

# Aryan Age

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## Maharashtra Ready to Lead India's Nuclear Energy Future

### American Companies Invited to Invest in Maharashtra's Nuclear Power Sector

**Mumbai:** Maharashtra is preparing to become a major leader in the nuclear energy sector as the demand for stable and uninterrupted electricity is expected to rise sharply due to artificial intelligence, data centres, semiconductors, green hydrogen, electric mobility and advanced manufacturing industries. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said that solar and wind energy alone will not be enough for long-term industrial growth, and nuclear power will play a key role in the future economy.

Speaking at a meeting organised under the US Nuclear Executive Mission in India by the Nuclear Energy Institute and the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum, Fadnavis invited American companies to invest in Maharashtra's nuclear energy sector.

The meeting was attended by Additional Chief Secretary of the

Energy Department Abha Shukla, Additional Chief Secretary to the Chief Minister Lokesh Chandra, Principal Secretary of Industries P. Anbalagan, Mahagenco CEO Radhakrishnan B., Chief Minister's Investment Advisor Kaustubh Dhavse and Protocol Department Secretary Rajesh Gavande.

Senior representatives from major American companies were also present, including Nuclear Energy Institute President and CEO Maria Korsnick, Centrus Energy Vice President Dan Listiko, Clean Core Thorium Energy CEO Mehul Shah, Curtis-Wright Corporation Vice President Gary Wolsky, US-India Strategic Partnership Forum Managing Director Nivedita Mehra, Edlow International President Jack Edlow and Holtec Asia CEO and Head of Strategic Partnerships Anant Jain.

Devendra Fadnavis said the global energy transition is

undergoing major changes. For many years, solar and wind energy were considered the main solutions for future energy needs. However, rapid industrialisation and the growing digital economy are now creating a strong need for stable and continuous electricity supply.

He said Maharashtra is already investing heavily in solar and wind energy, but nuclear power will become essential for carbon-free industrial-scale baseload electricity generation. Fadnavis highlighted that Maharashtra is India's leading industrial state with a 660-billion-dollar economy and receives more than 40 percent of the country's total foreign investment.

He also said nearly 60 percent of India's data centre capacity is concentrated in Mumbai and Navi Mumbai. In the coming years, sectors like semiconductors, artificial

intelligence, logistics and advanced manufacturing will significantly increase electricity demand across the state.

Fadnavis stated that several positive developments have taken place in India-US civil nuclear cooperation in recent years. Reforms under the "Shanti" framework, private sector participation, technology transfer and industrial cooperation are creating new opportunities in the nuclear sector.

He said India will remain one of the fastest-growing electricity markets for decades, and Maharashtra will become the biggest industrial driver of that growth.

The Chief Minister assured American companies that the Maharashtra government would support them with industrial land, infrastructure, skill development, research partnerships and manufacturing clusters if they establish nuclear manufacturing

and power projects in the state. He also said the government is ready to provide subsidies and special incentives for early-stage industries.

Maria Korsnick said India has huge opportunities in the nuclear energy sector. She added that Maharashtra has skilled manpower, industrial technology and a strong supply chain, making it an attractive destination for investment.

During the meeting, Additional Chief Secretary Abha Shukla gave a presentation on Maharashtra's rising electricity demand, current power generation capacity and the future need for nuclear energy. She said the state's present electricity demand stands at 31 gigawatts and is expected to increase to 42 gigawatts by 2030.

She also informed that Maharashtra is already implementing several large-scale projects related to solar energy,



battery storage, green hydrogen and energy transition.

Mahagenco Managing Director Radhakrishnan B. presented details about ongoing energy projects and said the company has set a target of producing 7,000 megawatts of nuclear power over the next two decades.

He said Mahagenco is currently India's largest state-owned power generation company with a capacity of 14.5 gigawatts. Considering the changing energy landscape, the focus is gradually shifting from coal-based power generation to

nuclear energy.

Radhakrishnan B. also revealed that the state is exploring the use of Small Modular Reactor technology to meet the needs of industrial zones. These projects could supply electricity to steel plants, cement factories, fertiliser industries and data centres.

US-India Strategic Partnership Forum Managing Director Nivedita Mehra explained the background of the meeting, while several dignitaries discussed investment opportunities and future possibilities in Maharashtra's nuclear energy sector.

## 22 Sunetra Pawar NCP MLAs in touch with Sharad Pawar

**Mumbai:** As many as 22 MLAs belonging to the Deputy CM Sunetra Ajit Pawar-led NCP faction met



NCP founder Sharad Pawar, party sources informally revealed here on Wednesday, though there is no word yet about what was discussed at the meeting.

The development comes after senior leaders of the party like Sunil Tatkare and Praful Patel met Sharad Pawar a few days ago after they were sidelined within the party by Deputy CM Sunetra Pawar. There was also another move by some MLAs to leave the Sunetra Pawar-led NCP and join the BJP.

According to sources, some MLAs from the Sunetra Pawar-led NCP are currently skeptical about their political future. There is discontent about the leadership of the party, as well as equations at the local level.

Those MLAs who are not willing to go with the BJP are eager to join the Sharad Pawar-led NCP, sources said. It is for the first time that doubts are being expressed about the leadership of Deputy CM Sunetra Pawar and her son Parth Pawar.

Until recently, it was believed that only MLAs who support Sunil Tatkare, Praful Patel and the BJP had misgivings about Deputy CM Sunetra Pawar's leadership.

Since both Sunetra Pawar as well as her son Parth Pawar lack the kind of seasoned political acumen and experience which the late Ajit Pawar was known for, the MLAs view them as political greenhorns, sources said.

Political observers are of the view that the hiring of political strategist Prashant Kishor-founded I-PAC organisation that will begin working for the Sunetra Ajit Pawar-led NCP from June 1 must be seen in this context.

According to the deal, Kishor will be active as the strategist of the Sunetra Ajit Pawar-led NCP and will pay attention to strengthening the party's image, social media campaigns, increasing communication with voters as well as strengthening the party at the booth level.

Previously, the party's image management was handled by a company called Design Box whose links with VSR Aviation which rented the ill-fated aircraft used by the late Ajit Pawar became controversial.

Meanwhile, a meeting of the Sharad Pawar-led NCP was held here on Wednesday. Sharad Pawar-led NCP's state president Shashikant Shinde stated that a discussion about strengthening the party organisation took place.

When Shashikant Shinde was asked about the 22 MLAs meeting party chief Sharad Pawar, he denied it by saying, "I am not aware of any such development, but if any proposal is received, we will definitely consider it. If they want to work under the leadership of Sharad Pawar, we will definitely consider it".

## Govt sets June 30 deadline for PNG switch

**Mumbai:** Amidst severe fuel crisis facing Maharashtra that has left numerous fuel pumps dry and created panic among the public, the Maharashtra government has issued a strict mandate for urban areas where piped natural gas infrastructure exists, setting June 30 as deadline for PNG switch, in a bid to conserve liquid fuel and manage the crisis on a war footing.

While petrol and diesel stocks are critical, the state possesses an abundant reserve of kerosene (ration oil). Special officers have been appointed to rebuild the broken distribution network and allow free-of-cost kerosene distribution to affected citizens.

Approvals for laying domestic gas pipelines will now receive automatic clearance within 24 hours. Furthermore, builders will no longer receive an Occupation Certificate (OC) for new constructions unless PNG lines are pre planned. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is actively negotiating with alternative oil-producing nations to secure emergency shipments and stabilize the supply



chain. The crisis has triggered a massive political showdown in the state. Nationalist Congress Party (SP) MP Supriya Sule expressed deep concern over the escalating public distress and long queues at fuel stations, calling out the administration for a lack of transparency.

Targeting the ruling Mahayuti alliance, Ms Sule demanded an immediate official statement from Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis.

"The government states we only have a month's worth of fuel left. What happens after 30 days? The state is facing a massive panic, and there is absolute chaos at the pumps. The Chief Minister himself must step forward and clarify the exact roadmap to resolve this bottleneck," Ms Sule urged.

## Severe heat wave grips UP, red alert issued in 11 districts

**Lucknow :** Uttar Pradesh is reeling under intense heat and heatwave conditions, with Banda remaining the hottest city in the country for the third consecutive day, recording a temperature of 48.2 degrees Celsius on Tuesday, 4.7 degrees above normal.

The previous two days saw temperatures of 47.6 degrees and 46.4 degrees Celsius in Banda too.

The Lucknow Meteorological Centre has issued a red alert for severe heatwave conditions for May 20 and 21. This warning applies to 11 districts, including Banda, Chitrakoot, Prayagraj, Fatehpur, Agra, Firozabad, Etawah, Jalaun, Hamirpur, Mahoba, and Jhansi.

Mohammad Danish, senior scientist at the Meteorological Centre, said, "Heatwave to severe heatwave conditions are likely to prevail during the day in many parts of the southern part of the state and in some parts of the rest of the region." He said that nights will also be unusually hot in some places, providing no relief from the day's heat.

The department has warned that severe

heatwaves are likely in 14 districts. These include Kaushambi, Pratapgarh, Chandauli, Varanasi, Ballia, Kanpur Dehat, Kanpur City, Rae Bareilly, Auraiya, and Lalitpur.

The weather will remain dry across the state, with strong surface winds blowing at speeds of 20 to 40 km per hour. Nights are expected to remain hot in western Uttar Pradesh for the next 48 hours, after which an orange alert may be issued.

On Tuesday, several cities in Uttar Pradesh sweltered above 40 degrees Celsius. Jhansi and Agra recorded 46.5°C, Prayagraj 45.8°C, Orai 45.2°C, Kanpur IAF 44.8°C, Kanpur City 44°C, Meerut 43.6°C, Aligarh 43.4°C, Churak 43.2°C and Etawah 43°C.

The day temperature in Lucknow was 40.9°C and the night temperature was 27.8°C. The maximum and minimum temperatures in Lucknow are expected to be around 42°C and 28°C respectively on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, a report from Varanasi said the increasing heatwave, and humidity have caused immense distress to people.

However, whether it's hot or cold,

## Firebrand IAS officer Tukaram Mundhe shuffled for 25th time in 21 years

**Mumbai:** In a significant bureaucratic realignment aimed at cleansing a graft-tainted department, the Government of Maharashtra has appointed senior Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Tukaram Mundhe as the new Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The high-profile appointment marks the 25th transfer in the 21-year career of the 2005-batch IAS officer, who has long been dubbed as the "Singham" of the state's bureaucracy for his unyielding anti-corruption stance, fierce discipline and strict adherence to rules. Mundhe's latest transfer comes after a brief period of administrative limbo. Just a month and a half ago, he was shifted from his position as Secretary of the Disability Welfare Department to the Disaster Management, Relief, and Rehabilitation Department. However, before he could officially take charge of the desk, his posting

was put on hold, leaving him awaiting a formal deployment. The



General Administration Department (GAD) has officially upgraded the FDA chief position to a super-time pay scale specifically to accommodate Mundhe's seniority. He takes over the reins immediately from Shridhar Dube, who has been reassigned as the CEO of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA).

The decision by the state leadership to place Mundhe at the helm of the FDA carries substantial political and administrative significance. The department has

drawn severe criticism over the past few months due to recurring allegations of institutional corruption and bribery.

Public anger peaked recently after an anti-corruption squad caught an FDA official accepting a bribe directly inside the state secretariat (Mantralaya). By injecting a notoriously uncompromising disciplinarian into the crisis-hit department, the administration is signalling a zero-tolerance policy against corrupt practices. Mundhe's administrative track record is defined by aggressive public interest crackdowns, which have frequently put him at loggerheads with local politicians and powerful lobbies.

While Mundhe's strict adherence to protocols has made his tenures notoriously brief, his deployment to the FDA is expected to trigger a major internal overhaul of food and medicine regulation across Maharashtra.

## Verma & Sirsa slam Rahul Gandhi for criticism of PM, say it reflects political desperation



**New Delhi :** Delhi Ministers Parvesh Verma and Manjinder Singh Sirsa slammed Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his tirade against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the government, terming his remarks as "extremely unfortunate" and an insult to the people of the country.

They said that Gandhi's remarks reflect his petty mindset, and that the continuous issuance of irresponsible statements by Congress leaders reflects their political desperation.

Taking to social media platform X, Delhi Minister Parvesh Verma stated that when the public has repeatedly rejected them through democratic means, such language is put to use by the Congress as a distraction tactic.

He alleged that the entire country has witnessed the grand old party's alleged divisive politics, corruption, and misuse of power for years, and presently, when the country is advancing on the global stage with strong leadership, the Congress party is unable to witness the public support.

"Rahul Gandhi must understand that while disagreement is possible in a democracy, maintaining decorum towards constitutional positions like the Prime Minister and Home

Minister is the responsibility of every political party," he said.

"Rahul Gandhi's statement today is extremely unfortunate and reveals his anarchic mindset."

Delhi Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa also hit out at Rahul Gandhi, stating that the kind of objectionable things he has said regarding PM and Home Minister Amit Shah reflects the mindset of the Congress leader, and also the hatred he harbours.

Sirsa said that the Congress leader must apologize for his remarks to the people of the country.

He said that the kind of respect PM is getting on the global platform is also the respect for the country's entire population, and not PM alone.

"Therefore the objectionable remarks are also against the people of the country, and the Congress leader must apologize to them," Sirsa added.

Earlier, BJP national president Nitin Nabin also condemned Rahul Gandhi's remarks on PM, stating that what he said is extremely unfortunate, as it exposes his anarchic and divisive mindset. Nabin stated that in Indian politics, where there has been a tradition of integrity and mutual respect, such indecent language is completely unacceptable.



**New Delhi :** Describing the practice as "very deceptive", the Supreme Court on Wednesday issued notice to the Central government and Excise Departments of various States on a Public Interest Litigation seeking a ban on the sale of alcohol in "inconspicuous packaging" such as tetra packs and sachets resembling fruit

juice cartons.

A Bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi observed, "This is very deceptive" after advocate Vipin Nair, told the bench that such packaging closely resembled fruit juice products and lacked statutory warnings associated with harmful products such as tobacco and alcoholic drinks.

He argued that the packaging made it difficult

## Very deceptive

**SC says on sale of alcohol in tetra packs, sachets; Issues notice on plea seeking ban**

Advocate Vipin Nair appeared for the petitioner organisation Community against Drunken Driving. Pointing to the packaging of certain liquor products, Nair submitted that these cartons carried images of fruits such as apples and mangoes and were marketed under labels suggestive of flavoured beverages, despite containing vodka.

He argued that the packaging made it difficult

to distinguish alcoholic beverages from ordinary juice packs. "This is very deceptive," Chief Justice Kant remarked while issuing notice in the matter. The petition contends that packaging alcoholic beverages in tetra packs and sachets facilitates concealment, encourages public drinking and drunk driving, and makes access easier for underage consumers. It also alleges

that such packaging increases the possibility of smuggling liquor across State borders. The plea further states that unlike tobacco products, these alcohol packs do not carry prominent statutory warnings despite their potential public health consequences. The petitioner organisation has urged the union government to frame a uniform national policy prohibiting sale of alcohol in

such inconspicuous packaging. It has also sought directions restricting "bottling" of alcohol to glass bottles or other visibly distinguishable containers. Notably, the Supreme Court had earlier, in November 2025, expressed concern over the growing sale of liquor in tetra packs while hearing a trademark dispute between two whisky manufacturers, observing that the packaging resembled fruit juice cartons.

# Mayawati avoids Congress leaders, Clouds 2027 tie-up

**Lucknow:** As the crucial assembly elections get closer, political activities have commenced in Uttar Pradesh for new pre-poll alliances.

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav has already said a couple of times that his party will continue its alliance with Congress as it did in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, when the alliance won 43 seats out of a total of 80.

However, in a major reversal, now the Congress is showing interest in joining hands with Mayawati-led Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) for the assembly polls.

A report said here on Wednesday that Congress leaders are trying to contact BSP leadership to initiate the discussion.

Congress sources here said that some leaders had tried to meet Mayawati recently in Lucknow, but they failed in their effort. It was also said that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi wants to open up the discussion with



the BSP for the 2027 assembly polls.

But repeatedly, Mayawati had said that BSP will not go for any alliance in the UP elections.

Sources said a delegation that went to meet Mayawati was turned

away, and these Congress leaders left after writing their names on the gate. However, party leaders maintain that they were there for a formal meeting only. BSP chief and former Chief Minister Mayawati is currently in

Lucknow.

The report said the Congress delegation, mostly Dalits, comprising National President of the Congress Scheduled Caste Department Rajendra Pal Gautam, State President of the department and MP Tanuj Punia, and other leaders, reached at Mayawati's residence and sent a message asking for a meeting.

The Congress leaders said that they were carrying a message from Congress General Secretary Rahul Gandhi.

But Mayawati refused to meet with the Congress leaders, forcing them to return empty-handed.

Rajendra Pal Gautam clarified to the media that she is a former Chief Minister from the Dalit community. "In such a situation, it is our responsibility to check on her well-being. We have put our names on the gate. We will go to meet her again when she calls," he said.

# TMC yet to get official opposition status in Assembly

**Kolkata:** The West Bengal Assembly Secretariat clarified that the Trinamool Congress (TMC) has not yet been officially granted the status of opposition party in the Assembly due to lapses in the documentation process.

Addressing a press conference, Assembly Secretary Samarendra Nath Das said on Wednesday that the proposal sent by the party lacked crucial procedural details and signatures of MLAs.

According to Das, the letter submitted by the TMC named Shovande Chatterjee as the Leader of the Opposition, Firhad Hakim as the Chief Whip, and Nayana Bandyopadhyay and Asima Patra as Deputy Leaders.

However, the document did not mention the date on which the proposal was passed, nor did it carry the signatures of the MLAs who

supported the decision.

"As soon as we received the letter, the matter was brought to the Speaker's attention," Das said.

"After reviewing the issue, the Speaker directed that a fresh letter be sent by the party along with a resolution signed by the MLAs who elected their leader," he said.

Reacting to the development, Shovande Chatterjee questioned the Assembly Secretariat's stance.

He said that during the Assembly session, both Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and he himself had escorted Speaker Biran Banerjee to his chair, despite his role as Opposition leader not being formally recognised.

In response, the Assembly Secretary said that the Speaker has the authority to seek clarification and documents on any matter related

to Assembly procedure.

"The Speaker is the highest authority in the Assembly in terms of decision-making," Das added.

Sources in the TMC said the party is now preparing to formally submit the required signed resolution to the Assembly Secretariat.

The issue was discussed during a meeting of TMC MLAs held at Kalighat on Tuesday in the presence of former Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and party national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee.

Party sources further said that during an earlier meeting of MLAs on May 6 at Kalighat, Shovande Chatterjee was unanimously elected as the leader of the TMC legislative party, with signatures collected from MLAs in support of the proposal.

# J&K govt forms panel to probe alleged Forest Rights Act violations in Sidra demolitions

**Srinagar:** Amid growing political outrage over the demolition drive targeting Gujjar and Bakarwal families in Jammu's Sidra area, the Omar Abdullah-led Jammu and Kashmir government on Wednesday constituted a fact-finding committee to inquire into alleged violations of the Forest Rights Act, 2006.

According to a government order issued by the Department of Tribal Affairs, the two-member committee has been tasked with examining the circumstances surrounding the demolition of houses belonging to tribal families and submitting its report within seven days.

The committee comprises Director Tribal Affairs J&K Mohammad Mumtaz Ali and Assistant Director, Directorate of Tribal Affairs, Muzamil Hassan Choudhary.

The order said that the panel will "enquire into, and report on any violations of Forest Rights Act, 2006" in connection with the demolition drive in Raika Bandi (Sidra), Jammu.

The move comes in the backdrop of widespread criticism

over the demolition campaign allegedly carried out under the Lieutenant Governor's administration. The action triggered protests and sharp reactions from ruling National Conference leaders and ministers.

Cabinet Minister Javed Rana had termed the drive "a targeted and cruel eviction aimed at terrorising and marginalising our nomadic tribal community." Former chief minister and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti on Wednesday claimed that nearly 60 houses were demolished in the Sidra. She said the PDP had earlier introduced a bill in the Assembly seeking regularisation of 5 to 10 marlas of state land under the possession of poor residents to protect them from eviction and harassment.

That was the reason the PDP brought a bill in the Assembly for the poor residents, so they would not face harassment. But the government rejected the bill, and now you can see what has happened in Jammu," she said. Senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader general secretary

(Organisation) for Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, Ashok Koul, defended the demolition drive in Jammu, saying that no houses of residents living in the area for the past 50 years were demolished.

Koul said the action was being taken only against those who had illegally occupied government land without permission.

He asserted that the administration was acting against encroachments in accordance with court directions. "The people who are occupying government or forest land without permission are being demolished. In 2020, the court ordered the demolition, but it was not implemented then. Today, the government has implemented it. We thank them," he told reporters in Srinagar. Hurriyat chairman and Kashmir's chief cleric Mirwaiz Umar Farooq termed the reported displacement of tribal Gujjar and Bakarwal families as "very disturbing" and accused the authorities of selectively targeting communities under the guise of law enforcement.

# BJP government weakening constitutional reservation; people forced to approach court for rights: Akhilesh Yadav

**Lucknow:** Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday launched a sharp attack on the BJP-led government, accusing it of systematically weakening the constitutional reservation system and forcing people to seek judicial intervention to secure rights guaranteed under the Constitution. Addressing a press conference at the party headquarters, the Samajwadi Party chief alleged that the ruling dispensation was undermining social justice and equal representation through various administrative and recruitment practices. During the press conference, Akhilesh Yadav released a document titled "PDA Audit," which he described as a report highlighting the alleged "loot of reservations."

He said the document contains details and findings related to what the Samajwadi Party views as attempts to dilute reservation provisions meant for socially and economically disadvantaged communities. He further stated that the report would continue to be updated with additional data, facts, and examples in the coming days. Targeting the BJP government over constitutional safeguards, the SP president said that the increasing need for students, job aspirants, and marginalised communities to approach courts for the enforcement of reservation-related rights reflects the government's "biased" approach. According to him, constitutional guarantees should be implemented automatically without forcing citizens into prolonged legal battles. "If we have to approach the courts for constitutional rights, it means the government is biased. And those who are biased are also unfaithful. Prejudice in itself is unjust because it takes away rights," Akhilesh Yadav said while addressing the media. He argued that any discrimination in the implementation of reservation policies directly affects social equality and constitutional justice. The former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister described reservation not merely as a welfare measure but as a fundamental constitutional mechanism aimed at ensuring social justice, equal participation, and democratic balance in society. He asserted that reservation plays



a critical role in providing opportunities and representation to historically marginalised sections. "Reservation is protection. Reservation is also a tool and medium of social coordination. Reservation is not a charity, it is a right," he said. Emphasising the broader social implications of reservation policies, Akhilesh Yadav stated that the system was designed to guarantee social and political representation and to strengthen democratic institutions by ensuring inclusive participation. He further alleged that there were deliberate attempts to gradually weaken the reservation framework through administrative mechanisms such as "lateral entry" appointments.

According to him, such recruitment practices bypass established reservation norms and undermine the constitutional spirit behind affirmative action policies. Explaining his concerns regarding lateral entry, Akhilesh Yadav claimed that the process allows the appointments of preferred individuals directly into mid-level and senior government positions from outside the traditional recruitment framework. He argued that this weakens opportunities available through regular competitive recruitment systems where reservation provisions are formally implemented. The SP chief alleged that such appointments could eventually reduce the

demand and relevance of reservation policies in government services. He maintained that the move represents a systematic effort to dilute constitutional safeguards meant for backward classes, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other disadvantaged communities. Referring to the BJP government's widely publicised bulldozer actions in Uttar Pradesh, Akhilesh Yadav used sarcasm to criticise the administration. He remarked that if the government was so committed to using bulldozers, they should instead use them to "level the uneven ground of inequality" and ensure fair implementation of reservation policies for all sections of society. His remarks drew attention to the broader political battle between the Samajwadi Party and the BJP over issues of social justice, representation, and governance. The SP has consistently attempted to position itself as a defender of backward classes and constitutional reservation, particularly through its "PDA" political strategy that focuses on Pichhde, Dalits, and Alpsankhyaks (minorities).

# 'Brand Bihar' initiative to strengthen state identity, perception and investment

**Patna:** The Bihar Government on Wednesday launched "Brand Bihar", a strategic state-wide initiative to build a cohesive and forward-looking identity for the State, strengthening perception through facts and ground-level transformation and positioning Bihar as an emerging destination for investment, innovation, and opportunity.

Established under the Chief Secretary's Cell, "Brand Bihar" has been constituted to drive integrated branding, communication, and positioning efforts for the state by showcasing the real progress, developmental work, institutional reforms, entrepreneurship, innovation, cultural heritage, and citizen-led change taking place

across Bihar.

Chief Secretary Pratyaya Amrit said here that the initiative will work in close coordination with several departments and stakeholders across the state to build a unified narrative and ensure that Bihar's transformation journey is represented in a structured, authentic, and impactful manner at national and global platforms.

He said that the key focus areas of "Brand Bihar" will include building and strengthening the overall perception and identity of Bihar through evidence-based communication and storytelling, showcasing on-ground developmental work, reforms, citizen impact and departmental achievements, positioning

Bihar as an investment-friendly destination by highlighting opportunities across sectors, and facilitating stronger visibility for the State.

The initiative seeks to create collaborative platforms across departments, institutions, industry, startups, academia, and communities to amplify Bihar's growth story, developing a long-term brand architecture and strategic communication framework for the state and an AI-led monitoring and dashboard for sentiment mapping.

The Chief Secretary will provide strategic direction to the initiative.

The initiative envisions active collaboration with all departments of the state government with struc-

tured mechanisms for periodic updates, knowledge sharing, and coordinated efforts to collectively build and strengthen the Bihar growth narrative.

Speaking on the launch, Amrit reiterated that Brand Bihar is not merely a communication initiative, but a long-term state transformation and perception-building effort designed to align development, identity, investment, and citizen participation into a unified vision for Bihar. The initiative aims to create a strong, authentic, and future-ready identity for Bihar by ensuring that the state's achievements, opportunities, and transformation are effectively documented and communicated.

# Dedicate yourself to defending unity, integrity of motherland; stay vigilant: J&K LG to new recruits

**Jammu:** Presenting appointment letters to newly appointed constables of Jammu and Kashmir Police, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Wednesday gave a piece of advice to the newly recruits to dedicate themselves to defending the unity and integrity of the motherland and to strengthen the proud legacy of this force.

"We must remain constantly alert and vigilant. The nature of law and order threats and terrorism has evolved, demanding a constant, unyielding vigilance and alert to threats that hide in plain sight," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor observed that new recruits must work as a team because the threats Jammu Kashmir confronts demand cooperation between different agencies.

"When we share information, plan strategies, and confront the enemy together, we build capacities that no single institution can create alone. India has always embraced the values of peaceful coexistence, mutual goodwill, and sincere friendship. Yet we face a neighbour widely known as a source of terrorism in the world. Alongside maintaining law and order, newly recruited constables must stand on the front line of national security with determination to eliminate threats of terror," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor stated that everyone should work with resolve and efficiency to rid Jammu Kashmir of fear and terrorism. He said terror does not sustain itself; it needs money, networks, and support systems. Using the full force of the law, we must trace and neutralize sources



of funding. We must identify every network and dismantle every support system completely," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor also cautioned that along with modern tools, police force should also adopt tradecraft of basic policing. "In matters of law and order, beat policing proves highly effective. When a beat constable resolves that no crime will occur within their jurisdiction and that public land will not be occupied illegally, such unwavering commitment inevitably delivers results," the Lieutenant Governor said. The Lieutenant Governor said all new recruits are heirs to this noble legacy and they will enrich it further. He said every uniform of the Jammu and Kashmir Police tells a story of courage, commitment, and purpose woven into the fabric of the nation's history.

"Each time you put on the uniform, remember that you are adding a proud chapter to its legacy. Take pride in the ideals of defence and service that the Jammu and Kashmir Police embodies, for they define both your duty and your

honour," the Lieutenant Governor said.

The Lieutenant Governor also commended the Jammu and Kashmir Police for its swift and effective action against the drug smugglers and drug peddlers during the ongoing Nasha Mukh Jammu Kashmir Campaign.

"J&K Police has laid out a comprehensive plan to completely choke drug entry routes. I am confident that the actions in the coming days will be stringent, and will yield major successes," he said.

Over 3200 newly recruited constables were inducted into the Jammu Kashmir Police Force.

Atal Dulloo, Chief Secretary; Nalin Prabhat, DGP J&K; Chandraker Bharti, Principal Secretary Home Department; S.J.M. Gillani, Special DG Coordination PHQ; Abdul Ghani Mir, Commandant General Home Guards; Dr Mandeep K. Bhandari, Principal Secretary to Lieutenant Governor; senior officials of police and civil administration, and family members of new recruits attended the appointment letters presentation ceremony.

# Live tracking of UP Transport Corporation buses makes passenger travel safer

**Lucknow:** The Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation is increasingly leveraging advanced technology to enhance passenger safety, improve operational efficiency, and provide a smoother travel experience across the state. In a major digital transformation initiative, nearly all buses operated by the corporation are now being live-tracked to monitor their movement and ensure safer journeys for more than 16 lakh passengers travelling daily.

According to a senior UPSRTC official in Lucknow on Wednesday, over 13,500 buses have been integrated with Vehicle Location Tracking Devices (VLT), making Uttar Pradesh's public transport monitoring system more transparent, effi-

cient, and technology-driven. The initiative forms a key part of the corporation's efforts to modernise the state's transport infrastructure and strengthen passenger confidence in public bus services.

The official said that the tracking and monitoring operations are being managed centrally through a sophisticated Command and Control Centre located at the UPSRTC headquarters in Lucknow. This central monitoring system works in coordination with 20 regional monitoring centres spread across the state, all of which remain operational round the clock throughout the week.

With more than 16 lakh passengers using UPSRTC buses every day, officials said the use of live-tracking technology has become essential for maintaining safe-



ty standards and ensuring accountability in operations. Through the tracking system, authorities can monitor the exact location and movement of buses in real time, helping improve route management and response time during emergencies.

The monitoring system keeps a close watch on several critical operational pa-

rameters, including overspeeding, sudden braking incidents, sharp turns at high speed, route deviations, and driving beyond prescribed speed limits. Officials said this level of detailed monitoring helps authorities identify risky driving behaviour and take preventive measures before accidents occur. The Command and Con-

trol Centre receives continuous data from buses and generates daily performance and safety reports. These reports are analysed at the headquarters level to assess driver conduct, route adherence, and overall operational discipline. In cases where violations or unsafe driving patterns are detected, warnings are issued and disciplinary action against the concerned drivers is initiated if necessary. UPSRTC officials stated that the introduction of real-time monitoring and data-driven supervision has significantly contributed to reducing road accidents involving state transport buses. By tracking unsafe driving practices instantly, authorities are able to intervene quickly and improve compliance with safety norms.

## Thousands of Mumbai Medical Shops Close for a Day to Fight App Sales

**Mumbai** : More than 7,000 retail chemist stores across the Mumbai Metropolitan Region closed down on Wednesday. The single-day shutdown was organized to oppose illegal online medicine sales and unfair pricing methods used by major corporate businesses.

The protest followed a country-wide call by the All India Organisation of Chemists and Druggists, a massive group representing over 12.40 lakh chemists and distributors across the nation. Different local retail groups took part in the event, declaring that the strike was completely successful.

Protesting shop owners gathered at Azad Maidan to express their worries. To ensure that citizens did not face extreme emergencies, medicine shops inside hospitals, government generic drug stores, and Jan Aushadhi Kendras stayed open to offer basic healthcare services. Food and Drug Administration officials confirmed that these essential options remained available to the public throughout the day.

The retail pharmaceutical landscape across the Mumbai Metropolitan Region experienced a significant shift on Wednesday as a large-scale shutdown took effect. More than 7,000 retail chemist stores closed down their shutters for a single-day protest, heavily impacting neighborhood medicine availability across Mumbai and its neighboring urban extensions. The coordinated shutdown was orga-



nized as a direct stand against the proliferation of online medicine sales and the highly competitive pricing models deployed by large corporate entities. Traditional brick-and-mortar store owners used the platform to voice their anxieties regarding the long-term viability of small businesses in the face of rapidly expanding e-pharmacy platforms. This impactful local action followed a widespread countrywide call for mobilization issued by the All India Organisation of Chemists and Druggists. This massive, influential parent body officially represents the collective

professional interests of over 12.40 lakh chemists, pharmacists, and pharmaceutical distributors across the entire nation. By uniting under this central directive, various independent neighborhood retail groups and regional associations across the metropolitan zone aggressively participated in the event. Organizers actively monitoring the situation declared the single-day strike a complete and resounding success in terms of regional solidarity and compliance. As the day progressed, hundreds of protesting shop owners and pharmaceutical distributors gathered at the historic

Azad Maidan to publicize their core grievances and demands. The core issues raised during the demonstration focused heavily on the apparent regulatory gaps that allow online medicine platforms to operate with fewer restrictions than traditional shops. Retailers also highlighted the economic strain caused by the deep, aggressive discounts offered by corporate-backed digital chains, which smaller businesses cannot match without eroding their margins. The gathering served as a unified appeal to government regulatory bodies to step in and create a fairer playing field.

## Secret Agents Seize Gold Worth Billions at City Airport

**Mumbai** : Officials from the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence caught a highly structured smuggling ring at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport under a targeted mission named Operation Golden Drop. Investigators recovered 3 kilograms of international gold valued at around 4.8 crore rupees and arrested one individual.

The investigative agency stated that the smuggling network used traveling transit passengers and local airport workers to bypass customs taxes and security checks. Agents acted on exact intelligence to intercept the hidden items.

The ongoing inquiry revealed a highly detailed method of operation. The gold was processed into dust, mixed with wax, and shaped into small egg-like capsules which passengers swallowed to carry into the city. A cleaning worker employed at an airport restaurant was then responsible for secretly collecting the delivered capsules

and moving them out of the airport boundary. This worker has since been taken into custody.

Officials from the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) successfully intercepted a highly structured smuggling ring operating at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport. The targeted enforcement action, code-named "Operation Golden Drop," was launched based on specific and actionable intelligence regarding an active network attempting to breach border security. During the precise operation, investigators recovered a substantial contraband haul consisting of 3 kilograms of international-grade gold, carrying a market valuation of approximately 4.8 crore rupees. The initial sweep also resulted in the immediate arrest of a key operative found directly handling the illicit shipment. The federal investigative agency revealed that the smuggling syndicate had developed a sophisticated system designed to systematically bypass

standard customs taxes, biometric protocols, and security screening checkpoints. This covert network relied heavily on a calculated combination of international transit passengers acting as couriers and complicit local airport service workers operating within the secure zones of the terminal. By embedding internal collaborators inside the facility, the masterminds of the scheme hoped to create a reliable and unmonitored pipeline to move valuable commodities into the domestic market without paying mandatory government duties. A deeper analysis of the ongoing inquiry has exposed a meticulous and physically demanding method of operation utilized by the couriers to escape detection by advanced imaging technology. The smuggled gold was first industrially processed into a fine dust, mixed with heavy industrial wax, and then compressed and shaped into small, smooth, egg-like capsules. The transit passengers would then swallow these prepared capsules prior

to boarding their flights, effectively using their own bodies as internal concealment chambers to transport the material across international borders and into the city. Once the transit passengers cleared the initial arrival gates, the logistics shifted to an internal collaborator working within the airport's public ecosystem. A cleaning staff member, who was officially employed at a prominent restaurant situated inside the terminal complex, was responsible for meeting the couriers and secretly collecting the delivered capsules. This service worker utilized their employee access privileges and knowledge of blind spots to hide the retrieved items and plan their movement past the outer airport boundary. Following the uncovering of this internal breach, the restaurant worker was promptly taken into custody, and authorities are currently expanding the investigation to identify any additional airport personnel or financiers involved in the wider conspiracy.

## Cleaning Teams Pull Abandoned Vehicle From Deep Sewage Line

**Mumbai** : A surprising video from the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's pre-monsoon cleaning work emerged online, showing municipal laborers dragging a completely ruined auto-rickshaw out of a deep sewage drain. The incident highlights the major issue of heavy trash blocking the city's water infrastructure before the rainy season starts. The online footage showed the top portion of the auto-rickshaw completely smashed, while the bottom metal frame held the vehicle together as a crane lifted it out of the dirty water system. The up-

date page that shared the clip noted that the rickshaw was not the only strange object found inside the city drains. Laborers have also dragged out full sets of sofas and old travel bags from main water channels during the cleaning drive. Experts pointed out that dumping such massive garbage into drainage lines blocks the water flow, puts pressure on city networks, and causes bad flooding during heavy rainstorms. The city corporation stated that main drain cleaning reached over 80 percent completion by May 20, while the cleanup of the Mithi River reached around

53 percent. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's intensive pre-monsoon cleaning operations recently took a surprising turn when municipal laborers working on the city's drainage network made an unexpected discovery. While clearing out a deep sewage drain in the Chandivali area, workers noticed a massive, heavy obstruction buried beneath the layers of silt and sludge. Upon closer inspection, the team realized that the blockage blocking the natural flow of water was actually a completely ruined, abandoned auto-rickshaw skeleton.

## Fatal Highway Crash Claims Two Lives on Expressway

**Mumbai** : A major accident on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway resulted in two deaths and left one person with severe injuries. A fast-moving Skoda sedan heading toward Pune lost control and crashed heavily into an iron safety barrier along the highway road.

Local update pages shared images showing the iron rail piercing straight through the front windshield and tearing up the vehicle's sunroof due to the high speed of the

impact. A crowd of local travelers quickly gathered around the damaged black car, which carried a Pune registration plate.

Emergency teams from the local fire department and highway traffic authorities arrived at the location quickly after getting the alert.

Reports confirmed that two passengers died instantly at the site, while the third injured individual was quickly taken to a nearby hospital for emergency treatment.

## Hospital Visitors Confront Man for Secretly Filming Patients

**Mumbai** : A video surfaced from the Balasaheb Thackeray Hospital showing several women confronting and hitting a man who was allegedly caught recording inappropriate videos of patients inside the medical center. The incident has raised serious discussions online regarding patient privacy and security rules within local hospitals. A clip shared by a digital news page showed women cornering the man after he was caught using his phone inside the patient wards. Angry visitors at the hospital confronted him and used footwear to hit him, leaving visible marks on the individual. One woman was also heard shouting at him during the loud argument. Local publications noted that they could



not officially verify the exact origin or authenticity of the recorded video. A video originating from the Balasaheb Thackeray Hospital has

sparked widespread discussions across social media platforms regarding patient security, privacy protocols, and personal safety

within public healthcare facilities. The circulated footage shows several women actively confronting and physically striking a male visitor inside the premises. The confrontation reportedly began after bystanders noticed the individual using his mobile phone camera in a highly suspicious manner within the patient care areas. According to reports from digital media outlets, the man was allegedly caught surreptitiously recording inappropriate and unauthorized video footage of female patients who were admitted to the hospital wards. Upon discovering his actions, angry visitors and family members cornered the individual to prevent him from deleting the recorded material or fleeing the scene.

## Editorial

### The Lamp of Humanity Rising from the Ashes of Violence

In the journey of India's democracy, May 21, 1991, stands as a poignant reminder of an extremely painful and dark chapter, the day the nation's former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, was brutally assassinated in a suicide bombing at Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu. This heinous act not only snatched away a young and visionary leader from the nation but also tore into the very fabric of the Indian Constitution and its security apparatus. In the wake of that horrific trauma, May 21st is observed annually across the country as 'Anti-Terrorism and Anti-Violence Day' to firmly root a deep-seated awareness within society regarding the dreadful consequences of terrorism and violence. This day is not merely an occasion for a ceremonial tribute to the memory of a single leader; rather, it is a profoundly sensitive moment to unite against the violent tendencies plaguing human society, to engage in introspection, and to pledge allegiance to national integration. In the present era, as the wildfire of war, hatred, and religious fanaticism rages across the globe the significance of this day has become not only more relevant for India but absolutely imperative for the very survival of all humanity.

The history of human civilization's evolution is as much a chronicle of progress as it is a saga steeped in conflict, warfare, and bloodshed. From ancient battles fought for territorial expansion and medieval massacres committed in the name of religion, to the modern-day forces of aggressive nationalism, political self-interest, and economic inequality all these factors have consistently fueled the monstrous entity of violence. While science has empowered humanity to soar into the cosmos, one is left to ponder a grave question: has the modern educational system failed to eradicate the primal, predatory instincts, the thirst for vengeance, and the intolerance that still lurk within the human psyche? Conversely, the misuse of modern technology and the internet has rendered contemporary terrorism more organized, covert, aggressive, and extremely lethal. Aided by social media, global financial networks, and sophisticated cyber weaponry, fundamentalist organizations are today establishing a reign of terror across the entire world, unconstrained by any national borders. Consequently, terrorism is no longer confined to a specific geographical region but has emerged as the greatest challenge confronting the entirety of human existence.

India's history, in particular, is replete with numerous wounds and traumas. Since gaining independence, India has endured the extremist insurgency in Punjab, cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, separatist activities in the Northeast, and the scourge of internal Naxalism. From the serial bomb blasts in Mumbai in 1993 to the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament an assault on the very core of democracy and the horrific 26/11 attacks on Mumbai in 2008, to the sacrifice of soldiers in Pulwama: in all these incidents, hundreds of innocent civilians and brave soldiers have laid down their lives. An examination of the root causes underlying these events reveals that poverty, unemployment, lack of education, social injustice, and the interference of foreign powers figure prominently. When a segment of society begins to feel marginalized, extremist organizations exploit this latent discontent to 'brainwash' young minds, luring them with financial incentives and pushing them onto a path of destruction. 'Cyber-terrorism' perpetrated through the internet acts as a destructive termite, gnawing away at the minds of today's youth. The dissemination of false rumors, the circulation of messages designed to incite religious discord on social media, and the subsequent instigation of riots are, in themselves, covert forms of violence. Therefore, to confront this crisis, relying solely on military force will not suffice; rather, a major ideological surgery must be performed at the moral and psychological levels of society.

Against this backdrop, 'education' emerges as the most effective and sustainable medium for eradicating this violent mindset. Our educational system must not merely be a race to acquire academic degrees; rather, it is essential to instill in children right from their formative years a deep awareness of peace, tolerance, fraternity, and the values enshrined in the Constitution. If rationality and a scientific temper are deeply ingrained in the youth, they will not fall prey to any destructive ideologies. In a nation like India which has gifted the world great luminaries such as Mahatma Gautama Buddha, Lord Mahavir, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Mahatma Gandhi, and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, all of whom championed the messages of truth, love, compassion, and non-violence there should be absolutely no room for violence. As Gandhiji aptly observed, victory achieved through the path of violence is transient and merely triggers a new cycle of hatred. The establishment of true peace is possible only through dialogue, mutual cooperation, and mutual understanding.

The role of the family unit is also of paramount importance in this struggle. The initial inculcation of cultural values and moral principles in children takes place within the home itself. In today's fast-paced world, the level of dialogue between parents and children is diminishing, causing children to become increasingly ensnared in the virtual and often violent realm of social media. It is the most pressing familial imperative of our time that parents closely monitor their children's behavior and cultivate within them a sense of patriotism and social responsibility. No religion advocates violence; the true purpose of religion is to guide humanity toward the path of compassion and love. However, certain self-serving and extremist forces often misinterpret religious tenets to mislead society. Preserving the constitutional value of 'Sarva Dharma Sambhav' (equal respect for all religions) and upholding unity amidst diversity constitutes the true strength of India. Indian culture which bestowed upon the world the noble concept of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (meaning the entire world is one family) must break free from the python-like stranglehold of terrorism. This 'Resolve Day' on May 21st serves as a reminder that we must reject the path of violence and hatred, and instead resolve our problems solely through democratic and constitutional means. Only when every citizen cultivates loyalty toward the nation and respect for human values will a truly fearless, secure, and prosperous India take shape. The true fulfillment of this day will be realized only when no mother in our country loses her child and no nation loses its leader to the fires of violence; this alone would constitute a genuine and sincere tribute to the memory of Rajiv Gandhi.

Terrorism cannot be combated solely through guns and military operations; it requires fostering a culture of peace, tolerance, and dialogue within society. A social structure grounded in education, strong family values, and constitutional principles constitutes the true strength against violence. India's identity is forged from the ideals of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' and non-violence. Therefore, it is the responsibility of every citizen to step out of the darkness of hatred and keep the light of humanity burning bright. The day an atmosphere of trust rather than fear and dialogue rather than violence prevails in society, will be the day this battle against terrorism is truly won.

## India's transformative women-led development model strengthens India-Sri Lanka partnership

Annapurna Devi today held a bilateral meeting in New Delhi with Saroja Savithri Paulraj along with members of the Women Parliamentarians' Caucus of Sri Lanka, during their study visit to India. The meeting took place at the Ministry of Women and Child Development and focused on strengthening cooperation between India and Sri Lanka in areas related to women and child welfare.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development formally welcomed the visiting delegation, noting that the engagement reflects the shared commitment of both countries to deepen collaboration in social development sectors. Officials highlighted that the interaction aligns with broader efforts to advance women-led development in line with India's policy framework.

During the discussions, both sides explored avenues for enhanced cooperation in key areas such as gender equality, maternal and child health, women's leadership in governance, and the development of the care economy. The



Addressing the delegation, Minister Annapurna Devi reiterated



dialogue also emphasized the importance of sharing policy experiences and successful program models between the two countries.

The Indian side presented several flagship initiatives aimed at improving the welfare and empowerment of women and children. These included Mission Shakti, Mission Vatsalya, and Mission Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0, which together form a comprehensive framework for social protection and empowerment.

Officials also highlighted the growing use of digital governance tools and technology-driven systems in improving service delivery. These innovations are being used to enhance access to nutrition, healthcare, safety services, and welfare schemes for women and children across urban and rural areas.

ed that under the leadership of Narendra Modi, the government has adopted a women-led development approach, where women are viewed not only as beneficiaries but as active contributors to national growth and decision-making.

She emphasized that strengthening institutional frameworks and expanding welfare mechanisms remain key priorities for the government. According to her, India's development model increasingly places women at the center of policy design and implementation.

The Sri Lankan delegation appreciated India's initiatives in the field of women and child development, noting that several of India's programs offer valuable lessons for other countries in the region. They expressed particular interest in understanding how large-scale welfare schemes are implemented using digital systems and grassroots

networks. Saroja Savithri Paulraj acknowledged India's holistic and inclusive approach toward empowerment and praised its focus on long-term social development outcomes. The delegation also conveyed interest in further strengthening institutional cooperation between the two nations.

Both sides agreed on the importance of continued dialogue, exchange of best practices, and closer institutional collaboration to address shared challenges in the areas of women's empowerment, child welfare, and social inclusion.

The meeting concluded with the exchange of mementos and a group photograph, symbolizing goodwill and the strengthening of bilateral relations between India and Sri Lanka in the social development sector.

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ship in governance, and the development of the care economy. The dialogue also emphasized the importance of sharing policy experiences and successful program models between the two countries.

## Cabinet approves Upgradation and Modernisation of Nagpur International Airport

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi today has approved the Extension of Lease Period of the Airports Authority of India (AAI)'s land leased to MIL (MIHAN India Limited) beyond 06.08.2039, so as to enable MIL to license Nagpur Airport to the Concessionaire, viz. GMR Nagpur International Airport Limited (GNIAL) for 30 years since Commercial Operation Date (COD).

This marks a major milestone in Nagpur air-

port's journey to becoming a regional aviation hub under the Multi-modal International Cargo Hub and Airport at Nagpur (MIHAN) project.

In 2009, a Joint Venture Company (JVC)- MIL was formed by AAI and Maharashtra Airport Development Company Ltd. (MADC) with equity structure of 49:51 respectively. Though Airport assets of AAI were transferred to MIL in 2009 for airport operation, the lease deed got delayed due to land demar-

cation issues. Subsequently, AAI land has been leased to MIL up to 06.08.2039.

In 2016, MIL floated a global tender for identifying a Partner to operate the airport under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. GMR Airports Ltd. (GAL) emerged as the highest bidder, with quoted revenue share of 5.76%. This was later revised to 14.49% of Gross Revenue. Subsequently, MIL annulled the bidding process in March, 2020. This annulment was successfully challenged by

GAL before Hon'ble Bombay High Court. Thereafter, Hon'ble Supreme Court of India also ruled in favour of GAL. Pursuant to Supreme Court Judgement dated 27th September, 2024, MIL signed Concession Agreement with 2nd JVC, i.e. GMR Nagpur International Airport Ltd. (GNIAL) on 8th October, 2024.

With extension of Lease Period of the AAI land leased to MIL beyond 06.08.2039, it would now become co-terminus with the 30 years Concession Pe-

riod of GNIAL, paving the way for handing over of airport to 2nd JVC-GNIAL. This is expected to usher in a new era of growth and infrastructure advancement for Nagpur Airport. With private sector efficiency and government oversight, the Airport is poised to see significant investment, modernization, and improved passenger and cargo services — Government of India's vision for robust infrastructure development in the aviation sector.

GNIAL will take up the

transformation of Nagpur's Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar International Airport into a world-class facility with phased development envisaged to reach the ultimate capacity of handling 30 million passengers annually, positioning it as a key Airport in Central India. This transformation is set to not only enhance connectivity within the Vidarbha region, but also strengthen its economic infrastructure. Cargo handling capabilities would also be significantly boosted.

## Cabinet approves one new project covering Ahmedabad District in the state of Gujarat, increasing the existing network of Indian Railways by about 134 Kms

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the Ahmedabad (Sarkhej)-Dholera Semi High-Speed Double Line project of the Ministry of Railways with an estimated cost of around ₹20,667 crore. The project is being positioned as India's first semi high-speed rail corridor developed using indigenously designed technology.

The new rail line will significantly enhance connectivity between Ahmedabad and Dholera Special Investment Region (SIR), along with key upcoming infrastructure nodes such as Dholera Airport and the Lothal National Maritime Heritage Complex. By reducing travel time between the two locations, the project is expected to enable faster, more comfortable commuting and support same-day return travel.

Officials said the project will not only connect Ahmedabad and Dholera more efficiently but also improve regional accessibility for surrounding areas. It is expected to integrate urban, industrial, and tourism hubs into a unified transport corridor, strengthening economic activity across the

region. As India's first semi high-speed railway initiative, the project is being seen as a pioneering model for future rail development in the country. It is expected to serve as a reference framework for expanding similar semi high-speed corridors in a phased manner across other regions of India.

The Ministry of Railways stated that the project will enhance operational efficiency, improve service reliability, and strengthen overall mobility on the network. It aligns with efforts to modernize Indian Railways through advanced infrastructure and integrated transport planning.

The initiative is also closely linked with the government's broader development vision under the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan, which focuses on integrated multi-modal connectivity and coordinated infrastructure development across sectors.

According to officials, the project will play a key role in promoting economic development in the region by improving access to industrial zones, employment hubs, and emerging urban centres. It is expected to support job creation and boost opportuni-

ties for self-employment in surrounding areas.

The rail corridor will cover approximately 134 kilometres within Gujarat, strengthening the existing railway network and improving regional transport infrastructure. It is also expected to directly benefit connectivity across Ahmedabad district and adjoining development zones.

Authorities estimate that the project will enhance access to nearly 284 villages, collectively home to around five lakh people. Improved rail connectivity is expected to significantly reduce travel time and increase economic participation from rural and semi-urban areas.

From an environmental perspective, the railway project is projected to contribute to sustainability goals by promoting energy-efficient mass transport. Railways, being one of the greener modes of transport, are expected to help reduce dependence on road transport and lower overall emissions.

Officials estimate that the project will reduce oil consumption by approximately 0.48 crore litres, contributing to energy savings at a national level. This reduction in

fossil fuel usage is also expected to improve India's energy efficiency and reduce import dependence.

In terms of emissions, the project is projected to reduce around 2 crore kilograms of carbon dioxide, an environmental benefit equivalent to the impact of planting nearly 10 lakh trees. This highlights the project's alignment with India's climate and sustainability commitments.

The government has also emphasized that the semi high-speed corridor will act as a catalyst for regional transformation, particularly in areas connected to industrial development and logistics expansion under the Dholera SIR project.

By integrating high-speed rail connectivity with planned urban and industrial infrastructure, the project is expected to strengthen Gujarat's role as a major growth engine in India's economic landscape.

Overall, the Ahmedabad-Dholera semi high-speed rail project represents a significant step in modernizing India's transport infrastructure, improving connectivity, and supporting long-term economic, environmental, and regional development goals.

## EC announces schedule for 17 seats of Maha Legislative Council elections

**Mumbai:** The Election Commission of India (ECI) has officially announced the schedule for the long-delayed elections to 17 seats of the Maharashtra Legislative Council (MLC) from the Local Authorities' Constituencies.

Polling will take place on June 18, and with the results will be declared on June 22.

The announcement has immediately sent the state's political temperature soaring. Coming closely on the heels of the recently concluded, fiercely contested local self-government polls—including Municipal Corporations, Municipal Councils, Nagar Panchayats, and Zilla Parishads—this election will serve as a definitive battle for regional dominance among the ruling Mahayuti allies: the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena, and Ajit Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP).

While the Mahayuti coalition collectively commands a dominant 67 per cent of the underlying electoral college across the state, internal friction over seat-sharing is expected to peak in 7 critical battleground constituencies.

Thane-Palghar (Prestige at stake in DCM's Home



Turf): In Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's pocket borough of Thane-Palghar, numerical reality favours the BJP.

The BJP controls a formidable block of 444 votes, while Shinde's Shiv Sena, alongside the aligned Nilesh Sambare faction, commands 346 votes.

While the BJP intends to stake its claim based on pure numbers, the seat remains a matter of absolute prestige for the Deputy Chief Minister, triggering speculation over a possible "friendly fight" or unexpected structural trade-offs.

Raigad-Ratnagiri-Sindhurg: Once considered an unassailable bastion of the undivided NCP, the coastal Raigad-Ratnagiri-Sindhurg constituency reflects a completely transformed political reality.

Shiv Sena (Shinde): 289 seats (Staked primary claim) BJP: 285 seats (A close second, eyeing the seat)NCP (Ajit Pawar): 106 seats (Pushed to the backfoot) With the BJP and Shiv Sena running neck-and-neck, this seat is expected to witness intense internal bargaining.

Pune: Out of the 804 total electors in Pune district, Ajit Pawar's NCP holds the upper hand with 347 members. The BJP follows closely behind with 319 members, while the rest are fragmented among the Shiv Sena (68), Congress (19), NCP-Sharadchandra Pawar (17), and Shiv Sena-UBT (11). Despite the

NCP's numbers, the BJP has significantly bolstered its standing after securing the strategic backing of councillors from the Daund Municipal Council, setting up a thrilling tug-of-war.

Parbhani-Hingoli: On paper, the mathematical advantage points toward Ajit Pawar's NCP. However, the BJP boasts a dense line-up of local aspirants eager to contest. Complicating matters, Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena has shown aggressive intent to retain its assembly-level momentum by preparing to field former MLA Viplav Bajoria, triggering a tense three-way deadlock within the ruling alliance.

Yavatmal & Ahilyanagar: The local math places the BJP ahead with 137

votes in Yavatmal, followed by the Maha Vikas Aghadi's (MVA) Congress at 110 and Shinde's Shiv Sena at 93. A crowded field of aspirants from both the BJP (Madan Yerawar, Sumit Bajoria, Nitin Bhutada) and Shiv Sena (Salim Khetani, Pandav, Sahabrao Kamble) has turned this into a political marketplace.

Ahilyanagar: Vacant for three-and-a-half years following the demise of former MLA Arun Jagtap, this seat is bracing for a heavyweight clash. The opposition MVA is likely to field former Rahrhi Minister Prajakt Tanpure against Mahayuti's probable candidate, BJP State Vice President Dr. Sujay Vikhe Patil.

Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar-Jalna: Historically a Shiv Sena stronghold, the ground reality here has decisively shifted toward the BJP. The saffron party currently enjoys absolute control over both municipal corporations, the Sambhajnagar Zilla Parishad, 6 out of 9 municipal councils in Sambhajnagar, and 2 out of 3 municipal councils in Jalna. Armed with this massive majority, the BJP is claiming the seat, even as Eknath Shinde remains stubborn about maintaining his party's traditional footprint.

## Mumbai Municipal Commissioner conducts surprise inspection for Monsoon preparedness

**Mumbai:** Ashwini Bhide on Wednesday intensified pre-monsoon preparedness efforts across Mumbai by conducting a series of surprise inspections in South Mumbai and other critical locations, while directing officials to complete all desilting works by May 31. The inspections were aimed at reviewing the city's readiness ahead of the monsoon season and ensuring that flood-prevention systems are functioning effectively.

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation Commissioner assured citizens that the civic administration is taking extensive measures to prevent waterlogging during the upcoming monsoon. She stated that the BMC would maintain strict supervision over all pre-monsoon activities, especially the desilting of drains and stormwater infrastructure.

Bhide said that desilting operations are being closely monitored at multiple levels to ensure timely completion and efficient removal of silt from drains, nullahs, and critical flood-prone points across the city. According to civic officials, the administration is aiming to complete all pre-monsoon works before heavy rainfall begins.

During the inspections, Bhide was accompanied by



senior civic officials and engineers who reviewed various civic facilities and infrastructure projects. Among the locations visited was Mumbai's nearly 100-year-old pesticide control station situated on Mint Road, which plays an important role in pest control and public health management during the monsoon period.

The Commissioner also inspected the A-2 road repair and storage station along with a sewage disposal station to assess the preparedness of civic departments responsible for road maintenance, waste management, and sanitation services during the rainy season.

In the C ward area, Bhide visited the road repair and storage station and reviewed operations related to maintenance materials and emergency response readiness. She also inspected a student study room located at S.K. Patil Garden on Kamalbai Girls' School Road, reflecting the civic body's

broader focus on public infrastructure and community facilities.

In the D ward, the Commissioner conducted inspections at Nana Chowk and another pesticide station to evaluate preparedness measures related to sanitation and vector control. Civic officials briefed her about arrangements being made to prevent water stagnation and the spread of mosquito-borne diseases during the monsoon. One of the key inspection points was the Love Grove Stormwater Pumping Station in Worli under the G South ward. The pumping station is considered one of Mumbai's most critical flood-prevention facilities and plays a major role in draining excess rainwater during periods of heavy rainfall and high tides. Bhide reviewed the operational preparedness of the pumping station and directed officials to ensure that all systems remain fully functional before the onset of the monsoon.

## Sanjay Raut today disagrees with Pawar, tomorrow may target UBT too: BJP

**Mumbai:** Sanjay Raut, who disagrees with Pawar today, will tomorrow go against even the UBT faction says BJP Maharashtra chief spokesperson Navnath Ban. Navnath Ban on Wednesday lashed out on Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut, alleging that he was opposing NCP chief Sharad Pawar only to "serve" Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. Addressing a press conference at the BJP state office, Ban said Raut, who has disagreed with Pawar's praise of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, may tomorrow also oppose the positions of Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders Aaditya Thackeray and Uddhav Thackeray. Ban alleged that Raut had taken a "contract" from the Congress to work against the Uddhav Thackeray-led faction and push it into political decline. Ban was speaking at a press conference held at the BJP state office. Defending Prime Minister Modi, Ban said Modi was "a leader of the nation" and not someone who "runs away."



In a swipe at Uddhav Thackeray, he claimed the former chief minister remained at home after coming to power for two-and-a-half years. He also targeted Raut over his arrest in the Patra Chawl case, alleging that both Raut and the Shiv Sena (UBT) leadership had repeatedly displayed "cowardice."

He further said Modi had been elected Prime Minister three times because people trusted his leadership and capability. Ban added that through programmes such as "Mann Ki Baat," Modi remained directly connected with the public and understood people's concerns. Modi constantly communi-

ates with the public, and through "Mann Ki Baat" and various programs, he knows well how to answer people's concerns, said Ban. Ban added that Sanjay Raut need not to teach him anything. The BJP spokesperson also criticised the opposition alliance, saying its leaders should first focus on the situation within their own parties. He alleged that the public had rejected them because of their governance record and corruption scandals. Ban said that Uddhav Thackeray backed out after saying he would resign from his Legislative Council membership. He alleged that the cowardice of Sanjay Raut and the UBT faction

has been seen repeatedly. Praising Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Ban said taking Maharashtra forward was the responsibility of "Devabhau." He alleged that Thackeray committed the "sin" of shutting down or discarding projects such as the Mumbai Metro, refinery projects, and nuclear power projects. Ban claimed that after Fadnavis assumed office, Maharashtra received the highest foreign direct investment in the country and that even Naxal-affected regions such as Gadchiroli had witnessed significant transformation. He said refinery projects were now progressing in Ratnagiri and Sindhurg districts, road infrastructure was improving and industrial investment interest was increasing in the Konkan region. Ban asserted that the BJP remained committed to the all-round development of Konkan, while accusing the opposition of obstructing projects and misleading the public.

## Outrage in Pune Over NEET 2026 Paper Leak; Chhava Organization Launches Aggressive Protest Against Education Mafia Demand for Strict Action Against Those Playing With Students' Futures

**Pune:** Members of the Akhil Bharatiya Chhava Organization staged a strong protest outside the District Collector's office demanding a comprehensive investigation and strict legal action against the alleged education mafia, agents, and coaching institutes linked to the NEET paper leak controversy.

The protestors raised slogans against Shivraj Motegavkar, who has reportedly been arrested in connection with the NEET paper leak case, along with other accused individuals. Demonstrators accused those involved of damaging the future of lakhs of students through corruption and malpractice in the education system.

Participants in the agitation expressed deep anger over repeated incidents of examination paper leaks and alleged irregularities in competitive examinations. They demanded stringent punishment against all individuals and institutions found responsible for compromising the integrity of the examination process.

The protest intensified when Machhindra Chinhole allegedly poured diesel on himself during the agitation as a symbolic act of protest. The incident created tension at the protest site and drew immediate attention from police personnel deployed outside the District

Collector's office.

According to reports, a scuffle broke out between some protesters and police officials during the demonstration, leading to a brief period of chaos and heightened tension in the area. Police later intervened and attempted to bring the situation under control while preventing the protest from escalating further.

Addressing the gathering during the protest, Chinhole said repeated paper leak incidents across the country were causing severe mental, educational, and financial distress to lakhs of students preparing for competitive examinations. He stated that many students spend years preparing with dedication, only to see their efforts undermined by corrupt practices.

He said honest students work day and night to secure success in examinations such as NEET, but their hard work is being destroyed due to the activities of what he described as education mafias and corrupt elements operating within the system.

Chinhole further alleged that although some accused individuals have been arrested in Latur in connection with the case, a wider and more detailed investigation into the entire network behind the alleged scam is still necessary.

The protestors demanded that authorities identify all individuals, coaching centres, middlemen, and officials allegedly linked to the paper leak racket. They called for a transparent probe into the broader network that may have facilitated examination irregularities.

Chinhole also accused several coaching institutes in Pune of operating illegal admission practices and misleading students through exaggerated advertisements and fabricated success stories.

He claimed that certain institutions were exploiting students and parents by projecting unrealistic results to attract admissions.

According to him, some coaching centres are charging lakhs of rupees in fees while prioritising commercial profits over educational ethics and student welfare. He alleged that aggressive marketing practices and false claims were being used to manipulate aspiring students and their families.

The organisation demanded detailed financial investigations into such coaching institutes to examine their operations, funding patterns, admission practices, and advertising claims. Protesters also sought criminal action against institutions and individuals found guilty of wrongdoing.

## Chemists, druggists in Kolhapur observe 'bandh'

**Kolhapur:** Thousands of chemists and druggists across Kolhapur on Wednesday participated in a nationwide bandh called by the All India Organisation of Chemists and Druggists (AIOCD) to protest against alleged illegal online drug sales and increasing competition from large corporate companies in the pharmaceutical retail sector.

Supporting the nationwide protest, medical and drug stores across the district remained closed throughout the day. The bandh was organised to raise concerns regarding the rapid growth of online medicine sales and what chemist associations describe as loopholes and regulatory ambiguities in the existing legal framework governing pharmaceutical distribution.

Madam Patil, District Chemist and Druggists Association, said in a press release that nearly 4,000 chemists and druggists in the district responded enthusiastically to the bandh call by keeping their establishments shut.

Patil stated that the protest was intended to draw the

attention of the government toward what the association views as uncontrolled and illegal online sales of medicines, which they claim threaten the traditional pharmaceutical distribution network and the livelihood of small and medium chemists.

He pointed out that the pharmaceutical business in India is governed under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act 1940 and the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945. However, according to him, the law does not contain a clear and comprehensive provision specifically regulating online sales of pharmaceutical products.

Patil alleged that despite the absence of explicit legal provisions permitting e-pharmacy operations, online medicine sales continue to expand rapidly across the country. He argued that this has created an uneven playing field for traditional chemists and raised concerns regarding compliance, prescription verification, and medicine safety standards.

Referring to government regulations, Patil said the Central government had issued a notification under GSR 517(E) on August 28,

## Chemists, druggists observe 'bandh'

Meanwhile, a report from Pune said that office-bearers of the (AIOCD) claimed that the nationwide strike called against illegal online medicine sales and unfair competition from corporate companies received an overwhelming response in Pune. According to Pune President Sandeep Parakh, the organization today held a protest march from Power House, Rasta Peth to the District Collector's office, in which hundreds of office-bearers, including Pune Secretary Anil Belkar and Treasurer Rohit Karpe, were present. The organization claimed that the strike was 100 per cent successful

and warned that if the government fails to take immediate concrete action, an even more intense agitation would be launched. Petrol pump worker stabbed in Jalgaon over fuel shortage refusalJalgaon, May 20 (UNI) A petrol pump employee was seriously injured after being stabbed by two unidentified youths at a fuel station in the Mhasavad area of Jalgaon district, after he refused to provide fuel due to a shortage of petrol and diesel stock. According to police, the incident took place after the employee informed the accused that petrol and diesel were unavailable at the pump. Enraged over the

refusal, the two youths allegedly attacked the worker and stabbed him in the abdomen. The injured employee has been identified as 21-year-old Tushar Gurav. The entire incident was captured on CCTV cameras installed at the petrol pump. Following the attack, a case was registered at the MIDC Police Station, and police teams have launched a search operation to trace the absconding accused. The incident has triggered fear among petrol pump employees in the district, with demands being raised for increased police protection at fuel stations. Police are further investigating the case.

ated uncertainty within the pharmaceutical retail sector. He alleged that traditional chemists are being adversely affected by aggressive pricing and business practices adopted by large online and corporate players. Patil also referred to the special relaxations granted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

to Patil, the court had also issued a stay order on online sale of pharmaceutical drugs, though online platforms continue to operate in various forms. The chemist association leader claimed that the continued functioning of online medicine companies despite pending legal clarity has cre-

ated uncertainty within the pharmaceutical retail sector. He alleged that traditional chemists are being adversely affected by aggressive pricing and business practices adopted by large online and corporate players. Patil also referred to the special relaxations granted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## ATS busts illegal arms racket in Buldhana; one arrested with pistols

**Buldhana:** In a major operation against illegal arms trafficking, the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) arrested a 22-year-old man in Buldhana district and recovered a cache of weapons and ammunition from his possession, officials said on Tuesday. The action is part of an intensified crackdown on organised criminal and gangster-linked networks allegedly operating across the state. The accused has been identified as Shubham Pawar, a resident of Wardha district. According to investigators, Pawar was allegedly involved in the illegal supply and sale of firearms and ammunition in parts of Maharashtra.

Officials said the ATS launched the operation after receiving specific intelligence inputs indicating that the accused was attempting to sell illegal pistols in the region. Acting on the information, ATS officers initiated surveillance and planned a targeted operation to intercept the suspect before the alleged transaction could take place. Based on the tip-off, an ATS team laid a trap at Pimpri Koli village, which falls under the jurisdiction of Raipur Police Station in Chikhli tehsil. Officials said the operation was carefully coordinated to ensure the suspect could be apprehend-

ed without resistance or risk to local residents.

The operation was conducted during the early hours between approximately 1:00 a.m. and 1:30 a.m. According to officials, the accused arrived at the village during this period and reportedly came to the residence of one of his relatives.

As soon as he reached the location, ATS personnel moved in and apprehended him on the spot. Officials stated that the accused was detained before he could allegedly complete the intended illegal arms deal.

During the subsequent search operation, officers recovered two pistols, four magazines, and 92 live cartridges from his possession. Investigators described the seizure as significant, indicating the possible existence of a wider illegal arms supply chain operating in the region. The ATS also seized a four-wheeler vehicle that was allegedly being used in connection with the operation. Officials believe the vehicle may have been used for transporting illegal firearms and ammunition across districts. Preliminary investigations suggest that the accused was allegedly on his way to deliver the weapons for sale when he was intercepted by the ATS team. Authorities are now examin-

ing the intended recipients of the weapons and the possible financial transactions connected to the alleged deal.

Following the arrest, a formal case was registered at Raipur Police Station under relevant provisions of the Arms Act. The accused is expected to be questioned further regarding the source of the weapons and his alleged associates.

Officials said the investigation is being carried out jointly by the ATS and local police authorities. The probe is currently focused on tracing the origin of the seized firearms, identifying suppliers, and uncovering individuals suspected to be connected to the alleged trafficking network. Authorities indicated that more arrests are likely as the investigation progresses. Investigators are also examining whether the racket has links extending beyond Maharashtra and whether the accused was part of a larger interstate network involved in illegal arms trafficking. The operation has raised concerns among law enforcement agencies regarding the circulation of illegal firearms in the region. Officials said organised criminal groups and gangster-linked networks often rely on such illegal supply chains to procure weapons for unlawful activities.

## Rajkumar Hirani makes streaming debut with 'Pritam and Pedro' on JioHotstar

**Mumbai** : Acclaimed filmmaker Rajkumar Hirani is all set to make his much-awaited streaming debut with the upcoming long-format series "Pritam and Pedro," which will premiere on JioHotstar on July 3. The announcement has already generated significant excitement among audiences and industry observers, especially considering Hirani's reputation for delivering emotionally resonant and socially engaging stories.

The makers officially unveiled details of the project on Tuesday, describing the series as a quirky, emotional, and layered narrative built around an unusual mystery. At the center of the story lies an abandoned ATM discovered on a beach and two completely different men who find themselves pulled into unexpected and life-altering circumstances.

The series is being directed by Avinash Arun, known for his visually rich and emotionally grounded storytelling style. According to the makers, the show combines Rajkumar Hirani's signature warmth and humor with an unpredictable narrative

structure designed specifically for the streaming format. For Hirani, "Pritam and Pedro" represents a major new chapter in his career. The filmmaker has long been associated with some of Indian cinema's most successful and beloved films, many of which balanced entertainment with emotional depth and social commentary. His transition into the streaming space is therefore being viewed as one of the most significant developments in Indian digital entertainment this year.

Over the years, Hirani has built a reputation for crafting stories centered on human relationships, emotional vulnerability, humor, and hope. His films often ex-



plure serious themes through accessible storytelling, making them resonate with audiences across generations and regions. Expectations from "Pritam and Pedro" are naturally high because viewers anticipate a similar emotional and narrative richness in the series format. Speaking about the collaboration, Alok Jain, Head of Hindi and English Entertainment Business (Streaming, TV & Studios) at JioStar, expressed enthusiasm about partnering with Hirani for his first streaming venture. He emphasized that the platform continues to focus on stories that feel deeply rooted in Indian sensibilities while also carrying universal emotional appeal.

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## Asian directors lead the Golden Palm race at Cannes Film Festival

**Mumbai** : As the 79th Cannes Film Festival crosses the half-way mark, a number of Asian directors have staked their claim to the event's top prize, the Palme d'Or.

At least five Asian filmmakers, including a previous recipient of the Palme d'Or, is in the race for the prestigious prize at the end of the first week of the festival, which opened on May 12.

Three Japanese directors, an Iranian filmmaker and a director from South Korea are representing Asian cinema in Cannes this year.

All the five Asian directors already have had the world premiere of their new feature films in the competition category of the festival, considered the high table of world cinema.

The Asian directors are led by Japanese filmmaker Hirokazu Koreeda, who won the Palme d'Or in 2018 for 'Shoplifters'. This year, Koreeda's new film, 'Sheep in the Box' is an Artificial Intelligence-laden production, which tells the story of a grieving couple who receives a complimentary humanoid boy following the death of their son in an accident.

Koreeda is joined by compatriots, Koji Fukada, whose 'Nagi Notes' is about an architect and artists in rural Japan struggling to leave their painful past behind; and 'All of a Sudden' directed by Ryusuke Hamaguchi, the



story of two women, one the head of a care home for the elderly, and the other a theatre director battling terminal cancer.

Celebrated Iranian director Asghar Farhadi is also part of the competition section this year, with his new film, 'Parallel Tales', about an author spying on her neighbours for inspiration for her new novel.

Legendary French actor Isabelle Huppert plays the lead role of the author in the film set in Paris. 'Parallel Tales' is Farhadi's second feature film set in France after his 2013 film, 'The Past', which also competed for the Palme d'Or in Cannes. Farhadi is a winner of the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film for 'The Separation'

Celebrated Spanish director Pedro Almodovar, acclaimed American filmmaker James Gray, Romanian director Christian Mungiu and Hungarian filmmaker László Nemes are also in the fray for the Palme d'Or this year.

Almodovar's new film 'Bitter Christmas', Gray's 'Paper Tiger' starring Adam Driver and Scarlett Johansson, Mungiu's 'Fjord' set in Norway, and 'Moulin' by Nemes about the arrest of French resistance leader Jean Moulin by the Gestapo during the Second World War, are strong contenders for the Cannes top prize.

Along with Koreeda, Mungiu is the only other filmmaker in the competition category this year to have won the Palme d'Or before. Mungiu's '4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days' won the Palme d'Or in 2007.

Nemes won the Oscar award for Best Foreign Language Film for his debut feature film, 'Son of Saul', the winner of the Grand Prix in Cannes in 2015. Acclaimed South Korean director Park Chan-wook is the president of the jury for the competition category, which awards the Palme d'Or, this year. Other members of the jury include American actor Demi Moore and Chinese director Chloé Zhao. The Palme d'Or will be announced at the closing ceremony of the festival on May 23.

Last year, there were only four Asian filmmakers in the competition category--- Chinese director Bi Gan for 'Resurrection', Japanese director Chie Hayakawa for 'Renoir', and Iranian filmmakers Jafar Panahi for 'It Was Just an Accident' and Saeed Roustaei for 'Woman and Child'.

Panahi went on to win the Palme d'Or last year for 'It Was Just an Accident', which was also nominated for the Best International Feature Film at the Academy Awards this year.

## Edin Rose joins Rajinikanth-starrer 'Jailer 2' in key role

**Mumbai** : Reality television personality and actress Edin Rose is set to take a major step forward in her acting career after being cast in the highly anticipated action sequel "Jailer 2," starring superstar Rajinikanth in the lead role. Best known recently for her appearance in "Bigg Boss 18," Rose's inclusion in the film has generated significant interest among fans and industry observers alike. The upcoming film continues the story of the blockbuster "Jailer" (2023), which became one of the biggest commercial successes in Indian cinema. Rajinikanth will reprise his celebrated role as 'Tiger' Muthuvel Pandian, a character that received massive appreciation from audiences for its commanding screen presence, emotional depth, and larger-than-life action moments.

According to reports carried by Variety India, Edin Rose has been cast as a spirited and feisty city-bred young woman in the sequel. Sources suggest that her role is not limited to a brief appearance and instead forms a meaningful part of the larger narrative. The actress reportedly spent nearly a month filming for the project, indicating the substantial nature of her involvement.

Industry insiders believe that "Jailer



2" is being mounted on an even larger scale than its predecessor, with the makers aiming to expand the cinematic universe established in the original film. The sequel is expected to combine high-octane action, emotional drama, humor, and mass entertainment elements that appealed strongly to audiences in the first installment. The cast lineup for the film is expected to feature several major stars from across Indian cinema. Malayalam superstar Mohanlal, actor-director S. J. Suryah, Kannada icon Shiva Rajkumar, and veteran actress

Ramya Krishnan are all expected to appear in the sequel. Additionally, the film is also expected to feature veteran actor Mithun Chakraborty, acclaimed Malayalam performer Suraj Venjaramoodu, and popular comedian Yogi Babu. The inclusion of actors from multiple film industries reflects the makers' ambition to position "Jailer 2" as a major pan-Indian entertainer. Sources suggest that Edin Rose will share screen space with several of these prominent actors, giving her one of the biggest opportunities of her career so far.

## Dharma Productions enters Gujarati cinema with 'Jindagi Once More'

**Mumbai** : Dharma Productions, led by filmmaker Karan Johar, is set to make its first official entry into Gujarati cinema with the presentation of the upcoming film "Jindagi Once More." The film stars veteran Gujarati actor Siddharth Randeria in the lead role and is already generating considerable interest within regional film circles.

The move marks an important expansion for Dharma Productions, which has long been associated with mainstream Hindi cinema and large-scale Bollywood productions. By stepping into Gujarati cinema, the banner appears to be acknowledging the growing strength and commercial potential of regional storytelling industries across India.

According to a Gujarat-based exhibitor quoted by Bollywood Hungama, "Jind-

agi Once More" is an emotional and heartwarming story centered on the relationship between a father and son. The exhibitor revealed that the

ema reach newer audiences outside its traditional market. Industry observers believe that established Bollywood production houses entering



film deeply impressed the Dharma Productions team, who eventually decided to come on board as presenters after appreciating its emotional core and cinematic appeal. The involvement of Dharma Productions is expected to provide the film with broader visibility and potentially help Gujarati cin-

regional industries could significantly strengthen distribution, marketing, and national recognition for regional films. Trade experts have noted that Gujarati cinema has witnessed remarkable growth in recent years, both commercially and creatively. Several films from the industry have managed to attract

strong box office collections while also earning appreciation for their storytelling quality and emotional depth.

One recent example frequently cited is "Laalo - Krishna Sada Sahaayate" (2025), which reportedly emerged as a major commercial success and contributed significantly to increasing attention toward Gujarati cinema. The growing success of such films has encouraged larger production houses and distributors to explore opportunities within the regional market. Siddharth Randeria remains one of the most influential and beloved figures in Gujarati theatre and cinema. Known for his immense contribution to stage performances and family-oriented films, Randeria commands a loyal fan following among Gujarati-speaking audiences across India and abroad.

## Kritika Kamra signs 'Dumbbell' after success of 'Matka King'

**Mumbai** : Actor Kritika Kamra is continuing her impressive rise in the entertainment industry with the announcement of a new feature film project following the success of "Matka King." The actress, who has steadily built a reputation for selecting unconventional and performance-oriented roles, has now officially signed director Pushan

Mukherjee's upcoming drama film, tentatively titled "Dumbbell." The project is expected to mark another major milestone in her evolving career. The announcement comes at a particularly exciting time for Kamra, especially after the recent confirmation and greenlighting of the second season of "Matka King" by

Prime Video India. The success of the series has significantly elevated her standing among audiences and industry insiders alike, making her one of the most closely watched performers in the digital entertainment space today.

With "Dumbbell," Kamra is stepping into a completely different cinematic territory. The makers of the film have kept the storyline tightly under wraps, adding a sense of mystery and anticipation around the project. However, industry insiders suggest that the film will be a deeply emotional drama that revolves around complex human experiences and demanding character arcs.

According to sources associated with the production, Kamra will be seen portraying a role that is both physically and emotionally challenging. The character reportedly requires significant transformation and preparation, something that the actress has already begun working on ahead of the commencement of filming. The project is expected to showcase a side of her acting abilities that audiences have not witnessed before.

The film's shooting schedule is set to begin in June, and preparations are currently underway to finalize the production setup. The makers are said to be ap-

proaching the project with a strong creative vision, aiming to deliver a grounded yet emotionally compelling cinematic experience. Kamra's inclusion as the lead has further heightened curiosity surrounding the drama. Sources close to the development revealed that the actress was immediately drawn to the script and the unique world envisioned by director Pushan Mukherjee. It is believed that the emotional depth of the narrative and the layered nature of the protagonist played a major role in convincing her to come on board the film. A source familiar with the project said that Kamra "immediately fell in love with the world of the film" because it was unlike anything she had done before. The source added that the drama offers immense scope for performance, allowing the actress to fully immerse herself in a role that demands emotional vulnerability as well as physical commitment.

Over the years, Kritika Kamra has gradually transitioned from being a popular television face to an actor recognized for meaningful and content-driven performances. Her choices in recent years have reflected a conscious shift toward stories that prioritize strong narratives and layered characters over formulaic commercial roles. Industry observers believe that "Dumbbell" could become an important project in her career trajectory. At a time when audiences are increasingly embracing realistic storytelling and nuanced perfor-

mances, Kamra's decision to headline a serious drama aligns well with the changing dynamics of Indian cinema and streaming entertainment. Director Pushan Mukherjee, meanwhile, is known for his interest in emotionally rooted narratives and unconventional storytelling. Though details regarding the supporting cast and technical crew are yet to be officially announced, insiders indicate that the film is being developed with a strong focus on authenticity and character-driven storytelling.

The secrecy maintained around the plot has only increased speculation regarding the nature of the film. Some industry insiders suggest that "Dumbbell" may explore themes of resilience, personal struggle, and emotional transformation. However, the makers have not confirmed any storyline details so far, preferring to reveal information gradually as production progresses.

Kamra has reportedly already begun preparations to get into the mindset and physicality of her character. Actors taking extensive preparation time for emotionally demanding roles has become increasingly common in modern cinema, and Kamra appears determined to approach this role with complete dedication and sincerity.

Her fans, many of whom appreciated her recent performances, have welcomed the announcement enthusiastically on social media. The combination of a fresh narrative, a performance-oriented role.

## Actress Amruta Subhash to receive Nilu Phule Gratitude Award this year

**Mumbai** : The prestigious Nilu Phule Gratitude Award, presented annually by the Belvalkar Sanskrutik Manch in association with the family of legendary actor Nilu Phule, has been announced this year for acclaimed actress Amruta Subhash. Widely respected for her remarkable contribution to theatre and cinema, Amruta Subhash will be honoured at a special ceremony scheduled to take place on May 23 in Pune.

The announcement regarding the award was jointly made by Sameer Belvalkar of the Belvalkar Sanskrutik Manch and Gargi Phule (Thatte), daughter of Nilu Phule. The organisers stated that the honour is being presented in recognition of Amruta Subhash's outstanding body of work and her continued contribution to meaning-



ful and socially relevant storytelling across multiple platforms.

Over the years, the Nilu Phule Gratitude Award has emerged as a respected cultural recognition in Maharashtra's theatre and film circles. Instituted in memory of Nilu Phule, one of Indian cinema and Marathi theatre's most influential performers, the award seeks to celebrate artists who carry forward the spirit of artistic excellence, social consciousness, and dedication that defined Phule's illustrious career.

The award ceremony this

year is expected to witness the presence of several prominent personalities from the Marathi entertainment industry. According to the organisers, last year's recipient, actor Prasad Oak, along with veteran actress Suhās Joshi, will formally present the honour to Amruta Subhash during the event.

Apart from the award presentation, the event will also feature a special on-stage conversation with Amruta Subhash. The interview session will be conducted by Sameera Gujar Joshi, offering audiences an opportunity to hear the actress speak about her artistic journey, creative process, theatre experiences, and evolving work in cinema and digital entertainment. The organisers have announced that the programme will remain open to the public free of charge.

## Veer Pahariya to lead action-thriller 'Benaam', Mahesh Bhatt on board as presenter

**Mumbai** : Actor Veer Pahariya is set to embark on a new cinematic journey with his next film, "Benaam", an upcoming action-thriller that marks a new phase in his career. Adding to the project's excitement, veteran filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt has joined the cast as the film's presenter, providing strong creative support.

"Benaam" is expected to be a rooted action entertainer, featuring high-octane action sequences and powerful emotions. Furthermore, the film is expected to feature a music album with commercial appeal. The makers aim to deliver a powerful cinematic experience to audiences by balancing action, emotion, and entertainment.

According to sources, the 31-year-old actor will be seen playing a rough and rugged anti-hero for the first time in this film. It's being said that this role will be a stark departure from the actor's previous screen image and will reveal a darker and more intense side of his personality. It's believed that this film may also mark a turning point in Pahariya's career.



While details about the film's supporting cast and technical team are currently unknown, buzz about the project has already begun within the industry. The makers are expected to share more information about the film in the coming days, along with an official announcement.

With a powerful action story, emotional drama, and Bhatt's presence, "Benaam" has already generated excitement among film lovers and industry insiders.

# SPORTS

# Aryan Age 07

## GT eye top-two finish as CSK fight to survive playoff cut

**Ahmedabad:** Ahmedabad is set for a high-stakes IPL encounter where the contrast could not be sharper. On one side, Gujarat Titans play with the calm assurance of a team already qualified, on the other, Chennai Super Kings arrive with their season hanging by a thread, where every over could be the difference between survival and elimination.

Gujarat have already secured their playoff berth, but their motivation has not faded. Instead, it has evolved. The focus now is on securing a top-two finish, a reward that offers a direct path into Qualifier 1 and a second chance in the event of a setback. More importantly, this phase of the tournament is about refinement—tightening roles, maintaining form, and building momentum at home in front of a dominant crowd.

They enter this contest with the luxury of clarity. Their campaign is defined, their place secured, and their combinations largely settled. That freedom makes them dangerous. Without the weight of qualification pressure, they can execute plans with precision rather than anxiety, especially at a venue where they have been difficult to dislodge.

In contrast, Chennai find themselves in a far more volatile position. Their path



to the playoffs is narrow and uncertain, demanding not only victory here but also favourable outcomes elsewhere. It is a situation where intent must meet execution under extreme pressure, and where even a strong performance may not guarantee continuation in the tournament. That tension defines their approach. CSK cannot afford slow starts, yet their batting unit has repeatedly struggled in the powerplay, often leaving too much for the middle order to recover.

The responsibility falls heavily on their top order to provide early momentum, because anything below par immediately shifts control to the opposition. The matchup narrative is equally compelling with the ball. Gujarat's new-ball pairing of Rabada and Siraj has consistently set the tone this season, striking early and compressing opposition innings before they can develop. For CSK, navigating those first six overs may determine whether they are competing or merely surviving.

However, CSK's strongest weapon lies in their spin

attack, which has been effective in slowing opposition scoring through the middle overs. If they can drag Gujarat into a controlled tempo, they may yet disrupt the rhythm of an otherwise stable batting lineup anchored by Gill and Sudharsan.

Gujarat's batting depth adds another layer of difficulty for CSK. Even if early breakthroughs are achieved, the Titans have shown the ability to rebuild and accelerate late, making containment as important as wickets. Ultimately, this contest

is framed by contrast. One side is building toward the playoffs with clarity and confidence, the other is fighting to extend its season by a single match. In that gap between security and survival lies the entire story of this encounter.

Teams: Chennai Super Kings: Ruturaj Gaikwad (Captain), Dewald Brevis, Ayush Mhatre, Matthew Short, Sarfaraz Khan, Shivam Dube, Maceil Noronha, Dian Forrester, Jamie Overton, Anshul Kamboj, Prashant Veer, Zakary Foulkes, Aman Khan, MS Dhoni, Urvil Patel, Sanju Samson, Kartik Sharma, Shreyas Gopal, Gurjapneet Singh, Mukesh Choudhary, Noor Ahmad, Akeal Hosein, Matt Henry, Rahul Chahar, Spencer Johnson, Akash Madhwal, Kuldeep Yadav

Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (Captain), Shahrukh Khan, Sai Sudharsan, Nishant Sindhu, Rashid Khan, Manav Suthar, Rahul Tewatia, Washington Sundar, Arshad Khan, Ravirivindan Sai Kishore, Jason Holder, Anuj Rawat, Jos Buttler, Kumar Kushagra, Glenn Phillips, Connor Esterhuizen, Gurnoor Brar, Mohammed Siraj, Prasidh Krishna, Kagiso Rabada, Jayant Yadav, Ishant Sharma, Ashok Sharma, Luke Wood, Kulwant Khejroliya.

## Sasikumar rides mid-match wobble, enter pre quarters of SMK Memorial tournament

**Bengaluru:** It wasn't a straight road, but Mukund Sasikumar found the straight answer when it mattered most.

From a brief mid-match wobble to a ruthless tie-break finish, the Indian kept his nerve to storm into the pre-quarterfinals of the Bengaluru 2026 ATP Challenger at the SM Krishna Memorial Open on Wednesday, outlasting Japan's Taiyo Yamanaka 6-4, 7-6(1) in a contest that swung before snapping firmly back in his favour.

For an hour and 53 minutes, the Round of 16 clash moved in waves — early control from Sasikumar, a sudden tightening of the contest in the second set, and then a decisive burst of authority when the pressure peaked.

The Indian came out sharp, serving with purpose and striking clean from the baseline to take the opening set 6-4. His first-serve numbers told the story of early control, and his lone break in the set proved enough to keep him a step ahead throughout.

But the second set brought a different rhythm.

At 6-4, 3-all, the match flickered. Sasikumar later admitted there was a brief dip in concentration, made trickier by conditions on one side of the court that affected his serve timing. That opening was enough for Yamanaka to sense a shift, dragging the set deep-



er with steadier exchanges and forcing the Indian to defend his rhythm rather than dictate it.

For a few games, the momentum blurred.

But Sasikumar responded like a player refusing to let the match slip away.

He broke back, levelled the set, and in that moment the tone changed again. The Indian began striking the ball with clearer intent, tightening his service games and regaining control of the baseline exchanges.

"I think I did really well to stay in the present and was a bit lucky in the game I broke him," Sasikumar said later, reflecting on the passage that turned the match. He added that the break-back brought him fully back into the contest and gave him what he called a "second burst of energy."

From there, there was no looking back.

The tie-break was one-way traffic. Sasikumar

surged through it 7-1, stepping up on returns, taking time away from his opponent and finishing points with controlled aggression that left little room for recovery.

Across the match, the Indian's numbers backed his control in the key moments — six aces, 80 per cent first-serve success, 28 winners, and near-perfect efficiency at the net with 14 points won out of 15.

Yamanaka matched stretches of the contest well, firing nine aces and producing 25 winners, but 31 unforced errors and missed break-point chances at critical stages ultimately tilted the balance.

In the end, it was not just a win built on shots, but on recovery — a brief lapse acknowledged, absorbed, and quickly erased.

Sasikumar walks into the last eight with momentum intact, and a reminder that in tight matches, control is often regained not by perfection, but by response.

## Decision is always the board's: Masood on Pak captaincy future

**Sylhet (Bangladesh):** Pakistan captain Shan Masood admitted there are serious issues to address in the team's Test setup after Bangladesh completed a historic 2-0 series sweep with a 78-run win in Sylhet, but stopped short of discussing his own future as captain.

The defeat marked Pakistan's fourth consecutive Test loss to Bangladesh and extended their poor away run to seven straight defeats, equalling their worst sequence overseas. Under Masood, Pakistan also finished bottom of the previous World Test Championship cycle and currently sit eighth in the ongoing standings.

When asked about his captaincy after the loss, Masood said the final decision rests with the Pakistan Cricket Board.

"My intentions are clean. I took on this job to improve our Test cricket. There are things that need to be discussed with the board and the decision is always the board's. But my intentions have always been on how to improve this side because [I feel] you should always take on challenges and accept opportunities," he said.

"It will always be my ef-



fort in any capacity - it doesn't have to be that I do it sitting in the captaincy chair, or the player chair, wherever. You don't know where life will take you, but I've always worn this shirt with pride and put everything aside for this."

Masood said Pakistan's repeated inability to capitalise on strong positions had hurt the team throughout the series. In Sylhet, Pakistan had reduced Bangladesh to 116/6 in the first innings before allowing them to recover through Litton Das's century.

"If we talk about the series, yes, it's never a good place to lose games," he said.

"But again, in this series, I thought in both matches

we've had significant chances to do well in the game. And I think we have to look at ourselves, we have to reflect on ourselves, whether that's batting, bowling, or fielding, and see where we lost the game."

The Pakistan skipper also pushed back against calls for sweeping changes to the squad, saying the focus should instead be on fixing deeper structural problems within the Test side.

"(The) changes needed are structural. For those changes you address root causes and put aside emotions. We are hurt and always offer our sincerest apologies. We won't look at it emotionally though, just how we can improve it," he said.

## Bangladesh overtake India after historic series sweep against Pakistan

**Dubai:** Bangladesh pushed India down to sixth in the World Test Championship standings after sealing a historic 2-0 Test series sweep over Pakistan with a 78-run win in the second Test held in Sylhet.

The outcome lifted Bangladesh to fifth in the WTC standings with a points percentage of 58.33, overtaking Shubman Gill's team. Pakistan, meanwhile, remain eighth.

The hosts wrapped up a memorable 2-0 series sweep on the final morning after taking the remaining three Pakistan wickets to seal another historic Test triumph

over their Asian rivals. Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam starred with the ball for Bangladesh, claiming six wickets in Pakistan's second innings, including two on the final day as the visitors fell short in their chase of 437.

Fast bowler Shoriful Islam also played a crucial role by dismissing Pakistan wicketkeeper-batter Mohammad Rizwan for 94, a breakthrough that effectively ended Pakistan's hopes of pulling off a remarkable chase. The series victory marked Bangladesh's first-ever home Test series win over Pakistan and followed their 2-0 sweep in Pakistan in



2024, making it back-to-back series wins against the former world champions.

Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto credited the result to the team's long-term planning and faith in the current group of play-

ers. "Credit goes to all the players, they have been working really hard," he said afterwards.

"We changed something, we tried to build our team. And if you look at world cricket, if you want to

build something you have to change."

Shanto also highlighted the contribution of the lower-order batters, who played an important role across both Tests. "Our tailenders also contribute a lot. Those are the things we wanted to improve and I hope we continue (to play this way)."

Veteran batter Mushfiqur Rahim was named Player of the Series after scoring 253 runs across the two matches. "It really means a lot, the boys really deserve it. The way they have been playing the last 2-3 years, especially in the Test format," Rahim said.

## Ireland announce squad for Women's T20 World Cup

**Dublin:** Ireland have announced their squad for the upcoming ICC Women's T20 World Cup in England and Wales.

The 15-member squad features a number of first-time call-ups for the marquee tournament, including Ava Canning, Christina Coulter Reilly, Alana Dalzell, Aimee Maguire and Lara McBride.

Taking charge in what will be her maiden T20 World Cup as captain is

Gaby Lewis, who was instrumental in Ireland confirming their spot. Lewis had finished as the top run-getter in the ICC Women's T20 World Cup Global Qualifier with 276 runs to her name from seven matches. She will be complemented by the likes of Leah Paul, Amy Hunter and Orla Prendergast, who make up for Ireland's batting top-order. Also present in the squad is Ireland's most experienced campaigner and former skip-

per, Laura Delany, according to ICC. Having captained the team at the 2023 edition of the tournament, Delany is closing on becoming the first Ireland Women's player to collect 100 T20I wickets. The bowling unit also features Arlene Kelly, who was the second-highest wicket-taker in the T20 World Cup Global Qualifier earlier this year. Ireland have been earlier in Group 2 of the Women's T20 World Cup alongside hosts

England, Sri Lanka, Scotland, West Indies and the defending champions New Zealand. In their opening game, they will face Scotland at Old Trafford on June 13. Ireland squad: Gaby Lewis (c), Amy Hunter, Arlene Kelly, Ava Canning, Cara Murray, Christina Coulter Reilly, Alana Dalzell, Georgina Dempsey, Laura Delany, Leah Paul, Louise Little, Orla Prendergast, Rebecca Stokell, Aimee Maguire, Lara McBride.

## Jemimah Rodrigues & India chase their own 1983 moment at Lord's

**Dubai:** There is an almost-instantaneous reaction when Jemimah Rodrigues hears the phrase, the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2026 Final at Lord's.

A vivid memory that is seared into the consciousness of Indian cricket flashes and sets the goal for her and the Indian women's cricket team this summer.

"Kapil Dev and the Indian men's team won their first-ever World Cup there. We would love to win our first-ever Women's T20 World Cup there. That would be super cool," she told ICC.

It hasn't been long since Rodrigues played an innings of a lifetime, an unbeaten 127 off 134, to take India across the line in an epic ICC Women's Cricket World Cup semi-final chase against Australia.

The victory was followed by India clinching their maiden title on a euphoric night in Navi Mumbai.

Rodrigues believes the triumph has added a steely resolve into the Indian side to

put their best foot forward at the ICC Women's T20 World Cup in England and Wales.

"The monkey is off the back," she said. "But I don't think it's pressure."

"I think it's more motivation because now you've tasted what it feels like to lift one World Cup.

It makes you want one more and then one more and then one more.

"So I think the team is even more motivated and even more eager. And more than that, we saw the kind of impact it had for women's cricket in India. We just want to continue that legacy going to England.

"I think this team has character. When you want to win big games, you need people with character, people who are different in their own way, but they have a thing that they'll do anything to win the match. That kind of an attitude. And I think that's great character.

"And that's why in any situation, I believe our team will find a way to win a match."

On a personal level, Rodrigues feels the journey to her coming-of-age innings against Australia brought about a cathartic self-realisation.

"I think firstly, the biggest learning for me was because I was going through a lot of anxiety, not doing well, got two ducks in the tournament, was dropped and four years ago, I was dropped from the Cricket World Cup," she recalled.

"This was my first World Cup. What I realised is that sometimes all you have got to do is show up because life has a way of making all things work together for good.

"And I think, those four years actually trained me for such a moment as that, because I had to use all that experience that all the failures in all those years taught me maybe for such a time as that.

"So I think that was my biggest learning, that sometimes, especially when it gets hard and you don't have the strength to run or fly, sometimes all you have to do is

just go and stand and God works out everything for you."

Rodrigues will once again be crucial to India's push for glory as they eye a maiden T20 World Cup title.

Slotted in Group 1, the Harmanpreet Kaur-led side will go up against Australia, South Africa, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Netherlands.

Their opening challenge will be going up against arch-rivals Pakistan, a contest Rodrigues has fond memories of. When the two teams squared off in the 2023 edition of the T20 World Cup, the right-handed batter had played a decisive role in yet another chase.

In pursuit of 150 runs, Rodrigues scored an unbeaten 53, combining with Richa Ghosh (31 not out) to see through the chase.

Recalling the chase, the middle-order batter said, "I think in 24 balls we needed 41 runs, which in a World Cup is a lot of pressure, like double the pressure," she recalled. "And from there we went out and chased it down."

## Kia India joins Tennis Premier League as the exclusive sponsor in a multi-year deal

**Mumbai:** Kia India and Tennis Premier League (TPL) on Wednesday announced a landmark three-year partnership, with Kia India coming on board as the Exclusive Sponsor for the league.

Bringing together Kia India's longstanding global association with tennis and TPL's growing ecosystem around the sport in India, the partnership reflects a shared vision towards strengthening the relevance and reach of tennis and inspiring a new generation of audiences across the country.

This multi-year deal marks one of the most significant milestones in Indian tennis, uniting one of the world's leading automotive brands with a home-grown movement that is quietly rewriting the country's tennis story through the Tennis Premier League and its App, with a strong focus on supporting grassroots tennis in India.

With a global tennis legacy spanning 25 years through its association with the Australian Open, Kia India has consistently focused on creating meaningful experiences around the sport through youth-focused and participation-led initiatives.

The partnership with TPL reflects Kia India's continued commitment towards engaging with progressive sporting platforms that are shaping contemporary sports culture in India.

With seven successful seasons under the auspices of the All India Tennis

Association and strong backing from iconic brand ambassadors like Leander Paes and Sania Mirza, along with celebrated personalities such as Sonali Bendre Behl, Co-owner - Lucknow Blazers, and Rakul Preet Singh, Co-owner - Hyderabad Strikers, the Tennis Premier League has steadily built credibility and mass appeal over the years.

It has emerged as one of India's most consistent and impactful non-cricket sporting leagues, achieving several significant milestones along the way while being broadcast live on Jio Hotstar.

As part of this multi-year association, Kia India will be integrated across the Tennis Premier League ecosystem, including the TPL App and all eight franchise teams as the front-of-jersey sponsor. The partnership also aligns with Kia India's vision of enabling greater participation and engagement around the sport, while further strengthening TPL's grassroots initiatives, which have played a key role in driving tournaments and identifying emerging tennis talent across the country.

Over the last two years, TPL, through its flagship "Race to Gold Scholarship" initiative, has supported over 80 young tennis players across India. With Kia India's support, the vision now expands further - to empower 120 additional young athletes in the coming years, with the long-term goal of nurtur-

ing Olympic-level talent capable of bringing home medals at the 2036 Olympics.

Recognizing TPL's strong grassroots focus and growing visibility for the sport, Kia India sees the partnership as a strong platform to further strengthen engagement around tennis in India and support its long-term growth through greater scale, structure, and sustained investment.

This partnership is expected to significantly enhance the reach of tennis across India, bringing the sport closer to households nationwide and positioning it as the next big sporting movement in the country that has already completed seven seasons with a greater focus on grassroots as well.

Kunal Thakur, Co-Founder, Tennis Premier League said, "This partnership with Kia India is a great moment for us. Over the last few years, we have focused deeply on building a strong grassroots ecosystem through our app and initiatives like Race to Gold along with our League. Having a global brand like Kia India recognize and back this vision gives us the confidence to scale our efforts and truly impact the future of Indian tennis." Mrunal Jain, Co-Founder, Tennis Premier League said, "TPL has always believed in creating a complete tennis ecosystem—from identifying young talent to giving them a platform at the highest level.

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
75,318.39	0.16%	23,659.00	0.17%	22,578.15	0.25%	69,361.55	0.54%	24,590.60	0.24%	53,562.20	0.29%	61,323.30	0.49%
Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open
75,200.85	74,806.49	23,618.00	23,457.25	22,521.75	22,379.85	68,992.35	68,578.00	24,531.70	24,368.35	53,409.15	53,015.70	60,478.40	60,643.10
High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
75,406.18	74,529.41	23,690.90	23,397.30	22,597.65	22,316.45	69,464.65	68,262.40	24,619.05	24,303.15	53,640.90	52,836.10	61,401.60	60,478.40

## Top Gainers

Company	Current	% Gain
Hindalco	1,085.50	3.55
Reliance	1,359.70	2.80
Bajaj Auto	10,462.50	2.52
Bajaj Finserv	1,772.00	1.27
Grasim	2,971.10	1.22

## Top Losers

Company	Current	% Loss
Bharat Elec	413.30	-2.28
Tech Mahindra	1,439.00	-1.92
Eternal	243.34	-1.57
Tata Steel	207.01	-1.09
HUL	2,209.30	-1.06

## Commodities

Commodity	Price	Change (%)
Gold Jun 05	159,825.00	745.00 0.47
Silver Jul 03	274,964.00	4,845.00 1.79
Crudeoil Jun 18	9,741.00	-286.00 -2.85
Naturalgas May 26	292.70	-6.70 -2.24

## Sensex Ends 118 Points Higher, Nifty Closes Above 23,650

**Mumbai:** Indian stock markets ended marginally higher on Wednesday after staging a strong recovery from steep losses witnessed during the opening session. Benchmark indices rebounded sharply in late trade, supported by buying in heavy-weight stocks such as Reliance Industries and gains across sectors including energy, automobiles, and capital goods.

The 30-share BSE Sensex advanced 117.54 points, or 0.16 per cent, to close at 75,318.39, while the Nifty 50 gained 41 points, or 0.17 per cent, to settle at 23,659. Market participants noted that the Nifty continued to remain trapped within the 23,600-23,700 range for the fifth consecutive trading session, reflecting a cautious undertone despite the late recovery.

The trading day began on a weak note as global concerns triggered heavy selling pressure in domestic equities. The Sensex plunged nearly 650



points during early trade, while the Nifty dropped more than 200 points amid widespread weakness across sectors. Investors initially reacted negatively to rising global bond yields, elevated crude oil prices, and persistent geopolitical tensions related to the ongoing US-Iran conflict.

During intraday trade, the Sensex touched a low of 74,529 before witnessing a sharp rebound in the second half of the session. Similarly, the Nifty recovered almost 300 points from

its intraday low of 23,397 as buying activity intensified in heavyweight and value stocks toward the close.

Market analysts said the rebound was aided by a gradual easing in crude oil prices, which slipped below the USD 110 per barrel mark during the day. The decline in oil prices provided relief to investors concerned about inflationary pressures and rising input costs for Indian companies.

According to Ajit Mishra of Religare Broking, the broader

market sentiment continues to remain cautious as the Nifty is still trading below the crucial resistance zone of 23,800-24,000. He observed that selective buying in large-cap stocks has so far helped prevent deeper declines in the market.

Analysts believe that investors are currently balancing concerns over global macroeconomic uncertainty with optimism around India's domestic growth outlook. The continued resilience in select blue-chip stocks and strong participation in broader markets helped stabilise sentiment despite persistent foreign fund outflows.

Broader markets outperformed the benchmark indices during the session. The Nifty Midcap 100 rose nearly 0.5 per cent, indicating sustained investor interest in mid-sized companies. Market experts said domestic institutional buying and improved risk appetite in select sectors contributed to the relative strength in midcaps.

## India hosts 68th APO Governing Body Meeting, focuses on productivity and sustainable growth

**New Delhi:** India is hosting the 68th Session of the Asian Productivity Organization (APO) Governing Body Meeting in New Delhi from May 20-22, bringing together senior policymakers and productivity experts from across the Asia-Pacific region.

The three-day meeting at Bharat Mandapam will see participation from over 60 delegates representing 20 APO member economies, along with observers and international organisations.

The event is being organised under India's chairmanship of the APO Governing Body.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal is scheduled to attend the inaugural session, while senior officials, APO directors and representatives from member nations will deliberate on strategies to strengthen productivity, innovation and sustainable economic growth in the region.

The meeting will focus on key issues including implementation of APO Vision 2030, future budget planning, institutional reforms and measures to improve governance and efficiency within the organisation.

Discussions are also expected on digital transformation, sustainability and regional cooperation aimed at enhancing productivity-led growth.

A major highlight of the gathering will be the APO National Awards Programme, where individuals and institutions contributing significantly towards productivity improvement and innovation will be honoured.

The initiative seeks to encourage best practices and foster a stronger culture of efficiency and competitiveness across member economies.

India assumed the chairmanship of the APO during the previous Governing Body Meeting held last year.

## T'gana CM Revanth Reddy calls for world-class 'Net Zero' Bharat Future City

**Hyderabad:** Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Wednesday directed officials to develop the proposed 'Bharat Future City' as a world-class "Net Zero City" with international-standard infrastructure and said the project should emerge as a global hub for industries, technology, data centres, and innovation.

Reviewing the Industries Department at the MCR Human Resource Development Institute, the Chief Minister stressed that there should be no compromise on infrastructure standards and instructed officials to study globally renowned cities and adopt best practices while planning the project.

Revanth Reddy said land allocations in Bharat Future City should be made only after the trunk infrastructure is fully developed. He also emphasised the need to attract international-level organisations and industries to the project.

The Chief Minister directed officials to allocate



500 acres within the Future City for public representatives, civil servants, and journalists.

He also instructed officials to ensure that the Health Cluster announced by the Central Government is established within Bharat Future City and said the state government was prepared to approach Prime Minister Narendra Modi, if necessary, to secure the project.

Revanth Reddy further directed that the foundation

stone for industries proposed in the Future City Industrial Park should be laid in June and said industries allotted land must immediately begin construction activities.

To boost investments, the Chief Minister ordered the establishment of a dedicated "Invest Telangana" cell with a separate office, logo, and website. He also proposed an "Escort Officer" system, suggesting the appointment of Group-I officers to assist investors plan-

ning to establish industries in the state.

The Chief Minister instructed officials to study the industrial policies of Tamil Nadu and Gujarat to strengthen Telangana's competitiveness.

He also directed initiation of land acquisition for the Bullet Train project and proposed the establishment of a 1,500-acre "Data City," with plans to utilise treated water from sewage treatment plants (STPs) for its requirements.

Further, Revanth Reddy instructed officials to identify government lands near Karimnagar, Warangal, and Vijayawada road corridors for setting up Global Capability Centres (GCCs) and Data Centres, while calling for a separate policy to encourage GCCs in Tier-II cities.

He also directed that all government offices in Telangana be connected to T-Fiber services within the next three months, according to an official statement.

## isolated expands India operations with new Hyderabad office, plans 400 hires by 2027

**Hyderabad:** isolated on Tuesday announced a major expansion of its operations in India with the inauguration of a new office in Hyderabad, reinforcing the city's growing prominence as a global centre for engineering excellence and artificial intelligence innovation. The expansion marks another significant milestone in Hyderabad's emergence as one of India's leading destinations for Global Capability Centres (GCCs).

The newly launched office, spread across 28,000 square feet at 23 Nord-west in Hyderabad, will serve as a strategic hub for product engineering, AI-driven innovation, platform delivery, and essential back-office operations such as payroll and tax processing. The facility is expected to play a key role in supporting the company's long-term global growth ambitions while strengthening its technology capabilities.

As part of its expansion roadmap, isolated announced plans to significantly increase its workforce in India over the next few years. The company aims to hire nearly 400 employees in the country by the end of 2027, underlining its confidence in India's talent ecosystem and Hyderabad's growing status as a preferred destination for global technology firms.

The Hyderabad centre was formally inaugurated by Vallabi A, Program Di-



rector at SPEED & Investment Cell, Government of Telangana, in the presence of senior company leadership including isolated Chief Operating Officer Pragma Gupta, Chief People Officer Amy Mosher, and General Manager of isolated India Yogesh More.

Addressing the gathering during the inauguration ceremony, Vallabi A said Hyderabad has rapidly evolved into one of the fastest-growing GCC destinations globally. She noted that the city's robust infrastructure, strong technology ecosystem, and availability of highly skilled professionals continue to attract major international companies seeking to establish innovation-driven operations in India.

She further observed that isolated's

expansion aligns closely with the Telangana government's broader vision of positioning Hyderabad as a global capital for engineering, digital transformation, and AI-led innovation. According to her, investments by global firms such as isolated are contributing to the state's ambition of becoming a leading technology and innovation powerhouse.

Highlighting the company's inclusive work culture, Vallabi A also praised isolated India for maintaining strong workforce diversity. She stated that the company currently has nearly 65 per cent gender diversity within its India operations, describing it as a noteworthy achievement in the technology and engineering sector where gender representation often remains uneven.

## MANN HUMMEL to invest over Rs 100 crore in India, launches Karnataka innovation hub

**Bengaluru:** MANN HUMMEL, a global leader in filtration technology, on Wednesday announced investments exceeding Rs 100 crore in India with the launch of its new Global Technology & Innovation Center in Karnataka and plans for a new manufacturing facility in Pune.

The company inaugurated its state-of-the-art Global Technology & Innovation Center at Tumkur in Karnataka, describing it as MANN HUMMEL's largest development centre outside Germany and a major milestone in its global growth and innovation strategy.

The new facility is aimed at accelerating global product development and customer-centric innovation by bringing together advanced research laboratories, testing infrastructure, digital engineering, and data analytics under one roof.

According to the company, the centre will support the development of next-generation filtration solutions across mobility, industrial applications, clean air technologies, and water purification systems while enabling faster time-to-market and closer collaboration with customers worldwide.

Speaking at the launch, Kurt Wilks, President and CEO of MANN HUMMEL Group, said India had

emerged as one of the company's most important engineering and innovation destinations globally.

"The new Global Technology & Innovation Center in India marks a significant milestone in MANN HUMMEL's global innovation journey. India stands at the forefront of engineering talent and technological advancement, making it a natural choice for our largest development hub outside Germany," he said.

Wilks said the new centre would accelerate innovation capabilities and help the company deliver scalable and sustainable filtration solutions globally.

Sudeesh Karimbalg, Managing Director of MANN HUMMEL India, said the facility reflected India's growing role as a strategic engineering and growth hub for the company.

"For more than two decades, our Indian engineering team has contributed significantly to global product development. This centre marks India's transition from a support hub to a strategic engineering powerhouse driving innovation for both local and global markets," he said. The company also announced plans to establish a new manufacturing facility in Pune, which will cater to automotive passenger vehicles, heavy-duty on-road and

off-road applications, and industrial segments through an integrated manufacturing setup for advanced filtration solutions.

MANN HUMMEL said the combined investment in the Tumkur innovation centre and the proposed Pune facility is expected to exceed Rs 100 crore, reaffirming its long-term commitment to the Indian market.

The company currently employs around 1,250 people across its India operations and expects to create an additional 300 to 400 jobs over the next 12 months.

With manufacturing operations already present in Tumkur in Karnataka and Bawal in Haryana, along with its Global Technology & Innovation Center in Bengaluru, the company said the Pune expansion would further strengthen its manufacturing and customer support capabilities in the country.

MANN HUMMEL said India is among its fastest-growing markets and currently houses more than one-third of the company's global R&D workforce. As part of its sustainability-focused strategy, the Tumkur facility will work on energy-efficient filtration systems, reduction of lifecycle emissions, circular manufacturing solutions, use of recycled materials, and environmentally friendly product design.

## Hyderabad logs record Q1 office leasing at 3.15 million sq ft: Cushman &amp; Wakefield

**Hyderabad:** Hyderabad's office market registered its strongest-ever first-quarter performance in 2026, with gross leasing volume (GLV) touching a record 3.15 million square feet (MSF), according to the latest Office MarketBeat Q1 2026 report released by the global real estate consultancy Cushman & Wakefield.

The report showed that office leasing activity in the city grew 21.6 per cent year-on-year, reinforcing Hyderabad's position as one of India's leading commercial real estate hubs.

The city accounted for nearly 14 per cent of India's total office leasing activity of around 22 MSF during the quarter.

Large office deals of over 100,000 sq ft dominated the market, contributing 81 per cent of the total leasing activity, while Madhapur emerged as the key driver with a commanding 91 per cent share in overall leasing, the report revealed.

Despite no new office completions during the quarter, Hyderabad recorded robust net absorption of 2.21 MSF, indicating sustained

occupier demand.

The strong demand also pushed citywide vacancy levels down by 260 basis points year-on-year to 20.22 per cent. Vacancy in Madhapur stood at 7.5 per cent, while Grade A office assets tightened further to just 4.8 per cent, the report stated.

Office rentals in the city also touched record levels, with average stock-weighted rents rising 11.6 per cent year-on-year to Rs 92.2 per sq ft.

Madhapur continued to command premium rentals at Rs 105.5 per sq ft, while

Gachibowli remained a cost-effective alternative at Rs 72.3 per sq ft.

Sector-wise, the IT-BPM segment remained the largest occupier with a 36 per cent share in leasing activity, followed by flexible workspaces at 30 per cent and BFSI firms at 23 per cent.

Global Capability Centres (GCCs) accounted for 0.83 MSF of leasing during the quarter, representing 26 per cent of the total leasing volume.

The report said Hyderabad is expected to witness a strong supply pipeline, with

nearly 11 MSF of new office space likely to be added during the rest of 2026, mainly in Gachibowli and Madhapur. Another 20 MSF is expected to be delivered during 2027-28.

Veera Babu, Executive Managing Director, Tenant Representation-India, Cushman & Wakefield, said Hyderabad continues to attract large occupiers due to its strong talent pool, mature office ecosystem and growing GCC presence, which are expected to sustain leasing momentum in the coming quarters.

## TSF Investments posts 28.66 pc increase in consolidated net profit

**Chennai:** TSF Investments Limited has registered a consolidated net profit of Rs 530.21 crores for the year ended 31st March 2026, which includes gain of Rs 40.99 crores from fair valuation of previously held equity interest in Axles India Limited on account of business combination, as compared to Rs 412.09 crores registered in the previous financial year, resulting in an increase of 28.66%.

The increase in consolidated net profit is partly because of Axles India

Limited, becoming a subsidiary during the year on account of TSF group acquiring shares held by Dana Global Products Inc. for a consideration of Rs 365.37 crores. TSF Investments operates as a core investment company, investing in a portfolio of automotive businesses including founders and manufacturers of wheels, brakes, turbo chargers, axles and distribution of spare parts. As a result, dividend from portfolio companies forms a substantial part of the finan-

cial results. Dividend received from portfolio companies is Rs 207.67 crores for the year ended 31st March 2026. Reflecting the consolidation of the T.S. Santhanam Family group, Sundaram Finance Holdings Limited has been renamed TSF Investments Limited with effect from 23 September 2025. This change reaffirms the group's strategic alignment and century-old legacy, a company release said. The Board of Directors have recommended a final dividend of Rs

4.45 per share (89%) for FY 25-26. This together with the Interim Dividend of Rs 6.70 per share (134%) paid during February 2026 aggregates to a total dividend of Rs 11.15/- per share (223%) for the FY 25-26. As part of the company's strategy to exit from non-core investments and invest the proceeds in the core investments in group companies, the company had during the financial year 2025-26 exited the TVS Holdings Limited (partial exit).