



# Aryan Age

The Age of Truth

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## Operation Sindoor Marked as Global "Gold Standard" on Its First Anniversary

**Jaipur** : India on Thursday celebrated the first anniversary of Operation Sindoor, hailing it as a military and strategic "gold standard" that has fundamentally redefined the nation's counter-terror doctrine. At a high-level briefing in Jaipur, former DGMO Lt Gen Rajiv Ghai described the May 7, 2025, tri-service operation as a defining moment in India's strategic journey. The mission was a direct response to the Pahalgam terror attack,

which claimed 26 civilian lives. Under clear political direction and with complete operational flexibility, the Indian armed forces executed nine stand-off precision strikes—seven by the Army and two by the Air Force—targeting terror hubs not only in Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir but deep within heartland Pakistan.



The operations showcased a "whole-of-government" approach, involving seamless coordination between the military, intelligence agencies, cyber units, and the BSF. Lt Gen Ghai emphasized that the strikes achieved total surprise and maximum damage while maintaining strict escalation control.

India's air defense successfully like the BrahMos and Akash missiles proving that "Atmanirbhar Bharat" is a potent force multiplier. Hostilities ceased only after India achieved its specific military objectives and compelled Pakistan to negotiate.

Adding to the strategic assessment, Deputy Chief of Air Staff Air Marshal A.K. Bharti and Vice Admiral A.N. Pramod emphasized that the operation projected India's resolve into the enemy's heartland. The Navy's rapid deployment of carrier battle groups and submarines in the northern Arabian Sea forced Pakistani naval units into a defensive posture. By striking the heart of Pakistan with long-range weapons, India effectively called the bluff on nuclear blackmail. The leadership warned that while India seeks peace, it remains prepared for "sustained overmatch" in the future, with a continued focus on jointness, indigenisation, and information dominance.

## India Expedites S-400 Induction and Indigenous Shield Post-Operation Sindoor



**Jaipur** : On the first anniversary of Operation Sindoor, the Indian Air Force confirmed it is fast-tracking the induction of remaining S-400 air defense units to stay ahead of evolving threats from Pakistan and China. Deputy Chief of Air Staff Air Marshal A.K. Bharti stated in Jaipur that pending deliveries of the Russian-origin system are now "fetching in." This urgency stems from the S-400's performance during last year's conflict, where it was described as a "game-changer" for its ability to keep Pakistani aircraft at bay and prevent the use of long-range glide bombs. The system was credited with enabling the IAF to record a surface-to-air kill at a distance exceeding 300 kilometers.

Alongside foreign acquisitions, India is aggressively pushing for indigenous alternatives to reduce external dependency. The DRDO is currently developing the "KUSHA" long-range air defense system, which is expected to be available in the near future. Air Marshal Bharti also highlighted the continued progress of the "ASTRA" indigenous air-to-

air missile. He noted that while many defense upgrades remain classified, the military is conducting constant "environmental scans" to ensure India maintains a technological edge over its adversaries. The focus remains on an integrated air defense architecture that combines both global platforms and home-grown innovation. Air Marshal Bharti also took the opportunity to firmly dismiss Pakistani claims of inflicting heavy damage on Indian assets during the 2025 conflict. He asserted that India's Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS) successfully neutralized incoming munitions and missiles, leaving Indian military and civilian infrastructure untouched. Contrasting this with "hard facts," Bharti noted that India successfully decimated nine terrorist camps and struck 11 Pakistani airfields during the operation. He concluded that the destruction of 13 Pakistani aircraft, including a high-value airborne asset, stands as the ground reality of the mission's success, regardless of opposing narratives.

## Congress demands Kargil-style review as questions persist over Operation Sindoor

**New Delhi** : On the first anniversary of Operation Sindoor, the Congress party has intensified its demand for accountability, with senior leader Jairam Ramesh raising critical questions about the operation's diplomatic and strategic consequences. While saluting the courage of the armed forces, Ramesh highlighted several unresolved issues, including the unexpected ceasefire announced on May 10, 2025. He pointed out that the first news of the truce came from US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who credited President Donald Trump's intervention. Ramesh noted that Trump has repeatedly made this claim internationally without a public contradiction from Prime Minister Narendra

Modi. He also referenced comments by Chief of Defence Staff Anil Chauhan, who admitted that India faced



initial tactical setbacks before regrouping for precision strikes deep within Pakistan.

Further concerns were raised regarding political constraints. Ramesh cited India's Defence Attache in Indonesia, who reportedly acknowledged that aircraft were lost on May 7, 2025, due to limitations imposed by the

political leadership. Additionally, he mentioned Deputy Chief of Army Staff Rahul Singh's remarks about China's deep involvement in supporting Pakistan with military supplies and satellite imagery. Ramesh accused the Modi government of "calibrated capitulation" toward China by easing investment restrictions despite ongoing border issues. He argued that post-operation diplomacy failed to isolate Pakistan, noting that General Asim Munir has since received significant engagement from the US. Drawing a parallel to the Kargil Review Committee, the Congress party is calling for a similar high-level institutional review to be tabled in Parliament to ensure strategic transparency.



**Bengaluru** : Former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda on Thursday said India, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, had sent a "clear message" to every threat confronting the nation through Operation Sindoor. Marking one year of the operation, the Janata Dal (Secular) patriarch said the mission showcased India's determination to defend its sovereignty with "strength, unity, and resolve."

"Under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi avaru, India sent a clear message that our nation will respond to every challenge with strength, unity, and determination," Deve Gowda said in a series of

## Under PM Modi, India sent clear message to every threat: Deve Gowda



posts on X. He described "Operation Sindoor" as more than a military exercise, calling it "a reflection of the courage of our armed forces, the resilience of our people, and the collective resolve of a strong nation." The former Prime Minister said the operation reaffirmed that "India stands united and unshaken against every threat to its sovereignty and peace."

Paying tribute to the armed forces, Deve Gowda said he bowed "with deep respect to every braveheart who safeguards our motherland with unmatched sacrifice and discipline." He also called upon citizens to continue working towards a "stronger, safer, and united Bharat." Deve Gowda concluded his remarks with "Jai Hind" and the hashtag "Operation Sindoor."

## PM Modi to visit Bengaluru on May 10

**Bengaluru** : Prime Minister Narendra Modi will arrive in Bengaluru on May 10 and address a public gathering at the HAL airport for about 30 minutes. Leader of the Opposition in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly R Ashoka said on Thursday. Speaking to reporters here, Ashoka said a felicitation programme is being organised on behalf of the people of Bengaluru to honour the Prime Minister during his visit. He said the event is being planned in a grand and orderly manner, with open participation from citizens. According to the schedule, the Prime Minister will land at HAL Airport Bengaluru at 9 am, where he will be received by party leaders and officials. He is expected to address the gathering shortly after arrival. Ashoka said the visit is significant in the backdrop of recent political developments and electoral outcomes, adding that preparations are underway to ensure large public participation. He also appealed to citizens to participate in the felicitation programme in large numbers. Further details on security arrangements and event logistics are expected to be released by the administration closer to the visit.

## Vijay's pre-poll power sharing bait triggers post-poll political realignment for the first time in TN history

**Chennai** : The political landscape of Tamil Nadu has been fundamentally altered following the recent Assembly elections, as actor-politician Vijay and his nascent Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) successfully forced the state's first-ever post-poll realignment. Initially dismissed as a "political novice," Vijay's pre-poll offer to share power in a coalition government proved to be a masterstroke. Although the TVK emerged as the single largest party with 108 seats, it fell 11 seats short of a simple majority in the 234-member house. This fractured mandate

ended decades of single-party dominance and triggered a sudden shift in alliances that has left the DMK-led front flummoxed. The most dramatic development came just two days after the results, when the Congress abruptly ended its ten-year partnership with the DMK. Enticed by the prospect of a cabinet presence for the first time since 1967, the Congress pledged the support of its five newly-elected MLAs to Vijay. This move was a direct response to Vijay's "power-sharing bait," a concept long considered anathema to major Dravidian



parties. The realignment marks a departure from the 2006 hung assembly scenario, where the Congress supported the DMK from the outside without demanding a share in the cabinet.

Currently, Vijay—who technically holds 107 seats after winning two constituencies—needs six more MLAs to reach the halfway mark of 118. All eyes are now on other former DMK allies, including Thol Thirumavalavan's VCK and the Left parties (CPI and CPM), who are expected to announce their stance by Friday. Meanwhile, the AIADMK, led by Edappadi K. Palaniswami, has officially ruled out supporting the TVK despite finishing a distant third. This shift not only ended M.K. Stalin's 25-year winning streak in his Kolathur stronghold but also signaled the potential birth of a permanent coalition era in Tamil Nadu politics.

## Oath ceremony for new Bengal CM on May 9 at Brigade

### BJP holds key talks with chief secretary

**Kolkata** : BJP state president Samik Bhattacharya said that the oath-taking ceremony of the new chief minister will take place on May 9 at Brigade Parade Ground, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah will be present.

"The oath-taking ceremony will take place at Brigade Parade Ground on May 9. Preparations are underway for a smooth and dignified swearing-in ceremony, and we are coordinating closely with the administration to ensure everything is in place," Bhattacharya said.

Bhattacharya, along with BJP's central observer for the state Sunil Bansal, Jyotirmoy Singh Mahato, and Soumitra Khan, met Chief Secretary Dushyant Nariwala on Tuesday evening to discuss arrangements for the event. A meeting of BJP MLAs has been scheduled for May 8, where the leadership is expected to finalise key decisions ahead of the swearing-in.

Though there have been growing speculations over the BJP's first chief ministerial face in the state, the state BJP president refused to make any comment on it.

However, before entering the state secretariat at Nabanna, the BJP state president asserted that post-poll violence would not be tolerated and reiterated the party's firm stance against what he termed the "Trinamoolisation" of the BJP.

Addressing the media, Bhattacharya said, "This is largely a fight between Trinamool and Trinamool. Some people are carrying the BJP's flag and doing all these things. This will not be tolerated, switching sides from the Trinamool Congress to the BJP in the wake of the election results would not be accommodated in the party." "We will not allow opportunistic entrants to dilute the ideology and legacy of the BJP. The party has been built through decades of hard work and

sacrifice," he said. "If any BJP worker or a leader is found resorting to violence, he will be thrown out of the party. I, being the state president, have the authority to do so, and if I can't, I shall step down. Give me names and photographs, and I shall take action," he added.

However, the state BJP president has made it clear that the party is not in power now. "We are yet to take responsibility. This is a buffering period, and the Election Commission and the Governor will have to take the responsibility," he said.

Bhattacharya also alleged that BJP workers had been targeted in the aftermath of the election results and claimed that at least two party members had lost their lives. He maintained that the party does not support violence under any circumstances and had already urged the state administration to take strict action to maintain law and order.

## 11 Indian ships exit Strait of Hormuz, 13 still await clearance

**New Delhi** : India on Thursday said that 11 Indian ships have successfully exited the Strait of Hormuz, while 13 vessels remain in the Persian Gulf as New Delhi continues talks with Tehran to facilitate their safe passage amid heightened regional tensions.

"We have seen forward movement and, as a result of diplomatic engagement and conversations with the Iranian side, 11 Indian ships have so far exited the Strait of Hormuz. Thirteen ships continue to remain in the Persian Gulf, and we are in touch with the Iranian authorities to ensure that the remaining vessels are also able to cross the Strait of Hormuz and reach India,

which is their destination," Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said during a media briefing.

Responding to questions regarding Iranian vessels and maritime access, Jaiswal said ships from other countries do not require permission to operate in international waters.

"If ships of other countries want to ply in international waters, no permission is required... But to your specific question about whether they want to come into Indian waters, this is something that the Ministry of Shipping or the relevant technical authorities would be able to answer," he said.

The remarks come as Iran has reportedly introduced a new set of

rules for ships seeking to transit through the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz, a key global



energy and shipping chokepoint. Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump announced that the US military operation facilitating ship movement through the Strait of Hormuz would be temporarily

paused following what he described as progress in negotiations with Iran and a



request from Pakistan. In a post on his Truth Social platform, Trump said, "Based on the request of Pakistan and other countries, the tremendous Military Success that we have had

been made toward a Complete and Final Agreement with Representatives of Iran, we have mutually agreed that, while the Blockade will remain in full force and effect, Project Freedom (The



Movement of Ships through the Strait of Hormuz) will be paused for a short period of time to see whether or not the Agreement can be finalized and signed."

The UK's Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) organisation said the threat in the Strait of Hormuz is at a critical level after a series of attacks in the last 48 hours. The report comes as US "naval units transiting the Strait of Hormuz repelled various threats" yesterday and today, the organisation said.

It noted that there have been "navigation interference, blockade enforcement, mine reports, residual kinetic risk" and "risk of attack or miscalculation in

the Strait of Hormuz".

The Gulf of Oman was also given a "critical" assessment. UKMTO said it was due to "historical projectile/UAV strikes", referring to unmanned aerial vehicles or drones, and because armed "naval presence remains high".

Commercial traffic through the strait has collapsed to just five transits on May 4 and six on May 3, against a historical daily average of 138.

"The operating environment remains high risk based upon recent attacks on ships in the area. Multiple instances of aggressive hailing and assertive action by Iranian units have been noted in the last 48 hours.



## Akhilesh questions security arrangements during Assembly elections

**Kolkata:** Samajwadi Party chief and former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Akhilesh Yadav, who landed at the Kolkata airport on Thursday, alleged that Home Minister Amit Shah and the Election Commission had failed to ensure safety and security in West Bengal. Reacting to the killing of BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari's personal assistant Chandranath Rath, he asked, "Who is responsible for the death of someone? Who is responsible when political workers are mistreated or when party offices of the Trinamool Congress are set on fire? The presence of 3,00,000 central forces in Bengal had failed to ensure that the stage remained free from post-poll violence."



Yadav said.

He stressed that it was the mandate of the Election Commission of India (ECI) and Home Minister Amit

Shah to ensure that peace prevailed after the elections.

On Wednesday night, the close aide of BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari, Chandranath Rath, died after being

shot minutes away from his home. Unidentified miscreants used a car to block the path of his SUV and opened

fire on Rath and his driver in Madhyamgram, North 24 Parganas, before fleeing the area on bikes. Rath's driver, who also sustained gunshot wounds, is admitted to a private hospital off EM Bypass for treatment.

The killing came days after Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) electoral win in Bengal. The party won 207 out of the 293 assembly seats. Repolls are scheduled in one assembly constituency, Falta, on May 21.

Yadav was received at the airport by senior Trinamool Congress functionaries, including Derek O'Brien. He is scheduled to meet Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee later in the day.

## Shivraj calls for focus on quality, exports to boost India's fruit market globally

**Lucknow:** Union Minister of Agriculture, Farmers Welfare and Rural Development, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, clearly stated that increasing production alone will no longer suffice.

"To establish India's strong presence in the global fruit market, serious work will be required on quality, shelf life, processing, logistics, and export standards," he stressed.

Speaking at "Fruit Horizon 2026" held at the ICAR-Central Institute of Subtropical Horticulture (CISH) in Lucknow on Thursday, the union minister emphasized that farming cannot be confined to the farm; the need of the hour is to strengthen the entire value chain, from production to processing, marketing, and export.

At this important event, while directly interacting with farmers and all stakeholders involved in fruit production and export, the union Agriculture Minister stated that improving fruit quality is paramount if India wants to advance in the global fruit market. He clarified that special attention must now be paid to increasing shelf life, maintaining quality during

export, and meeting international standards.

At the event, chaired by union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, it was decided that ICAR scientific institutes, exporters, APEDA, and other relevant agencies would jointly form a task force. This task force will work to address the problems faced by producers and exporters and develop an effective and timely action plan to ensure concrete steps can be taken to increase farmers' income.

Union Minister stated that, in light of the needs of farmers, the Government of India has decided to specifically strengthen Uttar Pradesh under the Clean Planting Material Program. In this regard, a modern Clean Plant Center is being established at CISH, Lucknow, where disease-free and breed-pure planting material for fruit crops such as mango, guava, litchi, and avocado will be prepared and preserved.

Chouhan stated that to make India competitive in the global market, special attention must be paid to the production of "zero rejection" and premium quality

fruits. He stated that the Indian horticulture sector can be elevated to new heights by developing modern technology, improved post-harvest management, packhouses, processing facilities, and practical SOPs for export.

Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan emphasized the crucial role of FPOs, FPCs, and self-help groups in connecting small farmers to better markets and exports. The event also highlighted that several export-oriented clusters are being developed by the National Horticulture Board, and that the development of modern radiation and integrated post-harvest facilities in Uttar Pradesh, especially the initiative associated with Jewar Airport, will be a significant step in this direction.

Participants from various states, including farmers, scientists, exporters, nursery operators, FPOs, representatives from the fruit processing sector, and various organizations, attended the event. Several senior officials and scientists, including Uttar Pradesh Ministers Surya Pratap Shahi and Dinesh Pratap Singh, were also present.

## Myanmar-Based Kuki Militants Attack Manipur villages; Houses Burnt, MLA Calls It 'External Aggression'

**Imphal:** Suspected Myanmar-based Kuki militants launched coordinated attacks on several Tangkhul Naga villages in Manipur's Kamjong district along the Indo-Myanmar border on Thursday morning, torching houses and forcing villagers to flee into nearby forests, according to the villagers and the local MLA.

The attack reportedly took place at Namlee, Wanglee, Ashang Khullen and Choro villages under Kasom Khullen Police Station in Kamjong district. The affected villages are located near the Indo-Myanmar border.

There are no police personnel in the border area and only Assam Rifles personnel are stationed protecting the international boundary.

According to the villagers, heavily armed militants opened fire and set multiple houses ablaze during the assault. Two houses were reportedly burnt at Namlee, three to four houses at Wanglee, while nearly the entire Choro village, was reduced to ashes.

At least one elderly woman sustained bullet injuries on her left thigh while attempting to escape the vio-

lence. Villagers, including women, children and elderly persons, reportedly fled into dense forest areas and surrounding hills to save their lives.

Fresh visuals and reports emerging from the area later in the day showed several houses engulfed in flames while displaced villagers were seen taking shelter in forested areas amid continued tension in the border belt. Security forces, including personnel of the Assam Rifles, later reached the affected villages to assess the situation and strengthen deployment in vulnerable stretches along the Indo-Myanmar border.

Phungyar MLA Leishiy Keishing alleged that the attack was carried out by Myanmar-based militant groups belonging to the Kuki National Army-Burma (KNA-B) and the People's Defence Force (PDF).

Speaking to reporters, the Naga People's Front legislator said, "So far the state had been seeing internal conflicts but today there has been external aggression. A combined force of Kuki National Army-B and Peoples' Defence Force attacked four to five border villages today

." He further stated that although no fatalities had been confirmed, two persons, including a woman, remained untraceable following the attack.

"Eye witness accounts said the two of them have been taken away by the armed militants," he alleged.

Calling the incident a serious cross-border security breach, Keishing said both the State and Central governments should not remain silent as "the attack came from across the Indian border."

The MLA also alleged absence of adequate state security presence in the area and criticised the Assam Rifles for allegedly failing to protect the border villages.

"There is no presence of Manipur police at the area even to witness an incident," he said. Meanwhile, the Tangkhul Aze Katamnoo Long (TAKL), also known as the Southern Tangkhul Students' Union, strongly condemned the attacks and expressed "extreme urgency and outrage" over what it described as assaults on indigenous Tangkhul Naga border communities by alleged Kuki narco-terrorists operating under KNA-B.

## College donor registration saves Bengaluru thalassaemia patient

**Bengaluru:** He signed up at a college donor drive without giving it much thought. Years later, that simple decision turned him into the life-saving match for a 12-year-old girl battling thalassaemia.

Ahead of World Thalassaemia Day, DKMS Foundation India reunited 27-year-old IT professional Dilip K. from Kolar, Karnataka, with Sameeksha, the young girl whose life he helped save through stem cell donation — a meeting filled with emotion, gratitude and hope.

The reunion also marked the launch of DKMS Foundation India's new initiative offering free HLA typing for all children below 12 years suffering from transfusion-dependent thalassaemia across India.

Dilip had registered as a potential stem cell donor during a college awareness campaign years ago, never imagining that a cheek swab taken during a routine drive would one day connect him to a child waiting for a second chance at life.

"I didn't think much of it when I registered. Until now, she was just a match on paper. Meeting her today

makes everything real," Dilip said after meeting Sameeksha for the first time.

For Sameeksha's family, the journey had been marked by years of uncertainty, hospital visits and dependence on regular blood transfusions after she was diagnosed with beta thalassaemia major at a very young age.

Doctors said a stem cell transplant was her only curative option, but finding a matched unrelated donor remained one of the toughest challenges.

"When Sameeksha first came to us, she was just a few months old, too young to understand what lay ahead, yet full of a spirit that was evident to everyone caring for her," said Dr Siddhesh Kalantri, consultant Haematologist and Stem Cell Transplant Physician at BloodCare Hematology Centre and Diagnostic Centre. "A stem cell transplant remained her only curative option."

Finding a matched unrelated donor for a child is never guaranteed, and when Dilip's match came through, it was a moment of immense relief for our entire team," he added.

## KTR condemns attack on Gangula Kamalakar's camp office, slams Bandi Sanjay

**Hyderabad:** Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS) Working President K T Rama Rao on Thursday strongly condemned the attack on the camp office of Karimnagar BRS MLA Gangula Kamalakar and alleged that followers of union Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar were behind the incident.

In a post on social media platform X, KTR said the attack also targeted BRS MLA Padi Kaushik Reddy and described the incident as a "despicable act." He said he had spoken to Kaushik Reddy immediately after the attack. KTR alleged that the attackers stormed into the camp of-



he allegedly lacked answers to questions raised by BRS leaders. He further alleged that the union Minister was acting as a "B-team" for Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy and had failed to address the issues of Karimnagar people.

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## Without Muslim votes, Cong is garbage: LoP Narayanaswamy

**Bengaluru:** Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Legislative Council Chalavadi Narayanaswamy on Thursday sparked a political controversy by alleging that the Congress party survives solely on Muslim support and would become politically irrelevant without minority votes.

"Without Muslim votes, Congress is equal to garbage dumped in a pit," Narayanaswamy said while addressing mediapersons at the BJP state headquarters Jagannath Bhavan here.

The BJP leader claimed that the results of the recent Assembly elections in five states had exposed what he termed as Congress's growing dependence on Muslim voters.

Referring to the electoral outcome in Assam, he alleged that out of the 19 Congress MLAs elected, only one belonged to the Scheduled Castes while the rest were Muslims.

"Congress has been misleading Muslims by constantly projecting fear of the BJP. Muslims are being used as a vote bank. Without Muslim support, Congress has no political existence," he charged.

Narayanaswamy asserted that Scheduled Castes, backward communi-

ties and "Ahinda" sections were increasingly backing the BJP under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Modi himself comes from a backward class community. For 25 years he has remained undefeated electorally and has worked tirelessly without taking leave. Ahinda communities across the country are supporting the BJP because of his leadership," he said.

Targeting self-proclaimed "Ahinda leaders" in Karnataka, he alleged that such leaders had failed to provide adequate political representation to backward and marginalised communities during elections.

Narayanaswamy also mocked the Congress party's political situation in Tamil Nadu, claiming that despite being aligned with the DMK, the party was now seeking political space from actor-politician Vijay and his TVK party after its growing electoral prominence.

"The condition of a national party like Congress has become pitiable. Congress leaders are now begging before others for political survival and ministerial positions," he alleged.

Claiming that the BJP had secured "unprecedented victories" in the recent

assembly elections, Narayanaswamy said people in West Bengal had suffered under the rule of the TMC government and were now placing their trust in Prime Minister Modi.

He alleged that women in West Bengal were approaching BJP legislators seeking protection and claimed that people had experienced "hell-like conditions" under the rule of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

"If BJP had not won this time, imagine what would have happened to the people there," he remarked.

The BJP leader further said the party had received strong public support in Assam and Puducherry, while its vote share had expanded in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Mocking the Congress-led UDF alliance in Kerala, he termed it a "khihdi party" made up of fragmented political outfits.

Turning his attention to Karnataka civic administration, Narayanaswamy questioned the state government's financial management and asked how it intended to conduct the proposed Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) elections while claiming there was no money available.

## Plea filed in Madras HC seeking filing of FIR, and probe under PMLA against him

**Chennai:** As confusion continued over his coronation as the next Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, a writ petition was filed in the Madras High Court seeking to register a (FIR) and order a probe against (TVK) Founder and actor-politician Vijay for alleged money laundering charges over the 2015 (IT) dispute case over the film "Puli".

The plea sought filing of FIR against him on the basis of the IT proceedings initiated after the release of the film for alleged suppression of income, receipt of unaccounted cash remuneration and concealing financial transactions. The petition, filed by one M Rajkumar, a resident of Kodungaiyur in Chennai city—also seeking a direction to the IT department to place all the materials before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to ascertain

whether any offence was also committed under the (PMLA)—was numbered by the High Court Registry and it was expected to be listed soon under the caption "For Maintainability". Though the petition was filed on March 18 this year, it was not numbered following which the First Bench comprising Chief Justice S A Dharmadhikari and Justice G Arul Murugan had on April 8 directed the Registry to nuber it, subject to maintainability. The issue pertained to the seizure of some incriminating documents during searches conducted by the IT department on Vijay's premises on September 30, 2025. As per the seized documents, Vijay had received Rs 4.93 crore in cash, besides Rs 16 crore remuneration through cheques from iP T Selvakumar Shibu of SKT studios, the producers of the film. Though the producers deposited the TDS for the cheque amount, it did not

do so in respect of the cash component. Later Vijay admitted to receiving Rs five crore in cash and agreed to pay the requisite tax on it and categorically told the IT officials that he had not received any other unaccounted money for the past six years. In a bid to settle the issue amicably, Vijay agreed to disclose the additional Rs 15 crore, including the cash transaction of Rs five crore, for the financial year 2015-16 and pay the necessary tax and subsequently in July 2016 in the IT returns for the assessment year 2016-17 he disclosed disclosing Rs 35.42 crore, including the Rs 15 crore, as his total income. While filing the returns, he had also claimed depreciation of assets to the tune of Rs 17.84 lakh and sought Rs 64.71 lakhs exemption for his fans' club expenses. However, the IT department rejected his claims and passed an assessment order on December 30, 2017

determining the taxable income to be Rs 38.25 crore, while stating Vijay would not have disclosed the additional income but for the seizure of documents during the search operations. Following this, the IT department imposed a penalty under two sections of the IT Act. Though he chose to go on statutory appeal against the assessment order and the penalty, the actor filed a writ plea against one penalty only and it was dismissed by a Single Judge of Mr Justice Senthil Kumar Ramamoorthy on February, 6 2026, following which a writ appeal was filed which was not yet listed for hearing before a Division Bench. In this backdrop the present plea was filed by Rajkumar seeking a direction to the IT department to initiate prosecution proceedings against the actor, besides a direction to the law enforcement agencies to register a FIR against him.

## SIT formed to probe killing of Suwendu Adhikari's aide Chandranath Rath

**Kolkata:** A Special Investigation Team (SIT) has been constituted to probe the murder of BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari's close aide Chandranath Rath in Madhyamgram.

The SIT comprises officers from the state police as well as the CID, though the exact number of members and identities of the officers involved were not immediately disclosed.

Meanwhile, the BSF Director General Praveen Kumar visited the crime scene in Madhyamgram on Thursday morning.

State Director General of Police Siddh Nath Gupta had already visited the Madhyamgram hospital on Wednesday night but refrained from divulging details citing the ongoing investigation making it obvious that police are giving key importance to the murder of Rath.

The state police chief confirmed that a four-wheeler suspected to have been used in the crime has been seized.

According to the vehicle's number plate, it was registered in Siliguri,

though investigators suspect the number plate to be fake. Police have also recovered bullets and spent cartridges from the spot.

CID officers reached the crime scene on Thursday morning as the state investigative agency formally joined the probe.

A forensic team from the state police had already inspected the area on Wednesday night and collected samples from the vehicle in which Rath was travelling.

Blood stains were found on both front seats of

the car, and samples were collected from multiple parts of the vehicle for forensic examination.

Police and central forces have cordoned off the entire area where Rath was shot dead on Wednesday night. Security deployment has been intensified from the housing complex where Rath lived up to Jessore Road. Vehicular movement along the stretch has been temporarily suspended and restrictions imposed on public movement in the area. Rath's body was shifted from the Madhyamgram

hospital to Barasat Medical College and Hospital early on Thursday morning.

The body has been kept at the hospital morgue, where a post-mortem examination will be conducted later in the day.

The medical college has formed a three-member team comprising a departmental head and two assistant professors for the autopsy. Hospital authorities said the post-mortem is being treated with utmost importance and will begin as soon as the necessary documentation is completed.

## Briefs :

**CBI arrests CGST superintendent, computer operator in Rs 6,000 bribery case**

**New Delhi:** The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Thursday arrested a Superintendent of CGST Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, along with a Computer Operator working in the Superintendent's office, in connection with a bribery case. The CBI registered the case on Wednesday against Yash Sharma, a Computer Operator at the CGST Office, over allegations that he demanded an illegal gratification of Rs 6,000 on behalf of Sanjay Meena, Superintendent, CGST Office, Range-I, Meerut (UP), for revoking a show-cause notice issued to the complainant. The CBI laid a trap and caught the accused Computer Operator red-handed while demanding and accepting the bribe amount on behalf of the CGST Superintendent, Meerut. Both the accused, the CGST Superintendent and the Computer Operator, have been arrested. Further investigation into the matter is underway.

**New Delhi tops in crime against women in Metros: Data**

**New Delhi:** The national capital recorded the highest number of cases in crime against women with the city recorded a total of 13,396 cases, according to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) that was released on Wednesday. As per the data, the city saw a minute increase in the cases to 13,396 in 2024 in comparison to 13,366 in 2023 and a decrease from 14,158 cases in 2022. The data was recorded of 19 cities in the country that has more than 2 million population. However, the rate of total crime against women in the city stood at 176.8 which was lower than 199 in Jaipur, 186 in Lucknow and 181.5 in Indore. Crimes like rape and dowry remained a major concern in 2024, with 1,058 cases registered for rape. The total number of dowry deaths remained at 109, according to the report.

**At Delhi Assembly, 'Apne Apne Ram' blends devotion with reflection**

**New Delhi:** As the Delhi Legislative Assembly was illuminated for a special cultural evening on Wednesday, its usually formal corridors took on a different character — one of quiet reflection, poetry and civilisational memory. A packed audience gathered to witness 'Apne Apne Ram', a Ram Katha by poet-orator Kumar Vishwas, in an event that blended devotion with thoughtful discourse. Presiding over the programme, Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta set the tone early. "Ram is not merely a figure of reverence, but a living principle of conduct," he said, framing the evening not just as a cultural presentation but as a reflection on ethics, duty and justice in contemporary life. Among those present were Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, senior officials and legislators, their presence underscoring the significance of an event that sought to bring India's philosophical traditions into a modern institutional space. At the heart of the evening was Vishwas's distinctive narrative style — part poetry, part storytelling, part introspection. Moving across episodes from the Ramayana, he presented Lord Ram not only as Maryada Purushottam but as a timeless moral compass. His narration explored dilemmas as much as devotion — choices made in moments of conflict, the weight of responsibility, and the idea of dharma as a guiding force even at personal cost.

## Delhi CM announces ₹805.99 crore medical college in Dwarka with 250 MBBS seats annually

**New Delhi:** In a push to Delhi's healthcare and medical education infrastructure, the state government, led by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, has given its nod to the construction of a modern medical college and hostel complex at the Indira Gandhi Hospital campus in Dwarka sub-city.

The cost of the project has been estimated to be around Rs 805.99 crore, and has received clearance during a recent meeting of the Expenditure Finance Committee (EFC) chaired by the CM.

The Delhi government aims to complete this ambitious project by 2028, which will include a full-fledged medical college, separate hostels for male and female students, faculty housing, and a modern academic block.

The initiative is expected to address the growing demand for doctors across the national capital, while significantly strengthening healthcare services in Delhi.

The medical college



will be developed in accordance with National Medical Commission (NMC) norms, and will eventually accommodate 250 MBBS seats every year, while the teaching activities will commence with an initial batch of 150 students.

CM Gupta has said the project would be executed in phases, with the first phase to focus on the construction of the academic block, student hostels, and residential quarters for faculty members.

Around 1,17,246 square metres of area will be developed in this phase, including nearly 34,000 square metres of basement space for parking and other

essential facilities.

The Public Works Department (PWD) will carry out the construction work, while the Health and Family Welfare Department will oversee the project.

According to the CM, the project would adopt modern and sustainable construction techniques, and the buildings would be earthquake-resistant, with their design to be energy efficient.

As part of the green building plan, the campus will feature solar power systems, rainwater harvesting, water recycling mechanisms, ample natural lighting, and proper ventilation. The entire campus will

be made fully accessible for persons with disabilities, with ramps, lifts, Braille signage, and wheelchair-friendly pathways.

To ensure safety and security, modern CCTV surveillance, fire alarms, and fire safety infrastructure will also be in place across the campus.

Gupta has directed officials to strictly adhere to quality standards and the project timelines, adding that a robust quality assurance mechanism would be in place and regular monitoring would be done.

The CM further informed that procurement of equipment, recruitment of staff, university affiliation, and other operational requirements for the medical college would be completed in later stages in line with NMC norms.

She reiterated that her government's goal is to ensure better and accessible healthcare for every resident of the capital, and increasing the number of trained doctors is crucial to achieving that objective.

## Delhi Congress flags poor condition of urban shelters, Summer Action Plan implementation in Capital

**New Delhi:** Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee president Devender Yadav has alleged that several urban shelters operated by the Delhi Urban Improvement Board are functioning under poor conditions despite the government's recently announced Summer Action Plan aimed at tackling heat wave challenges in the national capital.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, Yadav claimed that shortly after Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta unveiled the Summer Action Plan, reports have surfaced regarding inadequate basic facilities in shelters meant for homeless and vulnerable residents across the city.

According to the Congress leader, many of the shelters run by the Delhi Urban Improvement Board (DUIB) are facing issues related to hygiene, sanitation and essential amenities. He stated that the conditions inside several shelters remain unsuitable for residents, especially during the ongoing summer season and rising

temperatures in Delhi.

Yadav said that the DUIB currently operates 197 shelters with a combined capacity to accommodate more than 17,000 people. However, he alleged that despite the available infrastructure, the quality of maintenance and civic facilities in number of these shelters remains poor.

He further criticised the implementation of the Summer Action Plan, saying that many of the measures announced by the Delhi Government have not translated effectively on the ground. According to him, there is a visible gap between official announcements and actual execution.

The Summer Action Plan announced by the Delhi Government includes provisions such as mobile heat relief units, heat action strategies, healthcare preparedness measures and water supply management initiatives to protect residents from severe heat wave conditions.

However, Yadav alleged that the benefits of these measures are not adequately

reaching vulnerable populations, particularly homeless individuals and economically weaker sections who depend heavily on government shelters and public support systems during extreme weather conditions.

The Congress leader also raised concerns regarding recent eviction notices reportedly issued to residents living along the Yamuna riverbank near Nigam Bodh Ghat, including families residing in the Yamuna Bazar area.

He claimed that nearly 310 families have been asked to vacate the area within a short timeframe without being provided proper rehabilitation or alternative accommodation arrangements. According to him, the move has created uncertainty and distress among affected families. Yadav further alleged that similar eviction drives carried out in other parts of Delhi have also left displaced families struggling without adequate resettlement support from the authorities.

## Delhi Police Special Cell conducts major crackdown on organised crime, 481 arrested

**New Delhi:** Delhi Police Special Cell Additional Commissioner of Police P.S. Kushwaha on Thursday said the Special Cell had carried out a major operation against organised crime networks, resulting in the arrest of 481 people, including nine alleged members linked to the Pakistan-based Shahzad Bhatti gang.

Addressing the media, Kushwaha said the extensive crackdown was conducted over the last 48 hours with the coordinated participation of all district police units and Special Cell teams. The operation targeted organised criminal syndicates and individuals involved in illegal arms, narcotics and gang-related activities.

According to Delhi Police, nine persons allegedly associated with the Shahzad Bhatti gang were arrested during the operation. Officials stated that the gang is

linked to a Pakistan-based criminal-terrorist network involved in organised criminal activities.

Police officials alleged that five of the arrested gang members had been assigned contract killing tasks and were allegedly planning attacks on police personnel and security forces. Investigators said the accused were under surveillance before the coordinated raids were carried out. The operation involved more than 1,000 police personnel who simultaneously conducted raids at 1,014 locations spread across Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh. Police said the raids formed part of a large-scale campaign against organised crime and gang networks operating across northern India. Officials added that the action was aimed at disrupting criminal logistics, illegal weapons supply

chains and gang communication networks.

During the crackdown, police seized a substantial quantity of illegal arms and ammunition. According to officials, 130 pistols and 214 cartridges were recovered from different locations during the raids.

In addition, police also recovered 79 knives, cash amounting to approximately ₹99 lakh, 24 vehicles and nearly 90 kilograms of narcotic substances. Several mobile phones and electronic devices were also seized for forensic and technical analysis. Officials stated that the operation targeted operatives and associates connected with nearly 30 criminal gangs active in Delhi and neighbouring states. These gangs have allegedly been involved in extortion, contract killings, illegal arms trafficking and other organised criminal activities.

## ED cracks down on real estate fraud: fake CLU scam worth Rs 150 cr exposed

**New Delhi:** The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday conducted search and seizure operations against two real estate groups involved in fraudulent Change of Land Use (CLU) approvals and cheating of landowners and customers.

The ED alleged that Suntec City (Indian Cooperative Housing Building Society), along with Suresh Kumar Bajaj and Ajay Sehgal of the same society, prepared fake consent letters for 30.5 acres of land belonging to 15 landowners.

These consent letters reportedly contained forged signatures and thumb impressions to obtain CLU permissions for a mega real estate project named "Suntec City."

Based on these forged

documents, the society was granted CLU approval and subsequently collected over Rs 150 crore by enrolling members without executing any sale deeds.

The ED stated that the case was registered under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) on the basis of an FIR lodged by Punjab Police at Mullanpur Police Station in SAS Nagar, Mohali. The FIR pertains to forgery of signatures for obtaining CLU approvals.

The agency further alleged that Ajay Sehgal developed residential and commercial projects, including La Canela residential complex and District 7 commercial complex, using the same CLU. All units in these projects were sold, generating proceeds

of crime.

The ED also noted that CLU permissions were later cancelled by GMADA following litigation filed by victims in the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

In a related observation, the Court of Additional Sessions Judge, Mohali, remarked that the DSP Mullanpur was "acting at the behest of accused Ajay Sehgal" and had not conducted a proper investigation.

Another case involving Altus Space Builders Pvt. Ltd. was also mentioned, where multiple buyers alleged fraudulent misrepresentation regarding CLU approvals. A non-bailable warrant has been issued against promoter Mohinder Singh, who has been declared a proclaimed offender

under the Negotiable Instruments Act.

The ED further said that to facilitate money laundering, Dhir Constructions, through its entity Suncity Projects, attempted to acquire assets of Altus Space Builders at undervalued rates.

During searches, two middlemen, Nitin Gohal and Pritpal Singh Dhindsa, were also covered for allegedly providing political patronage and protection. Several incriminating documents were recovered indicating interference by private individuals in government functioning.

During the search operation, cash amounting to ₹21 lakh was allegedly thrown from a balcony but was later recovered by ED officials.

## AAP Targets BJP Over Punjab Blasts, Alleges Political Motive Behind Violence

**New Delhi:** Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MSanjay Singh on Thursday made serious allegations against the BJP, accusing the party of attempting to disturb peace in Punjab following the recent blast incidents reported in Amritsar and Jalandhar. Addressing a press conference at the party headquarters, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader alleged that the recent blast incidents were part of what he described as the BJP's "Mission Punjab" strategy ahead of future elections in the state.

Singh claimed that the ruling party was allegedly trying to create unrest and communal tension in Punjab for political gains. He accused the BJP of attempting to destabilise the peaceful atmosphere in the border state through divisive tactics.

During the press con-

ference, the AAP leader further alleged that certain BJP members had links with Pakistan's intelligence agency, the ISI. Referring to previous incidents and arrests reported in different states, Singh attempted to draw connections between past cases and individuals allegedly associated with organisations linked to the BJP.

However, no documentary evidence or official records supporting the allegations were presented by the AAP leader during the media briefing. The BJP has also not issued any official response to the allegations made by Singh so far.

The Rajya Sabha MP also raised questions regarding past terror-related incidents in the country, including the Pulwama attack, the Pathankot attack and the recent Pahalgam incident. He criticised the

Central Government over alleged security lapses and the handling of investigations into such cases.

Singh additionally referred to the Maur bombing in Punjab and claimed that similar incidents had occurred during the previous SAD-BJP government in the state. He alleged that some accused persons arrested in terror-related cases in the past had connections with organisations associated with the BJP.

The AAP leader warned against any attempt to disturb communal harmony and social peace in Punjab. He stated that the people of Punjab would strongly oppose and respond to any effort aimed at creating instability or tension in the state.

Singh said Punjab has historically suffered due to terrorism and violence and asserted that the people of the state value peace and

communal harmony. According to him, citizens would remain alert against forces allegedly trying to create divisions for political purposes.

The recent blast incidents in Amritsar and Jalandhar are currently under investigation by security agencies and local police authorities. Officials have not yet disclosed detailed findings regarding the motive or individuals responsible for the incidents.

Security agencies are continuing forensic examination and intelligence-based investigations related to the blasts. Authorities have also stepped up surveillance and security arrangements in sensitive areas of Punjab following the incidents. Political reactions over security-related incidents in Punjab have intensified in recent weeks, with opposition parties and rul-

ing parties exchanging allegations over law and order, security preparedness and political accountability.

While the AAP leader's remarks have triggered political debate, no independent verification of the allegations linking BJP members to the incidents or to foreign agencies has been officially established at this stage.

The BJP has not yet responded publicly to the accusations made by Sanjay Singh during the press conference. Political observers expect the controversy to intensify further if reactions emerge from BJP leaders in the coming days.

Meanwhile, investigation agencies continue to probe the Amritsar and Jalandhar blast incidents to determine the exact circumstances, possible conspirators and any wider network involved in the cases.

## MCD Mayor Wahi directs crackdown on poor sanitation

**New Delhi:** Delhi Mayor Pravesh Wahi on Wednesday directed officials to strengthen sanitation systems across the Capital, warning that any negligence in cleanliness would not be tolerated and accountability would be fixed on erring private waste management agencies. Chairing a meeting with all zonal deputy commissioners of the (MCD), the Mayor called for immediate improvements in sanitation and asked officials to identify vulnerable points in each zone and carry out regular as well as special cleanliness drives. Wahi empha-

sised that field-level monitoring must be intensified, directing Sanitary Supervisors and Assistant

Sanitary Inspectors to remain actively present on the ground to ensure visible improvements. To boost morale among sanitation workers, the Mayor announced that safai karamcharis delivering outstanding performance would be rewarded. He also instructed that sanitation staff must wear proper uniforms while on duty to maintain discipline and improve the civic body's public image.



## Editorial

### Toll Extortion and Substandard Amenities?

While the expressways, superhighways, and modern roadways rapidly springing up across the country are hailed as symbols of India's development, a widening chasm of discontent among ordinary travelers appears to be growing beneath the gleaming surface of these roads. The exorbitant sums levied at toll plazas coupled with the substandard amenities provided in return are fueling a growing sense of outrage among travelers. Plagued by pothole-riddled roads, unhygienic facilities, inadequate safety measures, and hours-long traffic snarls, the toll fee has ceased to feel like a "payment for convenience" and has instead begun to feel like "extortion under duress." In this context, while the state-of-the-art toll collection system proposed by the government may appear to be a ray of hope on one hand, it simultaneously raises the question: will it not, on the other hand, merely serve to divert attention away from the fundamental grievances of the travelers? Just as the development of road infrastructure and the network of highways in India are expanding at a rapid pace, the mountain of problems associated with toll plazas is also growing taller with each passing day. For the ordinary traveler today, the toll fee is no longer merely the cost of using a road; it has begun to feel like a "legalized robbery" on their pockets, perpetrated under the guise of facilitating smooth travel. While vehicle owners are made to pay substantial toll amounts for traveling on highways, the amenities provided in exchange are often of an abysmal quality. Travelers are frequently left to fend for themselves when it comes to road quality, safety, and basic necessities. Issues such as ubiquitous potholes, inadequate lighting on highways for night travel, unhygienic restrooms, and the lack of immediate medical or technical assistance in the event of an accident have effectively stripped away the joy of traveling. The continued, uninterrupted collection of tolls even when the roads are not in good condition constitutes a blatant violation of travelers' rights; yet, the administration still appears to lack the seriousness with which it ought to have addressed this issue. Against this backdrop, the new toll system proposed by the Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, appears to be both revolutionary and pioneering. The government has formulated an ambitious plan to completely phase out the country's existing traditional toll plazas by the end of 2026. The most significant feature of this new system is that vehicles will no longer be required to stop at toll booths to pay fees. This technology will primarily rely on 'Automatic Number Plate Recognition' and an advanced 'FASTag' system. The government claims that under this system, tolls will be levied based on the actual distance traveled by a vehicle on the highway, thereby significantly reducing travel costs. In instances where travelers currently have to pay a toll of ₹150, this cost could potentially drop to a mere ₹15 to ₹20. By successfully launching India's first 'multi-lane free-flow' barrier-less system at the 'Choryasi Toll Plaza' in the Surat-Bharuch section of Gujarat, the government has demonstrated the power of this modern technology to the world. While this technological application is certainly a welcome step toward saving travel time and conserving fuel, the fundamental issue at hand is not merely the amount of the toll, but rather the 'service' and 'transparency' provided in return. Fundamentally, the government's rationale behind collecting tolls is to gradually recoup the immense costs incurred in road construction, as well as to fund the regular maintenance and repair of those roads. The National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) oversees this entire process. However, while toll collection continues under the guise of maintenance, rules and regulations are frequently flouted with impunity. According to official regulations, a minimum distance of 60 kilometers is mandated between two toll plazas; however, in many states and on various highways, this rule is observed to be blatantly violated. Furthermore, there is a clear stipulation that no vehicle should be required to wait for more than 10 seconds at any toll plaza, nor should the queue of vehicles exceed 100 meters in length. If the queue extends beyond the designated yellow line, motorists are expected to be allowed to pass free of charge. In reality, however, toll plaza staff often engage in arguments with travelers and prioritize revenue collection above all else. Legal provisions exist to impose strict punitive action against the concerned toll company if road conditions are found to be substandard; yet, due to administrative apathy and the political clout wielded by toll contractors, the exploitation of the common citizen remains unchecked. Political protests have frequently erupted over the years due to allegations of corruption at toll plazas and a persistent lack of amenities. Although orders were issued to install CCTV cameras at Mumbai-Thane toll plazas to ensure transparency along with directives to strictly adhere to regulations regarding queue waiting times, numerous loopholes continue to be exploited at the implementation level. Ordinary citizens have now begun to raise a pertinent question: If road conditions remain poor despite the payment of tolls, why shouldn't the license of the concerned toll collection company be revoked? wherein the quality of amenities continues to deteriorate even as toll collection remains in full swing. The issues faced by commuters will not be resolved merely through number plate recognition systems or the introduction of satellite-based tolling; a genuine solution requires ensuring that they are provided with high-quality roads and adequate safety measures. In the near future, it is anticipated that the rapid completion of expressway projects such as the Delhi-Mumbai, Delhi-Jaipur, and Chennai-Bengaluru corridors will infuse a new vibrancy into road transportation. Furthermore, proposals such as offering an annual pass priced at ₹3,000 which allows for travel across 200 different toll plazas could prove to be a source of significant relief for commuters. However, no amount of technological glitz can mask the grim reality of life-threatening potholes or woefully inadequate emergency response facilities on our roads. What commuters seek is not merely a "non-stop" journey, but rather the assurance of a "safe" travel experience accompanied by amenities that uphold their human dignity. While the concept of "toll-free highways" may seem like a distant dream given the current economic climate, the right to fair toll charges and excellent road infrastructure remains a fundamental entitlement of every taxpayer. In addition to replacing physical toll plazas with technology, the government must establish stringent standards for highway amenities such as restrooms, ambulance services, clean drinking water, and road quality and ensure their rigorous enforcement. If a toll collection company fails to provide facilities in accordance with the terms of its contract, its authority to collect tolls should be immediately suspended, and motorists should be granted the privilege of traveling toll-free. Technology alone will not resolve these issues; the administration must acknowledge the hardships and grievances of travelers and implement concrete measures to address them. Only when technology, transparency, and accountability are harmoniously integrated will the 2026 objective truly usher in a "Golden Era" for India's road transport sector; otherwise, the burden of tolls will continue to weigh heavily upon travelers, albeit in a modernized guise. The time has come for the administration to recognize that, alongside the technological advancement of toll plazas, the advancement of travelers' rights is the true need of the hour.

# PM salutes armed forces on one year of Operation Sindoor

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday paid tribute to the courage, precision and determination of the Indian armed forces on the completion of one year of Operation Sindoor. Remembering the operation as a defining moment in India's fight against terrorism, the Prime Minister said the nation continues to take immense pride in the bravery and professionalism displayed by the forces during the mission.

In a message shared on social media platform X, Shri Modi said the armed forces had given a fitting response to those who dared to attack innocent Indians at Pahalgam. He described Operation Sindoor as a strong and decisive reply against terrorism and reaffirmed India's commitment to protecting national security at all costs.

The Prime Minister noted that the operation demonstrated the exceptional professionalism, preparedness and coordinated strength of the armed forces. According to him, the success of the mission reflected the capability of the Army, Navy and Air Force to work together seamlessly in the face of national security challenges.

Shri Modi further said that Operation Sindoor showcased the growing spirit of jointness among the armed forces. He added that increasing coordination between different wings of the military has significantly strengthened India's defence preparedness and operational efficiency.

Highlighting the importance of self-reliance in defence production, the Prime Minister said the operation underlined the strength that India's push for indigenous defence manufacturing has



brought to national security. He stressed that the country's efforts towards "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" in the defence sector are helping equip the forces with modern and reliable capabilities.

The Prime Minister reiterated that India remains unwavering in its resolve to defeat terrorism and dismantle the ecosystem that supports and enables terror activities. He said the country's fight against terrorism will continue with full determination and unity.

Recalling the events of Operation Sindoor, Shri Modi said the armed forces had displayed unmatched valour while responding firmly to those who targeted the people of India. He added that the operation remains a symbol of India's determination to safeguard its citizens and uphold national integrity.

The Prime Minister said every Indian is proud of the armed forces and their dedi-

cation towards protecting the nation. He noted that the courage and sacrifice shown

As a mark of respect to the armed forces and their achievements during the op-

Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, to the image shared by him. He described

### Union Home Minister Amit Shah salutes the unparalleled valour of armed forces

On the first anniversary of Operation Sindoor, Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation Shri Amit Shah saluted the unparalleled valour of armed forces and said that Operation Sindoor stands as an epochal mission of India that will always remind our enemies of the infallible striking power of our armed forces.

In a post on X, Union Home Minister said, "Operation Sindoor stands as an epochal mission of India that will always remind our enemies of the infallible striking power of our armed forces. History will

remember it as the day of the precise striking power of our armed forces, meticulous intelligence of our agencies, and resolute political will rising together as one to destroy each and every address of terror across the border that dared to cast an evil shadow on our citizens at Pahalgam. This day will continue to bring the dreadful mes-

sage to our enemies that no matter where they hide, they cannot escape. They are always within our sight and the fierce wrath of our firepower. On this day, I salute the unparalleled valour of our forces."



by soldiers during Operation Sindoor continue to inspire citizens across the country.

eration, Shri Modi urged citizens to change their display pictures on social media platforms, including X,

the gesture as a collective tribute to the nation's brave soldiers. In his post on X, the Prime Minister wrote that a

year ago, the armed forces displayed unparalleled courage, precision and determination during Operation Sindoor. He said the entire nation salutes the forces for their valour and unwavering commitment to national security.

Shri Modi also highlighted that the operation reflected India's firm stand against terrorism and sent a strong message to forces attempting to disturb peace and security in the country. He said India's response demonstrated both strength and strategic preparedness.

The Prime Minister observed that the operation not only reflected military strength but also showcased the nation's technological and strategic advancements in defence capabilities. He credited the armed forces for carrying out the mission with discipline and efficiency.

He further said that the success of Operation Sindoor strengthened the confidence of citizens in the country's security framework. According to him, the operation reaffirmed India's capability to respond decisively to threats against the nation and its people.

Shri Modi stated that the unity and determination displayed by the armed forces during the operation continue to serve as an example for future generations. He said the courage shown by soldiers will always remain etched in the nation's memory. Concluding his message, the Prime Minister once again saluted the armed forces for their service and sacrifice. He said that even one year after Operation Sindoor, the resolve of the country to combat terrorism and protect national security remains stronger than ever.

## AB PM-JAY Auto-Adjudication Hackathon on May 8-9, 2026

The National Health Authority (NHA), under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, will host the Grand Finale and Showcase of the AB PM-JAY Auto-Adjudication Hackathon on May 8-9, 2026, at the A. V. Rama Auditorium, Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru. The event is being organised in collaboration with the IndiaAI Mission and IISc Bengaluru.

The nationwide hackathon has drawn an overwhelming response, with over 3,500 participants registering through the official portal. This enthusiastic participation underscores the growing interest among innovators, technologists, and researchers in leveraging artificial intelligence to strengthen India's health systems and enhance the efficiency of public health in-

surance processes. The registration process concluded on April 13, 2026.

The inaugural session of the Grand Finale will feature a keynote address by Shri S. Krishnan, Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Government of India. The session will also be addressed by Dr. Sunil Kumar Barnwal, Chief Executive Officer, NHA, and Shri Ritwik Ranjanam Pandey, Principal Secretary, Government of Karnataka.

The two-day event is envisaged as a dynamic platform to showcase cutting-edge innovations that can shape the next phase of health claims management under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY). Finalist teams will present advanced AI/ML-based solutions addressing critical problem

areas such as clinical document classification and compliance with Standard Treatment Guidelines (STGs), radiological image-based validation, and the detection of forged or AI-generated medical documents. These solutions demonstrate strong potential for real-world deployment, with the capacity to significantly enhance the accuracy, speed, and integrity of claims adjudication.

The programme will also feature thought-provoking panel discussions bringing together leading voices from government, industry, startups, and academia. A session on "Building AI for Indian Healthcare" will explore strategies for scaling AI innovations within the healthcare ecosystem, leveraging the robust digital public infrastructure established under the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission

(ABDM).

Another panel discussion on "Future of Claims Adjudication" will deliberate on how AB PM-JAY can enable a faster, more transparent, and accountable claims ecosystem through the integration of artificial intelligence, automation, interoperable digital platforms, and data-driven governance frameworks.

In addition, a dedicated session on "Fraud, Waste and Abuse in the Era of AI — Challenges and Opportunities" will examine the responsible use of AI in fraud detection, while addressing critical issues related to transparency, accountability, and data privacy.

With nearly 40,000 claims processed daily across more than 1,900 treatment packages, AB PM-JAY stands among the largest publicly funded health assurance

schemes globally and is at the forefront of adopting AI-driven approaches for claims management. The Hackathon Showcase marks a significant milestone in NHA's efforts to expand auto-adjudication capabilities across a wider range of medical packages and specialties.

The event will culminate in the felicitation of winning teams whose solutions exhibit strong potential for real-world implementation, further advancing the vision of a transparent, efficient, and technology-driven claims ecosystem.

Through this initiative, the National Health Authority reaffirms its commitment to harnessing digital public infrastructure and responsible artificial intelligence to improve healthcare access, enhance service delivery, and achieve better health outcomes for beneficiaries and providers nationwide.

## Free annual health check-ups for workers above 40 years to be conducted across the Country

Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Wednesday launched the nationwide Annual Health Check-Up Initiative for all workers aged 40 years and above from ESIC Medical College & Hospital, describing it as a major step towards strengthening occupational healthcare and expanding social security coverage for workers across the country.

The initiative aims to provide free annual health screenings to workers covered under the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC), particularly those above the age of 40, to enable early detection and treatment of serious health conditions. The launch event was simultaneously organised at 11 other ESIC hospital locations across India.

Addressing the gathering, Dr. Mandaviya said the implementation of the four Labour Codes reflects the vision and guarantee of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to ensure dignity, welfare and comprehensive social security for workers in every sector of the economy.



Calling the occasion a tribute to the country's "Shram Shakti", the Union Minister said the Government remains committed to strengthening the social security framework and improving the quality of life for workers and their families. He stated that labour welfare has remained a central priority of the Government over the last several years.

Dr. Mandaviya said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, continuous efforts have been made during the past 12 years to empower both "Shram Shakti" and "Yuva Shakti" through large-scale

employment generation, skill development initiatives and welfare-oriented reforms.

Highlighting the expansion of social security coverage in India, the Minister said the number of beneficiaries covered under various social protection schemes has increased substantially from nearly 30 crore people a decade ago to around 94 crore beneficiaries today. He added that social security coverage has expanded from approximately 19 per cent to nearly 64 per cent of the population.

The Minister also pointed out the significant growth

in ESIC coverage during the last decade. According to him, the number of ESIC beneficiaries has risen from around 7 crore earlier to nearly 15 crore beneficiaries today, reflecting wider outreach and stronger institutional support for workers.

Announcing the nationwide annual health screening programme, Dr. Mandaviya said that free health check-ups for all workers above the age of 40 will now be conducted every year

prove long-term healthcare outcomes for workers.

The Union Minister emphasised that early diagnosis through regular screenings can play a crucial role in preventing serious illnesses and reducing health complications. He informed that workers diagnosed with diseases during the screening camps would receive treatment and medicines through ESIC healthcare facilities.

Speaking about labour reforms introduced through



across the country. He said the initiative has been designed to ensure timely medical intervention and im-

prove long-term healthcare outcomes for workers. The Union Minister emphasised that early diagnosis through regular screenings can play a crucial role in preventing serious illnesses and reducing health complications. He informed that workers diagnosed with diseases during the screening camps would receive treatment and medicines through ESIC healthcare facilities. Speaking about labour reforms introduced through

ers and strengthened provisions related to worker welfare and gender equality.

He further stated that maternity leave for women employees has been increased from 12 weeks to 26 weeks, while work-from-home provisions for women workers have also been incorporated into the labour reforms to provide greater flexibility and support.

The Minister said the Government has also taken proactive measures to include gig workers and platform workers within the ambit of social security frameworks. He noted that while several countries are still exploring policy mechanisms for such workers, India has already moved forward with their inclusion through the new Labour Codes. Dr. Mandaviya added that workers engaged in hazardous occupations and employees working in establishments with fewer than 10 workers are also being brought under ESIC coverage, ensuring wider protection for vulnerable sections of the workforce.



## Briefs :

### Patwari among 3 killed as truck collides with car

**Gurugram:** Three people, including a patwari, were killed in a head-on collision between a truck and a car on the Pachgaon-Jamalpur road in Bilaspur on Wednesday evening. The truck driver fled after abandoning the vehicle at the spot. Police registered an FIR and seized the truck. The deceased were identified as 40-year-old Kuldeep, 68-year-old Naval Singh and 70-year-old Samay Singh, all residents of Pukharpur village. Kuldeep was posted as a patwari with HSIIDC, Naval was a retired Army personnel and Samay was a farmer. According to police, the three had gone to Jamalpur for some work and were returning to Pukharpur when their car collided head-on with an oncoming truck near Mokalwas village. Kuldeep was driving the vehicle. The impact completely mangled the car, trapping all three occupants inside. Passersby alerted the police, pulled the victims out of the vehicle and rushed them to a nearby hospital, where doctors declared them dead. Eyewitnesses said the accident triggered a long traffic jam on Jamalpur Road. Amid the chaos, the truck driver managed to flee the scene. A senior police officer said the truck was registered in Daman and Diu and had arrived in Bilaspur carrying cargo. "The bodies were sent for post-mortem examination, which will be conducted on Thursday. Efforts are on to trace and arrest the truck driver," said Sub-Inspector Amit Kumar, the investigating officer.

### Yamunanagar civic body challans two marriage palaces for waste management

**Yamunanagar:** Under the Swachh Survekshan 2025 and the 'Nai Soch, Naya Shehar, Swachh Haryana' Abhiyan, a team of the (MCYJ), on Wednesday inspected various resorts, marriage palaces and clubs falling under the Bulk Waste Generator (BWG) category in the city. During the inspection, two marriage palaces were challaned for violating BWG rules, as the team found that waste was not being disposed of properly. The establishments were also found violating other BWG norms. Acting on the directions of Municipal Commissioner Mahabir Prasad, a team comprising Sanitation Inspector Sushil Sharma and Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (Information, Education and Communication) expert Akash Kumar carried out inspections at multiple BWG-category establishments. The inspection revealed lapses in compliance with BWG regulations at two marriage palaces, following which challans were issued by Inspector Sushil Sharma. The team also inspected compost pits at these establishments. At some locations, the pits were not being used properly and wet waste was not being composted as per prescribed procedures. The team directed operators to ensure proper utilisation of compost pits and regular composting of wet waste. Inspector Sushil Sharma said such inspections would continue to improve cleanliness and waste management in the twin cities of Yamunanagar and Jagadhri, in view of Swachh Survekshan 2025. "Strict action will be taken against establishments violating the rules to ensure a clean and healthy city," he said. Additional Municipal Commissioner Dheeraj Kumar directed operators of all hotels, marriage palaces.

## Air quality commission seeks reports as stubble burning cases surge in Haryana

**Hisar:** The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has sought detailed reports from districts in Haryana that have recorded more than 100 incidents of wheat stubble burning this season, amid a sharp spike in farm fire cases. Expressing concern over the trend, the Commission noted that 2,683 active fire locations (AFLs) have been detected so far during the current rabi season, compared to 592 during the same period in 2025 — a nearly four-fold increase. During an online meeting with district officials, CAQM asked authorities from high-incidence districts to explain the sudden surge and submit detailed assessments.

Jind reported the highest number of cases at 441, followed by Rohtak (393), Jhajjar (288), Sonapat (225), Kaithal (202), Sirsa (178), Karnal (172), Hisar-Hansi (171), Fatehabad (157) and Panipat (133), all crossing the 100-mark.

Officials pointed out that while 2021 had recorded the



highest number of incidents in recent years at 3,626, cases had steadily declined until this year, which has seen an unexpected rise despite monitoring measures by the state government.

The Commission, during a video conference with officials from Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, expressed serious concern and directed authorities to sub-

mit reports on the reasons behind the increase and steps taken for stubble management. Several districts reported relatively fewer cases, including Bhiwani (74), Ambala (54), Kurukshetra (50) and Palwal (39), while Mahendragarh reported no incidents. Rewari and Yamunanagar recorded minimal cases at 6 and 5, respectively.

Dr Rajbir Singh, Deputy Director, Agriculture Department, Hisar, said, "The Commission had sought reports especially from districts with more than 100 cases. Hisar district had only 53 cases, while Hansi reported 118. Officials have been directed to prepare a report on stubble management and ensure timely planning."

## Bhupinder Hooda predicts landslide win for Cong in Haryana civic polls

**Rohtak:** Former Haryana Chief Minister and Leader of the Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda on Wednesday expressed confidence that the Congress would register a clean sweep in all three municipal corporation elections scheduled to be held on May 10. He claimed that growing public dissatisfaction with the BJP government's policies and failure to address civic issues would result in a decisive victory for the Congress.

Addressing mediapersons, Hooda said the Congress was expecting a landslide victory with a massive majority in all three civic body polls. According to him, people across the state are frustrated with the BJP government's handling of local governance and public issues.

"The Congress will secure a landslide victory with a massive majority in all three municipal corporation polls, as the BJP has utterly failed to address civic issues across the state," Hooda said during the interaction with the media.

The senior Congress



leader alleged that the ruling BJP government had failed to provide effective solutions to problems related to sanitation, infrastructure, water supply, roads and urban management. He claimed that residents in urban areas have become increasingly unhappy with the administration's performance.

Hooda further stated that people were now prepared to "teach the BJP a lesson" by defeating its candidates in the upcoming municipal corporation elections. He maintained that the Congress campaign was receiving strong support from voters across different sections of society.

Reacting to the recently declared Assembly election results in five states, Hooda raised questions over the conduct of elections in West Bengal and Assam. He alleged that the elections in those states were not conducted in a fair manner and questioned the role of the Election Commission in ensuring transparency and fairness. At the same time, the Congress leader pointed to his party's electoral performance in southern states. He noted that the Congress had formed a government with an absolute majority in Kerala and was also part of the coalition government formed in Tamil Nadu.

## Sirsa farmers advised against early guar sowing, training held

**Sirsa:** Ahead of the upcoming Kharif season, the Agriculture Department in Sirsa has intensified awareness programmes aimed at helping farmers improve guar crop productivity and prevent crop diseases. As part of the initiative, a joint team of block-level agricultural officials and guar experts organised a farmer training session at Gusaiana village on Wednesday.

The awareness camp was conducted under the supervision of ATM Dr Madan Singh and guar specialist Dr BD Yadav. During the programme, farmers were educated about scientific guar cultivation practices, disease prevention methods and proper sowing schedules to maximise crop yield during the season. Agriculture experts specifically advised farmers not to sow guar before the recommended time, warning that early sowing often results in excessive vegetative growth and lower productivity. The officials also focused on creating awareness about "root rot" disease, locally known as "Ukhda", which has emerged as a major concern for guar growers in the region. Dr BD



Yadav explained the importance of using improved guar seed varieties, timely sowing methods, seed treatment techniques and balanced fertiliser application for achieving better production and healthier crops. He encouraged farmers to adopt scientific cultivation methods rather than relying entirely on traditional farming practices. The expert cautioned farmers against sowing guar during the month of May. According to him, premature sowing causes excessive plant growth, increases crop lodging and reduces pod formation, ultimately leading to lower yields and financial losses for farmers. Dr Yadav recommended that guar sowing should ideally be carried out during the second fortnight of June for better crop performance. He stated that in irrigated regions, sowing

may begin when surplus canal water becomes available, while in rain-fed areas, farmers should wait until sufficient monsoon rainfall is received. Explaining the issue of root rot disease, Dr Yadav said the infection is caused by a soil-borne fungus that attacks the roots of young guar plants. The disease turns the roots black and restricts the plant's ability to absorb nutrients and moisture from the soil, eventually affecting crop growth and yield. He informed the farmers that seed treatment remains the only effective and economical preventive measure against root rot disease. According to the expert, guar seeds should be treated with 3 grams of carbendazim 50 per cent, commonly known as bavistin, per kilogram of seed for 15 to 20 minutes before sowing.

## Haryana government announces statewide campaign against dowry

**Chandigarh:** The Haryana government has announced to launch a statewide campaign against dowry, a social vice that claim innocent lives in most of the cases. The campaign aims to build social resistance against dowry demands and create awareness around the legal consequences of demanding or giving dowry.

Chief Secretary Anurag Rastogi on Wednesday chaired a high-level review meeting to strengthen enforcement of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 and directed all district administrations to intensify the awareness campaigns and enforcement mechanism against dowry.

He observed that many families continue to face emotional, financial and social pressure due to dowry practices, making a collective societal action essential.

The meeting was attended by senior officers of the Home Department, Education Department, Women and Child Development Department, Haryana State Legal Services Authority and others. The review was held in compliance with direc-

tions issued by the Supreme Court of India in State of UP versus Ajmal Beg and Others, wherein all the states were directed to ensure effective implementation of anti-dowry laws, appointment and training of Dowry Prohibition Officers (DPO) and large-scale public awareness initiatives.

The Sub-Divisional Magistrates (SDMs) across Haryana have already been designated as DPOs under a state government notification issued in October 2015.

He emphasised that these officers must remain proactive in handling complaints, spreading awareness and coordinating with law enforcement agencies for timely action.

During the meeting, Rastogi stressed the need for a coordinated and people-centric strategy to curb dowry-related harassment and offences. He directed that the roles and responsibilities of DPOs be clearly defined to ensure accountability and effective implementation of the law. The Deputy Commissioners across the state were directed to launch extensive awareness cam-

paigns in coordination with the Haryana State Legal Services Authority, particularly targeting youth, educational institutions and rural communities.

To strengthen the accessibility and grievance redressal mechanism, the names, contact numbers and official email IDs of DPOs were to be prominently displayed and widely publicised at district and sub-divisional levels so that victims and their families can easily approach authorities for assistance. Rastogi also directed that complaints registered under Section 304-B relating to dowry deaths and Section 498-A concerning cruelty against married women be examined carefully from the earliest stage to ensure timely justice for genuine victims while ensuring expeditious disposal of cases.

Citizens facing dowry-related harassment, intimidation or unlawful demands have been urged to report such incidents without fear to the nearest DPO, local administration, police authorities or Women and Child Development officials.

The government reiter-

ated that strict action will be taken against persons found demanding dowry or harassing women and their families.

The DPOs have been directed to conduct extensive awareness drives at village, block and district levels through anganwadi networks and community outreach programmes to educate citizens, particularly youth, women and parents, about the legal and social consequences of dowry practices.

In this regard, the Women & Child Development Department has already conducted around 17,000 awareness camps across the state.

The Commissioner & Secretary, Women & Child Development Department Shekhar Vidyarthi informed that the Haryana Institute of Public Administration (HIPA), Gurugram, has been requested to organise structured training programmes for DPOs focusing on legal provisions, coordination with police authorities, victim support systems and prompt intervention in complaints related to dowry harassment.

## Nuh police nab 2 cow smugglers after brief encounter

**Gurugram:** Nuh police on Thursday morning nabbed two cow smugglers after a brief encounter on the Nuh-Tauru road. Both the smugglers were shot in the legs and have been admitted to Nalhar Medical College for treatment.

Police recovered two cattle and a pickup truck from the spot. An FIR has been registered at Sadar Nuh police station.

According to police, the encounter took place near



the repeater checkpoint in the mountains on the Nuh-

Tauru road when the CIA team from Nuh, led by In-

spector Sandeep Mor, chased the cow smugglers. When the police team signalled them to stop, they opened fire and during retaliatory action, the two cow smugglers were injured.

The injured were identified as Nafees and Mubarik, residents of Ghata village, and were admitted to the hospital.

"An FIR has been registered and a probe is under way," said a Nuh police spokesperson.

## Nine FIRs registered against 12 farmers for burning wheat stubble in Karnal

**Karnal:** As many as nine FIRs have been registered against 12 farmers in Karnal district for allegedly burning wheat stubble during the ongoing Rabi season, Deputy Director Agriculture (DDA) Dr Wazir Singh informed during a review meeting held on Wednesday.

The information was shared with Deputy Commissioner Dr Anand Kumar Sharma during a meeting on crop residue management and farm fire incidents organised at the conference hall of the Mini Secretariat in Karnal.

During the review meeting, the Deputy Commissioner directed officials to strictly enforce the ban on stubble burning and intensify awareness campaigns across all villages in the district. He stressed the need for coordinated efforts by administrative and agriculture departments to prevent crop residue burning incidents. DC Sharma instructed tehsildars and Block Development and Panchayat Officers (BDPOs) to organise public announcements in villages to educate farmers about the harmful effects of stubble burning and the legal consequences associated with it. He further directed Sub-Divisional Magistrates (SDMs) to personally visit fire sites along with enforcement teams to investigate the causes of fires and ensure that appropriate action is taken wherever deliberate burning is detected.

Providing details during the meeting, Dr Wazir Singh said that a total of 172 incidents related to stubble burning had been reported in the district so far during the current season. He said the incidents were investigated to determine their actual causes.

According to the DDA, out of the 172 reported cases, 130 incidents were found to be accidental in nature, caused either by short circuits or unknown reasons. In 24 cases, no actual fire was detected during verification, while two incidents were reported from forest areas.

He further informed that seven incidents are still under investigation by the authorities. However, in nine cases, deliberate burning of wheat stubble was confirmed following inquiries conducted by the administration and enforcement teams. As a result, FIRs were registered against 14 farmers under Section 39 of the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 and Section 223(A) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). Dr Singh said that two FIRs were registered in Gharanda block involving five accused farmers. In Assandh, five FIRs were lodged against five farmers for allegedly setting crop residue on fire. Additionally, one FIR each was registered at Nissing police station and Jundla against one farmer in each case for violating the stubble burning ban.

Apart from the FIRs, the Agriculture Department has also imposed a collective fine of Rs 40,000 on the accused farmers as part of the enforcement measures aimed at curbing crop residue burning in the district.

Dr Singh further stated that 172 "red entries" have been recorded on the Meri Fasal Mera Byora portal against farmers linked to fire incidents. These entries would prevent the concerned farmers from selling their crops at Minimum Support Price (MSP) for the next two years. The Deputy Commissioner, accompanied by Superintendent of Police Narender Bijarniya, appealed to farmers to refrain from burning crop residue and instead adopt proper crop residue management practices to protect the environment and maintain soil health. Officials highlighted that stubble burning contributes significantly to air pollution and can adversely affect public health, visibility and soil fertility. The administration reiterated that strict compliance with provisions of pollution control laws is mandatory across Haryana. The district administration also emphasised that awareness campaigns, enforcement drives and field inspections would continue throughout the harvesting season to prevent further incidents of stubble burning and encourage sustainable agricultural practices among farmers.

## Villagers demand relocation amid fly ash crisis in Yamunanagar

**Yamunanagar:** Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) of the Development and Panchayats Department, Haryana, Vijayendra Kumar on Wednesday held a meeting with residents of Ratanpura village and Kayampur village regarding the issue of fly ash pollution allegedly affecting the two villages due to emissions from the Deenbandhu Chhotu Ram Thermal Power Plant. The meeting was organised at the rest house of the thermal power plant in Yamunanagar and was attended by senior government officials, representatives of the thermal plant and local residents. Director Anish Yadav and Deputy

Commissioner Preeti were also present during the discussions. During the interaction, ACS Vijayendra Kumar directly listened to the grievances and concerns raised by villagers from Ratanpura and Kayampur. Residents alleged that fly ash generated from the thermal power plant was continuously settling in their villages and adversely impacting their health and daily lives. Villagers informed the officials that ash particles from the plant frequently contaminate their surroundings, including drinking water, household items and food. They claimed that the persistent pollution has created serious

health concerns for residents, particularly women, children and elderly people living in the affected areas. Speaking to mediapersons after the meeting, Vijayendra Kumar said the villagers had strongly demanded relocation from the affected villages due to the worsening impact of fly ash pollution. He stated that the administration had sought suggestions from the villagers regarding possible relocation options. "We asked them where they would prefer to relocate. They suggested being accommodated in the thermal plant colony, nearby villages such as Fatehpur and Naya Gaon, or on the 15-16 acres

of Panchayat-owned land within their village," the ACS said while addressing the media. He further informed that the committee constituted to examine the issue had taken note of all concerns and suggestions presented by the villagers. According to him, a detailed report along with recommendations would be submitted to the Haryana Government, which would take the final decision regarding further action. Following the meeting, ACS Vijayendra Kumar along with other senior officials visited Ratanpura and Kayampur villages to conduct an on-ground assessment of the situation.



## Haryana records highest crime rate against children among states in 2024: NCRB report

Chandigarh : Haryana recorded the highest rate of crime against children among all states in 2024, according to the latest National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report titled Crime in India 2024. The report highlights a significant rise in offences against children in the state during the year.

According to the NCRB data, Haryana recorded 7,547 crimes against children in 2024, reflecting an increase of 17.9 per cent compared to 2023, when 6,401 such cases were reported across the state. Based on the child population figures from the 2011 Census, Haryana registered a crime rate of 82.8 cases per lakh child population in 2024. This was the highest among all Indian states during the year. The report stated that Madhya Pradesh recorded the second-highest rate of crimes against children among states, with 76.2 cases per lakh child population.

However, when Union Territories were also included in the comparison, Delhi reported a higher crime rate

against children at 138.4 cases per lakh population, while the Andaman and Nicobar Islands recorded 122.9 cases per lakh child population, both surpassing Haryana's rate. The NCRB report revealed that Haryana registered 54 cases involving the murder of children during 2024. Among these, six cases involved rape and murder, reflecting serious concerns regarding crimes targeting minors. The state also reported 2,725 cases of kidnapping and abduction of children during the year, involving a total of 2,805 child victims. The figures include 530 cases related to missing children. Apart from kidnapping and murder cases, the report highlighted other serious offences against children in Haryana. These included eight cases of infanticide and 39 cases involving abandonment of children. Additionally, 12 cases of foeticide were reported in the state during 2024, according to the NCRB data. Authorities also registered 28 cases related to child marriage during the same period. The re-

port further stated that 241 cases were registered under Section 366 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which deals with kidnapping, abducting or inducing women or girls to compel them into marriage. The sharp rise in crimes against children has raised concerns regarding child safety, trafficking, exploitation and protection mechanisms in the state. Experts have often linked such trends to factors including urbanisation, social vulnerabilities, lack of awareness and weak monitoring systems. Officials and child rights activists have repeatedly stressed the importance of strengthening preventive measures, improving community awareness and ensuring faster investigation and prosecution in crimes involving minors. The NCRB report serves as one of the key annual references for analysing crime trends across India and is used by policymakers, law enforcement agencies and social organisations to assess law and order and identify areas requiring intervention.

## Single engine is sufficient to get work done, if the intentions are right, says Deepender Hooda

Ambala : Congress leader Deepender Hooda on Wednesday launched a scathing attack on the BJP and accused the state government of turning a blind eye to the plight of the common people.

He addressed gatherings in support of Congress candidates contesting the corporation election in Ambala City. Deepender Hooda said, "Corruption was rampant in the Municipal Corporations in Haryana, and in the corporation election, we have the opportunity to elect people who can ensure that public funds are being utilised honestly.

The corporation generates its own funds through tax collection and other services, and these funds must be used for the welfare of the public."

"The BJP is seeking votes in the name of forming a triple-engine government to ensure smooth development works, but there have been BJP governments at the center and in the state for the



past 12 years, so who is stopping them from carrying out development works? We have been in power and in the opposition, and we know that a single engine is sufficient to get the work done if the intentions are right," he said.

The Congress leader alleged that the BJP MLAs

were involved in developing illegal colonies while the mayors and members of the house in civic bodies were working as contractors.

"There have been scams in the civic bodies but no action was taken by the government. The BJP wants to form a triple-engine government so that the scams can be eas-

ily covered at all levels," Deepender said. He further said, "The BJP leaders have become arrogant and they have turned a blind eye to the plight of the people of Haryana. It has failed to fulfill the promises made in the assembly election. The BJP deserves a setback so that their leaders regain some con-

sciousness and start working for public welfare. The Congress party has fielded strong candidates, and I urge you to support the Congress candidates so that the voice of the public is raised effectively."

Ambala MP Varun Chaudhry said, "The BJP came to power by making false promises and then failed miserably to fulfill them. Sanitation, roads, and drainage are in poor condition. The BJP is talking about developing India as a Viksit Bharat by 2047 but has no roadmap prepared to achieve the target. The BJP is playing with the emotions of the people of the country, and its engines have failed.

The people of Ambala have the opportunity to teach the BJP a lesson for making fake promises." MP Karamvir Singh Boudh, Ambala City MLA Nirmal Singh, Congress District President (urban) Pawan Aggarwal, Shahabad MLA Ramkaran Kala, and several other Congress leaders were present on this occasion.

## HC directs Charkhi Dadri DC to stop illegal mining, orders ADM-level site survey report

Chandigarh : Taking note of allegations that mining activity was continuing despite the expiry of a mining lease in January this year, the Punjab and Haryana High Court has directed the Charkhi Dadri District Magistrate/Deputy Commissioner to ensure that no illegal mining was carried out in the area.

The direction came during the hearing of a petition filed by Vijay and another petitioner against the Union of India and other respondents. The Division Bench of Justice Ashwani Kumar Mishra and Justice Rohit Kumar also ordered that an affidavit be filed by a responsible officer not below the rank of Additional District Magistrate after personally surveying the site in question. At the onset, counsel for the petitioners submitted before the Bench that although the term of the mining lease granted to the private respondent had expired in January 2026, "rampant min-

ing" was still allegedly continuing despite the fact that renewal of the lease had not been granted so far.



After hearing the submissions, the Bench observed: "In the facts and circumstances of the case, we direct the District Magistrate/Deputy Commissioner, Charkhi Dadri, Haryana, to ensure that no illegal mining is carried out."

The matter has been adjourned to July 15. It will now be heard along with another connected petition. The Centre was represented in the matter by Additional

Solicitor-General of India Satya Pal Jain with senior panel counsel Ashish Rawal. The matter before the court

in the related petition was pertaining to alleged large-scale environmental violations in a mining area in Charkhi Dadri. The Bench, during the course of hearing, was told that the area fell in Aravallis.

The Bench, on previous dates of hearing, had flagged "callousness", possible "connivance" and a prima facie case of "loot and plunder of natural resources" while taking up the related

matter. It had also rapped Haryana for treating serious environmental concerns in a "casual manner".

The Bench had also questioned the State's decision to propose an inquiry committee instead of complying with binding court directions. Taking exception to the State's stand that it was "proposing to constitute some inquiry committee", the Bench had then asserted that no such direction had been issued.

Making it clear that the State could not sidestep judicial directions by initiating parallel processes, the Bench had observed: "We find it difficult to appreciate the stand taken by the State, inasmuch as the directions already issued have not been complied with and serious issues relating to environmental concerns are being dealt with in a casual manner. Instead, a committee is proposed to be constituted which was not required in terms of the previous order."

## Police initiate strict steps to ensure monitoring of licensed firearms in Sonapat

Sonepat : Mamta Singh on Wednesday issued strict directions to licensed firearm holders and gun house operators in Sonapat district regarding the monitoring and reporting of licensed weapons. The move aims to strengthen law and order and ensure greater transparency in the use of firearms in the district.

The directions have been implemented in compliance with instructions issued by the Haryana Home Department. Officials said the new measures are intended to improve accountability among arms licence holders and maintain proper records related to the use of licensed weapons.

According to official data, around 6,355 licensed firearms are registered across the district under the jurisdiction of 15 police stations. Police authorities have been directed to closely monitor compliance with the new reporting rules.

The highest number of licensed firearms, 737, falls under the jurisdiction of the Kharkhoda police station area. This is followed by 672 licensed weapons in the Sadar Gohana police station area and 667 firearms registered under the Sonapat City police station jurisdiction.

Police data further showed that 611 licensed weapons are registered in the Gannaur police station area, while 127 licensed firearms fall under the jurisdiction of HSIIDC Barhi police station.

Additionally, 210 licensed weapons are registered in the Murthal police station area, 216 in the Bahalgarh police station area and 154 in the Rai police station area.

The data also revealed that 331 licensed firearms are registered in the Kundli police station area, 416 under the Civil Lines police station jurisdiction and 384 under the Sector 27 police

station area.

Further, 543 licensed weapons are registered in the Sadar police station area, while 230 firearms are registered under the Mohana police station jurisdiction.

According to police records, Gohana City police station has 570 licensed firearms, while 478 licensed weapons are registered under the jurisdiction of the Baroda police station.

ADGP Mamta Singh directed that every licensed firearm holder must report the use of their weapon to the concerned licensing authority within 30 days of usage. The report must contain complete details regarding the date, location and purpose for which the weapon was used.

Officials stated that the firearm user must also disclose the number of cartridges fired during the use of the weapon. Authorities said this requirement has been introduced to ensure better track-

ing and monitoring of firearm usage.

The Commissioner further directed that all used or empty cartridges must be deposited with the licensing authority after use. In cases where empty cartridges are unavailable, the licence holder will be required to submit a written explanation clarifying the reason.

Mamta Singh warned that failure to provide timely or accurate information regarding firearm usage could lead to serious consequences for licence holders. These may include difficulties during licence renewal as well as suspension or cancellation of the arms licence.

The Commissioner also instructed gun house operators in the district to make their customers aware of the updated regulations and reporting requirements. Gun house owners have been directed to prominently display notices regarding the rules at their establishments.

## Haryana Congress MLA Kuldeep Vats targets own party leaders over infighting

Jhajjar : The Congress MLA from Badli, Kuldeep Vats, on Tuesday took a swipe at leaders within his own party, alleging that certain "mathadheesh" at both the Central and state levels were weakening the organisation and demoralising workers. Without naming anyone, Vats warned that he would not hesitate to launch a campaign against such leaders if they failed to work towards strengthening the party.

Calling for intervention by senior leadership, he said, "Rahul needs to look not just at Haryana but across the country, where several Congress leaders are in close proximity with the BJP and

weakening the party. I can provide proof of this," Vats said while interacting with mediapersons.

His remarks came a day after his birthday celebrations, which were attended by Rohtak MP Deepender Singh Hooda, Jhajjar MLA Geeta Bhukkal and other party leaders.

Vats also attributed the Congress' defeat in the 2024 Assembly elections to internal divisions rather than lack of public support. "The Congress' defeat in the 2024 Assembly elections was largely due to factionalism among the party leaders, and not the public, as people had already made up their mind to bring the Congress back to power.

Inviting applications for party tickets fuelled factionalism within the organisation, which played a key role in the party's defeat. There are 17 Assembly seats, which the party lost due to factionalism among the leaders," he said. Responding to another question, Vats said the party leadership should also examine the reasons behind cross-voting by five Congress MLAs during the Rajya Sabha elections.

The MLA's recent interaction with Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini also came up during the media interaction. Saini had attended a wedding function hosted by Vats in Jhajjar a day before the Rajya Sabha polls.

## Rs 2000-crore Sohna Highway's 6th cave-in since 2023 exposes Gurugram's sewer crisis

Gurugram : A portion of the Rs 2,000-crore Sohna Highway caved in yet again on Wednesday, marking the sixth major cave-in on the crucial Gurugram corridor since 2023 and reigniting concerns over the crumbling sewer infrastructure beneath one of NCR's busiest roads.

The latest collapse created a massive pit nearly 10 feet wide and 20 feet deep, just metres away from the site where a similar sinkhole had appeared in June last year. Authorities immediately barricaded the affected stretch to prevent accidents, while officials from the National Highways Au-

thority of India (NHAI) said further action would be taken in coordination with the Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA).

Officials said the recurring cave-ins had been repeatedly linked to a damaged 1,800-mm master sewer line running beneath the highway. Though the sewer network was officially handed over to GMDA in 2022, the critically damaged master pipeline still has not undergone complete rehabilitation.

The issue traces back nearly a decade. In 2017, the then Haryana Urban Development Authority

(HUDA), now Haryana Shehri Vikas Pradhikaran (HSVP), had proposed a comprehensive rehabilitation of the sewer line using cured-in-place pipe (CIPP) technology at an estimated cost of Rs 28.75 crore. The proposal also included laying a new 900-mm sewer line from Subhash Chowk towards Sector 48 and strengthening sewer manholes along the stretch. NHAI was expected to execute the project under HUDA's supervision.

However, during the highway widening phase and the subsequent administrative transition from HUDA to GMDA, the scope

of the project was significantly reduced. According to NHAI, only the strengthening of manholes was eventually carried out, while the rehabilitation of the main damaged pipeline was left unresolved. Since December 2023, the corridor has witnessed a series of alarming sinkholes, exposing the fragile condition of the underground sewer system. Major incidents were reported in December 2023, July 2024 and May 2025. One of the most serious cave-ins occurred near Sisal Vihar, where a collapsed sewer line and chamber triggered a 12-foot-deep pit. On June 30 last year, an-

other sinkhole — approximately two metres wide and six metres deep — emerged on the same stretch. Earlier, on June 18, a smaller collapse had forced authorities to shut nearly one-and-a-half lanes as a precautionary measure. After prolonged blame-shifting between multiple agencies, it was eventually decided that NHAI would undertake full rehabilitation of the master sewer line using CIPP technology at an estimated cost of Rs 68 crore. However, despite repeated collapses and mounting public safety concerns, the rehabilitation work is yet to begin.

## New Paniyala-Barodamev Expressway to connect Delhi-Mumbai corridor from September

Gurugram : Commuters travelling between Delhi and Jaipur are set to benefit from a major reduction in travel time beginning this September, with the journey expected to take only around two hours. Travellers starting from Gurugram will reportedly be able to reach Jaipur in nearly 90 minutes once the new high-speed corridor becomes operational.

The significant improvement in connectivity is being attributed to the upcoming completion of Rajasthan's 86-km greenfield expressway, officially known as the Paniyala-Barodamev Expressway.

The new expressway is being developed as a strategic link connecting the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway

with the Ambala-Kotputli Corridor, thereby creating a faster and more efficient route between major urban centres in northern India. Officials believe the project will significantly strengthen regional connectivity and reduce traffic congestion on existing highways connecting Delhi, Haryana and Rajasthan. The corridor is expected to facilitate smoother movement for daily commuters, commercial transport vehicles and tourists.

The expressway is also likely to provide a major boost to the famous "Golden Triangle" tourism circuit linking Delhi, Agra and Jaipur. Tourism stakeholders expect the improved road infrastructure to encourage more weekend travel and



make tour itineraries more convenient for both domestic and international visitors.

By reducing travel duration substantially, the project is expected to improve accessibility between historical and commercial hubs in North India. Authorities believe the faster connectivity could contribute to in-

creased tourism activity and economic growth in the region.

Constructed at an estimated cost of around Rs 2,000 crore, the 86-km greenfield project forms an important part of the broader regional infrastructure development plan currently underway in northern India.

## Political scions rise as MC poll din gets louder in Rewari

Rewari : Electioneering for the municipal polls in Rewari has witnessed the rise of the political scions of prominent leaders owing allegiance to the ruling as well as opposition parties. While Union minister Rao Inderjit Singh's daughter and Haryana Health Minister Arti Singh Rao is leading the BJP's campaign, former Haryana minister Capt Ajay Singh Yadav's son and former Rewari MLA Chiranjeev Rao is spearheading the Congress assault. Both Arti and Chiranjeev are holding public meetings, roadshows and outreach drives to seek votes and support for the candidates of their respective parties. Arti has made the creation of a 'triple-engine' regime her main poll plank. She lists the establishment of



AIIMS at Majra village in Rewari district, construction of Rewari bypass and launch of new bus-stand projects at Rewari, Dharuhera and Kosli as the major achievements of the BJP regime. BJP's backing is necessary to ensure the development of the city, provision of better fa-

cilities and installation of a strong leadership," she asserts as she appeals to the electors to vote in favour of Rewari Municipal Council chief aspirant Vinita Pipla, Dharuhera Municipal Committee head candidate Ajay Jangra and other BJP nominees.



## KKR eye fourth straight win as DC fight to keep playoff hopes alive

**New Delhi:** Kolkata Knight Riders will look to extend their winning streak and deepen Delhi Capitals' troubles when the two sides meet in a high-stakes IPL 2026 encounter at the Arun Jaitley Stadium here on Friday.

With the tournament entering its decisive phase, the clash has effectively turned into a survival battle for two teams desperately trying to stay alive in the playoff race.

The momentum, however, appears firmly with Kolkata, who have staged an impressive comeback with three consecutive wins after struggling for consistency earlier in the season.

Delhi enter the contest under mounting pressure following four defeats in their last five matches. Their latest setback came against Chennai Super Kings, where they suffered an eight-wicket loss despite showing flashes of promise with the bat.

The defeat intensified scrutiny on skipper Axar Patel and the team's inconsistent performances, particularly at home.

Delhi's biggest concern remains their fragile middle order. While KL Rahul has carried the batting almost single-handedly and currently leads the Orange Cap standings with 445 runs at a strike rate of over 180, support from the rest of the lineup has been inconsistent.



Players such as Nitish Rana, Karun Nair and Tristan Stubbs have struggled to convert starts into impactful innings, often leaving Delhi vulnerable in crunch situations. Delhi's poor home record has only worsened the situation. They have lost seven of their last eight matches at the Arun Jaitley Stadium, a statistic that reflects both their inability to handle pressure and recurring bowling failures in high-scoring games.

The bowling unit too has lacked consistency. Mitchell Starc and Kuldeep Yadav have delivered occasional breakthroughs, but Delhi have struggled to control the flow of runs during the middle and death overs. Axar Patel remains the side's leading wicket-taker, but the attack has failed collectively in

several close contests this season.

In contrast, Kolkata appear to be peaking at the perfect time. Ajinkya Rahane's side arrives with renewed confidence after defeating Sunrisers Hyderabad by seven wickets in a comprehensive display. More importantly, their bowling attack has found rhythm, giving the team a balanced look heading into the business end of the tournament. Sunil Narine has once again emerged as KKR's biggest weapon with the ball, maintaining an outstanding economy rate in the Power Play while also picking up crucial wickets.

Varun Chakravarthy and Kartik Tyagi have provided valuable support, helping Kolkata restrict opposition batting lineups effectively in recent matches.

KKR's batting has also shown improvement after an inconsistent start to the season. Finn Allen's aggressive approach at the top has provided quick starts, while Ankrish Raghuvanshi has anchored the innings with maturity beyond his years. The middle order featuring Rinku Singh and Cameron Green gives the side added firepower in pressure situations.

History also favours Kolkata heading into the clash. They have won the last three meetings against Delhi and will draw confidence from their recent dominance.

The pitch at the Arun Jaitley Stadium is expected to favour batsmen once again, with the average first-innings score this season standing around 177. Teams chasing have enjoyed nota-

ble success at the venue, winning six of the last eight matches, making the toss potentially crucial.

With Kolkata carrying momentum and Delhi fighting to prevent their campaign from slipping away, Friday's contest promises to be one of the most significant matches of the IPL 2026 league stage.

**Teams:**  
Delhi Capitals: Karun Nair, Nitish Rana, Sameer Rizvi, David Miller, Pathum Nissanka, Sahil Parakh, Prithvi Shaw, Ashutosh Sharma, Axar Patel (Captain), Ajay Jadav Mandal, Madhav Tiwari, Vipraj Nigam, Tripurana Vijay, Auqib Nabi Dar, Rehan Ahmed, Abishek Porel, KL Rahul, Tristan Stubbs, Dushmantha Chameera, Kuldeep Yadav, Mukesh Kumar, T Natarajan, Mitchell Starc, Lungi Ngidi, Kyle Jamieson

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

## Olympic champion Liu re-elected member of ITTF Athletes' Commission

**London:** China's Olympic champion Liu Shiwen has been re-elected as one of the 10 members of the International Table Tennis Federation Athletes' Commission.

The ITTF announced the results of the election on Thursday, following the conclusion of the election phase on May 4, adding that more than 300 votes were cast in the election for able-bodied athlete representatives.

Liu has served as co-chair of the ITTF Athletes' Commission along with India's Sharath Kamal Achanta from 2022 to 2026. Achanta was also re-elected as the member

this time. Other elected members include Charlotte Carey of Wales, Ghana's Celia Baah Danso, Paul Drinkhall of England, Algeria's Sami Kherouf, Alberto Mino of Ecuador, and Romania's Elizabeta Samara.

The ITTF said the election ensured balanced continental and gender representation across Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe, according to Xinhua.

Two para table tennis athlete representatives, England's Jack Hunter-Spivey and Tahl Leibovitz of the United States, were also elected to the commission.

## Wang leads China's comeback win over Romania at table tennis team worlds

**London:** Wang Chuqin claimed two wins as China rallied to beat Romania 3-1 and reached the men's team quarterfinals at the 2026 ITTF World Team Table Tennis Championships Finals.

China fell behind early when Liang Jingkun lost 11-5, 11-7, 11-6 to Eduard Ionescu, the highest-ranked player in Romania's lineup on Wednesday. "I was a bit tight at the start, and he performed better. After he had some excellent shots, my mentality was impacted and I failed to catch up with him afterwards," Liang said. "As I don't have much advantage technically and tactically, I need to go all out against every opponent," he added. Wang, the world No. 1, restored parity by beating Iulian Chirita in straight games. He took the first 11-5, then recovered from a 5-1 deficit in the second to level at 8-8 before edging it 12-10. He closed out the match 11-5, according to Xinhua.

"I prepared fully for this match. After trailing in the second game, I managed to turn the tables, which boosted my confidence in the third," Wang said.

Lin Shidong put China ahead with an 11-9, 11-6, 11-4 win over Ovidiu Ionescu in the third match. The 36-year-old Romanian called two TTR reviews in the second game, but both decisions went against him. "The third match was quite crucial, but I didn't think too much about it. I was just focused on every point," Lin said. "I felt that I didn't truly brace for high-intensity competition in the group stage. Hopefully I will be more pumped up in the upcoming matches," he added. Wang then sealed the tie against Eduard Ionescu. He led 8-2 in the opening game before the Romanian closed to within one point, but Wang held on for an 11-8 win. Ionescu took the second 11-8, but Wang responded to win

the next two games 11-3, 11-4.

"Eduard is a strong player, and I expected it to be a tough match. Due to Lin's win in the third match, I felt more relieved on the court," Wang said. China will face either South Korea or Austria in the quarterfinals. In the women's team round of 16, China dominated Sweden 3-0 without losing a game. Sun Yingsha eased past Swedish chopper Linda Bergstrom 11-3, 11-4, 11-4 in the opening match. "Linda has shown her characteristics with a defensive style. I hadn't expected it to be an easy match, and even prepared for losing the first game," Sun said after the win. "As the tournament now approaches the quarterfinals, the opponents will only get stronger and stronger. The contest will not only be about the skills and tactics, but also about the mentality and the ability to read the game," she added.

## Uncertainty over Mbappe clouds Real Madrid before Clasico

**Madrid:** With three days to go until the meeting between FC Barcelona and Real Madrid, which could see Barcelona crowned La Liga champion with a draw at home, forward Kylian Mbappe has become the focus of attention.

It remains unclear if the muscle injury that ruled Mbappe out of last weekend's 2-0 win at Espanyol will allow him to feature, with the forward limited to light gym work on Wednesday.

Beyond his fitness, however, Mbappe's future at Real Madrid is attracting increasing scrutiny.

The Frenchman's output has not been in doubt. He has scored 41 goals in 41 games this season and 85 in 100 appearances for the club. Instead, questions have centered on his attitude, particularly in sections of the Madrid media.

The latest controversy came last weekend when the injured Mbappe traveled to Sardinia with his partner, with images showing the pair on a yacht. Further criticism followed reports that his

private jet landed in Madrid just 10 minutes before kickoff against Espanyol, raising doubts about his engagement with the team, according to Xinhua.

Earlier in the year, Mbappe also drew attention when he traveled to France for a second opinion on a knee injury amid reports, denied by the player, that the club's medical staff had ini-



Madrid forward Kylian Mbappe.

tially scanned the wrong knee. Such incidents have gained traction in a season in which Madrid has struggled for silverware. The club's only trophy during Mbappe's two campaigns remains the 2024 UEFA Super Cup win over Atalanta.

In his first season, Barcelona won La Liga and defeated Madrid in the Copa del Rey final, while Arsenal eliminated Madrid in the Champions League quarterfinals. This season, Bayern Munich knocked Madrid out in the last eight, Barcelona is on the verge of the league title, and second-tier Albacete eliminated the club early in the Copa del Rey.

Barcelona also beat Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup in both 2025 and earlier this year, while Mbappe's former club Paris Saint-Germain won last season's Champions League and will face Arsenal in this year's final.

The context has fueled speculation in the Spanish press. Newspaper Marca reported this week that Mbappe has

"grown apart from the team," citing concerns over his behavior within the dressing room.

The report also pointed to a perceived power struggle with Vinicius Junior, suggesting the Brazilian currently enjoys stronger backing from teammates.

Marca, widely seen as close to club president Florentino Perez, said the relationship between Mbappe and the squad had "fractured" in recent months.

While a departure would have once seemed unthinkable, Madrid faces a significant squad rebuild this summer. Reinforcements are needed in midfield, defense and at full-back, with uncertainty surrounding players including Dani Carvajal, Fran Garcia, Ferland Mendy, David Alaba and Antonio Rudiger.

There are also tactical questions. The attacking trio of Vinicius, Jude Bellingham and Mbappe has yet to consistently deliver, with all three favoring similar areas of the pitch.

Mbappe joined Madrid on a free transfer, albeit with a substantial signing bonus, meaning any potential sale could represent a major financial gain. A fee exceeding 150 million euros could help fund a wider rebuild.

For now, Mbappe's immediate focus is on recovering in time for Sunday's Clasico. Beyond that, uncertainty around his long-term future, once unthinkable, is beginning to surface.

## Pakistan face Bangladesh pace challenge in key WTC27 series

**Mirpur:** With important ICC World Test Championship 2025-27 points on the line, Pakistan are all set to begin their tour of Bangladesh with a Test match here on Friday.

Pakistan are currently placed fifth on the WTC standings with a point percentage of 50, whereas Bangladesh are eighth with 16.67.

The last meeting between these two sides adds to the intrigue of the contest, as Bangladesh stunned Pakistan and secured a historic first-ever Test series win over their opponents in 2024.

And Pakistan skipper Shan Masood has a fair idea of the Bangladesh challenge, especially their potent pace attack.

From the hero of Mount Maunganui, Ebadot Hossain, who helped Bangladesh to a historic win over New Zealand in 2022, to the experienced Taskin Ahmed and the fiery Nahid Rana, Bangladesh's pace unit has a well-rounded look to it, according to ICC.

"Their pace attack is very good and it is probably

the best I have seen from them," Masood said ahead of the first Test.

At the same time, Pakistan are no short of capabilities, with veteran Moham-

ad Abbas in line to play his first Test since January 2025. Hasan Ali and Shaheen Afridi along with Khurram Shahzad round up a good pace attack.

"We won't get into comparisons between our units, as both have quality," Masood noted.

Having spoken about the pace factor, Masood stated that Pakistan were ready for any conditions, having played in a variety of places under his captaincy. "The pitch currently has grass on



Shan Masood and Shaheen Afridi with a trophy.

run-getter with 588 runs to his name, including two hundreds, while also guiding

Peshawar Zalmi to the title as captain.

Masood backed Babar to come good in Bangladesh and is confident their star batter will carry over his form into international cricket.

"I believe he is one of the best batsmen Pakistan has ever produced," the skipper said. "Having him scoring runs is always beneficial, as runs provide a batsman with essential confidence."

"It is a very good time for us because he is entering this series with a significant number of runs from the PSL. We are looking forward to Babar replicating those performances in these Test matches." Squad: Shan Masood (captain), Abdullah Faisal, Amad Butt, Azaan Awais, Babar Azam, Hasan Ali, Imam-ul-Haq, Khurram Shahzad, Mohammad Rizwan, Ghazi Ghori, Noman Ali, Sajid Khan, Salman Ali Agha, Saud Shakeel, Shaheen Afridi.

## KSCA's excess free ticket demand costs Bengaluru IPL final: BCCI

**Bengaluru:** In a major controversy ahead of the IPL playoffs, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Thursday accused the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) of demanding over 10,000 extra complimentary tickets — including allocations for MLAs, MLCs and the Karnataka government — forcing the Board to strip Bengaluru of hosting the IPL final and playoff matches.

Making explosive disclosures, BCCI Secretary Devajit Saikia said the Board was "shocked" by the scale of demands made by the KSCA, which allegedly went far beyond the 15 percent complimentary ticket quota permitted under IPL regulations and Supreme Court guidelines.

The BCCI on Wednesday officially shifted the IPL final to the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad, while playoff matches were allotted to Dharamshala and New Chandigarh's Mullanpur Stadium.

Saikia revealed that Bengaluru was originally scheduled to host one playoff

and the IPL final because Royal Challengers Bengaluru were the defending champions.

"Under normal IPL protocol, the defending champion franchise gets hosting rights for one playoff and the final. Therefore, Bengaluru should have hosted the marquee matches," he said.

"However, due to certain developments and serious difficulties in hosting the matches in Bengaluru, the BCCI had to take a hard decision to move the games out of Karnataka."

Saikia said the controversy began after the BCCI emailed the KSCA on May 1, reiterating that host state associations are entitled to only 15 percent of total stadium capacity as complimentary tickets.

"All remaining tickets must be sold online for the general public. This is not only an IPL norm but also in line with the mandate of the Hon'ble Supreme Court to ensure common cricket fans get fair access to tickets," he said. According to the BCCI Secretary, the KSCA's reply on May 2 sought a massive

additional allocation beyond the approved quota.

"After taking the 15 percent complimentary tickets, they wanted another huge chunk for members, clubs, life members and miscellaneous categories. Most surprisingly, they demanded 900 complimentary tickets for MLAs and MLCs and another 700 tickets for the Karnataka government," Saikia alleged.

He said the total additional demand crossed 10,000 tickets.

"If we had accepted all these demands, only a few thousand tickets would have remained for the general public. That would have been a direct violation of BCCI norms and Supreme Court directives," he asserted. Saikia stressed that while league-stage IPL matches are jointly conducted by franchises and state associations, the playoffs and final are organised directly by the BCCI, which cannot dilute its regulations. "The BCCI is the sole hosting authority for playoff and final matches. We cannot compromise established protocols," he said.

## Young Tigresses eye U17 Women's Asian Cup history in decisive Lebanon clash

**Suzhou, (China):** After facing the two heavyweight sides of the group, Australia and Japan, the equation for India at the AFC U17 Women's Asian Cup China 2026 has now become clear. One final match and one final chance to make the quarterfinals.

India will face Lebanon in their last Group B fixture at the Suzhou Taihu Football Sports Centre Pitch 8 on Friday, May 8, at 13:00 IST, knowing that a victory could be enough to seal a historic first-ever qualification to the knockout stage of the competition.

Goalkeeper Munni said after Thursday's training session at Pitch 6 of the centre, "Tomorrow is our last match of the group stage, and if we win, we will qualify. The feeling after training is good. We believe we can win this match. So, we need to stay fully focused on it."

Despite defeats against Australia (0-2) and Japan (0-3), the Young Tigresses remain alive in the race for the

knockout stage as one of the two best third-placed teams. India currently hold a superior goal difference of -5 compared to Group C sides Philippines (-13) and Chinese Taipei (-14), who face each other on the final matchday. That means either side would require a heavy-margin victory to overtake India's goal difference if the Young Tigresses defeat Lebanon.

Furthermore, if Thursday evening's Group A fixture between Vietnam and Myanmar ends in a draw or the latter wins by less than three goals, India will confirm their place in the last eight with a victory, irrespective of the Group C result.

For India, playing their first AFC U17 Women's Asian Cup in 21 years, progressing beyond the group stage would mark a historic achievement.

"We have to play thinking about India and give our all for the country," Munni said.

"The previous two teams were very tough, but Leba-

non are nearer to our level, and we respect them but believe we can beat them. Their strikers are good, so we need to stay alert. We need to attack with discipline, and we believe we can score goals against them," she said.

The 16-year-old goalkeeper from Rajasthan was one of India's standout performers against Japan, particularly during the narrow opening phases, where India held firm for almost an hour before eventually conceding.

"In both matches, especially the last one, I had to work a lot and stay very busy," Munni said. "Against Japan, we defended really well for around 60 minutes, and that itself was a big thing. We could have done even better against Australia, too. Overall, we performed well in both games."

"Personally, the Japan match was probably the most difficult match of my life, but also one of my best. I played well, even though goals were conceded. Those things happen in football."

Head coach Pamela Conti expects a very different challenge against Lebanon compared to the previous two matches. The Italian believes the contest will demand more attacking flair since both teams require a win to qualify. The West Asians, making their debut in the tournament, opened with a 0-13 loss against Japan, followed by a sensational point in a 1-1 draw with Australia.

"I watched Lebanon's game against Australia that ended 1-1. They are a team at our level, but they have very good attacking players. We need to be careful and not open up too much, because they can hurt us on the counter-attack. It will be a very intelligent game, and we must remember it's 90 minutes. It's a match where everything is at stake," said Conti. Unlike the opening two matches, where India spent large phases defending deep against physically and technically superior opponents, the Young Tigresses now have to play with great

er attacking intent.

On Wednesday, the girls had recovery sessions indoors in the gym and the swimming pool. On Thursday, they had a 90-minute official training session involving tactical and set-piece work, and small-sided games.

Centre-back Elizabeth Lakra explained that the team has specifically worked on both attacking and defensive scenarios during training.

"We are feeling great after training. We will give our full effort to win the game and qualify for the quarterfinals," Elizabeth said.

"In training, we worked on how to attack and also how to defend our goal against the way they attack. We practised those situations. In the first two matches, we had to defend a lot. But now, in the next match, we need to score goals because it's simple — either we win, or we go home. We are going with that mindset," the 16-year-old from Jharkhand added.



# MARKET

BSE Sensex			Nifty 50			Nifty 500			Nifty Next 50			Nifty 100			Nifty Bank			Nifty Midcap 100		
Close	Percent change		Close	Percent change		Close	Percent change		Close	Percent change		Close	Percent change		Close	Percent change		Close	Percent change	
77,844.52	-0.15%		24,326.65	-0.018%		23,214.00	0.35%		71,852.90	0.23%		25,319.50	0.027%		55,981.05	2.63%		62,003.15	1.1%	
Previous close	Open		Previous close	Open		Previous close	Open		Previous close	Open		Previous close	Open		Previous close	Open		Previous close	Open	
77,713.21	78,339.24		24,330.95	24,398.50		23,133.40	23,219.35		71,691.45	71,982.50		25,312.60	25,388.85		54,547.05	55,113.40		61,326.70	61,658.90	
High	Low		High	Low		High	Low		High	Low		High	Low		High	Low		High	Low	
78,384.70	77,713.21		24,482.10	24,284.00		23,304.50	23,142.45		72,037.60	71,610.90		25,460.90	25,267.90		56,078.80	54,587.20		62,094.40	61,441.15	

## Top Gainers

Company	Current	% Gain
HDFC Life	625.40	3.14
Bajaj Auto	10,605.00	2.77
M&M	3,370.70	2.12
Grasim	2,960.60	1.57
NTPC	400.35	1.39

## Top Losers

Company	Current	% Loss
HUL	2,272.20	-1.94
TCS	2,401.40	-1.40
Tech Mahindra	1,448.20	-1.26
Titan Company	4,307.50	-1.20
ITC	307.40	-1.06

## Commodities

Commodity	Price	Change (%)
Gold Jun 05	152,809.00	677.00 0.45
Silver Jul 03	262,189.00	8,924.00 3.52
Crudeoil May 18	8,640.00	-377.00 -4.18
Naturalgas May 26	255.20	-3.20 -1.24

## Telangana to double Hyderabad infrastructure in 10 years, IT Minister

Hyderabad: Telangana plans to double the size of Hyderabad's infrastructure over the next decade to support rapid enterprise growth and strengthen the city's position as a global innovation and Global Capability Centre (GCC) hub, Telangana IT and Industries Minister Duddilla Sridhar Babu said on Thursday.

Delivering the keynote address at the NASSCOM GCC Summit 2026 in Mumbai, Sridhar Babu said Hyderabad is emerging as one of the world's most diversified GCC ecosystems, bringing together technology, financial services, semiconductors, life sciences, defence, FMCG, and space technology sectors within a single innovation cluster. Speaking during the session "Beyond Policy: Designed to Win the Global GCC Race," Sridhar Babu said modern GCCs have evolved far beyond outsourcing centres and are now becoming strategic enterprise innovation hubs. "GCCs today are driving the decentralisation of corporate sovereignty itself," the Minister said.

Highlighting Hyderabad's growing global relevance, he said the city hosts operations of the

world's top technology companies including Apple, Google, Microsoft, Meta, and Nvidia, alongside seven of the world's top ten semiconductor firms.

The city also houses major financial and capital market institutions including Deutsche Börse, the London Stock Exchange, JPMorgan Chase, and Bank of America. "Hyderabad gives you something no other city can — the ability to cross-pollinate talent," Sridhar Babu said. "A financial GCC in Hyderabad doesn't just hire bankers; it hires from an ecosystem that designs AI models, builds global digital platforms, and includes security specialists from the defence vertical," he added. Addressing concerns around sustainability, urban congestion, and future infrastructure demands, the Minister outlined Telangana's long-term urban expansion strategy aimed at preventing the infrastructure stress witnessed in several large metropolitan cities. As part of its vision to build a US\$1 trillion economy by 2035, the state is developing a Net-Zero urban ecosystem that includes the proposed Bharat Future City and a dedicated AI City, he said.

## Stock market ends with marginal losses, Nifty above 24,330 mark

Mumbai: Indian stock market on Thursday ended with marginal losses in a volatile session as Nifty managed to hold above 24,330 mark.

At the time of close, Sensex was down 114 points or 0.15 percent at 77,844.52, while the Nifty was down 4.30 points or 0.02 percent at 24,326.65. Nifty Midcap index rose 1.1pc to hit a fresh high of 62,094.40, while the Smallcap index gained 0.9pc.

The markets reacted amid the hopes of easing geopolitical tensions following reports of a potential US-Iran peace deal.

The overall market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms rose to over Rs 475 lakh crore from Rs 472.8 lakh crore.

Among the sectors, pressure was seen in FMCG, IT, PSU Bank and consumer durable stocks. Further, buying interest emerged in auto,



defence, media, defence, Mahindra, Grasim Industries and NTPC while on the losing end were Tech Mahindra, Hindustan Unilever, Titan Company, TCS and ITC.

More than 200 stocks touched their 52-week high on the BSE, including Polycab, J&K Bank, GE Vernova

TD, CG Power, Hitachi Energy, Syra SGS, Bajaj Auto, Amber Enterprises, Kirloskar Oil, HFCL, Laurus Labs, Tata Steel, Lupin, CCL Products, AB Capital, Welspun Corp, Cummins, Bank of Maharashtra, Adani Green, Aurobindo Pharma, among others.

TD, CG Power, Hitachi Energy, Syra SGS, Bajaj Auto, Amber Enterprises, Kirloskar Oil, HFCL, Laurus Labs, Tata Steel, Lupin, CCL Products, AB Capital, Welspun Corp, Cummins, Bank of Maharashtra, Adani Green, Aurobindo Pharma, among others.

## CITI highlights decline in FY26 textile exports, flags key cotton policy measures

New Delhi: The Confederation of Indian Textile Industry (CITI) on Thursday released a report stating textile and apparel exports declined 2.2 per cent in dollar terms year-on-year (Y-O-Y) in FY26 to USD 35.79 billion, focusing on cotton production, pricing, and its supply.

The study "Economic Analysis of Cotton Supply, Pricing and Trade Policy in India", jointly prepared by Gherzi and the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC), flagged the adverse impact of 11 pc import duty on cotton during supply gaps to highlight the long-term competitiveness of India's textile and apparel sector.

Commenting on the report, Ashwin Chandran, chairman of CITI, said, "The Gherzi-ICAC report presents a detailed and implementable roadmap for stakeholders to realise the ambitious USD 350 billion target that we have for the textile and apparel industry by 2030, including exports worth USD 100 billion by the end of this decade."

Chandran noted that the key takeaway from the report is its central message: a thriving textile and apparel industry can be the farmer's strongest customer in keeping with the 5F vision.

The report recommended enhancing the fibre quality and alignment of domestic market conditions with global benchmarks to support farmers' livelihoods

and industry growth.

The Gerzi-ICAC report states that ad-hoc relief from import duty has had a limited impact.

"Most recently, the import duty on cotton was temporarily waived from August to December 2025. It was reinstated on January 1, 2026," it said.

"A stable and predictable policy is imperative to allow the mills to sustain their operations and fulfil the market demand. There is a need to withdraw the import duty on cotton and allow the mills to have access to cotton at competitive prices," the study said, pointing out that India's competitors in Asia have free access to international cotton without any import duty. The import duty put India at a significant disadvantage. The report recommended that the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI), as a nodal institution, needs to be empowered to supply cotton to mills at internationally competitive prices.

Pointing towards some urgent needs, the report said, "In budgetary terms, the CCI would require a buffer of approximately Rs 1,500 crores annually to supply about 100 Lakh bales of cotton (Shankar-6) representing about one-third of the crop, to the local textile mills at an international parity price (offsetting import duty disadvantage of 11pc) which is USD 4/lb below the international price." "Shankar-6" refers to

a premier, widely traded variety of long-staple Indian cotton mainly grown in Gujarat. It's widely popular for high tensile strength 28-30mm staple length, and low contamination.

The joint study further pointed out that the CCI may consider the feasibility of keeping a strategic inventory of about three months of consumption to be used to cushion volatility. These steps would be similar to the cotton reserve policy adopted by other major cotton-producing states, such as China.

"There would also be a need for the CCI to sustain a dynamic selling policy to meet the current requirement of the mills through its warehouses in upcountry locations near major textile clusters," it added.

On boosting productivity, the report said, "The long-term policy considerations should address the fundamental constraints faced by the cotton sector for improving productivity to ensure economic viability of this strategic crop for the growers."

It suggested that the policy framework for an industrial crop such as cotton will need to take into account the interests of the entire value chain.

Lastly, the report recommended that there is a need for an institutional mechanism to stabilise cotton prices for reducing the impact of price speculation on the value chain.

## ITC expands PwD skilling programme across 7 cities, to create over 2,300 jobs

New Delhi: ITC Limited is expanding its skilling initiative for persons with disabilities (PwDs) across multiple Indian cities and helping over 2,300 differently-abled youth secure formal employment opportunities.

The programme has now expanded to seven cities, including Bengaluru, Mysuru, Lucknow, Howrah, Kolkata, Pune and Bhubaneswar through eight centres operated in partnership with organisations such as Youth4Jobs, Anudip Foundation, Cheshire Disability Trust, Sarthak Educational Trust and Dr. Reddy's Foundation.

Over 2,370 differently-abled youth have been

trained under the initiative in less than four years, with women accounting for over 30pc of the participants. Trainees have secured employment across sectors, including retail, hospitality, logistics, IT-enabled services, customer support and back-office operations, the company said.

Among the beneficiaries is 33-year-old Kavali Jyothi from Andhra Pradesh's Anantapur district, who lives with 65pc locomotor disability. After years of limited employment opportunities due to mobility constraints, she now works as a Customer Support Associate at Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru, earning Rs 16,000 per month.

Similarly, Jayram Ramesh Sonune, a visually impaired youth from Pune district's Shikrapur village, secured employment at Pune Airport after receiving training in computer proficiency, workplace communication and professional readiness. He now earns Rs 25,000 per month. In Uttar Pradesh's Barabanki, Sunil Kumar, who has 90pc locomotor disability, works as an accountant earning Rs 15,000 per month. The programme focuses on industry-relevant training and workplace preparedness, covering spoken English, financial literacy, digital literacy and soft skills. It also provides mentorship and sign-language interpretation

support wherever required.

The initiative comes at a time when employment opportunities for persons with disabilities remain limited in India, especially in rural regions. According to estimates cited by the company, nearly 69pc of persons with disabilities live in rural India, while literacy levels among the specially-abled stand at 54.4pc. Employment participation also remains low, with only one in four PwDs engaged in employment.

Commenting on the initiative, Prabhakar Lingarddy, Executive Vice President and Head - Social Investments at ITC Limited, said the programme aims to nurture dignity and self-belief

among differently-abled individuals while enabling long-term social and economic inclusion.

The company has also introduced specialised interventions such as the Mangaldeep Sixth Sense programme for visually challenged individuals. Launched in December 2021, the initiative trains participants in fragrance evaluation by leveraging enhanced olfactory abilities and has already covered 210 individuals across five cities. ITC said its overall vocational skilling programme has so far reached nearly 1.45 lakh youth across India, reflecting a broader industry push towards inclusive workforce participation.

## Gulf NRIs shift from Indian real estate to equities amid West Asia uncertainty: Report

New Delhi: Amid the ongoing Iran War, the Indian expatriates in the Gulf region are rapidly shifting their investment preferences away from traditional real estate purchases in India and towards equities, mutual funds, and structured financial planning, according to a new report by Equirus Wealth.

The study, based on responses from 8,300 non-resident Indians (NRIs) across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, including the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain, points to a structural transformation in how overseas Indians are approaching wealth creation amid rising geopolitical uncertainty in West Asia.

According to the report, 73 per cent of GCC-based NRIs have increased their exposure to Indian equities and mutual funds, while 42 per cent said they are willing to deploy fresh capital into Indian equities going forward. Indian equities emerged as the single most preferred asset class for future investments, significantly ahead of fixed income and global markets.

The survey showed that 42 per cent of respondents preferred Indian equities as their primary future investment avenue, followed by fixed income and debt instruments at 23pc. Around 15pc of investors preferred to remain in a "wait-and-watch" mode, while 11pc favoured international equities. Gold and cash/liquid

assets each attracted 4pc preference, while Indian real estate accounted for just 2pc.

The findings mark a sharp departure from historical investment patterns among Gulf NRIs, who traditionally channelled remittances into property purchases, second homes, land, and other real estate-linked assets in India.

The report noted that Indian real estate is now witnessing broad-based selling, with as many as 40 pc of investors reducing exposure. This indicates a long-term portfolio reallocation rather than a temporary cyclical shift. Net portfolio allocation trends further highlighted the transition. Indian equities and mutual funds recorded a net positive allocation shift

of 54pc, while gold and fixed deposits/debt instruments saw net increases of 16pc and 15pc, respectively. In contrast, real estate registered a net decline of 27pc, while international equities and cash holdings both slipped by 4pc.

The report also highlighted improving investor confidence among overseas Indians despite ongoing geopolitical tensions in the region. Nearly 86pc of respondents said their financial confidence remained stable or had improved.

While 83pc of investors acknowledged geopolitical risks in West Asia, most respondents indicated they were responding with disciplined financial behaviour rather than panic.

## Emirates posts record AED 24.4 billion profit in FY26

Hyderabad: Dubai-based Emirates Group on Thursday reported record financial results for the 2025-26 financial year, posting a profit before tax of AED 24.4 billion (US\$ 6.6 billion), a 7 percent increase year-on-year, despite operational disruptions during the final month of the fiscal year.

The Group also recorded all-time high revenue of AED 150.5 billion (US\$ 41 billion), up 3 percent from the previous year, while cash assets rose 12 percent to AED 59.6 billion (US\$ 16.2 billion). In a release, the airline reported a standalone pre-tax profit of AED 22.8 billion (US\$ 6.2 billion), with a profit margin of 17.4 percent. Revenue grew 2 percent to AED 130.9 billion (US\$ 35.7 billion), while cash reserves reached a record AED 54.9 billion (US\$ 15 billion).

Group EBITDA stood at

AED 41.1 billion (US\$ 11.2 billion), underlining strong operational profitability across aviation, travel, cargo and airport services businesses.

Airport and travel services provider dnata also delivered record performance during the year.

The company posted pre-tax profit of AED 1.6 billion (US\$ 437 million), up 2 percent year-on-year, while revenue increased 12 percent to AED 23.6 billion (US\$ 6.4 billion).

Cash assets for dnata rose 28 percent to AED 4.7 billion (US\$ 1.3 billion). The Emirates Group declared a dividend of AED 3.5 billion (US\$ 1 billion) to its owner, the Investment Corporation of Dubai.

Commenting on the performance, His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Chairman and Chief Executive, Emirates

airline and Group, said the results reflected the resilience of the Group's long-term business strategy.

"These outstanding results reaffirm the strength and resilience of the Emirates Group's business model, which is rooted in safety, excellence, innovation, people and partnerships," he said.

The Group noted that military activity in the Gulf region from late February significantly disrupted commercial aviation operations, impacting air traffic across the UAE and neighbouring regions.

Despite the disruptions, Emirates and dnata maintained operational continuity while gradually restoring passenger and cargo services.

During FY26, the Emirates Group invested AED 17.9 billion (US\$ 4.9 billion) in new aircraft, advanced

technologies, infrastructure, facilities and equipment to support future expansion.

The Group's workforce expanded 8 percent to 130,919 employees globally. Emirates also strengthened its UAE national workforce, which surpassed

4,000 employees during the year.

Fleet Expansion and Global Network Growth Emirates expanded its passenger and cargo capacity by 1 percent to 60.6 billion ATKMs.

The airline launched ser-

vices to four new destinations — Da Nang, Hangzhou, Siem Reap and Shenzhen — while increasing frequencies across key international routes.

Its network now spans 152 cities across 80 countries.



During the year, Emirates took delivery of 15 Airbus A350 aircraft, taking the number of A350s in its fleet to 19.

The airline ended the financial year with a total fleet of 277 aircraft and an average fleet age of 10.8 years.

At the 2025 Dubai Airshow, Emirates announced additional fleet investments worth US\$ 41.4 billion, including orders for 65 Boeing 777-9 aircraft and eight additional Airbus A350-900s. The airline's order book now stands at 367 aircraft scheduled for delivery through to 2038.

Strong Passenger and Cargo Performance Emirates carried 53.2 million passengers during FY26, maintaining a passenger seat factor of 78.4 percent.

Passenger yield increased 4 percent, supported by strong global travel demand and premium product offerings.

The airline's cargo division, Emirates SkyCargo, transported 2.4 million tonnes of cargo during the year, up 3 percent from the previous year. SkyCargo revenue reached AED 16.2 bil-

lion (US\$ 4.4 billion), contributing 12 percent of Emirates' total revenue.

The cargo division also expanded its freighter network and introduced new logistics solutions, including Emirates Courier Express and specialised aerospace and engineering cargo services.

Emirates continued to invest heavily in customer experience and technology.

The airline announced a partnership with Starlink to introduce high-speed inflight Wi-Fi across its fleet. By the end of March 2026, 21 aircraft had already been equipped with the technology.

Its US\$ 5 billion aircraft retrofit programme also continued during the year, with 91 aircraft completing cabin upgrades featuring Emirates' latest inflight products and Premium Economy seating.

The airline additionally introduced new accessibility-focused travel initiatives, sensory products for passengers with autism, upgraded First Class check-in facilities in Dubai, and expanded chauffeur-drive services.

The Emirates Group continued expanding its sustainability and environmental initiatives.

Emirates also announced an additional AU\$ 50 million investment into the Emirates Wolgan Valley resort conservation project in Australia.

Outlook for FY27, the Emirates Group said it remains cautiously optimistic despite ongoing geopolitical uncertainty.

The company said its strong cash reserves, fuel hedging strategy, diversified business portfolio and continued investments in fleet and infrastructure would support long-term growth.