacing antagonist in *Dhurandhar: The Revenge*, a role that has reignited conversations about his versatility as an actor. The film's growing popularity among audiences has further amplified the praise coming his way.

As the action drama continues to gain strong traction at the box office, Rampal took a moment to reflect on his long and eventful journey in the film industry. His latest social media post struck an emotional chord with fans, offering a glimpse into the highs and lows that have shaped his career.

Sharing a heartfelt video montage, Rampal traced his evolution from his early days in Bollywood to his current success. The clip served as a nostalgic tribute to his journey, capturing moments of growth, struggle, reinvention, and perseverance.

The montage featured glimpses from his debut film *Moksha* to his latest outing in *Dhurandhar: The Revenge*, highlighting the transformation he has undergone over the years. It showcased how he has continuously adapted to changing cinematic landscapes.

In the caption accompanying the video, Rampal expressed deep gratitude for being part of such a fulfilling journey. He acknowledged that his path has been shaped by both challenges and achievements, making the experience all the more meaningful. "From playing cowboys as kids, to landing my first film *#moksha* to *#Dhurandhar I am blessed to have shared with everyone who was part of the journey,"* he wrote, reflecting on the memories that have defined his career. Rampal also extended heartfelt thanks to his fans, collaborators, and colleagues who have supported him through different phases of his life. He credited their encouragement and belief



for helping him grow not just as an actor, but also as an individual. Among those he mentioned were director Aditya Dhar and co-star Ranveer Singh, whom he fondly referred to as "Babbar sher." His acknowledgment highlighted the camaraderie and mutual respect shared on set. He also recognized the contributions of several others associated with the project, emphasizing that filmmaking is a collaborative effort where every individual plays a crucial role in bringing a story to life. Reflecting on the values that have guided him throughout his journey, Rampal emphasized the importance of patience, perseverance, and passion. According to him, these qualities have been instrumental in helping him navigate the ups and downs of the industry. Directed by Aditya Dhar, *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* has emerged as a gripping action drama, earning praise for its intense storytelling and high-octane sequences. The film has managed to strike a chord with audiences who enjoy larger-than-

life cinematic experiences. Rampal's portrayal of a layered antagonist has been particularly appreciated, with critics noting the depth, intensity, and charisma he brings to the role. His performance adds complexity to the narrative, making the character both compelling and memorable. The film also boasts a strong ensemble cast, including Akshay Khanna and Sanjay Dutt, whose commanding screen presence further elevates the storytelling and adds to the film's dramatic weight. In addition to its performances, the film has been lauded for its slick action choreography, stylized visuals, and emotionally charged moments. These elements combine to create a cinematic experience that resonates with fans of the genre. As *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* continues its successful run, Rampal's performance stands out as one of its biggest highlights. His ability to reinvent himself and take on diverse roles once again proves why he remains a significant presence in Bollywood.

## YouTuber Prajakta Koli's book 'Too Good To Be True' set for web series adaptation

**Mumbai:** Prajakta Koli, who rose to fame with her YouTube channel *MostlySane* and the hit series *Mismatched*, is set to adapt her romance novel *Too Good To Be True* into a web series.

Koli will not only play the lead role in the adaptation but also step in as a producer, marking a significant expansion of her creative involvement in the project. The series is expected to go on floors in the second half of the year.

This venture represents a major milestone in Koli's evolving career, as she continues to transition from digital content creation to mainstream entertainment, including acting, writing, and now producing.

Having built a massive following through her YouTube presence, she successfully made her acting breakthrough with *Mismatched*, which became one of Netflix India's popular young adult romance series.

Apart from web series, Koli has also appeared in films such as *Jug Jugg Jeeyo* and other upcoming projects, further establishing her versatility as a performer.

Originally published in January 2025, *Too Good To Be True* is a light-hearted contemporary romance set in Mumbai. The story captures the emotional and personal journeys of young adults navigating relationships and life.

The narrative follows

Avani, a law student working part-time at a bookstore, and Aman, a charming and wealthy CEO. Their slow-burn romance forms the heart of the story, layered with themes of healing from past trauma and finding connection.

Prajakta Koli is set to portray Avani in the series, bringing her own written character to life on screen. However, the casting for Aman is yet to be finalised and will be announced after the script is completed. Interestingly, Koli revealed that the idea for the story originated during the COVID-19 lockdown. She initially intended to develop it as long-format screen content before eventually turning it into a novel.

The upcoming adaptation now brings the story full circle, as it returns to its original vision of being presented in a visual format for audiences.

As of now, no director has been officially attached to the project, and further details regarding the supporting cast and production timeline are awaited.

On the work front, Koli will next be seen in the fourth and final season of *Mismatched*,

which is slated to premiere soon on Netflix India. She is also part of the upcoming series *Operation Safed Sagar*, which is based on the Indian Air Force's role during the Kargil War. The series is directed by Oni Sen and

features a strong ensemble cast including Siddharth, Jimmy Shergill, Abhay Verma, and Mihir Ahuja. With multiple projects across acting, writing, and production, Prajakta Koli continues to solidify her place as a multi-faceted talent in the Indian entertainment industry.



## Bhumi Pednekar: "OTT gave women their voice"

**Mumbai:** Bhumi Pednekar has said that the rise of OTT platforms has brought a significant shift in opportunities for women in the Indian entertainment industry, enabling them to take bolder creative risks and lead stronger narratives.

Speaking at the International Film Festival Delhi 2026 (IFFD), the actor highlighted how streaming platforms have reshaped storytelling by placing women at the center of many shows and films.

"I feel with OTT, especially for women, the narrative has become a lot stronger, because a lot of those shows and films are led by women. Women have always been more courageous while choosing their scripts. OTT just gives them the right platform," she said.

Bhumi emphasized that digital platforms have created space for diverse and unconventional stories, which may not always find backing in traditional theatrical for-

mats. This shift, she noted, has allowed female actors to explore more layered and meaningful roles.

Marking a decade in the film industry, Bhumi reflected on her journey since her debut in *Dum Laga Ke Haisa*. She acknowledged the challenges but also pointed out how the industry has evolved over the years, especially for women.

Offering advice to aspiring actresses, she addressed the perception that the film industry is unsafe. According to her, while caution is necessary, the landscape has become more empowering for women.

"Even now in India, we think the world of films is very dangerous, but it's not. Many women have become very capable in this world. If you have a dream, there will be many people who tell you 'no,' but you have to listen to that 'yes,'" she said.

She also stressed the importance of being aware of one's surroundings and

learning through experience. Bhumi encouraged newcomers to stay cautious while pursuing their ambitions with confidence. The actor also opened up about dealing with criticism and being underestimated in the industry. She shared that negative feedback often acts as a driving force behind her determination. "Actions speak louder than words. For women, that is our most powerful tool. Every time I am undermined, there's this fire... it motivates me a lot more. I have always used my work as a way of coming back," she added.

On the professional front, Bhumi was last seen in the crime thriller *Daldal*, where she took on an intense and layered role.

In 2025, she appeared in the romantic come-

dy *Mere Husband Ki Biwi* alongside Arjun Kapoor and Rakul Preet Singh, further showcasing her versatility across genres. She also starred in the Netflix romantic drama *The Royals* opposite Ishaan Khatter. While the show received

mixed reviews from critics, it managed to garner strong viewership on the platform.

Bhumi's comments reflect a broader transformation within the industry, where OTT platforms are not only expanding content but also redefining who gets to lead stories.



## Alka Yagnik reveals ongoing hearing condition, puts singing assignments on hold

**Mumbai:** Alka Yagnik has shared a candid update about her health, revealing that she continues to battle a rare hearing disorder that has significantly affected her professional life. The veteran singer, known for her timeless voice, opened up about her ongoing struggles in a recent interaction. Speaking to NDTV, Yagnik said she is "still suffering" from the condition, which she had first publicly disclosed in 2024. Her statement underscored that recovery has been slow and challenging, keeping her away from active work. The disorder, identified as a form of Sensorineural hearing loss caused by a viral attack, has impacted her inner ear and auditory nerves. This has made it difficult for her to continue recording songs, a profession that relies heavily on precise hearing.

Due to the ongoing health issue, Yagnik has largely stepped back from public appearances and professional commitments. Her absence has been noticeable in an industry where she has been a

dominant voice for decades.

Despite these challenges, the singer recently received one of India's highest civilian honours, the Padma Bhushan. The recognition celebrates her immense contribution to Indian music over the years.

Yagnik expressed gratitude for the honour, even as she continues to cope with her health struggles. The award stands as a testament to her enduring legacy in the world of playback singing.

Reflecting on the current state of the music industry, she shared a critical perspective, saying that "music today has lost its soul." Her remark highlights a perceived shift in the artistic depth and emotional resonance of contemporary songs.

Over the years, Yagnik has been one of the most prominent voices in Hindi cinema, delivering countless hits across multiple languages. Her songs have defined entire generations of Bollywood music lovers. From romantic ballads to energetic tracks, her versatility and vo-

cal clarity have made her a household name. Her contribution has played a crucial role in shaping the soundscape of Indian cinema.

Her current absence from playback singing marks a significant pause in a career that has remained consistently influential. Fans and industry peers alike continue to hope for her recovery and return.

The condition she is battling also sheds light on the seriousness of hearing-related disorders. Such ailments can deeply affect not only daily life but also careers that depend on auditory precision.

Medical experts point out that viral-induced hearing loss can be particularly complex, often requiring long-term care and management rather than immediate recovery. Early diagnosis and treatment are considered crucial in such cases. Prolonged exposure to high sound levels is another factor that can aggravate hearing conditions, especially for professionals in the music industry.

# Revamped LSG gear up for IPL 2026 opener against Delhi Capitals

**New Delhi :** Lucknow Super Giants will begin their IPL 2026 campaign against Delhi Capitals at the Ekana Stadium in Lucknow on Wednesday (tomorrow), hoping for a stronger and more balanced season after a difficult previous year.

The franchise has focused on strengthening its squad, particularly the bowling unit, while also reshaping its batting order to provide more stability.

Last season proved challenging for Lucknow, with injuries to several key players, especially in the pace department, affecting the team's consistency. This time, however, the squad looks far more settled, with a number of players returning to full fitness and some experienced additions boosting the lineup.

The pace attack has been reinforced with the inclusion of seasoned campaigner Mohammed Shami and South African speedster Anrich Nortje. Both are expected to bring experience and control to the bowling unit. Young pace sensation Mayank Yadav, who battled injuries last season, has spent the past year working on his fitness and could play a crucial role if he regains his rhythm.

Mohsin Khan is also set to return after recovering from injury, while Prince Yadav has impressed the coaching staff with his performances in the nets. Together, they provide Lucknow with a deeper and more varied pace attack than in previous seasons.

In the spin department, mystery spinner Digvesh Singh Rathi will be one to watch. After making a strong impression in his debut season last year, Rathi will look to build on that momentum and further establish himself as a key member of the bowling lineup.

Compared to the bowling unit, the batting order appears more settled. The opening combination of Mitchell Marsh and Aiden Markram gives Lucknow an explosive yet dependable start at the top. Both players bring international experience and the ability to accelerate the scoring during the powerplay.

Further down the order, the team has reshuffled roles to ensure better balance. Captain Rishabh Pant is expected to move up the order after struggling to make an impact at number four for much of last season before finishing with a century when promoted to number three. Nicholas Pooran is likely to follow in the middle order, providing firepower in the later stages of the innings. Lucknow will face a Delhi Capitals side that showed promise last year but fell short of a playoff berth. Delhi struggled with instability at the top of the order, trying as many as sev-



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## From doom-scrolling to decisive save: Suraj's turning point

**Male (Maldives):** Suraj Singh Achebam's journey from social media addiction to match-winning hero stands as a powerful example of how discipline off the pitch can redefine success on it. The India U20 goalkeeper's transformation has not only reshaped his routine but also accelerated his rise in Indian football.

Once caught in the cycle of endless scrolling and late-night distractions, Suraj admitted that social media had begun to negatively impact his focus, recovery, and overall performance. What initially seemed like harmless browsing gradually evolved into a habit that disrupted his training rhythm and mental sharpness.

The turning point came on April 14, 2025, following Classic Football Academy's 0-3 defeat to Mohun Bagan Super Giant in the Reliance Foundation Development League final. The loss forced Suraj to reflect deeply on his preparation and lifestyle choices.

Confronting the reality that his off-field habits were affecting his on-field output, the young goalkeeper made a bold decision. That very night, he deleted his social media accounts, choosing discipline and focus over distraction. "I had become a social media addict, constantly watching reels, especially at night. It affected my sleep and focus during training," Suraj revealed, highlighting how the habit had taken a toll on his development. The results of his digital detox were almost immediate.



With improved sleep cycles, better recovery, and a more structured routine, Suraj began to notice a significant improvement in his performance and mental clarity. His renewed discipline soon translated into a defining moment on the international stage. In the SAFF U19 Championship final on May 18, 2025, in Yupia, Suraj emerged as the hero for India.

With the match locked at 1-1, he held his nerve in the penalty shootout, producing a crucial save against Bangladesh to secure the title for India. The moment marked a turning point in his young career. "It validated everything. Staying away from distractions helped me stay calm and focused in that moment," he said, reflecting on the impact of his lifestyle change. Although he eventually returned to social media, Suraj now approaches it with a completely different mindset. He maintains strict con-

control over his screen time, prioritising rest, match analysis, and recovery over mindless scrolling.

His transformation has coincided with rapid professional growth. The 18-year-old has since earned a contract with Bengaluru FC in the Indian Super League, marking a significant milestone in his career.

In addition, he has taken on greater responsibility as captain of the India U20 side in the ongoing SAFF U20 Championship, embracing a leadership role at a young age. "I want to be a disciplinarian now. There is more responsibility as captain," Suraj said, underlining his commitment to leading by example both on and off the field. Inspired by Ederson's composure and distribution, Suraj continues to refine his goalkeeping skills. He also benefits from the mentorship of former India midfielder Renedy Singh, whose guidance has played a key role in his development.

## Komalika Bari: Starting off with bamboo bows, to becoming a world champion recurve archer

**Raipur:** Starting archery with make shift bamboo bows, Jharkhand's Komalika Bari would never have thought that her marksmanship would one day make her a world champion.

Komalika's international accolades include world youth championships women's singles gold (Wroclaw, 2021), a gold medal at world cadet championships (Madrid, 2019) and Under 17 cadet world champion among others.

Hailing from a tribal family of modest means, her father is a Life insurance corporation (LIC) agent and her mother is a former Anganwadi worker. Speaking to UNI on the sidelines of the ongoing Khelo India Tribal Games being played in Chhattisgarh she recounted her struggle and credited the Tata Archery academy for transforming her fortunes.

"I started archery in

2012, I practiced with a bamboo bow, as we did not have the money to buy recurve. I planned to play nationals with a bamboo bow, and buy a recurve bow when I have the money. But thankfully I got selected in the Tata Archery academy in 2016, that was the turning point for me, at the academy, food, lodging, equipment, dress, travel allowance for attending tournaments all was taken care off by the academy. I have been able to make it this far because of them." Komalika, who is only the second Indian woman recurve archer to clinch the world cadet and world junior title praised the Khelo India tribal games, says "the facilities here are at par with national and international levels, KITG is giving a platform to athletes from remotest areas who are not privileged. Getting a chance to play a tournament of this quality will spur play-

ers to take up their respective disciplines with greater intensity and ambition."

The Khelo India Tribal Games are being held from March 25 to April 3, 2026, in Chhattisgarh and the 10-day national event features over 3,000 athletes competing in seven disciplines—archery, athletics, football, hockey, swimming, weightlifting, and wrestling—along with demonstration sports like Mallakhamb and Kabaddi.

Recounting the highest and lowest points of her career so far, she said "becoming a champion at the world cup (2021 in Guatemala City), hearing my National anthem in a foreign land, that also coincided with the independence day made it an even special moment. My lowest point was in 2023, I became overage growing out of the junior circuit and I did not find a place in the senior team."

## Ultimate Table Tennis reaches India's heartland as UP Prometheans join line-up for Season 7

**Mumbai:** Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT) is set to add a strong new Uttar Pradesh flavour to Season 7 with the inclusion of UP Prometheans, bringing the energy and sporting passion of India's heartland into the league's mix.

The upcoming season, scheduled to be played in July in Goa, marks another step in UTT's journey of building a dynamic and competitive league.

Owned by first-generation entrepreneur and BITS Pilani alumnus Mukesh Sharma, UP Prometheans reflects a clear and long-term vision to strengthen India's high-performance sporting ecosystem. With the franchise coming into the lineup, UTT also sees a fresh regional presence added to its roster, as UP Prometheans step in place of Chennai as part of the league's evolving team composition.

The move strengthens

representation from the northern belt while adding a new competitive dynamic, with Season 7 also set to feature a revised format with an expanded group stage.

Commenting on the announcement, Ekansh Gupta, CEO, Ultimate Table Tennis, said: "We are pleased to see UTT's footprint extend into Uttar Pradesh with UP Prometheans coming on board.

As India's largest state, UP holds immense potential for sport, and this addition strengthens our ambition of building a league that truly represents the country. With growing interest from stakeholders who share our vision, UTT continues to evolve both on and off the table."

As Founder Chairperson of Prometheus School in Noida, Sharma has focused on reimagining education while also contributing to India's Olympic ambitions through sport. Through the



Prometheus Sports Academy, he has built Olympic-level infrastructure across disciplines, including table tennis, badminton, shooting, swimming, and golf, supporting the development of athletes such as Olympian Archana Kamath.

Sharma and the Prometheans' association with UTT aligns with the league's efforts to create structured pathways from grassroots to elite competition.

Extending this commitment to the next generation,

UP Prometheans will also compete in Dream UTT Juniors, a grassroots initiative by the Dream Sports Foundation in collaboration with UTT, aimed at nurturing young table tennis talent across the country.

Speaking on the occasion, Sharma said, "I'm excited to be part of Ultimate Table Tennis, which has already set a strong benchmark over the past seasons. With UP Prometheans, we look forward to raising the bar further and building a

team that reflects our commitment to excellence and high-performance sport. This is another step towards strengthening India's journey to the Olympic podium."

Season 7 will feature seven teams competing in a single round-robin format, where each team will face every other team once in the league phase. The total number of ties will increase to 24, up from 23 for the last two seasons. Over the years, UTT has continued to grow in scale and stature, bringing world-class table tennis to new regions while building a strong base of players, fans, and partners. With increasing interest from across the country and sustained investment at both grassroots and elite levels, the league remains a key driver in the growth of table tennis in India. UTT Season 7 will be streamed live on JioHotstar and broadcast on the Star Sports network.

## India ready to face Bhutan in SAFF U20 C'ship semi-final

**Male (Maldives):** Defending champions India will look to rise to the occasion when they take on Bhutan in the semi-finals of the SAFF U20 Championship at the National Stadium here on Wednesday.

The India U20 men's team head into the semi-final after making full use of the three-day break following their group-stage matches.

The Blue Colts used the time to recover physically and reset mentally after their outings against Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The squad also enjoyed a day out at the beach, allowing the players to unwind and strengthen team bonding ahead of the decisive encounter. The positive atmosphere carried into training, where the players showed sharpness, enthusiasm and renewed focus as preparations intensified.

India progressed to the semi-finals as group toppers after composed performances against Pakistan (3-0) and Bangladesh (1-1) in Group B. The team showed resilience in key moments and handled pressure well, par-



ticularly in phases where the matches demanded patience and discipline.

India head coach Mahesh Gawali praised his players for their effort and mindset so far.

"The boys have been playing well as they handled pressure well. We didn't get time to prepare before the tournament, but the boys are giving their 100 per cent. I am really happy and proud of the way we have performed so far," said Gawali.

While the group-stage results were encouraging, the Indian camp is aware that the semi-final will require another step forward. The team created opportunities in both matches but will aim to be

more clinical in front of goal. Maintaining concentration during defensive phases will also be important in a knockout encounter.

"Nothing is easy. We created chances to score, and we need to convert more. We also need to be more focused when defending," Gawali added.

Bhutan enter the semi-final after showing determination in Group A. They began with a defeat against Nepal but recovered with a goalless draw against hosts Maldives. Their qualification was sealed in dramatic fashion when they scored in injury time to beat Sri Lanka 1-0. The late winner underlined Bhutan's persistence and ability to stay in the con-

test until the final whistle.

India will therefore approach the match with caution. Bhutan's disciplined performances and ability to capitalise on decisive moments make them a dangerous opponent. Staying focused for the full 90 minutes will be crucial for the Blue Colts. There will also be a key battle in front of goal. India's Vishal Yadav and Omang Dodum have each scored twice in the tournament and have led the attacking effort. Bhutan's Dhendup Gyeltshen has also netted two goals and will be a major threat. The performance of these forwards could influence the outcome of the match. With no extra time scheduled, the semi-final will go directly to penalties if the scores are level after regulation time. That adds further intensity to the encounter, where composure and decision-making will play a vital role. India will look to build on the positives from the group stage, remain disciplined and deliver a strong performance as they aim to secure a place in the SAFF U20 Championship final.

## Barcelona move difficult to turn down: Cucurella

**London:** Marc Cucurella has admitted that it would be "hard to turn down" an offer to return to FC Barcelona, though he insists he remains fully focused on his current journey with Chelsea FC.

The 27-year-old defender, who has established himself as a regular left-back at Chelsea, opened up about his future while reflecting on his roots in Spanish football. His comments have sparked fresh speculation about a potential return to La Liga.

Cucurella's connection with Barcelona runs deep. After beginning his foot-

balling journey at RCD Espanyol's academy, he later joined Barcelona's famed youth setup, where he honed his skills.

Despite his development at the Catalan club, he made only one senior appearance for Barcelona in 2017. Seeking regular playing time, he moved on to build his career elsewhere in Spain.

He gained valuable experience in La Liga with spells at SD Eibar and Getafe CF, where his performances began attracting wider attention.

His breakthrough came after a move to Brighton & Hove Albion in

2021. Cucurella impressed in his debut Premier League season, showcasing his energy, defensive solidity, and attacking support.

That standout campaign earned him a high-profile £60 million transfer to Chelsea, where he has since cemented his place in the starting lineup and become an important part of the squad.

Speaking about the possibility of returning to Spain, Cucurella acknowledged the emotional pull of his homeland. "Spain is always Spain. It is where I grew up and you always think about going back," he said.

## Manika Batra battles past Lily Zhang to end group stage with win in ITTF World Cup 2026

**Macao:** Indian table tennis players Manika Batra and Sreeja Akula produced contrasting results on Day 2 of the ITTF World Cup 2026 here on Tuesday.

Manika Batra, 47th in the table tennis world rankings for women's singles, registered a 3-2 (11-7, 11-2, 14-16, 5-11, 11-6) win over world No. 42 Lily Zhang of the USA.

The 30-year-old Manika Batra appeared set to seal the contest in straight games, surging to a 5-2 lead in the third and earning two match points. However, Lily Zhang,

former Pan American singles champion, mounted a spirited comeback, forcing a tie-break before clinching the game. Riding that momentum, Zhang claimed the fourth to push the match to a decider, according to Olympics.com. The three-time Olympian Batra, though, regrouped under pressure to close out the contest and finish with a win in her final group match. All group stage table tennis matches at the ITTF World Cup follow a best-of-five games format before shifting to a best-of-seven for the knockout rounds.

Manika Batra had lost her first match of the tournament in Group 4 against world No. 5 Miwa Harimoto of Japan on the opening day of the ITTF World Cup.

Only the top 16 group toppers will qualify for the round of 16 stage. Miwa Harimoto and Lily Zhang will go head-to-head on Wednesday, following which the Group 4 winner will be decided. India's other entrant in the women's draw, Sreeja Akula, ranked 44th in the world, made a promising start by taking the first game against Olympian Fu Yu of Portugal in her tournament

opener in Group 2.

However, Sreeja Akula eventually went down 3-1 (8-11, 11-9, 15-13, 11-8) against world No. 48

Fu Yu. Sreeja Akula will face world No. 2 and Olympic gold medalist Wang Manyu of the People's Republic of China in her final group match on Wednesday. Manav Thakkar, who went down to the Republic of Korea's Park Gang-hyeon in his tournament opener in the men's draw, will also return to action on Wednesday. He will face Olympic silver medalist and world No. 2 Truls Møregård of Sweden.

# Adani Green Energy brings solar, hybrid power projects online

**Mumbai:** Adani Green Energy (AGEL) informed the stock exchange in a regulatory filing on Monday that its step-down subsidiary companies have commercially operationalised an aggregate of 951 MW power projects in Rajasthan and Gujarat.

“Based on relevant clearances, it was decided at 9.58 pm on March 29, 2026, to commercially operationalise these plants and commence power generation from March 30, 2026,” the company stated in its regulatory filing.

According to the company statement, 251 MW has been operationalised at Baiya, Rajasthan, while 700 MW has been added at Khavda, Gujarat. This also includes 926 MW of solar projects and 25 MW of hybrid power projects.

Among solar power capacity, Adani Hybrid Energy Jaisalmer Five has added 50 MW, Adani Green Energy



Twenty Four has added 100 MW, Adani Green Energy Twenty Five C has operationalised 225 MW, and Adani Green Energy Twenty Six A has added 300 MW,

while Adani Solar Energy Barmer One has added 251 MW. Adani Solar Energy Jodhpur Six has operationalised a 25 MW hybrid capacity, according to the com-

pany statement.

With the commissioning of these plants, AGEL's total operational renewable generation capacity has increased to 18,933.3 MW.

Adani Green Energy is developing the world's largest renewable energy plant of 30 GW on the barren wasteland at Khavda in Kutch, Gujarat. Built across 538 square kilometres, it is five times the size of Paris and will be visible even from space. Once complete, it will be the planet's largest power plant across all energy sources, according to the company statement.

AGEL plans to expand its renewable energy portfolio to 50 GW by 2030 through a combination of solar, wind, hybrid, and pumped storage projects with a planned investment of around \$21 billion. The company has already secured more than 5 GW of pumped storage project sites. The company is also increasing its focus on commercial and industrial (C&I) and merchant segments. The expansion is supported by a USD 3.4 billion revolving construction facility, the statement mentioned.

## Consumer durable retail chain Sathya Agencies to raise Rs.6,000 million from IPO

**Chennai:** Sathya Agencies Limited, a Tamil Nadu-based consumer durables retail chain, has filed its Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) with the Securities and Exchange Board of India to raise up to ₹6,000 million through an Initial Public Offering (IPO).

The proposed IPO comprises a fresh issue of shares worth up to ₹3,000 million, along with an offer for sale (OFS) of up to ₹3,000 million by promoter shareholders. The promoters participating in the OFS include Johnson Asaria, J John Sathya, and Charles Packiaraj.

According to the DRHP, the company plans to utilise the net proceeds from the fresh issue for multiple strategic purposes. A portion of ₹350 million will be allocated towards partial payment for the acquisition of its wholly owned subsidiary, Unilet Appliances Private Limited.

In addition, a significant share of ₹1,750 million will be used for repayment or prepayment, either fully or partially, of certain outstanding



borrowings. This move is expected to strengthen the company's balance sheet and reduce debt-related obligations.

The remaining funds from the fresh issue are earmarked for general corporate purposes, which may include expansion, operational improvements, and other business requirements.

Sathya Agencies Limited has built a strong presence in the consumer durables retail segment by offering a wide range of products across multiple categories. Its portfolio includes consumer electronics and home appliances catering to diverse customer segments and price points.

The company's product

lineup spans televisions, refrigerators, washing machines, air conditioners, kitchen appliances, and other electronic goods, positioning it as a comprehensive retail destination for household needs.

As of January 31, 2026, the company, along with its subsidiaries, operates an extensive retail network comprising 392 consumer electronics stores. This scale highlights its deep market penetration, particularly in southern India. In addition to its core electronics business, the company also runs 35 mobile retail stores focused on selling smartphones and related accessories, tapping into the rapidly growing mobile device market.

## Air India inks codeshare agreement with Uzbekistan Airways

**Chennai:** Air India, now owned by the Tata Group, on Tuesday announced a new codeshare partnership with Uzbekistan Airways, marking a significant step in expanding connectivity between India and Central Asia.

Effective March 20, 2026, Air India has started placing its 'AI' designator code on Uzbekistan Airways-operated flights across key India-Uzbekistan routes. These include connections such as Delhi-Tashkent, Mumbai-Tashkent, and the seasonal Goa-Tashkent service.

The partnership is aimed at enhancing travel convenience for passengers by offering seamless connectivity between the two countries. With this arrangement, travellers can now book integrated itineraries under a single ticket.

One of the major benefits of the codeshare agreement is the ability for passengers to check their baggage through to their final destination. This reduces the need for repeated check-ins and simplifies the overall travel experience.

The agreement also strengthens access to Tashkent, which is increasingly emerging as a key hub for tourism, business, and cultural exchanges between India and Central Asia.

In addition to the codeshare, the two airlines already maintain an interline partnership. This further expands connectivity beyond Tashkent to several cities across Uzbekistan.

Through this arrangement, travellers can access destinations such as Bukhara, Samarkand, Fergana, Namanagan, Urgench, Termez, Nukus, and Qarshi, making travel across the region more accessible.

Nipun Aggarwal, Chief Commercial Officer of Air India, expressed optimism about the collaboration. He noted that the partnership aligns with the airline's broader strategy to expand its global footprint.

He highlighted that Tashkent is becoming an important destination for Indian travellers, whether for leisure, business, or cultural purposes. The new

arrangement, he said, would provide passengers with greater flexibility and convenience.

Aggarwal also emphasized that the partnership would strengthen India's aviation links with Central Asia, a region of growing strategic and economic importance.

On the other hand, Shukhrat Khudaykulov, Chairman of the Board of Uzbekistan Airways, described the agreement as a milestone in bilateral aviation cooperation.

He stated that the codeshare marks a new chapter in strengthening ties between the two countries while also expanding Uzbekistan Airways' international network. Khudaykulov added that the collaboration would open up new opportunities for passengers and serve as a foundation for deeper cooperation in the aviation sector.

He further expressed confidence that the agreement would lead to additional joint initiatives between the two airlines in the future.

## Prologis commences 1.1 mn sqft Logistics Park in North Chennai

**Chennai:** Prologis today announced that it has commenced construction of Prologis Park Redhills CPRR, a Grade A industrial and logistics park with total development potential of 1.1 mn sqft in North Chennai.

The project is being developed on 51 acres acquired along the Chennai Peripheral Ring Road (CPRR) corridor.

Redhills marks Prologis' third location in Tamil Nadu, alongside projects in Hosur and Sriperumbudur.

Together, these developments represent a Rs 3,300 crore investment and span approximately 6.5 mn sqft across some of the state's key industrial and manufacturing corridors.

The first phase of Prolo-

gis Park Redhills CPRR comprises two buildings totalling about 412,000 sqft. The construction is expected to be completed in the third quarter of 2027.

“This construction start at Redhills speaks to the long-term opportunity we see in North Chennai as a logistics and industrial corridor,” Vineet Sekhsaria, Head of India, said.

“With the CPRR taking shape, this location will be increasingly important for regional distribution. Our site sits directly along the corridor, allowing us to support customers more efficiently while contributing to local jobs and economic growth in Tamil Nadu,” he said.

Located along the CPRR, the project sits on

the 52-km northern section of the 133-km corridor connecting Chennai's key highways, ports, and industrial zones. Once completed, the CPRR is expected to strengthen connectivity to Ennore and Kattupalli ports and improve access to the Chennai-Kolkata highway.

At full build-out, Redhills will deliver approximately 1.1 mn sqft of modern Grade A warehousing and industrial space. Designed for large format logistics and manufacturing occupiers.

The facilities will incorporate 34-m wide truck courts, 12-m clear heights, and robust power infrastructure to support high-throughput operations. It is structured as a professionally managed, integrated

campus designed to accommodate both standardised warehouse space and build-to-suit facilities, giving occupiers flexibility in layout and scale.

“We are seeing growing interest from port-linked manufacturers and third party logistics operators that require larger facilities, stronger yard planning and resilient power infrastructure,” Sekhsaria said, adding, “With direct connectivity to the CPRR and access to Ennore.

And Kattupalli ports, Redhills is positioned to support customers' high-volume operations. Our focus is on delivering quality Grade A industrial infrastructure - defined by specification, layout, and execution, not simply by label.”

## New Income Tax act roll out from Apr 1, focus on cleaner and simpler framework to comply with

**New Delhi:** India will roll out the Income-tax Act, 2025, from April 1, Wednesday, replacing the six-decade-old Income-tax Act, 1961, in a major reform aimed at simplifying the country's tax framework while retaining the existing tax structure.

The government has clarified that the new law does not introduce any new taxes or increase the tax burden, but focuses on making the system clearer, more transparent and easier to comply with.

The reform is being positioned as a complete structural simplification of the law. Over the years, the 1961 Act had become complex due to numerous amendments, provisos and explanations.

The new Act reduces this complexity by cutting down sections from over 800 to about 536, trimming rules and forms, removing redundant provisions and integrating explanations into the main text.

One of the most significant conceptual changes is the introduction of a single “Tax Year”, replacing the earlier dual concepts of “previous year” and “assessment year.”

The tax year will now align with the financial year, eliminating confusion caused by references to two different years.

The government has clarified that there will be no overlap or missing year during the transition.

Income earned up to March 31, 2026 will be governed by the old Act (Assessment Year 2026-27), while income earned from April 1, 2026 onwards will fall under

the new Act (Tax Year 2026-27).

Although the 1961 Act will be repealed from April 1, 2026, it will continue to apply to all earlier years.

Pending proceedings — including assessments, reassessments, appeals, penalties, and rectifications — will continue under the old law.

Rights and obligations such as refunds, tax demands, carry-forward of losses and MAT/AMT credits will remain valid and enforceable.

Even existing approvals, registrations, circulars and notifications will continue as long as they are not inconsistent with the new Act.

In practical terms, both the old and new laws will operate in parallel for a period. The income tax portal will support compliance under both frameworks simultaneously.

For instance, taxpayers will file returns for income earned in FY 2025-26 under the old Act in 2026, while at the same time paying advance tax for income earned from April 2026 under the new Act.

This dual compliance phase is aimed at ensuring a smooth and disruption-free transition.

The government has emphasised that core tax payment mechanisms remain unchanged. Systems such as Tax Deducted at Source (TDS), Tax Collected at Source (TCS), advance tax and self-assessment tax will continue in the same manner.

However, their presentation has been simplified. TDS provisions, for example, have been consolidated into fewer sections with tabular formats, though rates,

thresholds and timelines remain largely unchanged.

The applicability of the law during transition will depend on the timing of payment or credit — transactions before March 31, 2026 will fall under the old Act, while those after April 1, 2026 will be governed by the new Act.

Advance tax provisions also remain the same in substance, including instalment dates and the Rs 10,000 threshold.

The only change is the reference to “tax year” instead of “assessment year.” Similarly, interest rates for defaults, timelines for tax payments, and compliance procedures continue without policy changes.

Return filing rules under the new regime largely mirror the existing system.

Returns for FY 2025-26 will be filed under the old Act (AY 2026-27), even if filing occurs after April 2026. Returns for income earned in FY 2026-27 will be filed under the new Act in 2027.

Due dates remain unchanged, and taxpayers will not be required to file two returns at the same time. However, they must ensure the correct selection of the assessment year or tax year while filing or making payments.

The law also ensures continuity in specific areas such as carry-forward of losses and MAT/AMT credits, which will continue seamlessly under the new Act subject to existing conditions. Refund claims arising under the old Act will remain valid, and tax arrears will continue to be recoverable even after the new law comes into force.

## Centre's fiscal deficit hits Rs 12.53 Lakh Cr till Feb: Finance Ministry

**New Delhi:** Government's fiscal deficit reached Rs 12.53 Lakh Crore till February, which was 80.4 per cent of the full year (Rs 15.58 Lakh Crore) target. As per the monthly review of accounts by the Finance Ministry released here on Monday, the government received Rs 27,91,943 Cr which was 82 per cent of the corresponding RE2025-26 of total receipts up to February.

This amount comprises Rs 21,45,223 Cr. of tax revenue, Rs 5,81,173 Cr. of non-tax revenue and Rs 65,547 Cr. non-debt capital receipts.

As per the release, Rs 12,66,369 Cr. has been transferred to State governments as devolution of share of taxes by Government of India during this period which was Rs 85,837 Cr. higher than the previous year.

Total expenditure in-



currred by the government stood at Rs 40,44,592 Cr.

which was 81.5 per cent of corresponding RE 2025-26.

From this amount, Rs 31,15,270 Cr. and Rs 9,29,322 Cr. have been revenue and capital account, respectively.

Out of the total revenue expenditure, Rs 10,65,305 Cr. was on account of interest payments and Rs 3,89,610 Cr. was on account of major subsidies, the monthly report stated.

## Dell Technologies launches 'Tech ON Wheels' initiative in Mumbai

**Mumbai:** Dell Technologies has launched a novel initiative aimed at bringing its latest technology solutions directly to customers, enabling them to experience products firsthand and understand how they can drive business growth. The initiative, titled ‘Tech ON Wheels’, is a mobile experience centre designed to showcase Dell's diverse portfolio, including laptops, desktops, servers, and peripherals. By taking technology on the road, the company aims to bridge the gap between innovation and real-world business needs. The programme is currently being rolled out in Mumbai from March 30 to April 8, covering key IT and technology hubs across the city. The campaign kicked off at Boomerang, a prominent commercial complex in Chhandivali. Through this initiative, businesses can directly interact with Dell's latest offerings in a hands-on environment. The mobile setup allows decision-makers to explore how various solutions can be integrated into their operations.

The concept behind Tech ON Wheels is to move beyond traditional product displays and instead provide immersive demonstrations. This approach helps customers better understand how technology can address specific challenges and improve efficiency. The mobile experience centre has been strategically designed to cater to organisations of different sizes, from startups to large enterprises. It aims to provide tailored insights based on unique business requirements. According to Manish Gupta, President and Managing Director of Dell Technologies India, the initiative is focused on direct engagement with customers across the country. “With Tech ON Wheels, we are going on the road to connect directly with businesses of all forms and sizes across 20 cities in India,” he said, highlighting the scale of the campaign. He further explained that the initiative is not just about showcasing products, but about helping businesses discover solutions that align with their operational goals and growth strategies.

## New Era for Skill Development: FUEL's Debut on NSE Social Stock Exchange

**Mumbai:** In a historic milestone for social finance and vocational education, FUEL (Friends Union for Energising Lives) was on Monday listed on the social stock platform of the National Stock Exchange (NSE), marking a significant step in democratising access to impact-driven investments.

Announcing the development, Ashish Kumar Chauhan, Managing Director and CEO of NSE, said that FUEL has raised approximately ₹99 lakh through the Social Stock Exchange (SSE) platform. The listing represents a growing trend of integrating social initiatives with structured financial mechanisms. A notable highlight of the fundraising effort was the strong participation from retail donors, who contributed nearly 37 per cent of the total funds raised. This underscores increasing awareness and engagement among individuals in supporting social causes through formal investment channels. Chauhan also pointed out that the NSE platform now reaches 99.85

percent of India's PIN codes, enabling citizens across the country to participate in social impact initiatives alongside institutional investors.

The listing event also served as a platform for announcing new policy initiatives. Chandrakant Patil, Maharashtra's Minister for Higher and Technical Education, unveiled a transformative ‘Eam and Learn’ scheme aimed at supporting girl students. Under this initiative, eligible students in Maharashtra will receive a monthly stipend of ₹2,000 starting from the upcoming academic year. The scheme is designed to encourage education while providing financial assistance. Speaking at the event, Patil emphasised that when students are given clear direction and support, they can develop the skills necessary to uplift themselves and contribute meaningfully to society. He further noted that the collaboration between the state government, NSE, and FUEL will create pathways for free education for underprivileged girls, ensuring im-

proved livelihood opportunities and long-term empowerment. Joining the event via video conferencing, Devendra Fadnavis highlighted the broader vision behind FUEL's initiatives. He revealed that the organisation is planning a ₹100 crore social issue to expand public participation in its mission. Fadnavis explained that the initiative would offer diverse investment categories, making it easier for both retail and institutional investors to contribute to social impact projects. This approach aims to further democratise participation in nation-building efforts. He also noted that FUEL's evolution into a Skill Tech University is being supported by a strong framework of transparency and collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Reflecting on the organisation's journey, Dr. Ketan Deshpande, Founder Chairman of FUEL, spoke about its growth over the past two decades and its expanding role in skill development and education.