

# Aryan Age

PRGI No.- MHENG/25/A0943 | VOL - 1 | ISSUE 326 | 8 PAGES | ₹ 3.00



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## India has 60 days of crude, LNG and 45 days of LPG stock: Hardeep Singh Puri



to ensure stability in domestic supply. "We have 60 days of crude, which is the max we need. We have 60 days of LNG and 45 days of LPG," Puri said, stressing that India's energy preparedness remains strong even amid global price fluctuations and supply pressures.

The minister also acknowledged financial stress in the oil marketing sector, stating that oil companies are facing losses of around Rs 1,000 crore per day. He added that under-recoveries are Rs 198,000 crore and cumulative losses incurred by these companies are estimated at nearly Rs 1 lakh crore for the current quarter.

"When this crisis began, there were some concerns, but we converted the challenge into an opportunity. We have ramped up our domestic production of LPG, which used to be 36,000 metric tons per day. We have now taken it up to 54,000 metric tons per day," he said.

The minister further highlighted that the

LPG demand had also moderated from 90,000 metric tonnes to around 75,000 metric tonnes, partly due to seasonal factors, and credited supply-demand management for maintaining overall stability in the system.

Earlier on Monday, the Centre reiterated Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal for citizens to reduce fuel consumption. Officials urged people to use public transport, carpool where possible, and adopt electric vehicles and rail freight to ease pressure on energy demand and support conservation efforts.

Sujata Sharma, joint secretary for ministry of petroleum & natural gas, said, "I would like to convey to you that the Prime Minister has urged all citizens of the country to reduce their consumption of petrol and diesel. Wherever possible, utilise the Metro and public transportation; opt for carpooling; prioritise railways as a mode of transportation for goods; and wherever feasible, increase the usage of electric vehicles. Let us all come together and make every possible effort to

conserve energy in our daily lives, so that the economic burden currently weighing upon the nation may be alleviated."

Sharma said, "Our refineries are operating at optimum levels. There are no instances of dry-outs at any retail outlets. Nor have any dry-outs been reported at LPG distributorships. Adequate stocks of petrol and diesel are available, and LPG supplies for domestic cooking purposes are being maintained. Over the past three days, 1 crore 26 lakh LPG cylinders have been delivered to households against 1 crore 14 lakh bookings. Similarly, sales of commercial LPG have exceeded 17,000 tonnes over the last three days. Sales of Auto LPG have also surpassed 762 tonnes..."

Meanwhile, global oil prices continued to rise, with the Brent Crude Oil prices extended their rally. Brent crude futures were up 30 cents, or 0.29%, at \$104.51 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate rose 31 cents, or 0.32%, to \$98.38.

## Congress alleges 'ECI-BJP collusion' over Bengal appointments, Rahul Gandhi calls it a 'Market of Thieves'

New Delhi: The Congress on Tuesday launched a sharp attack on the BJP and the Election Commission of India over key appointments in West Bengal, alleging "brazen collusion" between the ruling party and the poll body.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh alleged that former Chief Election Officer Manoj Agarwal and senior bureaucrat Subrata Gupta had been rewarded with top posts in West Bengal after allegedly helping the BJP gain electoral advantage through manipulation of electoral rolls.

In a post on social media platform X, Ramesh claimed that Manoj Agarwal, a 1990-batch IAS officer who oversaw the 2026 West Bengal Assembly election as the state's Chief Election Officer, had now been appointed as the new Chief Secretary to the Government of West Bengal.

He further alleged that Subrata Gupta, also a 1990-batch IAS officer who served as Special Roll Observer overseeing deletions under the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, had been appointed Chief Adviser to West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari.

"These appointments reflect the brazen collusion and connivance between the ECI and BJP. There is no



longer even an attempt to keep the collusion discrete or concealed," Ramesh said in his post. Claiming that the Election Commission acted in a partisan manner during the Assembly polls, the Congress leader alleged that "an entire state went to election with 27 lakh people being debarred from voting" and asserted that the exercise was "tactfully executed by the ECI to create an electoral advantage for BJP".

Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi also attacked the BJP and the Election Commission in a separate post on X, writing: "In the BJP-ECI's 'market of thieves,' the bigger the theft, the bigger the reward."

The remarks come amid continuing Opposition criticism of the Election Commission over voter list revisions and alleged irregularities in several states. The Congress and other Opposition parties have repeatedly accused the poll body of functioning in a manner favourable to the BJP, allegations that the Election Commission has consistently rejected.

## CBI takes over NEET-UG 2026 paper leak probe, registers FIR under PC Act

New Delhi: In a significant escalation of the NEET-UG 2026 paper leak controversy, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has formally taken over the case earlier being investigated by the Rajasthan Police and registered an FIR under the Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act.

The central agency is now set to begin a detailed probe into the alleged examination leak racket, including recording statements of accused persons already detained by various police units and investigative agencies.

The controversy surfaced after a hostel operator in Rajasthan's Sikar district reportedly compared a so-called "guess paper" circulating before the May 3 NEET-UG examination with the actual question paper and found striking similarities. Sources linked to the investigation claim that almost all questions from Biology and Chemistry matched the final exam paper, raising serious concerns about a large-scale leak.

Following the revelation, alerts were reportedly sent to the National Testing Agency (NTA), which later referred the matter to central authorities. Investigators suspect the operation was being run through an organised network connected to coaching institutes, counselling agents and hostel operators functioning across multiple states.

Sikar, known as a major coaching hub, has now emerged as the focal point of the investigation. Probe agencies believe the leaked paper may have originated from a printing-related supply chain linked to Nashik in Maharashtra before being circulated

through intermediaries in Rajasthan and other regions.

Officials are now tracing how the alleged "guess paper" spread among candidates ahead of the examination. More than 45 people have reportedly been detained in Rajasthan so far in connection with the case.

The NEET-UG 2026 examination, conducted on May 3 for over 22 lakh aspirants across the country, was subsequently cancelled after widespread allegations that the leaked material closely resembled the actual exam paper. The NTA stated that based on inputs received from law enforcement agencies, the integrity of the examination process had been compromised, making cancellation unavoidable.

Authorities have confirmed that the examination will be conducted again, although revised dates and fresh admit card schedules are yet to be announced. Existing applications will remain valid and candidates will not be required to register again.

Meanwhile, in Maharashtra, Nashik Police have detained an accused linked to the case following a request from Rajasthan Police. According to Nashik Deputy Commissioner of Police Kiran Kumar Chavan, the accused had altered his appearance to avoid arrest but was eventually tracked down through surveillance and technical evidence. The suspect, a resident of Nandgaon in Nashik district and reportedly pursuing BAMS studies, will be handed over to Rajasthan Police for further investigation.

The focus now shifts to the CBI probe, which is expected to uncover the full extent of the alleged interstate examination leak network.

## NEET UG 2026 cancelled; NTA to re-conduct exam, CBI probe ordered

New Delhi: The National Testing Agency (NTA) on Tuesday cancelled the NEET (UG) 2026 examination conducted on May 3. It announced that the medical entrance test will be re-conducted on dates to be notified separately.

The decision was taken with the approval of the Government of India, following inputs examined in coordination with central agencies and investigative findings shared by law enforcement authorities.

In an official statement issued on May 12, 2026, the NTA said it had earlier referred the matter to central agencies on May 8 for independent verification and necessary action as part of its commitment to ensuring the fair, secure, and credible conduct of national examinations.

According to the agency, the inputs received and

findings shared by law enforcement authorities established that "the present examination process could

not be allowed to stand." The NTA said revised examination dates and the re-issued admit card schedule will be announced through official channels in the coming days.

The Centre has also decided to hand over the matter to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for a

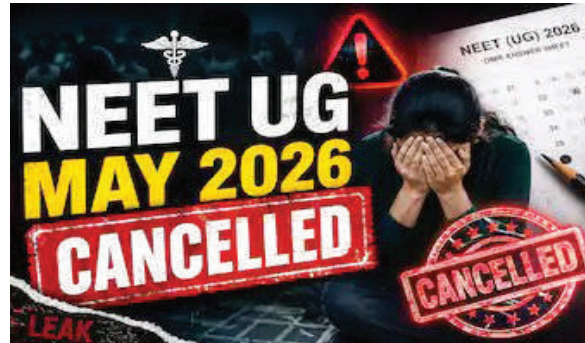
comprehensive inquiry into the allegations linked to the examination. The NTA said it would extend full cooperation to the investigating agency and provide all necessary records, materials, and assistance required for the inquiry.

The agency acknowledged that re-conducting the examination would cause inconvenience to candidates and their

families. Still, it said the decision was taken in the larger interest of protecting the trust and integrity of the national examination system.

The NTA further clarified that registration data, candidature details, and examination centres selected during the May 2026 cycle will be carried forward for the re-conducted examination. No fresh registration will be required, and no additional examination fee will be charged. The agency also announced that fees already paid by students will be refunded, while the fresh examination will be conducted using NTA's internal resources.

Candidates and parents have been advised to rely only on official communications issued by the agency and avoid unverified reports circulating on social media.



## Maharashtra Tourism Minister Shambhuraj Desai Cancels London-Paris Trip Following PM's Appeal

Mumbai: In a significant gesture of solidarity with the national interest,

and expenses to conserve the country's foreign exchange reserves amidst the current global economic and geopolitical challenges.

Minister Desai, who also serves as the Guardian Minister for Satara district, had planned this family vacation nearly three months ago. The itinerary included major European hubs such as London, Paris, and Amsterdam. However, upon the Prime Minister's call for fiscal responsibility, Desai chose to lead by example. By calling off the trip, the Minister aimed to send a message that national welfare and the conservation of "forex" (foreign exchange) must take precedence over personal holidays.

## Rahul Gandhi alleges BJP protecting those behind exam irregularities after NEET row

New Delhi: Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday launched a sharp attack on the BJP-led Centre over alleged irregularities in the examination system, accusing the Narendra Modi government of rewarding and protecting officials linked to controversies surrounding the NEET examination.

In a strongly worded post on social media platform X, the Congress leader sought to revive concerns over the alleged NEET 2024 paper leak controversy and questioned the government over the appointment of a former senior official of the National Testing Agency (NTA). "I want to place a serious matter before the youth of the country," Gandhi wrote, urging students to search online about "who was the

Director General of the NTA during the massive NEET 2024 paper leak, and where the Modi government has posted him today." Claiming that the BJP government shields those responsible for compromising the future of students, Gandhi alleged that the ruling party "rewards and protects those who play with the future of lakhs of hardworking students." "It is clear that Modi ji and the BJP are themselves partners in the theft of your future," he said. The Congress leader further accused the government of allowing a system where corruption and malpractice flourish unchecked. "The market where your hard work and your dreams are being auctioned has only one rule — the bigger the theft, the bigger the reward," Gandhi said in his post.

## Bhujbal Urges Public Austerity Amid Continuing Iran-US Tensions

Mumbai: Joining the Prime Minister's call for national frugality, Maharashtra Food and Civil Supplies Minister Chhagan Bhujbal has urged citizens to practice strict "belt-tightening" regarding fuel and essential commodities.

Bhujbal highlighted that the escalating conflict between Iran and the United States has triggered a global energy shortage, leaving India—a country without vast oil reserves—vulnerable to price volatility.

Bhujbal noted that while neighboring nations and global powers like Japan are reeling from record price hikes, India has remained "exceptionally resilient". He credited this stability to a major shift in the country's import strategy. Under PM Modi, India has expanded its oil sourcing from 27 countries to nearly 50. This diversification has allowed the nation to withstand the initial shocks of the Middle Eastern supply chain disruptions.

Despite India's strong standing, Bhujbal warned that a return to pre-war pricing is unlikely in the near

future. He recommended several lifestyle and administrative shifts to navigate the crisis. He



suggested that citizens in urban areas can ditch private cars in favor of the Metro, make judicious use of LPG (cooking gas), petrol, diesel, and even edible oils and adopt Work From Home (WFH) and Video Conferencing mode for official meetings to eliminate travel.

Bhujbal noted there is a global state of confusion as the Iran-US conflict continues to fluctuate. "The war appears to halt and then reignites, creating a vacuum of uncertainty. In such times, self-restraint is our best defense," he added.

"Compared to other nations, India is standing firm. However, we must realize that the global situation is no longer the same. Economy in consumption is the need of the hour," he advised.

# Raj Thackeray questions Modi's call for public austerity amid fuel crisis

Mumbai: Amid rising tensions in the Gulf region and concerns over fuel shortages, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) president Raj Thackeray has strongly questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his recent appeal asking citizens to adopt austerity measures.

The appeal came after disruptions in oil supplies due to the blockade around the Strait of Hormuz involving Iran and the United States, which has reportedly impacted imports of petrol, diesel and gas.

The Prime Minister has urged people to reduce fuel consumption, avoid unnecessary foreign travel, use public transport and cut down on gold purchases to reduce pressure on foreign exchange reserves.

Responding through an open letter shared on social media, Raj Thackeray criticised the Centre for asking ordinary citizens to sacrifice while political leaders continue to hold large rallies

and travel with massive vehicle convoys. He questioned why the burden of economic challenges should fall solely on the public.



He pointed out that crude oil prices had crossed similar levels several times in the past, including during the UPA government and also during Modi's tenure, but such appeals for austerity were never made earlier. He also questioned how the government utilised the huge revenues collected from high fuel prices when crude oil rates were comparatively lower.

The MNS chief further criticised what he called the "freebie culture" in

elections, claiming that schemes introduced during state polls had weakened the economy. He argued that instead of empowering citizens through long-term reforms, governments were relying on short-term financial assistance schemes.

He also raised concerns about unemployment, foreign investment outflows, rising inflation and lack of major reforms in education and the economy. Raj Thackeray urged the Prime Minister to first enforce austerity within the government and ruling party before making appeals to citizens.

In his letter, Raj Thackeray demanded that the Centre convene a special session of Parliament to explain the current economic situation and outline concrete steps to tackle the crisis. He also appealed to the Prime Minister to listen to independent economists and openly address concerns regarding the weakening economy and falling value of the rupee.

## Raj Thackeray attacks PM Modi over appeal to reduce personal spending, questions govt expenditure, economic policies

Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray launched a sharp attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his reported appeal urging citizens to reduce personal expenditure, questioning why ordinary people were being advised to tighten their spending while political leaders continued with high-cost public events, convoys, and foreign visits.

Raj Thackeray alleged that while citizens were being urged to cut back on expenses such as fuel, travel, and gold purchases, significant public money was being spent on political roadshows, welfare schemes, and election-related activities. He also raised concerns over inflation, currency depreciation, and alleged economic uncertainty, calling for a special session of Parliament to discuss the country's financial situation in detail.

The MNS chief further accused the government of adopting a "double standard" on economic discipline and cited past leadership examples to argue that political

leaders should reduce expenditure before advising austerity to the public.

He also referred to fluctuations in international crude oil prices, stating that crude had touched levels of 90 to 100 US dollars even during previous governments, but according to him, the financial burden had not been passed on to the public in the same manner.

Accusing the government of adopting a "double standard," Raj Thackeray alleged that while "revdi culture," or populist welfare politics, was publicly criticised, large-scale expenditure was simultaneously being incurred on welfare and election-oriented schemes for political gains.

Concerns regarding the country's economic condition were also raised by the MNS leader during his remarks. Raj Thackeray claimed that the Indian rupee was weakening and alleged that foreign investors were moving away from the country amid growing economic uncertainty.

He further stated that three Reserve Bank of India governors had resigned, while questioning the overall direction of the economy and financial management.

Citing the example of former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, Raj Thackeray urged Prime Minister Modi to reduce government expenditure and foreign tours before advising citizens to curtail personal spending. The MNS chief also demanded that a special session of Parliament be convened to hold a detailed discussion on the country's economic situation and related policy concerns. The remarks come amid continuing political debate over inflation, fuel prices, economic management and government expenditure ahead of upcoming electoral battles across the country.

Political observers noted that Raj Thackeray's comments reflected growing attempts by regional opposition leaders to raise economic issues and question the financial priorities of the central government.

## Action against narcotics alone won't work while liquor continues unchecked: Mirwaiz

**Srinagar:** Action against narcotics alone will not succeed while liquor continues unchecked: Mirwaiz

Amid an ongoing drive of Nasha Mukht J&K Abhiyan, Kashmir's chief cleric and Hurriyat chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq on Tuesday said action against narcotics alone will not succeed while liquor continues unchecked.

Mirwaiz reiterated the concerns he had expressed during his Friday address at Jama Masjid regarding the growing menace of drug addiction and the need for a ban on alcohol.

"Both drugs and alcohol are deeply harmful to society and that the government can-



not justify acting against one while staying quiet on another," Mirwaiz said while speaking to the media on the sidelines of a function in Srinagar.

He stated that although Jammu and Kashmir is a Muslim-majority region

where alcohol consumption is socially.

And religiously discouraged, several states in India with non-Muslim majorities have also imposed restrictions or bans on alcohol because of its damaging impact on society.

## Mayawati warns of economic strain amid US-Iran conflict, urges relief measures

**Lucknow:** Former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) National President Mayawati has expressed concern that uncertainty over the US-Iran conflict is contributing to a growing energy crisis and putting pressure on India's foreign exchange reserves.

She has urged both the central and state governments to take immediate steps in the public interest.

In a statement issued in Lucknow on Tuesday, Mayawati voiced deep concern over the ongoing conflict involving the United States and Israel against Iran. Referring to the Prime Minister's appeal for "restraint," she warned that the impact on India may go beyond rising prices of petroleum products such as petrol, diesel, and LPG, and could develop into a broad-



er economic crisis.

She added that such a situation would significantly affect the lives of millions of Indians and could further worsen living conditions. The BSP chief also noted that, following the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly one billion people in India are already facing livelihood challenges, leaving them with little capacity to absorb additional economic stress. Mayawati appealed to the central and all state governments to support poor and hardworking families by providing them some relief in this difficult situation. She said that governments themselves should take better measures to help the public overcome this crisis, describing such action as being in the national and public interest and reflective of public sentiment.

## At Baramulla, LG announces community, family-based anti-drug initiatives in J&K

**Srinagar:** Joining the anti-drug campaign in Baramulla on Tuesday, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha announced the launch of two new initiatives, the Community Immunization Program against drugs and the Family Fortress Initiative, to strengthen the movement against substance abuse across the union Territory over the next 69 days.

The Lieutenant Governor also participated in a Padyatra with citizens in Baramulla.

"Just as we have taught communities to vaccinate against bacteria or viruses, we will partner with religious leaders and social groups to create Community Immunization initiative against drugs in 5-10 high-risk hotspot areas per district," the Lieutenant Governor said while speaking on the occasion.

"I urge schools, mosques, temples, gurdwaras, and NGOs to dedicate

one hour weekly to strengthen this initiative through awareness. It will deliver real results, acting like an early warning system, monitoring hotspots while building them into fully drug-free zones.

The second pillar is the Family Fortress Initiative, which will rely on the strong family and community bonds for the ultimate shield against drug addiction.

Over the next 69 days, every school, college, and place of worship in Jammu Kashmir should host a weekly family dialogue on drugs. These dialogues should be open, honest paired with local campaign audits to spot and fix gaps," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor highlighted that in the past 31 days, over 2,35,000 awareness and outreach events have been held across Jammu Kashmir. More than 44,000 OPD patients have been treated, nearly 700 drug

smugglers and peddlers arrested, and stringent action has been taken against the drug supply chain.

"Action has targeted every financial transaction of drug cartels, seizing crores in properties built from drug money by major smugglers. Across Jammu and Kashmir divisions, 300 driving licenses and over 400 vehicle registrations linked to drug smugglers have been recommended for cancellation. Enforcement agencies have ensured massive drug hauls. We have inspected more than 3,300 drug stores, and 150 licenses have been suspended for violating the norms. Nearly 3,000 CCTV cameras are now installed at the drug stores across union Territory.

Over two dozen smugglers have been nabbed under PIT-NDPS Act. I assure the people that we will chase every rupee, every asset, and shell company of drug traffickers, ensuring the harshest

punishment for those who are destroying our youth's future," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor said that fueled by public support, this people's movement is setting historic records in Jammu Kashmir and no past social campaign has seen such massive participation.

"We have received nearly 3,000 calls for tele-manas counselling and support in the past 31 days. I want our response to drugs to be rooted in science. We don't shame diabetes patients into health or cure cancer victims through stigma. Likewise, we must treat and rehabilitate addicts with dignity, re-connecting them to society's mainstream through resolve and compassion. Government officials and citizens must unite for surveillance, rally against drugs, and foster drug-free villages and towns," the Lieutenant Governor said.

## Centre hiding economic reality, must answer on NEET leak: Owaisi

**Hyderabad:** Hyderabad: Asaduddin Owaisi on Tuesday launched a sharp attack on the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre, alleging that it was concealing the true condition of the Indian economy while burdening citizens with rising fuel prices and economic uncertainty. Addressing mediapersons in Hyderabad, the AIMIM chief accused the Central Government of failing to be transparent with the public during the election campaign regarding the likelihood of an increase in petrol and diesel prices after the polls.

Owaisi questioned why the government did not openly inform voters before the elections that fuel prices would rise once polling concluded. He alleged that the Centre deliberately avoided discussing the issue during campaigning to prevent public backlash. According to him, the increase in fuel prices was now directly affecting common citizens, transport costs and household expenses across the country.

The Hyderabad MP further alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was now attempting to portray the burden caused by rising petrol and diesel prices as a patriotic sacrifice. Owaisi criticised what he described as efforts to emotion-



ally justify economic hardships faced by ordinary people. He said citizens were already struggling with inflation and additional fuel costs would worsen the financial strain on families and small businesses.

Speaking on the broader economic situation, Owaisi claimed that foreign investors had withdrawn nearly Rs 1 lakh crore from Indian markets in March 2026. He alleged that the large-scale outflow of investments reflected declining confidence among international investors regarding the country's economic stability and policy environment. He said such developments should be a matter of concern for the government as they could impact employment generation and market growth.

Owaisi also alleged that the Indian

rupee had become one of the weakest-performing currencies among emerging market economies since 2020. He argued that the weakening currency was affecting imports, increasing costs of goods and placing additional pressure on consumers. He further claimed that despite repeated government assurances about economic strength, the ground reality being experienced by people was very different.

The AIMIM president stated that the Centre was presenting a selective picture of the economy while avoiding discussion on unemployment, inflation and the rising cost of living. He said citizens deserved clear and honest information about the country's financial condition rather than political narratives aimed at diverting attention from economic issues.

Turning to the alleged NEET examination paper leak controversy, Owaisi strongly criticised the Central Government and demanded accountability over the matter. He said lakhs of students and their parents were facing distress and uncertainty following the cancellation of the examination amid allegations of question paper leaks and malpractice.

## NEET paper leak shameful failure of Centre: KTR

**Hyderabad:** Hyderabad: K. T. Rama Rao on Tuesday launched a sharp attack on the Central Government over the alleged NEET question paper leak controversy, describing the incident as a matter of national shame and accusing the NDA government of failing to protect the interests of students. In a statement issued on the issue, the Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS) leader said the cancellation of the examination exposed serious systemic failures in the conduct of one of the country's most important entrance tests. KTR alleged that

the Centre had "played with the lives" of lakhs of students who had spent years preparing for the (NEET). He said students and their families invest enormous time, money and emotional energy in preparing for the highly competitive medical entrance examination, but repeated irregularities were destroying their confidence in the system. The BRS working president criticised the alleged inability of the BJP-led NDA government to conduct examinations in a secure and foolproof manner. According to him, repeated incidents of question

paper leaks reflected deep administrative failures and inadequate safeguards despite assurances of strict monitoring and reforms in the examination process. Referring to the controversy surrounding NEET in 2024, KTR said the Central Government had failed to learn any lessons from the earlier episode.

He alleged that despite nationwide criticism and demands for reforms after the previous controversy, another major irregularity had surfaced this year, once again throwing the future of students into uncertainty. KTR

described the recurring examination irregularities as a "curse" for students aspiring to pursue medical education. He said the credibility of national-level entrance examinations was being severely damaged due to repeated leaks and allegations of malpractice. According to him, such incidents were creating fear, frustration and disappointment among lakhs of aspirants across the country. The BRS leader alleged that more than 100 questions from the NEET examination paper had reportedly leaked a day before the examination. He said the scale of the

alleged leak exposed major flaws in the system and raised serious concerns about the security and integrity of the examination process. Highlighting the emotional impact of the controversy, KTR said nearly 23 lakh students and their parents had been subjected to severe mental stress and anxiety because of the alleged paper leak.

He stated that many students had spent years preparing for the examination by attending coaching classes, sacrificing personal time and working under immense academic pressure.

## BJP has ruined future of 2.3 mn students in NEET-UG paper leak case: Tejaswi

**Patna:** Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) national working president and Leader of Opposition in the Bihar Assembly Tejaswi Yadav today targeted the Bharatiya Janata Party over the cancellation of the NEET-UG examination following the alleged paper leak, accusing the ruling party of "ruining the future of 2.3 million students."

Yadav said here that incidents of paper leaks were continuously increasing across the country and alleged that even a common competitive examination could not be conducted transparently in BJP-ruled states. He claimed that repeated examination leaks had raised serious questions over the government's intent and policies.

The RJD leader said that nearly 2.3 million candidates would now have to reappear for the examination, forcing them to travel

again to examination centres located in 552 cities across the country. He said this would impose an additional financial burden on students and their parents.

Yadav further said that the re-examination process would lead to extra consumption of fuel and cause mental as well as physical stress to lakhs of students.

Tejaswi Yadav said merely ordering a formal investigation would not solve the issue and stressed that the government needed to undertake serious introspection.

He also questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi on whether the government had assessed the social and economic impact of the controversy. He alleged that instead of fixing accountability in such matters, the government was more focused on using institutions against the Opposition.

# Cong High Command set for final Kerala CM decision amid intense Delhi consultations

**Thiruvananthapuram:** The Congress high command is expected to take a final decision on Kerala's next Chief Minister on Tuesday as hectic consultations continue in New Delhi following the United Democratic Front's (UDF) Assembly election victory.

With factional activity intensifying and political lobbying reaching its peak, senior Congress leaders are engaged in a final round of discussions aimed at ending the prolonged uncertainty over the leadership question.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge is arriving in Delhi on a special chartered flight amid the extraordinary political developments surrounding the Chief Ministerial selection.

He is scheduled to hold crucial talks with senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi this evening, after which the party is likely to move closer to an official announcement.

However, sources indicated that the final declaration may come only after consultations with Sonia Gandhi.

The developments follow marathon discussions involving senior Kerala Congress leaders, including

former KPCC presidents, working presidents and key organisational figures.

Leaders who participated in the consultations included V.M. Sudheeran, K. Muraleedharan, M.M. Hassan, Mullaappally Ramachandran, K. Sudhakaran, Shafi Parambil, P.C. Vishnunath, A.P. Anil Kumar and Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan. According to party sources, the leadership discussions focused primarily on three contenders — V.D. Satheesan, K.C. Venugopal and Ramesh Chennithala — with the high command assessing their political acceptability, organisational backing and regional equations before taking a final call.

The Congress leadership is also understood to be weighing alliance considerations and internal factional balance while attempting to maintain unity within the party after the UDF's electoral victory.

During the consultations, Rahul Gandhi reportedly sought detailed explanations from Kerala leaders regarding the public demonstrations, flex-board campaigns and pressure tactics witnessed across the state during the Chief Ministerial

race.

Sources said he questioned how the protests subsided immediately after directions were issued by the party leadership.

While some leaders defended the demonstrations as spontaneous expressions of public sentiment, the high command is understood to have expressed reservations over whether genuinely independent protests could remain under such strict organisational control.

The issue reportedly emerged as a major point of discussion during the closed-door meetings.

Senior Congress leader Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan later told reporters that the consultations had entered their final stage.

Referring to earlier political transitions in Kerala, he observed that leadership decisions had also taken time during the tenures of Pinarayi Vijayan and V. S. Achuthanandan.

KPCC president Sunny Joseph said discussions on Cabinet formation would begin immediately after the Chief Minister is officially announced. Acknowledging that the prolonged uncertainty had affected the party's public image, he expressed

confidence that the ongoing talks at Sonia Gandhi's residence would soon produce a positive outcome.

At the same time, M.M. Hassan clarified that the selection of the Chief Minister remained an internal matter of the Congress party and that coalition partners had only a limited role in the process.



He also stressed that the party would not make decisions under pressure from media narratives or social media campaigns.

K. Muraleedharan said the leadership would also consider public sentiment before making the final announcement. Political observers noted that if K.C. Venugopal is selected as Kerala Chief Minister, it could trigger a major reshuffle within the national Con-

gress organisation.

His elevation would leave vacant the influential post of AICC Organisation General Secretary, potentially opening the door for senior leaders such as Bhupesh Baghel, Mukul Wasnik, Ajay Maken and Sachin Pilot.

Meanwhile, supporters of both Venugopal and Sath-

The newly elected Congress legislators had earlier passed a resolution authorising the All India Congress Committee (AICC) leadership to take the final decision on the Chief Ministerial post, effectively leaving the matter in the hands of the central leadership.

Leaders of the Indian union Muslim League are also understood to have conveyed concern over the prolonged delay and urged the Congress leadership to resolve the issue quickly as discussions within the UDF continue.

Leaders backing Venugopal argue that in Congress-ruled states such as Karnataka, Telangana and Himachal Pradesh, the high command ultimately considered legislative support while making leadership decisions. They maintain that the current delay is largely intended to take senior leaders into confinement before the final announcement. The Venugopal camp has also alleged that public mobilisation by supporters of Satheesan was aimed at exerting pressure on the high command. Supporters further claim that if Venugopal becomes Chief Minister, the UDF would comfortably win any by-

elections that may arise. They also point to the backing extended by KPCC president Sunny Joseph and several senior leaders.

At the same time, supporters of Chennithala argue that many leaders who once worked under him during his Youth Congress days have already risen to become Chief Ministers in different states.

According to them, making Chennithala serve under either Satheesan or Venugopal would amount to political humiliation and injustice. The Chennithala camp has highlighted that he maintained party discipline throughout the leadership tussle and stayed away from the "flex-board war" and public factional campaigns witnessed between rival camps. Sources said the Congress high command has widened its consultations in view of the unique political situation that emerged in Kerala after the Assembly election results. Kharge is also expected to hold discussions with senior leaders including Sonia Gandhi and A. K. Antony before the final decision is announced.

The leadership is additionally assessing the views of UDF allies regarding the

Chief Ministerial selection, with several senior leaders reportedly reminding the central leadership that Kerala's political landscape differs from states where the Congress governs independently and that alliance considerations cannot be ignored.

Although AICC observers have already completed discussions with MLAs and returned, a special team appointed by the Congress leadership is understood to be continuing in Kerala and submitting daily feedback reports to the national leadership regarding public sentiment surrounding the Chief Minister issue.

After hearing the views of the three principal contenders — Venugopal, Chennithala and Satheesan — Rahul Gandhi and Kharge reportedly informed them that the leadership would take a final decision soon and communicate it officially.

Congress leaders and workers across Kerala are now awaiting the outcome of today's high command meetings, hoping they will finally end the uncertainty surrounding the state's new leadership after a decade-long wait for the UDF's return to power.

# MUMBAI

# Aryan Age | 03

## New Metro Line for Vasai-Virar Moves Toward Reality



**Mumbai** : A major step has been taken to improve travel in the Vasai-Virar region. The official project report for "Metro Line 13" has been sent to the Maharashtra government for final approval. The proposed route will have 16 stations and stretch over 25 kilometers, with most of it elevated and a small portion underground. The project, which is expected to cost nearly ₹17,725 crore, will also include a maintenance hub (depot) in Virar. This new line is designed to make commuting much easier for one of the fastest-growing areas near Mumbai.

The dream of a faster, more comfortable commute for the residents of the far-northern suburbs is edging closer to fruition. A milestone was reached this week as the detailed project report (DPR) for the ambitious "Metro Line 13" was officially submitted to the Maharashtra state government for its final stamp of approval. This massive infrastructure undertaking is

poised to redefine the transit landscape of the Vasai-Virar region, an area that has seen explosive population growth but has long relied almost exclusively on the overburdened Western Railway suburban local trains.

The proposed 25-kilometer corridor is designed to serve as a high-capacity spine for the region, featuring 16 strategically placed stations that will connect major residential hubs

with commercial nodes. According to the current plans, the vast majority of the track will be elevated, soaring above the existing street-level traffic to ensure rapid transit times. However, the plan also includes a sophisticated, shorter underground section to navigate through more congested or geographically sensitive areas. This blend of engineering shows a tailored approach to the unique ur-

ban fabric of the Vasai-Virar municipal limits.

Financially, the project represents one of the most significant investments in the region's history, with an estimated price tag of approximately ₹17,725 crore. This budget covers not only the construction of the viaducts and stations but also the high-tech signaling systems and rolling stock required for a modern metro system.

## Man Arrested for Stealing Laptops on Trains

**Navi Mumbai** : Vashi Railway Police have arrested a 20-year-old man from Uttar Pradesh for stealing laptop bags from train passengers. The suspect, Karan Rajeshwar Mishra, was caught in his home village after police tracked him down using CCTV footage from train stations. By arresting him, the police were able to solve five different theft cases and recover stolen laptops, phones, and cash. The investigation began after a passenger traveling from Thane to Ghansoli reported their bag stolen in April.

The Vashi Railway Police have successfully apprehended a 20-year-old serial thief who had been targeting commuters on the suburban rail network, marking a major win for passenger security in Navi Mumbai.

The suspect, identified as Karan Rajeshwar Mishra, was taken into custody following an extensive cross-state operation that led investigators all the

way to his native village in Uttar Pradesh. The arrest has effectively dismantled a one-man crime wave that had been causing significant distress and financial loss to professionals and students who rely on the lifeline of the city's railway system for their daily transit.

The breakthrough in the case came through a meticulous analysis of digital footprints and surveillance technology, as the police relied heavily on high-definition CCTV footage from various railway stations.

By piecing together the suspect's movements across different platforms and exit points, the Vashi police were able to identify Mishra as the recurring figure in several reported thefts.

This technological approach proved vital, allowing the authorities to track the suspect's journey from the scene of the crimes in Navi Mumbai to his hiding spot hundreds of kilometers away in Northern India.

The initial spark for this

investigation was a specific complaint lodged in April by a passenger who had been traveling on a train from Thane to Ghansoli. The victim reported the sudden disappearance of their laptop bag, which contained not only expensive hardware but likely sensitive personal and professional data. As the police began investigating this single incident, they quickly realized that the modus operandi—targeting distracted passengers during peak hours or late-night commutes—matched several other unsolved cases reported along the same railway lines.

Upon Mishra's arrest, the police were able to provide closure for multiple victims, officially solving five distinct theft cases in one fell swoop.

During the recovery process, the authorities seized a significant haul of stolen property, including several high-end laptops, mobile phones, and a sum of cash that had been taken

from various unsuspecting travelers. These recovered items are currently being processed so they can be returned to their rightful owners, many of whom had likely given up hope of seeing their expensive electronics again.

The successful capture of a suspect from such a distance underscores the growing capabilities of the Railway Police in coordinating with local authorities across state lines to tackle urban crime. It serves as a stern warning to those who believe they can escape the reach of the law by fleeing to remote villages after committing crimes in major metropolitan hubs like Navi Mumbai.

For the commuters of the Harbour and Trans-Harbour lines, the arrest brings a sense of relief, reinforcing the importance of station surveillance and the efficacy of the police's dedicated response to "petty" crimes that have a massive impact on individual lives.

## Panvel Lawyer Completes Solo Mountain Trek in Nepal

**Panvel** : A 30-year-old lawyer from Panvel, Vikrant Gharat, has successfully finished a solo trek to the Annapurna Base Camp in Nepal. Gharat completed the difficult journey on May 7 without a professional guide, despite facing heavy snow and freezing temperatures. While he is an experienced trekker with over 10 years of experience, he warned others not to try such dangerous solo trips without proper training and official permission. He spent five days climbing nearly 20,000 stone steps to reach the camp, which sits at an altitude of 4,130 meters.

The trekking community in Panvel is celebrating the remarkable achievement of 30-year-old lawyer Vikrant Gharat, who recently returned from a successful solo expedition to the Annapurna Base Camp (ABC) in Nepal. Gharat reached the iconic milestone on May 7, standing at an altitude of 4,130 meters above sea level. What makes his

journey particularly noteworthy is that he chose to undertake the high-altitude climb entirely on his own, navigating the treacherous Himalayan terrain without the assistance of a professional guide or porter—a feat that requires immense physical stamina and mental fortitude. The journey was far from a casual hike, as the Panvel-based legal professional had to contend with the unpredictable and harsh spring weather of the Himalayas. During the final stages of his ascent, Gharat faced heavy snowfall and temperatures that plummeted well below freezing. The trek to Annapurna Base Camp is famous for its "stairway to heaven" geography; Gharat reportedly climbed nearly 20,000 stone steps over the course of five days to reach the sanctuary. This constant vertical gain at high altitudes puts extreme stress on the respiratory and cardiovascular systems, requiring careful acclimatization to avoid alti-

tude sickness. While Gharat managed to conquer the peak safely, he was quick to balance his success with a stern warning for aspiring adventurers. Drawing on his 10 years of trekking experience in the Sahyadri ranges and beyond, he emphasized that solo high-altitude trekking is a high-risk endeavor that should not be taken lightly. He urged fellow trekkers to ensure they have the proper technical training, high-quality gear, and, most importantly, the official permits required by the Nepalese government. His achievement highlights the growing trend of "ultra-trekking" among professionals in the Navi Mumbai region, where individuals seek to test their limits against the world's highest mountain ranges. For Gharat, the successful solo trek was a culmination of a decade of preparation, proving that while the mountains are beautiful, they demand a high level of respect and expertise.

## Police Catch Members of "Iranian Gang" Behind Chain Snatching

**Navi Mumbai** : Rabale Police arrested three members of a gang involved in stealing gold chains from people across Navi Mumbai and Thane. The gang, often referred to by police as the "Iranian gang," was caught after a robbery in Airoli where they snatched a gold chain worth ₹1.5 lakh. Detectives analyzed footage from hundreds of cameras to track the suspects to a settlement near Kalyan. In total, the police solved 10 cases and recovered gold and motorcycles worth more than ₹13 lakh.

The Rabale Police have achieved a major breakthrough in curbing street-level crime by dismantling a specialized cell of the notorious "Iranian gang," which had been terrorizing residents of Navi Mumbai and Thane for months. The operation resulted in the arrest of three key members who were allegedly the primary oper-



ators behind a series of high-speed gold chain snatching incidents. This particular gang has long been a challenge for local law enforcement due to their high-performance motorcycles and their ability to disappear into congested urban landscapes after a hit, making their capture a significant victory for the department's investiga-

tive wing. The catalyst for the intensive manhunt was a brazen daytime robbery in Airoli, where the suspects targeted an unsuspecting individual and forcibly snatched a gold chain valued at approximately ₹1.5 lakh. This incident sparked a high-priority response, as the bold nature of the

crime suggested the group was becoming increasingly comfortable operating in broad daylight. Rabale detectives immediately cordoned off the area and began the painstaking process of retracing the suspects' escape route using the city's extensive network of digital surveillance, marking the start of a multi-day forensic

investigation. In one of the most comprehensive uses of CCTV technology in recent months, the investigative team analyzed footage from hundreds of cameras spanning across multiple jurisdictions from Navi Mumbai toward the outskirts of Thane. By stitching together the movements of a specific high-speed motorcycle, detectives were able to maintain a visual lock on the suspects even as they changed lanes and navigated through heavy traffic. This digital trail eventually led the police to a specific settlement near Kalyan, where the gang had established a temporary base of operations to hide their stolen goods and plan their next strikes. The precision of the subsequent raid allowed the police to secure the suspects without a violent confrontation, despite the gang's reputation for being aggressive during escapes.

## Navi Mumbai Officials Remove Illegal Building in Airoli

**Navi Mumbai** : Authorities in Navi Mumbai partially demolished an unauthorized building in Airoli on Tuesday. The building owner, Santosh Sukhdev Prasad, had been warned as far back as August 2025 to stop construction because he didn't have the proper permits. Despite the legal notices, work continued, leading the city to send in a demolition crew. Officials warned that they will continue to take strict action against illegal constructions

across the city and urged residents to follow building regulations. The Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation (NMMC) has intensified its crackdown on the city's unregulated real estate sector, executing a partial demolition of a multi-story unauthorized structure in Airoli this Tuesday. The enforcement action serves as a stern physical manifestation of the city's building codes, which the owner, Santosh Sukhdev Prasad, had allegedly bypassed from the project's

inception. By deploying a demolition crew to the site, authorities have sent a clear message that the era of "build first, ask later" is being met with significant institutional resistance and heavy machinery. The history of this specific dispute dates back to August 2025, when municipal inspectors first flagged the site for a total lack of the mandatory commencement certificates and approved architectural blueprints. At that time, a formal legal notice was

served to the owner, explicitly ordering an immediate halt to all construction activities until the proper permits were secured. This initial warning was intended to give the developer a window to rectify the legal status of the project, but according to municipal records, these directives were largely ignored in favor of continued development. Despite the mounting pile of legal warnings and "stop-work" notices issued over the past several

months, the construction on the Airoli plot proceeded at a steady pace. This blatant disregard for municipal authority eventually exhausted the patience of the planning department, leading to the scheduling of Tuesday's enforcement drive. The sight of the demolition crew at work served as a jarring reminder to the local neighborhood that structural progress on a building does not equate to its legal permanence in the eyes of the city administration. During the operation, a

significant portion of the unauthorized floors and pillars were neutralized, effectively rendering the structure unusable in its current state. Officials at the scene noted that while the demolition was "partial," it was strategic enough to ensure that further construction would be impossible without a complete structural overhaul and full legal compliance. The cost of the demolition crew, the machinery, and the police protection required for the drive is also often recovered

from the offending party, adding a secondary financial sting to the structural loss. The NMMC has used this high-profile demolition as a platform to issue a wider warning to developers and prospective homebuyers across Navi Mumbai. They have reiterated that they are maintaining a comprehensive database of unauthorized constructions and that similar actions are planned for other nodes in the coming weeks. The city has urged citizens to be extreme-

ly cautious and to verify all RERA registrations and municipal approvals before investing in new properties, as the loss of an illegal building offers no recourse for those who have purchased units within it. This move in Airoli is part of a broader urban governance strategy to prevent the chaotic and potentially dangerous growth of "slum-like" permanent structures that lack proper fire safety, sewage, or structural integrity checks.

## Politician Rides Horse in Thane to Protest Against High Fuel Costs

**Mumbai** : On Tuesday, MLA Jitendra Awhad from the NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) faction took a unique approach to protest rising fuel prices. He rode a horse through the streets of Thane, mocking Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent suggestion that citizens should find ways to save fuel. Awhad was joined by supporters and a bullock cart, jokingly telling "Modi fans" that they should also start using horses to save money. This protest happened after the Prime Minister gave a speech in Vadodra encouraging people to use public transport, electric vehicles, and carpooling.



the escalating costs of petrol and diesel. In a move designed to capture public attention and symbolize a "return to the past," Awhad traded his usual vehicle for a horse, riding through the bustling urban corridors to highlight the financial strain on the common man. This equestrian pro-

test was not merely a local grievance but a targeted critique of the central government's economic policies, framed through a lens of sharp political satire. The protest was specifically timed to serve as a rebuttal to recent public statements made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi

during an address in Vadodra. In that speech, the Prime Minister had encouraged the nation to adopt more sustainable and cost-effective travel habits, such as utilizing public transportation, switching to electric vehicles, and practicing carpooling to mitigate fuel consumption.

## Documentation Camps Organized to Help Dharavi Residents

**Mumbai** : To help residents whose housing eligibility cases are still "undecided," special documentation camps will be held across Dharavi from May 14 to May 26. Local leaders (corporators) are supporting this project to help people get their ownership records verified. Officials explained that many residents are not "ineligible," but simply have missing or confusing paperwork.

These camps aim to provide a single place where residents can get their documents checked and fixed quickly so they can move forward with the redevelopment project. The Dharavi Redevelopment Project is taking a significant step toward inclusivity with the launch of a series of specialized documentation camps designed to resolve the "undecided"



status of thousands of local households. Scheduled to run from May 14 to May 26, these camps represent a concentrated effort to bridge the gap between residents and the administrative requirements of one of Asia's largest urban renewal schemes. By providing a centralized venue for record verification, the initiative aims to clear the bureaucratic hurdles that have left many families in a state of housing

uncertainty. Local leaders and former corporators have thrown their weight behind this project, recognizing that the primary obstacle for many residents is not a lack of eligibility, but rather the complexity of historical paperwork. In a densely populated area like Dharavi, ownership records, electricity bills, and voter IDs often span decades and may contain minor discrepancies or missing links.

Officials have clarified that a large segment of the population currently labeled as "undecided" actually possesses the necessary roots in the area but lacks the cohesive documentation to prove it under strict redevelopment guidelines. The camps are designed to function as a "one-stop shop" where residents can present their existing papers to a panel of experts and government officials. Instead of navigating multiple government offices, families can receive immediate feedback on what is missing and how to rectify specific errors. This proactive approach is intended to prevent legitimate residents from being unfairly excluded from the redevelopment benefits, such as the promised 350-square-foot apartments, simply due to clerical issues.



## A Call for Balance

The Supreme Court's strong displeasure regarding petitions opposing development projects serves as a mirror reflecting the momentum and administrative resolve essential for the nation's progress. The construction of roads, airports, railway lines, energy projects, and modern cities is not merely a component of physical development; it is a source of employment for millions, a catalyst for economic resurgence, and the very foundation of the country's bright future. If we are to remain competitive on the global stage, it is imperative that these wheels of development turn with speed. No society can truly prosper by rejecting development or by obstructing the pathways to progress. However, while welcoming this stance taken by the Court, one cannot afford to overlook the unsettling reality underlying the environmental issues that often give rise to these conflicts. The global definition of development that has become prevalent today rests primarily on four pillars: concretization, speed, mass production, and market expansionism. We have come to accept the equation that towering skyscrapers and six-lane highways are synonymous with progress. Yet, behind this glittering facade of development, the cries of vanishing forests, crushed biodiversity, polluted rivers, and displaced communities are often drowned out by the roar of development itself. In the truest sense, the issue at hand is not one of 'development versus environment,' but rather concerns the specific \*method\* of development we have chosen.

The cost of environmental degradation is often left unaccounted for within the statistics of development. Whenever the question arises is it truly inevitable to construct a road by carving through a mountain or felling a forest? Development and the environment are portrayed as mutually exclusive adversaries. In reality, while science has indeed advanced, humanity's delusion of having conquered nature has brought it to the very brink of destruction. Whether it be the disasters in Uttarakhand or the landslides in Himachal Pradesh, these serve as warning signals issued by nature. Unbridled construction in ecologically sensitive regions like the Himalayas coupled with the disruption of nature's delicate balance has led to a surge in the frequency of landslides in these areas today. Deforestation in the Western Ghats has altered rainfall patterns, and in cities like Mumbai, rivers have been reduced to mere open sewers. We have expanded our cities without leaving any space for rainwater to percolate into the ground; consequently, even a moderate amount of rainfall is now enough to leave these urban centers completely inundated. This reckless disregard for nature is ultimately posing a direct threat to human existence itself. Our greatest conceptual error lies in viewing trees merely as obstacles within the grand blueprint of development.

Another critical and deeply distressing aspect of development is displacement. As massive projects take shape, thousands of indigenous inhabitants lose their land, their homes, and a way of life that has endured for generations. While compensation may be provided on paper, no one seems to have an answer regarding the fate of the displaced community's culture or their unbreakable bond with nature. Particularly in tribal regions, the forest is not merely a natural resource; it constitutes the very essence of their existence. Although technology has endowed humanity with immense power, the hubris of believing we can exercise absolute control over nature is a perilous delusion. Climate change, rising global temperatures, and acute water scarcity are the inevitable price we are paying for this dangerous game played against nature. The question are we destined to bequeath nothing but concrete jungles and polluted air to the next generation is no longer a merely sentimental inquiry; it has evolved into a matter of sheer survival. Mountains, rivers, and forests are not merely subjects for tourism; they are the fundamental pillars upon which human life rests. True human well-being lies in moving forward in harmony with them. Today, the term "sustainable development" has become confined merely to political rhetoric. In reality, sustainability implies that the decisions we make today should not infringe upon the rights of generations to come those of the next fifty or one hundred years. When implementing any project, it is imperative to conduct an honest and scientific assessment of its potential impact on the environment, local groundwater, and the overall climate. Environmental clearance should not remain a mere administrative formality; rather, it ought to be a moral commitment made to society. Development signifies not merely an increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but rather the elevation of the quality of human life. If cities are to expand, their green cover must expand alongside them. If industries are to be established, rivers must remain vibrant and alive. A growing population undoubtedly requires employment; however, the pursuit of such employment must not create a situation where public health is jeopardized by pollution. Balanced development does not imply the present generation asserting its dominion over the very breath of future generations. In this context, the role of the judiciary proves to be crucial. The function of the courts extends beyond merely delivering legal verdicts; it involves maintaining a delicate balance between the government, industry, and society. When the government or industry disregards nature, citizens are compelled to knock on the doors of the courts. However, blanket opposition to every development project can also prove detrimental to progress. Today, society appears divided by two extreme viewpoints: on one hand, nature is being ravaged in the name of development; on the other, politics driven by mere opposition for the sake of opposition is gaining ground. Both these tendencies are perilous for the nation. What we need today is a 'golden mean' a middle path where development proceeds hand-in-hand with environmental conservation. By harmonizing science with tradition, we can shape the future. When the greenery surrounding us vanishes, the heat and aggression within the human psyche tend to intensify. A human being whose bond with nature has been severed becomes spiritually arid as well. Therefore, the world of the future cannot suffice merely by being more digital or fast-paced; it must be more humane, balanced, and responsible. The true essence of development lies in the improvement of the standard of living for all. Rather than measuring our achievements solely by the magnitude of the projects we have erected, we ought to measure them by the number of rivers we have saved and the forests we have preserved. If the next generation is compelled to struggle merely to access clean air and potable water, then the development we have undertaken will prove to be nothing short of a suicidal act. The resistance often encountered during the implementation of development projects frequently stems from a deep-seated mistrust of established institutions. To dispel this mistrust, transparency and an unwavering, sincere commitment to environmental stewardship are absolutely essential. It is not enough to bequeath merely bank balances or material assets as a legacy to our children; our paramount duty is to provide them with an environment where they can breathe freely. Future generations will judge us not by the number of concrete bridges we built, but by how beautiful and livable a planet we left behind for them. The time has now come to embrace this new definition of development and to chart a path of progress by regarding nature as a fellow traveler. Only then can we truly advance toward a sustainable and prosperous future. Development is indeed essential, but it should not be stifling; rather, it should be life-affirming.

# Atal Innovation Mission

Atal Innovation Mission, NITI Aayog successfully organized the Regional AIM SUMVAAD, North Edition in Mohali, bringing together key stakeholders from government, industry, academia, incubators, startups, and the wider innovation ecosystem.

The convening aimed at strengthening the State-Centre collaboration and to build a robust incubator network across the region, while deepening engagement with key innovation ecosystem stakeholders. The initiative also focused on fostering inclusive entrepreneurship and accelerating innovation through stronger partnerships between government, industry, academia, and startups.

The regional gathering witnessed participation from representatives of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Uttarakhand and Delhi, along with startup councils, incubators, industry leaders, CSR partners and ecosystem enablers. The Sumvaad featured high-level deliberations on strengthening incubation ecosystems, scaling state-led innovation initiatives and enhancing collaboration between governments, academia, incubators and industry. The sessions focused on enabling innovation-driven economic growth and unlocking opportunities for startups across emerging sectors. Speaking during the conclave, Member of Parliament, S.



Satnam Singh Sandhu, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha and Chairman of CGCL Landran appreciated Atal Innovation Mission's efforts for spearheading collaborative innovation platforms that leverage regional strengths and contribute towards India's innovation-led growth journey. He underlined the significance of entrepreneurship and innovation in realizing the Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision of Viksit Bharat. He also noted that Punjab and J&K share entrepreneurial energy and

academic depth and that this joint chapter would unlock new opportunities for startups, youth and industry across both states.

Sharing his thoughts on the initiative, Mission Director, Atal Innovation Mission, NITI Aayog Deepak Bagla said "Incubators are one of the key pillars of a successful startup ecosystem, playing a vital role in nurturing and scaling innovative ideas. At the Atal Innovation Mission, we are focused on strengthening this pillar by enabling incubators with better

infrastructure, mentorship, funding access, and market linkages. Through initiatives like AIM SUMVAAD and stronger regional collaborations, we are building bridges between states, industry, academia, and startups to create a more resilient, inclusive, and future-ready innovation ecosystem empowering young entrepreneurs and accelerating the Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision of Viksit Bharat." Director General (Industries), Himachal Pradesh Deepika Rana Khatri also emphasized the

importance of stronger coordination between States and alignment with Central initiatives to improve the success rate, growth and efficiency of startups and incubation ecosystems.

Besides, a special session on "Incubators in Hospitals", led by Dr. Aashish Chaudhry, Director, Aakash Healthcare, highlighted the growing importance of hospital-based incubation ecosystems in advancing MedTech innovation and healthcare entrepreneurship.

One of the major highlights of the event was the launch of the Punjab & Jammu and Kashmir Incubation Consortium – PI-RAHI, a collaborative initiative aimed at strengthening regional innovation partnerships and creating new opportunities for startups, youth and industry across both states. The Regional AIM SUMVAAD also serves as a powerful platform for knowledge exchange, strategic collaboration and policy dialogue, reinforcing AIM's commitment to nurturing innovation-led development and strengthening India's entrepreneurial landscape through localized action and national partnerships. Other dignitaries present on the conclave including Deepinder Dhillon, Joint Director, Startup Punjab; Prasad Menon, CEO Centre for Incubation and Business Acceleration (ISBA); Dr. Aashish Chaudhry, MD, Aakash Hospitals and Azure Labs; and Prateek Deshmukh, Program Lead, AIM, NITI Aayog, among others.

## JANANI Platform to Strengthen Maternal and Child Healthcare

In a significant step towards strengthening maternal and child healthcare services in the country, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare launched JANANI (Journey of Antenatal, Natal and Neonatal Integrated Care) at the recently concluded National Summit on Innovation and Inclusivity – Best Practices Shaping India's Health Future.

JANANI is a service-oriented digital platform designed to comprehensively monitor and maintain digital health records of women during their reproductive age. Developed as an upgraded version of the

existing RCH portal, the platform creates a longitudinal health record by capturing key service delivery events across the continuum of care.

The platform aims to ensure seamless tracking of maternal and child health services, covering antenatal care, delivery preparedness, delivery, postnatal care, newborn care, home-based newborn and young child care, and family planning. By enabling continuous monitoring and timely interventions, JANANI strengthens service delivery and ensures continuity of care at every stage.

A key feature of JA-

NANI is the introduction of QR-enabled digital Mother and Child Health (MCH) Cards, enabling portability and easy access to health records. The platform also incorporates automated alerts for high-risk pregnancies, real-time dashboards for supervisory review, and due-list generation, enabling timely tracking, monitoring, and targeted interventions. JANANI is designed with strong interoperability features, enabling integration with national platforms such as U-WIN and POSHAN, thereby facilitating seamless data exchange, improved coordination across

programmes, and comprehensive monitoring of beneficiaries across sectors.

The platform enables registration of beneficiaries using unique identifiers such as ABHA, Aadhaar (OTP and biometric), and mobile number, along with pan-India search functionality. This ensures continuity of care for migratory populations and prevents duplication of records. It also provides self-registration facilities through web and mobile platforms, empowering beneficiaries to actively engage with their healthcare journey.

JANANI supports citizens by enabling timely

scheduling and monitoring of antenatal care visits and immunizations, along with alerts and reminders to ensure that no critical health milestone is missed. It provides access to digital MCH cards, information on nearby healthcare facilities, expected place of delivery, and supports informed decision-making through health education and nutritional guidance. Overall, JANANI marks a structural reform in maternal and child health administration by integrating digital authentication, real-time monitoring and inter-sectoral convergence – thereby contributing to improved

service coverage, accountability and long-term reductions in maternal and child mortality indicators. Till date, JANANI has achieved 1.34 crore beneficiary registrations, over 30 lakh pregnant women registrations, more than 30 lakh MCH cards generated, and over 1 lakh biometric verifications. The launch of JANANI reflects the Government's continued commitment to ensuring accessible, equitable, and quality healthcare services, with a focus on digital enablement, continuity of care, and improved maternal and child health outcomes.

## Progress of EMRS Construction Across the Country

Hon'ble Union Minister of Tribal Affairs, Shri Jual Oram, chaired a high-level meeting to review the progress of construction of Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRSs) across the country.

The meeting was organized by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and attended by CMDs/MDs and senior officials of Central and State Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), Central Public Works Department (CPWD), and representatives from the States of Assam, Chhattisgarh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tripura, and West Bengal through virtual mode.

Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) is a flagship scheme of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs to provide quality residential education to Scheduled Tribe (ST) students in remote areas from Class VI to XII. The scheme aims to bridge educational gaps and promote holistic development, including academics, sports, and skills of tribal children.

The Hon'ble Union Minister comprehensively reviewed the physical and financial progress of ongoing EMRS construction works. During the meeting, major executing agencies such as CPWD, HSCL, TCIL, WAPCOS, B&R, EPIL, MANIDCO, MTDC, NPCC, and State Govern-



ment agencies presented their progress and scheduled timelines for completion.

Agency-wise and State-wise performance was reviewed, with a focus on adherence to timelines, quality standards and resolution of bottlenecks.

Hon'ble Union Minister emphasized on the importance of timely completion of EMRS projects as it plays a crucial role in providing quality education to tribal

students in remote and underserved areas. He directed all executing agencies, including PSUs, CPWD, and State Government departments, to expedite construction activities by optimizing the deployment of manpower and resources at project sites. He also instructed senior officials to undertake frequent field visits for close monitoring.

The Hon'ble Union Minister further directed

State officials to resolve all pending issues at the State level on priority, including matters related to land and forest clearances.

Construction agencies were instructed to submit updated monthly progress reports of all ongoing projects, along with EMRS-wise issues and action plans for timely completion, to the Ministry/NESTS. Concerned construction agency will be held accountable for

delays in the projects.

Reaffirming the Government's commitment to tribal welfare, the Hon'ble Union Minister stated that EMRSs are a transformative initiative aimed at empowering tribal children through access to high-quality residential education.

The Hon'ble Union Minister noted that the expansion of EMRSs is aligned with the vision of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Naren-

dra Modi for Viksit Bharat 2047, which places strong emphasis on inclusive and equitable development. He highlighted that strengthening educational infrastructure in tribal areas is critical to ensuring that tribal youth become active participants in nation-building, thereby contributing to a developed, self-reliant, and empowered India.

Smt. Ranjana Chopra, Secretary, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, highlighted that the EMRS scheme is a flagship initiative of the Ministry. She emphasized on resolving bottlenecks affecting project progress i.e approach roads, water scarcity, and shifting of HT/LT power lines needs to be resolved at earliest. She urged executing agencies to coordinate closely with State Governments and district authorities to resolve these issues in a time-bound manner. She also emphasized the use of the PM Gati Shakti portal for EMRS projects.

Dr Pratima Verma, Commissioner, National Education Society for Tribal Students (NESTS), presented the overall status of construction and the scheduled plan of action for completion. It was informed that the Ministry has approved 728 EMRSs, out of which construction of 428 school buildings has been completed, 249 are under construction, and 46 are at the pre-construction stage.

# ▶▶ MAHARASHTRA

# Aryan Age | 05

## Mumbai Drug Racket Busted, Chemicals Worth ₹4 Lakh Could Have Produced ₹100 Crore MD

**Mumbai :** Mumbai Police have busted a major drug racket and seized a huge stock of raw materials, chemicals and ready-made mephedrone, also known as MD. According to police officials, the chemicals seized in the raid were worth nearly ₹4 lakh, but they could have been used to manufacture MD drugs worth around ₹100 crore in the illegal market.

The massive operation was carried out by the Mira-Bhayandar-Vasai-Virar (MBVV) Crime Branch after raids at Saman Nagar in Malvani, Azmi Nagar and Gorai areas. During the operation, police seized material worth ₹13.65 crore. This included 6.773 kilograms of ready MD drugs worth ₹13.61 crore.

So far, police have arrested 13 people in the case, including two



women. A case has been registered against all the accused under the NDPS Act related to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

The investigation had started on April 4 from the Mira Road area after police seized MD drugs worth ₹2.66 crore from a woman identified.

As Firdous Arbaz Qureshi. During questioning, Firdous and her husband Arbaz Vakil Qureshi allegedly revealed details about the larger drug network, leading police to uncover the full racket.

During the raids, police also recovered 255 litres of medicinal chemicals, hydrochloric acid, acetone, chloroform and laboratory equipment such as heating mantles and flasks used for manufacturing synthetic drugs.

Police said the operation has dealt a major blow to a gang supplying synthetic drugs across Mumbai and nearby areas.

## Mumbai Court sentences taxi driver to two yrs for harassment, stalking

**Mumbai :** A local court awarded two years rigorous imprisonment of two years to a 35-year-old taxi driver for molesting and stalking a woman passenger in South Mumbai.

The court found Rocky Fernandes guilty under Sections 354 and 354(D) of the Indian Penal Code, covering outraging a woman's modesty and stalking. He was also fined Rs 1,000.

According to prosecution case the complainant, a front office associate at a five-star hotel, encountered the accused on two occasions in November 2023 while commuting by shared taxi from Churchgate station.

In the first incident on



Nov. 11, the driver allegedly grabbed and kissed the complainant's hand after she offered to pay the fare.

In a second encounter on Nov. 23, the driver reportedly diverted from the usual route and sought her mobile number.

The defense argued that

the act aligned with hospitality greeting customs and cited the absence of CCTV footage.

The court rejected the claim, stating no evidence showed such conduct was part of hospitality training, and noted that the offense occurred inside the vehicle.

# Nana Patole Slams BJP Over Luxury Lifestyle and Political Double Standards

**Mumbai :** Congress leader Nana Patole launched a fierce attack on the BJP and the Maharashtra government, accusing them of hypocrisy, misuse of public money and protecting influential people in serious cases involving women.

Speaking to the media, Nana Patole said ministers and MLAs from the ruling alliance continue travelling with massive convoys in the name of security while preaching austerity to the common public. He accused the government of wasting public money and misusing government machinery.

Patole also alleged that important national institutions and systems are being pushed towards privatisation and claimed the BJP is focused only on expanding political control across

states. Referring to BJP celebrations after election victories, Patole said the party even released a map showing how many states it controls, which according to him was nothing but self-praise by the government.

Nana Patole compared the current leadership with former leaders like Madhu Dandavate, Jawaharlal Nehru and Lal Bahadur Shastri, saying those leaders practised austerity themselves before asking sacrifices from citizens. He said today's BJP leadership lacks such responsibility and moral example.

Patole further said that after 13 years in power, the BJP government is trying to divert attention from the country's real issues. He credited former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi for making India self-sufficient

through the Green Revolution and White Revolution and said even BJP should acknowledge those contributions.

He also alleged that India is functioning under pressure from the United States and claimed the country's independence and security are under threat under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. According to Patole, people feel India is being surrendered before America.

Patole said Rahul Gandhi has repeatedly raised concerns about these issues and added that he himself had written letters about them.

He also mentioned that senior leader Sharad Pawar had criticised the government over similar concerns. Patole claimed the country is moving towards a dangerous situation where

common people may face serious shortages of food and daily essentials.

He said Congress has always stood united during national crises and even former Prime Minister Atal



Bihari Vajpayee was once entrusted with representing the country abroad. In contrast, Patole accused the current Prime Minister of avoiding all-party meetings and said Sharad Pawar's

criticism was justified.

Nana Patole also spoke about the Ashok Kharat case, alleging that the government is trying to suppress the matter. He said Chief Minister Devendra

Fadnavis himself had earlier admitted that the issue involved women and was highly sensitive. Patole claimed evidence against four ministers would soon be submitted after meetings

with the Chief Minister. He questioned why the case was handed over to the Enforcement Directorate when Maharashtra already has agencies like the Economic Offences Wing.

Patole asked whether the state government has lost trust in its own police force. He alleged that instead of taking action against guilty ministers and officers, the government was protecting them.

Patole also claimed there may be a connection between the Nashik SSK Hotel incident and the Kharat case, calling it part of a larger chain of events. He said timely action by the government could have prevented exploitation of many women.

He warned that Maharashtra, the land of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Mahatma Phule, Rajarshi

Shahu Maharaj and Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, would not tolerate attempts to spread superstition and fake godmen culture. Patole said strict action against such people was necessary.

He also alleged corruption in deputation appointments in departments like SRA and claimed Mumbai and Maharashtra were being looted through irregular postings.

He said all these issues had been communicated to the Chief Minister through letters and would also be raised in the upcoming Assembly session in June.

Speaking about Praful Patel, Nana Patole said Praful Patel had formed a separate political group with Ajit Pawar and handled political responsibilities in Delhi. He added that Praful Patel is a senior leader from his own district and should

not be insulted or removed from party committees. Patole also raised concerns over increasing crimes against women in Maharashtra. He referred to the recent case in Nasrapur, Pune district, where a minor girl was allegedly raped and murdered. He accused the government of failing to catch criminals and claimed that women or girls are facing atrocities every 53 minutes in the state.

Finally, Nana Patole criticised BJP ministers for travelling to Guwahati while ordinary citizens are being asked to save money and fuel. He recalled how Lal Bahadur Shastri practised austerity during war-time and how women had donated jewellery to help the nation. Patole accused today's government of enjoying luxury while leaving common citizens to suffer.

## Rs 4500 Bonus for KYC-Verified Women under CM Ladki Bahin Scheme

**Mumbai :** Women who completed their e-KYC process on time for the state government's 'Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin' scheme, may receive their pending subsidies for the last three months in a single lump sum, official sources hinted.

An initiative regarding this has been taken at the government level and an official announcement is currently awaited.

If approved, eligible women could see a direct deposit of 4,500 into their bank accounts.

Following the extensive verification process for the state government's scheme, millions of women were declared ineligible.

The Mahayuti govern-

ment launched the scheme in June 2024 to provide monthly financial assistance of rupees 1,500 to economically weaker women.

The scheme received an overwhelming response with approximately 2.47 crore applications from both rural and urban areas. After rigorous scrutiny and verification of criteria (including e-KYC, family income, and government employment status), the number of eligible beneficiaries has stabilized at approximately 1.89 crore.

The government took a firm stand after the verification process as several discrepancies were found where women in government service or those ex-

ceeding the income limit had applied. Instances emerged where men had applied using women's names to claim the benefits. By the end of March, nearly 68 lakh women were declared ineligible, leading to widespread concern.

The situation improved in April after the government provided an extension for updating documents.

About 14 lakh women successfully completed their e-KYC in April, proving their eligibility. The number of ineligible beneficiaries has now dropped to approximately 54 lakh. For those who recently cleared their e-KYC.

The possibility of receiving the three-month backlog (totaling rupees

4,500) has brought a major sense of relief to families facing financial hardships.

Many women who could not complete the e-KYC process within the stipulated time have approached the Department of Women and Child Development seeking a further extension.

Applications from various districts have been forwarded to the government.

If the state takes a positive decision on these requests, even more women could potentially benefit from the scheme.

Currently, lakhs of beneficiaries across the state are closely monitoring the government's next move, waiting for the release of their pending installments.

## Bombay HC pulls up education officers over TET rejections in minority schools, warns of strict action

**Ch. Sambhajnagar :**

Reiterating that (TET) qualification is not mandatory for teachers serving in minority educational institutions, the Aurangabad Bench of the Bombay High Court has strongly criticised the functioning of Education Officers for repeatedly rejecting appointment approval proposals on the basis of non-clearance of TET despite earlier judicial directions. The court warned that if such mistakes are repeated in future, the concerned officers would face strict action. In a significant relief to teachers working in minority-run schools across Maharashtra, the division bench of Justice Vibha Kankanwadi and Justice Ajit B. Kadehtankar partly allowed three separate writ petitions and quashed



the rejection orders passed by the Education Officer against teachers appointed as 'Shikshan Sewak'. The petitions were filed by Sayed Abu Zaid Sayed Rafique and another petitioner, Gaikwad Sayali Vyankatesh, and Sainath Ganpat Bansode. In all three matters, the Education Department had refused approval to the appointments on the ground that the teachers had not qualified

the Teacher Eligibility Test. Advocate Sayyed Tauseef Yaseen appeared for Sayed Abu Zaid and another petitioner, Advocate Sheikh Tarek Mobin H. represented Gaikwad Sayali Vyankatesh, while Advocate K.P. Rodege appeared on behalf of Sainath Ganpat Bansode in the proceedings before the High Court. During the hearing, the petitioners contended that the schools concerned

were minority institutions and therefore the TET condition could not be applied in the same manner as it is applied to non-minority schools.

The petitioners relied upon the Supreme Court ruling in the matter of Anjuman Ishaat-E-Taleem Trust vs State of Maharashtra and Others, in which the question regarding applicability of TET to minority institutions has already been referred to a larger bench of the apex court for final adjudication. The petitioners also cited the Bombay High Court's earlier judgment in Sarika Madhavrao Shinde vs State of Maharashtra and Others, wherein similar relief had been granted to teachers serving in minority institutions.

## Opposition Targets Amit Satam Over 25-Car Convoy Amid Fuel Saving Appeal

**Mumbai :** A political controversy has erupted in Mumbai after BJP Mumbai President Amit Satam was seen travelling with a convoy of nearly 25 vehicles during an inspection tour, despite Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently urging citizens to save fuel amid tensions in Gulf countries.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had appealed to people to reduce the use of petrol and diesel, save cooking oil and prefer public transport due to the ongoing conflict situation in West Asia. He had also advised people in cities to use metro services and public transport more frequently.

However, during Amit Satam's inspection tour of Mumbai's drain cleaning work, around 25 vehicles were seen accompanying him. The convoy included Satam's personal vehicles along with cars of MLAs, party office-bearers, corporators, municipal officers and staff members. Videos of the convoy travelling through Mumbai suburbs



quickly went viral on social media, triggering political reactions.

NCP MLA Rohit Pawar sharply criticised the BJP over the issue. He sarcastically said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Chief Minister had appealed for fuel saving, and Amit Satam responded with a convoy of 25 cars. Pawar further mocked the BJP by saying perhaps their vehicles run on water instead of fuel. He also took another sarcastic swipe, saying BJP leaders should soon demonstrate how to cook vegetables using only water instead of oil. Rohit Pawar accused the ruling party of double standards

and said, "They preach one thing to the public but follow another themselves."

Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray faction) leader Aaditya Thackeray also attacked the BJP over the convoy issue. He questioned whether ministers in the government would reduce their own convoys while asking common people to cut expenses and save fuel. Referring to Amit Satam's tour, Aaditya Thackeray asked how many actual garbage-removal vehicles were present compared to the 25-car convoy. He also alleged that Maharashtra has become dependent on Delhi for every major decision.

## Music, Honors, and Celebration; Grand Finale of 'Pune Idol held in Style

**Pune :** The grand finale of the state-level singing competition Pune Idol 2026 was held in a vibrant and celebratory atmosphere at Balgandharva Rangmandir, drawing a large crowd of music enthusiasts, participants and dignitaries from across Maharashtra.

Organised by the Someshwar Foundation, the competition has been conceptualised as a platform to promote emerging musical talent across the state. The initiative was originally started by late MLA Vinayak Nimhan and is currently being carried forward under the guidance of corporator Sunny Vinayak Nimhan. Over the past 24 years, Pune Idol has built a reputation as one of the most consistent talent-spotting platforms for aspiring singers.

This year's edition witnessed remarkable participation, with contestants ranging from just 4 years to as old as 80 years, high-

lighting the inclusive nature of the competition. A total of 560 participants from cities including Pune, Nagpur, Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, Solapur, Kolhapur and Mumbai took part, showcasing a wide variety of musical styles and performances that captivated the audience.

Several prominent personalities attended the event, including MLA Siddharth Shirole, corporator Sunny Vinayak Nimhan, former corporator Swati Nimhan, and corporator Ravindra Salegaonkar. Their presence added significance to the finale and highlighted the cultural importance of the event in Pune's social landscape.

Addressing the gathering, Siddharth Shirole praised the vision of late Vinayak Nimhan for initiating Pune Idol as a platform to nurture artistic talent in the city. He said the competition has played a crucial role in identifying hidden

musical talent and bringing it into the mainstream, while also appreciating Sunny Nimhan for continuing the legacy with dedication and commitment.

One of the highlights of the evening was MLA Siddharth Shirole himself performing a song on stage, which received enthusiastic applause from the audience. His impromptu performance added a lively and personal touch to the event.

The competition also featured special recognition awards titled "Voice of Choice", which honoured individuals who have excelled in fields such as social service, administration, medicine and public service while also nurturing a passion for music.

Among the awardees were Pune Municipal Commissioner Naval Kishore Ram, renowned cardiologist Dr. Jagdish Hiremath, corporator Sapna Anand Chhajed, and senior police inspector Prashant Bhasme.

Each of them also performed on stage, adding a unique blend of professionalism and artistic expression to the evening.

Naval Kishore Ram received special appreciation for his soulful rendition of "Ik Haseen Shaam Ko Dil Mera Kho Gaya", followed by another classic performance at the audience's request. Dr. Hiremath impressed the audience with an emotional poetry recital, while Prashant Bhasme energised the crowd with devotional and classical performances including "Omkar Swarupa" and "Jeeva Shivachi Bailjodi". Sapna Chhajed also contributed with a well-received singing performance.

Speaking on the occasion, Sunny Vinayak Nimhan said that music serves as a powerful medium to spread positivity and emotional harmony in society. He emphasised that Pune Idol provides a strong platform for amateur singers

from both rural and urban backgrounds, helping them gain confidence and recognition. Winners of the competition were felicitated across multiple categories. First-place winners received ₹15,000 along with a memento and certificate, while second-place winners were awarded ₹10,000. Consolation prize winners received ₹5,000 along with mementos and certificates of appreciation. The audience responded warmly to the performances throughout the evening.

The event was efficiently managed under the supervision of coordinators Jitendra Bhuruk, Manjushri Oak and Rajesh Datar, ensuring smooth execution of the large-scale programme.

The finale concluded with a special musical presentation titled "Geeton Ka Safar" by singer Jitendra Bhuruk, bringing the curtain down on an evening filled with talent, nostalgia and celebration of music.

## Ranveer Singh not to be a part of The Immortal of Meluha: Author Amrish Tripathi

**Mumbai:** Author Amish Tripathi has dismissed reports claiming that Bollywood actor Ranveer Singh will headline the film adaptation of his bestselling novel *The Immortals of Meluha*. The clarification comes amid widespread speculation that Singh was being considered to portray Lord Shiva in a large-scale cinematic adaptation of the popular mythological saga.

Reacting to the reports, Tripathi firmly denied that any agreement had been finalised regarding the adaptation rights or casting. Speaking to *Variety India*, the celebrated author stated that the rights for the *Shiva Trilogy* currently remain with him and no official deal has been signed with any actor, filmmaker or production house.

Tripathi, however, expressed admiration for Ranveer Singh and praised the actor's work. He said he has immense respect for Singh and considers himself a fan, but clarified that the circulating reports about the actor being locked for the role were incorrect. His statement effectively put an end to the rumours that had generated significant excitement among fans of both the actor and the book series.

According to recent industry buzz, Singh was reportedly being considered to play Lord Shiva in an ambitious big-screen adaptation of the novel. The reports had suggested that the project was being envisioned as a grand multi-film franchise with the first instalment expected to commence production in 2028.



Speculation surrounding the project gained traction because of the scale and popularity of the source material. Widely regarded as one of the most influential works in contemporary Indian mythological fiction, "*The Immortals of Meluha*" transformed the landscape of Indian commercial publishing after its release and helped revive mainstream interest in mythological-inspired storytelling.

The novel marked the beginning of Tripathi's acclaimed *Shiva Trilogy*, which later expanded with *The Secret of the Nagas* and *The Oath of the Vayuputras*. The trilogy became a publishing phenomenon and earned a massive readership across India and abroad.

Set in the ancient land of Meluha, the story presents a reimagined interpretation of

Lord Shiva as a human tribal leader from Tibet who gradually evolves into the legendary Neelkanth, the prophesied saviour destined to protect civilisation from evil forces. The fictional world of Meluha is inspired by the Indus Valley Civilisation and is portrayed as an organised and prosperous empire founded on the ideals of Lord Ram.

As the narrative unfolds, Shiva allies himself with the Suryavanshi rulers in their conflict against the Chandravanshis and the mysterious Nagas. Through warfare, political intrigue and spiritual evolution, the protagonist discovers his destiny as a leader and protector, eventually transforming into a divine figure revered across generations.

Over the years, several attempts have been made to adapt the bestselling novel

for the screen, but none have materialised successfully. One of the earliest and most talked-about adaptation efforts was initiated by filmmaker Karan Johar, who acquired the film rights in 2012 through his production banner.

The adaptation was expected to be directed by Karan Malhotra and envisioned as a large-scale cinematic spectacle. However, the project was eventually shelved amid concerns regarding possible backlash and controversies related to the depiction of a revered Hindu deity on screen.

After the rights reverted to the author, acclaimed filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali reportedly acquired them with plans to develop the story for cinema. Despite considerable anticipation, that version of the adaptation also

failed to progress into production.

Another major attempt emerged in 2022 when Tripathi collaborated with veteran filmmaker Shekhar Kapur and creator Suparn Varma to develop the novel as a web series. The project was expected to be backed by producer Roy Price under International Arts Machine. However, despite the initial announcement, the proposed web series never moved beyond the development stage.

As repeated adaptation plans stalled, the rights eventually reverted back to Tripathi, who continues to retain control over the franchise. Industry observers believe the complexity of adapting such an iconic and spiritually significant story, combined with the enormous expectations of fans, has contributed to delays and abandoned attempts over the years.

Meanwhile, Ranveer Singh continues to remain one of the busiest actors in the Hindi film industry. The actor recently delivered a massive commercial success with *Dhurandhar: The Revenge*, which has reportedly emerged as one of Indian cinema's biggest blockbusters.

Singh is next expected to headline filmmaker Jai Mehra's untitled post-apocalyptic zombie thriller, which is scheduled to begin production in September 2026. Reports also suggest that discussions are underway between Singh and filmmaker Aditya Dhar for another potential collaboration, though no official announcement has been made regarding that project so far.

## Matt Bomer enters 'The Day of the Jackal' season 2

**Mumbai:** Emmy-nominated actor Matt Bomer has officially joined the second season of the acclaimed espionage thriller *The Day of the Jackal*. The actor is set to appear in a recurring role opposite Academy Award winner Eddie Redmayne, further increasing anticipation surrounding the upcoming season of the internationally successful series.

While the makers have not yet revealed specific details regarding Bomer's character, reports suggest that he will portray a major antagonist in the new season. The secrecy surrounding the role has already sparked curiosity among fans of the thriller series, particularly given Bomer's popularity and versatility as an actor.

Production for the second season has reportedly commenced in Budapest, which will serve as one of the major filming locations for the new instalment. The series continues to expand its cast with several prominent additions joining the espionage drama for its next chapter. Apart from Matt Bomer, actors Weruche Opia and Pablo Schreiber have also joined the second season as series regulars. Their casting announcements have added further excitement around the show's evolving storyline and character dynamics. "*The Day of the Jackal*" is based on the iconic novel by Frederick Forsyth as well as the classic 1973 film adaptation produced by Universal. The story revolves around an elusive and highly skilled assassin known only as the Jackal, portrayed by Eddie Red-



mayne in the television adaptation. The Jackal is depicted as a mysterious lone operative who carries out high-profile assassinations for enormous sums of money while constantly staying ahead of authorities and intelligence agencies. The series combines political intrigue, global espionage and psychological tension, elements that have contributed significantly to its popularity among audiences worldwide. The first season of the show emerged as a major critical and commercial success following its release. It earned multiple award nominations, including Golden Globe and Screen Actors Guild recognitions, further cementing its status as one of the most successful espionage dramas in recent years. According to industry

reports, the series also performed exceptionally well in terms of viewership. Nielsen rankings reportedly placed the show among the Top 5 streaming original dramas in the United States during its opening weekend, highlighting its strong audience reception. In the United Kingdom, the first season reportedly recorded a 28-day audience reach of approximately 4.6 million viewers, making it the biggest launch ever for a new series on Sky Studios. The success on both sides of the Atlantic significantly boosted expectations for the upcoming second season. "*The Day of the Jackal*" is produced by Carnival Films, which operates under Universal International Studios, a division of Universal Studio Group.

## Palak Tiwari on her first meeting with Deepika Padukone

**Mumbai:** Actress Palak Tiwari has spoken about her admiration for Bollywood star Deepika Padukone, calling her "perfect" and revealing that she was completely starstruck the first time they met. The young actress recently opened up about the memorable encounter while discussing the celebrities who have inspired her journey in the entertainment industry.

Palak, who is currently appearing alongside singer and rapper King on *Lukkhe*, shared her thoughts during a candid interaction with *Variety India*'s "Spotlight". During the conversation, she spoke



about her admiration for Deepika Padukone and explained why she considers the actress one of the most inspiring personalities in Bollywood.

Expressing her admiration openly, Palak described Deepika as the ideal film heroine and praised both her personality and career journey. "I think she is a quintessential

heroine, you know? She's just perfect," Palak said, while discussing the actress she idolises the most.

The actress further revealed that her admiration for Deepika dates back to her childhood. According to Palak, meeting the Bollywood superstar in person for the first time became an unforgettable moment because she was too overwhelmed to even speak properly.

Recalling the incident, Palak said she was around 12 years old when she accompanied her mother, television actress Shweta Tiwari, to the sets of *Comedy Nights with Kapil*.

## Jio Studios to distribute Peddi across North India in Telugu and Hindi

**Mumbai:** Jio Studios is set to distribute *Peddi* across North India in both Telugu and Hindi languages, further expanding its rapidly growing footprint in theatrical film distribution. The move marks another major step in the studio's aggressive expansion strategy as it strengthens its presence in the exhibition and distribution business across the country.

Headlined by Ram Charan, the much-anticipated sports action drama is scheduled for a worldwide theatrical release on June 4, 2026, while premiere shows are expected to begin a day earlier on June 3. The film has already emerged as one of the most talked-about upcoming releases in Indian cinema, generating significant excitement among audiences and trade analysts alike.

Directed by Buchi Babu Sana, "*Peddi*" features a strong ensemble cast led

by Ram Charan and Janhvi Kapoor. The film also stars veteran Kannada actor Shiva Rajkumar, Jagapathi Babu and Divyendu in pivotal roles.

The project has been generating strong buzz ever since its announcement, with posters, first-look visuals and promotional material receiving massive traction across social media and digital platforms. Industry insiders believe the film has the potential to emerge as one of the biggest pan-India releases of 2026, especially given Ram Charan's strong nationwide popularity following the global success of *RRR*.

Trade circles are particularly optimistic about the film's performance in Hindi-speaking markets, where Jio Studios is reportedly planning an extensive release strategy. The studio is expected to leverage its rapidly expanding distribution infrastructure to ensure wide the-

atrical penetration across multiplexes and single-screen cinemas in North India. The latest development comes after the successful theatrical performance of the *Dhurandhar: The Revenge* duology, whose distribution rollout significantly strengthened Jio Studios' newly established in-house distribution vertical. Industry observers noted that the success of the "*Dhurandhar*" franchise demonstrated the company's growing capabilities in handling large-scale commercial releases independently. Since formally launching its distribution arm in 2025, Jio Studios has steadily expanded its slate of theatrical projects and built a strong nationwide network. The company has increasingly focused on distributing major commercial entertainers across multiple languages, positioning itself as a major player in the evolving Indian theatrical market.

## Sara Ali Khan says, "You have to meet me four times to like me"

**Mumbai:** Bollywood actress Sara Ali Khan is once again winning attention for her candid and unfiltered personality as she gears up for the release of *Pati Patni Aur Woh Do*. Known for her lively interviews, humorous interactions and honest approach during public appearances, Sara recently opened up about how people often take time to truly understand her personality and connect with her on a deeper level. Speaking about first impressions and friendships, the actress admitted that her transparent and expressive nature may not immediately appeal to everyone she meets. However, she believes that once people spend enough time with her, they eventually discover her

genuine side and form strong friendships with her. Sara candidly shared that people might initially find her unusual or difficult to energetic personality and spontaneous way of expressing herself. Despite that, she said she is completely comfortable with how she comes across and does not feel the need to change herself to fit public expectations.

"I think when you meet me for the first time or the second time or maybe the third time, maybe you won't like me. But if we meet for the fourth time, we will definitely become friends. So maybe there is a filter system in my life that you have to meet me four times to like me. Because the first three times you won't. And I am okay with that. Because after that we will become strong friends," Sara said while speaking about her personal experiences with friendships and social interactions. The actress further elaborated on how people's perception of her tends to evolve gradually over time. According to Sara, the first impression people often get is one of surprise because of her outspoken and uninhibited personality. However, she believes repeated interactions help others understand her

her sincerity and emotional honesty. "Because the first time you will say - what is this? The second time you will say - she is very strange. The third time you will say anything. Then you'll feel - The girl's heart is pure. This is your journey with me," she added, highlighting how she views relationships and human connections. Over the years, Sara Ali Khan has developed a distinctive image in the entertainment industry for being refreshingly open and expressive during interviews and social media interactions. Unlike many celebrities who maintain carefully curated public personas, Sara is often appreciated for her natural spontaneity and self-awareness. Fans frequently praise her actress for bringing relatability and humour into her public appearances. Whether interacting with paparazzi, sharing travel videos, posting poetry on social media or discussing personal experiences in interviews, Sara has consistently maintained a conversational and approachable image that resonates strongly with younger audiences. Industry observers have often noted that Sara's personality sets her apart in an era where celebrity branding is usually highly polished and controlled. Her willingness to laugh at herself, speak candidly about awkward situa-

tions and openly discuss personal experiences has contributed significantly to her popularity beyond films. The actress has also spoken on several occasions about embracing authenticity instead of trying to appear perfect. According to her, being genuine and emotionally transparent matters more than maintaining an idealised image. This honesty, fans say, has helped her build a loyal following over the years. Professionally, Sara is currently preparing for the release of "*Pati Patni Aur Woh Do*", which has already generated considerable buzz online following its promotional campaign and early promotional content. The film is expected to present the actress in a fresh and entertaining role, adding to anticipation among audiences. While details surrounding the storyline and characters are still being discussed widely online, the project has attracted attention because of its youthful tone and ensemble cast. Industry watchers believe the film could offer Sara another opportunity to showcase her versatility as a performer. Sara Ali Khan, who made her Bollywood debut with *Kedarnath*, has steadily carved a space for herself in the industry through a combination of commercial entertainers and performance-oriented roles.

## Kapil Sharma can make India laugh for free, but audiences are not buying tickets for his films

**Mumbai:** Kapil Sharma is not an unpopular man. That is the irony. He is still one of India's most recognizable comedy faces. He still has recall, reach, television legacy, a loyal family audience and a brand that most comedians would envy. And yet, when it comes to the big screen, the laughter is not translating into tickets. The box office tells a brutally clear story. Kapil Sharma's debut film *Kis Kis Ko Pyaar Karoon* opened at Rs. 10.15 crores and went on to collect Rs. 49.38 crores nett in India, earning a Hit verdict. But after that, the decline has been sharp and consistent. *Firangi* ended at Rs. 10.27 crores and was declared a Flop. *Zwigato* finished at Rs. 1.50 crores and was also a Flop. *Kis Kis Ko Pyaar Karoon 2*, which should have benefited from nostalgia and franchise recall, managed only Rs. 11.12 crores nett in India and was again classified as a Flop. The latest warning sign is *Daadi Ki Shaadi*. The film opened at just Rs. 0.50 crore on Friday. It doubled on Saturday to Rs. 1 crore, and rose further to Rs. 1.25 crore on Sunday. On paper, the jumps look decent. 100% growth on Saturday and 25% growth on Sunday. But the problem is the base. When a film opens at just Rs. 50 lakhs, even a 100% jump does not change the larger picture.



The question is larger: why is Kapil Sharma, the man who can command laughter on television and streaming platforms, unable to generate the same response in cinemas? The first problem is simple: Kapil Sharma's humour is built for interaction, not isolation. His biggest strength has always been the live-room format. He feeds off guests, audience reactions, co-actors, interruptions, improvisations and instant punchlines. His comedy works like a conversation. A feature film, however, is not a chat show. It demands plot, pacing, escalation, emotional investment and cinematic conflict. A two-line joke that lands beautifully in a studio can look flat when stretched inside a weak screenplay.

That is where Bollywood has repeatedly failed him. Instead of building sharp, contemporary comic vehicles around Kapil's real strengths, filmmakers have often placed him in soft, harmless, middle-class comic setups where the writing does not rise above the actor's goodwill. The assumption seems to be that Kapil's name itself will make people laugh. But in theatres, goodwill gets you awareness; it does not guarantee footfalls. The second issue is that Kapil's big-screen image has remained confused. Is he a comic hero? A dramatic actor? A family entertainer? A common-man protagonist? A social-commentary performer? His filmography has tried different routes, but without a clear cinematic identity.

## KKR resurgence built on process, not playoff calculations: Watson

**Raipur:** Kolkata Knight Riders' late-season revival has sparked growing chatter around a possible playoff charge, but mentor Shane Watson has firmly grounded expectations, insisting the franchise is not engaging in any future scenarios and is instead focused entirely on delivering "complete performances" one game at a time.

KKR, who endured a mixed start to their campaign following significant squad changes at the auction, have now strung together four consecutive victories to re-enter contention and shift momentum in their favour.

However, Watson made it clear that the dressing room narrative remains deliberately narrow in focus.

"We haven't talked about anything in the future at all," Watson said during the pre-match interaction. "It's a cliché, but that's the truth. We're just focusing on playing complete games."

According to Watson, the transformation in results is not rooted in any dramatic tactical overhaul, but in the gradual settling of roles within a reshaped squad.

He acknowledged that the team needed time to adjust after considerable turnover in personnel before finding a stable structure.

"It was always going to take some time for everyone to understand where they fit into the squad," he said. "Now things have come together nicely. The batting order is more settled, and there's a better understanding of what works for us."

That clarity, Watson said, has translated into improved execution



across departments, with KKR increasingly managing to tick most boxes in recent matches.

He credited the shift to continuous learning and growing familiarity within the group rather than any single breakthrough moment.

"There's been continuous learning and development from everyone. What we're seeing now is players stepping up at different times and contributing to complete team performances," he noted.

A key factor in KKR's resurgence has been the emergence and evolution of several young and new recruits, something Watson described as one of the most encouraging aspects of the campaign's second half.

Among those drawing attention is Cameron Green, the Australian all-

rounder who arrived with high expectations and a significant price tag. Watson, however, dismissed external pressure narratives and said the focus has been on helping him settle into defined roles.

"He's experienced similar situations before. It's about understanding his role and getting the best out of himself in this setup," Watson said, adding that Green's progression within the team environment has been steady and positive.

Finn Allen's recent performances also came under the spotlight, with Watson praising the New Zealand batsman's evolving approach. While known for explosive strokeplay, Allen has shown greater situational awareness in recent innings. "He's learning when to go and when to be a little more measured while still being

fearless," Watson explained, pointing to a more controlled knock in the previous game as a sign of maturity.

Young Indian batsman Angkrish Raghuvanshi earned perhaps the strongest endorsement from Watson, who was effusive about his technical range and adaptability.

"His skill development at such a young age is quite astonishing," Watson said. "We haven't yet seen a consistent explosion of his impact, but that will come. The ability he has is rare."

Watson also highlighted Raghuvanshi's work as a wicketkeeper, noting his rapid improvement despite not being a full-time gloveman earlier in his career.

"Good keepers are often the ones you don't notice — and he's done that job very well," he said.

On the team's immediate concerns, Watson confirmed that spinner Varun Chakravathy is being closely monitored after playing through discomfort in recent matches. While hopeful of his availability, he said no final decision has been made.

He also noted that Matheesha Pathirana remains fit and available but has been unable to break into the playing combination due to team balance.

As KKR head into the business end of the tournament, Watson's message remains unchanged: no distractions, no projections — only execution.

"If we keep putting together complete games, we give ourselves a great chance," he said, summing up a resurgence built more on process than prediction.

## PBKS rue poor execution after fourth straight defeat in IPL 2026

**Dharamshala:** Four defeats in a row have left Punjab Kings struggling to regain momentum after dominating the first half of IPL 2026. Despite the slump, they are still in the race for a playoff spot, although Monday's loss to Delhi Capitals made their path more complicated.

Spin bowling coach Sairaj Bahutule admitted the team was disappointed but said there was no point in overthinking the setback. Captain Shreyas Iyer, meanwhile, felt the team had been "short on planning".

Punjab appeared to have one hand on the game in Dharamshala when David Miller was dismissed in the 17th over of Delhi's chase of 211. At that stage, DC needed 36 runs from 18 balls, but late cameos from Ashutosh Sharma, Madhav Tiwari and Auqib Nabi carried them to a dramatic three-wicket win.

Bahutule said Punjab had failed to execute properly in the final overs. "I've said this before also, there are going to be lots of ups and downs. There are going to be times where you've almost won the game and you lose, like today, we had almost had the game with us, but we didn't execute the skills needed in the last five overs," Bahutule said at the post-match press conference. "So all we need to do is just keep this aside and move ahead and play the next three games

to the best of our ability".

He also felt Punjab could have added another 15-20 runs at the death after the strong platform they had built, which might have pushed the total beyond 240.

Iyer, however, had a different assessment of the pitch conditions. According to him, the total of 210 was already above par because of the movement and uneven bounce on offer for the seamers. Bahutule further pointed to dropped catches as another major factor in the defeat. "If we had caught two catches, I don't think they would have maybe reached the target, but it would have been very difficult for them and maybe won the game by 20 runs," he noted. For the first time in IPL history, neither sided a spinner during the match, with both teams relying entirely on pace. Iyer revealed that he did consider bringing Yuzvendra Chahal into the attack at one stage.

"There was absolutely a thought in my mind," Iyer said, "but the way the ball was seaming and the way it was helping seamers, I think if we would have executed our line and length precisely, we could have been able to extract wickets, but unfortunately again, we didn't." Bahutule agreed with the decision to persist with the quicks. "Definitely there was a thought during the time-out, but I think the ball was seaming and the condi-

tions were suitable for the fast bowlers," Bahutule said.

"So I think the decision was very spontaneous to continue with the fast bowlers and see how we can get those wickets, which we did early on".

Iyer also defended the bowlers' approach of hitting hard lengths instead of repeatedly attempting yorkers at the death. "I always say that hard length, short of hard length is the best ball, especially when a new batsman is coming in. It's not easy to hit because if you keep repeating those balls, at least one, there's one ball, there's a chance of, you know, mis-hitting and you can get a wicket. We've been short on planning," he said.

Bahutule also explained the decision to leave out Xavier Bartlett and hand Ben Dwarshuis his first game of the season with Lockie Ferguson unavailable, Punjab opted for another left-arm seamer on a pitch offering assistance to fast bowlers. "With Lockie (Ferguson) not available for this game, we thought of giving Ben that opportunity. He's also been bowling really well in the nets, performing well besides the games, so I think it was very important that we give that opportunity to a left-arm seamer who was doing well in the nets and constantly working with the group, and I think he did reasonably.

## Neeraj Chopra delays return, Sachin Yadav set for Diamond League debut in Rome

**Rome:** Indian javelin thrower Sachin Yadav is set to make his Diamond League debut at the Rome leg of the prestigious athletics series on June 4, with Olympic medallist Neeraj Chopra notably missing from the meet's entry list.

Neeraj, who is currently training and undergoing rehabilitation in Turkey, is yet to start his 2026 athletics season. He was last seen in action at the World Championships in Tokyo in September, where he competed with a back injury and finished a disappointing eighth.

With Neeraj absent, the spotlight in Rome will be on Sachin Yadav, who has been listed among eight competitors for the men's javelin throw competition.

The 26-year-old Sachin will be competing in his first international event since a breakthrough performance at the World Championships last year. He finished fourth in the final with a personal best throw of 86.27m, narrowly missing out on a medal.

He also won a silver medal at the Asian Championships last year. The Rome 2026 Diamond League will see Sachin line up against a strong field featuring former world champion Anderson Peters of Grenada, Germany's Julian Weber, Rio 2016 champion Thomas Röhler of Germany and Czechia's Jakub Vadlejch, a silver medallist from Tokyo 2020, according to olympics.com.

Curtis Thompson of the USA, Poland's Dawid Wegner and Sri Lanka's Ramesh Tharanga Pathirage - the current world leader - will also be in the mix. Sachin has already begun his 2026 season on the domestic circuit at the Indian Athletics Series meet in New Delhi in April, where he finished second with a best throw of 81.95m. While men's javelin throw will also be part of the Rabat Diamond League in Morocco on May 31, entry list for the meet in Morocco hasn't been announced yet.

Elsewhere, India's Parul Chaudhary, who holds the national records in women's 3000m, 5000m and 3000m

steeplechase, is set to compete in the steeplechase race at the Shanghai Diamond League 2026 on May 16.

The Indian athlete will be competing in her third Diamond League meet. Parul, the reigning Asian Games 5000m champion, finished 16th in Eugene in 2024 and came in sixth in Doha last year.

She will be up against reigning world champion Faith Cherotich of Kenya, former world champion Norah Jeruto of Kazakhstan and former Olympic champion Peruth Chemutai of Uganda in Shanghai.

The Shanghai meet also opens the 2026 Diamond League season as the Doha leg, which was originally meant to be the opener, was rescheduled from May 8 to June 19. Both Sachin and Parul will be looking to make use of the upcoming Diamond League meets and the competition against top athletes from around the world to build up momentum for a busy season ahead, which also features the 2026 Asian Games.

## IPL 2026: RCB seek batting revival against in-form Knight Riders

**New Delhi:** Defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru will look for a much sharper batting performance when they take on three-time title-holders Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) in a crucial IPL clash at the Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh International Stadium in Raipur on Wednesday, with both teams entering the match carrying very different momentum in the tournament.

RCB currently sit at the top of the points table with 14 points, although that position could change depending on the result of the clash between Sunrisers Hyderabad and Gujarat Titans, who are also on 14 points. But more than their position on the table, RCB will be concerned about the recent dip in the intensity and fluency of their batting unit.

The Bengaluru side built their campaign around aggressive and fearless batting performances earlier in the season, but that trademark approach was missing in their previous outing against Mumbai Indians while chasing a modest 167. RCB struggled for momentum throughout the innings and eventually relied on a fighting half-century from Krunal Pandya and a crucial six from Bhuvneshwar Kumar in the final over to scrape through. A major concern for RCB has been the form of



captain Rajat Patidar. After an explosive start to the season, during which he dominated bowling attacks with his aggressive strokeplay, Patidar's returns have dipped considerably in recent matches. In his last six innings, he has managed only one fifty-plus score and just one other innings above 20, affecting the firepower of RCB's middle order.

Despite that, contributions from players like Devdutt Padikkal and Tim David have helped RCB stay afloat and remain among the top teams in the competition.

However, they now face a much tougher challenge against a Kolkata bowling attack that has found rhythm at the right time. KKR's spin duo of Sunil Narine and Varun Chakravathy has been central to their revival, while domestic bowlers like Kartik Tyagi, Vaibhav Arora and Anukul Roy have provided excellent support.

That bowling unit has

played a major role in KKR's four consecutive wins after a poor start to the season. If the Raipur pitch continues to remain slightly tacky like it was in the previous game, RCB's batters could face another stern examination.

For KKR, the equation is much more straightforward. The three-time champions are still eighth on the table with nine points from 10 matches, and another defeat could leave them dangerously close to elimination from the playoff race.

To keep their hopes alive, KKR's batting group will need to handle RCB's new-ball pair of Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Josh Hazlewood effectively. Captain Ajinkya Rahane has not been able to find consistency this season, but vice-captain Rinku Singh, New Zealand batter Finn Allen, Anukul Roy and Angkrish Raghuvanshi have stepped up with important contributions in recent matches.

Australian all-rounder Cameron Green has also looked far more assured after struggling earlier in the season, giving greater balance and stability to the KKR batting line-up.

KKR will hope that improved form continues in Raipur as they aim to extend their winning streak and keep their slim playoff hopes alive.

Squads: Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Rajat Patidar (captain), Virat Kohli, Tim David, Jacob Bethell, Romario Shepherd, Josh Hazlewood, Nuwan Thushara, Devdutt Padikkal, Jitesh Sharma, Krunal Pandya, Rishabh Pant, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jordan Cox, Suyash Sharma, Venkatesh Iyer, Swapnil Singh, Jacob Duffy, Kanishk Chouhan, Abhinandan Singh, Mangesh Yadav, Phil Salt, Satvik Deswal, Vicky Ostwal, Vihaan Malhotra.

Kolkata Knight Riders: Ajinkya Rahane (C), Rinku Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Manish Pandey, Rovman Powell, Rahul Tripathi, Finn Allen, Tejasvi Singh, Tim Seifert, Sunil Narine, Anukul Roy, Ramandeep Singh, Cameron Green, Sarthak Ranjan, Daksh Kamra, Rachin Ravindra, Navdeep Saini, Vaibhav Arora, Umran Malik, Matheesha Pathirana, Kartik Tyagi, Akash Deep, Varun Chakravathy, Prashant Solanki.

## Chelsea start contacting prospective head coaches

**London:** Chelsea have started to make contact with prospective managerial candidates as they move towards appointing the club's next permanent head coach.

Andoni Iraola, Xabi Alonso and Marco Silva are among those already known to be on the list of names to replace Liam Rosenior, who was sacked last month, while

it is understood Crystal Palace head coach Oliver Glasner also features in Chelsea's thoughts.

Former Flamengo head coach Filipe Luis and Como boss Cesc Fabregas, who both played for Chelsea, are understood to have admirers at Stamford Bridge.

It is hoped that a new head coach will be appointed

well before the start of pre-season training in early July, according to BBC Sport. Iraola, Alonso, Silva and Glasner are all out of work, or scheduled to be without a club, by the end of the season which means Chelsea will not be required to pay compensation.

Ex-Liverpool midfielder Alonso, who left his position

as Real Madrid manager in January, is known to be optimistic about his chances in getting the role despite sources at Chelsea insisting the race is still wide open.

Glasner is leaving Crystal Palace when his contract expires this summer and is understood to be open to staying in England.

## Jannik Sinner one win away from longest Masters 1000 winning streak

**Rome:** World No. 1 Jannik Sinner extended his ATP Masters 1000 winning streak to 30 matches with a straight-sets win over Australia's Alexei Popyrin at the Italian Open, just one win away from equalling Novak Djokovic's record streak of 31 consecutive Masters 1000 victories set in 2011.

Sinner also became just the second player after Djokovic to win the first 25 Masters 1000 matches of a season.

Sinner came out firing from the opening game, breaking Popyrin immediately to seize control.

The Italian consistently dictated the baseline rallies in the first set and wrapped it up 6-2 in just 39 minutes on Monday. The second set turned into a one-sided affair as Sinner gave Popyrin little room to respond. Roared on by the home crowd, the top seed reeled off six straight games to complete a domi-



nant 6-0 set and book his place in the round of 16, according to Xinhua.

"He is a big server and his percentage was not very high, which helped me a little bit. But I have been returning the second serves very well and I am happy to be in the next round," Sinner said. On the women's side, third seed Coco Gauff survived a major scare against fellow American Iva Jovic, saving a match point in a hard-fought 5-7, 7-5, 6-2 win

after two hours and 45 minutes, while second seed Elena Rybakina and fourth seed Iga Swiatek both sailed into the quarterfinals.

Chinese pair Xiang Xinyu and Xu Yifan exited in the doubles first round. On Tuesday, Sinner will face fellow Italian Andrea Pellegrino, while men's second seed Alexander Zverev takes on 18th seed Luciano Darderi.

In the women's draw, Gauff will meet eighth seed Mirra Andreeva.

## Omkar Salvi backs simple bowling mantra, says 160-180 still competitive in T20s

**Raipur:** Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) bowling coach Omkar Salvi on Tuesday pushed back against the growing fixation on 200-plus totals in T20 cricket, asserting that disciplined bowling, clarity of roles and execution under pressure can still make even 160-180 scores highly competitive in the modern game.

Addressing the pre-match press conference ahead of RCB's clash against Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR), Salvi said the biggest challenge in contemporary T20 cricket is not just skill, but maintaining mental clarity in rapidly changing conditions.

"In this format, there is a lot of uncertainty. Pitches behave differently, conditions are not always favor-

able. The key for bowlers is decision-making and keeping things simple," Salvi said.

With T20 cricket increasingly dominated by high-scoring encounters, he stressed that teams often underestimate the value of disciplined bowling performances.

"Even 160-180 can be a very competitive total depending on the surface and execution.

The more simple you keep it for bowlers, the better they respond. Length and clarity at the top of the mark are very important," he added.

Salvi underlined that RCB's bowling philosophy is built around adaptability rather than reacting to external trends or opposition momentum.

He said bowlers are en-

couraged to trust their plans and adjust based on conditions rather than overthinking match situations.

"It is about setting the tone. Bowlers have to read

the wicket quickly and execute accordingly. Conditions will change, but clarity helps execution," he said.

On the upcoming contest against KKR, who have been in strong batting form in recent games, Salvi acknowledged the challenge but said RCB's preparation

remains focused on their own processes rather than opponent-specific pressure.

"We cannot control the toss or the pitch. We focus only on what is in our control—our preparation and our strengths. On match day, we will take tactical calls based on what we see," he said.

He also spoke about the growing role of young fast bowlers in the squad, highlighting their learning curve and development through exposure and experience.

According to him, set-backs.

And time spent observing senior players have contributed significantly to their improvement.

"It is a process. They are learning through experience, watching closely, and improving step by step," he said.

Salvi further noted that close victories have helped strengthen the team environment, building trust and belief within the dressing room.

"These wins help build confidence. The belief in each other becomes stronger, and that reflects on the field," he said.

On all-rounder Krunal Pandya's contributions with the bat, Salvi said the team was well aware of his ability to deliver under pressure, calling his performances an extension of his consistent all-round skill set.

As RCB prepare for a crucial phase of the tournament, Salvi's message remained consistent: in a format dominated by aggressive scoring, simplicity, discipline and execution may still be the most decisive factors.

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
74,559.24	-1.92%	23,379.55	-1.83%	22,299.90	-2.18%	68,586.55	-2.43%	24,303.05	-1.94%	54,439.90	-1.57%	59,704.65	-2.54%
Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open
76,015.28	75,688.39	23,815.85	23,722.60	22,795.75	22,728.70	70,297.85	70,121.85	24,784.80	24,694.30	55,310.55	54,832.45	61,258.40	61,171.45
High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
75,741.96	74,449.50	23,757.55	23,348.40	22,768.10	22,270.95	70,367.65	68,466.45	24,735.75	24,269.35	55,002.45	54,360.70	61,325.35	59,625.65

## Top Gainers

Company	Current	% Gain
ONGC	294.50	4.80
Hindalco	1,041.40	1.75
SBI	974.60	0.10
Sun Pharma	1,872.70	1.34
HUL	2,307.20	0.85

## Top Losers

Company	Current	% Loss
Shriram Finance	930.45	-4.66
Adani Ports	1,688.20	-4.48
Tech Mahindra	1,392.90	-4.43
HCL Tech	1,145.80	-4.11
Jio Financial	230.47	-4.10

## Commodities

Commodity	Price	Change (%)
Gold Jun 05	153,646.00	-17.00 -0.01
Silver Jul 03	279,628.00	1,317.00 0.47
Crudeoil May 18	9,759.00	383.00 4.08
Naturalgas May 26	271.30	-6.30 -2.27

## Bloodbath continues at Stock Market, Sensex down over 1400 points

**Mumbai:** Mumbai: Dalal Street witnessed another brutal session of selling on Tuesday as benchmark equity indices extended losses for the fourth consecutive trading day amid weak global sentiment, rising geopolitical tensions and sustained pressure on heavyweight sectors such as information technology and financials. Investor sentiment remained fragile throughout the day, leading to a sharp erosion in market wealth and pushing the Indian rupee to a record closing low against the US dollar.

The benchmark BSE Sensex ended the session down by 1,456.04 points or 1.92 per cent at 74,559.24. The broader Nifty 50 also suffered heavy losses, declining 436.30 points or 1.83 per cent to settle at 23,379.55. The sharp decline reflected widespread selling across sectors, with market breadth remaining decisively negative.

Trading data showed intense pressure across the broad-



er market, with around 3,219 shares declining on the exchanges compared to only 875 advancing stocks. Analysts attributed the weakness to a combination of global uncertainty, surging crude oil prices, persistent foreign investor selling and concerns surrounding the weakening rupee.

The Indian rupee slipped further and ended at a record closing low of 95.63 against the US dollar, adding to worries over imported inflation and foreign capital outflows. Currency weakness also weighed heavily

on investor confidence, particularly in sectors dependent on imports and global demand.

The sharp selloff wiped out massive investor wealth during the session. The total market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies fell to nearly Rs 467.3 lakh crore, with investors collectively losing more than Rs 11 lakh crore in a single trading session. Market participants said the prolonged correction reflected growing nervousness among institutional and retail investors alike. Electric vehicle-related stocks, which had wit-

nessed strong gains in recent sessions, came under significant selling pressure as investors rushed to book profits. Shares of Olectra Greentech declined 7.3 per cent, while Ola Electric Mobility fell 5 per cent. Ather Energy also slipped 4.6 per cent during the session.

Jewellery and consumer discretionary stocks also witnessed another round of intense selling. Kalyan Jewellers India dropped nearly 6 per cent, while Titan Company tanked 3.5 per cent as investors turned cautious amid broader market weakness and concerns regarding consumer demand.

Despite the broad-based decline, a few stocks managed to attract buying interest. Shares of Oil India surged 7.7 per cent, while Oil and Natural Gas Corporation gained 4.8 per cent amid rising crude oil prices in the international market. The rally in oil exploration companies came as higher crude prices are generally seen as beneficial for upstream energy firms.

## Telangana showcases EV charging success story at national conference in Bengaluru

**Bangaluru:** Telangana showcased its rapid progress in electric vehicle adoption and EV charging infrastructure at the National Conference on "Enabling Nationwide EV Charging Infrastructure under the PM E-DRIVE Scheme" held in Bengaluru on Tuesday.

The conference, organised at Hotel Taj Yeshwantpur, brought together representatives from Central ministries, state governments, public sector enterprises, EV manufacturers and charging infrastructure providers to discuss expansion of Electric Vehicle Public Charging Stations (EVPCS) across the country.

Navin Mittal presented Telangana's EV success story and highlighted the role of TGREDCO, the state nodal agency for EV charging infrastructure implementation.

According to officials, Telangana has registered more than 2.8 lakh electric

vehicles so far, including 91,572 new EV registrations during FY 2025-26. Around five percent of all new vehicle registrations in the state are now electric vehicles, while the EV market value touched Rs 6,297 crore during the financial year.

The state currently operates 325 electric buses from six city depots and has initiated retrofitment of 240 diesel buses. Telangana is also implementing a major e-bus programme targeting 2,800 electric buses in Hyderabad by 2027. Officials said Telangana presently has 1,063 operational EV charging stations, including around 600 in Hyderabad. TGREDCO alone operates nearly 200 public charging stations within GHMC limits and plans to establish additional charging stations at 116 locations under the PME-DRIVE Scheme with a sanctioned amount of Rs 10.24 crore under Phase-I.

## Reliance Jio to file IPO's draft prospectus, likely to list by July

**Mumbai:** Reliance Industries Ltd-owned Reliance Jio Platforms Ltd is expected to file the draft red herring prospectus of its initial public offer (IPO) within the next fortnight or as even early as next week, as well as complete other regulatory formalities, so that the company can list on the stock exchange by July, according to investment officials.

Jio's IPO valuation is expected to be in the range of \$180 billion USD or Rs 15 lakh crore.

The company is expected to raise around \$4 billion USD, by offering an initial 2.5% stake in the company during the IPO.

Reliance Industries has received regulatory approvals for listing only 2.5% stake in Reliance Jio in the market initially.

An older rule had man-

dated companies to list at least a 5% stake in the market.

If Jio's listing is successful, it will be the largest IPO India has ever seen.

So far, the largest IPO in India has been that of Hyundai Motor India, which had raised \$3.3 billion in October 2024.

As soon as it is listed, Jio is expected to become one of the most valued companies on India's stock exchanges.

Jio plans to use approximately Rs 25,000 crore from the total money raised to reduce the corporate debt of the company and scale up its artificial intelligence (AI) and mobile network infrastructure.

Jio has roped in top global investment banks like Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs, JP Morgan Chase and domestic names like Kotak

Mahindra Capital and Axis Capital to manage its mega IPO.

However, Reliance Industries is likely to change the Jio IPO structure from an "offer for sale" (OFS) to one which will consist entirely of freshly-issued shares in order to satisfy the company's existing high profile investors.

This is because existing investors, who were looking to cash out their investments, were reportedly unhappy with Reliance's earlier decision of not maximising the IPO valuation of the company. Reliance Industries CMD Mukesh Ambani is keen to protect retail investors and is hence cautious of pricing the IPO too high which could increase the chance of a negative listing, which could potentially result in losses for retail investors.

## India has 60 days of crude, LNG and 45 days of LPG stock: Hardeep Singh Puri

**New Delhi:** India has adequate crude and LPG stocks and no immediate supply crisis, union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said on Tuesday, while highlighting that the country is maintaining strong energy buffers despite global volatility in oil markets.

Speaking at the CII Annual Business Summit 2026, the minister said that India currently holds around 60 days of crude oil reserves and liquefied natural gas (LNG) as well as 45 days of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), adding that these levels are sufficient to ensure stability in domestic supply.

"We have 60 days of crude, which is the max we need. We have 60 days of LNG and 45 days of LPG,"

Puri said, stressing that India's energy preparedness remains strong even amid global price fluctuations and supply pressures.

The minister also acknowledged financial stress in the oil marketing sector, stating that oil companies are facing losses of around Rs 1,000 crore per day. He added that under-recoveries are Rs 198,000 crore and cumulative losses incurred by these companies are estimated at nearly Rs 1 lakh crore for the current quarter.

"When this crisis began, there were some concerns, but we converted the challenge into an opportunity. We have ramped up our domestic production of LPG, which used to be 36,000 metric tons per day. We have now taken it up to 54,000

metric tons per day," he said.

The minister further highlighted that the LPG demand had also moderated from 90,000 metric tonnes to around 75,000 metric tonnes, partly due to seasonal factors, and credited supply-demand management for maintaining overall stability in the system.

Earlier on Monday, the Centre reiterated Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal for citizens to reduce fuel consumption. Officials urged people to use public transport, carpool where possible, and adopt electric vehicles and rail freight to ease pressure on energy demand and support conservation efforts.

Sujata Sharma, joint secretary for ministry of petroleum & natural gas, said, "I

would like to convey to you that the Prime Minister has urged all citizens of the country to reduce their consumption of petrol and diesel.

Wherever possible, utilise the Metro and public transportation; opt for carpooling; prioritise railways as a mode of transportation for goods; and wherever feasible, increase the usage of electric vehicles. Let us all come together and make every possible effort to conserve energy in our daily lives, so that the economic burden currently weighing upon the nation may be alleviated."

Sharma said, "Our refineries are operating at optimum levels. There are no instances of dry-outs at any retail outlets. Nor have any

dry-outs been reported at LPG distributorships. Adequate stocks of petrol and diesel are available, and LPG supplies for domestic cooking purposes are being maintained. Over the past three days, 1 crore 26 lakh LPG cylinders have been delivered to households against 1 crore 14 lakh bookings. Similarly, sales of commercial LPG have exceeded 17,000 tonnes over the last three days. Sales of Auto LPG have also surpassed 762 tonnes..."

Meanwhile, global oil prices continued to rise, with the Brent Crude Oil prices extended their rally. Brent crude futures were up 30 cents, or 0.29%, at \$104.51 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate rose 31 cents, or 0.32%, to \$98.38.

## Abbott launches minimally invasive TriClip Heart Valve Repair System in India

**Hyderabad:** Abbott, a global healthcare leader, today announced the launch of the TriClip transcatheter edge-to-edge repair (TEER) system in India for the treatment of tricuspid regurgitation (TR), commonly known as a leaky tricuspid valve.

The minimally invasive device is designed to repair the tricuspid valve without the need for open-heart surgery and is delivered through a vein in the leg using catheter-based technology, the company said in a release..

According to the company, the TriClip system works by clipping together portions of the valve leaflets to improve blood flow and reduce leakage.

The technology is based on Abbott's MitraClip platform used for treating leaky mitral valves but has been specifically engineered for navigating the right side of the heart.

Abbott said most patients receiving the TriClip system require only one day of hospitalisation before returning home.

Tricuspid regurgitation occurs when the tricuspid valve fails to close properly, allowing blood to flow backward within the heart. The condition can lead to fatigue, breathlessness, atrial fibrillation and heart failure if left untreated.

The company said TR is increasingly being recog-

nised as a common but under-diagnosed heart valve disorder in India, particularly among elderly patients and those with rheumatic heart disease, atrial fibrillation, pulmonary hypertension and other cardiac conditions.

Sudheer Mirajkar, Country Manager for Abbott's Structural Heart business in India, said the launch of TriClip represents a significant advancement for patients with limited treatment options for tricuspid regurgitation. He said the minimally invasive therapy could help improve symptoms, enhance quality of life and reduce hospitalisations related to heart failure.

The device is backed by findings from the TRILUMINATE Pivotal trial, a global randomised clinical study evaluating the safety and effectiveness of TriClip compared with standard medical therapy in patients with severe TR.

According to the study findings reviewed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, nearly 90 per cent of patients who received TriClip showed improvement in TR severity within 30 days, while two-year data demonstrated a 28 per cent reduction in heart failure hospitalisations along with significant quality-of-life improvements, the release added.

## Banks register strong financial performance, business spikes to Rs 283.3 lakh crore

**New Delhi:** The Public Sector Banks (PSBs) continued to register strong financial performance during FY 2025-26, reflecting sustained business growth, improved asset quality, record profitability and strong capital position.

The aggregate business of PSBs increased to Rs 283.3 lakh crore as on March 31, 2026, registering growth of 12.8% over the previous year. Aggregate deposits rose by 10.6% y-o-y to Rs 156.3 lakh crore, reflecting continued depositor confidence and strong resource mobilisation by PSBs, as per the Ministry of Finance.

Banks' Gross NPA ratio

(Non-Performing Assets) declined to 1.93% and Net NPA ratio to 0.39%, reflecting historically low levels of stressed assets. Further, each PSB maintained provisioning coverage ratio of above 90%, indicating prudent provisioning practices, improved underwriting standards, effective risk management mechanisms and strengthened balance sheet resilience.

Fresh slippages continued to decline during FY26. Slippage ratio reduced to 0.7%. Total recoveries, including recoveries from written-off accounts, stood at Rs 86,971 crore, reflecting improved recovery mechanisms and better

credit discipline across PSBs.

Gross advances registered growth of 15.7% y-o-y and reached Rs 127 lakh crore, indicating sustained credit demand across sectors of the economy.

Credit growth in the Retail, Agriculture and MSME (RAM) segments remained broad based during FY 2025-26. Retail, Agriculture and MSME advances grew by 18.1%, 15.5% and 18.2%, respectively, reflecting the important role of PSBs in supporting entrepreneurship, strengthening financial inclusion, and enabling broad-based economic growth, it said. Aggregate operating profit

reached Rs 3.21 lakh crore, while aggregate net profit increased by 11.1% y-o-y to a historic high of Rs 1.98 lakh crore, marking the fourth consecutive year of aggregate profitability for PSBs. The capital position of PSBs remained healthy, with aggregate CRAR (Capital to Risk (Weighted) Assets Ratio) improving to 16.6% as on March 31, 2026, supported by internal accruals, retained earnings and capital raising of Rs 50,551 crore during FY 2025-26. The CRAR of all PSBs remained well above the regulatory requirement of 11.5%, providing adequate cushion for continued lending growth.

## Amazon Bazaar sees rapid growth in AP, Telangana: Sameer Lalwani

**Hyderabad:** Amazon Bazaar, the ultra-affordable shopping platform of Amazon, has witnessed significant growth in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, with orders and customer engagement increasing sharply over the past year, according to Sameer Lalwani, Head of Amazon Bazaar, Amazon India.

Addressing a press conference in Hyderabad on Tuesday, Lalwani said Amazon Bazaar was launched with the aim of combining Amazon's trusted shopping experience with affordability by offering products

priced below Rs 600. He said over three crore products are currently available on the platform, with nearly two crore items priced below Rs 300.

He stated that the platform offers products across categories including fashion, beauty, home and kitchen, electronic accessories and personal care items, with free delivery and a seven-day return policy on all products. Highlighting the growth of the platform, Lalwani said Amazon Bazaar recorded a 10-fold increase in orders nationally during 2025, while the first few months of

2026 have already seen a further four to five times increase compared to last year. In Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, the platform has registered nearly six-fold growth in orders and customers, he added.

He noted that Hyderabad has emerged as a major growth market, while customers from tier-2, tier-3 and tier-4 towns across the two Telugu states are also increasingly shopping on the platform. Women's fashion, home and kitchen products, and electronic accessories are among the fastest-growing categories.

## IHCL reports record FY26 Revenue of ₹ 9,971 Cr, Announces Dividend

**Hyderabad:** The Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) on Monday reported its sixteenth consecutive quarter of record performance, posting consolidated revenue of ₹9,971 crore for FY2025-26, registering a growth of 16 per cent year-on-year.

The company reported EBITDA of ₹3,477 crore with an EBITDA margin of 34.9 per cent, while profit after tax (PAT) stood at an all-time high of ₹2,084 crore for the financial year.

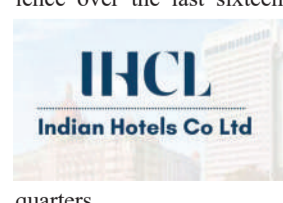
For the fourth quarter

ended March 31, 2026, IHCL posted consolidated revenue of ₹2,845 crore, up 14 per cent over the previous year, with EBITDA at ₹1,052 crore and PAT at ₹600 crore, the company said in a release.

Mr. Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director & CEO, IHCL, said the company achieved double-digit revenue growth despite macro-economic headwinds and the impact of the West Asia conflict.

He said IHCL's diversified strategy across brands,

management contracts, and geographies helped deliver consistent growth and resilience over the last sixteen



quarters. According to the company, IHCL added three new brands during the fiscal, taking its major brand portfolio to fourteen. The company also recorded 250 hotel sign-

ings, expanding its overall portfolio to 630 hotels, including an industry-leading pipeline of 255 hotels.

During FY26, IHCL opened or onboarded more than 130 hotels, expanding its footprint across luxury, experiential leisure, and mid-scale hospitality segments.

The company maintained a gross cash balance of ₹4,345 crore as of March 31, 2026. IHCL has proposed a dividend amounting to 25 per cent of consolidated PAT before exceptional items, in-

cluding a special dividend to commemorate the company's 125th AGM.

Mr. Ankur Dalwani, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, IHCL, said IHCL Standalone reported revenue of ₹5,640 crore with an EBITDA margin of 45.1 per cent and PAT of ₹2,012 crore during FY26.

He added that the company invested more than ₹1,000 crore in greenfield projects, renovations, digital initiatives, and acquisitions during the year.