


# Aryan Age

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## PM Modi Credits Reforms and Citizens as India Posts Strong FY26 Economic Growth

**New Delhi :** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday hailed India's latest economic growth figures, saying they demonstrate the country's resilience, the effectiveness of policy reforms, and the contribution of its 140 crore citizens.

Reacting to the latest GDP data in a post on social media platform X, Modi said India's economy continues to maintain strong momentum despite global uncertainties.

"India's growth momentum remains strong!" the Prime Minister wrote, adding that the GDP growth rate of 7.7 per cent in FY 2025-26 and 7.8 per cent in the fourth quarter reflected "the inherent strength of our

economy, the success of reforms and the hard work of 140 crore Indians."

According to the Provisional Estimates released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation on Friday, the Indian economy expanded by 7.7 per cent in real terms during FY26, while growth accelerated to 7.8 per cent in the January-March quarter, indicating sustained economic activity through the end of the fiscal year.

Emphasising the government's commitment to sustaining the growth trajectory, Modi said efforts would continue to improve the quality of life for citizens and create a more

business-friendly environment. "We shall leave no stone turned to further 'Ease of Living', 'Ease of Doing Business' and increase opportunities for our youth," he said.

India remains among the fastest-growing major economies in the world, with the government attributing the performance to a combination of structural reforms and public investment. Over the past decade, measures such as the Goods and Services Tax (GST), Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes, expansion of digital public infrastructure, and record capital expenditure on roads, railways, airports, and other infrastructure projects have been projected as key drivers of economic growth and investor confidence.

Economic policymakers have

also pointed to strong domestic consumption, rising government spending, and the continued expansion of the services sector as important factors supporting growth. Sustained economic expansion is seen as critical to generating employment, boosting incomes, and advancing India's ambition of becoming a developed nation by 2047.

Modi's remarks underscore the government's view that ongoing reforms, infrastructure development, and investment-led growth will remain central to maintaining economic momentum and expanding opportunities for the country's young and increasingly skilled workforce.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday extended greetings on World Environment Day and called for renewed commitment towards environmental protection and sustainable development, while highlighting India's progress in expanding green cover and conserving wildlife over the past decade.

In a post on social media platform X, Modi said, "Best wishes to everyone on World Environment Day. I would like to applaud all those passionate about environmental conservation. This is a day to reaffirm our commitment to protecting our environment and furthering growth that is sustainable."

The prime minister said the centre's initiatives over the last ten years reflect its commitment to environmental conservation and sustainable development. "Numerous efforts by our government over the last decade highlight our work in this direction. Some of India's key successes include expanding green cover and a rise in the population of several animals," he said.

Emphasising the role of public participation in environmental protection, Modi credited citizens for contributing to positive ecological outcomes through collective action and innovation. "The people of India have shown how collective efforts, policies, belief in science and innovation can improve our environment," he added.



### PM urges renewed commitment to sustainability on World Environment Day

### DR Congo Ebola cases rise to 381, with 63 deaths: health minister



**Kinshasa :** Confirmed Ebola cases in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have risen to 381, including 63 deaths, Health Minister Roger Kamba said.

Speaking at a press briefing here on Thursday evening, Kamba said about 233 patients are currently hospitalized in health facilities, either for isolation while awaiting test results or for treatment after developing the disease, according to Xinhua. The minister said the country's testing capacity has improved significantly following the arrival of more than 4,000 testing kits from the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and additional international support, allowing health authorities to test almost all samples received and provide results within 24 hours.

He also said contact tracing has improved from about 9 percent at the

beginning of the response to 55 percent now. The target is to reach 90 percent, which would allow health authorities to identify almost all contacts and better anticipate where new cases may appear.

Kamba said the outbreak, caused by the Bundibugyo virus, has so far affected three provinces, namely Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu. The DRC declared the Ebola outbreak on May 15. Health authorities and international partners have since stepped up testing, isolation, treatment and contact tracing in the affected eastern provinces.

The World Health Organization later designated it a public health emergency of international concern. Uganda has reported 16 confirmed cases, with one case newly confirmed on Thursday, according to the Ugandan health ministry.

### Two suspected Ebola cases admitted to Gandhi Hospital in Hyderabad

**Hyderabad :** The Telangana Health Department has been put on high alert after the number of suspected Ebola cases at Gandhi Hospital in Hyderabad rose to two amid heightened surveillance over the spread of the virus in Central African countries.

According to hospital officials, a 36-year-old Sudanese national, identified as Mohammed Yagouch Ahmed, arrived in Hyderabad early on Thursday. During routine medical screening at Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, Shamshabad, authorities detected symptoms suspected to be linked to the Ebola virus.

The passenger was immediately shifted to Gandhi Hospital and admitted to a special isolation ward for treatment and observation.

Doctors said Ahmed is reportedly a student at an educational institution in Hyderabad. Another individual who came into close contact with him has also been placed under special observation and is undergoing medical tests.



Dr Sunil Kumar, Ebola nodal officer at Gandhi Hospital, said blood samples collected from the patient had been sent to the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad, for preliminary testing and would subsequently be forwarded to the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune, for confirmation. Final test results are expected within a week.

Health officials stated that all precautionary measures are being taken and a 20-bed special isolation ward has been kept ready at Gandhi Hospital to handle any emergency situation.

Authorities urged the public not to panic but advised people experiencing symptoms such as fever, severe fatigue or bleeding to seek immediate medical attention.

### 300 Crore Tree Plantation Drive to Make Maharashtra Greener: Ganesh Naik

**Mumbai:** Maharashtra will become greener and environmentally stronger through the state-wide 300 crore tree plantation campaign, Forest Minister Ganesh Naik said on the occasion of World Environment Day. He emphasized that environmental protection is not just the government's responsibility and that every citizen must actively participate in conservation efforts.

Ganesh Naik was speaking at Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Borivali, where he inaugurated a special awareness vehicle for environmental education and performed the groundbreaking ceremony for a Central Government Employees Housing Complex. The event was attended by Home Self-Redevelopment Authority Chairman and MLA Pravin Darekar, MLA Sanjay Upadhyay, MLA

Prakash Surve, MLA Manisha Chaudhary, ward committee chairpersons Prakash Darekar, Ganesh Shankar, Sarita Zore and Ankit Save, Chief Conservator of Forests Dr. Jitendra Ramgaonkar, Chief Conservators K. Pradeepa and N.R. Praveen, Forest Department Deputy Secretary Nikita Pandey, and Sanjay Gandhi National Park Director Anita Patil.

Ganesh Naik said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam" campaign has transformed tree plantation into a nationwide people's movement. He added that rising concerns over global warming have made environmental protection a priority for citizens across the country. He stressed the need to promote cleaner energy sources such as solar and wind power as alternatives to conventional petrol and diesel fuels.

The Forest Minister said Maharashtra is progressing rapidly under the leadership of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, and the government is ensuring that development and environmental conservation move forward together. Responding to a request from Mumbai Mayor Ritu Tawde, he announced that the Social Forestry Department will provide one lakh saplings for Mumbai.

Naik also said special efforts are being made to equip forest personnel with modern facilities and equipment. The government is exploring the possibility of raising funds for the Forest Department through bonds. He further revealed that tissue culture centres have already been established in five regions of the state and will help produce large numbers of high-quality saplings.



Calling for greater public participation, Ganesh Naik urged citizens to strengthen the environmental conservation movement as part of the vision of building a developed and powerful India by 2047.

MLA Manisha Chaudhary appealed to people to plant and nurture at least one tree in their mother's name. MLA Pravin Darekar said positive changes are taking place in the Forest Department under the leadership of Ganesh Naik.

Chief Conservator of Forests

Dr. Jitendra Ramgaonkar said the ambitious 300 crore tree plantation campaign aims to increase Maharashtra's forest cover to 33 percent.

In her welcome address, Sanjay Gandhi National Park Director Anita Patil described the park as the "lungs of Mumbai." She said several initiatives are being undertaken to transform the park into a major centre for tourism and environmental education. As part of these efforts, a 34-hectare Miyawaki forest will also be developed within the park.

### Amit Thackeray slams 'money-driven' political culture

**Mumbai :** Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) youth leader Amit Thackeray has launched a scathing attack on the state's current political ecosystem calling out the pervasive influence of wealth and patronage in candidate selection.

Speaking during a cleanliness drive on Friday, Amit, son of MNS Chief Raj Thackeray, accused political parties of prioritizing candidates with "vast wealth and connections" over merit, further noting that this perceived entitlement among leaders has alienated the public which elects them.

Highlighting what he termed as "the commodification of local elections", Thackeray alleged that seats in municipal bodies are being "bought" for crores of rupees.

"The arrogance of these leaders stems from their belief that money and party backing guarantee victory. However, they hold these chairs because of the people," Thackeray pointed out. He urged the electorate to recognize their power, warning that silence from

the public only emboldens those who treat democracy as a business transaction.



Addressing the growing public discourse surrounding the 'Cockroach Janata Party'—a term gaining traction in local political circles—Thackeray clarified that while his party's official stance will be articulated by the MNS Chief, he personally supports the ongoing movement.

He called for the resignation of the concerned union Minister over the NEET examination scam, stating that

such accountability is essential for the government to remain responsive to the people, particularly the students.

In the context of World Environment Day, Thackeray expressed deep concern over the unchecked destruction of nature under the guise of "development." He emphasized that urban progress cannot come at the cost of the state's ecological heritage.

Singling out the ongoing deforestation in Nashik, he accused the ruling dispensation of prioritizing private interests over public green spaces. "Mumbai and Maharashtra's development cannot be achieved by sacrificing our environment. These projects are often a pretext to hand over prime land to private entities, and we will not remain silent spectators to this," he warned.

As the state gears up for future administrative challenges, Thackeray's remarks highlight a growing rift between the political elite and a populace increasingly concerned with institutional integrity and sustainable development.

### ATS questions Group of Youths for ISI link

**Mumbai:** Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad has questioned a group of youths from Shirampur in Ahilyanagar district of Maharashtra over their suspected links to Pakistan-based gangsters, officials said.

The action is part of the information gathered during the raids at five locations across the state into an alleged ISI-Mumbai underworld module, they said. ATS officials questioned the youths for over 10 hours and seized their mobile phones, laptops and digital devices. Notices were issued directing them to appear before the ATS Mumbai office when required, and they were instructed not to leave the district without

permission.

The probe centres on alleged communication between the youths and Pakistan-based gangster Shahzad Bhatti and his aide Rana Aveem alias "Rana Bhai", who is believed to handle recruitment activities on Indian soil, officials said.

The investigation gained momentum after Sagar Beg, president of Shri Ram Sangh in Ahilyanagar, reportedly received death threats from Bhatti and Rana on social media, sources said.

ATS is examining digital records and communication trails to ascertain the extent of involvement and whether the youths were part of a larger network, officials added. No arrests have been made so far.

### Five lakh trees to be planted across 80 acres in Mumbai, says Minister Shelar

**Mumbai :** As part of the 'Green Maharashtra - 300 Crore Tree Plantation' campaign being implemented across the state under the vision of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, an ambitious afforestation initiative has been resolved for the Mumbai Suburban District.

Under this initiative, a total of 5 lakh trees will be planted across 80 acres of vacant land in Aarey, announced Mumbai Suburban Guardian Minister Adv. Ashish Shelar today.

Marking World Environment Day, a tree plantation drive was organized at Aarey Camp area.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Shelar said, "Aarey had earned recognition as a forest on paper; now we will not keep it limited just to records. Our aim is to transform it into a truly flourishing green and vibrant forest that will inspire future generations. Today marks the beginning of a major drive to plant 5 lakh trees

across 80 acres in Aarey."

MLA Murji Patel, Mumbai Suburban District Collector Saurabh Katiyar, Konkan Divisional Commissioner Metro Carshed, reserved plots near Metro Bhavan, the National Dairy Development Board campus, the Agro Industries Development Corporation premises, State Reserve Police Force Group No. 8, Force One, Mahananda Dairy, and the Veterinary College campus. Following these inspections, a report prepared by the Mumbai Suburban District Collector's office revealed that a cumulative total of approximately 80 acres of land

across these locations is available for large-scale plantation activities.

Adv. Shelar emphasized that the campaign is not merely about planting trees but about creating a lasting green legacy for future generations. The initiative will employ modern technology, including GIS-based planning, digital monitoring systems and dedicated mechanisms for tree conservation, ensuring continuous tracking of the growth, survival and maintenance of every tree. In addition to conventional plantation methods, the Miyawaki technique will also be adopted to develop dense, self-sustaining and biodiversity-rich urban forests.

He further stated that the initiative aims to make Mumbai Suburban district greener, more beautiful and environmentally sustainable, while promoting environmental conservation, biodiversity enhancement and sustainable development.

### Abhijeet Rane Highlights PIL Over Non-Replacement of More Than 2 Lakh Trees in Mumbai

On the occasion of World Environment Day, environmental activist and Abhijeet Rane, Group Editor of Daily Mumbai Mitra and Vritt Mitra (Marathi/Hindi) Newspaper, has drawn public attention to a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed before the Bombay High Court seeking strict enforcement of tree replacement provisions under the Maharashtra (Urban Areas) Protection and Preservation of Trees Act, 1975.

According to RTI documents, as many as 204,695 replacement trees remain unaccounted for across H-East, L, M-East, M-West, P-South, N, S and T wards of Mumbai.

The petition alleges that builders, developers, charitable trusts, educational institutions, cooperative housing societies and even government agencies have failed to comply with mandatory tree replacement conditions imposed while granting tree-felling permissions.

Abhijeet Rane stated that Mumbai is steadily losing its green cover because trees are being felled in the name of development without ensuring corresponding plantation.

The PIL seeks a court-monitored audit of all tree-felling permissions issued since 2020, prosecution of violators under the Maharashtra Trees Act, creation of a public compliance portal and physical verification of plantation sites.

The respondents include the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM), Garden Superintendent and Tree Officer, Tree Authority, Government of Maharashtra, MMRDA and other concerned authorities.

Rubal Agrawal, Ward Committee Chairman Prakash Musale and officials from various government departments were present on the occasion.

As part of the 'Green Maharashtra' campaign, Adv. Shelar inspected several locations, including Aarey Camp, vacant land around the



## Telangana CM Revanth Reddy reviews works at third lift of Vattem Pump House

**Hyderabad:** Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Friday visited the third lift of the Vattem Pump House near Kummera village in Nagarkurnool district and conducted a detailed review of the ongoing works under the ambitious Palamuru-Rangareddy Lift Irrigation Scheme. The visit formed part of his two-day inspection tour of major irrigation projects in the erstwhile Mahabubnagar district, aimed at assessing progress and expediting completion of key infrastructure initiatives.

During the visit, the Chief Minister inspected various components of the project and interacted extensively with engineers and irrigation department officials. He sought detailed information regarding the current status of construction works, expenditure incurred so far, and the timeline for completion of the remaining activities.

Officials briefed the Chief Minister on the financial progress of the project, stating that substantial investments had already been made over the past several years. According to the officials, approximately Rs 3,300 crore was spent on the project between 2020 and 2023 to execute major civil, mechanical and electrical works.

They further informed him that an additional Rs 800 crore has been utilised since 2023 to continue the construction and installation of critical infrastructure required for the lift irrigation scheme.

The expenditure reflects the government's efforts to push forward one of the state's most significant irrigation projects.

Reviewing the remaining tasks, officials stated that only a limited



portion of the civil works is pending. They assured the Chief Minister that all unfinished construction activities would be completed within the next three months. The estimated expenditure required for the completion of these pending works is around Rs 90 crore.

The Chief Minister also reviewed the status of the pumping systems, which are central to the functioning of the lift irrigation project. Officials explained that the scheme envisages the installation of a total of ten high-capacity pumps to lift water through different stages and reservoirs.

Out of the proposed ten pumps, five have already been installed and commissioned. Officials informed the Chief Minister that successful trial runs of the installed pumps have been conducted, demonstrating the operational readiness of a significant portion of the project infrastructure.

Engineers explained that once sufficient water becomes available during the upcoming monsoon season, the pumping operations will commence on a larger scale. Water lifted through the system will be transported to the Venkatadri Reservoir, which forms an important component of the irrigation network being developed under the scheme.

Officials noted that the Venkatadri Reservoir has a total storage capacity of 16.74 TMC. The reservoir is designed to store large quantities of water that can subsequently be distributed for irrigation and other purposes across several districts in Telangana.

The Chief Minister was informed that the reservoir would not be filled in a single operation. Instead, water storage would be undertaken in phases in accordance with the standard operating procedures prescribed for the project, ensuring efficient man-

agement and safe operation of the infrastructure.

The Palamuru-Rangareddy Lift Irrigation Scheme is one of the flagship irrigation projects intended to address water scarcity in several drought-prone regions of Telangana. The project has been conceived to utilise available river waters and distribute them to areas that have historically faced irrigation challenges.

According to officials, the scheme is expected to provide irrigation facilities to a total ayacut of 12.30 lakh acres. Once fully operational, it is expected to transform agricultural activity in vast stretches of land by ensuring a reliable source of water for farming.

Addressing officials during the review, Revanth Reddy emphasised the importance of completing the project within the stipulated timelines. He underlined the need for maintaining quality standards while ensuring that the remaining works are executed without delay.

The Chief Minister stated that the project holds immense significance for the socio-economic development of the region. He noted that improved irrigation facilities would help increase agricultural productivity, strengthen rural livelihoods and provide long-term benefits to farming communities.

According to an official statement, Revanth Reddy said that the Palamuru-Rangareddy Lift Irrigation Scheme would benefit residents of Mahabubnagar, Nagarkurnool, Rangareddy and Nalgonda districts by providing water for irrigation, drinking and industrial purposes, thereby contributing significantly to the overall development of the region.

## Arrested TMC leader Swarup Biswas presented before court

**Kolkata:** Arrested Trinamool Congress leader Swarup Biswas, the ex-president of the Federation of Cine Technicians and Workers of Eastern India and brother of former West Bengal minister Arup Biswas, was produced before a court on Friday.

Under stringent security, Biswas was produced at the Alipore court during the day.

Biswas was arrested on Thursday evening on multiple charges including extortion, criminal intimidation and molestation. Charges under the Arms Act were also slapped against him.

The arrest followed a complaint lodged by a woman, who alleged that she had

been denied work for nearly two years and was asked to pay money when she approached Biswas seeking employment opportunities. The complainant also alleged that she was threatened.

Police sources said the case was registered at New Alipore Police Station based on her complaint, following which Biswas was taken into custody.

Investigators are also examining allegations that he extorted several lakhs of rupees from multiple individuals by using threats and his influence within the industry.

Biswas had long been a

prominent figure in South Kolkata's Tollygunge-based Bengali film industry as president of the Federation of Cine Technicians and Workers of Eastern India. Over the years, sections of technicians and other industry workers had levelled allegations against him, claiming that the federation exercised undue control over employment opportunities and access to work in the sector.

Following his arrest, angry locals staged an impromptu demonstration before the Alipore police station and vandalised Biswas's car on Thursday night.

## Anantnag Police launch 'Pahchan App' for secure Amarnath Yatra

**Srinagar:** To enhance the safety and security of tourists and pilgrims during the Amarnath Yatra, J&K Police in Anantnag district launched "Pahchan App" — a QR-based mobile application aimed at registering and verifying service providers operating along the Yatra route and key tourist destinations.

Police said the application enables instant, on-spot verification of service providers and creates a secure ecosystem by clearly differentiating registered and verified individuals from unregistered ones.

"The primary objective behind launching the 'Pahchan App' is to strengthen the overall security grid during the Yatra period by preventing the entry of unverified or anti-social elements in the guise of service providers. By creating a digital record of all authorized persons, the app brings greater

transparency.

And accountability to the services offered to pilgrims and tourists," police said, adding it will also aid in smooth crowd management, as organized and regulated service delivery reduces disputes, overcharging, and congestion on the Yatra tracks.

A Police spokesman said the initiative is expected to create a strong positive impression among the public.

"It will instill confidence among Yatries, tourists and local citizens by visibly regulating services and ensuring that they interact only with verified individuals.

The app empowers genuine service providers by giving them a digital identity and formal recognition, while simultaneously projecting Police as a proactive and technology-driven force committed to facilitating a safe and hassle-free pilgrimage," police said.

## After Reddy's resignation, Muniyappa's unhappiness add to Cong troubles

**Bengaluru:** Fresh signs of unease within the Karnataka Congress surfaced on Friday amid growing speculation that senior leader KH Muniyappa could become the next focal point of discontent within the ruling party. The developments come at a sensitive time for the Congress government, which is still adjusting to the recent leadership transition that saw DK Shivakumar assume charge as Chief Minister. The speculation follows the resignation of senior minister R Ramalinga Reddy, who stepped down from the Cabinet after expressing dissatisfaction with the portfolio assigned to him. His exit has exposed underlying tensions within the party and raised questions about the process through which ministerial responsibilities were allocated in the newly constituted government. Although Muniyappa has not publicly criticised the leadership or hinted at any intention to resign, political observers and party insiders have been closely watching developments. Reports circulating within political circles suggest that several senior Congress leaders are unhappy with the distribution of Cabinet berths and the allocation of key departments.

The issue has emerged as an early challenge for the Shivakumar-led ad-

ministration, which had hoped to begin its tenure on a note of unity and stability. Instead, the controversy surrounding ministerial appointments has brought internal rivalries and competing political aspirations back into focus. Senior party leaders are understood to be engaged in discussions aimed at containing the fallout from Reddy's resignation. The Congress high command is said to be monitoring the situation closely and maintaining contact with influential leaders to ensure that dissatisfaction does not escalate into a broader rebellion. According to party insiders, efforts are underway to address concerns raised by leaders who believe they have not received adequate representation in the government. The leadership is keen to prevent any perception that certain regions, communities or factions within the party have been sidelined during the Cabinet formation process. The transition of power from Siddaramaiah to Shivakumar was intended to bring closure to months of speculation and internal discussions regarding leadership. Many within the party had hoped that the change would help consolidate the Congress organisation and allow the government to focus on governance priorities. However, the debate over Cabinet

composition has shifted attention from the leadership transition to questions of political balance and representation. The allocation of influential portfolios has become a particularly sensitive issue, with leaders seeking greater recognition for their political standing and contributions to the party. Muniyappa's position is being watched especially closely because of his stature within the Congress and his influence in key regions of Karnataka. A veteran leader with a long political career, he commands significant support among party workers and voters, particularly in parts of the Kolar region. Political analysts believe that any public expression of dissatisfaction by Muniyappa could have wider implications for the Congress government. Such a development could encourage other disgruntled leaders to voice their concerns, making it more difficult for the leadership to maintain internal cohesion. At present, however, there has been no official indication that Muniyappa is considering any drastic step. Party leaders have sought to emphasise that discussions regarding portfolios and representation are part of the normal functioning of a large political organisation and can be resolved through dialogue.

## Alva's criticism of all-male Cabinet puts Shivakumar on defensive

**Bengaluru:** Veteran Congress leader and former union Minister Margaret Alva's public expression of "deep disappointment" over the absence of women in Karnataka's new Cabinet put the spotlight on gender representation in the DK Shivakumar government on Friday, prompting the Chief Minister to assure that women would be accommodated when the ministry is expanded.

As criticism mounted from both within the Congress and the Opposition BJP, Shivakumar defended the composition of his first Cabinet, saying several ministerial positions remain vacant and opportunities would be provided in the coming days. "Let them wait; there are a lot of vacancies. Last time, too, there were no women in the first round. We are all there," he told reporters. Margaret Alva, who congratulated Shivakumar on

taking oath as Chief Minister, said she had hoped to see at least one Congress woman sworn in as minister. "I would have loved to see at least one Congress woman in the new Karnataka Cabinet

sworn in today. Deeply disappointed that there isn't one," she said in a social media post.



The criticism comes after Shivakumar and 13 ministers were sworn in on Wednesday, with no woman legislator finding a place in the first phase of Cabinet for-



of programmes. "We have implemented several schemes for women and have set a model in the country," he said.

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka also attacked the government over the issue, questioning how a party that frequently speaks about

women's empowerment could leave women out of its first Cabinet.

The Karnataka Council of Ministers can have a maximum strength of 34, including the Chief Minister. With only 14 members currently sworn in, 20 berths remain vacant, providing scope for a substantial expansion.

Eleven of the 13 ministers inducted were part of the previous Siddaramaiah government. MLC Yathindra Siddaramaiah and former Assembly Speaker UT Khader are the only new entrants, while senior Dalit leader G Parameshwara has been appointed Deputy Chief Minister.

The row over women's representation has emerged as one of the earliest challenges confronting the Shivakumar government, with expectations growing that the next round of Cabinet appointments will be closely watched for gender balance.

## Rogue tusker to be relocated to Kanchinda Rescue Centre after 36-hr delay

**Bhubaneswar:** A rogue tusker that remained confined inside a transport truck for nearly 36 hours after being tranquilised will finally be shifted to the Kanchinda Wildlife Rescue Centre near Bangiriposi in Mayurbhanj district, forest officials said on Friday. The prolonged delay in relocating the elephant has sparked widespread concern among wildlife enthusiasts, conservationists and animal welfare advocates, who questioned the handling of the operation and the conditions under which the animal was kept. The elephant had been roaming in the Kusumapat area under the Ratapata section of the Angul Forest Division for several days, creating panic among local residents. Villagers reported repeated sightings of the tusker near human settlements, raising fears of possible attacks, damage to crops and property, and increasing the risk of human-elephant conflict in the region. In response to complaints from local communities and concerns over public safety, officials of the Forest Department launched an operation to capture and relocate the animal. After monitoring its movements, the department deployed a team of experts who successfully tranquilised the elephant and prepared it for transportation



to a safer location. The relocation, however, soon ran into difficulties. Forest authorities initially proposed shifting the tusker to the Satkosia Range under the Karanjia Forest Division, believing the area could serve as a suitable habitat for rehabilitation.

The plan was expected to provide the elephant with a forested environment away from densely populated settlements.

The proposal, however, faced strong resistance from residents living in and around the proposed relocation site. Local people expressed apprehension that introducing the tusker into the area could increase the chances of future human-elephant conflict and pose a threat to agricultural activities and public safety. Following the opposition, the Forest Department was forced to reconsider its plans and begin searching for alternative locations where the elephant could be safely re-

habilitated. Officials explored several possible sites, taking into account factors such as habitat suitability, availability of food and water, ecological compatibility and the potential impact on local communities. Despite these efforts, authorities reportedly struggled to identify an appropriate location that met all necessary requirements. As discussions and assessments continued, the elephant remained confined inside the transport vehicle, leading to growing criticism from wildlife experts and animal rights groups. The unusual situation attracted significant attention from conservationists, who argued that prolonged confinement could cause unnecessary stress and discomfort to a wild animal. They stressed that rescue and relocation operations should be supported by clear rehabilitation plans and adequate infrastructure to avoid such delays.

## UP's security system to be strengthened with modern technology, trained personnel and strong infrastructure: CM Yogi

**Lucknow:** Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday underscored the importance of modernising the state's security apparatus, asserting that the true strength of any force lies in its trained, disciplined and technologically proficient personnel. He said security agencies must continuously upgrade their capabilities to respond swiftly and effectively to emerging challenges in law enforcement, disaster management and public safety.

The Chief Minister made these remarks while conducting a comprehensive review meeting on the modernisation, capacity expansion, training systems, infrastructure development and future action plans of the Uttar Pradesh Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and Uttar Pradesh Special Security Force (UPSSF). He described the three organisations as vital pillars of the state's security framework and stressed the need to prepare them for future challenges.

Emphasising the importance of practical and technology-oriented training, Yogi Adityanath said that security personnel must be equipped with modern skills

and tools to handle a wide range of situations efficiently. He noted that changing security requirements demand continuous improvement in operational preparedness and professional competence.

The Chief Minister also highlighted the need to establish a distinct identity for the PAC by making its uniform clearly different from that of the civil police. He said such differentiation would help reinforce the force's unique role and operational responsibilities within the state's law enforcement structure.

Reviewing the digitisation and technological advancement of the PAC, the Chief Minister directed officials to maximise the use of information technology in security operations. He observed that modern security management increasingly depends on real-time information sharing, surveillance systems and digital coordination platforms.

During the meeting, officials informed him that work is underway to equip all PAC vehicles with GPS tracking systems and dashboard cameras. Plans are also being implemented to establish a quick response vehicle network capable of providing faster deployment during emergencies and law-

and-order situations.

A detailed blueprint of the proposed Uttar Pradesh PAC Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC) was presented before the Chief Minister. The project aims to create a unified digital network connecting PAC



battalions across the state and significantly enhancing operational coordination.

Officials explained that the ICCC project would integrate GPS-based vehicle monitoring, drone surveillance, artificial intelligence-powered monitoring systems, live command centres and secure communication networks. The system is expected to strengthen coordination during law-and-order duties, election deployments, women's safety initiatives and disaster response operations.

Focusing on women's safety and participation in the security forces, the Chief Minister directed that the construction of women's battalions be completed on priority. He stressed that dedi-

cated infrastructure and facilities for women personnel would further strengthen the state's security ecosystem.

Officials informed the meeting that construction work for women's battalions in Badaun, Lucknow and Gorakhpur is progressing rapidly. The Chief Minister also directed that equestrian statues of Veerangana Avanti-bai, Veerangana Uda Devi and Veerangana Jhalkaribai be installed at the three battalion campuses respectively as a tribute to their courage and contribution to India's history.

The meeting was also informed that work relating to additional women's battalions in Balrampur, Mirzapur and Jalaun is being actively pursued. These initiatives are expected to increase women's representation and strengthen gender-inclusive policing and security operations.

With the monsoon season approaching, the Chief Minister directed all concerned departments to place flood and disaster preparedness at the top of their priorities. He stressed the need for comprehensive readiness measures to minimise risks and ensure timely rescue and relief operations during emergencies. Officials informed the meeting that spe-

cial flood relief training for 17 PAC companies is currently being conducted at various riverbank locations from May 16 to June 30. The Chief Minister directed regular inspection of rescue equipment and instructed authorities to ensure that all machinery and resources remain fully operational and ready for deployment.

Reviewing the performance of the SDRF, officials informed him that teams are currently deployed across 12 districts and that a proposal has been prepared for additional deployment in 15 more districts considering potential flood threats. Personnel are also receiving specialised training at premier institutions, including the National Disaster Response Force Academy, training centres in Nadia, West Bengal, and the Nanda Devi Institute of Aero Rescue.

The Chief Minister further directed officials to formulate a promotion policy for PAC band personnel to ensure timely career progression. He also asked authorities to examine the feasibility and utility of human-lifting drones for search-and-rescue missions, reflecting the government's interest in adopting cutting-edge technologies for disaster response operations.

## Mumbai Chief Officer Dies During Oil Tank Cleaning Operation At Sea

**Mumbai** : A 43-year-old Chief Officer died after collapsing inside an oil tank during a cleaning operation at sea, officials said.

Officer identified as Harsha Gopalan Rajan, a resident of Chennai, was working as the Chief Officer on the oil vessel Jag Aba. According to the Yellow Gate Police, the incident occurred on June 1 around 9.30 am while the vessel was operating at sea.

The officer lost consciousness while carrying out tank cleaning duties onboard a vessel off the Mumbai coast.

Crew members pulled him out and administered first aid, but he was declared dead, sources said.

Preliminary information suggests the death may have been caused by inhalation of toxic gas or oxygen deficiency inside the confined space of the tank, a common



hazard during such operations.

Maritime safety regulations mandate strict protocols for tank entry, including gas testing, ventilation, and the use of breathing apparatus with a standby crew.

The police have registered an accidental death report (ADR) under Section

194 of the BNSS. No injuries or suspicious circumstances were found, and family members stated they had no suspicion regarding the death.

The tragic death of Chief Officer Harsha Gopalan Rajan onboard the oil vessel Jag Aba highlights the extreme and persistent

dangers faced by maritime professionals working in confined shipboard environments. The 43-year-old Chennai resident collapsed unexpectedly on June 1 at approximately 9:30 am during a routine tank cleaning operation while the vessel was navigating waters off the Mumbai coast.

## Large Building Companies Compete to Fix Major Slum Area

**Mumbai**: Three giant property development companies are competing to win a massive new project to rebuild a large slum area in Andheri West. This project covers over 101 acres of land and plans to build 28,061 free, safe homes for the local residents who currently live in poor conditions. The government wants to use this pilot project around C.D. Barfiwala Road as a model to make the entire city clean and slum-free. According to the state rules, any big area where more than half the ground is covered by slums can be taken up for this modern housing development, and top companies have now sent in their business plans to win the work. The ambitious initiative by the Maharashtra state government to systematically transform Mumbai's sprawling informal settlements has entered a critical operational phase, marked by intense corporate competition over

a flagship urban renewal contract. Three of the country's largest property development and infrastructure giants—Shapoorji Pallonji Real Estate, Reliance 4IR Realty Development, and JSW Realty & Infrastructure—have formally entered a high-stakes race to secure the rights for a massive rehabilitation project in the prime locality of Andheri West. This major infrastructure undertaking marks the very first time these heavy-weight corporate entities are participating in a cluster-based Slum Rehabilitation Authority program, highlighting a major shift in how the private sector views large-scale public housing developments. The targeted development footprint spans an expansive, contiguous land parcel measuring precisely 101.36 acres, strategically located along the heavily commuted C.D. Barfiwala Road, commonly known as Juhu Galli.

## Safety Raid Uncovers Large Batch of Bad Medical Supplies

**Mumbai**: The food and drug safety officers discovered a large stock of illegal medical devices and medicines worth more than 2.17 crore rupees during sudden raids across Mumbai, Bhivandi, and Palghar.

The team found big mistakes in the way items like surgical gloves, cotton bandages, and cleaning gauze were stored and packed without proper official papers.

The officers also suspect that normal rubber gloves were falsely marked with labels saying they were clean and germ-free before being sent to major government hospitals and local colleges. The safety board has locked up the supplies and started legal action against the suppliers for breaking the safety rules.

The recent multi-city enforcement operation conducted by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) across Mumbai, Bhivandi, and Palghar highlights a critical crackdown on the supply chains of medical equipment and pharmaceuticals.

The sudden administra-

tive raids resulted in the immediate seizure of a massive stockpile of unauthorized medical devices and prescription products collectively valued at over 2.17 crore rupees. This coordinated action underscores the state's intensifying efforts to eliminate sub-standard, unverified, and potentially hazardous healthcare items from circulating within both private and public medical networks.

During the extensive physical inspections of the targeted distribution hubs and warehouse facilities, safety officers documented severe systemic lapses in regulatory compliance. Investigators discovered that essential clinical supplies, including surgical gloves, cotton bandages, and sterile cleaning gauze, were being stored in highly unhygienic environments that lacked appropriate temperature and moisture controls. Furthermore, bulk quantities of these products were systematically packed and prepped for shipping without any valid manufacturing licenses, batch numbers, or official documentation required

to trace their origins.

A major focus of the investigation involves a suspected labeling fraud scheme concerning protective gear destined for public healthcare infrastructure.

Senior safety officials revealed that ordinary, non-sterile industrial rubber gloves were allegedly being relabeled with counterfeit tags falsely asserting that the items were completely sterilized and germ-free. These misbranded products were reportedly being distributed in bulk to major state-run government hospitals and local medical colleges, potentially exposing healthcare workers and patients to severe cross-contamination risks.

The food and drug safety board has taken immediate steps to neutralize the threat by sealing the compromised facilities and confiscating the entire inventory to prevent further distribution. Simultaneously, the legal wing of the regulatory body has initiated formal criminal and civil proceedings against the identified suppliers for direct violations of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.

## New Strict Rules Started for Cleaning Up Trash in Rural Areas

**Palghar**: The environment ministry has put out a new set of rules for handling daily waste, and the local district leader, Rajendra Patil, has asked all village councils to follow them strictly.

Under these new guidelines, every single home and shop must separate their trash into four different boxes before giving it away.

These boxes are for wet food scraps, dry items like paper and plastic, personal hygiene items, and dangerous waste like old batteries or expired medicines. The village leaders must set up proper trucks and stations to collect and safely destroy this garbage, and they must also teach the local public how to keep their villages clean and protect nature.

The implementation of the environment ministry's new waste management guidelines in Palghar marks a decisive step toward institutionalizing systematic environmental sanitation

across rural landscapes.

Under the direct orders of the district leader, Rajendra Patil, all local village councils are legally mandated to enforce a strict four-way segregation protocol at the source of generation.

This framework transitions rural areas away from undifferentiated garbage dumping, requiring every household and commercial establishment to categorize their daily refuse into distinct streams prior to municipal or village collection.

The structural foundation of this new policy relies on the precise separation of waste into four specialized categories to optimize recycling and safe disposal.

Residents must isolate wet organic food scraps, recyclable dry materials such as paper and plastics, domestic hazardous products like expired pharmaceuticals and old batteries, and personal hygiene items into designated collection bins.

This meticulous separation is designed to prevent cross-contamination, ensuring that biodegradable matter can be efficiently composted while hazardous materials are kept out of local soils and water tables.

To support this behavioral shift, village councils are tasked with upgrading their localized logistics infrastructure to maintain the separation of waste throughout the transport chain.

Local authorities must procure specialized partitioned vehicles and establish designated processing centers capable of sorting, recycling, and safely neutralizing the various material streams.

Additionally, the district mandate places a heavy emphasis on community education, requiring village leaders to run continuous public awareness campaigns that instruct residents on the long-term ecological and public health benefits of maintaining a contamination-free living environment.

## City Starts Eco-Friendly Clay Festival Drive

**Thane**: The Thane Municipal Corporation started a new program on World Environment Day to encourage people to use traditional Shadu clay for making festival statues. The city government will give free market stalls and natural clay to local artists so they can make and sell these safe statues easily. They will also run learning programs in schools and local housing societies to show everyone why eco-friendly celebrations are important.

The authorities have already brought in 12 tonnes of natural clay to support the local sculptors. Top city leaders joined the public event at the Biodiversity Park in Hiranandani Estate, where expert artists showed the public how to shape these beautiful statues using safe materials instead of harmful plastics.

The Thane Municipal Corporation's decision to launch a large-scale ecological campaign on World Environment Day represents a progressive administrative shift toward sustainable cultural practices within the urban limits.

By actively promoting the utilization of traditional Shadu clay for the creation of festival statues, the civic body aims to systematically reduce the environmental degradation associated with non-biodegradable materials.

This structural initiative is designed to offer a viable, environmentally safe alternative to the mass-produced plaster of Paris and plastic idols that routinely compromise the



health of local aquatic ecosystems during annual immersion ceremonies.

To ensure the practical success of the program, the municipal administration has integrated economic incentives with raw material distribution to support the local artisanal community.

The city government has officially set aside dedicated commercial spaces, offering free market stalls to traditional sculptors to ensure they can showcase and sell their organic products without facing high overhead costs.

Furthermore, the authorities have procured and transported a massive initial consignment of 12 tonnes of natural clay, distributing it directly to sculptors to alleviate the financial burden of sourcing sustainable raw materials.

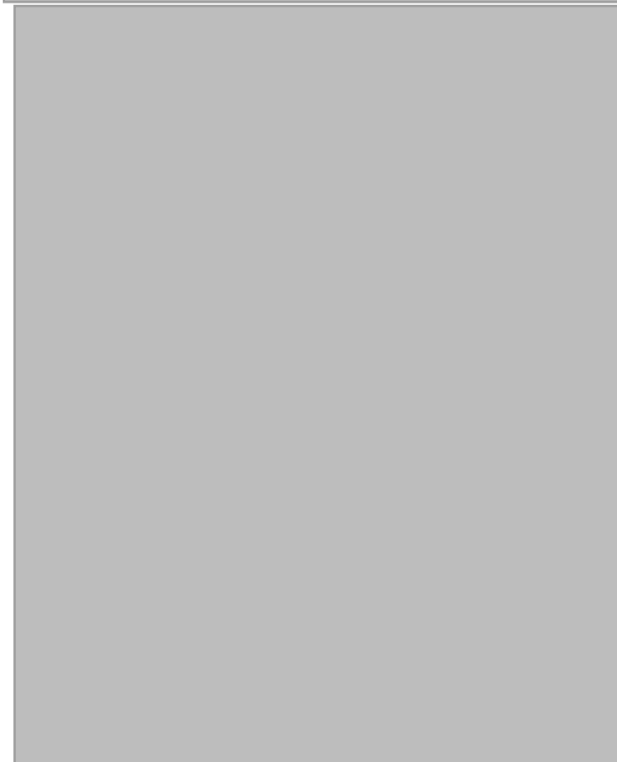
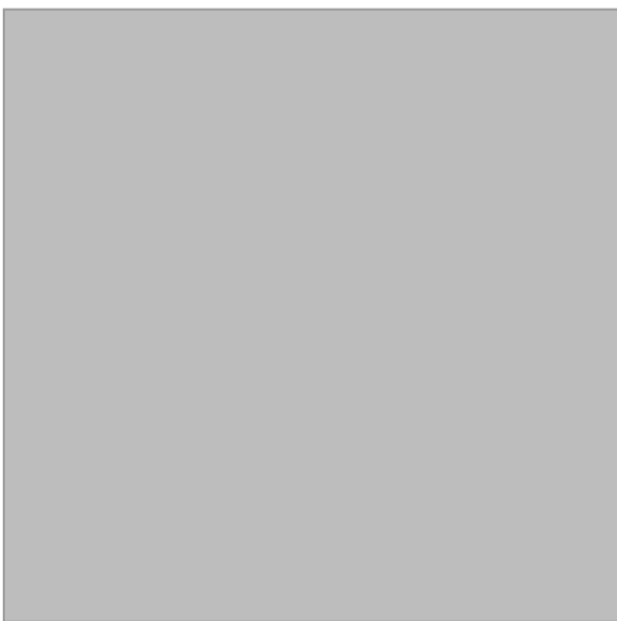
A core component of the civic strategy relies

heavily on long-term public education and community outreach to drive a permanent behavioral shift among residents. The Thane Municipal Corporation has outlined a comprehensive calendar of interactive learning programs and practical workshops to be conducted across regional schools and residential housing societies.

These educational sessions are designed to demonstrate the scientific benefits of clay statues, instructing citizens on how plaster models release toxic heavy metals into water bodies, whereas natural Shadu clay dissolves harmlessly back into nature.

The formal inauguration of this environmental drive took place during a high-profile public assembly at the prominent Biodiversity Park located within the Hiranandani Estate.

Senior municipal leaders and environmental policy makers attended the event to signal strong institutional backing for the eco-friendly transition.



## Editorial

### A Strategic Policy or a Temporary Band-Aid?

The entire world is currently grappling with a massive economic storm fueled by the heat of conflict in the Gulf, disrupted global supply chains, and the looming shadow of recession over developed nations. Yet, amidst this brewing turmoil, the Indian economy has demonstrated remarkable resilience; maintaining a robust GDP growth rate of 7.7%, it has solidified its standing as the world's fastest-growing major economy. While the country's economic position appears strong—bolstered by the RBI's prudent monetary policy, a historic 'balance of payments' masterstroke, and record-breaking stock market activity—opposition parties have raised serious questions regarding these government policies and the sluggishness of domestic investment.

Recent official data and strategic decisions clearly indicate that India's economy is maintaining its momentum with remarkable resilience, even within a highly volatile and challenging global environment characterized by geopolitical tensions, war-like conditions, and disrupted supply chains. According to the latest projections released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, India's real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate is estimated to reach 7.7% in the 2025-26 fiscal year, successfully retaining its position as the fastest-growing major economy globally. During this period, the country's nominal GDP growth rate is projected to stand at 8.9%. This momentum is not merely a matter of statistics; it is a direct reflection of robust domestic demand and the stellar performance of the industrial and service sectors. India's economic framework appears robust at a time when many developed nations across the globe are contending with economic recession. This robust economic standing has bolstered the ruling establishment's claims of development and further solidified India's stature on the global stage.

Taking stock of these economic developments, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has unanimously decided to keep the benchmark repo rate unchanged at 5.25 percent. While announcing this decision, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra offered significant reassurance to the nation, clarifying that despite the surge in crude oil prices and global financial uncertainty caused by the Iran-Israel conflict in West Asia, the Indian economy is far more resilient and structurally sound today than in the past, capable of withstanding any external shocks.

Under this decision, the Standing Deposit Facility rate remains at 5.0 percent, while the Marginal Standing Facility rate (and the Bank Rate) remain unchanged at 5.5 percent. The central bank has adopted a 'neutral' stance on monetary policy, deeming it necessary to remain cautious until there is greater clarity regarding the intensity of the conflict in the Gulf and its potential impact on domestic inflation. Although Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based inflation remained under control at 3.4 percent in March and 3.5 percent in April 2026, the central bank has flagged the likelihood of upward pressure on prices in the near future due to weather uncertainties and forecasts of a poor monsoon. To address these challenges, the RBI has projected a real GDP growth rate of 6.6 percent for the country for the year 2026-27 and has assured that the nation's banking and financial systems remain highly secure and well-capitalized.

This comprehensive policy move by the RBI is being welcomed by the corporate world and market experts alike. According to Anindya Banerjee, Head of Commodity and Currency Research at Kotak Securities, the central bank's initiative extends beyond mere interest rates; it is a broad 'Balance of Payments' masterstroke designed to boost India's foreign exchange reserves. To stabilize the currency and encourage foreign investment inflows, the RBI has opened a 'fully accessible route' for foreign investors in 15, 30, and 40-year government securities and has reinstated the nine-month window for exporters to repatriate their earnings to India. This is considered the most significant and wide-ranging administrative effort since 2013 to boost dollar inflows. Additionally, the central government has issued an ordinance recommending the complete removal of taxes on foreign investment in government bonds—a historic move expected to rapidly attract major global bond investors to the Indian market. With India holding massive foreign exchange reserves of \$682 billion as of the end of May, the RBI is fully equipped to curb the rupee's depreciation against the dollar and rein in market speculation. Experts believe that if global oil prices remain below \$100 per barrel, the rupee could strengthen in the near term, reaching the 94-94.5 level. However, opposition parties have sharply criticized the government's decision to grant these tax concessions to foreign investors, raising serious questions about the government's economic priorities. Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh has leveled serious allegations against the Modi government, stating that it is operating in a state of panic to stem the outflow of foreign capital; instead of undertaking structural reforms, the government is merely applying "Band-Aid" measures—such as stop-gap ordinances—to grab headlines.

According to him, the country's real economic problem is not the tax concessions offered to foreign investors, but the sluggish pace of private corporate investment within India. Even as major domestic companies post record profits, private sector investment has plummeted relative to GDP; those capable of investing in India are either moving capital abroad or deferring new domestic projects. The opposition argues that domestic industrialists are hesitant to invest due to stagnant real wages, rising economic inequality, and an atmosphere of fear created by the alleged misuse of central investigative agencies. Sustainable national development cannot be achieved by relying solely on foreign capital, as true growth hinges on domestic demand, rising citizen incomes, and the confidence of local entrepreneurs.

In the current volatile and uncertain international climate, the greatest challenge for any government is to preserve economic autonomy, arrest the rupee's depreciation, and shield the common people from the brunt of inflation. To overcome these persistent global challenges, the government must look beyond merely attracting foreign capital; by focusing long-term on boosting domestic private investment and enhancing the purchasing power of ordinary citizens, India can stride more confidently toward becoming a powerful and truly self-reliant economic superpower.

## Funds allocated under MNREGA, special survey window for PMAY-G to be opened

Union Minister for Agriculture & Farmers Welfare and Rural Development Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan met Assam Chief Minister Shri Himanta Biswa Sarma at Krishi Bhawan in New Delhi today to discuss subjects related to the State. In this high level meeting, the progress of various central schemes run by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Assam was reviewed and wide-ranging discussions were held on several important issues.

In the meeting, Union Minister Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that under the guidance of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, there will be no shortage of funds and resources for agriculture and rural development in Assam. He assured full support to the State in ensuring maximum benefits of Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Gramin (PMAY-G), MGNREGA and other Central schemes.

Speaking on the agenda of the Ministry of Rural Development, Secretary Shri Rohit Kansal informed that the technical bottlenecks in the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) and MNREGA systems have been completely resolved. Funds have been allocated under MNREGA as per the Assam government's demand. He also informed that the Vikas Bharat-Rozgar Evam Aajeevika Mission (Rural) will replace MNREGA across the country from July 1st.

The meeting lauded the Assam government's historic move to grant land ownership rights (Patta) to tea garden workers. The Union Minister announced that the central government will open a special survey window to digitally record the names of eligible beneficiaries so that these workers receive the benefits of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin.



On this occasion, Union Minister Shri Chouhan handed over the draft of Agriculture Action Plan, prepared on the basis of the specific climatic and soil characteristics of Assam, to Chief Minister Shri Sarma. Several important decisions related to agriculture and rural development were agreed upon during the meeting.

Rural Development Ministry officials informed that Assam has achieved a remarkable progress towards women empowerment by creating over 9 lakh 'Lakshpati Didis', exceeding the target. Work will be accelerated in collaboration with incubators at Assam Agricultural University (AAU) to further strengthen these women's enterprises.

To strengthen the agriculture sector, the Central Government

informed about the projects and funds approved in Assam under

and Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY). Shri Atish Chandra,



the Agricultural Mechanization Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture

apprised the Chief Minister of efforts being made to provide agricultural power weeders to women farmers. The expansion of the National Mission on Edible Oils - Oil Palm (NMEO-OP) was also discussed.

To promote safe farming in the state, 1,500 new bamboo polyhouses have been approved this year. To strengthen agricultural infrastructure, buildings for a Pesticide Testing Lab and an Edible Oil Testing Lab have been approved under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY). Partnerships are being established with APEDA and the National Organic Cooperative Limited to promote international marketing and export of Assam's organic products, providing extensive handholding support to farmers. Elaborate discussions on promotion of rich biodiversity of Assam were also held in the meeting. Dr. M.L. Jat, Secretary DARE and Director General, ICAR informed that the existing centres of Assam Agricultural University will be further strengthened. Under this, All India Coordinated Research Programme for Spices and Network Programme for Development of State Flower 'Foxtail Orchid' will be conducted in collaboration with Institute of Floriculture, Pune. Resolution of pending cases related to retirement benefits and pension of employees of Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) was also discussed. Shri Narendra Bhusan, Secretary, Department of Land Resources, informed that positive progress is being made towards digitization of land records in Assam. Chief Minister Shri Himanta Biswa Sarma expressed gratitude to Union Minister Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan for the support being provided by the Central Government for giving impetus to agriculture and rural development in the State.

## Convocation Ceremony of AIIMS Bathinda



Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Shri J.P. Nadda, today addressed the 2nd Convocation Ceremony of AIIMS Bathinda and congratulated the graduating students on embarking upon their professional journey. He lauded the institute's growing contribution towards strengthening tertiary healthcare, medical education and research.

Addressing the gathering, Shri J.P. Nadda, Shri Nadda congratulated the students on the successful completion of their academic journey and described the 2nd Convocation as a moment of pride and celebration for the students, their parents, faculty members and the entire AIIMS Bathinda fraternity. He commended the institute for its rapid growth and contribution to healthcare delivery in the region, noting that AIIMS Bathinda today caters to nearly 3,000 OPD patients and around 600 IPD patients daily while upholding the high standards and credibility associated with the AIIMS brand. The Union Health Minister also lauded AIIMS Bathinda's community outreach initiatives, including the organization of Ayushman camps twice every month across 59 nearby villages, where citizens are screened for non-communicable diseases such as diabe-

tes, hypertension and cancer. He noted that through telemedicine services, mobile medical units, rural awareness campaigns and health-care outreach programmes, the institute is making significant contributions to public health beyond hospital-based care.

Highlighting the transformative impact of healthcare reforms introduced under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, Shri Nadda stated that India's healthcare approach has evolved from a predominantly curative model to a comprehensive framework encompassing preventive, promotive, rehabilitative, palliative and geriatric care. He noted that over 1.82 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandirs are today serving as the first point of contact for health-care services across the country. Emphasizing the Government's focus on preventive healthcare, he informed that all individuals above 30 years of age are being encouraged to undergo regular screening through Panchayats, ASHA workers and frontline health personnel. Sharing the progress achieved under these initiatives, he stated that over 36 crore people have been screened for oral cancer, more than 17 crore women for breast cancer and over 9 crore women for cervical

cancer. In addition, more than 42 crore individuals have been screened each for diabetes and hypertension, while a nationwide tuberculosis screening campaign is also underway. Shri Nadda also underscored the importance of quality healthcare delivery and research, appreciating the NABL-accredited laboratories at AIIMS Bathinda. He urged the institute to emerge as a leading centre for medical research and innovation.

Underscoring the importance of health in nation-building, Shri Nadda stated that the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047 can only be realized through a healthy and productive population. He emphasized that while governments can provide infrastructure and modern facilities, healthcare ultimately depends on the dedication, competence and compassion of doctors and healthcare professionals. Describing doctors as the true strength of the healthcare system, he remarked that infrastructure may constitute the "hardware" of healthcare, but healthcare professionals are its "software". He further noted that Punjab remains a priority for the Government in healthcare development and highlighted the expansion of healthcare infrastructure in the state. The Union Health Minister highlighted

the unprecedented expansion of India's medical education ecosystem over the past decade. He noted that the number of AIIMS institutions has increased to 23, medical colleges have grown from 387 to over 820, undergraduate medical seats have increased from about 59,000 to more than 1.28 lakh, and postgraduate seats from around 31,000 to over 86,000. He further informed that the Government is committed to adding 75,000 more UG and PG medical seats over the next five years, with nearly 23,000 seats already established during the last two years.

Shri Nadda also highlighted India's significant achievements in public health, including being declared polio-free in 2014 and eliminating maternal and neonatal tetanus in 2015. He noted that trachoma is no longer a public health concern in the country and that

the core of patient care.

Speaking at the Occasion, Prof. (Dr.) Neerja Bhatla, President, AIIMS Bathinda, welcomed the Union Health Minister and expressed gratitude for his continued guidance and support to the institution. She highlighted that under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, the Government has undertaken unprecedented efforts to make healthcare more inclusive, accessible and affordable, with the expansion of the AIIMS network across the country emerging as a landmark step towards achieving quality healthcare for all.

Highlighting the achievements of AIIMS Bathinda, Prof. Bhatla noted that the institute has emerged as a catalyst for healthcare transformation in the region through its contributions to patient care, medical education, research and communi-

detection, accurate diagnosis and precision-based cancer care, benefiting patients across Punjab and neighbouring states.

Furthermore, strengthening specialized healthcare services at the institute, Shri Nadda also inaugurated a dedicated Burns Intensive Care Unit (Burns ICU), equipped with advanced infrastructure to provide comprehensive critical care and treatment for patients suffering from severe burn injuries. He also dedicated the Child Development and Early Intervention Centre (CDEIC) to the community. The first facility of its kind in the region, the CDEIC will play a crucial role in the early identification, diagnosis and management of developmental disorders and disabilities among children, thereby improving child health outcomes. Underscoring the importance of holistic well-being in the health-



substantial progress has been made towards the elimination of Kala-azar, leprosy and lymphatic filariasis.

Concluding his address, He urged the graduating students to uphold the values and legacy of AIIMS, and as ambassadors of India's premier medical institution, they must carry the responsibility of maintaining the highest standards of professional excellence. He encouraged them to embrace emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, precision medicine and telemedicine while ensuring that compassion, empathy and the human touch remain at

ty outreach. She emphasized that AIIMS Bathinda is committed to the holistic development of its students and strives to nurture healthcare professionals who combine clinical excellence with compassion, ethics and a spirit of service. During his visit, the Union Health Minister inaugurated a state-of-the-art Positron Emission Tomography-Computed Tomography (PET-CT) facility and a second High Energy Linear Accelerator (HELA) unit, significantly enhancing AIIMS Bathinda's capabilities in cancer diagnosis and treatment. These advanced facilities will enable early

care ecosystem, the Union Health Minister also inaugurated the Gymnasium and Wellness Centre at AIIMS Bathinda, aimed at promoting physical fitness, mental wellness and a healthy lifestyle among students, faculty and staff. Shri Vijay Nehra, Additional Secretary, MoHFW; Prof. (Dr.) Ratan Gupta, Executive Director AIIMS Bathinda; Prof. Rajeev Ahuja (Director, IIT Ropar); Dr. Yogender Malik, and Prof. Kamlesh Upadhyay, graduating students, faculty members, healthcare professionals, and Parents were also present at the event.

## Proposal to create safer school zones through zebra crossings, school-zone signage, wall murals, and awareness campaigns

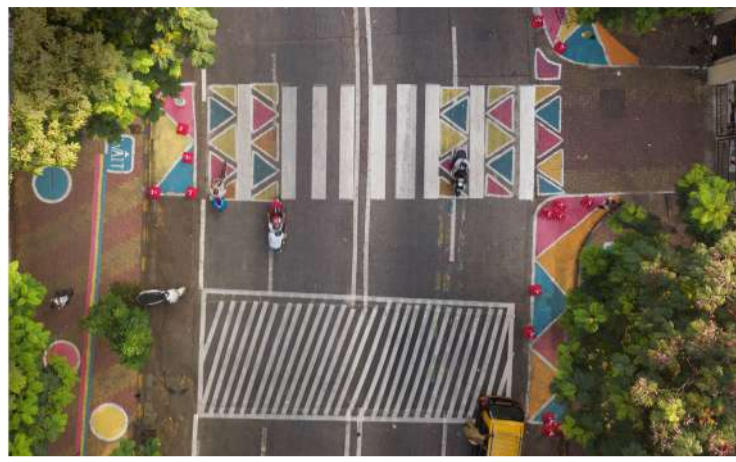
**Pune:** To make intersections near schools in the Aundh-Bopodi area safer, more organized, and traffic-friendly, Pune corporator Sunny Vinayak Nimhan has submitted a proposal to the PMC Road Department.

He has requested traffic-oriented development of various intersections near schools along Ganeshkhind Road in Ward No. 8D.

In his representation to the Chief Engineer of the Road Department, Nimhan stated that reputed educational institutions such as Kendriya Vidyalaya, DAV Public School, and Spicer School are located along busy main roads. During school opening and closing hours, heavy congestion is caused by the large number of students and parents' vehicles, putting considerable pressure on traffic. As a result, students often face hazardous situations while crossing the road.

Prioritizing student safety, the proposal calls for the installation of school-zone signboards, zebra

crossings, speed breakers, directional signs, and clear road-safety guidance systems at the concerned



intersections. In addition, it suggests creating attractive and educational wall paintings (murals) around school premises to raise awareness about traffic rules and capture students' attention.

The proposal also recommends installing informational signboards and banners to promote road-safety

undertaken by qualified professionals or institutions with higher education in Fine Arts or Commercial Art.

Speaking on the issue, corporator Nimhan said student safety is an extremely sensitive and important issue. Thousands of students in the Aundh-Bopodi area use these roads every day. Therefore, planned modernization of these intersections in a safe and traffic-friendly manner is the need of the hour. Pune Municipal Corporation should treat this matter seriously and take prompt positive action.

Meanwhile, PMC Chief Engineer Rajesh Bankar has responded positively to the proposal and assured that the matter will be properly followed up and necessary action taken.

Local residents have expressed the view that this initiative will play a significant role in improving student safety, ensuring better traffic management, and making school surroundings more secure.

It specifically emphasizes that, to ensure high-quality murals and maximize their positive impact on children, the artwork should be un-

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## Intense speculation over Maharashtra RS seat as former MP Navneet Rana enters fray

**Mumbai:** There is an intense power struggle underway within the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) led by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar over the nomination of the party's candidate for the upcoming Rajya Sabha by-election in Maharashtra. The contest has assumed significance as the seat became vacant following the resignation of Sunetra Pawar, who stepped down after being elevated to the post of Deputy Chief Minister earlier this year.

Sunetra Pawar's resignation from the Rajya Sabha was necessitated by the political reshuffle that followed the tragic death of Ajit Pawar in a plane crash, an event that dramatically altered the state's political landscape.

Her induction into the

Maharashtra Cabinet as Deputy Chief Minister created a vacancy in the Upper House, triggering the need for a by-election.

The Election Commission has already announced the schedule for the bypoll, with voting and counting set to take place on June 18. Given the numerical strength enjoyed by the ruling Mahayuti alliance in the state legislature, the election is largely expected to be a formality.

However, the real battle is taking place within the NCP itself, where multiple aspirants are lobbying for the coveted parliamentary berth. Initially, senior NCP leader and cabinet minister Chhagan Bhujbal was widely regarded as the front-runner for the nomination. Bhujbal, a veteran politician

with decades of administrative and parliamentary experience, was considered a natural choice for the Rajya Sabha seat. His stature within the party and his long association with the NCP made him one of the strongest contenders.

However, according to party insiders, the leadership is currently hesitant to send Bhujbal to New Delhi. Sources indicate that the party believes his presence remains crucial in Maharashtra, particularly at a time when the organisation is seeking to consolidate its position within the ruling coalition and strengthen its influence ahead of future electoral contests.

The reluctance to move Bhujbal out of state politics has opened the door for several other aspirants.

## Couple attacked with axe on suspicion of witchcraft; Woman dies, husband critical

**Palghar:** A shocking case of violence allegedly triggered by superstition and suspicion of witchcraft has emerged from the Saravali area of Dahanu taluka in Maharashtra's Palghar district, resulting in the death of a woman and leaving her husband critically injured. The incident has sent shockwaves through the local community and once again highlighted the dangers posed by deeply rooted superstitious beliefs.

According to police and local reports, the attack took place on Wednesday afternoon in Patilpada, a village located in the Saravali region of Dahanu. The victims, identified as Suresh Harji Bharkud and his wife Gulab Suresh Bharkud, were allegedly targeted by their neighbor, who suspected them of practicing 'Karni' or black magic against his family.

The accused has been identified as Vilas Arjun Namkoda, a resident of the same locality. Investigators believe that the attack was motivated by a personal belief that the Bharkud couple had used witchcraft to harm his family, particu-

larly his wife, who had been suffering from a prolonged illness.

According to preliminary information, Namkoda's wife had been battling health issues for an extended period and passed away a few days before the attack. Her death reportedly had a profound impact on the accused, who allegedly became convinced that supernatural forces were responsible for her illness and eventual demise.

Police sources said that following his wife's death, Namkoda increasingly suspected his neighbors, Suresh and Gulab Bharkud, of practicing witchcraft against him and his family. This suspicion allegedly grew into a belief that the couple was responsible for his wife's suffering and death.

Driven by these suspicions, the accused allegedly launched a violent attack on the couple on Wednesday between approximately 2:30 pm and 3:00 pm. Armed with an axe, he reportedly confronted the victims and assaulted them in a brutal manner, inflicting serious injuries on both husband and wife.

The sudden attack left the couple

grievously wounded. Residents of the area were alerted by the commotion and quickly rushed to the scene. Family members and villagers immediately intervened and arranged for the injured couple to be transported to the Dahanu Sub-District Hospital for emergency medical treatment. Medical officials at the hospital found the injuries sustained by both victims to be severe. Given the critical nature of their condition, doctors decided to refer them to a higher medical facility in neighboring Gujarat for advanced treatment and specialized care. Despite efforts by doctors to save her life, Gulab Suresh Bharkud succumbed to her injuries while undergoing treatment. Her death transformed the case from one of attempted murder into a homicide investigation, adding to the seriousness of the crime. Meanwhile, her husband, Suresh Bharkud, continues to battle for his life. Hospital sources indicated that he remains under intensive medical care and his condition is critical. Doctors are closely monitoring his health and providing all necessary treatment.

## Mah BJP Criticizes Sanjay Raut

**Pune:** People are retained through love, not money, said BJP Maharashtra Chief Spokesperson Navnath Ban while strongly criticizing Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Friday. Addressing a press conference at the BJP state office, Ban said that neither Raut nor his party leadership values humanity, loyalty, or relationships. According to him, this is why they have failed to retain party workers, leaders, and candidates. He argued that while money cannot achieve everything, genuine affection and respect can win people's trust and even "win the world." Ban alleged that practices such as keeping party offices inaccessible, refusing to meet workers, and turning away legislators are associated with Raut's camp, not with the BJP-led Mah-



ayuti alliance. He claimed that the BJP wins people's support through goodwill rather than financial influence. Responding to Raut's allegations that money and political manipulation were used in the Legislative Council elections, Ban said that the opposition lacks both appreciation for people and respect for loyalty. He argued that their inability to retain workers and candidates stems from their own treatment of party

members. Ban further stated that Legislative Council elections are not decided by grassroots workers but by elected representatives such as municipal councilors, district council members, and panchayat committee chairpersons. He pointed to local body election statistics, claiming that the BJP and the Mahayuti alliance hold the largest number of such representatives. Therefore, he said, a Mahayuti victory was

virtually certain. According to Ban, the opposition alliance anticipated defeat and consequently withdrew candidates in several constituencies. He insisted that the BJP and Mahayuti had no need to engage in horse-trading because they already possessed sufficient numerical strength and were confident of winning all 17 Legislative Council seats. He also mocked the opposition alliance, saying that repeated withdrawals and requests for stays have become its trademark. Referring to candidate withdrawals by Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT), and the Sharad Pawar-led NCP faction in various places, he joked that the MVA should now be renamed the "Maghar Vikas Aghadi" (Withdrawal of Development Alliance) instead of the Mahavikas Aghadi.

## FDA seizes Enerzal, nutraceuticals worth Rs 58 lakh in Nagpur raid

**Nagpur:** The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) seized ready-to-serve fruit drink Enerzal, nutraceuticals and other suspected food products worth over Rs 58 lakh during raids conducted in Maharashtra's Nagpur district on the directions of FDA Commissioner Tukaram Mundhe, officials said on Thursday.

According to the FDA, a total stock worth Rs 58,42,396 was seized during inspections carried out by teams of assistant commissioners and food safety officers following inputs received by the department's intelligence wing.

The seized material included 36,366 litres of ready-to-serve fruit drink Enerzal worth Rs 55,67,779, nutraceutical products comprising 536 strips and 22 plastic jars valued at Rs 1,42,890, and 161 kg of prohibited food items worth Rs 1,31,727.

Officials said samples of suspected food products were collected for laboratory analysis.

Preliminary inspection found alleged labelling irregularities in Enerzal products, leading authorities to classify them as "misbranded".

In all, 1,79,627 bottles and packets of various flavours of Enerzal, nutraceuticals and prohibited food products were seized during the operation.

The FDA said further action under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, would be initiated after laboratory reports are received.

Authorities also appealed to citizens to report suspected substandard food products to the FDA office or its toll-free helpline, adding that similar drives would continue in Nagpur district to ensure food safety.

## Daylight robbery in Nagpur: Forex manager attacked, Rs 7.16 lakh looted

**Nagpur:** A daring daylight robbery near Ambazari Lake in Nagpur has raised serious concerns about the safety of cash transactions arranged through online contacts, after three unidentified assailants allegedly attacked a forex exchange manager and fled with cash worth Rs 7.16 lakh.

The incident occurred on Thursday and is currently under investigation by the Nagpur police.

According to police officials, the victim has been identified as Khillesh Sahu,

a manager employed with a foreign exchange firm based in Raipur, Chhattisgarh. Sahu had travelled to Nagpur after receiving what appeared to be a legitimate request for a foreign currency exchange transaction involving US dollars.

Preliminary investigations revealed that Sahu received a WhatsApp call from an unidentified individual who expressed interest in exchanging US currency for Indian rupees. The caller allegedly presented the deal as a genuine business trans-

action, convincing Sahu to travel to Nagpur with a substantial amount of cash.

Believing the exchange to be authentic, Sahu reportedly carried Rs 7.16 lakh in cash and arrived in the city to complete the transaction. Police said the victim remained in contact with the caller, who continued to coordinate the meeting through phone calls and messages.

Investigators said the suspects appeared to have carefully planned the crime. Rather than fixing a single meeting point, the caller al-

legedly kept changing the location multiple times, forcing Sahu to move from one area to another within the city.

Eventually, the victim was directed to a relatively isolated spot near Ambazari Lake, one of Nagpur's prominent landmarks. Police suspect the secluded location was deliberately chosen to minimize the possibility of public intervention and facilitate the robbery.

As soon as Sahu reached the designated location, he was allegedly confronted

by three unidentified men. Before he could react, the attackers reportedly threw chilli powder into his eyes, temporarily blinding and disorienting him.

The sudden assault left the victim unable to defend himself effectively. Taking advantage of his condition, the assailants allegedly snatched the bag containing Rs 7.16 lakh in cash. They also took away his mobile phone, likely to delay any immediate attempt to contact authorities or seek assistance.

# Setback For MVA As Candidates Withdraw Before Legislative Council Election

**Mumbai:** The opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) suffered a major political setback on Thursday after several of its candidates withdrew from the Maharashtra Legislative Council (Vidhan Parishad) elections, effectively clearing the path for the ruling BJP-led Mahayuti alliance to secure victory virtually unopposed in multiple constituencies. The developments have triggered a fresh political controversy, with opposition leaders alleging large-scale horse-trading and misuse of financial power by the ruling alliance. Thursday marked the final day for the withdrawal of nominations for the Legislative Council elections, and candidates had until 3 pm to pull out of the contest. By the end of the deadline, a series of unexpected withdrawals from the opposition camp dramatically altered the electoral landscape, reducing the prospects of direct contests in several key constituencies.

One of the most significant developments came from the Raigad-Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg Legislative Council constituency, where the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena had fielded Bal Mane as its candidate. Mane, however, withdrew his candidature on Thursday, leading the party to immediately expel him on charges of anti-party activities. Bal Mane's political journey has been marked by shifting allegiances. Originally associated with the BJP, he left the party before the 2024 Maharashtra Assembly elections and joined the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena faction. He subsequently contested the Assembly election from Ratnagiri against Cabinet Minister Uday Samant as the Maha Vikas Aghadi candidate but suffered defeat. Despite that setback, the Shiv Sena leadership had once again entrusted him with a significant electoral responsibility through the Legislative Council election.

His sudden withdrawal has come as a major embarrassment for the opposition alliance, particularly in the politically sensitive Konkan region. Political observers believe the move has substantially altered the balance

of power in the constituency and strengthened the ruling alliance's prospects.

Another shock came from the Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar-Jalna Legislative Council constituency. The Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena had nominated Devyani Dongaonkar as its candidate. However, she unexpectedly withdrew her candidature before the deadline, prompting swift disciplinary action from the party. Both Devyani Dongaonkar and her husband Krishna Dongaonkar were expelled from the Shiv Sena for what the party described as anti-party conduct.

The opposition's troubles deepened further in Nashik, where Shiv Sena leader Anil Kadam, who was expected to be the party's candidate for the Legislative Council election, did not even complete the nomination process and effectively stayed out of the contest. His decision further weakened the opposition's challenge in the region.

Similarly, in Yavatmal, Congress candidate Sahebrao Kamble, who had been

officially nominated by the party, withdrew from the election race. His exit added to the growing list of opposition candidates who abandoned the contest, significantly reducing the scope for electoral competition against the Mahayuti alliance.



The series of withdrawals triggered sharp reactions from senior opposition leaders. Shiv Sena (UBT) Rajya Sabha MP and chief spokesperson Sanjay Raut launched a scathing attack on the BJP, alleging that the ruling party had spent enormous sums of money to engineer the withdrawal of opposition candidates. "The ruling party has spent around Rs 150 crore to ensure that

our candidates withdraw from the elections. One of our candidates was offered Rs 25 crore to step aside," Raut alleged while speaking to reporters. He claimed that the BJP was determined to ensure uncontested victories and had employed ques-

tionable methods to achieve that objective. According to Raut, multiple attempts were made to financially influence opposition candidates, and in some cases those efforts allegedly succeeded. He claimed that information available to him suggested that extensive efforts were undertaken to persuade candidates to withdraw rather than face elections. Making even more seri-

ous allegations, Raut claimed that crucial negotiations and financial transactions took place at a luxury hotel in Mumbai's Bandra-Kurla Complex. Referring to the withdrawal of candidates from Konkan and Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, he alleged that these decisions were linked to deals struck behind closed doors. According to him, individuals involved in arranging such agreements had informed the opposition leadership about the developments. Raut described the alleged practice of purchasing candidates as a dangerous trend that threatens the foundations of democracy. He said that the Legislative Council election had increasingly become an arena for money power rather than political ideology or organisational strength. He claimed that the contest was no longer about party workers or democratic participation but about those capable of influencing outcomes through financial resources. The Shiv Sena (UBT) leader further remarked that he was not surprised by the withdrawals because he had

anticipated such developments from the beginning. He said he had repeatedly warned within his party that the election was vulnerable to horse-trading and monetary influence. According to him, he feared that participation in such a process could ultimately damage the credibility of the Maha Vikas Aghadi, particularly his own party. Echoing similar concerns, Maharashtra Congress president Harshwardhan Sapkal accused the BJP of undermining democratic norms despite already enjoying substantial political power. He alleged that offers worth crores of rupees had been made to opposition candidates to ensure uncontested victories for the ruling alliance. According to Sapkal, the BJP had set aside all political morality in its pursuit of absolute dominance. Sapkal argued that the BJP preferred a "nomination system" over genuine elections and accused the ruling party of using its influence to eliminate electoral competition. He pointed out that Legislative Council elections are decided by elect-

ed representatives of local self-government bodies and involve a limited electorate, yet even in such elections, he alleged, money power had been openly deployed to influence outcomes. The Congress leader further claimed that there had been large-scale distribution of money by the ruling alliance and alleged an "unholy alliance" between the BJP and the Election Commission. He said such developments presented a disturbing picture for Indian democracy and raised serious concerns about the fairness of the electoral process. With the withdrawal of several opposition candidates, the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance now appears set to secure a comfortable victory in the Legislative Council elections. However, the controversy surrounding the withdrawals has intensified the political battle between the ruling coalition and the opposition, with allegations of horse-trading, financial inducements and democratic erosion likely to dominate Maharashtra's political discourse in the days ahead.

## Pahlaj Nihalani will be remembered as the producer who shaped commercial Hindi cinema to new heights

**Mumbai:** Veteran film producer, distributor and former chairperson of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) Pahlaj Nihalani will be remembered as a key figure in shaping and popularising mainstream Hindi commercial cinema from the 1980s through the 1990s.

He played an important role in giving a new identity to commercial films and taking them to a wider audience.

Born in Karachi (now Pakistan) on January 10, 1950, Nihalani's family migrated to India after the Partition of India and settled in Mumbai. It was there that he began his journey in the film industry and gradually established himself as a successful producer in the Hindi film industry.

His first film as a producer was "Hathkadi" (1982). He subsequently produced successful films such as "Andhi Toofan" (1985), "Ilzaam" (1986), "Aag Hi Aag" (1987), "Gunaahon Ka Faisla" (1987), "Paap Ki Dunya" (1988), "Mitti Aur Sona" (1989), "Shola Aur Shabnam" (1992), and



"Aankhen" (1993). His films, a balanced blend of action, romance, drama, and family entertainment, established him among the leading producers of commercial cinema.

His film "Ilzaam" was a significant milestone in Govinda's early career, while "Shola Aur Shabnam" and

"Aankhen" played a key role in elevating him to superstar status. Most of his films focused on audience entertainment and were box office successes. In addition to film production, Nihalani served as president of the Association of Picture and TV Pro-

gram Producers for nearly 29 years.

He also tried his hand at direction in 2012 with the film "Avatar."

He was appointed Chairman of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) in 2015. During his tenure, he took a tough stance on film certification and was at the center of several controversies. In August 2017, he was replaced by Praseon Joshi as Chairman of the CBFC.

Nihalani also made headlines for his popular video 'Har Har Modi, Ghar Ghar Modi' and later the video 'Mera Desh Mahaan', made in support of Prime Minister Narendra Modi before the 2014 general elections.

Nihalani, a man of clear views and a keen understanding of commercial cinema, is remembered by his supporters as a successful producer and skilled organizer, while critics will remember him for his strict censorship policies. With his passing, the film industry has lost a figure who made a significant contribution to the development of Hindi commercial cinema.

## 'Gram Chikitsalay' to return with season 2

**Mumbai:** The makers of the popular comedy-drama series Gram Chikitsalay have officially announced its second season, with the new installment set to premiere on June 23. The series will be available to viewers across India and in more than 240 countries and territories worldwide, expanding the reach of a show that has earned appreciation for its authentic portrayal of rural life and healthcare challenges. Directed by Lalitam Tiwari and produced by The Viral Fever, the series continues to blend humor, emotion and social commentary. The story has been written by Vaibhav Suman and Shreya Srivastava, who have crafted a narrative that explores the realities of rural healthcare through relatable characters and situations. Set in the fictional village of Bhatkandi,

the show revolves around the functioning of a primary



health centre and the various social, administrative and cultural challenges that accompany efforts to improve healthcare services in rural India. Through a mix of light-hearted moments and emotional storytelling, the series highlights issues that resonate with audiences while maintaining an engaging narrative. The second season will continue from the

point where the first season concluded. The story once again follows Amol Parasher as Dr. Prabhat, an idealistic doctor determined to transform the village's struggling healthcare system. His efforts to improve the condition of the primary health centre remain at the heart of the narrative. As Dr. Prabhat pursues his mission, he will encounter fresh obstacles and complex situations that test both his patience and commitment. Winning the confidence of villagers, navigating local dynamics and dealing with institutional challenges will form a significant part of the upcoming season's storyline. The makers have indicated that the new season will delve deeper into the relationships between the characters while continuing to explore healthcare-related issues in a manner.

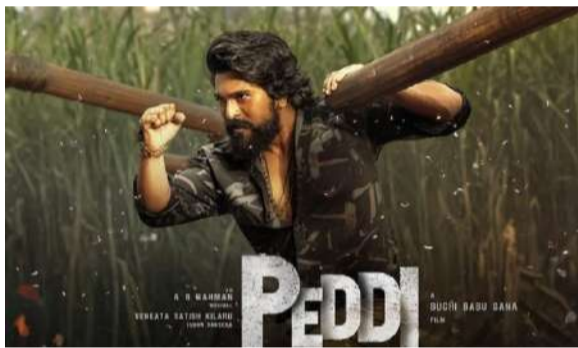
## Ram Charan's 'Peddi' creates stir; enthralled audiences

**Mumbai:** Telugu superstar Ram Charan has once again emerged as the centre of attention with his performance in Peddi, the latest film directed by Buchi Babu Sana. The actor's portrayal in the film is drawing praise from audiences for its emotional intensity, powerful screen presence and convincing characterisation. Set against the backdrop of a rural community, "Peddi" tells the story of a small village fighting to preserve its identity and protect its railway station, which serves as a vital link to the outside world. The narrative combines themes of community, resilience, sacrifice and social change, creating an emotionally charged storyline.

One of the most talked-about aspects of the film is Ram Charan's introduction sequence. Viewers have praised the actor's commanding screen presence, noting that his entry establishes the tone of the character and immediately captures the audience's attention.

Throughout the film, Charan reportedly delivers a performance that balances action, emotion and drama with remarkable ease. His ability to transition between intense dramatic moments and high-energy sequences has been highlighted as one of the film's major strengths.

The actor is being particularly appreciated for the emotional depth he brings to the role. Whether portraying anger, affection, determination or personal sacrifice, Charan succeeds in conveying the character's internal struggles in a believable and



engaging manner. Critics and fans alike have noted a visible transformation in his body language and overall screen energy. His physical mannerisms, expressions and dialogue delivery have been carefully adapted to suit the character, helping create a more authentic portrayal.

The performance also reflects Charan's continued evolution as an actor. Rather than relying solely on his star image, he appears to have focused on developing the emotional and psychological dimensions of the character, adding greater realism to the narrative. Action sequences in the film have also attracted attention, with audiences appreciating the intensity and conviction he brings to key moments. His performance reportedly ensures that the action serves the story rather than overshadowing it. Beyond the dramatic aspects of the film, Ram Charan's dance performances have become a major talking point. His energetic appearances in the songs Rai Rai Ra Ra and Chikiri Chikiri

have been widely appreciated by fans. Many viewers have compared the impact of these dance numbers to the excitement generated by Naatu Naatu, which became a global sensation. While the styles may differ, audiences have welcomed

Charan's return to energetic and visually engaging dance performances. The film's emotional core is strengthened by its focus on a community struggling to protect an important part of its identity. The railway station serves as both a practical necessity and a symbolic representation of the village's hopes and aspirations. Director Buchi Babu Sana has reportedly combined emotional storytelling with large-scale cinematic presentation, creating a film that appeals to both mass audiences and viewers seeking a meaningful narrative. The village setting adds authenticity.

### Chiranjeevi showers praise on Ram Charan, team 'Peddi' following blockbuster success

**Mumbai:** Megastar Chiranjeevi has heaped praise on Ram Charan and the entire team of the film Peddi following the movie's massive success and overwhelming audience response.

The film, directed by Buchi Babu Sana, has been receiving appreciation from critics and audiences alike, particularly for Ram Charan's performance. Congratulating the film unit, Chiranjeevi said the hard work and dedication put in over the last two years had finally paid off.

In a message posted on X, Chiranjeevi said that although he was currently shooting in Pollachi, his heart and thoughts remained with Peddi. He stated that he had personally witnessed Ram Charan's commitment, dedication and sincerity towards the role over the past two years.

"The tireless effort, unwavering determination, and sincerity with which he immersed himself completely into the character of 'Peddi' are clearly visible in every scene. This grand success is the rightful reward for that hard work," Chiranjeevi remarked.

The veteran actor also praised director Buchi Babu Sana for crafting and presenting the story effectively on screen. He extended congratulations to Kamada actor Shivarajkumar and actor Jagapathi Babu for their performances in the film.

Chiranjeevi further appreciated Oscar-winning music composer A. R. Rahman for the songs and background score, cinematographer R. Rathnavelu for the visuals, art director Avinash Kolla and editor Naveen Nooli for their technical contributions.

## Madhuri Dixit wins praise for her standout performance in 'Maa Behen'

**Mumbai:** Veteran actress Madhuri Dixit is once again earning widespread appreciation for her acting skills, this time for her performance in Maa Behen. Known for her versatility and enduring popularity, the actress has surprised audiences with a role that moves away from her glamorous screen persona and presents her in a refreshingly different light. Over the decades, Madhuri Dixit has built a remarkable career with performances that have showcased her talent across genres ranging from romance and drama to comedy and family entertainers. In "Maa Behen," however, she takes on a character that is grounded, realistic and deeply relatable, offering audiences an opportunity to see a new dimension of her craft.

The film presents Dixit in the role of a middle-class woman navigating the challenges and emotions of everyday life. Unlike many of her previous characters, which often carried an aura of glamour and elegance, this role is rooted in ordinary experiences and human relationships.

What makes her performance stand out is the sincerity with which she approaches the character. There is no attempt to dramatise emotions unnecessarily. Instead, she relies on subtle expressions, natural dialogue delivery and nuanced body language to bring authenticity to the role.

Critics and viewers alike have noted that the actress appears completely immersed in the character. From moments of humour to scenes requiring emotional depth, Dixit delivers each sequence with remarkable ease, making the character believable and engaging.

One of the most striking aspects of her performance is her ability to balance multiple emotional shades. The character is lively and spirited on one hand, while also carrying emotional

complexities that gradually unfold as the story progresses. Dixit handles these transitions effortlessly.

For an actress often remembered as Bollywood's iconic "Dhak-Dhak Girl," taking on such a role represents a significant departure from her established image. It reflects her willingness to experiment and embrace characters that challenge audience expectations.

Industry observers have described the choice as a bold and confident move. At a stage in her career when many actors prefer familiar territory, Dixit has demonstrated a readiness to explore unconventional roles and continue evolving as a performer.

Her portrayal of a simple middle-class woman has particularly resonated with audiences because it feels genuine and relatable. The character's concerns, aspirations and daily struggles mirror the realities faced by countless families across the country.

Another highlight of her performance is her command over the character's linguistic and cultural nuances. Her dialogue delivery, infused with a North Indian accent, adds credibility to the role and helps create a stronger connection with the audience.

Dixit's facial expressions remain one of her greatest strengths, and "Maa Behen" provides ample opportunities for her to showcase them. Whether expressing frustration, amusement, affection or determination, she conveys emotions with remarkable precision.

The film also benefits from her impeccable comic timing. Several lighter moments are elevated by her natural sense of humour and effortless delivery. Even simple interactions become memorable because of the confidence and

charm she brings to the screen.

At the same time, the actress ensures that the character never becomes one-dimensional. Beneath the humour and sarcasm lies a strong emotional core, and Dixit carefully reveals these layers throughout the narrative, giving the audience a deeper understanding of the character. Many viewers have pointed out that her performance serves as a reminder of why she remains one of Indian cinema's most respected actresses. Her ability to command attention without relying on elaborate costumes, grand sets or dramatic dialogues speaks volumes about her acting prowess. The film further reinforces the idea that talent transcends age.



## Quick TV unveils June slate of original micro-dramas featuring TV stars

**Mumbai:** Quick TV, the micro-drama platform operated by ShareChat and Moj, on Thursday unveiled an ambitious slate of original micro-drama series that will premiere throughout June, reinforcing its commitment to India's rapidly growing short-form entertainment market. The new line-up spans multiple genres, including revenge thrillers, family dramas, action-packed narratives, romantic suspense stories and fantasy adventures, catering to a wide spectrum of viewers who increasingly consume content on mobile devices. The platform's latest programming strategy reflects the growing popularity of micro-dramas among Indian audiences, particularly younger viewers seeking engaging stories in compact formats. With attention spans shifting toward shorter content experiences, Quick TV is aiming to establish itself as a major player in the mobile-first entertainment ecosystem through a diverse range of original productions. Featuring a strong ensemble of television and digital entertainment actors, the June slate includes notable names such as Rajneesh

Duggal, Ujjwal Chopra, Piyush Sahdev, Zaan Khan and Gautam Vig. The inclusion of established actors is expected to enhance the appeal of the platform's offerings while attracting audiences familiar with their previous work across television, films and digital platforms. One of the most anticipated releases in the new line-up is "Bhula Dia Tujhe", a revenge thriller headlined by Rajneesh Duggal. The series centres on Aryan, a man whose life has been shattered by years of captivity and betrayal. After enduring immense suffering, Aryan embarks on a relentless quest for justice and revenge, setting the stage for an emotionally charged narrative filled with suspense, confrontations and dramatic revelations. Another major release is "Tring Tring", featuring Ujjwal Chopra in the lead role of Tejaswi. The story introduces an intriguing blend of mystery and speculative fiction as Tejaswi's ordinary life takes a dramatic turn when he receives a phone call from an unexpected source—his own son from the future. Set against the backdrop of India's booming stock market environment, the series promises a gripping

exploration of fate, choices and the consequences of decisions made across time.

Adding to the platform's varied content portfolio is "Zinda Hoon Main", starring Rohit Chaudhary. The drama revolves around a man who has been officially declared dead, only to return years later in a determined effort to reclaim his identity and expose those responsible for the injustice he suffered. The series is expected to combine emotional storytelling with elements of mystery and suspense, making it one of the standout titles of the month. The action-drama "Baaghi", featuring Ankit Raaj, explores themes of redemption, family bonds and personal transformation. The story follows a former don who emerges from prison hoping to rebuild his fractured relationships and lead a peaceful life. However, circumstances force him back into conflict when his loved ones become targets, compelling him to confront enemies from his past while protecting those he cares about. Quick TV is also venturing deeper into the romantic thriller genre with "Detective Aur Haseena", starring Zaan Khan and Kajal Chauhan.

## 'Alpha' is a super cool action film and a thoroughly entertaining masala entertainer: Bobby Deol

**Mumbai:** Bollywood actor Bobby Deol has described his upcoming film Alpha as a stylish, high-energy entertainer designed to provide audiences with a complete theatrical experience. According to the actor, the film combines action, excitement and mass appeal, making it a full-fledged masala entertainer that aims to keep viewers engaged throughout its runtime.

The film features Alia Bhatt and Sharvari Wagh in the lead roles, while Bobby Deol plays a significant character in the story. The project has already generated considerable anticipation among moviegoers due to its star-studded cast and its association with one of Bollywood's most successful production houses.

Speaking about the film, Deol said one of the aspects he appreciated most was the clarity with which the project was conceived. According to him, the makers were fully aware of the kind of cinematic experience they wanted to deliver and remained committed to that vision throughout the production process.

The actor noted that



"Alpha" is designed to be an engaging theatrical spectacle that consistently entertains audiences. He explained that the film's narrative and presentation are crafted in a way that maintains excitement and momentum from beginning to end.

Reflecting on his experience during the shoot, Bobby said he looked forward to reporting to the set every day because there was always something interesting happening. The dynamic nature of the production and the scale of the project contributed to an enjoyable and stimulating working environment. He added that the atmosphere on set played a

major role in making the experience memorable. According to Deol, there was a strong sense of camaraderie among the cast and crew, creating a positive environment that encouraged collaboration and creativity.

The actor also reserved special praise for director Shiv Rawail. He described the filmmaker as someone with a clear artistic vision and a deep understanding of the world he wanted to bring to the screen.

Deol said that working with a director who possesses such clarity can be highly inspiring for actors. When filmmakers have a strong sense of direction, he noted, performers are better able to

understand their characters and contribute meaningfully to the storytelling process.

According to the actor, Shiv Rawail has created a film that feels fresh and distinct. He suggested that audiences can expect something different from conventional commercial entertainers while still enjoying the excitement and spectacle associated with mainstream cinema.

Bobby also praised the dedication shown by Alia Bhatt and Sharvari Wagh during the making of the film. He said both actresses invested tremendous effort and energy into their performances, helping elevate the overall quality of the project. He noted that their commitment to their roles was evident throughout the production and contributed significantly to the film's impact. Their enthusiasm and professionalism, he said, helped create an engaging and collaborative environment on set. The film has attracted attention not only because of its cast but also because it is backed by one of the industry's most prominent banners. Produced by

Yash Raj Films, "Alpha" is expected to be mounted on a grand scale and appeal to audiences across different demographics.

Industry observers believe the project could become one of the notable releases of the year, particularly given the popularity of its lead actors and the growing anticipation surrounding its storyline and action sequences.

Expressing his hopes for the film's reception, Bobby Deol said he wants audiences to enjoy the movie on the big screen and connect with the entertainment experience the makers have worked hard to create. He expressed confidence that viewers would appreciate the film's energy, scale and storytelling.

Scheduled for a worldwide theatrical release on July 3, 2026, "Alpha" promises a blend of action, drama and entertainment. With Shiv Rawail at the helm, Alia Bhatt and Sharvari Wagh leading the cast, and Bobby Deol playing a pivotal role, the film is positioning itself as one of the major Bollywood releases of the year.

## Gill era begins as India face Afghanistan in transition Test

**Mullanpur:** A new era in Indian Test cricket begins on Saturday as a Shubman Gill-led side steps into a transition phase, taking on Afghanistan in a one-off Test at the Maharaja Yadavindra Singh International Cricket Stadium in Mullanpur.

The match, which falls outside the ICC World Test Championship cycle, marks India's return to red-ball cricket after a break since November last year and comes at a time when the team is undergoing a generational shift with senior players Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma rested.

For Gill, the series represents an early test of leadership as he looks to consolidate his position as India's long-term Test captain while guiding a relatively young and reshaped squad. India have used the fixture to widen their bench strength, offering opportunities to several emerging players alongside established names.

India's batting line-up is expected to be anchored by KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal at the top, followed by Sai Sudharsan, Gill, and Rishabh Pant in the middle order. The lower order features all-round options in Washington Sundar and Nitish Kumar Reddy, giving the side considerable depth even in the absence of senior stalwarts.

Gill comes into the contest in strong form, having amassed 983 runs in nine Tests in 2025 at an average of 70.21. His prolific run included a historic 269 at Edgbaston, underlining his growing stature in the longest format.

Afghanistan, led by Hashmatullah Shahidi, arrive with limited experience in Test cricket but with a core



group that has shown flashes of resilience. Rahmat Shah remains their most reliable batter in the format, while Rahmanullah Gurbaz brings an aggressive edge at the top of the order.

However, Afghanistan's challenge is compounded by the absence of key spinners Rashid Khan and Mujeeb Ur Rahman from the Test setup, placing added responsibility on Qais Ahmad to lead the attack. Supporting bowlers Bilal Sami, Saleem Safi, Sharafuddin Ashraf and Nangyal Kharotai will need to work collectively to contain a strong Indian batting line-up. India's bowling attack, meanwhile, is expected to be

led by Mohammed Siraj and Prasidh Krishna in the pace department, while Kuldeep Yadav will be the key spin weapon on a surface likely to assist turn as the match progresses. Washington Sundar adds further spin depth and batting balance to the XI.

The Mullanpur pitch is expected to offer good bounce and carry early in the match, with fast bowlers likely to find assistance in the first session. However, as the Test progresses, the surface is expected to slow down and assist spinners. Hot and dry weather conditions over five days could accelerate deterioration, making batting increasingly challenging in the latter stages.

Afghanistan, meanwhile, will be aiming to build their reputation in the longest format after inconsistent performances since gaining Full Member status in 2017. Their most recent Test outing ended in defeat against Zimbabwe, exposing familiar vulnerabilities against sustained pressure.

India, on the other hand, had lost to South Africa 2-0 in the home series. However, the current gap in experience and depth between the two sides, makes them overwhelming favourites.

While Afghanistan will look to Rahmat Shah, Hashmatullah Shahidi and Qais Ahmad for resistance, India's superior batting depth and varied bowling resources are expected to dictate terms from the opening sessions.

Overall, the contest represents both a transition moment for India and another developmental step for Afghanistan in Test cricket, with the hosts strongly positioned to assert control across five days.

**Teams:** India: Shubman Gill (Captain), Rishabh Pant, Yashasvi Jaiswal, KL Rahul, Sai Sudharsan, Dhruv Jurel, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Prasidh Krishna, Mohammed Siraj, Gurnoor Brar, Harsh Dubey, Devdutt Padikkal, Manav Suthar. Afghanistan: Hashmatullah Shahidi, Afsar Zazai, Abdul Malik, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Rahmat Shah, Azmatullah Omarzai, Sharafuddin Ashraf, Ziaur Rahman Sharifi, Qais Ahmad, Bilal Sami, Mohammad Saleem Safi, Nangeyalia Kharote, Sediqullah Atal, Ikram Alikhil.

## Siraj looks fine, no concerns over Pant's leadership role, says Taen Doeschate

**New Delhi:** India assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate today provided an encouraging update on pacer Mohammed Siraj's fitness ahead of the one-off Test against Afghanistan, while also revealing that the team management is still weighing its spin-bowling combination for the match starting in New Chandigarh on Saturday.

India have had only a five-day gap between the end of IPL 2026 and the Test, and the team management is still finalising its bowling combination, particularly the spin department in the absence of the rested Ravindra Jadeja.

"Siraj bowled yesterday, he looked absolutely fine. It's been great having some fresh faces around. Look, I think the chance of both of them playing in the test are probably pretty small. We haven't finalised the combination but I would imagine Kuldeep will play, Washi will play and then one of those two will play."

"Also, you've got seven guys in the squad from GT who played an uphill final five days ago. So, it's just been good having fresh faces and our main job now is to freshen the guys up and get them ready for a Test match starting in a couple of days," said Doeschate ahead of the Test.

Pant remains a leader despite losing vice-captaincy. The former Dutch international also spoke about



Rishabh Pant's role in the team after he was removed as vice-captain, insisting that the wicketkeeper-batter remains an important figure in the dressing room.

"I don't think you need a formal title to be a leader in a lead set-up like this. I think Rishabh understands that and I think he's committed to being a good role model and a senior player."

I actually heard him and Gauti (head coach Gautam Gambhir) having a chat around that yesterday - how you want to conduct yourself as a senior player extends to your communication but also how you're going to play. With Rishabh's brilliance, we don't want to take away all the stuff that he does," he said.

"Occasionally, if he can adjust his game to play the situation slightly more, I think that's something you'll see him work on. But he's been in great spirits again. He's always one of those guys who's happy and cheerful and drives the spirit in the team."

"You've got no complaints from him. You wouldn't even notice that his role in the leadership structure has changed. So, no concerns about Rishabh and I can't wait to see him back again," he added.

Number three spot still under discussion. India are yet to settle on a long-term number three in Tests, a position that has seen multiple candidates since Cheteshwar Pujara's exit. Ten Doeschate admitted the constant chopping and changing has not helped but suggested the team now wants to back one player for an extended period.

"There's been a lot of changes in that spot and that's not ideal. I think you need to look at the incumbents for that role and maybe stick with someone. It's a difficult and very important position to bat. Dev (Devidutt Padikkal) comes in with a ton of runs in domestic cricket across all the formats."

"Obviously, Sai (Sudharsan) had a nice IPL with Gujarat.

## India Women's Hockey team loses to China in semifinal at U18 Asia Cup

**Kakamigahara (Japan):** After an intense and well-fought 2-2 draw over four quarters, the Indian U18 Women's Hockey Team suffered a 1-3 defeat in shootout against China in their semi-final clash at the U18 Asia Cup 2026 in Kakamigahara, Japan, on Friday.

Nousheen Naz (3') and Kiran Ekka (54') scored the goals for India while Li ZeYan (24') and Zhang Yuzheng (48') were the goalscorers for China.

India made a bright start in the first quarter, securing the opening goal in the third minute itself. Captain Sweetie Kujur played a brilliant pass from the midfield to Nousheen (3') inside the circle who delivered a strong back-handed shot into the net to give India an early lead.

Both sides did well in the midfield to

create good opportunities inside the circle but couldn't find another goal in the opening quarter.

China were awarded a penalty corner in the 21st minute but Feng Jiaxin's dragflick was beautifully saved by Indian goalkeeper Mahak Parihar. Three minutes later, however, China found the equaliser due to a defensive error by India in the 24th minute, which China's Li ZeYan capitalised on to level the game with a field goal.

In the third quarter, China were awarded a penalty corner in the 34th minute but the Indian backline showed great resilience to deny them the opportunity to take lead. China held more of the possession in the following minutes but couldn't break the deadlock. In the 43rd minute India received consecutive

penalty corners, but could not breach the Chinese post. Despite multiple chances at both ends, the match remained tied at 1-1 as the teams entered the fourth quarter.

The third minute of the final quarter saw China go ahead through a penalty corner. Although the initial shot was blocked by India's first rusher, the ball went to China's Zhang Yuzheng (48') on the rebound, and she delivered a calm finish to give her side a slim advantage. However, China's lead only lasted for a few minutes as India's Kiran (54') converted a penalty corner to equalise and it remained 2-2 at full-time, with shootout to decide the winner. China defeated India 3-1 in the shootout courtesy of some brilliant saves by their goalkeeper Liu Xue.

## Andreeva reaches first Grand Slam final, qualifier Chwalinska continues dream run

**Paris:** Eighth seed Mirra Andreeva advanced to her first Grand Slam final, defeating 15th-seeded Marta Kostyuk 6-1, 6-3 at the French Open, while qualifier Maja Chwalinska continued her remarkable run by reaching the championship match.

At 19, Andreeva became the youngest women's singles Grand Slam finalist since Coco Gauff reached the French Open final in 2022.

Andreeva dominated from the beginning and wrapped up victory in an hour and 16 minutes, revenging the loss in the Madrid fi-

nal last month, where Kostyuk had beaten her in straightsets on Thursday.

"I'm just super happy with the way I played today," said the Russian. "Then I'm happy I got revenge from the Madrid final, then I'm happy as well that I'm in my first Grand Slam final."

All of these feelings have combined."

Andreeva praised her rival who entered the semifinal with a 17-0 record on clay this season, according to Xinhua.

"I was very nervous coming into this match. Obviously, she's had an amaz-

ing season. Until this match, she hadn't lost a match on clay. That brought a lot of pressure. She's an amazing player, very tough opponent. I'm very excited about the last match in Paris."

Andreeva will face one of the most unexpected finalists in recent Grand Slam history after world No. 114 Chwalinska defeated 25th-seeded Diana Shnaider 7-6 (4), 6-4 to become only the second qualifier in the Open era to reach a women's Grand Slam final.

The Polish left-hander has now won nine consecutive matches in Paris, includ-

ing three in qualifying. Chwalinska is one win away from matching the feat achieved by Emma Raducanu, who won the 2021 U.S. Open as a qualifier.

"I mean, [it feels] like a dream, honestly. I don't know what's going on," she said. "I don't know what to say, I'm sorry. I'm just very happy." "I'm crazy sometimes also," Chwalinska said.

"But I mean, I try to stay composed because I know that it's the best way for me. It helps me to play my best tennis."

So that's what I'm trying

## Siliguri Strikers ready to strike big in Bengal T20 League Season 3

**Kolkata:** The Servotech Siliguri Strikers officially commenced their Bengal T20 League Season 3 campaign with the grand unveiling of their new team jersey, bringing together players, team management, and supporters in a celebration of ambition, unity, and sporting excellence. The franchise also unveiled its new golden logo along with distinctive red and pink jerseys for the home and away matches of both the men's and women's teams. The newly launched identity reflects the team's fighting spirit, determination, and commitment to achieving success both on and off the field. As preparations intensify for the upcoming season, players expressed confidence and enthusiasm, reaffirming their dedication to delivering an exciting and competi-

tive campaign for cricket fans across West Bengal. Speaking to the media, Rishabh Bhatia, Owner of Servotech Siliguri Strikers, said, "The unveiling of our Season 3 jersey marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter for Servotech Siliguri Strikers. This jersey reflects the passion, determination, and fighting spirit that define our team and the people of North Bengal." "We have assembled a talented squad with a perfect blend of experienced campaigners and promising young players, and we are confident of putting up a strong performance in the Bengal T20 League. Our objective is not only to compete at the highest level but also to inspire cricket enthusiasts across the region and create memorable moments for our supporters."

## Livingstone alleges owner interference, sparks IPL governance debate

**Bengaluru:** England allrounder Liam Livingstone has triggered a major debate over the balance of power in franchise cricket after alleging that owner preferences influenced team selection decisions at Sunrisers Hyderabad during the IPL 2026 season.

The explosive claim, made during a podcast appearance, has cast a spotlight on one of the most sensitive issues in the Indian Premier League — whether cricket-

ing decisions are always left to coaches and captains or are sometimes shaped by franchise ownership.

Livingstone, who was signed by SRH for Rs 13 crore but featured in only two matches during the season, claimed he was effectively sidelined because a particular player enjoyed the backing of the franchise owners.

The England international said he was informed that the team's combination

would not be altered as the owners were keen on retaining a specific player in the playing XI.

Without naming the player concerned, Livingstone suggested that his opportunities remained limited even when circumstances appeared to favour a change in team composition, including during periods when SRH were not fielding their full complement of overseas players. The comments have reopened a long-running but

largely unspoken debate about the extent of owner involvement in cricketing affairs in the IPL, one of the world's richest and most influential sporting leagues.

Adding weight to the discussion, former England captain Alastair Cook and veteran commentator David Lloyd acknowledged during the conversation that owner influence in franchise cricket is a subject frequently discussed within the game. While neither directly con-

firmed Livingstone's allegations, both questioned whether financial stakeholders should have any role in determining team selections.

The allegations come despite a successful season for SRH, who qualified for the playoffs and were eliminated only in the Eliminator. The franchise's on-field achievements, however, now risk being overshadowed by questions surrounding the autonomy of its cricket management.

## FIFA World Cup Group D preview: U.S. faces familiar foes

**Washington:** Co-hosts the United States will meet familiar opposition in Group D of the FIFA World Cup after confronting Australia, Paraguay and Türkiye in friendlies last year.

Türkiye returns to the World Cup after a 24-year absence, while Paraguay is back for the first time since 2010 and Australia arrives after reaching the last 16 in Qatar.

United States team: The United States heads into its home World Cup with questions in defense. The Americans have their weakest goalkeeping group in decades and concerns over the fitness of Chris Richards, the only U.S. central defender playing regularly in a top European league.

Mauricio Pochettino has spent much of his tenure searching for the right balance. The Argentine has alternated between a back three and a back four while trying to build a side capable

of controlling matches rather than sitting back and countering.

The United States generally looks to play through midfield and create overloads in central areas before releasing its full backs into space. Width often comes from the flanks rather than traditional wingers, while possession remains a central part of the approach.

The attack appears stronger than the defense. Christian Pulisic remains the leading figure in the squad, while Folarin Balogun offers the kind of focal point the United States lacked for much of the past decade.

Having avoided the demands of qualification as co-hosts, the Americans will expect strong support throughout the group stage. The challenge is whether a talented attack can compensate for uncertainty at the back.

Star player: AC Milan's Pulisic remains the face of

the national team. The forward has carried expectations since the United States missed the 2018 World Cup and remains the player opponents are most concerned about stopping.

Pulisic's ability to beat defenders, create chances and score important goals makes him tricky for opposition defenses to neutralize. If the United States is to make a deep run on home soil, he is likely to be at the center of it.

Player to watch: Balogun gives the United States a different dimension in attack, combining intelligent movement with sharp finishing. The United States relied heavily on goals from midfielders and wide players in recent years. Balogun offers a more traditional solution and

could become one of the most important players in the group, according to Xinhua.

Türkiye team: Türkiye returns to the World Cup for the first time in 24 years car-

rying the hopes of a talented generation that has begun to fulfill its promise. The European side reached the semifinals in 2002 before missing the next five World Cups.



Vincenzo Montella has overseen the team's revival since taking charge in 2023. The Italian has built a side that blends youthful creativity with experienced leadership and has largely avoided the instability that often accompanied previous Tür-

kiye teams.

Captain Hakan Calhanoglu remains a key figure, providing leadership and control from midfield. Around him is a younger core led by Arda Guler and Kenan

Yildiz, two players viewed as central to the team's future.

Türkiye is strong in several areas of the field, with a settled goalkeeper, experienced defenders and attacking midfielders capable of unlocking opponents. The

biggest question remains at center forward, where no player has fully established himself. After such a long absence, simply returning to the tournament represents progress. Yet the quality within the squad means Türkiye will expect to challenge for a place in the knockout rounds.

Star player: Guler has become a leading figure in Türkiye's resurgence. The Real Madrid midfielder has successfully made the transition from prodigy to established international performer. Still only 21, he carries much of the team's creative responsibility. Guler combines vision, making him an eye for goal, making him capable of changing a match in an instant.

Player to watch: Yildiz is regarded as one of Europe's most exciting young attacking players.

The Juventus star combines technical quality with physical strength and relish-

es taking on defenders. His ability to create and score goals gives Türkiye another dangerous attacking weapon. The World Cup could provide the stage for his international breakthrough.

Paraguay team: Paraguay returns to the World Cup after missing the past three tournaments, ending a drought that stretched back to 2010. The turnaround has been driven largely by

manager Gustavo Alfaro, who rebuilt the team's identity after a disappointing 2024 Copa America campaign.

Alfaro returned Paraguay to the qualities that traditionally defined its football: defensive discipline, intensity and collective commitment. The transformation was rapid and qualification followed.

Paraguay generally operates in a structured 4-4-2 system that prioritizes organization and balance. Defensive solidity remains the

foundation, but the team is no longer limited to simply frustrating opponents.

Veterans Miguel Almiron and Antonio Sanabria provide experience in attack, while a younger generation has added energy and creativity. The blend has given Paraguay renewed confidence after years in the wilderness.

Paraguay's greatest strength remains its collective approach. It may lack the depth of some rivals, but it arrives with a clear identity and a head coach who has already exceeded expectations. Star player: Julio Enciso is widely regarded as Paraguay's brightest attacking talent. Quick, direct and fearless in possession, he provides the spark capable of turning disciplined performances into victories. Enciso's ability to create chances and influence matches in the final third makes him the player most likely to determine Paraguay's fortunes.

BSE Sensex		Nifty 50		Nifty 500		Nifty Next 50		Nifty 100		Nifty Bank		Nifty Midcap 100	
Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change	Close	Percent change
74,243.34	-0.16%	23,366.70	-0.21%	22,465.35	-0.14%	70,191.95	0.26%	24,397.30	-0.12%	54,496.25	0.35%	60,754.90	-0.35%
Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open	Previous close	Open
74,360.01	74,629.94	23,416.55	23,478.95	22,497.70	22,569.45	70,010.95	70,311.50	24,427.70	24,500.20	54,307.85	54,405.20	60,966.65	61,179.00
High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
74,717.57	73,988.75	23,516.35	23,282.65	22,614.65	22,379.05	70,568.95	69,814.80	24,544.60	24,301.50	54,865.50	54,140.60	61,359.15	60,508.15

## Top Gainers

Company	Current	% Gain
Adani Enterpris	3,048.20	2.54
HUL	2,121.50	2.02
Adani Ports	1,824.20	1.86
Bajaj Finance	889.40	1.72
Axis Bank	1,272.30	1.52

## Top Losers

Company	Current	% Loss
Hindalco	1,092.60	-2.93
Wipro	198.37	-2.91
Trent	2,774.20	-2.23
Coal India	472.30	-1.94
TCS	2,198.90	-1.88

## Commodities

Commodity	Price	Change (%)
Gold Aug 05	155,321.00	-4,226.00 -2.65
Silver Jul 03	248,909.00	-15,887.00 -6.00
Crudeoil Jun 18	8,738.00	-104.00 -1.18
Naturalgas Jun 25	313.10	-8.80 -2.73

## Nifty slips below 23,400; Markets end lower for 2nd straight week

**Mumbai**: Markets ended slightly lower on Friday after a volatile session, with weakness in metals and IT stocks weighing on sentiment. The Sensex fell 117 points to close at 74,243, while the Nifty declined 50 points to settle at 23,367, slipping below the 23,400 mark.

The Nifty Bank index outperformed, rising 188 points to 54,496 and extending gains for a fourth straight session, while the Midcap index fell 212 points to 60,755.

Broader markets also closed in the red, with Nifty Midcap 100 index falling 0.35% and Nifty Smallcap 100 index closing with marginal losses. Sectorally, Nifty Metal tumbled 1.6% to lead losses, while Nifty Media surged more than 3%. Around 1,694 stocks declined on NSE, while 1,623 advanced and 94 remained unchanged. Hindalco, Wipro, Trent, Coal India and TCS were among the top Nifty losers,



while the Nifty Metal index emerged as the worst-performing sector with Hindustan Zinc tumbling over 6%. Market breadth remained neutral, with the NSE advance-decline ratio at 1:1.

Among individual stocks, Zee Entertainment extended its rally to nearly 19% over the last three sessions, while Go Digit

pared sharp intraday gains to end well off its highs after reporting weak May insurance data. For the week, both the Sensex and Nifty declined by over 0.5%, marking their second consecutive week of losses. The Midcap index underperformed, falling more than 1%, while the Bank Nifty bucked the trend and ended the week

higher. Capital Markets, FMCG and Realty were the worst-performing sectors, while Titan, Adani Enterprises, Coal India and Infosys were among the key Nifty gainers for the week. The rupee was a bright spot, posting its biggest single-day gain in over two months to close below the 95/\$ mark at its highest level in a month.

## India's economy maintains strong momentum; real GDP expected to grow 7.7 per cent in FY 2025-26

**New Delhi**: India is poised to sustain its position among the world's fastest-growing major economies, with Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) projected to expand by 7.7 per cent in FY 2025-26, according to the latest estimates released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI). Nominal GDP is expected to grow by 8.9 per cent during the fiscal year. The estimates indicate broad-based economic strength, with Real (GVA) projected to rise by 7.9 per cent, while Nominal GVA is expected to grow by 9.1 per cent in FY 2025-26. The growth story is being led by the secondary and tertiary sectors, which are estimated to register robust expansions of 8.8 per cent and 9.3 per cent, respectively, at constant prices. These sectors have emerged as key drivers of economic activity, reflecting sustained industrial output and strong performance

across services. The primary sector is also expected to post a healthy growth rate of 3.2 per cent, supported largely by positive contributions from the agriculture and fisheries segments. Among individual industries, the manufacturing sector, along with trade, repair, hotels, transport, communication and services related to broadcasting, as well as financial, real estate and professional services, is projected to achieve double-digit growth at both constant and current prices during FY 2025-26, underscoring the resilience of India's productive and service-oriented sectors. On the demand side, economic activity continues to be buoyed by strong domestic consumption and investment. Both (PFCE) and (GFCF) are estimated to grow by more than 7.5 per cent during the fiscal year, highlighting healthy consumer demand and sustained capital formation.

## Govt announces major reforms to boost foreign investment in equity &amp; government securities

**New Delhi**: The Central Government on Friday announced a series of reforms aimed at attracting greater foreign investment into India's equity and government securities markets, while strengthening the country's position as a leading global investment destination.

The measures, announced by the Ministry of Finance, are expected to make investment in Indian markets easier, improve market access for overseas investors and encourage long-term foreign capital inflows.

As part of the reforms, individual Persons Resident

Outside India (PROIs) will now be allowed to invest in equity instruments of listed

(NRIs) and Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs).

The government has also



Indian companies through the Portfolio Investment Scheme, a facility that was earlier available only to Non-Resident Indians

increased the investment limit for an individual PROI from 5 per cent to 10 per cent in any listed company. The overall investment limit for

all such investors has been raised from 10 per cent to 24 per cent. According to the Finance Ministry, the move will simplify investment procedures, reduce compliance requirements and help attract a wider pool of foreign investors to Indian equity markets.

In another significant decision, the government has expanded the list of government securities available under the Fully Accessible Route (FAR) by including new issuances of 15-year, 30-year and 40-year government bonds, along with Sovereign Green Bonds in eligible tenors.

## Revenues not overstated; SEBI order is not final, says Rajesh Exports

**Mumbai**: Rajesh Exports Ltd informed the BSE here on Thursday that the order passed by the Securities & Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is an interim order and not a final order, after the SEBI alleged that prima facie, the company appears to have overstated its revenues.

Rajesh Exports Ltd Chairman Rajesh Mehta informed the BSE in a statement on Thursday that, "The (SEBI) order is interim and there has been no adverse conclusion on any aspect arrived by SEBI. The revenues declared by the company are correct and there is no overstating of revenues. There seems to be some type of communication gap and confusion between SEBI and the company. The company is in the process of clarifying all aspects to

SEBI by submitting all the required and relevant documents".

"The company is confident that SEBI in its wisdom will clarify the situation and arrive at the correct conclusion based on the authenticated documents which are in the process of submission by the company," Rajesh Exports Ltd informed the BSE.

"The company rejects all adverse media reports appearing with regard to the interim order of SEBI. The company will be shortly issuing a media clarification which would clarify and settle the unnecessary speculation in the media," according to the statement by Rajesh Exports.

The statement was issued to the stock exchange after the SEBI passed a 109-page interim order alleging that

Rajesh Exports misrepresented consolidated revenues aggregating about Rs 15.15 lakh crore between FY 2020-21 and FY 2024-25, which accounts for nearly 99.8 per cent of the company's total consolidated revenue during the period.

"I prima facie find that the pattern of routing substantial sums through the personal bank accounts of Rajesh Mehta and Siddharth Mehta, coupled with absence of approvals, non-disclosure and inconsistent explanations, demonstrates systemic failure of corporate governance, concealment of material information and deliberate circumvention of regulatory requirements," SEBI Whole Time Member Kamlesh Chandra Varshney mentioned in the SEBI's interim order.

## EV sales surge signals forward acceleration in India's mobility landscape: Shriram Bulletin

**New Delhi**: India's mobility sector continued to demonstrate resilience in May 2026, with electric vehicle (EV) adoption accelerating sharply and travel demand boosting fuel consumption and toll collections, according to the latest Shriram Mobility Bulletin.

The report highlights a significant transformation in the country's transportation ecosystem, led by robust growth in EV sales across categories. Electric cars emerged as the standout performer, registering an impressive 157 per cent year-on-year growth in retail sales during May. Electric three-wheelers and two-wheelers also posted strong gains of 87 per cent and 78 per cent, respectively, underscoring the growing acceptance of cleaner mobility solutions among consumers and businesses.

The broader automobile sector also maintained a healthy growth trajectory. Retail sales of passenger cars increased by 24 per cent year-on-year, while goods carriers re-

corded a 10 per cent rise. Three-wheeler goods carriers witnessed a robust 25 per cent growth, and the two-wheeler segment expanded by 7 per cent. Tractor sales grew 13 per cent, supported by the onset of the kharif sowing season.

Travel activity remained strong during the summer vacation period, providing a boost to fuel demand. Petrol consumption rose by 6 per cent month-on-month, while diesel consumption increased by 5 per cent, reflecting higher road traffic and economic activity.

The increase in highway traffic was also reflected in FASTag collections, with transaction volumes rising by 4.2 per cent and collection values growing by 3.7 per cent during the month.

While the trucking sector faced challenges from rising fuel prices and softer freight demand, key long-haul freight corridors continued to display resilience.

## Vedanta's CopperTech Metals files for IPO on NYSE

**Mumbai**: Anil Agarwal-led Vedanta-owned copper mining company CopperTech Metals Inc, which is domiciled in the United States, has announced that it has publicly filed a registration statement on Form S-1 with the United States Securities and Exchange Commission regarding its proposed initial public offering (IPO) on the (NYSE). However, neither the number of CopperTech shares to be offered nor the price range of the date of listing for the proposed IPO have been disclosed.

The company plans to list itself on the (NYSE), under the symbol "CUX", according to the website of the

company's IPO lead manager. Citigroup and Cantor have been appointed as joint lead managers for the proposed offering.

BMO Capital Markets, RBC Capital Markets, TD Securities, Stifel, William Blair, and Needham & Company are acting as book runners for the proposed offering, with Roth Capital acting as co-manager. Vedanta-owned CopperTech controls 79.42% of Konkola Copper Mines in Zambia. CopperTech plans to use the proceeds of the IPO to invest in exploration activities across its operational sites and select international jurisdictions to support long-term mineral resource develop-



ment, beyond expanding copper production at Konkola Copper Mines in Zambia, which is owned by CopperTech.

CopperTech intends to build on the existing \$3 billion investment made by Ve-

danta Resources Limited in the Konkola Copper Mines, which included construction of a deep mine shaft, a smelter and a concentrator, for general mine development, and it intends to invest an additional \$1.5 billion in the operations. CopperTech intends to leverage advanced mining and cutting-edge AI-driven resource identification and extraction technology, as an integral part of its plans to expand production capacity and enhance operational efficiency from the current planned integrated copper production levels of 140,000 tonnes in FY26 to 300,000 tonnes by 2031. With future investments, and supported by proven and probable reserves, CopperTech has plans to raise production levels to 500,000 tonnes per year, which CopperTech believes would position the company among the leading copper producers in the world.

## RBI keeps repo rate unchanged at 5.25 percent

**New Delhi**: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday kept the benchmark repo rate unchanged at 5.25 per cent, with Governor Sanjay Malhotra asserting that the Indian economy remains resilient and is better prepared than in the past to deal with rising global uncertainties, supply chain disruptions and geopolitical tensions.

Announcing the decisions of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), the Governor said the global economy has been facing heightened uncertainty in recent months due to disruptions in key trade routes, volatility in financial markets and cautious business sentiment.

He noted that the ongoing geopolitical situation in West Asia has led to higher energy prices and supply chain disruptions, creating challenges for economies across the world.

"Let me at the outset emphasise that the Indian economy entered this episode of global turbulence with much better fundamentals than in previous similar episodes. While we remain confident to withstand these shocks with minimum pain, it is important to not only confront and address these challenges but also take them as an opportunity to further enhance resilience," the Governor said.

The six-member MPC unanimously voted to retain the repo rate at 5.25 per cent. Consequently, the Standing Deposit Facility (SDF) rate remains at 5.0 per cent, while the Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) rate and the Bank Rate remain at 5.5 per cent. The committee also decided to continue with the neutral stance.

Explaining the rationale behind the decision, the Governor said the committee felt it would be prudent

to wait for greater clarity regarding the duration and intensity of the ongoing geopolitical conflict and its impact on inflation and growth.

While inflation risks have increased, the central bank believes that policy flexibility is necessary amid evolving global conditions.

The RBI noted that inflation has remained below the target despite external shocks. Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation stood at 3.4 per cent in March and 3.5 per cent in April 2026. However, the central bank warned that rising crude oil prices, higher input costs and weather-related risks could exert upward pressure on prices in the coming months.

The Governor said the baseline projections indicate inflation may move closer to the upper tolerance band during the third quarter of the current financial year

before easing thereafter.

He also cautioned that second-round effects through wages and inflation expectations remain a possibility and would require close monitoring.

On growth, the RBI



presented a relatively optimistic picture, highlighting that India's economic activity has remained steady despite global headwinds.

Manufacturing and services sectors continue to expand, business confidence remains positive and private

consumption has remained resilient, supported by discretionary spending.

The Governor said high-frequency indicators suggest that the economy has broadly withstood the spill-over effects of global disrupt-

ions. Merchandise exports recorded healthy growth in April, while services exports have continued to perform strongly despite concerns regarding global demand. At the same time, he acknowledged that ele-

vated energy prices and supply constraints could weigh on economic activity. Rising input costs, higher logistics expenses and a forecast of below-normal monsoon conditions remain areas of concern. Taking these factors into account, the RBI projected India's real GDP growth at 6.6 per cent for 2026-27. The Governor said government capital expenditure, sustained services sector growth, stable employment conditions and healthy credit flows would continue to support domestic demand. Highlighting the strength of the financial system, the RBI said banks and non-banking financial companies remain well-capitalised and financially sound. Asset quality has improved further, liquidity buffers remain robust and credit growth continues to be broad-based across sectors.

The Governor also underscored the strength of In-

dia's external sector. Foreign exchange reserves stood at over USD 682 billion at the end of May, providing a strong cushion against external shocks. He noted that gross foreign direct investment reached a record high in 2025-26, reflecting continued global confidence in the Indian economy.

To further strengthen capital inflows and support external stability, the RBI announced several measures. These include expanding investment opportunities for foreign investors in government securities, increasing investment limits for non-resident Indians and overseas citizens, incentivising foreign currency borrowings and easing certain export-related norms.

Reiterating the RBI's position on the currency market, the Governor said the central bank does not target any specific exchange rate level but remains com-

mitted to preventing excessive volatility and disorderly market movements.

"We will curb excessive volatility and prevent disorderly market movements. While our foreign exchange reserves provide a strong buffer against external shocks, we have a broad range of regulatory and market-based instruments to respond effectively as may be required," he said.

Concluding his statement, the Governor said that although global economic conditions remain challenging, India's economy continues to display strength and resilience. "While these have adversely impacted the domestic growth-inflation outlook, the economy at this point is relatively strong. We shall put in place policies to meet the challenges while taking measures to further strengthen the macroeconomic fundamentals of the country," he said.