

# Aryan Age

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## Second round of talks in Pak uncertain as US-Iran tensions spike over seized cargo ship

**Islamabad/ Tehran:** Uncertainty remains over whether Iran will attend a second round of US-Iran negotiations due in Islamabad, as tensions between the United States and Iran have sharply escalated after US forces seized an Iranian-flagged cargo vessel in the Gulf of Oman.

Iran has signalled that it has no plans to send negotiators to Islamabad for a new round of talks with the United States, threatening Pakistan's plans for multiday negotiations between the warring nations less than 48 hours before a fragile ceasefire is set to expire.

A spokesperson for Iran's foreign ministry, Esmail Baghaei, said no decision had been made.

"As of now... we have no plans for the next round of negotiation," Baghaei said, adding that Iran does not respond to "deadlines or ultimatums" when national interests are at stake.

He also accused

Washington of undermining diplomacy. "While claiming diplomacy and readiness for negotiations, the US is carrying out behaviours that do not in any way indicate seriousness in pursuing a diplomatic process," he said.

Baghaei said on Monday Washington had "violated the ceasefire from the beginning of its implementation", citing the US naval blockade of the Strait of Hormuz since April 13, and the overnight capture of an Iranian container ship by the US military as breaches of the truce as well as international law.

According to US officials, the ship, identified as the Touka, was intercepted after allegedly attempting to breach a blockade near Iranian ports.

US President Donald Trump said the vessel was given multiple warnings before US naval forces disabled its engine room and boarded it. The US Central Command said Marines from the USS Spruance and USS

Tripoli conducted the operation after what it described as a six-hour period of non-compliance.

Iran, however, condemned the incident as "armed piracy" and a violation of a ceasefire arrangement.

Its military headquarters, Khatam al-Anbiya, vowed retaliation, while Iranian media reported drone activity targeting US naval assets in the region, though no damage has been confirmed.

Baghaei further reiterated that Iran would not accept removing its nuclear stockpile as part of any deal, a key sticking point in earlier talks held in Pakistan on 12

April that ended without agreement.

Despite Iran's hesitation, the United States has confirmed it will send a high-level delegation to Islamabad, and renewed fears of instability in the Strait of Hormuz — a critical passageway for global energy supplies. Brent crude jumped nearly 5% as traders reacted to concerns over potential disruption.

China, a major importer of Iranian oil, expressed "concern" over the US action and urged both sides to return to diplomacy, warning against further destabilisation of maritime trade routes.

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The escalation has already rippled through global markets. Oil prices rose sharply following the seizure of the Iranian vessel

### No plans for Iran to hold another round of talks with US: Iranian Foreign Ministry

Iran has currently no plan for holding another round of talks with the US, confirmed Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei today.

"As I am speaking to you now, we have no plan for the next round of negotiations," Baghaei told a press conference. His comments come amid increasing uncertainty over whether any further discussions between Tehran and Washington will take place at all, as the situation continues to worsen between the two nations, as the ceasefire approaches its expiration. Iran accused Washington of 'showing little seriousness in pursuing diplomacy', citing what it described as repeated violations of the ceasefire. Baghaei said Washington's actions, including what he termed were breaches of agreements related to Lebanon and efforts to impose a naval blockade of Iranian ports, worked only to further undermine and violate the ceasefire, and offering little incentive for Tehran to get back on the table.

"The United States, through contradictory behaviour and continuous violations of the ceasefire, has shown it is not serious about pursuing diplomacy," Baghaei told reporters at a press conference. He described recent US actions, including what he said was an attack on an Iranian commercial vessel, as a "clear act of aggression" under UN resolutions. "This clear contradiction between words and actions increases the Iranian people's distrust of US intentions," he said, adding that Iran would decide on the future of talks based on its national interests. His comments came as Iranian officials made it clear that Tehran's missile and nuclear programmes were non-negotiable, as the country's top joint military command moved to slam the US for attacking an Iranian commercial tanker in the Sea of Oman, which Tehran said was a clear breach of the ceasefire.

The spokesperson for Iran's joint military command - Khatam al-Anbiya headquarters - accused US forces of firing at the ship, disabling its navigation system and assailing it with Marine Corps troops, in what he described as "an act of maritime piracy".

He warned that Iran's military was fully ready to confront Washington and would soon respond to what he called "armed attacks" by the US.

## PM Modi to dedicate Rs 79,450-cr refinery- petrochemical mega project in Rajasthan today

**New Delhi :** Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to visit Rajasthan on Tuesday April 21, where he will dedicate to the nation India's first greenfield integrated Refinery-cum-Petrochemical Complex at Pachpadra in Balotra and address a public gathering, according to an official statement.

The landmark project, developed as a joint venture between Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited and the Rajasthan government, has been established with an investment of over Rs 79,450 crore and is designed with a capacity of 9 Million Metric Tonnes Per Annum (MMTPA).

Described as a major milestone in India's energy and petrochemical sector, the state-of-the-art complex integrates refining and petrochemical production, with a petrochemical capacity of 2.4 MMTPA. The refinery also features a high Nelson Complexity Index of 17.0 and petrochemical yields exceeding 26%, aligning

with global efficiency and sustainability benchmarks. Officials said the project is expected to significantly strengthen India's energy security and reduce dependence on imports by enhancing petrochemical self-sufficiency. "This integrated complex marks a transformative step in building a resilient and future-ready energy

ecosystem," the statement said.

The refinery is also expected to act as an anchor for the development of a petrochemical and plastic park in the region, boosting downstream industries and ancillary sectors. Authorities highlighted that the project will generate substantial employment opportunities and contribute to the socio-economic development of the region.

The April 21 event will mark the formal commissioning of the ambitious project, positioning Rajasthan as a key hub in India's expanding petrochemical landscape.



## Thunderstorms and Heavy Rain Likely in 13 Districts Amid Rising Heat in Maharashtra

**Pune :** Even as temperatures have crossed the 40°C mark in most districts across the state, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast thunderstorms accompanied by heavy rainfall in 13 districts over the next three days.

A low-pressure trough extending from northern Karnataka to the Gulf of Mannar remains active in a north-south direction.

Additionally, cyclonic wind patterns between Maharashtra and Karnataka, along with intensified westerly winds, have created favorable conditions for rainfall across large parts of the state.

According to the forecast, parts of Vidarbha and Marathwada are likely to experience hailstorms and gusty winds along with rain. Meanwhile, districts

in central Maharashtra and the Konkan region may witness light to moderate rainfall accompanied by lightning and thunder.

On Sunday afternoon, cities like Solapur and Akola, which had been reeling under intense heat, received heavy showers. Cloudy conditions were also reported in several parts of the state, indicating a shift in the weather pattern.



## Nashik court posts hearing on interim anticipatory bail application of Nida Khan on April 27

**Nashik :** A court here has posted the hearing on an interim anticipatory bail application of Nida Khan -- a suspected accused in the TCS religious conversion and sexual exploitation case -- to April 27, after her lawyers presented their arguments today. Nida Khan's lawyers had filed an application seeking interim anticipatory bail. The public prosecutor, along with the victim's lawyers, will present their arguments on the next hearing. Accordingly, a decision on Nida Khan's interim anticipatory bail plea will be delivered on April 27.



## Confident Women's Reservation Bill will be implemented before 2029 elections: Fadnavis

**Mumbai :** Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has expressed confidence that the constitutional amendment providing 33 percent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies will be approved and implemented before the 2029 general elections.

Speaking at a press conference, Fadnavis said that the "power of women" in the country will play a decisive role in pressuring opposition parties—who are currently opposing the bill—to fall in line and support its passage.

To build momentum for the legislation, the Bharatiya Janata Party along with its allies plans to mobilize women across the state.

As part of this effort, a memorandum signed by one crore women will be submitted to demand approval of the bill. Fadnavis asserted that the party will not remain silent until the reservation is implemented.

Criticizing the opposition, particularly the Indian National Congress and its allies, Fadnavis alleged that their stance has historically been anti-women.

He accused them of maintaining a "double standard

and said their true position would be exposed before the public, especially women voters.

He pointed out that in 2023, all opposition parties had initially supported women's reservation, with a consensus that implementation would follow the completion of the census and constituency delimitation.

However, due to delays in the census caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the central government introduced the bill based on the 2011 census data.

Fadnavis criticized the opposition for opposing the bill despite earlier support, calling it

a "black day for Indian democracy."

Fadnavis further argued that opposition to the bill—and indirectly to constituency delimitation—has not only harmed women but also affected Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

He noted that if the amendment had been implemented earlier, women's representation in Parliament would have increased by 30 percent while representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes would have risen by 13% and 7%, respectively.

## Pakistani fairness creams causing kidney disorders; FDA conducts raids in Nagpur

**Nagpur :** Fairness creams allegedly imported from Pakistan and marketed for instant skin lightening have been found to pose serious health risks, with cases of kidney-related ailments reported among users in Nagpur, officials said on Monday.

According to medical officials, at least 18 women in the city have developed kidney disorders over the past two years, reportedly linked to prolonged use of such creams. Investigations indicate that these products contain high levels of mercury, a toxic substance that can enter the

bloodstream through the skin and damage vital organs, particularly the kidneys. Following similar findings in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) conducted raids at multiple locations in Nagpur and seized large quantities of suspected harmful cosmetic products. Samples have been sent for laboratory analysis, officials added. During the raids, creams sold under various brand names, including Mallika, Zhalak, Goree, Golden Pearl, Chandni, Ujooba, Face Fresh, Noor Herbal and New Face, were

confiscated. Certain soaps and vitamin-based liquid products were also recovered.

Doctors have warned that while initial symptoms may include skin irritation, pigmentation and swelling, prolonged use can lead to severe internal complications, including kidney failure. Dermatologists have cautioned the public against using unverified cosmetic products and advised seeking medical guidance before use.

Authorities are continuing investigations into the distribution and sale of these products in local markets.

## Maharashtra gears up for possible El Nino impact with focus on water management

**Mumbai :** The Maharashtra government has initiated extensive preparedness measures in view of a possible El Nino impact, with Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis directing all departments to undertake immediate steps for water management, conservation, and coordinated response to mitigate potential challenges.

Chairing a high-level review meeting on Monday, the Chief Minister emphasised the need for advance planning, effective implementation, and inter-departmental coordination to reduce the adverse effects of the anticipated climatic phenomenon.

The meeting was attended by Agriculture Minister Dattatray Bharane, Minister of State for

Agriculture, Finance and Planning Adv Ashish Jaiswal, along with senior officials from key departments including agriculture, relief and rehabilitation, finance, water resources, water conservation and the India Meteorological Department.

According to inputs shared by the India Meteorological Department, the impact of El Nino is expected to be most pronounced during August and September, with forecasts indicating below-average rainfall during the monsoon.

While heat intensity in May may remain comparatively lower, the likelihood of increased heatwave occurrences has been projected. Officials also noted that the development of a positive

Indian Ocean Dipole could partially offset the severity of El Nino.

Fadnavis highlighted that while the state's water storage stood at only 45 per cent after the monsoon in 2015, a similar level of reserves is currently available even before the onset of the rainy season.

He said that with proper planning, the state would be able to effectively tackle the situation. Drawing from past experience, he noted that measures implemented in 2018, based on lessons from the 2015 El Nino, had helped protect crops despite rainfall irregularities, particularly in Marathwada where long dry spells between showers had severely impacted agriculture.

The Chief Minister directed

that schemes such as Jalyukt Shivar and Gaalmukt Dharan-Gaalmukt Shivar be implemented on priority and at scale. He also instructed the finance department to ensure immediate availability of funds and stressed the importance of restoring and rejuvenating old water sources to enhance storage capacity at lower cost. He added that these



measures would be crucial in ensuring irrigation even during low rainfall conditions.

He further called for the formation of district-level task forces to ensure efficient water usage and storage, involving district collectors, irrigation officials and representatives of local self-government bodies.

Emphasis was also laid on utilising funds under the MGNREGA scheme for water conservation works and planning not only for the current year but also for the following summer.

To prevent fodder shortages for livestock, Fadnavis directed early implementation of fodder development programmes within the state, reducing dependence on other regions. Special attention is to be given to areas

such as Solapur, Sangli and Marathwada, where fodder scarcity is more likely.

The Chief Minister also instructed authorities to ensure timely availability and transparent distribution of fertilisers by integrating systems with the AgriStack platform and strengthening monitoring through artificial intelligence.

Agriculture Minister Dattatray Bharane stated that the department has already held internal meetings to assess preparedness and identify potential challenges. He stressed the importance of timely fertiliser supply, particularly DAP, to prevent crop losses during the Kharif season amid rainfall uncertainties. Field officials have been directed to inspect

distribution centres to avoid artificial shortages of fertilisers and seeds.

Bharane added that contingency plans are being put in place to address possible fodder shortages and ensure adequate stock of seeds and fodder through agencies such as Mahabeej.

Instructions have also been issued to remain prepared for additional seed supply in case re-sowing becomes necessary. He further emphasised the effective implementation of farm pond schemes to support water storage for farmers.

He concluded that the agriculture department is fully prepared to handle the potential crisis and is implementing all necessary measures to safeguard farmers from losses.

## JD(U) legislature party authorises Nitish Kumar to pick its leader

**Patna:** In a significant political development in Patna, the Janata Dal (United) on Monday unanimously reaffirmed its trust in veteran leader and former Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. The party authorised him to take the final decision on selecting the leader of its legislature party, underlining his continued dominance within the organisation.

The decision was taken during a crucial of senior party leaders held in the state capital. The meeting witnessed a rare show of unity, with all members supporting the proposal without dissent, reflecting the party's consolidated stance amid the evolving political landscape in Bihar.

The proposal to empower Nitish Kumar was formally moved by Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Choudhary. His motion was quickly endorsed by other leaders, demonstrating the high level of confidence the party leadership continues to place in Kumar's political judgment and experience.

Following the meeting, JD(U) chief spokesperson and MLC Neeraj Kumar briefed the media about the developments. He emphasised that the party once again expressed "complete faith" in Nitish Kumar's leadership, describing him as the guiding force behind Bihar's governance and development trajectory.

Neeraj Kumar highlighted that Nitish Kumar's governance model has not only transformed Bihar internally but has also enhanced its reputation at the national and global levels. According to him, the party sees Kumar as the architect of a political



framework that balances development with social justice.

A resolution passed during the meeting praised Nitish Kumar for establishing what leaders described as a "model of politics and development." The resolution noted that his policies have brought Bihar into national prominence and significantly improved its global perception.

Party leaders across ranks also expressed gratitude to Nitish Kumar for strengthening the organisational structure of JD(U). They credited him with ensuring internal stability while simultaneously pushing forward an ambitious development

agenda for the state.

Union Minister and senior JD(U) leader Rajiv Ranjan Singh, popularly known as Lalan Singh, also addressed the meeting. He, along with several other prominent leaders, endorsed the resolution and reiterated their support for Nitish Kumar's leadership. During the discussions, leaders stressed the importance of maintaining unity within the party, especially at a time when Bihar's political environment remains dynamic. They underscored that a strong central leadership was essential for navigating upcoming challenges.

Neeraj Kumar further informed

that Nitish Kumar assured party members of his continued involvement in Bihar's development, despite his responsibilities as a Rajya Sabha MP in Delhi. He promised to remain actively engaged in monitoring the progress of key projects across the state.

According to the spokesperson, Nitish Kumar emphasised the need for regular reviews of ongoing development initiatives. He called for better coordination between party leaders, government officials, and alliance partners to ensure faster implementation of projects.

The assurance was seen as a significant message of continuity, indicating that Nitish Kumar remains firmly in control of both governance and party affairs. His dual role at the state and national level continues to shape JD(U)'s strategic direction.

Reiterating his commitment, Nitish Kumar conveyed confidence in his ability to steer the party forward. His message was aimed at reassuring party workers and leaders amid speculation and shifting political equations in Bihar.

Neeraj Kumar quoted Nitish Kumar's remark, "Main hoon na" (I am there), which he said served as a powerful reassurance to party members. The statement was interpreted as a signal of stability and leadership continuity. The development reinforces Nitish Kumar's position as the central figure in JD(U)'s decision-making process. It also highlights the party's reliance on his leadership as it prepares for future political challenges in Bihar.

## Uttar Pradesh invites private capital to build next-generation Industrial Parks

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## Odisha rolls out 'Seeds on Wheels' to boost farm productivity & access to quality seeds

**Bhubaneswar:** Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Monday launched the "Seeds on Wheels" initiative aimed at ensuring easy access to improved seed varieties for farmers across the state.

In the first phase, mobile seed distribution units will operate in 31 blocks across 10 districts, supplying new varieties of paddy seeds in 5-kg packets directly at the gram panchayat level.

The programme was launched near the Central Rice Research Institute in Cuttack on the auspicious occasion of Akshaya Tritiya, observed as the State-level Farmers' Day.

The Chief Minister performed traditional rituals, including offering "Akhi Muthi," before flagging off 'Aam Bihan Rath' and 'Krishi Rath'.

On the occasion, Majhi disbursed financial assistance of Rs 838.48 crore to



over 41.68 lakh farmers under the CM-KISAN Yojana through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).

He reiterated that strengthening farmers financially remains a top priority of the government.

Of the total beneficiaries, over 41.24 lakh are small and marginal farmers, while 41,049 belong to landless farming families and 3,292 are from tribal communities.

Highlighting the state's

agricultural progress, the Chief Minister said Odisha's agricultural growth rate has reached 5.3 percent in the past 22 months, surpassing the national average.

He added that food grain production has crossed 15 lakh metric tonnes this year, marking a record achievement.

To ensure fair returns, the state is procuring paddy at Rs 3,100 per quintal. During the 2025-26 Kharif season, 76.47 lakh metric

tonnes of paddy were procured from over 18.55 lakh farmers, with input assistance of Rs 5,589.98 crore provided.

Majhi also emphasized initiatives such as the Balabhadra Organic Farming Mission and the Shree Anna Abhiyan to promote sustainable and traditional agriculture.

He noted that improving seed quality, expanding irrigation, and strengthening market linkages are key focus areas for enhancing farmers' income. Infrastructure development, including cold storages and warehouses, is being supported under the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund.

The Chief Minister also expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for including tribal districts such as Kandhamal, Malkangiri, Sundargarh, and Nuapada under the PM Dhan-Dhanya Krishi Yojana launched last year.

## Congress-BRS engaged in 'fixed politics' in Telangana: BJP spokesperson N V Subhash

**Hyderabad:** Telangana BJP State Chief Official Spokesperson N V Subhash on Monday alleged that the Congress and BRS are engaged in "fixed politics" in Telangana, accusing both parties of working in tandem to mislead the public.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP state headquarters, Subhash claimed that simultaneous public meetings by Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy and former Chief Minister K. Chan-

drasekar Rao were part of a pre-planned strategy to counter the BJP's growing influence in North Telangana.

He criticised KCR for not actively participating in Assembly proceedings despite being the Leader of the Opposition, and accused him of neglecting public issues, particularly farmers affected by unseasonal rains. At the same time, Subhash questioned the Congress government over its handling of the Kaleshwaram project, alleging inaction

despite earlier corruption claims.

Subhash also accused the state government of failing to deliver on key promises such as farm loan waivers and the Rythu Bharosa scheme, while raising concerns over issues like the drug menace and TSPSC paper leak.

Alleging that both Congress and BRS are shielding each other, he termed their politics as a "loot, stash, and share" model, and asserted that the BJP would continue to fight on behalf of the people.

## NDA women leaders protest march in Patna, target Oppn over women's reservation bill

**Patna:** Women leaders of the NDA staged a massive protest march on Monday in Patna, accusing opposition parties of "insulting half the population" after the Women's Reservation Bill failed to pass in the Lok Sabha.

Organised by the NDA, the "Jan Aakrosh Mahila March" witnessed partici-

ation from thousands of women who gathered at Kargil Chowk and marched towards the historic Gandhi Maidan.

Participants carried placards highlighting demands for the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill and condemning the opposition's stance. In a symbolic act of protest, a wom-

an was seen chaining herself to depict what leaders described as the "continued suppression" of women's political representation.

BJP leader and former minister Shreyasi Singh said the failure to pass the bill was not just a legislative setback but a moral one for the opposition.

"It is not the bill that has

fallen, but the respect of opposition leaders in the eyes of women," she said, accusing them of hypocrisy over women's empowerment.

Senior Janata Dal (United) leader and former minister Lesi Singh alleged that opposition parties acted at the behest of Rahul Gandhi to block the legisla-

## Kolkata court sends land scam accused to ED custody till April 28

**Kolkata:** A court in Kolkata on Monday remanded businessman Joy Kamdar, managing director of Sun Enterprises, to custody of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) till April 28 in connection with an alleged multi-crore land scam.

Kamdar was arrested on Sunday following raids conducted by the ED at his residence. He has been booked under the stringent Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), with investigators alleging his involvement in a large-scale financial network spanning multiple locations across West Bengal.

During the court proceedings, the ED's counsel argued that the agency had uncovered a complex web of nearly 150 shell companies allegedly used to route illegal funds through hawala channels. The prosecution claimed that these entities were instrumental in concealing the origins of illicit money.

According to the ED, cash transactions amounting to approximately Rs 500 crore were carried out within a span of just four months by Kamdar and his associates. Officials described the operation as part of a sophisticated inter-country hawala racket in-

volving multiple actors. The agency further informed the court that Biswajit Poddar, also known as 'Sona Pappu', allegedly transferred Rs 1.5 crore to Kamdar, while the latter reportedly declared only Rs 15 lakh. Investigators believe this discrepancy points to a larger concealed money trail linked to the scam.

In a significant revelation, the ED's counsel stated that WhatsApp chats involving senior officers of the Kolkata Police were recovered from Kamdar's mobile phone. These chats are currently being analysed as part of the investigation.

The agency alleged that Kamdar maintained close contact with Shantanu Sinha Biswas, Deputy Commissioner of the Special Branch of Kolkata Police. It also claimed that financial transactions and gifts were exchanged between Kamdar and Biswas, as well as members of his family.

The ED had sought a 14-day custody of Kamdar to facilitate sustained interrogation and to trace the beneficiaries of the alleged land-grabbing network. However, the court granted custody till April 28, allowing the agency time to pur-

sue further leads.

Officials said that Sun Enterprises has multiple business interests, particularly in the real estate sector. During earlier searches, the ED had reportedly recovered cash worth Rs 1.2



crore from Kamdar's premises.

The raids extended beyond Kamdar's residence, with properties linked to Shantanu Sinha Biswas also being searched. The agency is probing an alleged land-grabbing and housing racket involving real estate developers, politically connected individuals, and other intermediaries.

On Friday, the ED had also conducted searches at premises linked to the Merlin Group, a prominent real estate firm based in Kolkata, in connection with the same case. Multiple locations tied to key individuals were covered during the operation. Properties associated with businessmen

Sushil Kumar Dhandhan and Vijay Kumar Dhandhan at Middleton Street, along with locations linked to DC Paul Group Construction Private Limited in Salt Lake, were also searched as part of the widening probe.

The ED further searched residences of officials connected with DC Paul Group, including director Kamalini Paul and former director Shanti Ranjan Paul, as investigators attempted to piece together the alleged network.

Authorities believe that the money trail involving Kamdar and Biswas is linked to Biswajit Poddar, a known history-sheeter facing serious criminal charges, including attempted murder, rape, and violations under the Arms Act.

In a related development, the Income Tax Department had earlier conducted searches at the residence of Debasish Kumar, an outgoing MLA from Rashbehari Assembly constituency and a mayoral council member of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation. Investigators suspect that the alleged land dealings may be part of a broader extortion racket disguised as legitimate real estate development, involving forged documents and

inflated property transactions.

Kamdar's arrest and the subsequent searches have triggered strong political reactions in poll-bound West Bengal. Leaders across parties have weighed in on the developments, reflecting the high-stakes nature of the case. Trinamool Congress spokesperson Jay Prakash Majumder questioned the ED's claims, stating that it is not unusual for citizens to have connections with police officials and demanding concrete evidence from the agency. Meanwhile, senior Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Choudhury alleged the existence of a deep-rooted nexus involving politicians, police personnel, and real estate developers, accusing them of amassing wealth through exploitation. Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari of the Bharatiya Janata Party claimed that incriminating materials had been recovered, and alleged that such accumulation of wealth pointed to systemic corruption under the state leadership of Mamata Banerjee. As the investigation continues, the ED is expected to intensify its probe into the alleged financial irregularities, with further arrests and disclosures likely in the coming days.

## Public service is govt's duty, and the govt is committed to this path: UP CM Yogi

**Lucknow:** In Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday held a 'Janata Darshan', where he personally met petitioners from different parts of the state, listened to their grievances, and directed officials to ensure timely redressal of issues.

The 'Janata Darshan' programme continues to serve as a key platform for direct interaction between the government and citizens, allowing people to present their concerns before the Chief Minister without bureaucratic barriers. Officials from various departments were present to take immediate note of complaints.

Addressing the gathering, Yogi Adityanath reiterated that public service remains the foremost duty of the government. He emphasised that the administration is committed to serving nearly 250 million people of the state with accountability and responsiveness.

The Chief Minister underlined that the government is determined to resolve all genuine grievances and ensure that no deserving individual is left without support. He stressed the importance of sensitivity and efficiency among officials while dealing with public issues.

Among the petitioners



was Deepthi, a resident of Bareilly, who shared her financial struggles with the Chief Minister. She explained that she lives in a rented accommodation and sustains her family by running a handcart, making it difficult to raise her children.

Taking immediate cognisance of her situation, Yogi Adityanath directed the District Magistrate of Bareilly to provide prompt assistance and ensure that she is covered under the PM SVANidhi Yojana. He also instructed officials to extend any additional local support required.

Deeply moved by the Chief Minister's response, Deepthi became emotional and expressed her gratitude. With visible relief, she offered her blessings before leaving the venue, highlighting the human impact of such outreach initiatives.

During the interaction, several individuals submit-

ted applications seeking housing assistance. The Chief Minister assured them that the government is committed to providing homes to all eligible beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana.

He forwarded these applications to the respective district authorities, instructing them to verify eligibility and ensure that deserving applicants receive the benefits without unnecessary delay. Beneficiaries expressed appreciation for the swift response.

Some petitioners also approached the Chief Minister seeking financial assistance for medical treatment. In response, he directed officials to immediately prepare cost estimates and submit them for government approval.

He reassured the affected families that while they should focus on taking care of their loved ones, the government would extend support for medical expenses, reflecting a welfare-oriented approach. Concerns related to children's education were also raised, particularly by parents facing financial hardships. The Chief Minister directed officials to ensure that no child is forced to drop out of school due to lack of resources.

## Dangerous Metal Plank Removed From Metro Pillar In Andheri

**Mumbai:** A potential accident was avoided in Andheri West after a construction plank was found hanging dangerously from a Metro Line 6 pillar. MNS leader Prashant Rane spotted the plank opposite Infiniti Mall and immediately told the authorities.

The plank looked like it could fall on people or cars at any moment. Because of Rane's quick action, the authorities removed the hazard right away. In a similar safety concern, a resident in Thane also reported a "misaligned slab" on Metro Line 4, asking officials to check it before any accidents happen.

The removal of a precarious metal plank from a Metro pillar in Andheri West serves as a stark reminder of the critical importance of vigilant oversight in urban infrastructure projects. This incident, which unfolded in one of Mumbai's most congested commercial corridors, highlights the thin line between routine construction and potential catastrophe in a densely populated metropolis.

The presence of such a hazard on a project of this scale suggests a temporary lapse in safety protocols that could have resulted in significant harm to commuters or pedestrians. Fortunately, the timely intervention by a local public figure ensured that the structural anomaly was addressed before it could escalate into a tragic headline.



The specific location of the hazard—directly opposite the high-traffic Infiniti Mall—added a layer of urgency to the situation, as thousands of vehicles and shoppers pass through this area daily. Metro Line 6, which is currently under various stages of development, involves complex elevated engineering that necessitates the use of heavy scaffolding and temporary support structures.

When a construction plank is left hanging or becomes detached, it transforms from a tool of progress into a gravity-bound weapon. The height of the Metro pillars means that even a relatively light object can gain lethal kinetic energy during a fall, making the stabilization of all onsite materials a non-negotiable priority. The discovery was made by MNS leader Prashant Rane, whose proactive stance in monitoring the neighborhood's safety proved instrumental in preventing a mishap.

Upon spotting the dangling metal piece, Rane did not merely observe the risk but took immediate steps to engage with the relevant authorities to ensure a rapid response. His actions underscore the vital role that community leaders and engaged citizens play as "extra eyes" for municipal and developmental bodies.

In a city as sprawling and fast-moving as Mumbai, the collaboration between the public and the engineers managing these mega-projects is often the final safety net against human error. Following the alert, the response from the metro authorities was swift, reflecting an understanding of the immediate danger posed by the loose hardware. Teams were dispatched to the site to secure the area and remove the metal plank using specialized equipment, thereby restoring safety to the road below.

This rapid remediation is a positive sign of the responsiveness of the city's infrastructure teams, yet it also raises questions about the frequency of safety audits conducted during off-hours or between construction shifts. The incident has prompted calls for more rigorous "walk-through" inspections to ensure that all tools and materials are double-locked or removed when not in active use.

The Andheri incident does not exist in isolation, as it coincides with similar safety reports emerging from other parts of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region. For instance, in Thane, a resident recently flagged concerns regarding a "misaligned slab" on Metro Line 4, urging officials to conduct a thorough structural assessment.

These recurring reports from the public indicate a growing anxiety regarding the pace and safety standards of the massive metro expansion currently underway across the region. When residents begin to notice visible misalignments or hanging debris, it creates a sense of unease that can only be mitigated by transparent communication and visible safety improvements from the developers.

Safety in large-scale urban engineering is not just about the final integrity of the bridge or tunnel, but about the daily management of the construction site itself. The "misaligned slab" reported in Thane, much like the hanging plank in Andheri, serves as a warning sign that requires immediate technical verification to distinguish between cosmetic issues and structural flaws. Authorities have been urged to treat these citizen reports with the highest level of seriousness, as early detection of minor faults is significantly more cost-effective and safer than dealing with a structural failure after a project is operational.

## Traffic Changes Near Gateway Of India For Beauty Work

**Mumbai:** If you are traveling near the Gateway of India, take note: several roads and stops have been moved due to beautification work on Adam Street. The Southbound part of the road is closed while workers install new granite stones.

The BEST bus stop and the local taxi stand have also been moved to different spots. These changes started on April 20 and will stay in place until April 29.

The traffic police have put up barricades and signs to help guide drivers through the alternate routes.

The beautification project currently underway on Adam Street has necessitated a significant reorganization of the urban landscape surrounding the iconic Gateway of India, a move designed to enhance the aesthetic and structural quality of this historic precinct.

As one of Mumbai's most frequented landmarks, the area requires constant maintenance to withstand both heavy tourist footfall and the coastal environment.

The current phase of the project involves the specialized installation of high-quality granite stones, which are being laid to replace the aging road surface and footpaths.

This upgrade is part of a larger vision to transform the immediate surroundings of the monument into a more pedestrian-friendly and visually appealing space for both locals and international visitors.

To facilitate the heavy construction work and ensure the safety of both laborers and the public, the southbound section of Adam Street has been officially closed to all vehicular traffic.

This closure is a critical component of the project logistics, as the installation of granite requires a stable environment free from the vibrations and weight of passing cars and buses. The decision to shut down this major artery was not taken lightly, given its role in connecting various parts of South Mumbai, but it was deemed necessary to achieve the level of craftsmanship required for such a high-profile location.

Drivers are being advised to plan their journeys well in advance to avoid potential delays in the Colaba area. In tandem with the road closure, the Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking has had to temporarily relocate its bus stops in the vicinity. These stops, which typically serve as vital nodes for commuters traveling to and from the southern tip of the city, have been moved to nearby alternative locations to keep the transit network operational.

Frequent travelers are encouraged to look for official notices at the old stops to find the exact coordinates of the new boarding points.

## Mumbai Airport Runways To Close For Six Hours In May



**Mumbai:** Both runways at Mumbai's airport will be closed for six hours on May 7 for important maintenance work before the monsoon rains begin. The closure will happen from 11 am to 5 pm.

The airport operator, MIAL, planned this early so airlines could change their flight times and avoid canceling trips. Experts will spend those six hours checking the runway surfaces for any damage and fixing them to ensure planes can land and take off safely during the rainy season.

The Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport in Mumbai is preparing for a significant operational pause scheduled for early May to facilitate essential pre-monsoon maintenance across its entire runway infrastructure.

This planned closure is a standard but critical safety procedure conducted annually to ensure that the airfield can withstand the rigorous demands of the Indian monsoon season, which often brings heavy rainfall and high-speed winds. By shutting down all flight operations for a specific six-hour window, the airport operator, Mumbai International Airport Limited (MIAL), provides a safe

environment for engineering teams to perform high-precision repairs that are impossible to execute during active flight schedules. This proactive approach is fundamental to maintaining the airport's status as one of the busiest and safest aviation hubs in the world.

The specific timing for this maintenance block has been set for May 7, with the closure spanning from 11:00 am to 5:00 pm.

This midday slot was strategically chosen to minimize the impact on the highest-density travel periods, such as the early morning and late evening international flight surges.

During these six hours, the silence on the runways will be replaced by the activity of specialized maintenance crews and heavy machinery tasked with inspecting every square meter of the landing strips.

The goal is to maximize efficiency within this limited timeframe, ensuring that the facility can return to full operational capacity the moment the clock strikes five. The primary focus of this maintenance drive is the structural integrity of the runway surfaces, which endure immense pressure from the hundreds of daily take-offs and landings.

## Editorial

### The Scourge of Child Marriage and Stunted Development

While India has undoubtedly left its mark on the global stage today in the fields of science, technology, and economics, certain dark facets of our social reality continue to act as shackles hindering our path to progress. On one hand, we proudly champion grand concepts such as 'Digital India,' 'New India,' and 'Women's Empowerment'; yet, on the other, the practice of child marriage—which crushes tender young buds under the burden of domestic life before they even have a chance to bloom—remains alive and prevalent in many parts of the country. This is not merely an archaic tradition; it constitutes a blatant violation of human rights and a ruthless assault on the future of an entire generation. The issue of child marriage is not merely a private decision made by a single family; rather, it serves as a mirror reflecting the regressive mindset of our society. In rural and remote areas, even today, the birth of a girl child triggers greater anxiety regarding her marriage than concern for her education. The erroneous—and profoundly dangerous—belief that an early marriage guarantees a girl's secure future is so deeply ingrained in the collective social psyche that it ultimately results in the sacrifice of her childhood, her dreams, and her health.

The consequences of child marriage are not merely social in nature; they are also of a gravely serious medical and psychological character. At an age when a girl has not yet fully grasped even the distinction between 'good touch' and 'bad touch,' she is compelled to confront the responsibilities of married life and undergo complex physiological processes such as pregnancy. Since girls under the age of 18 have not yet attained full physical and mental maturity, pregnancies occurring during this developmental stage frequently emerge as a leading cause of maternal mortality. According to statistics from the World Health Organization (WHO), the rate of death during childbirth among girls who become mothers at a young age is twice as high as that among adult women. Furthermore, it is not only the mother whose life is jeopardized; the health and well-being of the newborn child are also placed at grave risk. Children such as these are gripped by a vicious cycle of malnutrition, low body weight, and various ailments right from birth. Alongside this physical torment, the girl child suffers severe psychological demoralization. At an age meant for play and carefree frolic, she is forced to shoulder the burden of domestic responsibilities; in the process, she loses her self-confidence and becomes confined within a restrictive social framework. This practice permanently closes the door to education—which is, in reality, the sole key to progress. If a girl is educated, she shapes not only her immediate family but the entire society; however, through child marriage, we stifle this cycle of development at its very inception.

India has had the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, in force for some time now, mandating that a girl must have completed 18 years of age and a boy 21 years. Under the law, child marriage is a cognizable and non-bailable offense; yet, the mere threat of legal action has not been sufficient to completely eradicate this practice. Laws may appear formidable on paper, but their true potency lies in their rigorous enforcement and their acceptance by society. All too often, traditional customs, social pressures, and poverty prove to be more powerful than the law itself. Driven by poverty, many parents harbor the belief that marrying off their daughter will alleviate a financial burden on them; however, this mindset ultimately plunges the girl into a perpetual abyss of poverty and ignorance. The vigilance recently demonstrated by the District Child Protection Unit in Babhulgaon, Akola district, is truly commendable; by intervening before the ceremony could take place, the administration successfully halted a child marriage and secured a written undertaking from the parents. Such proactive efforts are imperative in every village and district; only then can we truly address this issue at its very roots.

The government has taken a historic decision to grant women 33 percent reservation in Parliament; however, until girls at the grassroots level are liberated from the scourge of child marriage and enabled to access education, the objectives of this reservation and empowerment cannot possibly be realized. Empowerment is not merely confined to holding political office; rather, it is about enabling a girl to make decisions regarding her own life. Education stands as the most potent remedy for overcoming this grave issue. It is the collective responsibility of both the government and society to encourage girls to pursue not only primary but also higher education, and to create a safe and secure environment for them. An educated girl not only safeguards herself but also possesses the courage to stand up against regressive practices such as child marriage. Since economic hardship is a primary driver of child marriage, it is imperative to provide sustainable financial support to impoverished families through various government schemes, thereby ensuring that a girl is viewed not as a 'burden,' but as an 'asset.'

The role of the media is also pivotal in this struggle. Newspapers, television channels, and social media platforms must consistently expose the harrowing reality of child marriage to the public. Society cannot be transformed solely through legislation; rather, a fundamental shift in societal mindset is required. Local administrative bodies, village officials (Police Patils), teachers, and Anganwadi workers can serve as crucial links in addressing this issue. Establishing a robust intelligence network at the local level is essential to prevent child marriages before they even take place. Parents must come to realize that marrying off their daughter at a tender age amounts to gambling with her very life. Only when society collectively condemns child marriage—and prioritizes placing books in girls' hands rather than snatching away their toys—will this practice truly come to an end. Putting an end to child marriage is not merely about saving the life of a single girl; it is about securing a safe, healthy, and progressive future for the entire nation. The empowerment of girls must not remain confined merely to slogans; it must be manifested through concrete action. The day the very last girl in every remote corner of the country walks to school without fear—and, upon turning eighteen, chooses a life partner or builds a career entirely of her own free will while standing firmly on her own feet—that day alone will mark the true dawn of social freedom. Practices such as child marriage constitute a shameful blot upon the forehead of our progressive India; to erase this stigma, what is needed now is not merely legal enforcement, but a sweeping social revolution. The greatest stride in this battle would be for parents to voluntarily adhere to the law, keeping in mind the well-being and health of their daughters. Rather than plucking a bud before it has had a chance to blossom, give it the time and space to bloom—for she is the architect of tomorrow's prosperous India. We must all collectively resolve that no childhood shall ever again be collected in the fires of child marriage. This is not merely the need of the hour; it is a clarion call for humanity itself. Only when the vision of a 'Child Marriage-Free India' is translated into action across every stratum of society will we truly be recognized as a developed nation. The message of our times is clear: parents must safeguard their daughters not solely through moral upbringing, but by providing them with opportunities for education and by prioritizing their health and well-being.

## Raksha Mantri & Uttar Pradesh CM jointly inaugurate state-of-the-art Laser, Light & Sound Show at Smritika War Memorial, Lucknow Cantt

Defense Minister Rajnath Singh and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath marked a significant milestone in military tribute on April 11, 2026, by jointly inaugurating a state-of-the-art Laser, Light, and Sound Show. Held at the Smritika War Memorial in Lucknow Cantonment, the event serves as a high-tech homage to the Indian Army's storied history and its relentless contributions to nation-building.

The multimedia extravaganza, lasting approximately 30 minutes, is conducted entirely in Hindi. It utilizes cutting-edge projection mapping, immersive sound systems, and advanced lighting technologies to narrate the Indian Army's operational achievements. Scheduled to be held daily in the evenings, the show is expected to open to the general public shortly, turning the memorial into a major educational and patriotic hub.

A central theme of the presentation is the detailed overview of India's major military conflicts. The show provides deep insights into the 1947-48, 1962, 1965, and 1971 wars. It specifically underscores the strategic nuances of Operation MEGHDOOT (Siachen) and Operation VIJAY (Kargil), ensuring that the tactical brilliance of the armed forces is conveyed to the younger generation.

The show places a significant emphasis on the Central Command's pivotal role in these historical op-



erations. By highlighting regional contributions, the narrative effectively bridges the gap between local history and national defense, showcasing how Central India has consistently served as a backbone for the country's security architecture.

A particularly poignant segment of the show is dedicated to the Param Vir Chakra awardees hailing from the Awadh region. The script skillfully interweaves their unmatched bravery with a concise history of Awadh's deep-rooted martial traditions. This focus highlights the region's long-standing legacy as a cradle for warriors who have defended the nation's frontiers for centuries.

Beyond historical retrospection, the multimedia show pivots toward the future by showcasing the In-



dian Army's continuous modernization and transformation. It addresses the changing dynamics of modern warfare and the evolving threats that the military now faces, illustrating the shift toward technology-driven defense strategies.

A major highlight of the presentation is the surge of the Indian Defence Indus-

try. The show features recent advancements and provides a glimpse into Operation SINDOOR, where new-generation domestic equipment was first utilized. This segment serves as a visual testament to the growing prowess of "Made in India" defense technology.

The show also cele-

brates the emergence of Uttar Pradesh as a vital nucleus for Aatmanirbharta (self-reliance) initiatives. Through the development of the state's dedicated defense corridor, Uttar Pradesh is portrayed as a critical driver in the national mission to reduce dependence on foreign imports and strengthen domestic manufacturing.

To house this sophisticated production, the Smritika War Memorial has undergone a comprehensive structural upgrade. The premises now feature a modern amphitheater designed to provide an optimal viewing experience for large crowds. This facility is part of a broader plan to make the memorial a more interactive space for visitors. The aesthetic and educational value of the site has been enhanced by the installation of high-detail murals. These artworks depict new-generation military equipment and war trophies, serving as a permanent exhibition of India's military strength. These murals act as a bridge between the physical statues of the memorial and the digital show.

Three dedicated mural walls currently under construction will serve a dual purpose. They will act as prominent displays of military history during the day and transform into dynamic canvases for the laser and light projections at night. This architectural integration ensures that the memorial remains engaging around the clock.

This massive cultural and educational initiative was executed through a robust partnership between HQ Central Command, the Government of Uttar Pradesh, and the Uttar Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation. This collaboration ensures that the show meets international standards of production while being accessible to tourists and locals alike.

Since its establishment in 1994, the Smritika War Memorial has stood as an enduring tribute to the valor and sacrifice of Indian soldiers. Under the aegis of HQ Central Command, it has become a cornerstone for preserving military heritage and fostering a sense of national pride among the civilian populace, especially the youth.

The inaugural event was attended by a host of high-ranking dignitaries, including UP Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak and Lt Gen Anindya Sengupta, the GOC-in-C of Central Command. Their presence underscored the importance of the project as a symbol of the synergy between the military and the state government.

By blending history with modern technology, the Laser, Light, and Sound Show at Lucknow Cantonment ensures that the "indomitable spirit" of the Indian soldier remains a living narrative. It stands not just as a memorial for the fallen, but as an inspiring beacon for the future of a self-reliant and secure India.

## National Cadet Corps Launches Nationwide Cyber Security Capacity Building Programme for Cadets

The National Cadet Corps (NCC) has taken a monumental stride into the digital age by launching a comprehensive Cyber Security Capacity Building Programme. This initiative, formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT), marks a strategic shift in how India's largest uniformed youth organization prepares for modern challenges. The MoU was signed in the presence of high-ranking officials, including DG NCC, Lt Gen Virendra Vats, and DG NIELIT, Dr. Madan Mohan Tripathi, signaling a high-level commitment to fortifying the nation's "digital infantry."

The partnership is built on the realization that the battlefields of the 21st century are increasingly virtual. By leveraging NIELIT's technical expertise and the NCC's vast network of disciplined youth, the programme seeks to instill a culture of digital hygiene and practical cyber defence. This collaboration is not merely about technical training; it is about empowering the next generation of Indian citizens to navigate an increasingly complex online landscape with confidence, ethics, and resilience. A Tiered Approach to Digital Mastery: The programme is meticulously structured into two



distinct stages to ensure both wide-scale awareness and deep-dive technical specialization. The first phase, known as the Cyber Security Awareness Programme, consists of a 15-hour online training module. This initial stage is designed to be inclusive, reaching every enrolled NCC cadet across the country. Delivered via the NIELIT Digital University platform, it covers the essential pillars of digital literacy, ranging from

safe internet practices to the fundamentals of identifying common cyber threats like phishing and malware. For those who demonstrate exceptional aptitude, the second phase—the Cyber Defender Programme—offers a significant escalation in intensity. This 60-hour offline training is reserved for cadets who pass a rigorous, merit-based screening process. Unlike the introductory phase, this stage is heavily fo-

cused on practical application. Cadets will engage in real-life simulations and gain hands-on experience with advanced cyber security tools, learning the precise techniques required to detect, mitigate, and respond to sophisticated digital attacks in real-time.

The ultimate goal of this initiative is the creation of a specialized pool of NCC Cyber Cadets. These individuals are envisioned as grassroots leaders who will champion safe digital practices within their local communities, schools, and families. By turning cadets into digital ambassadors, the programme creates a multiplier effect, spreading awareness far beyond the immediate participants. This grassroots approach is vital for building a "Cyber-Safe India" where every citizen is equipped to protect their digital identity and assets. Furthermore, the programme is strategically aligned with major national frameworks, specifically Digital India and the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF). This alignment ensures that the skills acquired by the cadets are standardized, recognized by industry, and contribute directly to the national pool of skilled human resources. By professionalizing the training through NIELIT, the NCC is ensuring that its cadets are not just socially re-

sponsible citizens, but also technically proficient individuals ready to contribute to India's burgeoning digital economy.

Strengthening the National Fabric

This initiative represents more than just a training course; it is a critical update to the NCC's mission of nation-building. As India continues its rapid digital transformation, the vulnerability to cyber disruption grows. By training thousands of young men and women in the nuances of cyber defence, the NCC and NIELIT are creating a robust second line of defence for the nation's digital infrastructure. It reinforces the idea that national security in the modern era is a shared responsibility that begins with individual awareness and technical competence.

As the programme rolls out across various directorates, it is expected to inspire a new generation of cybersecurity professionals. The blend of military discipline and technical prowess will likely produce a unique class of experts capable of handling the ethical and technical challenges of the future. In the spirit of "Unity and Discipline," the NCC is now ensuring that its cadets are as formidable behind a keyboard as they are on the field, securing the nation's future in the silicon-driven world of tomorrow.

## "Restoration of Water Bodies" Workshop under Swachhata Pakhwada, 2026

On April 13, 2026, the Legislative Department of the Ministry of Law and Justice took a proactive step toward environmental stewardship by organizing a workshop titled "Restoration of Water Bodies." Held at Shastri Bhawan under the leadership of Dr. Rajiv Mani, Secretary, Legislative Department, the event was part of the Swachhata Pakhwada initiative. The workshop was designed to underscore the critical link between healthy aquatic ecosystems and national water security, emphasizing that the preservation of these resources is a prerequisite for long-term sustainable development.

The event saw active participation from senior leadership, including Shri Ganilung Panmei, Joint Secretary, and Shri R.S. Jayakrishnan, Additional Legis-



lative Counsel. The inclusive nature of the workshop was evident as it brought together officers and staff not just from the main department, but also from its attached offices: the Official Language Wing (O.L. Wing) and Vidhi Sahitya Parkashan (VSP). This broad participation highlights the government's effort to integrate en-

vironmental consciousness across all functional wings of the legal and legislative administration. Ecological and Health Impacts of Restoration: A central highlight of the workshop was an expert session led by Shri Madhukar Swayambhu, representing the NGO INDIA-AIDS. The session focused on the multifaceted benefits that

water bodies provide to both the environment and public health. It was explained that thriving water bodies act as natural filters and temperature regulators, significantly reducing air pollution and aiding in the vital process of groundwater recharge. By maintaining these ecosystems, we protect biodiversity and ensure that the ecologi-

cal balance is not tilted toward environmental degradation.

From a public health perspective, the expert noted that the restoration of clean water is a primary defense against a variety of illnesses. Contaminated water is a breeding ground for water-

borne diseases like cholera and typhoid, while stagnant, neglected water bodies often lead to outbreaks of vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue. Proper maintenance and restoration techniques are, therefore, not just environmental projects but essential public health interventions that save lives and reduce the



borne diseases like cholera and typhoid, while stagnant,

burden on the national healthcare system.

# ▶▶ MAHARASHTRA

# Aryan Age | 05

## Fadnavis accuses INDIA bloc of blocking women's quota, terms opposition move "betrayal" of 70 crore women

**Mumbai:** In a sharp political attack, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday accused opposition parties of derailing the Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament, calling it a "betrayal" of 70 crore women across the country. Speaking in Mumbai, he alleged that the INDIA bloc deliberately blocked the legislation by denying it the required two-thirds majority.

Fadnavis used strong language to criticise the opposition, describing their actions as the "foeticide of women's rights" and condemning their celebrations after the bill's failure as a "mockery" of the values upheld by India's social reformers. He said April 17 was expected to mark a transformative moment in India's socio-political landscape, but instead exposed what he termed an "anti-women mindset" among parties such as Congress, TMC, DMK, Shiv Sena (UBT), NCP (Sharad Pawar faction), and the Samajwadi Party.

Expressing anguish, the Chief Minister noted that the episode occurred during the 200th birth anniversary year of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule. He remarked that political groups invoking Phule's legacy had been "completely exposed" by their conduct in Parliament.



Clarifying the government's position, Fadnavis explained that under the 2023 amendment, implementation of women's reservation is linked to the next census and subsequent delimitation. Due to delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the census process is now expected to be completed only by 2027, which could push the rollout of reservations beyond the 2029 general elections.

To expedite the process, he said, the government had proposed conducting delimitation based on the 2011 Census so that the reservation could be implemented earlier. However, this proposal was rejected by the opposition, leading to the current deadlock.

In response, the ruling Mahayuti alliance has announced a statewide agitation. The BJP and its allies plan to launch a major outreach campaign, including collecting one crore signatures from women across Maharashtra to build public pressure on the issue.

Fadnavis asserted that the campaign would be taken down to the taluka level and warned that women voters would not forgive those who blocked the bill. He said the alliance would continue its efforts until the reservation is implemented and the opposition's stance is exposed before the public.

"If the rights of women are being suppressed, democracy demands a strong public response. We will mobilise women across the state and compel these parties to bow to the will of the people," he said.

## Mass migration of workers from Gujarat sparks concern; NCP leader Khadse asks Fadnavis govt to wake up

**Mumbai:** The escalating Middle East crisis and the subsequent blockade of the Strait of Hormuz have sent shockwaves through India's industrial landscape, leading to a massive exodus of migrant workers from Gujarat. Rohini Khadse, State Women's President of the Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar faction), has raised serious concerns regarding the deteriorating situation, warning that the economic ripples could soon paralyze major urban centers in Maharashtra, such as Mumbai and Pune.

The geopolitical tension in the Gulf has directly resulted in a severe gas shortage across India, hitting energy-dependent industries with unprecedented force. In Gujarat, the famed textile industry has reportedly come to a standstill. Without the fuel necessary to power factories and the

rising costs of basic utilities, lakhs of migrant workers find themselves stripped of both food and employment, leaving them with no choice but to return to their native villages. Heart-wrenching scenes at Surat Railway Station through a poignant social media post, Khadse highlighted the human cost of this energy blockade. Distressing visuals from Surat railway station show an overwhelming number of workers—the backbone of India's manufacturing sector—scrambling to leave the city. Khadse described the situation as "heart-wrenching," noting that the sudden loss of livelihoods has deprived these families of even the most basic necessities, turning a regional industrial slowdown into a full-scale humanitarian crisis. Red Flags for Mumbai and Pune Khadse's warning extends beyond Gujarat's

borders, as she pointed out that the symptoms of this crisis are already surfacing in Maharashtra. In Mumbai and Pune, local economies are feeling the pinch, with reports of hotels and eateries shutting down due to the scarcity and skyrocketing prices of commercial gas. This has created a precarious environment for students and workers who moved from rural areas to these metros in search of education and a better life, only to find themselves struggling to survive. A Call for Government Intervention

Criticizing what she termed a "sleeping government," Khadse urged the Maharashtra authorities to wake up to the looming threat. She emphasized that the state must take immediate corrective measures to stabilize energy supplies and protect the labor force from displacement.

## Reconstruction of Andheri Kamgar Hospital to be Investigated

**Mumbai:** The reconstruction of the ESIC Kamgar Hospital in Marol, Andheri (East), once a vital healthcare lifeline for Mumbai's industrial workforce, has now become the epicenter of a major federal investigation. Union Labour Minister Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya has officially sanctioned a high-level probe into the project following grave allegations of financial misconduct, unauthorized tender modifications, and systemic delays that have stalled the facility for

over a decade and a half. Originally sprawled across a significant 10.74-acre plot since its inception in 1985, the hospital's trajectory took a downward turn after a devastating fire in 2018 forced its closure. While the Bombay High Court had stepped in to mandate a strict timeline—ordering construction completion by August 15, 2025, and full operational status by January 31, 2026—the project remains mired in incompletion, effectively depriving thousands of laborers of their right to essential

medical services.

The impetus for this central intervention came from Ravindra Waikar, the Member of Parliament for Mumbai North West, who presented a detailed memorandum to the Union Ministry exposing what he describes as a "large-scale scam." Waikar highlighted a pattern of suspicious administrative behavior, noting that the project cost has inexplicably ballooned to ₹254 crore due to frequent and questionable alterations in the tendering process. Furthermore, the renovation has been plagued by reported structural deficiencies that threaten the very viability of the building. In response to these findings, Minister Mandaviya has not only demanded an inquiry into the "stalled" 15-year timeline but has also issued a stern directive for authorities to rectify these failures immediately, promising that any officials or contractors found guilty of orchestrating these irregularities will face rigorous legal and disciplinary action.

Moreover, the renovation has been plagued by reported structural deficiencies that threaten the very viability of the building. In response to these findings, Minister Mandaviya has not only demanded an inquiry into the "stalled" 15-year timeline but has also issued a stern directive for authorities to rectify these failures immediately, promising that any officials or contractors found guilty of orchestrating these irregularities will face rigorous legal and disciplinary action.

## Mumbai AQI reaches to Good Category of 38 °C

**Mumbai:** Air quality levels in Mumbai showed a noticeable improvement on Monday, offering some relief to residents after fluctuating pollution levels in recent days. In several parts of the city, the Air Quality Index (AQI) was recorded in the 'good' category, indicating relatively clean and breathable air.

Despite the overall improvement, the air quality across Mumbai remained uneven. While some areas enjoyed better conditions, others continued to report AQI levels ranging from 'good' to 'poor', reflecting localized variations in pollution levels.

The most concerning air quality was recorded in Sunder Nagar near Malad West, a suburban area that registered an AQI of 127.

This placed it firmly in the 'poor' category, suggesting that air pollution



could pose health concerns, especially for sensitive groups.

In contrast, the cleanest air was reported at Mulgaon Station 2 in Andheri East, where the AQI dropped to an impressive level of 5. This falls well within the 'good' category and indicates minimal pollution, making it one of the best locations in the city in terms of air quality.

These variations highlight how air quality in Mumbai can differ significantly even within short distances, influenced by factors such as traffic

density, construction activity, and local weather conditions.

According to the Regional Meteorological Department, weather conditions in Mumbai are expected to remain partly cloudy throughout the day. This pattern will likely be consistent across both the city and its suburban regions.

Temperature levels are forecast to range between 25°C and 35°C, suggesting warm but manageable conditions for residents. The absence of extreme heat has come as a relief, particularly as summer intensifies in other parts of the country.

Weather data recorded at 8:30 am showed the temperature at 29°C. Meanwhile, the 'feels-like' temperature, which accounts for humidity and other factors, was slightly higher at 30°C, indicating mild discomfort but not severe heat stress.

## Mumbai cops to set up special teams to monitor live shows

**Mumbai:** Days after two MBA students died following suspected party drug consumption and alcohol overdose during a concert in Mumbai, the city police has decided to set up special squads to monitor live shows and music concerts, officials said on Monday.

According to Additional Commissioner of Police (West Region) Paramjit Singh Dahiya has asked police units to deploy special squads to prevent drug consumption, molestation and theft at venues hosting large gatherings.

Each squad will consist of two teams, with one officer and four constables per team. The anti-eveteeasing squad will include a woman officer.

"All these personnel will be deployed in plain clothes to discreetly monitor activities and respond swiftly. Deployment will be based on crowd size: events with around 2,000 attendees will have two squads, rising to four for 4,000 people and six for gatherings of 6,000 or more," police said.

The police teams will also deploy CCTV cameras at the event premises. "Officers have been told to ensure compliance with the directive at all events, including performances by Indian and international artists, bands and DJs. Organisers will be required to pay prescribed fees in advance for police deployment. Additional security arrangements will also be charged as per official rates," police said.

## NCW looking into Amravati-Paratwada, Kharat cases

**Mumbai:** Chairperson of the National Commission for Women (NCW), Vijaya Rahatkar, announced on Monday that the panel has taken suo motu cognisance of the Amravati-Paratwada obscene video case, the latest scandal that has rocked Maharashtra after the fake godman Kharat and TCS Nashik office episodes.

Highlighting the severity of the matter, she confirmed that a high-level Fact-Finding Committee of the NCW

is already on the ground to ensure a thorough investigation.

Rahatkar revealed that the Fact-Finding Committee has been active for the past two days, conducting an extensive tour of the affected areas. The committee has held detailed discussions with the local police and interacted with the relatives of the victims.

Rahatkar said she has personally spoken with the District Superintendent of

Police (SP) regarding the progress of the investigation. "We are determined to get to the bottom of this in the coming days," she added.

The NCW chief urged citizens to come forward with any information. "Do not be afraid. We will ensure that the identity of informants remains strictly confidential," she emphasized.

Turning her attention to the controversial Kharat case, Rahatkar described it as "extremely grave".

## Movement against sub-categorisation of SC reservation

**Pune:** The movement against the Maharashtra government's proposal for the sub-categorisation of Scheduled Castes (SC) reservations has reached a historic turning point. What began as a localized concern has rapidly transformed into a massive public campaign, fueled by the submission of over 33,000 formal objections via email. This surge in digital dissent underscores a deep-seated apprehension among the community regarding the potential restructuring of long-standing constitutional protections.

The driving force behind this organized resistance is the Maharashtra Scheduled Caste Reservation Sub-Categorisation Review Committee, spearheaded by the Padmapani Foundation. This coalition has successfully bridged the gap between grassroots activism and institutional advocacy, drawing significant support from a diverse array of political parties, social organizations, and academic institutions. Their collective aim is to ensure that any change to the reservation framework

is handled with extreme caution and transparency.

A pivotal moment in the campaign occurred this past Monday, when a high-level delegation led by committee chairman Rahul Dambale held a formal meeting with officials at BARTI (Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Research and Training Institute). As an autonomous body under the state's Department of Social Justice, BARTI serves as a critical bridge between the government's policy-making arms and the marginalized communities those policies directly impact.

During this meeting, the delegation successfully secured a major procedural victory. The concerned authorities have officially agreed to issue formal replies or acknowledgments for every single one of the 33,000 objection emails received. This commitment ensures that the voices of the protesters are not lost in a digital void but are instead officially recorded as part of the state's administrative history. The delegation also voiced a scathing critique of the Justice Anant Bader



Committee, which has been tasked with reviewing the sub-categorisation issue. There is a profound sense of dissatisfaction regarding the committee's methods, with allegations emerging that the report preparation process lacked the necessary transparency required for such a sensitive social undertaking.

According to the protesters, the Bader Committee prioritized confidentiality over public consultation, a move they argue is a direct violation of the principles of natural justice. They believe that a matter of such immense constitutional and

social importance should never have been deliberated behind closed doors, especially when the outcomes could fundamentally alter the lives of millions.

Rahul Dambale has been vocal in his warnings to the state administration, urging them not to view these 33,000 objections as mere "technical inputs." He emphasizes that behind every email is a citizen concerned about their future, representing a complex tapestry of social sentiments, historical struggles, and valid legal concerns that cannot be brushed aside by a bureau-

cratic wave of the hand.

The movement's leadership has also questioned the timing and the lack of scientific rigor in the government's approach. Dambale pointedly asked why the Bader Committee had not invited public participation at an earlier stage, suggesting that proceeding with sub-categorisation without robust scientific data or community input could lead to unintended social friction and fragmentation.

The fear of creating divisions within the SC community is a central theme of the opposition. Critics argue that without a clear, data-driven rationale, sub-categorisation risks pitting different sub-castes against one another, potentially diluting the collective political and social power that the Scheduled Castes have built over decades of struggle. To address these complexities and plan a path forward, the movement is transitioning into a strategic phase. A Joint Round Table Conference is currently being organized in Pune, scheduled for April 26.

## Name venue and time to debate Women's Bill, Congress leaders tell Fadnavis; NCP, UBT too hit out at Fadnavis

**Mumbai:** The Congress issued an official statement after the press conference of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday where he challenged opposition parties to debate the Women's Reservation Bill with him, stating that they are willing to debate the issue with him, and asked for the time and venue where the debate will be organized.

The development came after Fadnavis challenged the opposition for a debate on the Women's Reservation Bill at his press conference here on Monday, where he said, "These opposition parties have no counter argument. Any leader of my level should have an open debate

with me regarding the Women's Reservation Bill and show what is wrong with it, but none of them will do it. They have started to make excuses and run away from the debate.

"So, the BJP will unite women across the country and Maharashtra against this attitude. After they realise the public opinion is going against them, they will approve women's reservation".

Accepting the challenge of an open debate on the Women's Reservation Bill given by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Congress Working Committee Member and Lok Sabha MP Praniti Shinde said, "The Congress is ready for a debate

on the Women's Reservation Bill. Tell us when and where to come for the debate. Also include Prime Minister Narendra Modi in this debate".

Addressing a press conference here at Tilak Bhavan, Congress MP Shobha Bacchav and MP Praniti Shinde stated that the Women's Reservation Bill had already been passed unanimously in 2023, but the BJP government added two conditions to it, namely a census and constituency reorganisation.

"The Congress had demanded 33 percent reservation for the current Lok Sabha's 543 seats without these conditions, but the BJP ignored it. The BJP's

attempt to convene a special session on April 16, 2023, in order to introduce the Women's Reservation Bill was a



sham. Their real objective was mere to pass the Constituency Reorganisation Bill, which was a conspiracy to divide the country by

creating divisions between the states of South India and North India.

"Furthermore, an unsuccessful attempt was made to portray the Congress and the India Bloc as anti-women. The BJP played this trick to influence the ongoing

assembly elections in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, but this has backfired on it," Praniti Shinde said.

"The then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi introduced the Panchayat Raj Bill, providing 33 percent reservation for women in local self-government institutions. Sonia Gandhi subsequently increased this to 50 percent. Congress did not impose any conditions for this.

"Today, 1.5 million women hold various positions in Panchayat Raj institutions across the country, which is a contribution made by Congress.

Therefore, it is wrong to say that Congress is anti-women," Lok Sabha MP

Praniti Shinde said. "In reality, it is the BJP which is anti-women. The BJP is trying to spread a false narrative, but women will not fall prey to its propaganda. The BJP's true face has been exposed. If the Women's Reservation Bill 2023 had been implemented before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, there would have been approximately 180 women MPs in 543 seats today.

"This clearly demonstrates that the BJP is anti-women and has completely failed on this issue," Praniti Shinde said. Responding to the "foeticide" allegation made by Fadnavis, Congress Lok

Sabha MP Praniti Shinde said that the atrocities against women in Manipur, the injustice done to female athletes, and case like Harthas, Unnao, Badlapur and godman Ashok Kharat occurred during the BJP's rule.

"Everyone knows how the BJP handled these cases. Therefore, not only foeticide, but crimes like character assassination, atrocities against women and their murder are also occurring under the BJP's rule. There's no need to explain how much respect women receive in the BJP and the RSS. Why has no woman become the national president in the BJP's history? They should give an answer," Praniti Shinde said.

# Tia Bajpai makes her mark on the international stage

## Kritika Kamra and Vijay Varma share mutual respect, as 'Matka King' receives praise

**Mumbai:** Vijay Varma and Kritika Kamra, the lead actors of the web series Matka King, are currently drawing attention not just for their performances but also for their strong off-screen camaraderie, which seems to mirror their on-screen chemistry.

The series, which was recently released on Amazon Prime Video, has been receiving a positive response from audiences, with viewers appreciating both the storyline and the performances of the lead cast.

Amid the growing popularity of the show, Kritika Kamra recently spoke about her experience of working with Vijay Varma, offering insight into his acting style and approach.

She described Varma as a "very sharp actor" who prioritizes the needs of the scene over personal spotlight, a quality she believes stems from his strong training, curiosity, and collaborative mindset.

According to Kamra, this approach makes working with him not only smooth but also creatively fulfilling, as it allows both actors to focus on storytelling rather



than individual performances.

Her comments highlight the importance of mutual respect and artistic understanding between co-actors, especially in projects that demand emotional depth and realism.

On the other hand, Vijay Varma was equally appreciative of Kritika Kamra during the promotional activities for the series.

He noted that Kamra brings something new to every take, constantly surprising him with her interpretations and performance choices.

Varma added that this unpredictability keeps him engaged as an actor, pushing him to stay present and responsive in every scene.

He also mentioned that her commitment and willingness to experiment make her one of his favorite co-actors to work with, as it elevates the overall quality of their performances.

What stands out about their partnership is their shared focus on delivering the best possible version of the story, rather than competing for attention on screen.

Both actors seem to draw inspiration from each other's strengths, using that dynamic to add depth and nuance to their characters.

Their collaboration is rooted in trust, respect, and a genuine understanding of the craft of acting, which is often reflected in the authenticity of their performances.

**Mumbai:** Tia Bajpai, best known for her role in 1920: Evil Returns, is steadily making her mark on the international stage as she shoots for a Hollywood project in Monaco.

Currently on location, the actress is working under the direction of Omid Rormal, marking an important milestone in her evolving career and signaling her transition into global cinema. This project represents a significant leap forward for Bajpai, as she moves beyond Indian films to explore opportunities in international filmmaking, thereby expanding both her artistic scope and global reach.

Over the years, Bajpai has built a reputation for her versatility and strong on-screen presence, often choosing roles that challenge her abilities and push her creative boundaries.

With this Hollywood venture, she appears to be continuing that trend, stepping into a space that demands adaptability, resil-

ience, and a fresh perspective. The film brings together a diverse international cast and crew, giving Bajpai the chance to collaborate with professionals from different cultural and cinematic back-

grounds. Such exposure not only enriches her acting craft but also introduces her to varied storytelling techniques and production styles distinct from mainstream Indian cinema.

From the breathtaking coastline of Monaco to the disciplined and methodical workflow of an international set, Bajpai is fully immersing herself in this new experience.

Her presence on set has reportedly drawn atten-

tion not only for her performance but also for her professionalism and ability to adapt seamlessly to a different working environment.

Transitioning into a Hollywood project can come with its own set of challenges, including adjusting to new cultural norms and production standards.

However, Bajpai appears to be handling these challenges with confidence and determination, reflecting her commitment to growth and excellence as an artist.

Speaking about her journey, she described shooting in Monaco as a dream come true, adding that each day on set offers valuable learning experiences.



## 'Mahavatar Parashuram' first poster unleashed, promises a grand retelling of Vishnu's sixth avatar

**Mumbai:** The makers of "Mahavatar Parashuram" have unveiled the film's first poster, offering an arresting glimpse into what promises to be a grand retelling of the legend of Lord Vishnu's sixth incarnation, Parashurama.

After the grand success of Hombale Films and Kaleem Productions' "Mahavatar Narasimha", the next big film is in the offing. The makers have shared the first glimpse of the film with an

exciting poster, which promises to be a visual spectacle.

Ever since watching "Mahavatar Narasimha," fans have been excited for the sequel.

Now, the makers have officially announced the film with a visually stunning poster. The film's tagline reads, "Where patience ends, Parashurama's axe begins!" This line alone is enough to convey the film's powerful impact.

The makers are all set to present the story of Parashurama, the sixth incarnation of Lord Vishnu, in a grand and impactful way.

The film will depict how Lord Vishnu incarnated to end the tyranny of corrupt and arrogant kings who had abandoned the path of righteousness.

Speaking on the cultural and emotional foundation of the film, producer Vijay Kiragandur said, "Our stories are

our strength. With Mahaavatar Parashurama, we aim to reconnect audiences with the power of their roots and present it in a format that resonates with today's generation. It is a story of heritage, power and purpose."

Directed by Ashvin Kumar, the film is produced by Vijay Kiragandur and Shilpa Dhawan under the banner of Hombale Films and Kaleem Productions, while the music is composed by Sam CS.

## Inside 'Toxic': Yash reveals the secrets of love and darkness

**Mumbai:** Yash, one of South Indian cinema's biggest stars, has opened up about his upcoming film Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups, revealing that the project goes far beyond the boundaries of a conventional action entertainer.

According to Yash, the film is designed to explore a deeply emotional and layered narrative, blending large-scale action with intense human experiences and darker thematic undertones.

He emphasized that scale alone is not enough for a film of this magnitude, noting that every sequence must bring something unique to the table.

"Every sequence needs to have a different style and flavor," Yash said, underlining his commitment to ensuring that the film remains visually and emotionally engaging throughout.

For the actor, action is not merely about spectacle or high-octane stunts,

but about creating an immersive experience that resonates with the audience on a deeper level.

He explained that the goal is to make viewers feel the emotions behind each scene, rather than just witness the action unfold on screen.

Yash further elaborated that "Toxic" is not just an action spectacle, but also a profound exploration of human emotions and psychological depth.

Sharing his philosophy about cinema, he said that people watch films to experience emotions they may not encounter in their own lives.

"Through films, we live someone else's life, understanding their pain and struggles," he noted, highlighting the emotional connection that storytelling can create.

With this perspective, "Toxic" aims to delve into the darker and more com-

plex aspects of human nature, offering audiences a narrative that is both intense and thought-provoking.

The film is directed by Geetu Mohandas, known for her distinctive storytelling style and ability to craft compelling narratives.

"Toxic" features a strong ensemble cast, including Nayanthara, Kiara Advani, and Huma Qureshi.

The film also stars Rukmini Vasanth and Tara Sutaria, adding further depth and star power to the project.

With such a diverse and talented cast, the film is expected to bring together multiple perspectives and performances that enhance its emotional and narrative complexity.

"Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups" is slated for release on June 4, 2026, and is already generating significant buzz among fans and industry observers.

## Ajay Devgn pays gallant tribute to 'Raja Shivaji'

**Mumbai:** Ajay Devgn has extended his best wishes to Riteish Deshmukh for his upcoming historical film Raja Shivaji, adding to the growing buzz surrounding the ambitious project.

As the film moves closer to its release, excitement among audiences continues to build, particularly because it focuses on the life and legacy of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, one of India's most revered historical figures.

The project holds special significance for Riteish Deshmukh, who has taken on multiple roles as director, lead actor, writer, and producer, reflecting his deep personal commitment to bringing this story to life on the big screen.

"Raja Shivaji" aims to chronicle the journey and achievements of the legendary Maratha warrior king, who established the concept of 'Hindavi Swarajya' and remains a timeless symbol of courage, leadership, and vision.

Ajay Devgn, who portrayed the iconic warrior Tanaji Malusare in Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior, expressed his admiration for the film in a heartfelt and symbolic manner.

Sharing the Hindi version of the film's anthem 'Chhatrapati' on his Instagram stories, Devgn paid tribute in a tone reminiscent of his portrayal of Tanaji, writing, "Tanhya chya naman, Raje! This looks incredible!"

He further added, "Wishing you nothing but glory for #RajaShivaji @riteishd Jai Shivraji!", extending his support and appreciation for the project.

The gesture has been widely appre-



ciated by fans, many of whom see it as a symbolic passing of the torch from one cinematic representation of Maratha history to another.

With such endorsements, the anticipation surrounding the film continues to grow, especially among audiences interested in historical and period dramas.

The excitement is expected to intensify further with the grand release of the film's trailer on April 20, which promises to offer a glimpse into the scale, storytelling, and visual grandeur of the project.

The film features a powerful ensemble cast, bringing together talent from both Hindi and Marathi cinema, including Sanjay Dutt, Abhishek Bachchan, and Vidya Balan.

Other prominent actors in the film include Mahesh Manjrekar, Sachin Khedekar, Boman Irani, and Bhag-

yashree.

The cast is further strengthened by the presence of Fardeen Khan, Jitendra Joshi, Amol Gupte, and Genelia Deshmukh.

Backed by Jio Studios in collaboration with Mumbai Film Company, the film is produced by Jyoti Deshpande and Genelia Deshmukh.

"Raja Shivaji" is scheduled for a worldwide theatrical release on May 1 and will be released in multiple languages, including Marathi, Hindi, and Telugu, aiming to reach a wide and diverse audience across India and beyond.

## Kalki Koechlin opens up about sleep struggles, says she uses sleeping pills while travelling to the US

**Mumbai:** Actor Kalki Koechlin candidly spoke about her experiences with sleep struggles and occasional use of sleeping pills during a recent appearance on Soha Ali Khan's podcast All About Her.

The latest episode focused on the importance of sleep and its wider impact on mental, emotional and physical wellbeing. Hosted by Soha Ali Khan, the podcast has steadily built a space for thoughtful and honest conversations around health, relationships and modern life. In the newest episode, the spotlight turned to sleep, a subject often overlooked despite its significance in everyday wellness. Joining the discussion were Kalki Koechlin and sleep specialist Dr. Viny Kantroo, who together explored sleep cycles, common lifestyle habits and warning signs that many people tend to ignore.

During the conversation, Soha asked Kalki about her own experiences with insomnia and disrupted sleep patterns. Responding candidly, Kalki said, "I do take sleeping pills now if I'm travelling to the US and back and need to quickly adjust, I take them for three or



four days.

But I'm very afraid of it becoming addictive, and I'm very scared to use it regularly because I feel like it might stop me from being able to sleep on my own."

Her remarks reflected a concern shared by many people who rely on medication for short-term sleep support while also worrying about long-term dependency.

The discussion balanced personal experiences with professional guidance, as Dr. Kantroo offered insight into healthy sleep habits and the science behind rest and recovery.

The episode continued All About Her's approach of

blending real-life stories with expert advice in a calm, accessible format. With Soha steering the conversation in an easy and empathetic manner, the session addressed common myths around sleep while highlighting why quality rest is essential for overall health.

Beyond simply discussing bedtime routines, the episode underscored how sleep plays a key role in emotional balance, physical recovery and long-term wellness.

For listeners dealing with insomnia, travel fatigue or irregular schedules, the conversation offered both relatability and perspective.

## Sana Makbul in talks to rejoin Khatron Ke Khiladi for upcoming season

**Mumbai:** Sana Makbul is reportedly being considered for the upcoming season of Khatron Ke Khiladi, with early industry buzz suggesting that the makers are keen on bringing back familiar faces who have previously made a mark on the show.

While there has been no official confirmation so far, sources indicate that her name has emerged as a strong contender during the initial stages of casting discussions for the new season.

Sana has been in the spotlight recently following her win on Bigg Boss OTT, a development that significantly boosted her popularity and visibility in the entertainment industry.

Her journey on Bigg Boss OTT showcased her ability to stay composed under pressure, maintain focus in high-stress situations, and display a competitive spirit—qualities that are essential for a demanding reality format like Khatron Ke Khiladi.

Interestingly, this would not be Sana Makbul's first stint on the stunt-based show. She had previously participated in an earlier season, where she managed to leave a lasting impression with her fearless atti-

tude. During her earlier appearance, she was particularly noted for taking on physically challenging stunts with confidence, often pushing her limits to complete tasks successfully.

One of her performances, in particular, drew attention for its execution and determination, earning appreciation from the show's host Rohit Shetty during the episode.

The reported plan to bring back former contestants appears to be part of a broader strategy by the makers to blend familiarity with proven on-screen performance.

By including contestants who have already demonstrated their capabilities, the show can maintain a balance between entertainment value and competitive intensity.

In this context, Sana's previous experience on Khatron Ke Khiladi, combined with her recent surge in popularity, positions her as a strong and viable choice for the upcoming season.

Industry insiders suggest that the makers are focusing on contestants who not only have a fan following but also possess the physical and mental endurance required for high-risk stunts.

Sana's track record indicates that she fits well into this category, making her inclusion a logical possibility if the discussions move forward.

However, it is important to note that the final lineup for the new season has not yet been confirmed, and casting decisions are still underway. Reality shows like Khatron Ke Khiladi often undergo multiple rounds of selection and negotiation before finalising their contestants.

If her participation is officially confirmed, Sana Makbul's return could add a sense of familiarity and continuity for viewers who have followed her journey in previous seasons.

Fans of the show may also look forward to seeing how she has evolved as a performer and whether she can outperform her earlier stint.

For now, audiences will have to wait for an official announcement from the makers to know whether Sana Makbul will indeed be part of the upcoming season.



## Hockey India announces 36-member senior men's national coaching camp

**New Delhi:** Hockey India on Monday named a 36-member core probable group for the upcoming Senior Men's National Coaching Camp, scheduled to be held at the Sports Authority of India (SAI) Centre in Bengaluru from April 20 to May 9.

The coaching camp will focus on tactical cohesion, conditioning, and match-simulation sessions

as the team aims to fine-tune its preparations in the lead-up to a busy international season, which includes European leg of the FIH Pro League 2025-26, World Cup, and Asian Games.

Also, the squad will look to build rhythm, refine combinations, and strengthen depth across all departments.

The goalkeeping unit



features experienced names including Krishan Bahadur Pathak, Suraj Karkera and Pawan, alongside emerging talents such as Mohith Hon-

nenahalli Shashikumar and Princedeep Singh. In defence, the team will be anchored by stalwarts like Harmanpreet Singh and

Amit Rohidas, supported by Jarmanpreet Singh, Jugraj Singh, Sanjay, Sumit, and a promising pool comprising Poovanna Chandura Bobby,

Yashdeep Siwach, Nilam Sanjeev Xess, and Amandeep Lakra.

The midfield sees a strong blend of experience and youth, with Manpreet Singh, Hardik Singh, and Vivek Sagar Prasad leading the charge. They will be joined by Rajinder Singh, Manmeet Singh, Moirangthem Rabichandra Singh, Vishnu Kant Singh, Raj Kumar Pal, Nilakanta Sharma, and Rosan Kujur.

The forward line features an exciting mix of proven performers and rising stars, including Mandeep Singh, Dilpreet Singh, Abhishek, and Sukhjeet Singh. They will be supported by Shilanand Lakra, Arajeet Singh Hundal, Angad Bir Singh, Uttam Singh, Selvam Karthi, Aditya Arjun Lalage, and Maninder Singh.

## Kiran Powar named Assam head coach for 2026-27 season

**New Delhi:** Former domestic cricketer Kiran Powar has been appointed as the head coach of the Assam cricket team for the 2026-27 season, marking his first assignment as coach of a senior men's side. The 50-year-old, who represented teams like Mumbai cricket team and Baroda cricket team during his playing career, steps into a significant role as Assam aim to improve their performances in India's domestic circuit.

Before this appointment, Powar was serving as the head coach of Mumbai's Under-23 team, where he gained valuable experience in nurturing young talent. His transition to a senior coaching role is seen as a natural progression in his career.

Powar's association with Assam is not entirely new. He had earlier visited the state with the Mumbai Under-23 squad during the

C. K. Nayudu Trophy, where he interacted closely with officials of the Assam Cricket Association.

Speaking about his appointment, Powar expressed enthusiasm about taking on the new challenge. He said he was impressed by the vision and long-term plans of the Assam Cricket Association during his earlier visit.

"I am delighted to be appointed as Assam Ranji team coach. Really looking forward to working with them," Powar said, highlighting his eagerness to contribute to the team's growth and success.

He also emphasised that his positive experience with the ACA played a crucial role in his decision to accept the role, indicating strong alignment between his coaching philosophy and the association's objectives. As a player, Powar had a solid domestic career, scoring close to 3,500 runs across 71 matches in

first-class and List A cricket. His experience across multiple teams, including Assam, gives him valuable insight into the domestic cricket structure.

In addition to his playing credentials, Powar holds a Level 'B' coaching certification from the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), which adds to his professional coaching qualifications.

He acknowledged the support he received during his tenure with the Mumbai Cricket Association, particularly from its president Ajinkya Naik.

"My sincere thanks to MCA and its president Ajinkya Naik, who backed me when a lot of people were against me," Powar said, expressing gratitude for the faith shown in him. Despite his excitement about the new role, Powar admitted that leaving Mumbai cricket was an emotional decision.

## Real Madrid under pressure as La Liga action resumes

**Madrid:** After a week-end pause for the Copa del Rey final between Real Sociedad and Atletico Madrid, La Liga returns with a mid-week round that, combined with next weekend's fixtures, brings seven consecutive days of top-flight action in Spain.

Tuesday's schedule features four matches with implications at both ends of the table, from the title race and European qualification to the battle against relegation.

Real Madrid returns to the Santiago Bernabeu for the first time since last week's Champions League exit to Bayern Munich.

Madrid faces Deportivo Alaves nine points behind leaders Barcelona with 21 points left to play for, and anything other than a win would all but end the club's slim title hopes.

Coach Alvaro Arbeloa has almost a full squad available, with only Raul Asencio sidelined by a stomach problem. However, with little margin for error and an ex-



pectant home crowd, his side will need to show urgency and intent.

Alaves arrives one point and one place above the relegation zone and could drop into the bottom three if it fails to win and Elche beats Atletico Madrid on Wednesday.

The Vitoria-based side is unbeaten in four matches since Quique Sanchez Flores took charge, including a 3-3 draw away to Real Sociedad, and forwards Toni Martinez and Lucas Boye pose a threat.

Earlier, Athletic Club will host Osasuna in a key match for the home side, which sits six points clear of

the relegation zone. Club president Jon Uriarte returns to the directors' box after being

re-elected unopposed for another four-year term, while Athletic looks to end a run of 15 league games without a clean sheet dating back to December 6 and to see Nico Williams return to form.

Mallorca faces Valencia in another meeting of sides near the bottom. Back-to-back wins have lifted Mallorca to 15th, two points above Elche, while Valencia is one point above its last after consecutive defeats.

## Jack Draper to miss Madrid & Rome tournaments

**London:** Jack Draper has withdrawn from this week's Madrid Open and he will also miss next month's Italian Open because of a knee tendon injury.

The 24-year-old did not play in the Monte Carlo Masters either, and retired from his only clay court match of the season in Barcelona as a result of the problem. That tournament was just the fourth of his comeback from bone bruising, which - bar one match at the US Open - had kept him off the tour since Wimbledon, according to BBC sport.

"An aggravated tendon in my knee means I am not able to play in Madrid and Rome," Draper said.

"It's frustrating for sure, but I am thankful it isn't anything more serious. Recovery is going well and I feel good about my chances of being fit for Roland Gar-

ros. I am looking forward to building momentum from there."

The French Open begins in Paris on May 24, but Draper is considering playing an ATP event in either Hamburg or Geneva the week before.

The 2024 US Open semi-finalist retired from his first round match in Barcelona when trailing Tomas Martin Etcheverry 4-1 in the deciding set. Struggling with his movement, the physio had applied tape to an area below his right knee before the final set began.

He also wore tape on the knee at times in Indian Wells in early March, where he beat Novak Djokovic en route to the quarter-finals.

Draper had a lot of ranking points to defend in Madrid and Rome. He reached his first clay court final in Madrid last year - losing to Casper Ruud - and followed



that with a run to the quarter-finals in Rome.

A total of 850 points will fall from his ranking, and that is likely to see him drop outside the world's top 70. Draper reached a career high of four in June last year, but will now be unseeded for the French Open and most likely for Wimbledon, too.

The former British number one has had a lot of

injuries in his short career. He missed six months of the 2023 season because of a shoulder injury and had hip problems leading into last year. He recovered superbly to win his first Masters 1000 title at Indian Wells, as well as finishing runner-up in Madrid, before bone bruising in his left serving arm allowed him just one singles match post Wimbledon.

His comeback match was on Davis Cup duty for Great Britain in Norway in February. After beating Viktor Durasovic, Draper reflected on how he has managed to cope with so much time away from the sport.

"I've kind of taken a step back from tennis in this period," he told BBC Sport. "Tennis is a bubble, and sometimes you can get distracted that it's all that matters in life. When I have time out, I use it wisely to make sure that when I try and come back to tennis, that I'm ready to go all the way again."

"With Emma Raducanu also missing Madrid to continue her recovery from illness, and Sonay Kartal absent with a back injury, Katie Boulter and Cameron Norrie are the only two British players in the main draw in the Spanish capital.

## Stunners Academy lifts PSPB Baba Deep Singh Basketball Trophy

**New Delhi:** Stunners Academy showcased remarkable grit and skill to clinch the championship title in the women's category at the 5th PSPB Baba Deep Singh Basketball Tournament. The victory cements their reputation as a formidable force in the local basketball circuit, following a highly competitive series of matches that drew talent from across the region.

The championship climax unfolded at the prestigious Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Khalsa College, University of Delhi, which served as the host venue for the final. In a high-stakes encounter, Stunners Academy faced off against a resilient Gargi College team. The game was a point-for-point battle that kept spectators on the edge of their seats until the final whistle.

Stunners Academy eventually edged out their opponents with a final score of 72-67. The narrow five-point margin highlights the defensive intensity and offensive precision maintained by both teams throughout the four quarters, though the champions' superior late-game execution ultimately proved to be the deciding factor.

A standout performance

by Dhanni Dhama was the highlight of the winning team's campaign. Her contributions on both ends of the court were so significant that she earned the rare distinction of a double honor, being named both the Player of the Final Match and the Best Player of the Tournament.

The closing ceremony was graced by a host of prominent figures from the academic and sporting

worlds. The Chief Guest, Prof. Rajni Abbi (Director, South Campus), led the prize distribution ceremony, celebrating the athletes' dedication and the spirit of sportsmanship displayed throughout the event.

Joining the Chief Guest were several key dignitaries who have been instrumental in promoting basketball in the capital. These included Mukesh Kalia,

## Babar ends long wait for T20 century in Zalmi's win

**Lahore:** A resurgent Babar Azam scored his first century in 67 T20 innings in Peshawar Zalmi's thumping 118-run victory over Quetta Gladiators.

Former Pakistan captain Babar's T20 game has come under scrutiny in recent years, no more so than this winter when he scored 91 runs across six matches at the T20 World Cup, according to BBC sport.

He also struggled in this winter's Big Bash - he scored

202 runs at a strike-rate of 103.06 and was retired out in one match - but has found form in the PSL with scores of 87 not out and 71 not earlier in the tournament.

He only faced one dot ball in his knock against Quetta but also hit six fours and four sixes in making exactly 100 not out in 52 balls.

The right-hander reached his 12th T20 hundred and his third in the Pakistan Super League off the final ball of the innings and

roared in delight.

Zalmi's 255-3 was the third-highest total in PSL history. Sri Lanka batter Kusal Mendis also hit 83 from 44 balls. Zalmi continued their dominance throughout the chase by taking wickets throughout. Quetta were 82-7 and limped on until 18.1 overs before being bowled out for 137. The win extends unbeaten Zalmi's lead at the top of the table to five points with two matches to go.

## Ibrahima Konate says he is close to signing new Liverpool deal

**London:** Ibrahima Konate has provided a major boost to Liverpool supporters by confirming he is "close to an agreement" on a new contract, signaling a long-term commitment to the club. Speaking in the wake of Liverpool's recent Merseyside derby victory, the French international addressed the speculation surrounding his future, revealing that a "big chance" exists for him to remain at Anfield beyond the current campaign. With his deal set to expire this summer, the news brings much-needed clarity to the club's defensive planning.

The 26-year-old centre-back, who arrived from RB Leipzig for £35m five years ago, was adamant that his desire to stay has never wavered. He suggested that his intentions were made clear to sporting director Richard Hughes at the very start of the negotiation process. According to Konate, once the paperwork is finalized, the

details of those early conversations in September and November will "make everyone quiet" regarding rumors of a potential departure. Addressing the timeline of the negotiations, Konate noted that while fans might have wanted a resolution sooner, the process is moving in the right direction. He compared the duration of his talks to the high-profile contract situations of Virgil van Dijk and Mohamed Salah from the previous season. By referencing his teammates, he implied that the club's methodical approach to veteran extensions is a standard operating procedure rather than a sign of friction.

The defender's commitment is particularly poignant given the personal and professional sacrifices he has made over the last year. Konate revealed that the current campaign has been a period of significant personal hardship, most notably following the death of his father in France in January. Despite

being granted compassionate leave, Konate volunteered to return to Merseyside early to help alleviate a defensive injury crisis, a gesture that underscores his dedication to the "Liverpool family."

Reflecting on the emotional weight of the season, Konate hinted that there is more to his story than the public currently knows. He spoke of the "sacrifices" he has made for the club, stating that one day he looks forward to sharing these experiences with his future children and the supporters. For now, however, his focus remains strictly on the pitch and ensuring the club finishes a difficult year on the strongest possible footing.

On the field, the season has been a departure from the high standards set during Liverpool's recent title-winning era. Konate, who played a pivotal role in the Reds' Premier League triumph last season and their domestic double in 2022, admitted that

the current campaign has been underwhelming. He was candid in his assessment, noting that simply finishing in the top four would not be considered a success by the players or the fans.

Currently sitting in fifth place, Liverpool holds a seventh-place position in the Premier League, putting them in a strong position to secure Champions League football. However, for a player who has made 113 Premier League appearances and lifted major trophies, the lack of silverware this year is a significant disappointment. Konate stressed that this "bad season" by Liverpool's standards will serve as a primary motivator for the squad to bounce back next year.

The France international's presence in the squad has become increasingly vital as the club undergoes a period of transition. His blend of physicality, recovery pace, and aerial dominance has made him a cornerstone of the Reds' backline.

## Arsenal fans must help team in title hunt: Rooney

**London:** Wayne Rooney, the former Manchester United and England captain, has issued a sharp critique of the Arsenal faithful, suggesting that the fans "need to be better" if the club is to clinch its first Premier League title in over two decades. Speaking on the Wayne Rooney Show, the legendary striker expressed disappointment over the atmosphere at the Emirates Stadium, particularly following the Gunners' recent setbacks in what has become a high-tension title race.

The timing of Rooney's comments follows a significant blow to Arsenal's aspirations. A 2-1 defeat at the hands of Manchester City on Sunday saw their lead at the top of the table shrink dangerously. With City now just three points behind and possessing a game in hand—a midweek fixture against Burnley—the momentum has shifted significantly toward the blue half of Manchester.

Rooney's criticism was primarily triggered by the reaction of the home crowd during Arsenal's 2-1 loss to Bournemouth on April 11. He noted that despite the team's brilliance throughout the majority of the 2026 campaign, some fans chose to boo the players off the pitch. Rooney argued that such reactions are counterproductive during a



Wayne Rooney speaking at a press conference.

"bad run of form" and fail to account for the immense effort players put in daily. According to Rooney, the psychological impact of being booed by one's own supporters cannot be overstated. He emphasized that for a squad to navigate the immense pressure of a title run, the energy from the stands must be unwavering. "The players will have put so much work in day in and day out," Rooney explained, suggesting that negative reinforcement from the crowd can actively derail a player's confidence at the most critical juncture of the season.

The former captain went as far as to say that the fans themselves are a variable in the title race. He asserted that for Arsenal to finally "get over the line," the

supporters must play a more constructive role. This perspective comes as Arsenal has five games remaining to stave off Manchester City's relentless charge and secure a trophy that has eluded them for 22 years. Rooney drew a direct comparison to his former club to illustrate his point. He cited Manchester United's recent history under managers Erik ten Hag and Ruben Amorim, noting that even during periods of extreme difficulty and poor results, the Old Trafford crowd remained "right behind the manager." He highlighted that United fans were constantly singing and rarely resorted to booing, creating a supportive environment despite the lack of on-field success. The contrast, in Rooney's eyes, is startling. He pointed out that Arsenal has been top of the league for almost the entire season and has even progressed to the Champions League semi-finals. For fans to turn on the team after a single loss to Bournemouth, he argues, shows a lack of perspective regarding the team's overall achievements this year.

This sense of fan anxiety is likely rooted in recent history. Arsenal fans are still haunted by the 2022-23 season, where the team sat at the top of the table for a staggering 248 days only to finish second.

BSE Sensex		Nifty 50		Nifty 500		Nifty Next 50		Nifty 100		Nifty Bank		Nifty Midcap 100	
Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change
78,520.30	0.034%	24,364.85	0.046%	22,865.80	-0.016%	70,341.00	0.096%	25,252.90	0.055%	56,582.35	0.029%	59,790.75	-0.18%
Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open
78,493.54	78,632.90	24,353.55	24,391.50	22,869.40	22,906.65	70,273.80	70,342.85	25,238.90	25,275.60	56,565.70	56,704.05	59,898.20	59,898.20
High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
78,942.45	78,203.30	24,480.65	24,241.25	22,987.60	22,717.55	70,813.85	69,522.90	25,379.30	25,096.65	57,085.10	56,356.55	60,261.10	59,420.70

## Top Gainers

Company	Current	% Gain
Trent	4,242.80	3.29
JSW Steel	1,274.50	2.76
SBI	1,107.85	2.55
Asian Paints	2,516.80	2.14
Grasim	2,760.10	1.46

## Top Losers

Company	Current	% Loss
Jio Financial	237.15	-2.75
Hindalco	1,015.25	-2.29
TMPV	355.70	-1.22
Kotak Mahindra	379.20	-1.15
Bharat Elec	457.55	-1.12

## Commodities

Commodity	Price	Change (%)
Gold Jun 05	154,145.00	-464.00 -0.30
Silver May 05	254,200.00	-2,942.00 -1.14
Crudeoil May 18	8,042.00	376.00 4.90
Naturalgas Apr 27	250.00	-0.20 -0.08

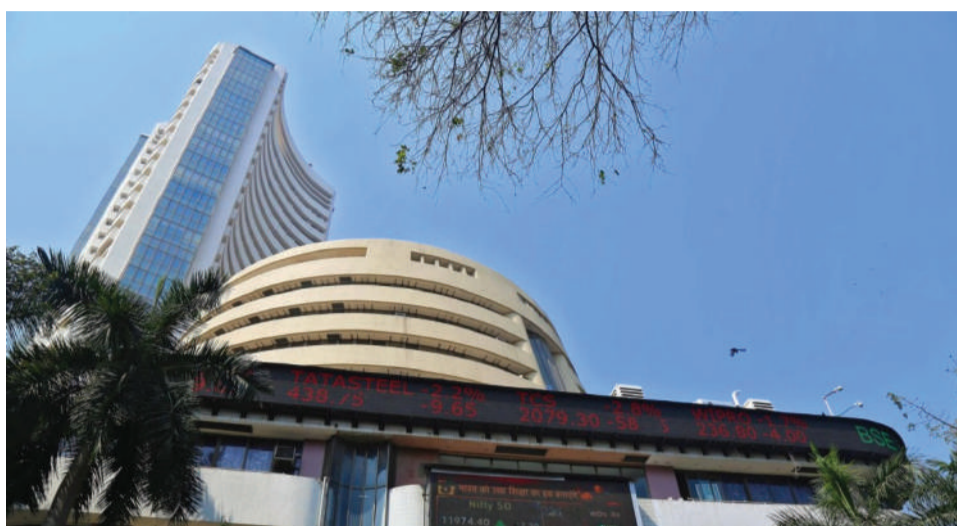
## Sensex ends flat at 78,520, Nifty closes above 24,000

Mumbai : Indian benchmark indices closed with marginal gains on Monday, as index traded with high volatility due to geopolitical tensions that resurfaced over the weekend. At close, the Sensex gained 26.76 points, or 0.03 percent, to settle at 78,520.30, while the Nifty advanced 11.30 points, or 0.05 percent, to close at 24,364.85.

Market participants remained cautious and awaited further developments related to Middle East tensions, while the rise in crude oil prices also kept sentiment restrained.

Sectoral performance remained mixed during the session. Gains were led by Nifty Media, Auto, and Oil & Gas, while Nifty IT, Realty, and Chemicals witnessed weakness, as per Bajaj Broking Market Commentary.

The broader market witness mild profit booking after



recent strong gains, with Nifty Midcap declining 0.18 percent and Nifty Small cap correcting 0.45 percent, indicating subdued risk appetite in the broader market. In terms of Nifty outlook, the index formed a

high wave candlestick pattern with a higher high and a higher low signaling consolidation around the 50 days EMA.

Going ahead index sustaining above last Wednesday gap up area of 23850 will keep the

bias positive and will gradually open upside towards 24,700-24,800 levels being the confluence of the 200 days EMA and the 61.8 percent retracement of the entire decline 26,373 to 22,183.

## Iran has closed Strait of Hormuz completely

New Delhi: Open, closed, closed but open - the Strait of Hormuz has become the center of the ongoing US-Iran conflict and its blockade a key factor in pressure tactics from both sides. The Strait of Hormuz is a critical channel for nearly one-fifth of global oil trade. The result is that economies dependent on the Middle East for energy supplies stare at disruptions and uncertainties.

India is among Asian economies which require ships to transit smoothly through the Strait of Hormuz for its crude, LPG, and LNG needs. Since deciding to restrict access to the vital energy corridor last month during its conflict with the US and Israel, Iran has intermittently allowed Indian vessels to pass through. The Indian-flagged tanker Desh Garima, carrying crude oil, successfully passed through the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday afternoon. However, two other vessels, Sanmar Herald

and Jag Arnav, came under fire from boats of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) while navigating the conflict-hit route and were forced to turn back.

No injuries were reported among the crew.

India summoned Iranian ambassador Mohammad Fathali on Saturday to convey its "deep concern" over the firing incident. During the meeting, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri underlined the importance India places on the safety of merchant vessels and seafarers, while recalling that Iran had earlier ensured secure passage for ships bound for India.

He urged the envoy to communicate India's position to authorities in Tehran and called for the swift restoration of safe transit for Indian-bound ships through the strait. The Ministry of External Affairs said the ambassador agreed to relay these concerns.

## Hyundai launches bold New Venue Knight

Chennai: Hyundai Motor India Limited (HMIL) has officially expanded its popular compact SUV lineup with the launch of the Venue Knight, a bold and dynamic edition designed for customers seeking a commanding road presence. Announced on Monday, April 20, 2026, this new version builds on the substantial success of Hyundai's "Knight" range, which has sold over 92,000 units since its initial debut in 2022.

The Venue Knight is defined by its "enigmatic allure of black," featuring a series of exclusive design enhancements.

The exterior boasts a black-painted front grille, matte black Hyundai logos, black skid plates, roof rails, and ORVMs. Complementing these dark aesthetics are 16-inch black alloy wheels accented by sporty red brake calipers and exclusive Knight badging, ensuring the vehicle stands out with a

distinctive visual identity. Inside, the cabin continues the premium theme with an all-black interior set against sophisticated brass-colored inlays.

These brass accents are thoughtfully placed on the steering wheel, air conditioning vents, and climate control buttons. To further distinguish the Knight edition, Hyundai has included exclusive seat upholstery with brass-colored stitching, creating a refined atmosphere for both driver and passengers.

Amit Dhaundiyal, HMIL's Head of Product Strategy and Planning, emphasized that the Venue Knight is a "bold expression of style and individuality." He noted that the curated elements, from the blacked-out exterior to the premium interior highlights, are designed to resonate with the evolving aspirations of Indian customers who want their vehicles to be a reflection of their

personal style.

In addition to the Knight edition, Hyundai has introduced significant updates across the broader Venue lineup. Select variants now come equipped with a factory-fitted dual-camera dashcam, a feature that supports multiple recording modes—including driving, event-based recording, and on-demand video capture. This addition addresses growing consumer demand for enhanced safety and modern tech integration in the compact SUV segment.

The refresh also includes the introduction of two new matte exterior color options: Hazel Blue Matte and Mystic Sapphire Matte. These additions provide even more variety for buyers looking for a unique finish, further strengthening the Venue's position in a highly competitive market where it currently maintains a strong monthly sales average of 10,000 to 11,000 units.

## Banking sector to see 9-13% industrial credit growth in Jan-June period: Survey

New Delhi: The Indian banking sector is poised for a period of robust expansion in the first half of 2026, according to the latest survey conducted by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in collaboration with the Indian Banks' Association (IBA). The report projects that industrial credit growth will likely range between 9 and 13 percent during the January-June period, signaling a healthy appetite for investment across the economy.

This anticipated growth is underpinned by a broader macroeconomic recovery, characterized by a steady expansion across multiple sectors. Experts believe this trend is being significantly fueled by an ongoing revival in capital expenditure, a persistent push for infrastructure development by both public and private entities, and a widespread recovery in sectoral demand that is per-

meating various industries.

The survey provides a detailed breakdown of these expectations by categorizing them according to the type of banking institution. For instance, small finance banks and cooperative banks are adopting a more cautious stance, with their industrial credit growth largely expected to fall within the 7 to 9 percent range. This reflects a conservative outlook, likely influenced by their specific business models.

Public-sector banks, in contrast, are exhibiting much stronger confidence. Their outlook is skewed toward the higher end of the growth bands, a sentiment anchored by significant structural improvements. These institutions are benefiting from markedly better asset quality, significantly strengthened capital buffers, and a sustained increase in corporate lending traction as the broader economy witnesses a resurgence in capi-

tal investment.

Foreign banks operating within India are maintaining a tone of moderate optimism, with their growth expectations projected in the 11 to 13 percent range. This outlook is primarily shaped by international factors, including global liquidity conditions, strategic capital allocation priorities, and a more selective approach to participating in the domestic corporate credit markets.

The report emphasizes that the variation in growth expectations is a direct result of the diverse portfolios held by these institutions. While larger banks are leaning into the industrial credit boom, smaller finance and cooperative banks remain focused on their core competencies, specifically retail and MSME lending, which inherently limits their exposure to the fluctuations of large-scale industrial borrowing.

Beyond industrial credit,

the survey paints a highly optimistic picture for retail loan growth, with financial institutions expressing strong expectations for high double-digit expansion. This suggests that consumer confidence remains resilient, driving demand for personal, housing, and vehicle loans, which continue to serve as a bedrock for banking sector revenue.

Agriculture and its allied sectors are also expected to maintain a steady growth trajectory. The survey anticipates credit growth in this segment to be between 9 and 13 percent for the first half of 2026, supported by favorable seasonal conditions and sustained government focus on rural credit accessibility and technological adoption in farming.

The infrastructure sector is emerging as a critical driver of term loan demand. Areas such as power, road construction, and telecommunications are ex-

pected to witness high growth in the coming six months. These sectors require significant long-term capital infusion, and banks are positioning themselves to capitalize on these massive capital-intensive projects.

Following infrastructure, the metals, iron and steel, and real estate and construction sectors are also expected to see significant borrowing activity. As the housing market stabilizes and urban development initiatives continue to gather pace, the demand for construction finance is anticipated to rise accordingly, contributing to overall credit off-take.

Furthermore, the auto and auto components industry, alongside pharmaceuticals, textiles, and engineering goods, feature prominently among the sectors where bankers anticipate increased borrowing activity.

## 'A win-win for both nations!' Three-day India-US trade talks to begin this week

New Delhi: India and the United States are set to resume trade talks this week, taking a "great step to finalize" the proposed agreement. Taking to social media platform X, US Ambassador to India Sergio Gora said "The Indian trade delegation will be arriving in Washington this week. A great step to finalize our bilateral trade deal. A win-win for both nations!"

This week, a delegation of around a dozen officials will be travelling from New

Delhi to Washington for discussions on the first phase of the proposed bilateral trade agreement (BTA). The talks are scheduled from April 20 to 22 and will be led by India's chief negotiator Darpan Jain, additional secretary in the department of commerce. The team will also include officials from the customs department and the ministry of external affairs.

The negotiations come against the backdrop of recent changes in the US tariff system, prompting both

sides to revisit parts of the trade agreement finalised earlier this year and released on February 7.

A key development was the US Supreme Court striking down reciprocal tariffs imposed under the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act. Following this, the US administration introduced a temporary flat 10% tariff on all countries for 150 days from February 24. These changes led to the postponement of a planned February

meeting between the chief negotiators. The rescheduled talks in Washington will now proceed under the revised tariff framework.

Alongside tariff issues, the discussions are also expected to cover two investigations initiated by the US Trade Representative under Section 301 of its trade law. India has refuted the allegations and is seeking withdrawal of the probes, arguing that the initiation notices do not provide adequate justification.

## Adani incorporates subsidiary for nuclear power venture

Mumbai: The Indian banking sector is poised for a period of robust expansion in the first half of 2026, according to the latest survey conducted by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in collaboration with the Indian Banks' Association (IBA). The report projects that industrial credit growth will likely range between 9 and 13 percent during the January-June period, signaling a healthy appetite for investment across the economy.

This anticipated growth is underpinned by a broader macroeconomic recovery, characterized by a steady expansion across multiple sectors. Experts believe this trend is being significantly fueled by an ongoing revival in capital expenditure, a persistent push for infrastructure development by both public and private entities, and a widespread recovery in sectoral demand that is permeating various industries.

The survey provides a detailed breakdown of these expectations by categorizing them according to the type of banking institution. For instance, small finance banks and cooperative banks are adopting a more cautious

stance, with their industrial credit growth largely expected to fall within the 7 to 9 percent range. This reflects a conservative outlook, likely influenced by their specific business models. Public-sector banks, in contrast, are exhibiting much stronger confidence. Their outlook is



skewed toward the higher end of the growth bands, a sentiment anchored by significant structural improvements. These institutions are benefiting from markedly better asset quality, significantly strengthened capital buffers, and a sustained increase in corporate lending traction as the broader economy witnesses a resurgence in capital investment. Foreign banks operating within India are maintaining a tone

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in the domestic corporate credit markets. The report emphasizes that the variation in growth expectations is a direct result of the diverse portfolios held by these institutions. While larger banks are leaning into the industrial credit boom, smaller finance and cooperative banks remain focused on their core competencies, specifically retail and MSME lending, which inherently limits their exposure to the fluctuations

of large-scale industrial borrowing. Beyond industrial credit, the survey paints a highly optimistic picture for retail loan growth, with financial institutions expressing strong expectations for high double-digit expansion. This suggests that consumer confidence remains resilient, driving demand for personal, housing, and vehicle loans, which continue to serve as a bedrock for banking sector revenue. Agriculture and its allied sectors are also expected to maintain a steady growth trajectory. The survey anticipates credit growth in this segment to be between 9 and 13 percent for the first half of 2026, supported by favorable seasonal conditions and sustained government focus on rural credit accessibility and technological adoption in farming. The infrastructure sector is emerging as a critical driver of term loan demand. Areas such as power, road construction, and telecommunications are expected to witness high growth in the coming six months. These sectors require significant long-term capital infusion, and banks are positioning themselves to capitalize on these massive capital-intensive projects.

## T&amp;D sector to remain strong, supported by Rs 9 lakh crore capex push

New Delhi: In upcoming years, India's transmission and distribution (T&D) sector is expected to see steady growth, lifted by investment of almost Rs 9 trillion or Rs 9 lakh crore through 2032.

According to a report by Motilal Oswal Financial Services, the current investment cycle, which began in FY22-23, has already improved performance across the sector.

It noted that "the transmission and distribution (T&D) value chain... continues to benefit from a robust capex outlay of INR9t until 2032," leading to "sharp growth in order books, revenue, and the margin profiles for industry participants."

However, the brokerage house flagged that new project orders have slowed down in FY26.

The report said "sector-level ordering was weaker in FY26 (16 schemes awarded) versus FY25 (45 schemes awarded), primarily due to temporary bandwidth constraints rather than any structural demand slowdown."

"It added that currently, local producers are focusing more on high-voltage transformers that "involve longer manufacturing cycles and testing timelines," causing delays in deliveries.

Even with this, the report remains positive about the sector. It stated "there remains room for the cycle to continue over the next couple of years," helped by

capacity expansion and strong demand from both India and overseas markets.

It also highlighted India's National Electricity Plan, which includes an "ambitious investment plan of ~INR9t in transmission."

This is mainly driven by the need to add more renewable energy and has already led to a "structural acceleration in orders over the past few years."

Meanwhile, the demand continues to stay strong.

The report noted that "demand continues to remain strong from both domestic and export markets while transformer supply has struggled to keep pace," leading to longer waiting times and better conditions for manufacturers.