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Government positive about Maratha reservation, says Fadnavis as Jarange sits on hunger strike

Mumbai : Maratha job reservation quota agitator Manoj Jarange-Patil began an indefinite hunger strike at 10 am on Saturday morning at his native village of Antarwali Sarati, located in the Jalna district of Maharashtra. Jarange-Patil is demanding that Kunbi OBC certificates be issued to 58 lakh Marathas based on the historical gazette records of the erstwhile pre-independence princely state of the Nizam of Hyderabad, as well as the Satara Gazette records. He has made it clear that he will not withdraw his indefinite hunger strike until his demands are met, prompting immediate action from supporters as Maratha protesters blocked the Mumbai-Nagpur Samruddhi Mahamarg Expressway on Saturday.

His comprehensive list of demands extends beyond the immediate issuance of caste certificates to structural and legal changes within the state administration. Jarange-Patil has called for the establishment of a separate Maratha Kunbi Ministry and the immediate withdrawal of all police cases registered against Maratha protesters who participated in previous agitations for reservation. Furthermore, he demanded that the state government constitut-



ed Shinde Committee be granted an official extension so that it can continue to thoroughly check all relevant historical caste records, while insisting that the state take strict disciplinary action against officials who are negligent or reluctant to clear these documents.

Reacting to these rapid developments, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis told media persons on Saturday that the state government's stance on the Maratha reservation remains entirely positive. While highlighting that no one in history has taken as many decisions for the Maratha community as he and Eknath Shinde have,

Fadnavis emphasized that any final resolution must strictly follow the Constitution of the country and the directions given by the High Court and the Supreme Court. The Chief Minister noted that the government will only make decisions that can legally stand the test of the courts, as acting otherwise would mean taking decisions solely for the sake of publicity.

Seeking to maintain social harmony amidst the brewing dispute, Chief Minister Fadnavis also issued a strong reassurance to the OBC community regarding their existing quota protections. He explicitly stated that his government has never engaged in tak-

ing away benefits from one community to give them to another, urging the OBC community not to fear any dilution of their rights. He reiterated that while the government will satisfy the Maratha community and make concrete decisions for them, it will do so without compromising the legal and constitutional safeguards already promised to other communities.

In a swift bid to resolve the impasse, a Maharashtra state government delegation led by Water Resources Minister Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil personally met with Jarange-Patil to present an official draft of assurances, though the activist firmly refused to end

his fast. The government's proposal promised to set up an office within one month to clear Maratha reservation cases, establish a helpline within eight days to facilitate document searches, operationalize a standard operating procedure (SOP) for issuing Kunbi certificates, and distribute financial assistance to the families of deceased protesters within 15 days. However, the move triggered a severe backlash from OBC leader Laxman Hake, who criticized Jarange-Patil's demands—particularly the separate ministry—as ridiculous and politically motivated, warning that OBC groups will launch an aggressive counter-agitation starting Sunday if their reservation rights are threatened.

Meanwhile, regional political analysts warn that this sharpening polarization between the Maratha and OBC communities could create significant administrative and social challenges for the state government in the coming weeks. With both sides taking uncompromising stances and threatening statewide agitations, the administration faces the delicate task of balancing constitutional limitations with intense grassroots political pressure.

PM Modi extends Goa Statehood Day greetings, hails state's culture and contribution to Viksit Bharat



New Delhi : Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday extended greetings to the people of Goa on the occasion of Goa Statehood Day, praising the state's vibrant culture, rich heritage, natural beauty and the warmth of its people.

In a post on social media platform X, the Prime Minister said, "Greetings to the people of Goa on the special occasion of Goa Statehood Day. Goa's vibrant culture, rich heritage, natural beauty and warm-hearted people are widely known."

Modi also paid tribute to those who contributed to the state's development and distinct identity over the years. "This day is also an opportunity to remember with gratitude all those who worked tirelessly for its progress and identity," he said.

Expressing confidence in Goa's future role in the country's growth story, the Prime Minister said he hoped the coastal state would continue to prosper and play an

important role in the vision of a developed India. "May Goa continue to prosper and play an important role in building a Viksit Bharat," he added.

The Prime Minister also conveyed his wishes for the well-being of the people of the state, saying, "Praying for the good health and prosperity of every Goan."

Goa Statehood Day is observed annually on May 30 to commemorate the state's elevation as the 25th state of India in 1987. The occasion is marked by celebrations across the state, highlighting Goa's unique cultural identity, historical legacy and achievements in sectors such as tourism, education and economic development. Goa was liberated from Portuguese rule in 1961 and remained a union Territory before attaining full statehood nearly three decades later. Modi's message comes as the state celebrates its journey of progress while reaffirming its place in India's development aspirations.

IMD issues heavy rain, thunderstorm alert for Vidarbha; 15 states on weather watch

Pune : After weeks of intense heat and soaring temperatures, residents of Vidarbha may finally get relief as the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast heavy rainfall and thunderstorms across the region over the next 24 hours.

A thunderstorm alert has been issued for the districts of Yavatmal and Am-

ravati, while a yellow alert for heavy rainfall has been declared in other parts of Vidarbha.

The weather department has also warned of severe weather conditions in 15 states, including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.

Strong thunderstorms accompanied by rainfall and winds reaching speeds

of up to 90 kmph are expected in several regions. Authorities have advised residents to remain alert and take necessary precautions.

In Uttar Pradesh, heavy rain and storm activity have already disrupted normal life, while hailstorms are likely in at least six states.

Meteorologists have attributed the changing

weather pattern to a cyclonic circulation prevailing over the mid-tropospheric levels along the north Tamil Nadu coast and adjoining areas.

The IMD has urged people to stay updated on weather advisories and avoid unnecessary travel during severe weather conditions.

Class 11 Admission Relief: Students Can Submit Documents Later

Mumbai : Thousands of students waiting for their original Class 10 marksheets and school leaving certificates have received major relief from the Maharashtra government. To ensure that no student faces difficulty during the Class 11 admission process, schools and junior colleges have been instructed not to insist on these documents immediately at the time of admission confirmation.

The decision was taken by the School Education Department on the instructions of School Education Minister Dadaji Bhuse. The move aims to help students participating in the state's

online Class 11 admission process. Director of Education (Secondary and Higher Secondary) Dr. Mahesh Palkar has issued official instructions to all divisional deputy directors of education, education officers, and junior colleges. The first regular round of admissions for the 2026-27 academic year is currently underway, and the merit list was announced on May 29, 2026.

Under the revised instructions, students who have not yet received their original marksheet or school leaving certificate can still confirm their admission by submitting an undertaking

stating that they will provide the documents once they become available. Marksheets of Aadhaar-verified students have already been made available through DigiLocker.

However, students and parents have been warned that admission may be cancelled if the required documents are not submitted within the prescribed period.

Minister Dadaji Bhuse said the decision will help thousands of students who are still waiting for their documents and will ensure that the admission process continues smoothly and on time without unnecessary obstacles.

Rahul Gandhi slams Modi govt over Exam chaos, warns "students will hold you accountable"

New Delhi : Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, launched a sharp attack on the Narendra Modi government on Saturday, blaming it for repeated failures in conducting major national exams and accusing it of damaging India's education system.

In a post on X, Gandhi clubbed together recent controversies around NEET, CBSE, SSC and CUET, calling it evidence of deeper governance failure.

"NEET | CBSE | SSC | And today CUET. Four exams. One crore students. Not even one was conducted honestly," he wrote.

Mocking the government's "Vishwaguru" pitch, he added: "Claims of being 'Vishwaguru', but you can't even conduct a single exam in the country - Modi ji has destroyed the entire education system."

Gandhi also issued a political warning: "The generation whose future you are ruining - that same generation will hold you accountable."

His comments came as CUET-UG 2026 ran into technical glitches at multiple TCS-operated centres in Delhi, Bengaluru and elsewhere, disrupting the test for thousands. The National Testing Agency admitted the issue, granted extra time to affected candidates, and postponed some afternoon sessions.

The CUET trouble follows the cancellation of NEET-UG 2026 earlier this month over paper-leak allegations, which impacted nearly 24 lakh medical aspirants and sparked nationwide protests. Opposition parties accused the Centre of failing to protect exam integrity, while the government said corrective steps were underway and culprits would face action.

CBSE's shift to digital On-Screen Marking for Class 12 answer sheets also drew flak, with students and teachers reporting mismatched scripts, blurred scans, missing pages and unexpectedly low marks, fueling calls for re-evaluation and more transparency.

In another X post, Gandhi extended his criticism to healthcare and medical education, stressing that medicine rests on trust:

"Becoming a doctor and saving people's lives is the noblest work, bound by the delicate thread of trust. When that trust is turned into business, malpractice begins - something that cannot be fixed with patchwork reforms. This system must be corrected from the root."

Congress leaders have repeatedly argued that tech-driven reforms without safeguards are hurting students, and that commercialisation of education and healthcare needs stronger public oversight.

Education, jobs and youth opportunity were key themes in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls and remain central to Congress's attack strategy. With fresh exam disruptions and leak allegations keeping the issue alive, the gov-

ernment's push for tighter security and better administration is being countered by the opposition's charge that structural flaws run deeper.

As millions of students wait for clarity on exams and admissions, accountability in the education sector is set to stay a hot political battleground.



Gen Anil Chauhan demits office, leaves legacy of military reforms, Tri-Service Integration and Op Sindoor

New Delhi : Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan on Saturday demitted office after more than four decades of distinguished military service, bringing to a close a tenure marked by major defence reforms, enhanced tri-service integration and the successful execution of Operation Sindoor.

Before laying down office, General Chauhan paid homage to the nation's fallen heroes at the National War Memorial and was accorded a ceremonial Tri-Services Guard of Honour. Reflecting on his journey, he said it was a matter of great honour to retire with a tri-services guard of honour and described his tenure as "very satisfying and excellent."

General Chauhan was appointed as India's second CDS on September 30, 2022, succeeding the late General Bipin Rawat. As CDS and Secretary of the Department of Military Affairs, he was entrusted with advancing greater integration and jointness among the Army, Navy and Air Force.

During his tenure, he emerged as a key architect of India's military transformation, pushing forward the Integrated Theatre Command initiative aimed at creating unified operational commands for the three services. He also promoted integrated logistics, common procurement systems and the adoption of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, cyber warfare tools,

space-based assets and drones.

Commissioned into the 11 Gorkha Rifles in June 1981, General Chauhan held several important command appointments, including General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Eastern Command, overseeing operational preparedness along the borders with China and Myanmar.

A defining milestone of his tenure was Operation Sindoor, which showcased enhanced coordination among the Army, Navy and Air Force and highlighted the effectiveness of integrated intelligence, surveillance and command structures developed under the CDS framework.

In September 2025, the government extended his tenure until May 30, 2026, enabling continuity in key defence reforms. As he demits office, General Chauhan leaves behind a legacy of accelerating military integration, strengthening higher defence management and laying the foundation for a more technologically advanced and future-ready armed force. Lieutenant General N. S. Raza Subramani (Retd) will assume charge as the next Chief of Defence Staff.

His leadership is widely credited with strengthening tri-service coordination, accelerating defence reforms and laying a strong foundation for a more integrated, modern and combat-ready military capable of addressing future security challenges.

Kharge seeks action after attack on Abhishek Banerjee, calls for protection of opposition leaders

New Delhi : Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday condemned the alleged attack on Abhishek Banerjee in Sonarpur, West Bengal, and urged authorities to ensure the safety of opposition leaders, while accusing the BJP of engaging in politics driven by "vendetta and persecution." In a post on X, Kharge expressed concern over the incident, which reportedly took place when Banerjee was visiting families affected by post-poll violence in the state. "The Congress president alleged that the absence of adequate security arrangements for a senior opposition leader reflected a troubling political atmo-

sphere. "The deliberate lack of adequate police protection for a prominent Opposition leader speaks volumes about the BJP's politics of vendetta and persecution," he said.

Kharge called on the West Bengal and Union governments to take immediate steps to prevent such incidents and ensure security for opposition leaders. Stressing the importance of democratic values, he said political differences can never justify violence or intimidation.

His remarks come amid recurring allegations of political violence in West Bengal, where clashes between rival political parties have frequently sparked controversy following elections.

Three Pune police officers suspended in toxic liquor tragedy

Pune : The death toll in the toxic liquor tragedy that rocked Pune, Pimpri-Chinchwad and Hadapsar has risen to 19, prompting swift action from the police department.

Pune Police Commissioner Amitesh Kumar has suspended three police officers for alleged negligence and dereliction of duty in connection with the case.

The incident first came to light after eight people died allegedly after consuming spurious liquor in the Phugewadi area. Subsequently, more deaths linked to toxic liquor were reported from Hadapsar, taking the



total number of fatalities to 19 so far.

Police have arrested eight accused in the case.

The suspended officers include Senior Police Inspector Sanjay Mogale of Hadapsar Police Station,

Assistant Police Inspector Hasina Shikalgar, who was in charge of the Hadapsar police outpost, and Police Sub-Inspector Hasan Mulani from the crime detection unit.

A case has been reg-

istered at Hadapsar Police Station under various sections of the law relating to the toxic liquor deaths. The officers have been accused of failing to take effective action despite having information about the illegal liquor trade in the area.

Officials said the disciplinary action was taken due to alleged lapses in preventing the illegal sale of liquor and the resulting damage to the reputation of the police force.

The investigation into the tragedy is ongoing, with authorities intensifying efforts to identify and prosecute all those responsible.

Mayawati raises concern over Ghaziabad youth murder, seeks tough action

Lucknow: Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief and former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mayawati on Saturday expressed grief over the murder of a teenager in the Khoda area of Ghaziabad and urged the state government to take swift and decisive action against those responsible.

In a statement posted on social media, Mayawati described the killing of 17-year-old Surya Chauhan as "extremely sad and worrying" and said such incidents raise serious concerns about public safety and law and order.

The BSP president said the government and administrative authorities must take concrete measures to prevent the recurrence of such crimes and ensure that citizens feel secure.

She called for a thorough investigation into the case and demanded that all those involved in the murder be identified and brought to justice in accordance with the law.

Mayawati stressed that criminal incidents should be dealt with firmly and impartially, regardless of the identity of the accused, and said strict legal action would help strengthen public confidence in the justice system.



Referring to the political climate ahead of upcoming elections, she cautioned that incidents of serious crime can have wider social and political repercussions if not addressed promptly and effectively.

"The government should remain fully vigilant," she said, urging authorities to maintain law and order and prevent any attempts to disturb communal harmony or public peace.

Her remarks come amid continuing political debate over crime control and law-and-order issues in Uttar Pradesh, where opposition parties

have frequently raised concerns regarding incidents of violence and public safety.

The case relates to the murder of 17-year-old Surya Pratap Chauhan in the Khoda police station area of Ghaziabad district. The incident has attracted significant public attention and prompted calls for swift action by law enforcement agencies.

According to preliminary reports, the teenager was allegedly attacked with sharp-edged weapons on the evening of May 28 and later succumbed to his injuries. Police are in-

vestigating the circumstances surrounding the incident.

Investigators are examining the sequence of events leading up to the attack and are gathering evidence, including witness statements and other material, to establish the motive and identify those responsible.

Some reports have alleged that the accused and the victim knew each other and that the incident may have stemmed from a previous dispute. However, police have not yet publicly confirmed all aspects of these claims as the investigation remains underway.

Authorities are expected to verify all allegations through the course of the investigation and determine the exact circumstances that led to the crime.

The murder has sparked concern among local residents, with many demanding a speedy and transparent probe. Community members have also appealed for strict punishment for those found guilty.

Police officials have indicated that efforts are underway to identify and apprehend all suspects connected with the case. Further details are expected to emerge as the investigation progresses and authorities complete their inquiry into the incident.

UP govt to conduct safety audit in over 1.4 lakh schools

Lucknow: Giving top priority to the safety of school children, the Government of Uttar Pradesh has decided to conduct a comprehensive safety audit and risk assessment in all government and government-aided schools across the state.

Under this initiative, safety arrangements in a total of 1,40,555 institutions, including primary, upper primary, composite, secondary and Kasturba Gandhi residential girls' schools, will be evaluated. This initiative is expected to provide lakhs of students with a safer and more secure learning environment.

As part of this ambitious program, schools in all districts of the state will be assessed on scientific and technical parameters. A detailed inspection will be conducted covering various aspects related to student safety, including the structural condition of school buildings, fire safety, electrical safety, disaster preparedness, sanitation facili-

ties, entry and exit systems and overall campus security.

Potential safety risks will be identified and detailed recommendations for corrective measures will also be prepared.

Basic and Secondary Education Departments signed an agreement on Friday evening with Bennett Coleman and Company Limited, the agency selected through a transparent and rule-based tender process conducted via the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) portal of the Government of India. Present on the occasion were Director General School Education, Ms. Monika Rani, In-charge Director Secondary Education, Surendra Kumar Tiwari, Director Basic Education, Pratap Singh Baghel and from BCCL, Chief Business Officer, Mr. Kuldeep Pathak and Chief Manager & Regional Lead, Brijesh Kumar Mishra.

According to officials, the program will not be limited to reviewing safety

standards alone, but will also play a significant role in developing a long-term system for safety awareness and risk management in schools.

This will strengthen the confidence of students, teachers and parents, while helping create a safe and conducive environment for quality education.

The service provider agency will identify safety-related risks for each school and provide corrective recommendations to help prevent potential accidents in the future and ensure a protected learning environment.

The state government aims to establish the highest standards of safety in every government and government-aided school across Uttar Pradesh. Officials stated that this initiative will prove to be a significant step towards strengthening the state's education system and positioning Uttar Pradesh as a model for student-centric and safe school education.

Electricity bills set to rise in Uttar Pradesh as UPPCL imposes 10 pc fuel surcharge

Lucknow: Electricity consumers in Uttar Pradesh will be receiving higher power bills in June after the Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Limited (UPPCL) directed distribution companies to levy a 10% fuel surcharge to recover increased power purchase and transmission costs.

The order, issued late Friday night, allows recovery of the fuel surcharge for March 2026 in the June 2026 billing cycle. Officials indicated that a similar 10% surcharge may also be recovered in July, potentially extending the burden on consumers.

With nearly 37.3 million electricity consumers in the

state, the move is expected to significantly impact household budgets. Awadhesh Kumar Verma, President of the Uttar Pradesh State Electricity Consumer Council and member of the State Advisory Committee, said on Saturday that a 10% fuel surcharge had already been levied in February 2026. "At a time when the people of the state are suffering from extreme heat, power shortages, rising inflation, petrol and diesel prices, and the increasing prices of daily commodities, this additional increase in electricity rates will prove to be a burden on ordinary consumers," he alleged.

He stated that the actual power purchase cost ap-

proved in the Electricity Regulatory Commission (UPERC) tariff order was Rs 4.94 per unit, while the Power Corporation has imposed an additional burden of approximately Rs 1,610 crore on consumers by showing the purchase price at approximately Rs 5.86 per unit in March 2026. According to the Council, this is against the interests of consumers and an impartial investigation into the entire matter is necessary. Verma demanded a detailed investigation into the circumstances under which such expensive power was purchased in March 2026, and from which private power generating companies.

BJP set for full cabinet expansion in Bengal next week; 33-member ministry likely

Kolkata: West Bengal is likely to get a full-fledged BJP ministry next week, with sources indicating that Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari is set to expand his Cabinet nearly three weeks after assuming office.

According to sources in the state administration and the BJP, the exercise of finalising the list of ministers and allocating portfolios is in its final stages after multiple rounds of consultations aimed at ensuring political and regional balance.

If the schedule remains unchanged, the swearing-in ceremony is expected to take

place on Monday, with the new ministry likely to comprise 33 members.

The expansion comes after weeks of speculation following the formation of the BJP government in the state.

Since taking oath on May 9, Adhikari has been overseeing 42 of the state's 54 departments with the assistance of an interim council of five ministers — Dilip Ghosh, Agnimitra Paul, Ashok Kirtania, Nisith Pramanik and Kshudiram Tudu.

Sources said the names of the new ministers could be formally announced after re-

ceiving the final approval from the party's central leadership. An important com-



munication from Delhi is expected shortly, following which senior BJP leaders are likely to hold a series of meetings to finalise the remaining details. The proposed ministry is expected to feature a blend of experienced leaders and fresh fac-

es. Particular emphasis is being placed on representation from North Bengal, Janglemahal and urban areas, while women are also expected to secure a significant share of berths in the expanded Cabinet. Discussions over the Cabinet's composition have intensified in recent days amid reports of consultations between Adhikari and Governor R.N. Ravi. Preparations for the swearing-in ceremony are also understood to be underway. Sources said Adhikari is expected to retain the crucial Home and Finance portfolios, while the remaining de-

partments will be distributed among the new inductees and existing ministers.

Among the BJP legislators whose names are reportedly under consideration for ministerial berths are Swapan Dasgupta, Tapas Roy, Shankar Ghosh, Indranil Khan and Saradwat Mukherjee, although no official confirmation has been made.

The Cabinet expansion is being closely watched as it is expected to provide the first clear indication of the BJP government's governance priorities and political strategy after its historic victory in West Bengal.

JK Haj committee's baggage decision sparks anger among returning pilgrims

Srinagar: The Jammu and Kashmir Haj Committee's decision to transport a large portion of returning Haj pilgrims' baggage by road from Ahmedabad to Srinagar has sparked widespread criticism from pilgrims, their families, and political leaders.

The decision, taken due to NOTAM-related restrictions and aircraft load limitations, has raised concerns over inconvenience, particularly for elderly pilgrims returning from the annual pilgrimage.

Many fear delays, loss, or damage to personal belongings, including religious items, gifts, and perishable

goods purchased during their stay in Saudi Arabia, prompting calls for immediate government intervention. The arrival phase of Haj flights to Srinagar is scheduled to begin on June 2, with the first flight expected to land at Srinagar International Airport at 12:45 pm. Additional flights are scheduled for June 3 and June 4. More than 7,000 pilgrims from Jammu and Kashmir undertook the Haj pilgrimage this year. The Jammu and Kashmir Haj Committee in a notification said that immigration and customs clearance of the pilgrims will be completed at Ahmedabad itself before their onward journey



to Srinagar. Under the revised baggage arrangements, pilgrims have been advised to carry only one piece of hand baggage weighing up to 7 kilograms, while just 5 kilograms of check-in baggage will be allowed on flights to

Srinagar. The remaining baggage, up to 30 kilograms per pilgrim, will be transported separately by road due to NOTAM-related restrictions and aircraft load limitations. The committee further clarified that no sin-

gle piece of check-in baggage should exceed 22 kilograms. Pilgrims will be able to collect their road-transported luggage from Haj House Srinagar upon its arrival. The decision has triggered anger among pilgrims and their families, many of whom fear delays, damage, or loss of belongings, including religious items, gifts, and perishable goods purchased during their stay in Saudi Arabia. Political parties have also raised concerns. Apni Party President Altaf Bukhari said it was troubling that pilgrims returning from a sacred journey were being subjected to unnecessary hardship.

No claimants for Karnataka CM post than Shivakumar: Cong leader

Bengaluru: Karnataka's political leadership transition appears to have been settled within the Congress, with party leader MC Sudhakar on Saturday asserting that there are "no claimants" to the Chief Minister's post and that Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar will assume charge with full support from outgoing Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

Sudhakar told media persons that Siddaramaiah had clearly conveyed that Shivakumar would take over responsibility and had extended his wholehearted backing to ensure continuity of governance and the party's prospects in the 2028 Assembly elections.

"There are no claimants, it was very clear and our outgoing CM has categorically mentioned that DK Shivakumar is going to take up the responsibility and he has extended his wholehearted support," Sudhakar said.

The development comes amid heightened political activity within the Karnataka Congress, with Shivakumar recently holding discussions in New Delhi with AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge and senior leader Rahul Gandhi on issues related to leadership transition, organisational appointments and Rajya Sabha nominations.

The Congress Legislature Party (CLP) is scheduled to meet in Bengaluru at

4 pm on Saturday, where party observers are expected to consult the high command before a final decision on leadership and organisational matters.

The meeting follows Governor Thaaawarchand Gehlot's acceptance of Siddaramaiah's resignation and the subsequent dissolution of the Council of Ministers, though Siddaramaiah has been requested to continue as caretaker Chief Minister until a formal transition is completed.

Party leaders have indicated that decisions on Rajya Sabha nominations, MLC appointments and other organisational changes will be taken by the central leadership in New Delhi.

State-wide public outreach campaign in UP June 5–21 marking 12 years of NDA govt

Lucknow: A statewide public campaign will be held in Uttar Pradesh from June 5 to June 21 to mark 12 years of the NDA government at the Centre under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, focusing on governance, development, and welfare initiatives.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath reviewed preparations for the campaign on Friday and directed officials to transform it into a mass participation movement and apprise the citizens of the achievements, schemes, and developmental journey of the Central and State Governments to every citizen. Of both the central and state governments.

The Chief Minister said, "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has attained new heights in development, good governance, welfare for the poor, social justice, and global prestige over the past 12 years. Through coordinated efforts by the Central and State Governments, positive changes have been brought into the lives

of every section of society. Through this campaign, these achievements, public welfare schemes, and the resolve of a developed India should be effectively communicated to the people." He instructed that the extensive transformations, achievements, and best practices in the fields of healthcare, education, youth empowerment, farmers' welfare, women's safety and dignity, welfare of the poor, employment generation, investment, infrastructure development, law and order, digital services, and good governance brought about by the Central and State Governments should be conveyed to every citizen. Successful stories of beneficiaries of various schemes and the positive changes brought into their lives should also be prominently highlighted.

Chief Minister stated, "All ministers should spend sufficient time in their respective assigned regions and ensure active participation in every programme under the campaign. Extensive dia-

logue should be established with various sections of society, intellectuals, youth, women, farmers, entrepreneurs, and trade organizations." As part of the campaign, the state will organise a 10-km "Pragati Path Yatra" in each of its 403 assembly constituencies, with elected representatives expected to engage with villagers through overnight stays and hold chaupal meetings, and interact with village heads and local citizens. A series of events will also be held, including environmental drives on World Environment Day, public welfare fairs, media interactions, exhibitions, and district-level conferences on the vision of a "developed India."

The campaign will conclude on June 21 with International Yoga Day events across all development blocks and urban local bodies in the state.

The Rural Development Department will coordinate the programme, and Members of Parliament and MLAs will actively participate in it.

The Chief Minister directed



all public representatives and office-bearers to establish one-to-one dialogue with intellectuals, academicians, doctors, entrepreneurs, trade organizations, and various sections of society. He said that extensive public communication should be established regarding the government's achievements, schemes, and the vision of a Viksit Bharat.

He said, "On June 5, on the occasion of World Environment Day, large-scale plantation programmes should be organized across the state under the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign. Semi-

nars related to environmental conservation, water conservation, cleanliness, and health awareness should be organized in every development block and urban local body. Wide participation of public representatives, village heads, self-help groups, youth, students, social organizations, entrepreneurs, and the general public should be ensured so that the campaign takes the shape of a mass movement. A special public awareness campaign should also be conducted to make the state free from single-use plastic. Through all programmes, broad public participation should be ensured to increase awareness about environmental conservation and a plastic-free lifestyle." It was informed during the meeting that from June 8 to June 14, public outreach campaigns, interaction programmes, and foot marches will be organized. Media interaction programmes will be held on June 11 and 12, after which ministers will interact with media representatives at the district level. On June 13 and 14, Members

of Parliament and MLAs will share information about the achievements and development works of the double-engine government through media interactions in their respective regions. The Chief Minister directed, "Public welfare fairs should be organized in all development blocks and urban local bodies across the state between June 14 and June 16. Exhibitions based on the achievements of the Central and State Governments should be set up at these fairs, and special campaigns should be conducted to connect eligible yet deprived beneficiaries with various schemes. Along with this, health fairs, animal health fairs, and other public welfare activities should also be organized." He said that district-level Viksit Bharat Sankalp Conferences should be organized on June 16 and 17. Beneficiaries of various schemes should share their experiences at these events, and maximum participation of intellectuals, youth, women, and social organizations should be ensured.

The Chief Minister directed, "On-the-spot painting competitions should be organized at various places to increase the participation of youth and students. To promote natural farming, special seminars should be organized connecting farmers, agricultural experts, and Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) with the campaign." He added, special emphasis should also be placed on interacting with women associated with self-help groups and connecting them with government schemes and the development journey. Special exhibitions showcasing the 12-year development journey of the Central Government and the resolve of a Viksit Bharat will be organized on June 18 and 19. Achievements should be effectively displayed through attractive mediums. The Chief Minister said that on June 21, on the occasion of International Yoga Day, yoga programmes will be organized in all 825 development blocks and more than 700 urban local bodies across the state.

Fuel Price Increase Triggers Massive Lines at Gas Stations Across the City

Mumbai: Giant lines of vehicles blocked fuel stations throughout the city on Saturday after the Mahanagar Gas Limited company announced a sudden increase in the cost of compressed natural gas. Video footage from fuel stations along JJ Road in Byculla and other neighborhoods showed hundreds of auto-rickshaws, taxis, and delivery vehicles waiting in long lines as drivers hurried to top off their tanks before the new pricing took full effect.

The fuel price change rolled out at midnight, with the gas company raising the retail price of compressed natural gas by 2 rupees per kilogram. The price of piped kitchen gas also went up by 50 paise per standard cubic meter. Following this adjustment, natural gas in the city and neighboring districts costs 86 rupees per kilogram, while home kitchen gas is priced at 52 rupees per unit.

According to statements from the gas company, the higher prices were caused by rising costs to secure



natural gas supplies. The firm pointed out that they are receiving lower amounts of cheaper domestic gas, forcing them to rely on expensive alternative energy imports while dealing with a drop in the value of the Indian currency. This marks the second fuel price hike for local drivers in less than two weeks. Giant lines of commercial and private vehicles blocked fuel stations throughout the city on Saturday after the Mahanagar Gas Limited company an-

nounced a sudden increase in the cost of compressed natural gas. Video footage captured from fuel stations along JJ Road in Byculla and other central neighborhoods showed hundreds of auto-rickshaws, black-and-yellow taxis, and light delivery vehicles waiting in long lines as drivers hurried to top off their tanks. The massive congestion across various fuel retail outlets disrupted morning traffic flow on several adjacent arterial roads, requiring local

traffic police to intervene at multiple bottlenecks. The fuel price change officially rolled out at midnight, with the city-gas distribution company raising the retail price of compressed natural gas by exactly two rupees per kilogram. Concurrently, the price of piped kitchen gas supplied directly to households also went up by fifty paise per standard cubic meter across the distribution grid. Following this sudden upward adjustment, compressed natural gas in

the city and neighboring districts costs eighty-six rupees per kilogram, while home kitchen piped gas is now priced at fifty-two rupees per unit. According to formal statements released by the gas company, the higher retail prices were directly caused by escalating costs to secure stable natural gas supplies on the open market. The utility firm pointed out that they are receiving significantly lower amounts of cheaper domestic gas allocation from central reserves, forcing them to rely on expensive alternative energy imports. This supply shift, coupled with a recent drop in the value of the Indian currency against the US dollar, has significantly driven up procurement expenses, making this the second fuel price hike for local drivers in less than two weeks. The sudden financial revision has immediately triggered widespread anxiety and frustration among the city's extensive commercial transport community, who rely almost exclusively on natural gas to sustain their daily operations.

Local Police Department Uses Trending Drama to Share Road Safety Lesson

Mumbai: The city police department has launched a creative traffic safety drive using themes from a popular streaming television series called Off Campus to persuade motorcycle and scooter riders to use safety helmets. By using the show's college setting and ice hockey themes, the police department hope to connect with young drivers and encourage safer choices on the road.

The popular romantic college show has become incredibly famous across social media networks, with numerous video clips of the main actors and their stories going viral online. Using their official internet profile, the Mumbai Police wrote that whether a person is off campus or playing on the ice, a helmet must always come first. They added that safety is a major priority and noted that a single wrong choice can alter a person's life forever.

The clever social media drive uses trendy entertainment to deliver a vital public safety reminder to the community, highlighting that wearing a proper helmet serves as a protective shield that significantly lowers the danger of head injuries

during traffic accidents.

The Mumbai Police Department has launched an innovative and creative traffic safety initiative, utilizing themes from the immensely popular streaming television series Off Campus to advocate for mandatory helmet use among two-wheeler riders. Recognizing that traditional public service announcements can sometimes fail to engage younger demographics, the department's digital media team strategically adopted the romantic college drama's narrative elements and its prominent ice hockey theme. By aligning vital road safety guidelines with contemporary pop culture trends, law enforcement officials hope to build a genuine connection with adolescent and young adult motorists across the metropolitan area, persuading them to make safer choices while navigating the city's streets. The acclaimed television show has secured a massive, dedicated following on various social media platforms, with countless video clips, fan edits, and character discussions involving the main actors routinely going viral online. Capitalizing on this massive wave of digital

engagement, the Mumbai Police utilized their official internet profiles to craft a highly relatable public safety message centered around the show's core imagery. In their viral post, the department emphasized a clever parallel, stating that whether a person is navigating life off campus or physically competing on a high-stakes ice hockey rink, a protective helmet must always remain the absolute priority. The law enforcement agency further expanded on this sentiment by emphasizing that personal safety on public roads should never be treated as a secondary concern, especially when operating vulnerable vehicles like motorcycles and scooters. The department noted that a single moment of negligence or a solitary wrong choice on the road has the potential to alter an individual's life and the lives of their loved ones forever. This digital safety drive leverages lighthearted entertainment trends to deliver an uncompromising reminder to the community, highlighting that a standard helmet acts as an indispensable shield that substantially lowers the risk of fatal head injuries during unexpected traffic accidents.

Airline Offers Direct Match Day Flights for Big Cricket Finale

Mumbai: Expecting an immense rush of sports travelers heading to the IPL cricket finale in Ahmedabad, Akasa Air has set up special game-day flight routes from Mumbai and Bengaluru to help fans travel easily for the championship match. The highly anticipated final game between the Gujarat Titans and the Royal Challengers Bengaluru will take place on Sunday, May 31, at the massive Narendra Modi Stadium.

The special flight schedules are timed perfectly so that fans can land in Ahmedabad right before the match starts, watch the championship game live in the stands, and fly right back to their home cities early the next morning. This smart travel setup removes any need for fans to book an overnight stay in the host city. Hotel rooms in Ahmedabad usually experience massive price jumps during major sports games, making these round-trip flights an affordable choice for cricket fans.

The airline shared a message on its official internet account inviting fans to use the special match-day

flights to reach Ahmedabad in plenty of time for the big event. They highlighted that fans can experience the excitement of the live game and head back home immediately afterward, skipping hotel expenses to enjoy non-stop sports action and easy travel.

An absolute frenzy has gripped cricket enthusiasts across the nation as Akasa Air announced the launch of highly specialized, direct match-day flight routes designed exclusively for fans attending the Indian Premier League championship finale in Ahmedabad. This strategic scheduling intervention was introduced to accommodate an immense, unprecedented rush of sports travelers originating from major metropolitan hubs who are desperate to secure transit to the tournament's ultimate showdown. The highly anticipated final game is scheduled to take place on Sunday at the massive Narendra Modi Stadium, an iconic sporting venue capable of hosting over one hundred thousand roaring spectators for this pinnacle event of the domestic

cricket calendar.

The special flight schedules have been timed with meticulous precision by aviation planners to ensure that fans can touch down in Ahmedabad with plenty of buffer time before the opening coin toss. By offering highly optimized arrival slots, the airline allows travelers to transition seamlessly from the tarmac to the stadium stands without feeling rushed or missing any pre-match entertainment. This carefully calculated timeline is mirrored by the return legs, which are scheduled to depart from Ahmedabad early the next morning, allowing fans to witness the entire trophy ceremony before heading back to the terminal.

This smart travel setup offers a massive logistical advantage by completely eliminating the necessity for fans to book an overnight hotel stay in the host city, which is historically a major pain point during premium sporting events. Hospitality rates in Ahmedabad routinely experience astronomical price jumps whenever the stadium hosts high-profile

games, with standard rooms often retailing at five to ten times their regular market value due to sudden demand. By facilitating a rapid, same-day turnaround, these curated round-trip flights provide a highly efficient, cost-effective alternative that keeps the total cost of the match experience relatively reasonable for the average fan.

The airline broadcasted the infrastructure initiative through its official internet and social media accounts, inviting cricket fans to leverage these tactical routes to ensure they do not miss a single moment of the live spectacle. Marketing teams highlighted the unique proposition of experiencing the raw, electric atmosphere of a stadium finale while bypassing the stress of navigating fully booked local hotel markets or dealing with extended check-in protocols. The campaign presents the specialized service as the ultimate travel hack for modern sports consumers who prioritize non-stop athletic action and zero-fuss transit over traditional, multi-day tourist itineraries.

City Authorities Clean Up Flooding Hotspot Ahead of Rains

Thane: The local municipal corporation stepped into action following a series of detailed media reports showing serious flooding dangers in the area. Within a single week of the issues being brought to light, government workers started the essential task of digging out heavy soil and trash from the Kranti Nagar drainage channel, providing major relief to neighborhood families right before the summer monsoon starts.

The local neighborhood group and a political leader named Javed Shaikh pushed hard for the cleanup by delivering an official warning letter on May 18, 2026, to the Thane Municipal Corporation chief and the local neighborhood board.

However, it was the investigative spotlight and steady attention from the media that forced the city administration to move quickly. Starting their machinery just seven days after the news reports and citizen letters were filed, the local government sent out workers and digging trucks to clear away the massive dirt deposits that were blocking the natural flow of the water



channel. Even with this quick cleanup success, local families remain highly worried about an unfinished safety wall near Rahmat Nagar and Rabodi. Neighbors fear that if the protective wall is not finished before the heavy rains hit, the area could easily face the same destructive flooding that damaged their homes last year.

The Thane Municipal Corporation initiated a major infrastructural cleanup operation following a series

of highly detailed, investigative media reports that highlighted the severe and immediate flooding vulnerabilities plaguing the local sector. Within a single week of these systemic drainage issues being brought to public light by journalists, the civic administration mobilized its engineering department to undertake the critical task of desilting and widening the choked water systems. Government laborers began excavating mas-

sive layers of packed soil, industrial waste, and accumulated plastic trash from the expansive Kranti Nagar drainage channel, providing immense psychological and physical relief to hundreds of neighborhood families who were deeply anxious about the rapidly approaching summer monsoon season.

The momentum for this urgent public works intervention had been building for weeks, driven primarily by a dedicated local neighborhood association alongside a prominent regional political leader named Javed Shaikh. Together, these community advocates coordinated a grassroots campaign to formally document the deteriorating condition of the locality's primary stormwater networks, which had been neglected for several consecutive seasons. Their efforts culminated on May 18, 2026, when the delegation officially drafted and delivered a rigorous warning letter directly to the desk of the Thane Municipal Corporation chief and the executive members of the localized neighborhood planning board.

High Speed Car Crash Near Highway Bridge Leaves Person Critically Hurt



Mumbai: A violent collision between a passenger car and a roadside utility truck near Borivali West has left one individual fighting for their life with critical injuries.

The severe traffic accident occurred near the East-West Bridge on Friday evening when a moving car slammed directly into a generator vehicle that was parked along the shoulder of the road. A video of the crash aftermath was uploaded to social media by a local online page called Dahisarkar. The clip shows the extreme violence of the crash, revealing that the car struck the back of the parked generator truck with immense force. The severe impact left one pas-

senger with life-threatening injuries, though authorities have not yet confirmed the identity of the hurt individual.

Additional video clips from the accident scene show nearby residents and passing drivers rushing to the smashed car to pull the victims out and offer emergency help before the ambulance and rescue teams arrived.

This event follows another tragic accident in the region, where four young people lost their lives in a head-on collision when a long-distance travel bus traveling to Pune crashed into a motorcycle near Manwath town, completely destroying the bike. A violent traffic collision be-

tween a passenger car and a stationary utility vehicle near Borivali West has left one individual fighting for their life with critical, life-threatening injuries.

The severe accident transpired near the prominent East-West Bridge on Friday evening when a moving car lost control and slammed directly into the rear of a generator truck that was parked along the shoulder of the thoroughfare.

The immense force of the impact completely crushed the front section of the passenger car, trapping the occupants inside the mangled metal frame and drawing immediate attention from nearby commuters.

Overflowing Trash Blocks Major Drainage Path Outside Local Transit Station

Mumbai: A video clip showing a roadside drain completely choked with household trash right outside the Valnai-Meeth Chowky Metro station in Malad has gone viral online, triggering concerns about public waste management just days before the monsoon arrives.

The video footage was recorded and uploaded by a local neighborhood social platform called MaladCulture.

The clip shows an im-

mense pile of garbage trapped inside the drainage line right next to the transit hub, with the accumulated waste creating a long, solid blockade across a major section of the channel.

The visuals from the site show plastic bottles, bags, and other discarded household items piled up together in one specific spot.

Interestingly, the water flowing past the garbage blockage looks fairly clear, which indicates that the

trash was likely dumped right there by people rather than washing down from other parts of the neighborhood.

This massive collection of trash has worried local residents, especially since the city is getting ready for heavy monsoon downpours when blocked drains regularly cause severe street flooding and waterlogging in low-lying neighborhoods. While city officials claim that 99.87 percent of the

main drainage channels have already been cleared out, local activists are reminding the public to stop throwing trash into open drains to prevent local flooding.

A disturbing video clip capturing a roadside drainage channel completely choked with massive piles of household trash directly outside the Valnai-Meeth Chowky Metro station in Malad has gone viral online. The digital footage has triggered widespread concern

regarding the efficiency of local public waste management systems and the operational readiness of the city's civic infrastructure, especially since the highly disruptive monsoon season is scheduled to arrive in just a few days.

The viral nature of the clip has forced the issue into the public spotlight, amplifying long-standing anxieties within the suburban community about preventable street inundation.

Multi Crore Metro Network Faces Backlash Over Cost and Green Impact

Thane: A large alliance of local residents, city layout experts, and environmental protectors has challenged the proposed Thane Integrated Ring Metro initiative, pointing out massive planning mistakes, major financial dangers, and threats to nature. The alliance is operating under the names Citizens for Sustainable Transport and the Thane Green Collective. They have sent an official petition to the Maharashtra state government asking them to pause the 12,200-crore rupee transport project until an independent panel can review the plans. Their arguments are backed by detailed assessments from transportation expert Ashish Verma and city planner Sulakshana Mahajan. The planned 29-kilometer transit line claims it

will carry 6.47 lakh riders every single day by the year 2029. However, the expert review exposes major mathematical mistakes in the official project papers. A powerful alliance comprising local residents, urban planning experts, and environmental advocates has formally challenged the implementation of the proposed Thane Integrated Ring Metro initiative, igniting an intense public debate over the city's future. Operating under the coordinated banners of Citizens for Sustainable Transport and the Thane Green Collective, the coalition has submitted an official petition directly to the Maharashtra state government. The group is demanding an immediate, comprehensive freeze on all development activities related to the massive 12,200-crore

rupee rapid transit project until an independent, multidisciplinary panel can thoroughly re-examine the core structural plans. The arguments presented by the alliance are anchored by detailed technical assessments from prominent figures in Indian urban development, including transport engineering expert Ashish Verma and seasoned city planner Sulakshana Mahajan. According to the official project documents published by the state, the planned 29-kilometer circular transit loop is projected to carry an estimated 6.47 lakh riders every single day by its targeted launch year of 2029. However, the comprehensive independent review conducted by Verma and Mahajan exposes what they characterize as major mathematical

mistakes, exaggerated growth projections, and flawed assumptions within the project's official papers. The expert dissenters argue that the government's ridership metrics are highly unrealistic when compared against the actual population density and travel patterns documented across Thane's primary corridors. They point out that a circular loop line operates differently than traditional linear mass transit systems, meaning it cannot count on the same volume of long-distance point-to-point commuters. By treating the closed loop as a standard transit line in their formulas, the state's planners have allegedly manufactured an artificial ridership boom that fails to reflect how local residents actually navigate the municipality.

Editorial

The Grip of Ebola!

The warning recently issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) to the entire world regarding the new, rapidly spreading Ebola virus outbreak clearly underscores the severity of the growing threats facing human health. Speaking from the platform of the 79th World Health Assembly held in Geneva, the organization's Director-General, Tedros Ghebreyesus, made it clear that recent outbreaks of the Ebola and Hanta viruses demonstrate that the world remains extremely vulnerable to rapidly spreading infectious diseases. Recognizing the gravity of the situation, the World Health Organization has declared this new Ebola outbreak a global public health emergency. This epidemic which has been wreaking havoc across the African continent in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, and South Sudan has now compelled numerous nations worldwide, including India and the United States, to remain on high alert. Several countries have issued advisories to their citizens, urging them to refrain from traveling to the affected nations. In India as well, the discovery of suspected Ebola cases in major cities like Bengaluru and Nagpur has caused immense anxiety within the healthcare system. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo the nation hit hardest by this outbreak the death toll has now surpassed 234, while the number of suspected cases has reached the one-thousand mark. Since the discovery of this virus in the African region in 1976, there have been a staggering 17 outbreaks of this disease to date. Prior to this, the Ebola outbreak that swept through West Africa between 2014 and 2016 proved to be the largest and most lethal in history; it infected nearly 30,000 people and claimed the lives of over 11,000 innocent citizens.

Ebola is an extremely deadly disease that is primarily transmitted from animals to humans. This virus primarily infects fruit bats; subsequently, the disease enters the human body through other animals and birds that have come into direct contact with the bats or have consumed fruits partially eaten (contaminated) by them. Once inside the human body, the virus spreads rapidly from one person to another, eventually escalating into an epidemic. The greatest challenge associated with Ebola infection is that its symptoms do not manifest immediately. After the virus enters the body, it typically takes a period of about 21 days for actual symptoms to appear. The onset of the disease is marked by symptoms resembling those of the common flu or malaria such as a sudden, high fever, headaches, and extreme fatigue.

However, as the illness progresses, the patient begins to suffer from vomiting and severe diarrhea, and their internal organs start to fail. In critical cases, the patient experiences both internal and external bleeding. Since the virus spreads to a healthy individual through direct contact with the saliva, blood, or other bodily fluids of an infected person, immediately placing a suspected patient in isolation remains the primary and sole method for safeguarding others.

The Ebola virus is primarily classified into four main strains: Zaire, Sudan, Bundibugyo, and Tai Forest. Among these, the 'Zaire' strain has been responsible for the majority of human epidemics recorded to date including the historic 2014 outbreak and the outbreak in Gabon for which, fortunately, a vaccine is now available. The 'Sudan' virus wreaked havoc in South Sudan and Uganda, while the 'Tai Forest' strain is considered extremely rare. However, the current spreading epidemic is caused by the 'Bundibugyo' virus, which was first discovered in 2007 in the Bundibugyo district of Uganda. This marks the third outbreak of this particular virus, following two previous occurrences.

The most concerning aspect is that, although an effective vaccine is available for the Zaire virus, no precise vaccine or definitive cure is yet available for the Bunibugyo variant currently wreaking havoc.

The current, devastating epidemic has spread across the Democratic Republic of the Congo a territory vast enough to encompass all of Western Europe posing a direct threat to at least ten neighboring nations. The ceaseless warfare resulting from inter-ethnic conflicts, the struggle for control over mineral resources, and the insatiable lust for power has left the country's administrative and healthcare systems completely shattered. Consequently, this political instability has severely undermined the precautionary and containment measures required to combat a grave epidemic like Ebola, leading to a rapid surge in both the spread of the disease and the death toll. The delayed detection of the disease stands as the most significant obstacle in addressing this crisis. Given that Ebola is highly contagious, it is imperative to rapidly diagnose suspected cases and place patients in isolation; however, regional insecurity frequently results in significant delays in diagnosis. Furthermore, since the initial symptoms of diseases such as the flu, malaria, typhoid, and Lassa fever closely mirror those of Ebola, the risk of misdiagnosis is significantly heightened. Moreover, as the current Bundibugyo virus strain is relatively new, there has been very limited research conducted globally regarding the development of vaccines and therapeutic treatments for it.

Alongside these scientific and administrative challenges, traditional African social customs and burial rites are also proving to be major impediments to disease containment efforts. In countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, traditional and religious burial rites hold immense cultural significance, viewed as the sacred means by which the deceased are ushered into the realm of their ancestors.

These rituals typically commence with communal mourning and pre-burial rites, during which physical contact such as touching the body of the deceased and embracing one another is considered an indispensable part of the tradition. In the Congo, numerous instances have been recorded where hundreds of people attending funeral rites were simultaneously infected after coming into contact with the bodily fluids of a deceased Ebola patient. These inherent challenges have been further compounded by the negative influence of global politics. The Trump administration in the United States significantly cut funding to various international medical organizations including the World Health Organization which has had a severely adverse impact on public health initiatives and services in impoverished nations like the Congo, making the containment of epidemic diseases increasingly difficult.

To combat this new and highly virulent strain of Ebola, there is now an urgent global need for a rapid and multi-pronged strategy. Overcoming this crisis requires a focused approach centered on four key pillars: tracing patients on a war footing, enhancing international medical cooperation, developing a rapid and collaborative surveillance system, and fostering community engagement at the local level. Given that no effective vaccine currently exists for this specific virus, health officials must implement comprehensive community-wide campaigns to raise public awareness and sensitivity regarding the disease. Furthermore, the government must strictly enforce public health laws. In particular, the rigorous application of the law to curb traditional cultural practices which often encourage unsafe burial rituals and heighten the risk of Ebola transmission remains the only viable means of breaking the chain of this epidemic.

G. Kishan Reddy Directs Agencies to Fast-Track Pending Mining & Exploration Projects During Bengaluru Review Meetings

Hon'ble Union Minister for Coal & Mines G. Kishan Reddy on Monday directed all mining and exploration agencies under the Ministry to fast-track pending projects and adopt a mission-mode approach to strengthen India's mineral security and strategic growth objectives.

"All organisations must fast-track pending projects and ensure that technology, transparency and efficiency become the foundation of every institutional process. The people of India and the Government of India expect speed, accountability and visible outcomes from every agency working in this sector," the Minister said while chairing a series of high-level review meetings in Bengaluru with senior officials of the Geological Survey of India (GSI), National Institute of Rock Mechanics (NIRM), Indian Bureau of Mines (IBM) and the Remote Sensing & Aerial Survey (RSAS) division.

The meetings focused on accelerating mineral exploration, strengthening scientific and technological capabilities, promoting sustainable mining practices and aligning institutional efforts with the national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

During the review, the Minister assessed ongoing projects, technological advancements and exploration activities being undertaken across the country, particularly in the field of critical and strategic minerals including Rare Earth Elements (REE), Lithium, Nickel, Cobalt, Tungsten, Vanadium and Platinum Group Elements (PGE). The organisations presented detailed updates on resource augmentation, mineral targeting, scientific surveys, mine sustainability, geospatial technologies and advanced exploration systems being implemented to strengthen India's mineral security and strategic growth objectives.

Addressing the officials, Shri G. Kishan Reddy stated: "Under the leadership and vision of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Nar-



endra Modi Ji, India is moving decisively towards becoming a self-reliant and globally competitive economy. The mining and exploration sector has a critical role in securing India's future growth, industrial expansion and strategic mineral security."

He further directed all organisations to work in a coordinated mission-mode approach with clearly defined timelines, measurable outcomes and greater accountability. The Minister also emphasised the importance of advanced technologies, data integration and scientific innovation in strengthening India's exploration ecosystem.

"The future of mineral exploration lies in technology-driven systems including AI, remote sensing, integrated geoscience analytics and advanced exploration methodologies. Our institutions must lead this transformation to make India future-ready and resource-secure," he said.

The Geological Survey of India highlighted major exploration outcomes across Karnataka and Goa, including the identification of gold,

copper, PGE, nickel and cobalt-bearing zones, along with significant augmentation of mineral resources following reforms introduced under the MMDR Amendment Act, 2015. GSI also

The National Institute of Rock Mechanics showcased its contributions towards nationally significant infrastructure and mining safety projects including hydropower, metro rail, tunnel engineering, seis-



outlined its five-year roadmap involving large-scale thematic mapping, AI/ML-enabled mineral targeting and advanced-stage exploration projects covering nearly 48,000 sq. km.

mic monitoring and controlled blasting near sensitive infrastructure. The institute also presented its capabilities in rock mechanics, engineering geology, micro seismic monitoring and geotechnical solu-

tions supporting strategic national development projects.

The Indian Bureau of Mines reviewed progress in sustainable mining practices, operationalisation of auctioned mineral blocks, scientific mine closure, mineral beneficiation and environmental safeguards. IBM also presented findings related to critical mineral enrichment and recovery potential from existing mining ecosystems under the National Critical Mineral Mission.

The RSAS division presented the progress achieved under the National Aerogeophysical Mapping Programme (NAGMP), including airborne geophysical surveys, hyperspectral remote sensing and AI/ML-driven mineral prospectively mapping. The review highlighted that more than 6.5 lakh sq. km. has already been covered under the programme, generating over 200 exploration projects using aero-geophysical datasets.

As part of the Bengaluru visit, Hon'ble Minister Shri G. Kishan Reddy also visited the Art of Living Foundation International Centre and interacted with members of the Art of Living family. The Minister visited the Gurukul and Exhibition Centre and appreciated the institution's efforts towards value-based education, spiritual awareness and social transformation rooted in India's cultural heritage.

The Minister also had the privilege of interacting with Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and sought his blessings.

Reflecting on the visit, Shri G. Kishan Reddy said: "India's development journey towards Viksit Bharat 2047 must be guided not only by economic progress and technological advancement, but also by spiritual consciousness, cultural values and a spirit of collective service towards society."

The visit concluded with a renewed emphasis on nation-building through scientific progress, sustainable development, cultural values and institutional excellence in alignment with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

India Post's Revenue Surges to ₹15,373 Crore in FY 2025-26

Union Minister of State for Communications and Rural Development, Dr. Chandra Sekhar Pemmasani, in an interview with DD India, said that India Post's revenue has surged to ₹15,373 crore in the financial year 2025-26, marking one of the most significant financial milestones in the department's 170-year history. The Minister of State noted that the department's revenue stood at approximately ₹11,500 crore in 2016, with an average annual growth of ₹200-300 crore in the intervening years. This year, however, witnessed an unprecedented single-year increase of ₹2,100 crore, nearly ten times the historical average.

The Minister of State attributed this turnaround to a structured dual-pronged approach which was a top-down strategy involving identification of the total addressable market, target-setting, and accountability, combined with a bottom-up strategy of workforce engagement. He credited the leadership of Union Minister of Communications Shri Jyotiraditya Scindia for establishing an organizational framework that has identified bottlenecks, fixed them, and delivered results.

Furthermore, the Minister of State underscored that India Post's parcel and logistics segment has registered a 70% growth, driven by technology integration and expanded e-commerce partnerships. When the current leadership assumed charge, total parcel revenue stood at approximately ₹600 crore. With the introduction of OTP-based delivery, SMS tracking, UPI and digital payment acceptance, and B2B tie-ups with major e-commerce platforms, parcel services alone are estimated to have the potential to generate up to ₹10,000 crore in revenue. Route rationalisation has been undertaken to enable faster deliveries, and after extensive piloting, India Post launched 24-hour and 48-hour Speed Post delivery services across six metro cities, supported by large-scale public awareness campaigns. Dr. Pemmasani said that as traditional letter mail becomes increasingly marginal, logistics and parcel services represent the primary growth frontier for the department.

A cornerstone of India Post's modernisation drive is the ₹5,800 crore investment under the Advanced Postal Technology (APT) initiative as part of IT 2.0. The

Minister of State outlined the department's vision of fully digital, end-to-end services, enabling citizens to purchase savings instruments and insurance policies such as PLI and RPLI through a browser with a single click, download digital certificates instantly, and receive matured policy amounts directly into their bank accounts, all without visiting a post office.

Postal savings accounts, which offer an interest rate of 4%, among the highest in the country and significantly above the approximately 2.5% offered by leading commercial banks, are expected to see substantially wider adoption through this digital accessibility push. Security architecture under IT 2.0 includes facial recognition for system access, E-KYC, Aadhaar linking, and full compliance with national cloud security protocols.

India Post, through India Post Payments Bank (IPPB), is currently distributing approximately ₹45,000 crore annually through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), making it one of the largest last-mile welfare delivery channels in the country. IPPB representatives, equipped with mobile phones, biometric devices, and printers, deliv-

er doorstep banking services including fund disbursements and bill collections directly to rural households.

The department is implementing the Sukanya Samridhi Scheme in saturation mode, with 3.8 crore girl children currently enrolled under the scheme. Women-centric savings products, Self-Help Group (SHG) linkages, and high-interest rural savings accounts are being actively promoted through the Gramin Dak Sevak network, a force of approximately 2.5 lakh personnel present in virtually every village, described by the Minister of State as the "backbone" of India Post. Dr Pemmasani also noted that the department's future vision includes demography-based suggestions to DBT beneficiaries on suitable insurance and savings products, further strengthening their financial safety net.

Along with infrastructure upgradation, India Post has undertaken a massive capacity building and behavioural transformation programme across its workforce. Training sessions are being conducted for every 100 employees, focusing on customer interaction, service delivery, and sales skills.

Dr. Chandra Sekhar Pemmasani emphasised that this cultural and mindset shift, moving from a transactional to a customer-centric orientation, is as integral to the department's transformation as any technological intervention.

Gramin Dak Sevak sammelans were organised across the country to directly engage field staff, explain the department's financial position, and convey their role in realising the vision of Viksit Bharat. In parallel, India Post is undertaking a comprehensive physical modernisation of its post office network. Urban post offices are being revamped with an investment of ₹60-70 lakh per facility, featuring digital counters, streamlined Aadhaar updation services, and shared workspaces on their premises. Next-generation post offices are being set up in universities and educational institutions, incorporating cultural elements and digital amenities to connect with India's youth. In rural areas, the focus remains on saturation coverage, ensuring every household is reached, enrolled in applicable schemes, and educated about the full range of postal financial services available to them.

"Spice and Heal" Initiative Can Position India as Global Wellness Leader

In a significant step towards strengthening India's global leadership in traditional wellness and natural products, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between AYUSHEXCIL and the Spices Board of India in the presence of Shri Prataprao Jadhav, Union Minister of State (IC), Ministry of Ayush, and Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, Shri Prataprao Jadhav congratulated AYUSHEXCIL and the Spices Board of India for what he described as a "visionary and forward-looking partnership." He said the collaboration represents an important step towards strengthening India's traditional wellness systems and promoting the

global integration of Ayurveda, medicinal plants, and Indian spices.

Highlighting India's rich heritage, Shri Jadhav noted that Ayurveda and Indian spices have for centuries symbolised preventive healthcare, balanced living, and natural wellness knowledge. He said the coming together of the two sectors reflects a shared commitment to work for the benefit of farmers, industry, startups, exporters, and global consumers.

The Minister expressed satisfaction that the collaboration focuses on critical areas such as quality enhancement, traceability, scientific validation, innovation, export promotion, and devel-



opment of international markets. He also highlighted the proposed "Spice and Heal" initiative, stating that it has the potential to emerge as a powerful branding campaign positioning India as a

global leader in holistic health and natural healing solutions. Emphasising the Government's commitment to empowering MSMEs, startups, women entrepreneurs, farmers, and young

innovators, the Minister said the initiative aligns closely with the vision of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for Atmanirbhar Bharat, Vocal for Local, Make in India, and Heal in

India. He added that the Prime Minister has consistently recognised India's traditional knowledge systems and wellness heritage as important pillars of the country's global identity and economic progress.

Expressing confidence in the long-term impact of the partnership, the Minister stated that the MoU would open new avenues for export growth, rural development, farmer empowerment, and international collaboration. He conveyed his best wishes for the success of the partnership, noting that it would further strengthen India's reputation in the field of global wellness and natural products.

FDA Seizes Massive Methanol Stock in Bhiwandi After Deadly Liquor Tragedy

Mumbai: In a major crackdown following the deaths of 18 people who allegedly consumed toxic illicit liquor in Fugewadi, Dapodi, and Hadapsar in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has seized 5,929 kilograms of methanol from a company in Bhiwandi. Preliminary investigations have revealed that the methanol used in the poisonous liquor was supplied by M/s Rex International.

Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Tukaram Mundhe said that no individual or establishment playing with public health will be spared. He warned that strict legal and judicial action will be taken against anyone violating the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, and other related laws. He emphasized that safe food and medicines are the fundamental rights of every citizen and ensuring those rights remains the administration's highest responsibility.

The action comes after investigations confirmed that methanol, a highly toxic chemical, had been mixed into country liquor that was being sold for as little as Rs 30. Following the deaths, Commissioner Tukaram Mundhe ordered an immediate statewide crackdown on illegal methanol stocks.

According to the police investigation, the deceased had consumed country liquor from the premises



of Karnalsing Virka in Fugewadi. Investigators found that Virka had obtained the liquor from Yogesh Wankhede, who in turn was sourcing it from Raju Prajapati of Uruli Kanchan. Further investigation revealed that the methanol used in the liquor supply chain originated from M/s Rex International.

Officials found that the company's office is located in Vashi, while its warehouse operates at Anant & Company, Gala No. 544/A, Mhatre Compound, Anjur Road, Valgaon,

Bhiwandi. Acting on the commissioner's instructions, Drug Inspector Yogendra Pol from the Thane FDA office conducted a raid at the warehouse.

During the inspection, company owner Arunkumar Chaube and authorized representative Abhishek Arunkumar Chaube were not present. Officials discovered a stock of 5,929 kilograms of methanol. However, no official records, stock registers, transaction details, or mandatory documents related to the pur-

chase and sale of the chemical were available.

As required records were missing under poisonous substances regulations, the entire stock was seized. A complaint has been filed against Arunkumar Chaube and Abhishek Arunkumar Chaube at Narpoli Police Station in Bhiwandi, and police have registered a criminal case.

The FDA's Thane office has also issued a show-cause notice under the Poisonous Substances Act and has begun proceedings to cancel the company's license.

The FDA has appealed to citizens to actively report illegal drug sales, adulterated medicines, misuse of toxic chemicals, and misleading advertisements. Citizens who suspect poor-quality medicines or illegal storage are encouraged to immediately file complaints with the FDA, providing their name, address, contact details, the exact location of the suspected establishment, and information about the product involved.

The administration assured that all complaints will be investigated confidentially and that prompt legal action will be taken wherever violations are found.

To make reporting easier for the public, the FDA announced that it will soon launch a dedicated mobile application and a toll-free helpline service for complaints and information sharing.

Sunetra Ajit Pawar-led NCP may cease to exist, hints Sanjay Raut

Mumbai: Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena Rajya Sabha MP and chief Sena spokesperson, Sanjay Raut, today indicated that the Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Ajit Pawar-led NCP will cease to exist or may merge with the BJP.

"This party formed by Ajit Pawar will not exist in the future. Now the quartet of Chhagan Bhujbal, Praful Patel, Sunil Tatkare, Hasan Mushrif and Dhananjay Munde may regret their moves. They might regret their move to tie Ajit Pawar to the BJP by separating him from Sharad Pawar," Sanjay Raut said here, while reacting to reports about fighting inside the Sunetra Ajit Pawar-led NCP.

It was reported that there was a heated exchange between Sunetra Ajit Pawar leader Sunil Tatkare and Chhagan Bhujbal at a recent party meeting held on Tuesday. It was also reported that there was another major spat between Sunetra Pawar's son as well as party MP Parth Pawar and party leader Chhagan Bhujbal, who is the Food & Civil Supplies Minister.

The dispute between



Parth Pawar and Minister Bhujbal arose after Parth Pawar reportedly had sent a contractor to Bhujbal regarding a state-level transport tender floated by the Food & Civil Supplies Department, but Bhujbal promptly sent the contractor back, disregarding Parth Pawar.

Eventually, this episode led to a verbal altercation between Parth Pawar and Minister Bhujbal.

Bhujbal expressed his displeasure to Parth Pawar by saying, "Not even your father or grandfather ever told me anything in such a manner."

Reportedly, Parth Pawar's reply to Bhujbal was "If that is the case, I will have to remove you from your department."

Bhujbal said, "The contract is stuck in the court. The cabinet has approved

it. There is an online process for awarding contracts. Those who qualify through that process are given contracts. How can a contract be given to someone just like that? There was no dispute between the two of us. Some things have to be done with understanding. Currently, the scrutiny and final process of the tender documents is being carried out by a state-level committee headed by the Additional Chief Secretary, and no work order has been given to any transporter." However, Parth Pawar has denied that anything happened between him and Chhagan Bhujbal. "Wrong news is being deliberately spread about us, especially about me. Nothing like that has happened. I have not interfered in any government work," Parth Pawar told media persons.

Adverse Weather Devastates Mango and Cashew Orchards in Ratnagiri

Ratnagiri: Continuous adverse weather conditions over the past several months have severely impacted mango and cashew growers in the Konkan region, the backbone of the local economy.

According to a joint report prepared by the Konkan Agricultural University and the Agriculture Department, nearly 90 percent of mango and cashew production in Ratnagiri district has been affected this season.

Following the natural calamity, the Agriculture and Revenue Departments launched a large-scale survey drive on a war footing. Officials have completed damage assessment reports for 48,791 hectares of or-

chard land belonging to 56,420 farmers across the district.

The detailed report is expected to be submitted to the state government through the District Collector's office within the next two days.

Govt to hold talks with Jarange Patil to clear misconceptions, egal hurdles causing delay, says Minister Vikhe Patil

Mumbai: In a bid to defuse the brewing quota crisis in Maharashtra, Minister Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil announced that the state government will hold direct talks with Maratha activist Manoj Jarange Patil to clear his "misconceptions" and persuade him to call off his indefinite hunger strike scheduled from May 30.

Asserting the ruling dispensation's positive approach, Vikhe Patil expressed confidence that once the administrative realities and the progress made by the government are explained, the activist will reconsider his decision to launch a fresh stir.

The government has taken highly proactive steps regarding the Maratha reservation. I am confident that once Jarange Patil understands the government's position and the ongoing implementation process, he will not proceed with the hunger strike," the Minister told reporters.

Taking a swipe at the



opposition, Vikhe Patil reminded that it was Devendra Fadnis who successfully granted a legally sustainable reservation to the Maratha community during his tenure as Chief Minister between 2014 and 2019. He alleged that the subsequent Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government failed to defend the quota, leading to its cancellation by the courts. He added that the current government has already withdrawn nearly 95 per cent of the police cases registered against Maratha protestors.

Addressing the procedural delays that have fueled

the protest, the Minister clarified that the decisions taken by the Cabinet Sub-committee have been communicated to Jarange Patil in writing.

"There seems to be confusion in his mind regarding the speed of implementation. We are effectively executing the decisions and reviewing them regularly. However, certain legal complexities naturally arise, which take time to resolve. Interpreting this necessary legal window as government inaction is incorrect," Vikhe Patil explained.

Providing specific data on the distribution of Kun-

bi (OBC) caste certificates, the Minister debunked the activist's claims regarding 58 lakh certificates. He stated that in Marathwada, 2.50 lakh certificates were distributed based on the Hyderabad Gazette.

"The Hyderabad Gazette does not directly mention individual names but contains village-level numbers. Establishing family lineages against these numbers is a time-consuming process. Since our dedicated committee was formed, more than 61,000 certificates have been issued. I will present these ground realities to Jarange Patil today to clear the air," he said.

Vikhe Patil further mentioned that there are technical and legal bottlenecks in implementing the Satara Gazette as well. He reiterated that once these administrative constraints are shared with the protest leader, the government expects a breakthrough and a peaceful resolution to the deadlock.

Toxic Liquor Tragedy Claims 14 Lives in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad; CM Orders Strict Action

Pune: A wave of concern and panic has spread across Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad after a suspected toxic liquor tragedy claimed 14 lives over the past two days, prompting an extensive investigation by law enforcement and excise authorities. Authorities have launched a joint probe involving the police and the excise department to uncover the source of the illicit liquor and identify all those involved in its manufacture and distribution. Multiple raids have already been carried out at locations suspected of being linked to the illegal network. According to officials, the crackdown has resulted in the arrest of the alleged

mastermind, Colonel Virkha Singh, along with eight other individuals. Investigators believe the accused played key roles in the production, supply and sale of the suspected poisonous liquor. Police have invoked stringent legal provisions against those arrested and indicated that additional charges may be added as the investigation progresses. Authorities have also suggested that more arrests are likely in the coming days. The tragedy has triggered an intensive search operation across both cities. Police teams continued overnight raids on suspected illicit liquor dens and storage facilities in an effort to dismantle the en-

tire supply chain behind the operation. Investigators are focusing on identifying the exact location where the liquor was allegedly manufactured and determining how it entered the distribution network. Officials are also attempting to establish whether similar consignments may have reached other areas. Forensic teams have collected samples of the seized liquor for laboratory analysis. The findings are expected to help determine the precise toxic substance responsible for the fatalities and provide crucial evidence for the investigation. Authorities are also examining the procurement of raw materials used in the manufacturing process.

Senior Minister Chhagan Bhujbal eyes vacant Rajya Sabha seat, pushes for nephew Sameer's cabinet entry

Mumbai: Against the backdrop of upcoming Legislative Council elections and seat-sharing negotiations in Maharashtra, a fresh political storm has hit the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP - Ajit Pawar faction). Senior leader and Food and Civil Supplies Minister Chhagan Bhujbal has reportedly initiated behind-the-scenes lobbying to secure a Rajya Sabha nomination.

The Upper House seat fell vacant following the resignation of Sunetra Pawar, who vacated her parliamentary position to take up responsibilities in

the state legislative assembly.

Reliable sources within the party revealed that Bhujbal's political push is two-pronged. Apart from eyeing the parliamentary berth for himself, the veteran Other Backward Classes (OBC) leader is strongly advocating for his nephew, Mumbai NCP chief Sameer Bhujbal, to be inducted into the Maharashtra state cabinet ahead of the highly anticipated ministerial expansion.

The aggressive maneuvering by the Bhujbal camp has triggered a sharp debate over internal party

and dynastic politics within the party. Speaking on condition of anonymity, a prominent Bhujbal loyalist raised a direct query over the alleged selective implementation of the "one family, one post" principle.

"When Ajit Pawar was the Deputy Chief Minister, his wife Sunetra Pawar was made an MP. Similarly, while Sunil Tatkare sits in Parliament, his daughter Aditi Tatkare is a Cabinet Minister in the state. Furthermore, Parth Pawar is being promoted at the national level. Why then is a different yardstick applied only when it comes to the

families of other senior leaders?" the leader questioned. The emerging friction comes on the heels of long-standing ideological and strategic differences between party chief Sunetra Ajit Pawar and Bhujbal. During the height of the Maratha quota agitation led by Manoj Jarange-Patil, Bhujbal had adopted a staunch pro-OBC stance, openly challenging the protest dynamics—making him the first major Mahayuti leader to do so. While Bhujbal's aggressive posture consolidated the OBC voting bloc, a section of the NCP leadership felt it

damaged the party's standing among Maratha voters. Faction insiders noted that Ajit Pawar had expressed strong displeasure during a party meeting, stating that extreme postures taken by certain leaders were damaging the party's overall image and resulting in heavy political costs. With the Rajya Sabha bypoll looming and internal dynamics shifting, the state's political circles are closely monitoring how Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Ajit Pawar balances the demands of his most senior cabinet colleague against rising internal dissent.

Scorching Heat Claims Five More Lives in Nagpur Amid Intensifying Heatwave

Nagpur: The relentless heatwave sweeping across Nagpur district during the ongoing Nautapa period has emerged as a serious public health concern, with five more suspected heat-related deaths reported on Thursday. Officials confirmed the fatalities on Friday, highlighting the continuing impact of extreme temperatures across the region.

The latest deaths come just a day after 10 suspected heatstroke-related fatalities were recorded in the district, marking the second consecutive day of casualties linked to the severe heatwave conditions.

According to preliminary reports, the five deceased included two residents from Nagpur city and three individuals from rural areas of the district. Authorities are examining the circumstances surrounding the deaths to determine whether they were directly caused by heat-related illnesses.

The ongoing spell of extreme weather has coincided with the traditional Nautapa period, which is widely regarded as the nine hottest days of the Indian summer. This year's temperatures have remained exceptionally high, placing considerable strain on res-

idents and healthcare services.

Many residents had hoped for some relief on Thursday morning when overcast skies appeared over parts of the district. However, the cloud cover failed to bring any meaningful respite from the oppressive conditions.

Instead, high humidity levels combined with soaring temperatures to increase discomfort across the region. The humid conditions made it more difficult for the body to cool itself, thereby increasing the risk of heat-related illnesses.

Maharashtra govt orders 'mission mode' crackdown on illegal fetal sex determination

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Forensic teams have collected samples of the seized liquor for laboratory analysis. The findings are expected to help determine the precise toxic substance responsible for the fatalities and provide crucial evidence for the investigation.

Authorities are also examining the procurement of raw materials used in the manufacturing process and tracing the movement of the liquor from production sites to retail points. Investigators believe these details could reveal the full extent of the illegal network.

The deaths have raised serious concerns about the continued presence of illicit liquor operations despite periodic enforcement drives.

MVA reaches consensus on 15 of 17 maharashtra legislative council seats

Mumbai: The opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) coalition in Maharashtra has ironed out differences over a majority of seats for the upcoming Legislative Council elections, reaching a consensus on 15 out of 17 seats, state Congress chief Harshwardhan Sapkal announced on Friday.

Addressing the media after a high-stakes MVA meeting at the Yashwantrao Chavan Auditorium, Sapkal stated that while primary discussions had taken place two days prior, final agreements were reached today in a display of unity against the ruling Mahayuti alliance.

Under the current consensus, the Congress will contest eight seats, the Ud-

dhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) four, and the Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) three seats.

A decision on the remaining two seats—Nanded and Nashik—which are currently being claimed by all three allies, will be finalized in the next two days, Sapkal added.

According to the agreed formula, Congress will field candidates in Chandrapur, Yavatmal, Bhandara-Gondia, Amravati, Ahilyanagar, Sholapur, Dharswad-Beed-Latur, and Nagpur.

The Shiv Sena (UBT) will contest from Ratnagiri, Jalgaon, Parbhani-Hingoli, and Sambhajinagar, while the NCP (SP) will fight for

the Pune, Thane, and Satara-Sangli seats.

"The MVA is fighting this election as a united front. Disregarding the horse-trading tactics of the BJP, we are stepping into this election to protect democracy, uphold cultural decency, and awaken constitutional values and the spirit of 'Maharashtra Dharma'," Sapkal declared.

Launching a scathing attack on the ruling dispensation, the Congress leader alleged that massive sums of money are being deployed by the ruling party to manipulate the elections, with corporators being offered advance payments as high as Rs 5 lakh.

"Huge amounts of cash are being funneled into this

election. Money power has peaked to such an extent that the ruling party is not only poaching opposition votes but also targeting its own allies' voters," Sapkal claimed, adding that a culture of 'money over relations' has been established by the Mahayuti.

Taking a historical jibe, Sapkal remarked that Devendra Fadnis had become the Chief Minister in 2014 through "vote theft" and alleged that the present regime is relying on monetary muscle to sustain its power. He appealed to the people of Maharashtra to stand up against the "authoritarianism and dictatorship" of the BJP to safeguard democratic systems in the state.

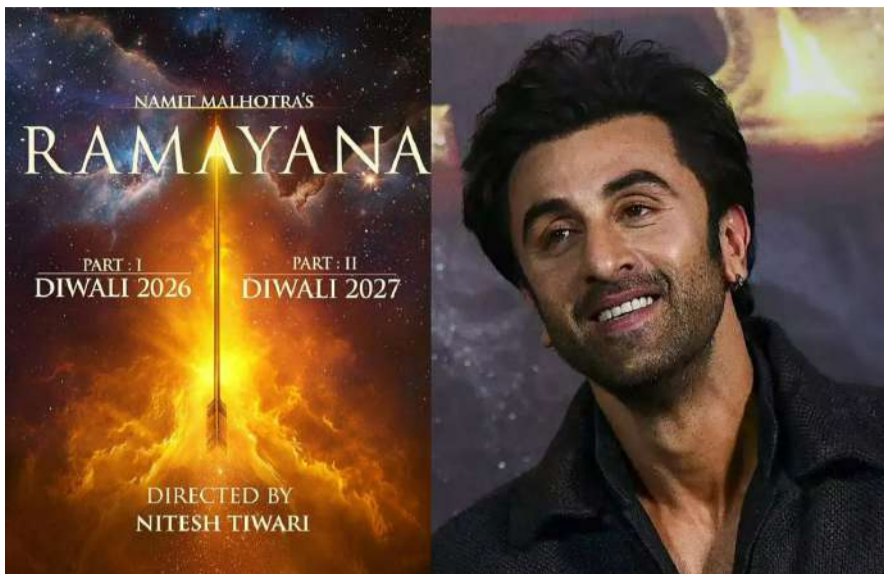
Hollywood stunt experts join Ranbir Kapoor's 'Ramayana'

Mumbai: The makers of the upcoming epic film Ramayana have brought on-board renowned Hollywood action specialists in a move aimed at elevating the project's scale and visual spectacle. The development further underscores the filmmakers' ambition to create a cinematic adaptation of the Indian epic that can resonate with audiences worldwide.

Widely regarded as one of the most ambitious projects in the history of Indian cinema, Ramayana is being conceived as a two-part saga that seeks to retell the ancient epic on an unprecedented scale. The filmmakers aim to combine emotionally compelling storytelling with cutting-edge visual effects and large-scale action sequences.

The project has already generated considerable anticipation among moviegoers due to its star-studded cast and ambitious production values. The film features Ranbir Kapoor, Yash, Sai Pallavi and Sunny Deol in key roles.

To ensure that the action sequences match international standards, the production has enlisted acclaimed Hollywood action and performance experts. Among them is Terry Notary, whose credits include major productions



such as Planet of the Apes and The Avengers.

Notary is widely recognized for his expertise in motion-capture performance, creature movement and action choreography. His involvement is expected to contribute significantly to the film's visual storytelling and character portrayals. Joining him is Guy Norris, one of the industry's most respected action directors. Norris has worked on acclaimed action spectacles including Mad Max: Fury Road, Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga and The Suicide Squad.

The addition of internationally renowned action specialists reflects the filmmakers' intention to create action sequences that can stand alongside major global productions. Their expertise is expected to help deliver large-scale battle scenes and visually immersive cinematic moments.

The film is being directed by Nitesh Tiwari, known for helming critically acclaimed and commercially successful films. His vision for Ramayana has been a key factor behind the excitement surrounding the project.

Production duties are being handled by Namit Malhotra through Prime Focus Studios in collaboration with DNEG, the globally renowned visual effects company that has won multiple Academy Awards for its work on international blockbusters. The project is also being backed by Monster Mind Creations, the production house founded by actor Yash. The collaboration brings together some of the most prominent names in Indian filmmaking and global visual effects.

A major focus of the pro-

duction is the use of advanced technology and world-class visual effects to recreate the epic world of the Ramayana for contemporary audiences. The makers have repeatedly emphasized their commitment to delivering a visually immersive experience while remaining respectful to the source material.

The film is planned as a global IMAX release, highlighting the scale of its international ambitions. By targeting audiences beyond India, the makers hope to introduce one of India's most celebrated epics to viewers across different cultures and regions.

The first part of Ramayana is scheduled to release during the Diwali festival season in 2026, while the second installment is slated for a Diwali 2027 release. The back-to-back festive releases are expected to make the franchise one of the biggest cinematic events in Indian entertainment.

With an ensemble cast, international action experts, cutting-edge visual effects and a global release strategy, Ramayana is positioning itself as a landmark production that seeks to redefine the scale and scope of mythological storytelling in Indian cinema.

Actress Varsha Usgaonkar, singer Anand Shinde elected unopposed: 44 candidates in fray for 14 seats in AIMFC election

Mumbai: The upcoming elections to the Director Board of the All India Marathi Film Corporation have gathered momentum, with 44 candidates remaining in the contest for 14 seats after the withdrawal of several nominees. The elections have attracted significant attention within the Marathi film industry, with prominent actors, singers, producers, directors and technicians entering the race.

The electoral process witnessed a major development as veteran actress Varsha Usgaonkar, noted singer Anand Shinde and film editor Vijay Khochikar were elected unopposed after rival candidates withdrew their nominations.

Originally, 60 candidates had filed nominations for various categories of the Director Board elections. However, following the withdrawal of 13 candidates during the scrutiny and withdrawal process, the number of contestants was reduced significantly.

With 44 candidates now in the fray for 14 positions, the stage is set for a keenly contested election. Industry observers expect a direct battle between two major panels along with several independent candidates seeking support from voters across the Marathi film fraternity.

The final list of candi-



dates and allocation of election symbols is scheduled to be announced following the completion of the symbol distribution process. This is expected to formally kick off the next phase of campaigning.

Campaign activities have already intensified, with candidates and panel leaders reaching out directly to voters. Several contenders have begun door-to-door campaigns and meetings with members of the film fraternity to secure support ahead of polling day.

The election campaign has become active across key centres of the Marathi film industry, including Mumbai, Pune and Kolhapur, where a large number of eligible voters are based.

A major contest is expected between the panel led by Meghraj Raje Bhosale and the group headed by Milind Ashtekar. Bhosale has al-

ready announced his "Samarth Panel," while Ashtekar is expected to formally unveil his panel after the allocation of election symbols.

Apart from the two principal groups, several candidates have chosen to contest as independents. These contestants are expected to play an important role in determining the final composition of the board.

The elections have drawn participation from many established figures in Marathi cinema, including veteran artists, filmmakers, producers, directors and technicians. Their involvement has increased interest in the polls and highlighted the importance of the corporation's future leadership.

Earlier, there had been speculation that the election might proceed largely unopposed after Neelam Shirke filed her nomination.

Dhurandhar production designer Saini S Johray found guilty by POSH committee

Mumbai: Significant new developments have emerged regarding the ongoing legal and professional fallout surrounding Dhurandhar production designer Saini S Johray. The latest updates follow the high-profile registration of a First Information Report (FIR) against him earlier this month, which brought serious allegations of sexual harassment into the public eye.

According to an investigative report published by Mid-Day, the woman who leveled the accusations against Johray had initially approached his employers directly. She filed a formal complaint with B62 Studios, the prominent production house helmed by filmmaker Aditya Dhar and producer Lokesh Dhar.

The initial complaint was reportedly submitted to the studio management back in October 2025. Prompted by the gravity of the accusations, B62 Studios' internal Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Committee immediately stepped in and initiated a comprehensive internal inquiry into Johray's conduct.

An industry source quoted by the publication emphasized the rigorous nature of the studio's internal procedures. The insider noted that the POSH committee conducted a thoroughly detailed investigation, given the highly sensitive nature of the matter and the production house's strict, no-tolerance policy toward any form of workplace harassment.

The investigative process was notably lengthy, spanning nearly half a year to ensure all evidence and testimonies were meticulously evaluated. The report



stated that the exhaustive internal probe concluded around late March or early April of this year.

At the end of the inquiry, the internal committee allegedly found Johray guilty on multiple serious charges. The source revealed to the publication that the six-month investigation ultimately concluded that Johray was guilty on two major counts: sexual molestation and the tampering of evidence.

Following the completion of the probe, the committee formally communicated its definitive findings directly to the complainant. While the internal studio investigation concluded in early spring, the allegations against Johray shifted into a matter of criminal law shortly afterward.

The situation escalated into a full-blown public controversy after the complainant, a resident of New Delhi, escalated the matter to law enforcement. On April 20, she officially filed a criminal complaint at the Sector-17 police station in Chandigarh.

According to details published in a report by India Today, the complainant detailed a harrowing encounter. She ac-

cused Johray of summoning her to a private room at the Taj Hotel in Chandigarh, where the alleged misconduct took place.

In her statement to the police, she alleged that Johray subjected her to severe sexual harassment and physical assault. Furthermore, the complainant claimed that she was subjected to wrongful confinement inside the hotel room during the course of the incident.

The legal complaint included additional troubling assertions regarding the evening's events. The report claimed that the woman alleged an intoxicating substance had been surreptitiously mixed into her drink, which caused her physical condition to rapidly deteriorate.

Following a mandatory preliminary enquiry into the allegations, the Chandigarh Police determined there was sufficient ground to register a formal case. They booked Johray under Sections 74, 79, 123, and 126(2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

Events moved quickly following the registration of the FIR, leading to the production designer's detention. Johray was subsequently arrested by the local police in connection with the criminal case before later being granted bail by a district court.

The widening legal scandal has simultaneously triggered severe repercussions for Johray's standing in the entertainment industry. Reports indicate that the controversy has drastically affected his professional credits across both ongoing and upcoming streaming projects.

Darlings fame Jasmeet K. Reen replaces Nupur Asthana as director of The Royals Season 2

Mumbai: Netflix India's popular romantic comedy series The Royals is gearing up for a significant creative shift ahead of its highly anticipated second season. According to recent industry reports, the production is undergoing a major structural overhaul, highlighted by the appointment of a new director to spearhead the upcoming installment.

Acclaimed filmmaker Jasmeet K. Reen has officially been brought on board to take over the directorial responsibilities for the series. Reen, who shot to fame with her directorial debut in 2022, is expected to bring a fresh perspective and a renewed creative energy to the show's established narrative framework.

Reen is stepping into the role previously held by filmmaker Nupur Asthana, who co-directed the maiden season of the romantic comedy drama. Asthana has reportedly chosen to step away from the project due to prior professional commitments, leaving a directorial vacancy that the makers were quick to fill with premium talent.

Despite Asthana's departure, the series will retain some directorial continuity moving forward. Priyanka

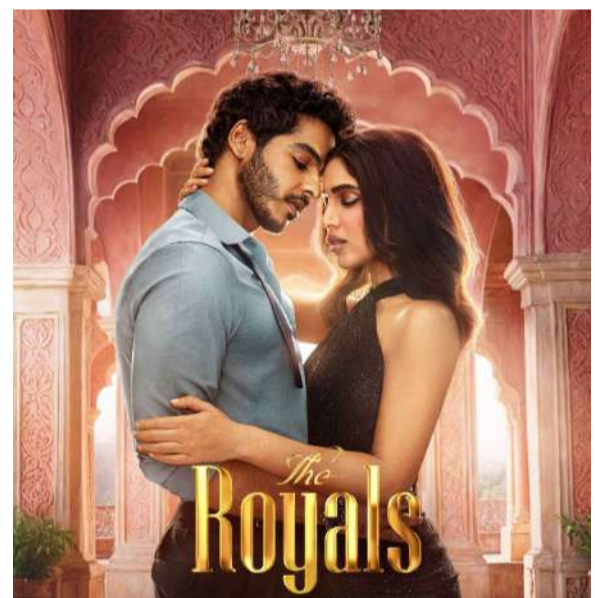
Ghose, who co-directed the first season alongside Asthana, is confirmed to be continuing her association with the project for its second

chapter, ensuring that the core essence of the show remains intact.

The transition in the director's chair comes at a busy time for the production house, as pre-production work for Season 2 is already in full swing. Creative teams and crew members are currently working behind the

scenes to map out the logistics and aesthetic tone for the next installment.

If current timelines hold steady, cameras are expected



to start rolling very soon, with filming scheduled to commence in July 2026. The production schedule is being tightly managed to accommodate the availability of the ensemble cast and the newly structured creative team.

Insiders suggest that the new season is being meticulously developed with a com-

pletely refreshed creative approach. This strategic pivot follows extensive viewer feedback from the first season, prompting the writers and producers to evolve their narrative plans to deliver a more compelling viewing experience.

The directorial swap follows hot on the heels of another massive development that shook up the show's fan base. Recent reports have strongly indicated that Bhumi Pednekar, who played the central female lead opposite Ishaan Khatter in the debut season, will not be returning to reprise her role.

Pednekar's abrupt exit from the series is believed to be directly linked to the broader creative restructuring currently taking place behind closed doors. The decision to move forward without one of its primary stars signals a drastic shift in the show's central dynamics.

With a key cast member out and a new director in, intense industry speculation has begun to mount regarding the plot. Sources close to the production suggest that the show's writers are heavily reworking central storylines and character arcs to smoothly transition into this new chapter.

Rishita Kothari calls Seher Hone Ko Hai her 'destiny moment'; says, "This is where my journey begins"

Mumbai: Newcomer Rishita Kothari is all set to make her formal entry into the entertainment industry with her upcoming project, Seher Hone Ko Hai. The young actress describes this milestone as a deeply personal, emotional, and transformative beginning to her professional acting career. For Kothari, landing the pivotal role of Seher has been nothing short of a defining moment in her life. In a recent interaction, she shared that the very moment she accepted the role, she felt an instant and incredibly powerful connection with the character's core identity.

She described the casting as something she firmly believes was "meant to be" rather than a mere stroke of luck. The experience of joining the project felt more like destiny unfolding in real-time than a standard professional opportunity, adding a layer of profound significance to her debut.

The actress noted that she immediately sensed a strong, unexplainable emotional bond with the character of Seher during her initial script readings. This immediate resonance made her feel as though she was stepping into a role specifically tailored to her own emotional depth.

Reflecting on her path to the industry, Kothari revealed that her journey has been far from easy or

straightforward. Like many aspiring artists trying to break into show business, her early days were shaped by repeated auditions, constant rejections, and long periods of agonizing uncertainty.

Despite the numerous professional setbacks and challenges that came her way, she remained fiercely persistent. Kothari emphasized that she never once entertained the thought of giving up on her lifelong dream of becoming a professional actor.

According to her, the struggles, heartbreaks, and professional roadblocks she faced over time now feel entirely meaningful in hindsight. She believes these difficult experiences ultimately prepared her for a debut role that aligns perfectly with her personal and creative aspirations.

Kothari further detailed the striking emotional contrast she experienced when she finally received the official confirmation for the project. Instead of the typical nervousness or anxiety that usually accompanies a major career breakthrough, she felt an overwhelming sense of calm and clarity.

She interpreted this unexpected inner peace as a reassuring sign from the universe that she was finally on the right path. The role of Seher holds a very special, irreplaceable impor-

ance for her because of the sheer depth of this emotional connection.

The immersive nature of the project has made the filming experience deeply meaningful for the newcomer. According to her, portraying Seher does not feel like traditional work or a routine job, but rather an authentic extension of her own soul.

She views the performance as an opportunity to express a genuine part of her own personality and complex emotions through her craft. This strong personal resonance has made the absolute beginning of her career incredibly memorable and encouraging.

The actress credited the project with reinforcing her firm belief in divine timing and the importance of patience. She expressed immense optimism about her future in show business, viewing this debut as the launchpad for a lifetime of artistic exploration.

She sees Seher Hone Ko Hai as the start of a long, rewarding journey focused on continuous learning, personal growth, and artistic evolution within a highly competitive entertainment landscape.

Kothari stated that beginning her career with a project that feels so personally and spiritually aligned gives her immense confidence. It has provided her with the vital motiva-



Prime Original series Raakh to premiere worldwide on June 12

Mumbai: Prime Video has announced the global premiere of its upcoming original series Raakh, which will begin streaming on June 12. The series features Ali Fazal, Sonali Bendre and Aamir Bashir in key roles.

Directed and executive produced by Prosit Roy, Raakh is positioned as a gripping investigative drama that explores crime, trauma and the darker layers of human behaviour. The series has been created, written and co-directed by Anusha Nandkumar and Sandeep Saket, with dialogues penned by Aayush Trivedi.

The project has been produced by Deepak



Dhar, Rishi Negi, Mrinalini Jain and Shyam Rathi in association with Endemol Shine India and BhaDiPa. At the heart of Raakh is an intense investigative storyline that begins with the sudden disappearance of two teenagers, an incident that devastates a family and triggers widespread panic across a city. The case quickly escalates into a nationwide search operation led by a determined police officer. As the investigation unfolds, the story delves deeper into a disturbing world of violence, psychological trauma and moral conflict. The series aims to portray how a seemingly straightforward missing-person case gradually exposes hidden layers of human cruelty.

Director Prosit Roy described Raakh as one of the most creatively and emotionally profound projects he has worked on. He said the narrative goes beyond a conventional crime thriller and explores themes of trauma and the darker aspects of human nature alongside a tense investigative arc. Roy also highlighted the contributions of writers Anusha Nandkumar and Sandeep Saket, praising the depth and research behind the story world. He noted that the series carefully examines the conflict between right and wrong while maintaining a strong sense of realism.

Speaking about the cast, Roy said Ali Fazal brings a calm yet powerful energy that anchors the narrative.

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Pant steps down as LSG captain after disappointing IPL season

Lucknow: Lucknow Super Giants will head into IPL 2027 with a new captain after Rishabh Pant stepped down from the role. The franchise confirmed on Friday that it had accepted Pant's request to relinquish the captaincy following a disappointing 2026 season in which LSG finished at the bottom of the table.

The franchise announced the decision through an official statement, stating that Pant had requested to be relieved of his captaincy duties and that the management had accepted his request with immediate effect.

"Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) wish to formally announce that Rishabh Pant has requested to be relieved of his captaincy duties with the franchise, and the franchisee has accepted his request with immediate effect," the statement read.

LSG Director of Cricket Tom Moody said the decision came after Pant himself approached the franchise. "Rishabh approached the franchisee with his request and we have respectfully accepted it. These decisions are never easy. We are grateful for everything Rishabh has brought to this dressing room as captain. Our focus now is on the collective - rebuilding and restructuring to reach the best standards."

The franchise added that a new captain would be named in due



course as they begin preparations for the next season. "With an eye on making a positive comeback in the upcoming season, the new Lucknow Super Giants captain will be announced in due course," the statement added.

The leadership change does not come as a complete surprise. Following LSG's final league game of the season against Punjab Kings, Moody had hinted that the franchise would assess all aspects of the campaign during its post-season review, including the captaincy.

"You do have to wonder whether that is a pressure that is reflected with

his performance with the bat," Moody had said. "I know that this season has been a difficult season for us, but we will reflect on it, we'll take time, we'll reflect on it. We'll consider all things."

Pant arrived at Lucknow with enormous expectations. After spending eight seasons with Delhi Capitals, he was bought by LSG for a record Rs 27.50 crore ahead of IPL 2025 and was immediately handed the captaincy. The move was seen as the start of a new era for the franchise.

However, things never quite went according to plan. In his first season with Lucknow, Pant endured

an inconsistent run with the bat. Although he produced a brilliant unbeaten 118, he finished the campaign with only 269 runs as LSG ended the season in seventh place.

The 2026 season brought only a slight improvement in his individual numbers. Pant scored 312 runs in 13 innings, but the team's fortunes declined further. Lucknow managed just four wins in 14 matches and finished at the foot of the table, making it their worst campaign since joining the IPL.

Before Pant's arrival, LSG had been led by KL Rahul since the franchise's debut season in 2022. Under Rahul, the team reached the playoffs in their first two seasons before slipping to seventh place in 2024. Seeking a fresh start, Lucknow moved in a different direction and appointed Pant as captain ahead of IPL 2025.

Two difficult seasons later, that experiment has come to an end. Lucknow are not short of leadership options as they look for a new captain. Aiden Markram currently captains the franchise's SA20 side, Durban Super Giants, and also leads Manchester Super Giants in The Hundred. Mitchell Marsh is the captain of Australia's T20 team, while Nicholas Pooran recently guided MI New York to the Major League Cricket title after taking over the captaincy from Kieron Pollard.

Jemimah opens up on pressure, self-doubt & World Cup redemption

New Delhi: India batter Jemimah Rodrigues has opened up about the emotional struggles she faced during the ICC Women's World Cup 2025, revealing how the pressure of playing a home World Cup and being dropped from the playing XI for a crucial match left her devastated. Speaking on JioStar's 'Unstoppable' ahead of the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2026, Jemimah admitted that she was not in the best mental space even before the tournament began, as the expectations surrounding a home World Cup started weighing heavily on her. "For some reason, even before the World Cup starting, I was not doing well mentally. Maybe it was because it was a home World Cup, and with the expectations that come with it. And it being a World Cup, the pressure doubles," Jemimah said. Things got even tougher when she was dismissed for a first-ball duck in India's opening match. "In the very first match, I got out for a duck off the first ball itself. That really broke me; it crushed me."



The worst part was that it started affecting my fielding as well. I am someone who enjoys fielding, but I was putting so much pressure on myself that I wasn't able to move the way I normally do. I made a few misfields, which I usually wouldn't," she added. With India struggling in the tournament after consecutive defeats, Jemimah said a brief but impactful innings against Australia helped restore some of her confidence before a must-win clash against England. "Then came the league game against Australia, where I scored an impactful 33-odd at a good strike rate. That gave me some confidence, and I told myself, 'Okay, fine. The England game is very important. Let's do whatever it takes to win against England,'" she said. "I really wanted to do it

for the team because the World Cup was at stake, and we had already lost two games in a row. That game was crucial," she added. However, on the day of the England match, Jemimah received disappointing news from head coach Amol Muzumdar. "Amol sir messaged me saying, 'I need to talk to you.' Then, at the ground, I was told that I had been dropped from the team for that game. I was broken inside," she revealed. Despite the setback, India recovered strongly in the tournament. The team defeated New Zealand to qualify for the semifinals, stunned Australia in the last four and then beat South Africa in the final to win the Women's World Cup title.

Asian U20 Athletics Championship: Pooja breaks national & meet record

Hong Kong: India's young athletes delivered a string of impressive performances on the second day of the 22nd Asian U20 Athletics Championships in Hong Kong, with high jumper Pooja producing the standout performance by breaking the national record and clinching a gold medal.

Pooja scripted history in the women's high jump event by clearing 1.93 metres to secure the top spot on the podium. In the process, she surpassed the long-standing Indian national record of 1.92 metres that had been held by Sahana Kumari since 2012.

The remarkable effort also enabled Pooja to rewrite the championship record. Her jump of 1.93m eclipsed the previous Asian U20 Championships record of 1.90m established by Svetlana Radzivil in 2006, underlining the significance of her achievement.

Pooja's gold medal provided a major boost to the Indian contingent, which enjoyed one of its most successful days at the competition. Her performance highlighted the growing strength of India's athletics development programme at the junior level.

Earlier in the day, race walker Nitin Gupta opened India's gold medal account by winning the men's 5,000m race walk event. He crossed the finish line in 19 minutes 47.49 seconds to secure the title ahead of the rest of the field.

Although Nitin comfortably claimed the gold medal, he was unable to better his own Asian U20 record of 18:47.37. Nevertheless, his victory provided India with an early advantage in the medal standings.

India's second participant in the event, Tushar Panwar, finished sixth with a timing of 20:55.41. While he

missed out on a medal, his effort contributed valuable points and experience at the continental championship.

The gold medal tally continued to rise when discus thrower Amanat Kamboj emerged victorious in the women's discus throw competition. Her best effort of 52.24 metres proved enough to secure first place and another gold for India.

Amanat displayed consistency throughout the event and maintained her lead against strong competition from other Asian nations. Her success further demonstrated India's strength in field events.

India's fourth gold medal of the day came through Rahul Jakhar, who dominated the men's decathlon. Rahul accumulated an impressive 7,185 points across the ten disciplines to emerge as the overall champion.

Season dates and registration periods for 2026-27 announced

New Delhi: The All India Football Federation has officially announced the season dates and player registration periods for the 2026-27 football season, providing clubs, players and stakeholders with a clear framework for domestic competitions across both men's and women's football.

According to the federation, the men's football season will commence on June 1, 2026, and conclude on May 31, 2027. The schedule aligns with the international football calendar and is intended to facilitate the smooth conduct of domestic

leagues, cup competitions and player transfers throughout the season.

AIFF has also confirmed the registration windows for professional male footballers.

The first registration period, commonly referred to as the summer transfer window, will remain open from June 12, 2026, to August 31, 2026. During this period, clubs will be able to register new players, complete transfers and strengthen their squads ahead of the competitive season.

A second registration period, or winter transfer win-

dow, will be available from January 1, 2027, to January 31, 2027. This mid-season window will allow clubs to make adjustments to their squads based on performance, injuries or tactical requirements.

The federation announced that the women's football season will follow the same timeline as the men's competitions. The women's season will also run from June 1, 2026, to May 31, 2027, ensuring uniformity in the administration of football activities across the country.

For women's clubs and

players, the first registration period will likewise be open from June 12, 2026, to August 31, 2026.

This window will provide teams participating in various domestic competitions the opportunity to finalise their rosters before the start of major tournaments.

The second registration period for women's football will take place from January 1, 2027, to January 31, 2027. Clubs will be permitted to register eligible players and make necessary squad changes during this period in accordance with AIFF regulations.

PSG eye repeat, Arsenal target first Champions league title

Budapest: French champions Paris Saint-Germain and Premier League winners Arsenal will square off in the UEFA Champions League 2025-26 final at the Puskás Arena here in Hungary on Saturday.

Under head coach Luis Enrique, PSG will be looking to become just the second team to defend the title in the UCL era after Real Madrid. Los Blancos won three successive UEFA Champions League crowns from 2016 to 2018.

PSG, who won the treble last season, have clinched the French league title in the ongoing campaign and will be looking to do the double by defending the Champions League crown.

Paris Saint-Germain

have qualified for two Champions League finals in the past, winning once and losing the other. They lost 1-0 to Bayern Munich in the 2019-20 final and beat Inter 5-0 - the biggest margin of victory in a European final - to claim their maiden title last season.

PSG had a couple of injury concerns in Ousmane Dembele and Achraf Hakimi but the duo are likely to be fit for the final. Goalkeeper Lucas Chevalier, however, looks set to miss the final. Meanwhile, Arsenal will head into the final brimming with confidence after lifting their first Premier League title in 22 years.

The Gunners will be aiming to win their first-ever Champions League title and complete the double under



head coach Mikel Arteta.

Arsenal are unbeaten in 14 Champions League games this campaign, becoming the first team to achieve the feat in a single season under the new format.

They qualified for the final once in the 2005-06 campaign when they lost 2-1 to Barcelona despite scoring

the opener and leading for most of the game, according to olympics.com.

As far as injury news is concerned, Arsenal will be without defender Ben White, who has been ruled out with a serious knock to the knee. Jurrien Timber and Noni Madueke remain doubtful but could make cameo ap-

pearances if they can pass last-minute fitness tests.

PSG hold a slender edge over Arsenal in the head-to-head record, having won two of the five matches played between the teams. The Gunners have won once, while two matches also ended in draws.

Last season's semi-final between PSG and Arsenal ended in a 3-1 aggregate win for the Parisiens.

The PSG vs Arsenal UCL final starts at 9:30 PM Indian Standard Time (IST) on Saturday and will be live streamed and telecast in India.

Live streaming of the PSG vs Arsenal UEFA Champions League 2025-26 final will be available on SonyLiv.

NCC wins NCC Ekta Cup 2026 in Imphal

Imphal: Governor of Manipur Ajay Kumar Bhalla, along with the First Lady, attended the grand finale of the NCC Ekta Cup 2026 held at the Artificial Turf Ground, Lamlong Thongkhong in Imphal today.

The final match of the tournament was played between NCC and RFA, with NCC defeating RFA 1-0 to lift the championship trophy.

The Under-17 Boys' Football Tournament was organised by NCC Group Headquarters, Imphal under the NCC North East Region Headquarters, Shillong.

The concluding event featured cultural and musical performances by local artists Mangka Mayanglambam and John Oinam respectively.

Deputy Chief Minister Losii Dikho, senior NCC officers, cadets, students and other dignitaries were also present at the programme.

Addressing the gathering, the Governor expressed happiness at being part of the concluding function of the first-ever NCC Ekta Cup organised in Manipur.

He said the tournament had showcased not only sporting excellence and healthy competition but also discipline, teamwork, friendship and the spirit of national integration.

Highlighting the significance of the tournament, Bhalla said the word "Ekta" symbolises unity and observed that the event had truly reflected its meaning by bringing together young ca-

dets and students from diverse backgrounds.

The Governor stressed the importance of sports and cultural activities in shaping young minds. He said sports instill values such as perseverance, cooperation and graceful acceptance of both victory and defeat, while cultural programmes help strengthen the spirit of harmony, respect and unity amid India's rich diversity.

He also lauded the role of the National Cadet Corps (NCC) in nurturing disciplined, confident and patriotic citizens. According to the Governor, initiatives such as the NCC Ekta Cup play a significant role in preparing youth to serve society and the nation with dedication and commitment.

Esha Singh keeps focus on Olympics after Munich breakthrough

Munich: Indian sport is entering a new phase of confidence, fuelled by a generation of athletes who believe they can compete with - and beat - the world's best.

Among them is 21-year-old shooter Esha Singh, who underlined her growing stature by winning gold in the women's 25m pistol event at the ISSF World Cup in Munich with a record score of 43.

The Hyderabad shooter held her nerve in a high-pressure final to secure one of the biggest victories of her career, strengthening her credentials as one of India's leading prospects for the LA 2028 Olympics.

Speaking to Olympics.com after her triumph, Esha Singh said the magnitude of

the achievement had yet to fully sink in. "I still can't believe it happened," Esha said.

"I was only thinking about focusing on one shot at a time and staying calm throughout the final."

The ability to remain composed under pressure has become a hallmark of Esha's shooting. While many athletes can struggle with expectations, Esha has learned to embrace pressure rather than fear it. India's depth in shooting means competition for international places can often be as demanding as the events themselves.

"Competition in India is so strong," Esha said. "But I think that is a very good thing because it pushes all of us to improve every single

day." Her rise has not happened overnight. Esha became the youngest national champion at 13, competed at the Paris 2024 Olympics and has now added an ISSF World Cup gold medal in Munich to her growing list of achievements.

Through that rise, she says her enjoyment of the sport has remained unchanged. "I genuinely enjoy the sport," she said.

"No matter how tough training gets or how difficult a competition becomes, I still feel excited to come back to the range every morning." That passion has helped her navigate the setbacks that accompany elite sport.

"There will always be bad days in sport," Esha re-

flected. "Sometimes things do not go your way even after working very hard. But one competition should never define you. You have to keep believing in yourself and continue moving forward."

At a time when Indian sport is rapidly evolving, athletes like Esha are becoming symbols of possibility for the next generation. Youngsters training in academies and shooting ranges across India now see global success not as a distant dream but as an achievable reality. And Esha wants them to believe in that dream wholeheartedly. "If young athletes really want to do something in sport, they should give everything towards it," she said.

UFC champion Joshua Van says Mizoram feels like home

Aizawl: Fresh from his rise on the global mixed martial arts stage, UFC flyweight champion Joshua Van today struck an emotional chord in Mizoram, saying he considers the state "like his own home" and its people as his "brethren".

The young UFC star, who belongs to the Chin community of Myanmar, made the remarks during a meeting with Chief Minister Lalduhoma at the latter's office in Aizawl, where he was hosted for high tea amid his ongoing visit to the state.

Joshua Van's arrival at Lengpui Airport earlier in the day drew an enthusiastic reception from fans and sports lovers, many of whom see the fighter as a symbol of pride for the wider Zo ethnic community spread across the region and neighbouring Myanmar.

Speaking briefly during the interaction, Joshua Van highlighted the



close cultural and ancestral ties shared by the Chin and Mizo communities and urged people in Mizoram to regard him as "their own UFC champion".

"Mizoram feels like my own state. I look upon the people here as my own brothers and sisters," he said.

Chief Minister Lalduhoma congratulated the fighter on his success in the Ultimate Fighting Championship, describing his achievement as a source of motivation for young people in Mizoram.

He also expressed happiness over

Joshua Van's visit and wished him an enjoyable stay in the state.

Officials said the fighter's growing international success has generated considerable interest among youths in Mizoram, particularly aspiring athletes involved in combat sports and fitness training.

Joshua Van also thanked the Chief Minister for sparing time to meet him despite a busy schedule and expressed appreciation.

For the warm welcome he received from the people of Mizoram. Sports Minister Lalhinghlova Hmar and MLA Lt. Col. Clement Lalhingthanga accompanied the Chief Minister during the meeting.

Joshua Van is regarded as one of the fastest-rising fighters in the UFC flyweight division.

And has built a strong following across Northeast India and Myanmar in recent years.

India's macroeconomic position reflects "cautious resilience", policy vigilance needed: Monthly Economic Review

New Delhi: India's macroeconomic position reflects "cautious resilience"; however, the rise in global energy prices, a depreciating rupee, rising upstream cost pressures, and the prospect of a below-normal monsoon require policy vigilance, said the Monthly Economic Review (MER) released by the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) here on Saturday.

The monthly assessment of the Finance Ministry noted that the West Asia crisis has emerged as a major shock to the fragile global recovery, with its effects increasingly visible across energy markets, supply chains, trade routes, and global financial conditions.

"Elevated energy, transportation and logistics costs have revived inflationary pressures and renewed stagflation concerns across major economies", the report said.

"Confronted with these pressures, major central banks are expected to maintain restrictive monetary policy stances for longer than previously anticipated, pushing sovereign bond yields in advanced economies to multi-year highs"

The report warned that prolonged disruptions to Gulf energy supplies could hamper global growth and intensify macroeconomic vulnerabilities.

"For India, these external pressures are beginning to transmit, selectively but perceptibly, into domestic economic conditions."

Highlighting the performance



of last month, MER said, "The Indian economy maintained its growth momentum in April, with E-way bill generation, PMI indices and electricity consumption remaining in expansionary territory."

The report noted that moderation in the Eight Core Industries and fuel consumption shows that global headwinds are affecting the selected segments of domestic activity.

Inflation dynamics of April reflect a divergence between consumer prices and rising wholesale prices.

"While retail inflation increased only marginally to 3.48 per cent and remained below the RBI's target, pressures intensified in select food items and services such as restaur-

ants and accommodation."

In contrast, wholesale inflation accelerated sharply to 8.3 per cent, driven primarily by elevated global energy prices, currency depreciation and low base effect.

Adding to the future risks, India Meteorological Department (IMD) predicted overall monsoon rainfall at around 92 per cent of the long-period average.

The report noted that buffer stocks of rice and wheat at 817.53 lakh tonnes and adequate reservoir storage provide a suitable cushion to foodgrains. "However, any significant rainfall deficit coupled with current geopolitical conditions could translate into food inflation, weakening rural demand and aggre-

gate growth", the report warned.

Industrial activity in April moderated amid global uncertainty and weakness in the hydrocarbon sector.

"Resilience in cement, steel, and electricity generation continued to support overall momentum, reflecting sustained domestic demand from infrastructure and construction activity."

On the external front, India's total exports recorded strong growth in April 2026, with buoyant services exports substantially narrowing the overall trade deficit.

The report said that India also diversified its trade strategy through bilateral and strategic economic partnerships, while policy measures undertaken to manage non-essential imports.

"On the financial side, capital flows remained volatile, with FPI outflows exerting pressure on the Indian rupee. Nevertheless, gross FDI inflows remained resilient, reaching a historical peak of USD 94.5 billion in FY26, indicating continued long-term investor interest in the Indian economy," it said.

Labour market indicators reflect a stable employment landscape with steady participation and employment levels.

The report suggested that navigating FY27 require agility across monetary, fiscal and structural dimensions to safeguard growth momentum, keeping inflation durably anchored.

Jio continues to lead wireless, home broadband segments in Odisha



Bhubaneswar: Jio continued to strengthen its position as Odisha's leading telecom and broadband service provider by recording the highest subscriber additions in the state during April 2026. According to the latest telecom subscription data released by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, the company added more than 1.61 lakh new mobile and home broadband users during the month, reflecting sustained consumer preference for its digital services and network offerings.

The data showed that over 1.43 lakh new mobile subscribers joined the Jio network in Odisha in April. This accounted for a significant share of the total new mobile connections added across the state during the period. The strong growth underlined Jio's continued ability to attract new users in both urban centres and rural regions.

Apart from mobile services, Jio also witnessed robust growth in the home broadband segment. The company added more than 17,000 new home broadband subscribers during April, further expanding its footprint in households across Odisha. The growth was driven

largely by increasing demand for high-speed internet connectivity for work, education, entertainment and digital services.

According to the TRAI report, Odisha's overall mobile subscriber base increased by more than 2.52 lakh during the month. With these additions, the total number of mobile subscribers in the state reached approximately 3.84 crore, highlighting the growing penetration of telecom services and digital connectivity across Odisha.

Jio maintained its leadership in the home broadband market, supported by the rising adoption of JioFiber and JioAirFiber services. The company has been aggressively expanding its broadband infrastructure to cater to the increasing need

for reliable internet access in homes, businesses and educational institutions.

Industry data indicated that Jio added more than twice the number of home broadband subscribers compared to its nearest competitor during April. This performance reinforced the company's dominance in the fixed broadband market and reflected strong consumer confidence in its service quality and network reliability. With the latest subscriber additions, Jio further consolidated its leadership position across multiple telecom segments, including wireless services, wireline broadband and Fixed Wireless Access (FWA). The company continues to hold a significant market share in Odisha's rapidly expanding digital ecosystem.

Paradip port ranked no.1 in India for dry bulk cargo handling

Bhubaneswar: In a significant recognition of its operational excellence, Paradip Port Authority has been ranked No. 1 in the country for Dry Bulk Cargo handling at the prestigious Sagar Aankalan Awards instituted by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways. The achievement further strengthens Paradip Port's standing as one of India's best-performing major ports.

The award was presented during a ceremony held in Mumbai, where P. L. Hanraadh received the honour on behalf of the port from Sarbananda Sonowal.

Under the Ministry's Sagar Aankalan Certificate for Logistics Port Performance, Paradip Port secured the top position in the Dry Bulk Cargo category among

ports handling cargo volumes of five million tonnes and above. The ranking reflects the port's sustained efficiency, strong infrastructure and ability to manage large-scale cargo operations.

The recognition highlights Paradip Port's vital role in supporting India's industrial growth and energy security. As one of the country's key maritime gateways, the port handles substantial volumes of coal, iron ore, fertilisers and other bulk commodities that are essential to various sectors of the economy.

Officials noted that the award acknowledges the port's consistent performance in cargo handling, operational productivity and logistics management. Over the years, Paradip Port has

undertaken several initiatives to improve efficiency, reduce turnaround times and strengthen its service delivery capabilities. In addition to securing the top rank in Dry Bulk Cargo handling, Paradip Port also recorded a notable achievement in container operations. The port was awarded the third rank nationally in the Container Cargo category among ports handling less than 0.5 million TEUs (Twenty-foot Equivalent Units).

The recognition in container cargo handling reflects the port's growing diversification beyond its traditional bulk cargo operations. It also highlights ongoing efforts to enhance logistics infrastructure and strengthen multimodal connectivity for containerised trade.

Reliance Consumer Products Bets On Campa For Multifold Growth By 2030

Mumbai: Reliance Consumer Products Ltd (RCPL) has positioned its Campa soft drink portfolio for its aggressive expansion plans in the fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector in order to grow its revenue multifold by 2030, according to its FY26 annual report.

According to RIL's FY26 annual report, the aim behind the expansion is to emerge as one of the leading branded consumer products companies in the world.

RCPL's gross revenue doubled year-on-year to Rs 22,000 crore in FY26, driven largely by strong growth in staples and beverages. RCPL, the FMCG unit incorporated in 2022, has become central to Reliance's

broader consumer business strategy spanning packaged foods, beverages, home and personal care products, according to the annual report.

Since it was relaunched, Campa has rapidly expanded its market presence and it has crossed Rs 4,700 crore in gross sales during FY26 to emerge as India's fourth-largest carbonated soft-drinks brand by March 2026, securing double-digit market share in key markets.

The company plans to disrupt the soft drink market which is traditionally dominated by multinational giants like Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, through aggressive pricing, deep distribution expansion and by leveraging Reliance Retail's nationwide



network.

According to its annual report, RCPL has expanded its distribution network which has reached more than 3 million retail outlets through a network of more than 5,000 distributors during the year. Its packaged staples brand Independence also crossed approximately Rs 2,600 crore in sales and

was recognised among India's trusted consumer brands in 2026, according to the annual report.

The company's FMCG strategy is built around offering "global quality at affordable prices" while leveraging backward integration, manufacturing scale and supply-chain efficiencies to lower costs. As part of this

strategy, Reliance is building integrated food parks aimed at improving sourcing and production efficiencies across categories.

Reliance has also pursued accelerated expansion through acquisitions and partnerships. Last year, RCPL acquired stakes in staples and millet businesses such as Udhayam and Manana, while also adding international personal care brands including Brylcreem, Toni & Guy, Matey and Badedas to its portfolio.

According to its annual report, Tier-2 cities and rural markets will remain the key focus areas of the company as it scales its FMCG ambitions in India as well as global markets.

NTPC observes Swachhata Pakhwada across stations, promotes cleanliness and sustainability

New Delhi: The All India Football Federation has officially announced the season dates and player registration periods for the 2026-27 football season, providing clubs, players and stakeholders with a clear framework for domestic competitions across both men's and women's football.

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smooth conduct of domestic leagues, cup competitions and player transfers throughout the season.

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period will likewise be open from June 12, 2026, to August 31, 2026. This window will provide teams participating in various domestic competitions the opportunity to finalise their rosters before the start of major tournaments.

The second registration period for women's football will take place from January 1, 2027, to January 31, 2027. Clubs will be permitted to register eligible players and make necessary squad changes during this period in accordance with AIFF regulations.

India's natural stone industry seeks policy support, lower taxes and greater use of stone in public infra

Hyderabad: India's natural stone industry on Friday urged governments to introduce policy reforms, rationalise taxation and promote the use of natural stone in public infrastructure projects, citing the sector's substantial contribution to exports, employment generation and mineral revenues. Industry leaders said supportive policies would help unlock the sector's full potential and strengthen India's position in the global stone market.

The demands were raised during the inauguration of the three-day Stone & Tech Expo 2026 in Hyderabad, the first exhibition of its kind to be organised in the Telugu States. The event brought together quarry owners, exporters, manufacturers, technology providers and policymakers to discuss opportunities and challenges facing the natural stone industry.

Speaking at the event, Rajesh Angara, Chairman of the Quarrying Development, Environment and Ecology Sub-Committee of the Federation of Indian Granite and Stone Industry, highlighted India's prominence in the global natural stone sector. He said Indian stones enjoy a strong reputation worldwide for their quality, durability, wide colour range and skilled craftsmanship. According to Angara, Indian natural stones are exported to more than 120 countries and are widely used in prestigious construction and architectural projects across the



world. He noted that the country's stone products have become an integral part of international infrastructure and real estate development.

He further claimed that nearly 90 per cent of major monuments, memorials, public spaces, commercial complexes and architectural landmarks globally incorporate stone sourced from India in one form or another. This, he said, reflects the trust that international markets place in Indian stone products.

India remains one of the world's largest producers and exporters of granite, marble, sandstone, limestone and quartzite. These materials are supplied to premium construction projects across North America, South America, Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa, making the country a key player in the global natural stone supply chain.

Angara attributed the growing international demand for Indian stone to the country's rich geological reserves, advanced processing infrastructure and adherence to global quality standards. He said the industry has consistently upgraded its production capabilities to meet evolving

international requirements. However, industry representatives expressed concern over the significant wastage generated during mining operations. Angara pointed out that between 80 and 90 per cent of the stone extracted from quarries ultimately ends up as waste, representing a major challenge for the sector.

He urged both Central and State governments to formulate policies that encourage the productive utilisation of stone waste in public infrastructure and utility projects. According to him, discarded stone material can be transformed into slabs, tiles, cubes, cuboids and various other value-added products suitable for construction purposes. The organisers of the expo, Deepak Goyal and Praveen Goyal, observed that several Western countries, particularly in Europe, extensively use natural stone in roads, pavements, public buildings and urban infrastructure because of its durability, strength and long service life. They argued that India should similarly increase the use of natural stone in government projects and reduce dependence on artificial stone products.

Employee Welfare, Safety Equal to Production Growth: Singareni CMD

Ramagundam: Chairman and Managing Director of The Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL), Dr. Buddhaprakash Jyoti, on Friday said employee welfare and safety are accorded equal importance alongside production growth in the coal mining major.

During an extensive tour of the Ramagundam-I Area, the CMD reviewed mine production, employee welfare initiatives, safety measures and various facilities being provided to workers.

At GDK-11 Incline, he interacted with employees, officers and workers, seeking suggestions for the company's development. Discussions focused on

coal production, productivity enhancement, quality improvement and the company's future plans.

Highlighting Singareni's strengths, the CMD said the organisation's vast experience, discipline and collective work culture have made it a unique enterprise in the mining sector. He stressed that employee welfare and workplace safety would continue to receive priority along with efforts to increase production.

He also inaugurated the fifth Man Riding System installed in the mine. He said the facility would enable workers to travel safely, quickly and comfortably between the mine surface and underground workplaces, reducing physical strain

and improving operational efficiency. He felicitated employees who played a key role in the installation of the system and other developmental works, appreciating their commitment and dedication.

Speaking on the occasion, Director (Operations) L. V. Suryanarayana said GDK-11 is the second-largest mine in Singareni in terms of productivity and mechanisation. He urged officials to maximise the use of modern equipment to reduce operational costs while achieving production targets.

Director (Projects and Planning) K. Venkateswarlu called upon employees to work collectively to bring

the mine to a zero-loss position and ensure profitable operations.

He said efforts should be made to enhance annual production from the present one million tonnes to 1.5 million tonnes in the coming years.

Later, the CMD visited GDK-5 Opencast Mine and reviewed coal and overburden production, transportation systems, machinery utilisation and productivity levels. He directed officials to achieve assigned targets while maintaining high standards of safety, efficiency and quality. He also inspected sports and recreational facilities at the Jawaharlar Nehru Stadium in the Ramagundam-I Area and emphasised the impor-

tance of promoting sports and healthy recreational activities for employees and their families.

Subsequently, he conducted a video conference with General Managers of all SCCL Areas from the Ramagundam-I Area General Manager's Office.

The review focused on coal production, productivity, safety standards, quality, cost control measures and future targets.

He instructed all areas to work in coordination to achieve assigned production goals and contribute to the company's overall growth. The CMD also reviewed the performance of employees working in various departments at the General Manager's Office.