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Anti-reform mindset: PM Modi blasts Congress for derailing women's quota bill

New Delhi.(Agency)

PM Modi's attack on the Congress came a day after a Constitutional Amendment to implement 33 per cent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies failed to pass in the lower House of the Parliament. While the Bill required the support of at least 352 out of the 528 MPs present in the Lok Sabha, it could only garner 298 votes in its favour.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday targeted the Congress for its "anti-reform" mindset, blaming the party for defeating the Women's Reservation Bill in the Lok Sabha. In his address to the nation, PM Modi alleged that the Congress has long opposed women's reservation in Parliament and state legislatures and has consistently sought to obstruct it.

"By opposing the reservation of seats for women, the Congress has once again conclusively demonstrated that it is an anti-reform party. The anti-reformist stance adopted by the Congress has consistently inflicted immense damage upon the nation," he alleged.

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While the Bill required the support of at least 352 out of the 528 MPs present in the Lok Sabha, it could only garner 298 votes in its favour.

He accused the Congress of using "falsehoods" to block the bill, adding that the party had missed a historic opportunity to support the measure and correct its past mistakes. Comparing the party to a parasite, PM Modi accused the Congress of surviving on the support of regional parties and alleged that it orchestrated opposition to the bill to undermine them.



"The Congress itself has already lost its very existence in the majority of the country's states. However, it does not wish to see regional parties grow.

Hence, it hatched a political conspiracy to plunge the future of numerous regional parties into darkness," he said.

The Prime Minister also accused the party of spreading misinformation on delimitation and criticised it for pursuing "divide and rule" politics. "The Congress has learnt the politics of divide and rule from the British. It has always fanned sentiments that create divisions within the country," he said.

'Unfortunate': Mamata accuses PM Modi of misleading nation on women's reservation Bill

West Bengal.(Agency)

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday slammed PM Narendra Modi, stating that it was "deeply unfortunate" that he had chosen to "mislead the nation" over the women's reservation Bill.

In a post on X, the West Bengal Chief Minister also alleged that the Centre was attempting to push forward the delimitation exercise by "using women as a shield". "It is deeply unfortunate that the Prime Minister chose to mislead the nation rather than address it honestly," Banerjee said.

Her remarks came a day after the Prime Minister, in an address to the nation following the defeat of a Bill proposing 33% reservation for women in legislatures from 2029 in the Lok Sabha, accused the Congress and its allies of committing a "sin of foeticide" and warned that women voters would punish them.



Banerjee asserted that the Trinamool Congress (TMC) has consistently supported greater political representation for women. "We have the highest proportion of female elected representatives in both Parliament and the state legislature. In the Lok Sabha, 37.9 per cent of TMC's elected members are women," she said, adding that the party has nominated 46% women members in the Rajya Sabha.

She emphasised that there was no question of opposing women's reservation. "What we are fundamentally opposed to is the delimitation exercise that the Modi government was plotting to push through by using women as a shield for its vested political.

Short news

Women's reservation law: BJP hits back at Oppn, says 'hypocrisy exposed'

New Delhi.(Agency)

Senior BJP leaders Ravi Shankar Prasad and Smriti Irani on Saturday clapped back at Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and the Congress, terming the Opposition's stance a "hypocrisy exposed" on the issue of women's empowerment.

Their comments came during a press conference, a day after a Constitution Amendment Bill, aimed at enabling reservation for women in legislatures from 2029 and increasing the strength of the Lok Sabha, failed to get passed in the Lower House after it did not meet the required majority of 2/3.

Shortly after Priyanka's media briefing, the BJP intensified its criticism, accusing the Congress of "betraying" women and then celebrating the defeat of their political aspirations. Ravi Shankar Prasad asked the Congress to first understand constitutional provisions before making statements.

"Congress needs to understand the Constitution. No revision in the number of seats in Parliament or Assemblies can be done or is possible without delimitation," he said. Taking a swipe at Priyanka Gandhi, Prasad added, "I don't say anything against her (Priyanka Gandhi), but this is the first time I am doing so.

3 days before election, Chandrababu Naidu set for whirlwind campaign across Tamil Nadu

Hyderabad.(Agency)

A day after strongly criticising Opposition parties for opposing the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill — aimed at fresh delimitation, increasing seats in Lok Sabha, and 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha and state Assemblies — Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu is all set to undertake a two-day campaign tour across Tamil Nadu on April 20 and 21 as part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)'s intensified outreach in the state ahead of Assembly elections.

The visit is aimed at energising cadre, strengthening voter connect, and reinforcing the NDA's development-driven narrative, a statement from Naidu's office said. The Assembly election in Tamil Nadu will be held on April 23.

Naidu will begin his tour in Coimbatore, where he is scheduled to address a major public meeting in the afternoon. He will then travel to Hosur and proceed to Thalli for a public rally later in the day. In the evening, Naidu will reach Chennai and participate in a large roadshow in Avadi, engaging directly with citizens and NDA supporters. On the second day, the Chief Minister will travel to Madurai and proceed to Sattur, where he will interact with community leaders and take part in a key campaign event later in the afternoon.

Strait of Hormuz crisis shifted global shipping to Vizhinjam Port in Kerala, says Shashi Tharoor

New Delhi.(Agency)

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor who is an MP from Kerala's

Thiruvananthapuram, highlighted how the Vizhinjam Port in the city was handling large vessels, with having already handled 66 ships in the month of March. Vizhinjam is officially India's transshipment answer to the world, said Tharoor.

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor highlighted that amidst the ongoing tensions in the Strait of Hormuz, there could be a window of opportunity for an Indian port. This port is none other than the Vizhinjam Port in Kerala's capital Thiruvananthapuram. Taking to social media platform, 'X', the Congress leader pointed towards the surge in vessels waiting to dock there.

Global shipping eyes shifted to my constituency: Tharoor

Congress leader Tharoor took to social media platform, 'X' and wrote, "The Strait of Hormuz crisis has shifted global shipping eyes to my constituency! Thiruvananthapuram's Vizhinjam Port is currently seeing a massive



surge with 100 vessels in queue or seeking calls."

He also said that Vizhinjam is officially India's transshipment answer to the world. He highlighted how the port in his constituency handled its 1 millionth TEU in record time to

fast-tracking Phase II. He said that when he helped get the tender for this port, this achievement was a long shot project. He said that he also faced a lot of criticism and skepticism regarding this ambitious project. He said, as of today times have changed for the Vizhinjam Port. With the ongoing tensions in the Strait of Hormuz, the world is looking for a new, reliable gateway and this port is answering their call, he added.

He called it not just a project, but a global necessity. The port reportedly handled 66 vessels in March 2026, setting a new record. More than 100 berthing calls are currently pending at this port. The Congress leader said that efforts were underway and expansions were being made to accommodate 5 motherships simultaneously.

Digital Conspiracy: Investigating the Truth

Digital Blackmail Conspiracy Exposed: ₹2.5 Crore Extortion Plot Targets Jain Monks and Surat Temple Event

MAHANAGAR METRO | SPECIAL INVESTIGATION | BIG EXPOSE

Pawan Makan (Group Editor)

Surat: In a deeply disturbing development, a major conspiracy targeting the faith of the Jain community has come to light in Surat, exposing an alleged organized digital extortion racket involving fake videos, blackmail, and attempts to disrupt a major religious event. According to sources, a three-member gang has been accused of orchestrating a "honeytrap-style" plot against revered Jain monks by circulating morphed and fabricated videos, with the intention of defaming them and creating unrest ahead of the upcoming Anjanshalaka Pratishtha Mahotsav scheduled for April 23 at the under-construction Shri Abhay Parshvanath Bhagwan Jinalay in the Vesu area of Surat. The accused individuals have been identified as Hardik Hudiya from Mumbai, believed to be the mastermind of the operation, Jagat Parekh from Ahmedabad, allegedly acting as the recovery and pressure agent, and Vikram Bafna from Jodhpur, who is said to be leading the local coordination of the plan. Sources claim that the trio demanded an extortion amount of ₹2.5 crore from the temple trustees, offering to stop the circulation of the defamatory content and allow the religious event to proceed peacefully in return. This demand has raised serious concerns about the emergence of organized "digital blackmail gangs" targeting religious institutions. Further revelations suggest that the gang also attempted to manipulate administrative processes by making fake calls to officials



of the Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC), allegedly to create hurdles in the construction work of the temple and delay the preparations for the religious ceremony. There are also unverified reports indicating the possible involvement of a local woman journalist, who is suspected of amplifying the narrative against the temple and the Jain monks through media channels, although official confirmation on this aspect is still awaited. This incident has triggered outrage within sections of the Jain community, with many viewing it as not just a criminal act but an attack on religious faith and dignity. The case has also sparked speculation about possible larger motives, including attempts to create social unrest or political polarization ahead of upcoming electoral cycles. Authorities are now

being urged to conduct a thorough investigation, including scrutiny of call records, digital evidence, and financial transactions, to establish the full extent of the conspiracy. There is growing demand for immediate arrests under charges of extortion, criminal conspiracy, and spreading misinformation, along with strict action against anyone found complicit. The incident highlights a growing trend of cyber-enabled crimes where fabricated digital content is used as a weapon to intimidate, defame, and extort individuals and institutions. Observers stress that a strong and swift response from law enforcement agencies will be crucial not only to deliver justice in this case but also to deter similar attempts in the future.

News box

2 die in hit & run, one on way home, another out for a walk after dinner

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Two men died in separate hit-and-run accidents late on Thursday night and early Friday — one while riding home from work on Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway, the other while out for a walk in Palam Vihar. In both cases, the vehicles that struck them fled, leaving police to piece together the final moments and trace the drivers.

The first victim, Amit Kumar (37) of Rajasthan, was hit by a vehicle on NH-8 near Murali Wala Dhaba in Bilaspur. Kumar, who worked for a private company in Manesar, was returning home on his Hero Splendor when an unidentified vehicle hit his motorcycle.

According to a complaint filed by his younger brother, Hitesh Kumar, the impact threw Amit onto the road, causing fatal injuries. Police said they received information about the crash around Friday midnight and reached the spot soon after. He was taken to General Hospital, where doctors declared him dead on arrival. His body was later handed over to the family after an autopsy. "We are trying to trace the vehicle involved in the accident using technical inputs and local intelligence," said Rajesh, the investigating officer. A case was registered under sections 281 and 106 of BNS for rash driving and causing death by negligence.

In the second case, Arpit Singh (32) of Agra died in a late-night hit-and-run in Palam Vihar. Singh, who worked with a private company and lived in the area on rent, had stepped out for a walk after dinner around 12.15am on April 16, according to a complaint filed by his elder brother, Amit Singh. Police said Arpit was walking from Krishna Chowk towards the C-2 gate in Palam Vihar when an unidentified vehicle hit him from behind. The force of the collision flung him to the roadside, leaving him fatally injured. A passerby took him to Civil Hospital in Sector 10, where doctors declared him brought dead. His body was kept in the mortuary, and his brother identified him on Friday. Police have registered a case under sections 281 and 106 of the BNS against an unknown driver.

Rain relief over, temperature set to rise again this week

Gurgaon.(Agency)

After a brief spell of light rainfall on Friday evening, the city is set to get warmer again as IMD has forecast a rise of 3-5 degrees Celsius in maximum temperatures during the next 5-6 days. On Saturday, the minimum temperature dipped to 19.9 degrees Celsius, down from 22.4 degrees Celsius recorded a day earlier at the Gurgaon KVK observatory. At The NorthCap University weather station, the minimum settled at 20.8 degrees Celsius, compared to 24.3 degrees Celsius on Friday. The maximum temperature, too, saw a slight dip. At the Gurgaon KVK observatory, it was recorded at 38.3 degrees Celsius, down from 39.1 degrees Celsius a day earlier. At The NorthCap University, the maximum stood at 40.1 degrees Celsius, compared to 40.8 degrees Celsius previously. According to IMD, a western



disturbance is circulating over north Pakistan and adjoining areas in the lower tropospheric levels. In addition, upper air cyclonic circulations persist over central Rajasthan and over Haryana and neighbouring regions. However, these systems are currently weak and are not expected to trigger any rainfall activity. With no active weather system impacting the region, dry conditions are set to dominate. According to IMD, daytime temperatures are expected to hover between 41 degrees Celsius and 44 degrees Celsius over the next few days, while minimum temperatures may range between 24 degrees Celsius and 26 degrees Celsius.

Noida DM wants medical camps, mobile vans in industrial areas

NOIDA.(Agency)

The district administration on Saturday directed private hospitals to organise regular medical camps in industrial areas to improve healthcare access for workers, and asked officials to submit a plan to empanel more hospitals under the Ayushman Bharat scheme.

At a meeting with chief medical officer Dr Narendra Kumar and Government Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMS) director Dr Rakesh Gupta, district magistrate Medha Roopam said providing quality healthcare to workers was a shared responsibility.

"We have urged all private hospitals to utilise their CSR funds to organise regular medical camps in industrial areas. Special facilities shall be ensured for women workers at these camps," she said. Hospitals were directed to ensure camps include OPD services and screening for serious illnesses such as breast and cervical cancer. They were also asked to deploy mobile medical vans in industrial clusters, conduct eye examinations, distribute spectacles to those in need, and facilitate treatment for conditions such as cataract.

The DM stressed the need to extend health check-up camps and mobile medical services to construction sites, and asked all private hospitals to prepare detailed micro-plans in coordination with the health department and appoint nodal officers. "Their details are to be shared for effective implementation," she said.

Health department officials were also directed to ensure adequate availability of doctors, medicines and equipment at district hospitals, community health centres, primary health centres and GIMS.

Dr DK Gupta, chairman of Felix Hospital in Sector 137, said the hospital regularly conducted health camps across the city and would deploy mobile vans in industrial areas. "This will not only provide basic check-ups but also promote early diagnosis, preventive care and health awareness," he said.

Exports down due to war, industries seek review of 35% wage hike

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Industrialists from across the state urged the govt to review the recent 35% increase in minimum wages, calling it impractical amid current economic pressures. At a meeting in Udyog Vihar, participants said industries, especially MSMEs, were already under strain due to the ongoing West Asia conflict, which has hurt exports. They resolved to submit memorandums to the chief minister next week, seeking a phased implementation of the hike instead of a one-time increase of 35%. A parallel meeting organised by Confederation of Haryana Industries Association (CHIA) echoed similar concerns, with leaders calling for a balanced approach.

"The govt's objective of safeguarding workers' interests is commendable. However, the current condition of industries cannot be overlooked. A sudden hike will severely impact the MSME sector in particular. If the govt



implements the wage increase in a phased manner, it will help maintain a balance between the interests of workers and industries," said Progressive Federation of Trade and Industry (PFTI) chairman Deepak Maini.

The industry body demanded reconsideration of the recent lump-sum increase of Rs 4,000 in minimum wages, with participants unanimously stating that such a sudden hike is impractical and could have serious repercussions on the

industrial sector under the current economic conditions. They highlighted that exporters, already under pressure, expect support from the govt rather than the imposition of additional financial burdens. RL Sharma, director general of PFTI and a senior advocate, reiterated that industrialists do not oppose an increase in minimum wages. "But implementation should be carried out in a phased manner to avoid sudden financial strain on industries," he said. The CHIA meeting in Udyog Vihar was attended by around two dozen industrial associations from NCR. The meeting was chaired by Chamber of Industries president Ashok Kohli.

The wage debate comes against a backdrop of simmering worker unrest in Haryana and elsewhere. Manesar and Noida have witnessed repeated flashpoints between labour and management, with workers protesting stalled wage negotiations, contract work conditions and delayed disbursements.

Gurgaon court orders FIR against ex-minister for grant fraud

Gurgaon.(Agency)

A local court has directed the police to register an FIR against former minister Sukhbir Kataria and others for alleged misuse of govt grants by diverting benefits to ineligible persons. The petition filed last year by a Gurgaon resident, Om Parkash, claimed that Kataria abused his ministerial position between 2014 and 2019 to secure a Rs 20 lakh govt grant for a female acquaintance allegedly residing in his own building. The grant was intended for the construction and repair of houses for the economically weaker sections. Parkash alleged police delay in acting on the matter, prompting him to approach the court. Observing that the evidence indicated possible misuse of public funds for personal and electoral benefit, chief judicial magistrate Rajat Verma on Friday asked SHO of New Colony police station to register a case under IPC sections 403 (dishonest misappropriation of property), 405 (criminal breach of trust), 409 (criminal breach of trust by public servants), 420 (cheating) and provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act against Kataria. The complaint alleged that former minister Sukhbir Kataria misused his official position to facilitate illegal grant of funds to individuals like Sharmila Devi and others, by falsely showing them as residents of a property that allegedly belonged to him. According to the complainant, the grants were purportedly diverted to secure "fake votes." The police, in their action taken report, confirmed that grants had been provided at the request of the former minister. However, it stated that clarification regarding the legitimacy of the grant and the residential details of the beneficiaries could only be provided by the concerned department and the deputy commissioner's office. Appearing in person, Parkash argued that the electricity bill submitted by the beneficiaries for verification bore the address of a house owned by the minister himself.

Kejriwal's Power Show Sparks Political Storm: "Countdown to Modi Government Begins," BJP Hits Back

New Delhi: The political temperature in the national capital has surged once again after former Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener Arvind Kejriwal launched a sharp attack on the central government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Addressing a public gathering, Kejriwal declared that the "countdown of the Modi government has begun," a statement that has intensified the ongoing political battle between the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the opposition. Kejriwal asserted that the time has come for a change at the national level, citing what he described as growing public dissatisfaction over issues such as unemployment and inflation. He also pointed to increasing unity among opposition parties as a key factor that could challenge the BJP in upcoming elections. Positioning himself as a prominent face of political change, Kejriwal's remarks are being seen as part of a broader electoral



strategy to consolidate anti-incumbency sentiment. The BJP, however, strongly dismissed Kejriwal's claims, calling them "baseless" and a reflection of political frustration. Party leaders defended the government's track record, emphasizing strong leadership under Prime Minister Modi and highlighting achievements in governance and development. According to BJP spokespersons, Kejriwal's remarks are merely an attempt to stay relevant in the political discourse, while the government continues to focus on performance-driven politics. Political observers believe that Kejriwal's statement is a calculated move aimed at energizing voters who are seeking change, especially in the run-up to crucial elections.

Teen skips Class 12 boards, NEET to donate liver to grandmother

NOIDA.(Agency)

When his friends were busy with last-minute revisions, 19-year-old Aditya Raj made a choice few at his age would be asked to. The Class 12 student from Bihar's Hajipur put his boards — and even his first shot at NEET on hold to save his grandmother's life, donating a part of his liver when her condition turned critical. Sunita Devi (62) had been battling liver cirrhosis for more than a year. The illness had led to repeated hospitalisations, fluid build-up in the abdomen and growing weakness. When her health worsened, the family brought her to NCR — Max Hospital in Vaishali — where doctors found she was in an advanced stage of cirrhosis. A transplant, they said, was the only definitive treatment. And that couldn't wait. Doctors told the family Aditya's grandmother would die if the transplant wasn't done at the earliest. The family did have other possible donors. Aditya's father and aunt were both found

compatible, but existing health conditions ruled them out. That left the teenager to volunteer to donate a part of his liver. But the timing of the surgery was crucial. It clashed with the CBSE Class 12 boards — Feb 17 to March 27. Since the surgery couldn't wait, Aditya decided to skip the boards this year. And NEET too. After detailed medical, psychological and legal assessments at Max hospital, Aditya was cleared for surgery under national transplant protocols, becoming the family's first living donor. The date of the transplant was fixed for March 12.

"I was fully prepared for my Class 12 exams, but that wasn't more important than my family. Exams can be taken again next year. So, I decided to skip them and do my bit to save my grandmother," the teenager told TOI. Aditya, who wants to become a doctor himself, said he planned to make his first attempt at NEET this year. "That, too, will happen next year," he added. Dr Subhash Gupta, group chairman at the

Centre for Liver and Biliary Sciences at Max Healthcare, said the case was both emotionally moving and medically demanding. "What stood out was the young donor's determination despite his academic commitments.

Careful matching of the donor and recipient, meticulous preparations for the surgery and strict adherence to transplant protocols were essential to ensure a safe and successful transplant," Dr Gupta said. Dr Rajesh Dey, director of liver transplant and biliary sciences at Max, said the procedure involved a right lobe graft weighing about 710 grams and was carried out for almost 10 hours. "Living donor liver transplantation is a complex surgery in which a portion of a healthy donor's liver is transplanted into the recipient.

Because the liver can regenerate, both donor and recipient livers gradually return to near-normal size. Donor safety remained our highest priority," he added.

Engineer accused of 'inciting' Noida protesters held at TN station

NOIDA.(Agency)

The Special Task Force and a police team from Noida arrested Aditya Anand, described as "mastermind" behind the April 13 labour protest violence in the city, from Tiruchirappalli railway station in Tamil Nadu on Saturday.

Anand was tracked through electronic surveillance and intelligence inputs, and a reward of Rs 1 lakh was announced for his capture. Police claimed Anand played a central role in orchestrating the violence that erupted during the workers' protest, which initially began as a demonstration over labour-related grievances. There was large-scale vandalism in the city's industry hubs on April 13 after violence broke out. Investigators alleged Anand and his associates planned to incite unrest and escalate the protest into a violent confrontation. Originally from Hazaribagh in Jharkhand, Anand holds a BTech degree from NIT Jamshedpur and was placed as a software engineer at a private company in Noida through campus recruitment. He lived in Gurgaon



for work before shifting back to Noida in June 2025 and was residing in rented accommodation in Sector 37 at the time of the protest, sources said. Police said Anand first came into contact with Mazdoor Bigul, a labour-focused organisation led by Anubhav Sinha, on Facebook in 2022 and subsequently began reporting on factory workers' conditions in the city. He met co-accused

Rupesh Roy — arrested on April 11 along with Manisha Chauhan as alleged conspirators — during the Bhagat Singh Jan Adhikar Yatra in 2023, an initiative organised by Mazdoor Bigul.

Over time, Anand deepened his association with the organisation's senior leadership and participated in agitations across the country, police said. Police also link Anand with Disha Student Organisation,

RWPI and Naujawan Bharat Sabha. Multiple police teams from Noida and the STF were deployed across several states to track Anand after investigators initially suspected he may have fled to Delhi. Officials said his questioning is expected to shed light on others involved.

Anand will be brought to Noida on transit remand, police said. A non-bailable warrant was earlier issued against him by a local court, and a case was registered at Noida Phase 2 police station under BNS sections 191(1) and (2) (rioting), 115(2) (voluntarily causing hurt), 121(1) and (2) (voluntarily causing hurt or grievous hurt to deter public servant from his duty), 351(3) (criminal intimidation), 352 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace) and 61(2) (criminal conspiracy) and Section 7 of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act.

The Anti-Terrorism Squad has separately launched an investigation into the violence after police claimed two handles on X that posted fake videos about people dying during the protests were operated from Pakistan.

“To promote science education among girls in Punjab:” STEM Collective launched

100 girls from 25 govt schools of Patiala were chosen for the programme's first cohort

Shimla. (Agency)

The Punjab government, academia, civil society and industry came together at Thapar Institute in Patiala on Saturday to launch the STEM Collective, a multi-year programme to promote science education among girls in Punjab.

As many as 100 girls from 25 government schools across the city joined the programme's first cohort. Aiming to reach 100 girls annually, the programme is designed to be replicated across other states.

The STEM Conclave marked the public launch of the STEM Collective, built in partnership between Sanjhi Sikhiya, Avanti Fellows, PI-RAHI and the Department of School Education, Punjab, with support from Genpact. The selected 100 girls took a tour of the exhibition put

up by various organisations, heard STEM alumni talk through their science journey and later participated in a guided campus immersion at Thapar's ongoing Techfest – Helix, exploring robo wars, hackathons, and advanced laboratories, many for the first time.

Simultaneously, science and mathematics teachers held small group sessions with professors from IIT Ropar, Thapar University, Punjabi University.

“This is not just about choosing science as a subject — it is about understanding why we learn what we learn,” said Dr Jaswinder Singh, national award-winning science teacher from Patiala. “Students shouldn't be scared of science. They should be curious about what lies inside their geometry boxes and how the world around them works.”

Alumni of government schools, now engineering students at NIT Jalandhar, spoke about what made the difference in their journeys: timely mentorship and access.

Prof Arvind, former vice-chancellor of Punjabi University, reflected on his own path through a village government school. “Classroom environments often push students away from science rather than drawing them in. In my own journey, real learning began when I had to explore and understand concepts on my own.”

“Students learn as much from each other as they do from teachers,” said Prof Arun Kumar Grover, former vice-chancellor of



Punjab University. “We need to create environments where curiosity is encouraged, and teachers continuously evolve with the times.” Raising concerns

around shrinking opportunities for hands-on learning, Prof Rajat Sandhir, Director, PI-RAHI, said, “How do we promote science in an ecosystem where imagination is limited and practical learning is disappearing? That is the challenge we must address together.”

Sarika Rastogi, representing Genpact CSR, highlighted the broader impact of the initiative. “When a girl from a government school in Punjab enters a career in technology, it transforms not only her life but also the aspirations of her family and community. That ripple effect is what Genpact aims to support,” she said.

Short news

Meet this Haryana farmer earning Rs 6.5 lakh per acre growing 5 varieties of watermelon

Chandigarh. (Agency)

A watermelon farmer from Siwah village in Panipat, Ram Pratap Sharma, 63, honoured with the Krishi Rattan Award, has built a remarkable reputation by cultivating five distinct varieties of watermelon. He supplies his produce to families in Gurgaon, Ludhiana, Chandigarh, and Delhi, maintaining close ties with influential households. Firms with online supply chains serving Delhi and Noida are also among his regular buyers.

Sharma, who studied up to the second year of graduation in 1981, contributed for years to his family's farming and small-scale horticulture before turning full-time to vegetables and fruits in 2011, when polyhouse, polynet, and drip irrigation began to gain ground in the region.

Over time, he developed his own client base, including industrialists and administrators from major cities, who often collect 10–15 kg fruit packs from him to share with their relatives.

“My watermelon is especially in demand from firms engaged in online supply to Delhi and Noida, where fresh fruit is delivered to homes on a phone call,” Sharma told. In recent years, his watermelons have earned him recognition, with five colour varieties—red, orange, dark yellow, light yellow, and blue. “To ensure good quality watermelon, I procure seed from companies in Thailand and Taiwan at a rate of Rs 1 lakh per kg. For one acre, only 300 grams of seed is required to grow a good crop with 6,000 plants,” Sharma said.

HC upholds Pangna Gram Panchayat pradhan's disqualification under Panchayati Raj Act

Shimla. (Agency)

The Himachal Pradesh High Court has dismissed a petition challenging the disqualification of a panchayat representative, asserting that “strict penalties for electoral malpractice are justified and necessary to maintain the integrity of the democratic process”.

Hearing the matter on Friday, a Division Bench of Justice Vivek Singh Thakur and Justice Ranjan Sharma upheld the order disqualifying petitioner Basant Lal from contesting elections for six years under Section 146(2) of the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994.

The court observed that “for corrupt practices in the election process, punishment should be harsher”, adding that “the statutory disqualification cannot be termed harsh or disproportionate”. Finding “no merit” in the plea, the bench dismissed the petition, along with all pending applications.

The petitioner had approached the high court under Article 226 of the Constitution, seeking to quash the February 3, 2025, order of the Mandi Deputy Commissioner, and also challenging the constitutional validity of Section 146(2), terming it “arbitrary and violative of Articles 14 and 21”.

Basant Lal was elected pradhan of Pangna Gram Panchayat in Mandi district during the 2020 Panchayati Raj elections, but his election was set aside following an election petition filed by a private respondent.

The Karsog Sub-Divisional Officer (Civil), in an order dated April 25, 2022, had declared his election “null and void” after finding that he had deliberately concealed a pending criminal case in his nomination form filed on February 17, 2021.

Gujarat 2027: Is the Fall of an “Invincible” Majority Beginning? Political History Raises Alarm for BJP

Ahmedabad . A growing political debate is emerging in Gujarat over whether an overwhelming electoral majority could turn into a strategic disadvantage ahead of the 2027 state elections. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which secured a dominant mandate in the last election, is now facing questions from political observers about the long-term sustainability of such a large victory. Analysts often point to historical precedents to frame the discussion. In 1985, under the leadership of Madhavsinh Solanki, the Indian National Congress achieved a massive electoral win in Gujarat. However, in subsequent elections, the party saw a sharp decline, illustrating how rapidly political fortunes can shift when voter sentiment changes. Some observers suggest that prolonged dominance can lead to challenges such as voter fatigue, reduced political competition, and internal factionalism.



These factors, if not addressed, may affect elec-

toral performance over time. In the current context, there is also discussion around the gradual expansion efforts of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Gujarat, which could influence the state's political dynamics by offering voters an alternative. At the same time, BJP leaders remain confident, emphasizing organizational strength, governance record, and grassroots presence as key advantages. Supporters argue that strong leadership and consistent development initiatives will continue to resonate with voters. Political analysts note that the 2027 elections are likely to be shaped by multiple factors, including governance performance, opposition strategy, and voter expectations. While comparisons with past political shifts provide context, the actual outcome will ultimately depend on how effectively parties respond to evolving public sentiment in the coming years.

Abhishek suggested the country's PM to be patient and cool in his election speech, Yuvraj said

Don't get angry due to fear of losing the election, keep your mind calm and work in the increasing heat.

Kolkata: During the election campaign, the rhetoric of BJP leaders from Delhi has sometimes spiraled out of control. Some leaders can't even pronounce the names of the constituencies they visit properly, while others cross all limits of decency when attacking the ruling party. Now, the Prime Minister's name has been added to this list. Previously, while campaigning in several constituencies in Bengal, the Prime Minister had said that if the BJP comes to power, it will put all Trinamool Congress goons in jail. Trinamool's All India General Secretary, Abhishek Banerjee, considered the PM's statement highly objectionable and, while addressing a rally in Sagar on Sunday, reminded the Prime Minister of the dignity of his position. The Trinamool prince said, “The Prime Minister came here and announced that he will put everyone in jail. I would request the Prime Minister to please remain calm and not lose his temper. You are much older than me. With all due respect and reverence for you, I would like to say that just as Mamata Banerjee is everyone's Chief Minister in Bengal, you too are everyone's Prime Minister in the country. Please, do not lose your temper.” On Sunday afternoon, at a massive rally in support of Trinamool candidate Bankim Chandra Hazra from the Sagar Assembly constituency in South 24 Parganas, Trinamool's All India General Secretary Abhishek Banerjee launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP. Addressing the rally at Sagar's Kaligiri grounds, Abhishek said with apparent sarcasm: “Now they've realized that their SIR strategy has also failed. The PM is now fearing a major defeat in Bengal.” Addressing the PM in his election speech, Abhishek said, “No matter how much you trust SIR, this Bengal is going to be Mamata's once again. She has realized that despite



SIR fully mobilizing every institution at her disposal—the High Court, the Supreme Court, the central forces, and the National Election Commission—she is facing a major defeat in Bengal.” Attacking the BJP in an even sharper tone, Abhishek added: “There are still 10 days left.” Some people, upon hearing the slogan “Jai Bangla,” bare their teeth and lash out in a fit of rage; they are losing their composure. Some BJP leaders are barking like rabid dogs. This is proof that their defeat is certain. No one can stop it. Addressing the Prime Minister, the Trinamool General Secretary continued, “I would urge the Prime Minister to maintain his composure. If you truly love Bengal, release the ₹2 lakh crore that

is owed to the people of this state. If you truly want to bring positive change to the lives of the people of Bengal, why are you waiting for the elections to end, Modiji? After all, the reins of the central government are in your hands. Send money directly to the bank accounts of women, youth, and the fishing community. Currently, the BJP has Chief Ministers in 16 states. If you can ensure that a scheme like 'Lakshmi Bhandar,' under which Mamata Banerjee provides financial assistance to every woman in a household, is implemented in even one BJP-ruled state, I promise you, I will retire from politics. I will never again come forward to seek votes on behalf of the Trinamool.” Voting in this constituency is scheduled for the 29th, part of the second phase of the elections. South 24 Parganas is a stronghold of the Trinamool Congress, yet, despite this lead, there is no room for laxity. Campaigning efforts have not slowed down at all. On the contrary, the party's top leadership, including Abhishek Banerjee, is intensifying its campaigning.

Women's credit access: To ensure borrowing means building

The conversation on women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) has, for too long, been framed around inclusion. It is time to reframe it around power, leadership and agency. The real question is not whether women should participate in science and technology, but whether they will shape its future. Across the world, women are stepping forward not just as scientists and innovators, but as institution builders, capital allocators and ecosystem shapers. Their influence is redefining how we think about empowerment—not as access alone, but as the ability to create, lead and transform systems.

India begins from a position of latent strength. Women account for a significant 43 percent of its STEM graduates, placing the country among the strongest globally in terms of participation. The imperative now is to convert this participation into authority and leadership. Though women enter STEM education in significant numbers, their drop-offs at senior levels—in research leadership, deep-tech entrepreneurship and policy influence—remain stark. This is not a pipeline problem alone. It is a power asymmetry. Empowerment in STEM must, therefore, move beyond with elevation to leadership, ownership and participation in decision-making. Encouragingly, India's wider policy experience shows what is possible when structural barriers are removed. Over the past decade, women's access to assets, credit, health and basic infrastructure has expanded at unprecedented scale. More than 72 percent of homes under PM Awas Yojana (Gramin) are owned by women, while women account for nearly 69 percent of loans sanctioned under the Mudra Yojana and 84 percent of beneficiaries under the Stand-Up India scheme. These outcomes demonstrate that when women are given agency and control over resources, participation can translate into leadership.

When women lead in science, they expand the frontier of what science chooses to solve. They bring not just representation, but reorientation. From healthcare to climate science, women leaders often prioritise preventive and community health models, focus on access, affordability and equity, and drive collaborative, interdisciplinary innovation. This is not anecdotal; it is structural. Diverse leadership produces more relevant, scalable and humane solutions.

A defining shift of our time is that women are not waiting to be included; they are deploying capital and influence to build new pathways. American philanthropist MacKenzie Scott has redefined large-scale trust-based philanthropy, directing billions towards education, equity and institutional capacity. Closer home, Rohini Nilekani has consistently emphasised building public goods and ecosystems—recognising that access to knowledge, digital infrastructure and education are foundational to participation in the future economy. In India, this shift is also being reinforced by public policy that expands women's economic agency by bringing them into the mainstream. Over the past decade, the country has invested in enabling conditions that free up women's time, energy and ambition. Clean cooking access through more than 10 crore Ujjwala LPG connections has reduced health burdens. Tap water to over 14 crore rural households under the Jal Jeevan Mission has lifted one of the most invisible forms of unpaid labour. Improved dignity and safety through Swachh Bharat—where over 90 percent of women report freedom from the dangers of open defecation—has transformed everyday lives. Yet, we risk under-leveraging this advantage if women continue to be underrepresented in advanced research, innovation ecosystems and leadership roles. Empowerment must therefore be engineered deliberately. Women trained in science and technology bring evidence-based thinking, data literacy and systems reasoning into governance—strengthening policymaking across public health, climate and digital infrastructure.

Stalin finds gold in delimitation row

Delimitation, which threatens to shrink Tamil Nadu's space and voice in the federal polity, is the darkest red flag that the DMK has waved over the years.

THE Centre's delimitation ambush, a week before Tamil Nadu votes in the Assembly elections, has infused new life into the DMK's campaign for a second term. The party that in 2021 won 133 seats on its own in the 234-seat Assembly—an absolute majority that silenced the murmurs of partners in the Secular Progressive Alliance—was beset this time by concerns about incumbency, the Vijay effect (Vijay, the popular Tamil film star and founder of the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam, who has emerged as a new political factor in Tamil Nadu politics) and a dysfunctional alliance with the Congress. While DMK insiders were confident that the party still had the edge, it was with the caveat of a definite erosion in the party's vote share, perhaps even dependence on its allies.

But the Narendra Modi government may have just erased DMK's worries. Over the last five years, Chief Minister MK Stalin has lost no opportunity to highlight Tamil Nadu's fight to retain what little autonomy India's federal system gives it considering the BJP's apparent appetite for centralising everything—from finances to language, culture and religion.

Delimitation, which threatens to shrink Tamil Nadu's space and voice in the federal polity, is the darkest red flag that the DMK has waved over the years.

Last year, Stalin convened a meeting of chief ministers of four Opposition-bled states—three of them in the south and Bhagwat Mann of Punjab—deputy chief minister of Karnataka D K Shivram, and representatives of Opposition parties, including BRS, BJD and SAD. The discussion was how states that had managed to rein in population growth with their progressive policies and development priorities were being punished for it. It's no longer talk. On April 16 and 17, at a time when the DMK (and the TMC in West Bengal) are in the thick of their campaigns, the Centre wants to rush through Parliament two related Bills: the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, which removes the constitutional freeze on delimitation until after the first census to be conducted post 2026. This means delimitation can begin immediately on the basis of the 2011 Census, without waiting for the 2027 Census. It increases the number of seats in the Lok Sabha from 543 to 850. Deviously, the government has linked delimitation to the implementation of Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, which provides 33% reservation of seats for women in Parliament and state Assemblies. Under the 2023

Women's Reservation Act, this was to be implemented only after the first Census to be conducted after 2023. The BJP's political message is clear: you are against women's reservation if you are against delimitation. The associated Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 seeks to replace the Delimitation Act of 2002.

If these Bills become law, Tamil Nadu's share of representation in Parliament will reduce, even though the number of parliamentary constituencies is set to increase from 39 to 50 in the expanded Lok Sabha. This reduction will carry serious repercussions for both politics and governance. Stalin's response, invoking the memory of the "DMK of the 1950s and 1960s", was a not-so-subtle reminder about a history that is precious in

By then, Tamil Nadu had mobilised against Hindi for nearly three decades, starting from the pre-Independence 1937 Madras government's move to impose the language in schools. In the 1950s, the newly formed DMK ran a campaign to black out the names of railway stations written in the Devanagari script. The late DMK leader, former Chief Minister and Stalin's father, M Karunanidhi, then a celebrated scriptwriter for Tamil films, led the protests against the renaming of the Kallakudi station in Tiruchirappalli as Dalmiapuram, after the industrial township set up by the Dalmia group in 1939. The anti-Hindi agitation of the 1950s also fuelled a secessionist demand for Dravida Nadu, which remained on the DMK's books until 1963, when it faced the reality check

of the Constitution (16th Amendment) Act, which banned secessionist speech and also included "upholding the sovereignty and integrity" of India in the wording of the oath of office. But the agitation against Hindi continued. Led by CN Annadurai, the DMK mobilised students behind the cause in Chennai and other cities in the Madras state, using Tamil movies, songs, poetry and newspapers. Annadurai was arrested on January 25, 1965, ahead of the planned protests on Republic Day. Scores of students and other youth were killed in the protests that erupted throughout the state. After that, Madras burned for nearly two months. The violence stopped only after assurances from Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri that there would be no compulsory imposition of Hindi and that English would remain the official language for an indefinite period. The state won the right to implement a two-language formula in its schools. The Congress was voted out in 1967, and has never been voted back to office since then. The

BJP is trying but is nowhere close to succeeding. The AIADMK, whose tense alliance with the BJP has already sucked the life out of the NDA campaign, and the inexperienced but popular Vijay, the biggest crowd puller in this election, have yet to come to grips with this new challenge from the Centre. For the DMK, however, it is election gold for sure.

The best hope for Tamil Nadu and the country is that these Bills, which go against the spirit of India's federal compact, are defeated on April 17. Never mind if the BJP paints those who voted against it as anti-women's reservation. Nothing prevents the Centre from implementing the reservation for women without linking it to delimitation.



Tamil Nadu for a hard-won victory that changed the course of the state politically and in every other way in the nascent years of the Republic. The long history of street protests and political agitation against Hindi is what Stalin was referencing when he messaged: "Not just a threat, but a warning" that "every family" would take to the streets. For those who may not know: on January 25, 1964, 4.30 am, Keezhapazhur Chinnasamy, a 27-year-old youth, walks into Tiruchirappalli junction railway station, pours kerosene on himself and sets himself ablaze. It was possibly the first self-immolation as political protest in India. As the flames consumed him, his screams of "Vaazhga Tamil, Ozhiga Hindi (long live Tamil, down with Hindi)" became the slogan of a generation.

Eroding federalism: BBMB rule change dilutes riparian rights

What is needed is not unilateral change but consultation and consensus

THE Centre's decision to amend the rules governing the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB) has triggered predictable outrage in Punjab and Haryana. But the issue goes far beyond routine political protest. At its core lies a fundamental question: how far can Central authority extend into institutions that were designed to embody cooperative federalism? By ending the longstanding convention that key technical posts in the BBMB would be held by officers from the partner states, the Centre has altered the delicate balance that underpins the management of crucial river waters. For Punjab and Haryana, whose agrarian economies depend heavily on these waters, the move is being seen as a dilution of their rightful stake. The timing is equally significant. With summer approaching and water demand set to rise, any perception of reduced state control risks fuelling inter-



state tensions, particularly against the backdrop of the unresolved SYL canal dispute. Trust, once eroded in water-sharing arrangements, is difficult to rebuild. The Centre may argue that broad-basing appointments

enhances efficiency and professionalism. Yet, governance structures in a federal polity cannot be judged by technocratic logic alone. They must also inspire confidence among stakeholders. In river water management, where history, geography and politics intersect, legitimacy is as important as competence.

What is needed is not unilateral change but consultation and consensus. The BBMB has long been a symbol of negotiated coexistence between riparian states. Undermining that symbolism risks reopening old fault lines. A course correction is still possible. The Centre must engage with the states to evolve a framework that balances efficiency with federal sensitivity. In matters of shared resources, cooperation cannot be commanded; it has to be cultivated.

No respite in sight for the rupee

It's unlikely that the RBI will be able to prevent its slide in 2026-27

THE rupee closed at 94.35 to the dollar on March 31, declining in a year by 10.5% from Rs 85.4 (its rate on March 31, 2025). In free fall since September last year, the rupee touched nearly 95/dollar on March 27. After the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) took some extraordinary measures and a ceasefire was brokered between the US and Iran, it is currently trading around Rs 93/dollar. The rupee's depreciation hurts India badly. Dependence on energy and Chinese imports makes our situation worse, while Indian merchandise exports don't gain any additional traction as we don't have products which the world has to import only from India or which we offer at the most competitive prices.

Foreign loans and their servicing become much costlier when the rupee depreciates. It is necessary to look at what is in store for the rupee in 2026-27. Will it touch the 100/dollar mark? Will it depreciate again by 10%? Does the RBI have sufficient firepower to stem the rot?

The RBI's foreign currency reserves (FCRs) of \$551 billion—our stock of dollars and other foreign currency assets and deposits—are its real firepower. Headline foreign exchange reserves of \$688.1 billion—the RBI's total reserves—include, besides FCRs, gold reserves (\$113.5 billion) and our holdings in the International Monetary Fund (\$24.4 billion). Gold reserves are difficult to sell, especially for India, as considerable odium is attached to it, thanks to the gold sales we had to undertake in 1991. Other components are too small.

Gold reserves make up as much as one-sixth (16.5%) of the RBI's total reserves. Gold did not have that dominance earlier. The RBI's fascination for the purchase of gold in the past four years and higher gold prices have materially reduced the real firepower—the FCRs' share. In March 2022, FCRs at \$553.7 billion were nearly 90% of the total reserves (\$619.7 billion). Currently, FCRs make up only about 80% of the total

reserves. There is another factor which reflects the RBI's mindset: it is unwilling to use its firepower. India was precariously vulnerable in 1991, with its total reserves being less than \$10 billion. This gave us the mindset of wanting to add more and build "adequate" reserves. When reserves reached \$100 billion in 2003-04, we felt adequately covered, but only for some time. In 2007-08, our reserves crossed \$300 billion and remained at that level for the next 4-5 years. Still, India suffered a bout of rupee depreciation in 2013 when the taper tantrum struck (the US Federal Reserve decided to reduce purchases of bonds, making the dollar appreciate).

India launched a costly FCNR(B) deposit scheme (foreign currency non-resident accounts) to collect \$26 billion to shore up reserves. In 2017-18, we had more than \$450 billion in reserves, yet we panicked when crude went past only \$80 a barrel and foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) withdrew about \$50 billion. Instead of using reserves, the government and the RBI contemplate raising \$50 billion in forex deposits/bonds.

Currently, we have total reserves of about \$700 billion and FCRs of \$550 billion. Yet, the RBI finds it difficult to use reserves for arresting the fall of the rupee. In the past few months, the Central bank went on adding to its reserves by undertaking swap operations (buying dollars now to sell dollars later) of about \$80 billion.

How should we assess the adequacy of our reserves (FCRs for me)? It has been traditionally measured in terms of months of merchandise imports they can finance; 10-12 months' coverage is considered comfortable. This, however, is not a good benchmark. Current account deficit (CAD) matters more. India's total imports of

\$915.2 billion in 2024-25 were more than 90% financed by exports of \$825.3 billion. Surplus in other items of current account (like remittances from our workers abroad) reduced CAD to only \$23.3 billion in 2024-25, which hardly needed about 4% of FCRs to finance it. It is the capital account (receipts of equity, bonds and NRI deposits minus payments for loans taken and



investments withdrawn) which should worry us more. Our foreign exchange reserves have been built by surpluses in the capital account. Two big volatile constituents of capital account—foreign debt and portfolio investment—can cause real trouble. Foreign debt flows reverse when the rupee depreciates, as servicing and hedging costs go up. Indian holders of foreign debt stop borrowing and start paying off. For

FPIs, their rupee investment in Indian equities and debt lose big when stock markets plummet and the rupee depreciates (as loss in share value and exchange rate far exceeds dividends, as is happening currently). In 2025-26, FPI investments generated large negative returns of more than 15%. No wonder FPIs sold over Rs 1 trillion worth of equities in March 2026 alone.

The ratio of outstanding foreign debt and portfolio liability to India's foreign currency reserves is a better marker to see where the rupee-dollar exchange rate is headed. India's foreign debt is about \$750 billion. FPIs' stock is also about the same amount. Together, these volatile foreign debt and portfolio investment assets are about \$1.5 trillion, which is about 2.7 times the RBI's currency reserves. This is India's real vulnerability. A ratio of more than 1 should worry policymakers and the RBI.

Prospects for 2026-27 are indeed quite worrying. The damage to oil and gas production infrastructure in the Middle East, which produces more than 20% of the global oil and 30% of the natural gas supplies, is extensive and unlikely to be undone anytime soon, even if there is a permanent agreement. Iran has successfully weaponised the Strait of Hormuz and would continue to recover a toll charge (currently \$1 million per ship). Iran has the ability to regulate the supply/flow of oil. Iran and other members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) are likely to ensure that oil prices stay around \$90-100 per barrel in 2026-27. This will make India's oil bill go up massively as every \$10 per barrel increase in crude oil prices adds about \$50 million a day to our import bill, making the current account worsen. FPIs are unlikely to return to Indian markets anytime soon. With a weakening rupee, they may continue to exit.

Swanky furniture alone won't add style and vibrancy to your living room. Here are four simple ways to add colour and style to your living room

4 ways to add style to Your living Room



Colorful cushions:

Cushions in different bright colors add much life to your living room. And add comfort factor to it.

The most comfortable sofas and chairs also need cushions. So, have them generously in your living room. You can also have some floor cushions so that on a lazy Sunday afternoon you can just take a nap and chill. Cushions in varying sizes, textures, patterns and colors make your living room attractive. And there are not expensive too.

Rug it: Rugs are wonderful ways to bring color to your floor. Imagine having an ikkat or kalamkari rug in your living room and bringing in a slice of our very own textile heritage into the living room. You need not follow the rule of putting a rug only in the middle of the room. Make your cosy

corner with a rug and couple of cushions. What a comfortable space will it be to curl up with a book and a cup of tea/coffee.

Bring in nature: There's no substitute to having a bit of greenery in your living room. Put some potted plants in your living room and see what difference it brings to your decor. Add more to the magic by putting fresh flowers in the room. Have a sense of variation by putting flowers in a terracotta/ceramic/glass bowl. Put them in different corners of the room and revel in the beauty.

Your signature style: Your home is a reflection of your personality. So, from art, books, handicrafts, photographs to your specialized collections (it could be anything), you can display it all and bring in a bit of your personality. Make the room look unique and let your guests have a dekho at you from a different perspective.

Beautify your home with local plant Breeds



and flower-bearing indigenous plants should be the only species in gardens here," he said. "By using these plants, one can not only have a beautiful garden, but also contribute towards conserving the environment." Environmentalist Biswajit Roy Chowdhury said the trend of opting for foreign plant breeds has been taking its toll on the local ecosystem. Since these plants are unknown to local birds and insects, they fail to attract them, resulting in ecological imbalance. "Planting a tree is not enough. The real benefits come from the biodiversity that it helps evolve. Foreign plants do not share that relationship with the local ecosystem and end up upsetting the ecological balance," he said.

Another adverse impact of this trend is the destruction of local shrubs, which are being replaced by foreign exotic species like Bougainvillea, Callistemon citrinus and Magnolia grandiflora. "Due to rampant plantation, most native plants are vanishing and fancy shrubs, non-fruit bearing plants and manicured lawns are taking their place," Das said. Roy Chowdhury revealed that some exotic plants also caused pollution by releasing pollens capable of causing respiratory problems and serious allergies. Parthenium is one such species. All of them, however, agree that not all exotic species are harmful. Some, like the sunflower, share a symbiotic relationship with the local environment. On the other hand, Alstonia, an Indian species, can cause respiratory problems. So, it's your turn to create an ecosystem, and not just a garden.

Das said gardening with the local plant species is not only pocket-friendly, but also helps the environment. "Kolkata is in a tropical region with lots of water and good soil. There are thousands of local plants that one can use for gardening," he said, adding that a mid-sized garden won't cost anything more than '500 to '700. "Most of these plants grow everywhere in the state, so they don't need additional fertilizers or extra care." Environmentalist HS Debnath also recommends trees like the banyan, mango, neem or palm that not only yield seasonal fruits but also attract birds and animals. "Fruit

Relocating to new home? Clean it well



If you're relocating to a new home, make sure you clean the walls, toilet seats, drains and pipes well for hygienic surroundings, says an expert.

Here are some tips:

Walls: Start cleaning the walls using the broom. Do it in top-to-bottom direction. Reach out for the webs and dust on the walls and remove all of it.

Glass surfaces:

Whether it is window glass, door glass, shower glass or mirrors, all are equally prone to getting scratched if a hard sponge is used. Use a soft (cotton) cloth to dust these and then clean them using window or glass cleaning

agents.

Toilets and toilet seats:

The toilet seat can be cleaned using a sponge soaked in liquid soap water mixture. Just add disinfectant or an antiseptic along with the liquid soap. For the toilet bowl, use a cleaning agent and leave it on for some time.

Drains and pipes:

Use a plunger on all pipes and drains, even if they don't appear to be clogged. Check for open drains which permit entry for rats and cockroaches. Place drain covers on such openings.

Do not miss:

Sink drains (kitchen drainage system), bathroom drains (shower, tub, wash basin and toilet) and balcony drains.

Kitchen:

Use strong cleaning agents with care - especially in areas where you plan to store food. Note presence of pests - especially stubborn cockroaches and tell tale signs of rats. If you spray any pesticides and use rat poison, air the kitchen for a day before unpacking food stuff.

It was happy start for wannabe gardener Soumita Banerjee when she decided to beautify her home with some exotic plants.

So, off she dashed to the Gullif street market, bought all kinds of ornamental plants and started her very own garden! A few months later, however, when her garden was in full bloom, she noticed that it was not attracting butterflies or insects. Sure something was amiss, she contacted gardening consultant, Somnath Pal Das.

To her amazement, Das asked her to replace the exotic plants with some local shrubs, which Soumita knew as nothing but weeds. She did so, and within a few weeks, saw her garden transform. "I had no idea local plants could be this beautiful. They are also attracting butterflies and birds to the garden," said Banerjee, while watering a bunch of Nayantara picked up from a neighbourhood pavement. She has also replaced all the exotic plants with five more local species, including Catharanthus roseus (Nayantara), Ixora coccinea (Rangan) and Gardenia jasminoides (Gandharaj).



Short news

Soon, common man's drink to cost 20% more in Karnataka under new alcohol tax plan

BENGALURU.(Agency) The maximum retail price (MRP) on the common man's alcohol -- whiskey, rum, gin and brandy -- in Karnataka will soon increase by at least 20%, with the government issuing a draft notification to bring in a new tax structure that will tax the content of alcohol in beverages. Higher the content of alcohol in Indian Made Liquor (IML) made in Karnataka, higher will be the tax on it once the amendment comes into effect.

IML in the state is sold in slabs depending upon the MRP. The first four excise slabs, which till now are with the lowest MRP and meant for low-income group consumers, now stand to become more expensive. The average alcohol content in this segment of IML is 42.8v/v.

These four slabs contribute 80% towards the excise revenue. From Rs 80 per 180 ml (nip) the price last year went up to Rs 95 per nip. It will now cost between Rs 105-110 with AIB taxation.

The government on Saturday issued draft notification to amend a more than six-decade-long alcohol taxation policy and usher in 'Alcohol-in-Beverage' (AIB)-based excise duty structure. With amendment to Karnataka Excise (Excise Duties and Fees) Rules, 1968, the state will become the first in India to introduce excise duty based on AIB.

Karnataka PHC officers stretched thin as staff shortage deepens, care may suffer

BENGALURU. (Agency) Mounting vacancies in Karnataka's primary healthcare system are forcing frontline workers to take on multiple roles, with Primary Health Care Officers (PHCOs) now being asked to shoulder the responsibilities of Community Health Officers (CHOs), triggering concerns over workload, training gaps, and patient care.

In 2024-25, as many as 1,194 CHO posts remain vacant out of 6,780 sanctioned positions. At the same time, 2,949 PHCO posts are also unfilled, pointing to a wider human resource crisis at the grassroots level.

PHCOs, earlier known as Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), are primarily trained in reproductive and child health. However, a recent order by the Department of Health and Family Welfare has directed district officials to obtain consent from PHCOs to take on CHO duties in centres where vacancies persist, instead of filling these posts.

Experts say the move reflects deeper systemic issues. "There is a clear mismatch of capacity and skills. CHOs are trained as mid-level healthcare providers focusing on non-communicable diseases, while PHCOs are trained mainly in maternal and child health. Simply transferring responsibilities is not a sustainable solution," says Dr Swathi SB, public health practitioner and member of Sarvatrika Arogya Andolana Karnataka (SAAK). She added that the approach risks weakening the system further. "When both cadres themselves are understaffed, redistributing roles only increases pressure without strengthening healthcare delivery," she noted.

As Siddu plays it safe, Jarkiholi steps in to take on AHINDA mantle

BENGALURU.(Agency) With Chief Minister Siddaramaiah reluctant to back under fire Muslim leaders and MLCs, Naseer Ahmed and K Abdul Jabbar, PWD Minister Satish Jarkiholi, who is aspiring to become KPCC president, has stepped in to control damage.

Naseer was sacked as CM's political secretary. Jabbar was suspended from the party after having been made to resign as KPCC minority cell chief. Deputy Chief Minister and KPCC president DK Shivakumar's camp is now anticipating action against Housing Minister Zameer Ahmed Khan. All this is in the backdrop of alleged anti-party activities during the byelection in Davanagere South.

Once the bypoll results are declared on May 4, Jarkiholi, Social Welfare Minister Dr HC Mahadevappa and former minister KN Rajanna are likely to meet AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge, General Secretary (Organisation) KC Venugopal and LoP in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi in New Delhi and apprise them of the 'harsh' action against the minority leaders that could damage party's prospects in the 2028 Karnataka Assembly polls, sources said.

Siddaramaiah is said to have suggested to Zameer to explain to the party high command his alleged anti-party activities to defeat Samarth Shananur, son of Horticulture Minister SS Mallikarjun. Jarkiholi and Mahadevappa had a breakfast meeting with Zameer and discussed strategy, a source said. "Zameer along with Siddaramaiah's son Dr Yathindra has been reiterating that Siddaramaiah will continue as CM for five years and his interest should be safeguarded," a Congress leader said.

Dushyant Chautala and Hisar crime branch in-charge file complaints against each other

Mumbai.(Agency) Former Haryana deputy chief minister Dushyant Chautala and Hisar crime branch in-charge Pawan Kumar have filed complaints against each other, with the Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) leader accusing Kumar and armed personnel accompanying him of blocking his vehicle and attempting to intimidate him. The crime branch officer, on the other hand, accused Chautala and his brother of reckless driving and attempting to ram a police vehicle.

Dushyant Chautala on Friday alleged that a police car blocked his way, tried to knock him down, and a pistol was aimed at him when he was on his way to meet Hisar Superintendent of Police (SP) Sidhant Jain in connection with the "wrongful arrest" of six people connected with the JJP over a protest at Guru Jambheshwar University of Science and Technology (GJU S&T) in Hisar on Thursday.

The complaints have intensified political heat in Haryana. Addressing a press conference here on Saturday, Dushyant Chautala alleged that

despite submitting a written complaint at the Urban Estate police station, an FIR was not registered even after 24 hours.

Dushyant said he would approach the Punjab



and Haryana High Court if the police failed to act by Monday. He also claimed that the Director General of Police Ajay Singhal did not respond to his calls and demanded an independent probe led by a senior officer. The former deputy CM alleged, "Pawan Kumar and SP security in-charge Amarjeet stopped

my convoy near Sabzi Mandi bridge in Hisar on Friday when I was accompanying Digvijay on his way to surrender in connection with the university case."

Dushyant alleged, "Kumar and armed personnel accompanying him blocked my vehicle by a Mahindra Bolero bearing no registration number plate and attempted to intimidate me. CCTV footage from the spot was deleted to conceal the incident."

In his counter-complaint against Dushyant and Digvijay Chautala, Kumar accused their driver of reckless driving and attempting to ram a police vehicle. "I intervened only to advise the driver to drive responsibly," Kumar said, alleging that Digvijay "pushed a police constable" during the incident, a claim he said "is buttressed by video evidence". On Thursday, tensions gripped the university after the authorities reportedly denied permission to let the JJP's youth wing hold an event on the campus, triggering a massive protest.

Nine men 'sexually assault' teen for 3 years in Kheda; 8 held

According to the police case, one of the eight arrested men allegedly lured the minor into a relationship, and the prime accused allegedly took intimate photos of her. Thereafter, all nine accused blackmailed the girl by threatening to release her pictures on a public forum.

Vadodara. (Agency) Police in Kheda on Saturday arrested eight men and launched a search for the ninth accused in connection with a case of alleged gangrape and sexual assault of a teenage girl—a minor at the time of the crime—for over three years. Also, a special POCSO court later remanded the eight accused to three days in police custody.

According to the police case, one of the eight arrested men allegedly lured the minor into a relationship. During the course of the relationship, the prime accused allegedly took intimate photos of her. Thereafter, all nine accused blackmailed the girl by threatening to release her pictures on a public forum.

As per the complaint, the accused repeatedly called the victim to different locations, where they sexually exploited her. The complaint states that the victim, who was allegedly first

raped in 2023, mustered the courage to confide in her parents recently.



Kheda Superintendent of Police Vijay Patel said, "The Kheda district police received a complaint that nine accused persons, who belong to the same village as the minor, repeatedly blackmailed her with some photographs and

taken her to various locations to gangrape her as well as sexually exploited her time... We have probed the aspects of the case and lodged an FIR. Eight of the nine accused have been arrested. A search is on for the ninth accused."

Patel added that relevant sections of the POCSO Act and Sections of gangrape have been invoked in the case. The police also undertook reconstruction of the crime on Saturday, bringing the eight accused to the various locations where they allegedly sexually assaulted the minor on several occasions. The accused were brought to the spots under heavy police deployment as local residents turned out in large numbers to express anger over the crime.

The Special POCSO court on Saturday considered the remand application of the police and granted three days' custody of the accused to the police, public prosecutor Dhaval Barot said.

Twist in pan parlour owner's kidnap: Vadodara woman, lover abduct her husband in canal using hitmen, he survives

Wife and lover among 7 arrested; husband says he was held captive, assaulted, and robbed of his belongings, including his wallet, mobile phone and cash in his account

Vadodara.(Agency) What appeared to be a case of a late-night robbery and abduction of a local pan parlour owner in Vadodara has now taken a far more sinister turn.

The businessman, who was rammed off the road, kidnapped, and thrown into a canal near Anand district in an apparent attempt on his life, survived not only to tell the story but also lead the investigators to unravel a shocking conspiracy allegedly orchestrated by his wife and her former lover.

The victim, Girishbhai Patel, a resident of the Chhani area, was returning home on the night of April 8 after shutting down his shop as usual when a white hatchback car rammed into his two-wheeler on the Chhani-Sokhda Road. Before he could react, a group of men allegedly forced him into the car and drove away, marking the beginning of a horrifying ordeal. Even as CCTV footage of the alleged abduction went



belongings, including his wallet, mobile phone, and cash by the unknown attackers. Patel has alleged that his attackers also forced him into revealing his ATM PIN, which they used to allegedly withdraw Rs 1 lakh from multiple locations across the city

and nearby highways. The accused then allegedly took Patel to a canal near Sojitra in Anand district and in an attempt to allegedly eliminate him, they threw him off a bridge into the canal.

However, Patel managed to cling to a pillar in the canal and remain in hiding until dawn. Police said that he was rescued the next morning with the help of locals and later informed his family that he had survived.

Stunned by the revelation

A detailed probe by the Chhani police, under the supervision of Deputy Commissioner of Police, Zone-1, Jagdish Chavda revealed that the crime was not the handiwork of random criminals but allegedly a conspiracy by Patel's wife Falguni along with Kaushik Sharma—her former lover. Police said that although Falguni and Sharma were allegedly engaged, the relationship was called off and Falguni eventually married Patel about five years ago.

Amravati explicit video case: Minor victim agrees to testify

Revenue Minister and guardian minister of Amravati Chandrashekhar Bawankule on Saturday visited the SP's office in Amravati to review the progress of the probe. He directed police to investigate the case from all angles and ensure that no accused escapes the law.



Nagpur.(Agency) In a key development in the case related to the alleged circulation of explicit videos of minor girls online in Maharashtra's Amravati, a victim has agreed to record her statement before the police.

Revenue Minister and guardian minister of Amravati Chandrashekhar Bawankule on Saturday visited the SP's office in Amravati to review the progress of the probe. He directed police to investigate the case from all angles and ensure that no accused escapes the law.

Police said three mobile phones seized from the accused are being examined for forensic data. Authorities have also appealed to other victims to come forward without fear and record their statements. Police assured that all necessary precautions are being taken to protect the identity of survivors. The case came to light when several obscene videos of the main accused with girls, believed to be minors, were widely shared on social media platform, Telegram.

Over eight accused came under the scanner. Police have conducted house searches and seized electronic devices for forensic analysis to trace digital evidence and establish the extent of the crime.

ASCI report bats for phased ban on sleeper buses in Andhra Pradesh

VIJAYAWADA.(Agency)

Following back-to-back severe road accidents involving privately operated sleeper buses catching fire, the State government has sought an inquiry into the causes behind the fire mishaps and recommendations on measures needed to ensure safe travel for passengers.

Based on the government's request, the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI) carried out a detailed investigation into one such road mishap and submitted a report to the State government recommending a complete ban on sleeper buses in a phased manner.

Ironically, Transport Minister Mandipalli Ramprasad Reddy too stated that the State government is considering a ban on sleeper buses in the State.

According to the study report, ASCI has recommended a phased ban on sleeper buses following a series of fatal accidents, including a major fire incident on the Nayakallu flyover along National Highway-44. The report, submitted to the State government, highlights serious safety concerns and calls for complete removal of sleeper bus operations within 22 months.

The study draws comparisons with international practices, noting that China banned sleeper buses in 2012, while several European countries enforced similar prohibitions as early as 2004 due to inherent safety risks.

ASCI's findings underline critical design flaws in sleeper buses, including elevated centres of gravity due to multi-tier bunks, which increase rollover risk, and the incompatibility of horizontal sleeping arrangements with rapid evacuation during emergencies.

Gujarat Gas reduces PNG price for Morbi cluster, but ceramics prices to remain dearer

Decision after Morbi Ceramics Manufacturers Association's talks with PSU, govts; fuel costs still 48% higher than pre-crisis period

Ahmedabad . (Agency) Two weeks after the price of the Piped Natural Gas (PNG) proposed by the Gujarat Gas Ltd left the propane-run ceramic units in Morbi upset, the state government-run public sector unit has agreed to bring the price down.

From Rs 88 per cubic metre which was offered on April 1, which would add up to Rs 93 per cm. GGL has brought the price down to Rs 77 per cubic metre following multiple negotiations. The price of PNG for the tile-makers, however, still is 48% higher than Propane-LPG (Rs 52 SCM) whose supplies ran out after the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz following the war in West Asia. It does however, bring the difference in prices between the regular users of PNG which were largely the sanitaryware units and those returning to

PNG, which is the tile making units, to Rs 7 instead of Rs 23, bringing some semblance of parity to the sector.

The decision by Gujarat Gas comes two days after the retail prices of the ceramic products were increased by the Morbi Ceramics Manufacturers Association (MCMA) on April 15 by 30% to 50%. In spite of these decreased rates of PNG, the prices of end products will remain unchanged, the association said.

The shutdown at Morbi cluster, which accounts for 90% of the Indian ceramic industry, started on March 17 due to the fuel shortage in India following the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz by Iran in light of devastating attacks by the US and Israel starting February 28.

Almost all the fuel for the ceramic industry

is imported, including all of the Propane-LPG and half of the natural gas.

According to data from Gujarat Gas, as of



February 2026 (pre-crisis), of the 792 ceramic units in Morbi, 377 had been using PNG supplied by it while the other 415 units had been using Propane-LPG

supplied by Oil Marketing Companies IOCL, BPCL and HPCL. While the 110-odd sanitaryware units and smaller tiles units had been using PNG, all the other tile units had been relying on Propane-LPG to fire their kilns. Before the West Asia war began, consumption of Propane-LPG was an average of 55 lakh cubic metres per day, and consumption of Natural Gas was approximately 25 lakh cubic metres per day. After the supply of Propane-LPG to industry was throttled by lack of supplies from Qatar and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations and remaining stocks were ordered priority redirection to residential cooking needs by the Government of India, the ceramic units, mostly the tiles units, were forced to turn to Gujarat Gas seeking PNG supplies.

Iran's representative downplays Hormuz shooting, says ties with India very strong

Iran's representative in India downplayed concerns over the reported shooting at two Indian-flagged ships in the Strait of Hormuz, stressing strong bilateral ties and calling for peace. India flagged "deep concern" and summoned the Iranian envoy after the vessels were fired upon by IRGC forces.

New Delhi.(Agency) Iran's representative of the Supreme Leader in India, Dr Abdul Majid Hakeem Ilahi, on Sunday played down concerns over the reported shooting involving two Indian-flagged ships in the Strait of Hormuz, saying he was not aware of the specifics of the incident. "The relationship between Iran and India is very strong, and I don't know anything about this event which you mentioned. We hope that it will be okay, and it will be solved," Ilahi said while talking to news agency ANI.

Ilahi also stressed that Tehran does not seek further escalation and remains committed to peace in the region. "We don't want this war. We want peace, and we hope that the other side will also follow peace so that we can have a peaceful area," he said.

His remarks come amid heightened tensions in the strategic waterway, which has seen increased friction linked to the broader US-

Iran standoff. INDIAN SHIPS COME UNDER FIRE

Two Indian-flagged merchant vessels, including a supertanker, came under gunfire on Saturday while attempting to transit the Strait of Hormuz, according to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). The ships were forced to reverse course after firing by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).



The supertanker was carrying nearly 2 million barrels of Iraqi oil. Audio intercepts indicated IRGC gunboats fired during the encounter as vessels were redirected westward. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) centre also confirmed that two IRGC gunboats opened fire on a tanker in the strait.

Earlier reports indicated gunfire between the Qeshm and Larak islands, with vessels

aborting transit. A container ship was also reportedly hit, according to a maritime security source. Several ships also picked up VHF broadcasts declaring the Strait of Hormuz "completely closed again".

"Attention all ships, regarding the failure of the US government to fulfil its commitment in the negotiation, Iran declares the Strait of Hormuz completely closed again. No vessel of any type or nationality is allowed to pass

through the Strait of Hormuz," the message said.

INDIA FLAGS 'DEEP CONCERN'

India summoned the Iranian ambassador to lodge a formal protest, flagging its "deep concern" over the incident. One of the vessels involved was identified as Sanmar Herald, a government source said, adding that the crew and the ship were safe.

The MEA said India's top foreign ministry official urged the envoy to convey New Delhi's concerns to Iranian authorities and called for the early resumption of safe passage for India-bound ships. The ambassador assured that the concerns would be communicated. Authorities said the Directorate General of Shipping is closely monitoring the situation and taking steps to ensure the safety of Indian seafarers and vessels in the region.

LG Taranjit Singh Sandhu flags traffic, parking reforms at Delhi heritage event

New Delhi.(Agency) Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu on Saturday participated in DDA's Delhi Heritage Week at Mehrauli Archaeological Park, maintained by the Delhi Development Authority. "Mehrauli park has been restored by DDA as part of its redevelopment project. We want people to come and see the 'ease of living' efforts by the DDA," LG said.

Highlighting infrastructure concerns, the LG said the traffic situation in the national capital will be improved. "A new system will be adopted in Delhi to eliminate the problem of illegal roadside parking. Additionally, modern technology will be used for better management of street lights and traffic in the capital. Extra steps will be taken to enhance women's safety in Delhi," he said.

He added that Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) will be involved in addressing traffic congestion. "Local-level RWAs will work in coordination with Delhi Traffic Police. Wherever there are problems of illegal parking and traffic, emphasis will be placed on implementing this system at those locations first," Sandhu said.

The LG also said he has been continuously engaging with citizens. "The general public wants that if a road is in poor condition, it should be repaired immediately," he added.

In a post on X, Sandhu described the event as "a magical evening" celebrating heritage. He highlighted a "soulful tribute to Delhi's rich cultural and architectural legacy," mentioning the welcome dance, a Qawwali performance by the Niazi Nizami Brothers, and exhibitions by DDA and ASI that showcased ongoing conservation efforts.

Chaos erupts during polls to Gargi College council

New Delhi.(Agency) Chaos erupted during student council elections at Delhi University's Gargi College on Friday, with rival student groups and a candidate alleging intimidation, misconduct, and irregularities in the polling process.

Videos circulating on social media showed a presidential candidate claiming she was "treated disrespectfully" and physically pushed out of the campus by teachers after her political leanings became known. She alleged she was made to wait for hours and pressured to sign documents certifying that the elections were being



conducted fairly. She further claimed ballot boxes were not inspected before polling and voting began without her signature.

The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad supported the candidate's allegations, claiming the administration tried to coerce her into withdrawing her nomination, denied her entry during voting and counting, and subjected her to "rude and disrespectful" behaviour. ABVP's Delhi state secretary Sarthak Sharma demanded that the polls be annulled and fresh elections conducted, alleging the process was manipulated.

Sharma said the candidate sought help from DUSU president Aryan Mann and maintained she had no formal affiliation with ABVP. He also alleged that Left-affiliated students raised slogans when Mann arrived.

Meanwhile, the Students' Federation of India (SFI) accused ABVP members of forcibly entering the campus and engaging in intimidation. It alleged hooliganism and attempts to disrupt the campus environment. AAP leader Saurabh Bhardwaj questioned police inaction and demanded an FIR.

Torch rally in Imphal West turns tense, tear gas used to disperse protesters

New Delhi.(Agency) A torch rally in Imphal West's Sagolband on Saturday turned tense after security forces used tear gas to disperse the protesters amid a fresh spurt of violence in Manipur. The agitators were demanding accountability for the deaths of two children in Tronglaobi.

The protest was part of a series of demonstrations across Manipur. The participants were shouting slogans while holding torches when the security personnel resorted to tear gas firing. The smoke reportedly created confusion and panic in the area with residents rushed to safer areas.

There were chaos and confusion in the area as shells were fired in quick succession. Several of the protesters were arrested by the security forces. Heavy security was later deployed in

the area to suppress any flareup. **Public resentment building ever since the April 7** attack on a residential house at Moirang



Tronglaobi village in Bishnupur. Suspected militants launched rocket bombs at a house resulting in the deaths of a five-year-old boy and his five-month-old sister. Their mother suffered injuries in the attack. According to reports, five suspects

from United Kuki National Army have been taken into custody in relation with the case. The protesters allege that despite prolonged instability the security agencies have failed to prevent violence in the state.

Two killed in an ambush in Ukhrul

Meanwhile, a retired Army personnel was among two persons shot dead by suspected militants in an ambush in Ukhrul district on Saturday. The incident took place at T M Kasom village in Litan police station area in the afternoon.

The deceased were identified as Chinaoshang Shokwungnao, a retired Army personnel, from Tashar village; and Yaruingam Vashum from Kharasom village. Chief minister Y Khemchand Singh announced that the probe in the incident will be handed over to the NIA.

Deer no dear: Villagers in Chhattisgarh rescue Chital from dogs before killing it for meat, arrested

New Delhi.(Agency) The deer at first thought that it was being rescued from a pack of dogs in Chhattisgarh's Raigarh district. But then, the rescuers themselves turned into predators, with the villagers allegedly killing and eating it.

In the Raigarh forest division's Delari village, a spotted deer (commonly known as Chital in India), while searching for food and water, strayed into the village from nearby forests. Its entry into the habitation proved to be dangerous as a pack of dogs chased and injured the animal. According to reports, some villagers first saved the injured deer by dispersing the dogs. But later, those who saved the animal allegedly killed it and divided its meat among themselves.

Accused arrested, sent to judicial custody

The forest department got a tip-off that several houses in the



village was consuming venison and it dispatched a team to the place. The team conducted raids and recovered pieces of deer meat from five homes, and have sent the samples for forensic test. The law enforcement first detained the five accused, Mayaram Rathia, Atmaram Rathia, Tarun Agararia, Haricharan Sao, and Motilal Agararia and later arrested them after they allegedly confessed to the crime while being questioned.

Raigarh forest division SDO Tanmay Kaushik has reportedly said that the team found remains of the animal in five houses and they have sent the samples for examination. The department is probing the matter and further action will be taken once the report comes. A case has been registered against the accused under sections of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

Army officer injured during para training in Ballari, airlifted to Bengaluru

Ballari para incident: During a similar exercise on Friday, the 25-year-old officer sustained injuries at around 11.30am. He was airlifted in an Army helicopter for further treatment after primary treatment at a local hospital in Ballari. He was shifted to Command Hospital in Bengaluru for treatment as his condition was said to be serious.

New Delhi.(Agency) An Army personnel was seriously injured and was airlifted to Bengaluru after falling from a height of 50 feet during a routine para training exercise in Karnataka's Ballari district.

The personnel was identified as Colonel Chinnaraj. According to reports, the PD Halli area of Ballari has long been used as drop zone for para training exercises with aircraft taking off from Bengaluru and the participants landing in the outskirts of the district.

He suffered injuries during a training

During a similar exercise on Friday, the 25-year-old officer sustained injuries at around 11.30am. He was airlifted in an Army helicopter for further treatment after primary treatment at a local hospital in Ballari. He was shifted to Command Hospital in Bengaluru for treatment as his condition was said to be serious.

Colonel Chinnaraj was part of a group of 417 soldiers participating in the training. After jumping from the sky from a height of 800 feet his parachute stopped functioning properly at around 50 feet from the ground, according to reports. This led to a loss balance after which he fell and suffered serious injuries to his leg.

Ballari SP confirmed the incident

Ballari Superintendent of Police confirmed that a minor incident occurred during the parachute dropping training at the Army centre, according to a Republic report.

"There was a minor incident during a parachute dropping training at the Army Centre. The Army has not given any report so far. Army has brought the helicopter and airlifted injured to Bengaluru.

They have not told the police anything yet, so we can't confirm anything officially. Army has informed one person is injured. This was annual training.

When incident happened, he was airlifted to Bengaluru," the SP said. According to a Deccan Chronicle report, the training exercises are conducted at all times except during the monsoon. These exercises go on for several days.

How NDA aims to convert Lok Sabha defeat into an opportunity with women voters

New Delhi.(Agency) Days after suffering a rare setback in the Lok Sabha, the NDA government is attempting to turn the defeat of its women's reservation amendment into a political opportunity, with the governing alliance led by BJP betting on its outreach to women voters and framing a narrative against the opposition — presenting them as being anti-women.

The Constitution amendment, which proposed implementing 33 per cent reservation for women by 2029 along with a 50 per cent increase in Lok Sabha seats, failed to secure the required majority after the Opposition opposed the legislation. While the outcome handed the Opposition a moment of unity, the NDA has moved quickly to frame the defeat as resistance to women's empowerment.

Numbers and the setback

During voting in the Lok Sabha on Friday night, 528 MPs voted for the amendment Bill. With



352 votes required for the passage, the government could secure only 298 votes, while the Opposition got 230.

For the first time since 2014, the BJP-led government failed to push through a legislative proposal. The outcome has triggered speculation over whether the government anticipated the numbers and whether the special session was also aimed at shaping a political narrative. Had the bill

passed, the government would have claimed credit; its defeat now allows it to target the Opposition.

Reframing the loss

The government's response has been swift. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in an address to the nation, targeted Opposition parties, saying women would not "forgive" them for blocking the measure.

Within the NDA, there is an acknowledgement that the defeat is an embarrassment. However, leaders believe the issue can still be leveraged to consolidate support among women voters — a constituency that has played a major role in recent electoral successes for the alliance. In the ongoing assembly elections too, the women are being heavily courted by the political parties. The BJP is already on the ground with protests and sloganeering. While the senior party leaders including Smriti Irani, Kiren Rijiju addressed press briefings.

India's banks remain resilient supported by asset quality, credit momentum: Report

New Delhi, (Agency)

India's banking sector remained resilient, supported by improved asset quality, strengthening capital buffers, robust retail and SME credit momentum, and early signs of revival in private capital expenditure, a survey showed on Sunday.

The survey from FICCI and Indian Bank Association (IBA) said the banking sector maintains a broadly constructive outlook on credit growth over the near term, supported by improving balance sheets, steady economic activity, and sustained demand across multiple segments of the economy. Respondents expect current monetary policy to remain broadly stable in the coming months, suggesting that the existing policy framework remains appropriately calibrated to balance growth and inflation considerations. Only cooperative banks stood, with all respondents expecting a 25-basis point rate increase.

Expectations regarding overall credit expansion remain positive, with banks anticipating continued momentum in non-food credit, the report said.

Public Sector Banks (PSB) appear particularly confident in the outlook, reflecting improved asset quality, stronger capital positions, and increasing traction in corporate lending. Private banks demonstrated a balanced and selective approach to credit growth, while foreign banks displayed moderate optimism consistent with their focused exposure to corporate and institutional segments, the report noted. Sectorally, credit demand from services and retail segments is expected to remain a key driver of overall lending growth. The services sector outlook reflected strong expectations of expansion, supported by activity in real estate, financial services, logistics, and tourism-related industries.

HDFC Bank Q4 profit rises 9.1% to Rs 19,122 crore; board declares final, special dividends

New Delhi, (Agency)

The largest private sector lender, HDFC Bank, has reported a healthy set of numbers for the March quarter, with a 9.1% year-on-year growth in standalone net income at Rs 19,122 crore. For the full year, profit grew 10.9% to Rs 74,670 crore.

The key operational metric, net interest income, grew at a tepid 3.2% to Rs 33,080 crore in the March quarter. However, a drop in provisions and robust fee income, including higher treasury gains despite a marginal hit due to the Reserve Bank-ordered forex unwinding, supported earnings. The bank did not disclose the quantum of the forex hit. Total revenue grew 5% to Rs 46,280 crore for the quarter.

Key profitability metric net interest margin stood at 3.38% on total assets for the quarter and at 3.53% for the full year based on interest-earning assets. Asset quality improved, with gross non-performing assets (GNPA) declining to 1.15% from 1.33%, while net non-performing assets fell to 0.33% from 0.38%. Provisions and contingencies for the quarter stood at Rs 2,610 crore, while the total credit cost ratio was 0.35. Other income rose to Rs 13,200 crore, of which fees and commissions contributed Rs 9,220 crore, up from Rs 8,530 crore. Gains from foreign exchange and derivatives stood at Rs 1,490 crore, up from Rs 1,440 crore, while net trading and mark-to-market gains rose to Rs 820 crore from Rs 390 crore. Miscellaneous income, including recoveries and dividends, stood flat at Rs 1,670 crore, the bank said during the concall on Saturday. Expenses rose to Rs 18,480 crore from Rs 17,560 crore, while the cost-to-income ratio stood at 39.9.

India's LPG consumption drops 13% in March amid Middle East supply disruptions

New Delhi, (Agency)

India's cooking gas consumption saw a sharp decline in March, with LPG usage falling 13 per cent year-on-year due to supply disruptions linked to the ongoing Middle East conflict, according to official data.

LPG consumption stood at 2.379 million tonnes in March, down from 2.729 million tonnes in the same month last year. The decline comes as disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, a key route for India's fuel imports, impacted supplies from major exporters like Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Household supply prioritised, commercial usage hit hard. To manage shortages, the government curtailed LPG supply to commercial establishments such as hotels and industries, prioritising household consumption.

According to the news agency PTI, LPG sales to domestic users fell by 8.1 per cent to 2.219 million tonnes. The impact was far more severe on non-domestic segments. LPG sales to commercial users dropped nearly 48 per cent, while bulk LPG consumption plunged by a massive 75.5 per cent.

The data from the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC) contrasts with government claims that household demand was being fully met.

Domestic production boosted to offset imports

With India importing around 60 per cent of its LPG needs, the disruption forced authorities to ramp up domestic output. Refineries were directed to divert feedstock from petrochemical production to LPG manufacturing. As a result, LPG production rose to 1.4 million tonnes in March from 1.1 million tonnes a year earlier, reported PTI. For the full 2025-26 fiscal, production increased to 13.1 million tonnes, compared to 12.8 million tonnes in the previous two years. Despite the March dip, overall LPG consumption for the fiscal year rose 6 per cent to 33.212 million tonnes, reflecting steady long-term growth driven by cleaner fuel adoption.

What is the difference between HRA, DA, and DR? Explained In detail

New Delhi, (Agency)

If you have ever looked carefully at your salary slip or a government employee's pay structure, you have probably noticed several allowances listed below the basic pay figure. Three of them — House Rent Allowance, Dearness Allowance, and Dearness Relief — appear regularly and are often confused with each other. They sound related, and in some ways they are. But they serve entirely different purposes, are calculated differently, and apply to different groups of people. Here is a clear explanation of each one. House Rent Allowance, universally abbreviated as HRA, is a component of salary specifically designed to help employees cover the cost of renting a place to live. It acknowledges a basic reality: if you work in a city, you probably need to pay rent, and rent is expensive, especially in large urban centres. The amount of HRA you receive depends on where you live. The

government classifies Indian cities into tiers based on population. Employees living in metro cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, and Chennai, along with Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, and Ahmedabad under the new 2026 rules, receive HRA equal to 50 percent of their basic salary. Those living in other cities and towns receive 40 percent of basic salary. The logic is simple — rent is higher where more people live, so the allowance is proportionally larger.

HRA is paid to working employees only. If you are retired, you do not receive HRA. And crucially, HRA is not automatically tax-free. The actual tax exemption you can claim on HRA depends on three factors calculated together: the HRA you actually received, the rent you actually paid minus ten percent of your basic salary, and fifty or forty percent of your basic salary depending on your city. Whichever of these three calculations

produces the smallest number is the amount you can exempt from tax. The remaining portion is taxable income. One important rule: if you live in a house you own, you cannot claim any HRA tax exemption. The allowance is specifically for people paying rent to someone else. However, if you pay rent to a parent or family member and can prove it with documentation, the exemption applies. Dearness Allowance — protection against rising prices for working employees. Dearness Allowance, known as DA, is a completely different kind of payment. It has nothing to do with housing.

It is entirely about inflation — specifically, protecting the purchasing power of employees whose salaries would otherwise lose real value as prices rise around them. The concept is straightforward. Suppose you earned Rs 50,000 per month last year and prices

across the economy have risen by six percent since then. Your salary buys six percent less than it used to. DA is the government's mechanism to compensate for that loss. It is calculated as a percentage of basic pay and revised periodically — twice a year for central government employees — based on changes in the All India Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers, commonly called the AICPI-IW. DA applies to working employees — both government employees and, in many cases, employees of public sector undertakings. It is linked to active employment. The moment you retire, DA as such stops applying to your salary. Because DA is tied to inflation data that changes over time, it is not a fixed number. When inflation is high and prices are rising quickly, DA rises to compensate. When prices stabilise, DA adjustments are smaller.

China-India trade deficit balloons to USD 112.16 billion as India is behind 25-30 years in most industrial metrics — But leads in this area

New Delhi, (Agency)

The President of the Federation of There is a number buried inside India's FY26 trade data that deserves more attention than it has received. India's trade deficit with China — the gap between what India buys from its northern neighbour and what it sells back — hit USD 112.16 billion in the financial year ending March 2026. That is an all-time record. It is larger than India's entire annual defence budget. It is roughly the size of the entire economy of Morocco. And it did not happen by accident.

To understand why India's China deficit keeps growing, you have to go back further than last year's trade data. You have to go back 35 years — to 1990, when India and China were, by most measures, economic equals. When both countries started from the same place

In 1990, India's GDP per capita was approximately USD 370. China's was USD 350. India was actually marginally wealthier on a per-person basis. Both countries were poor, agrarian, and largely closed to the world. Both were home to over a billion

people. Both had everything in front of them. Then they made different



choices. China, beginning in the late 1970s under Deng Xiaoping and accelerating through the 1980s and 1990s, threw its weight behind manufacturing. The state directed capital toward factories, infrastructure, and export capacity. It built ports, roads, and industrial zones at a scale and speed the modern world had not seen. It brought hundreds of millions of people from fields into factories, raised their productivity, and made Chinese goods the default input for the entire global economy.

India chose a different path. It opened its

economy in 1991 following a balance-of-payments crisis, but the liberalisation was incomplete. Manufacturing never became the centrepiece of India's growth story the way it did for China. Instead, India grew through services — IT, software, outsourcing, finance. These sectors created wealth for millions but did not absorb the vast low-skilled rural workforce the way factory floors would have. India's manufacturing sector today contributes roughly 17 percent of GDP. China's contributes around 28 percent. The gap between those two numbers represents roughly 28 years of divergence. The numbers that show the distance by 2025, the consequences of those choices had compounded into a chasm that is difficult to look at directly. China's GDP per capita is USD 13,806. India's is USD 2,818. China is 4.83 times richer per person. To find a year when China had roughly the same per-capita income as India does today, you have to go back to around 2005. India is, on this measure, approximately 20 years behind.

Akshaya Tritoaya 2026: Gold, silver trade likely to cross Rs 20,000 crore despite high prices, low volumes

New Delhi, (Agency)

Record-breaking sales of precious metals are expected on Akshaya Tritoaya 2026, with total trade expected to exceed Rs 20,000 crore, even as soaring prices influence how India buys gold and silver, according to the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT). This is set to be a notable jump from last year's estimated Rs 16,000 crore, despite bullion rates touching unprecedented highs. "Akshaya Tritoaya has traditionally been one of India's most auspicious occasions for purchasing gold... While gold continues to dominate, the nature of purchasing is evolving significantly in response to steep price escalation," said Praveen Khandelwal, Member of Parliament from Chandni Chowk and Secretary General of CAIT. Gold prices have surged from around Rs 1,00,000 per 10 grams last year to nearly Rs 1.58 lakh this year, while silver prices have

jumped from Rs 85,000 per kg to an unprecedented Rs 2.55 lakh per kg. Rather than kill demand, CAIT said the



spike is pushing consumers toward "more calculated and value-driven purchases"

"There is a clear shift towards lightweight, wearable jewellery, alongside a stronger focus on silver and diamond products. Attractive incentives such as reduced making charges and complimentary gold coins are also helping sustain consumer

interest," said CAIT National President BC Bhartia. The value-volume divergence is stark. Pankaj Arora, National President of the All India Jewellers and Goldsmith Federation (AIJGF), an associate of CAIT, said the projected Rs 16,000 crore gold trade translates to about 10,000 kilograms (10 tonnes) at current prices. Spread across an estimated 2 to 4 lakh jewellers, that means average sales of just 25 to 50 grams per jeweller — "clearly indicating a sharp decline in volume." The Rs 4,000 crore silver trade equals roughly 1,56,800 kilograms (157 tonnes), implying an average of only 400 to 800 grams per jeweller during the festival. "These figures underline a critical shift: while the value of business is expanding due to rising prices, actual consumption is contracting," Khandelwal said. That explains the rising popularity of lightweight jewellery and small-denomination coins this year.

Why your car insurance may not pay when you need it most

An accident, a flooded road, a damaged engine, and a car insurance claim is filed with the expectation that the insurer will step in. But for many, that moment turns into something else entirely: confusion, partial payouts, or in some cases, outright rejection.

New Delhi, (Agency)

For most vehicle owners, motor insurance is something you buy once and forget about. It sits quietly in your inbox, renewed every year, until the day something goes wrong.

That is when the real test begins.

An accident, a flooded road, a damaged engine, and a car insurance claim is filed with the expectation that the insurer will step in. But for many, that moment turns into something else entirely: confusion, partial payouts, or in some cases, outright



rejection. The problem, experts say, is not always the insurer. More often, it is the gap between what customers think their motor insurance policy covers and what it actually does. Saurabh Vijayvergia, founder and CEO of CoverSure, said that when his team looks into motor insurance claim rejection cases, the reasons are often simple. "Nine times out of ten, the reason is something that could have been avoided entirely," he said.

In many cases, it is a policy that has lapsed because the renewal reminder was ignored. In others, it is a driving licence that expired months ago. Sometimes, it is a modification, like a CNG kit or accessories — that was never declared to the insurer. "These aren't obscure technicalities. Their conditions are well within the insurer's rights to enforce," Vijayvergia explained.

WHY MOTOR INSURANCE CLAIMS

ARE PARTIALLY PAID

Not all motor insurance claims are rejected outright. Many are settled, but not fully.

"The claim isn't rejected, but the customer gets back maybe 60% of what they spent at the garage," he said. The reason is depreciation. In a standard car insurance policy, the value of replaced parts is reduced before reimbursement. So even if you replace a bumper or headlamp, you may not get the full cost back. "Most people don't know this until the cheque arrives," Vijayvergia said.

MOTOR INSURANCE CLAIM REJECTION: IT'S OFTEN AWARENESS, NOT FRAUD

When motor insurance claims get rejected, many customers feel cheated. But the issue is often lack of awareness. "I'll be honest with you, it's almost always awareness. Or rather, the absence of it," Vijayvergia said. He pointed out that most people do not fully understand their motor insurance policy terms and exclusions. "The terms are in the document. But the document is forty pages of dense language handed over with a 'please read carefully'. Nobody reads it carefully. And nobody explains it clearly either."



10 hacks to keep your kitchen sorted!

There is no place like home. Amidst the hustle bustle of our over-demanding lives, what soothes is the comfort our homes provide. And home-cooked food further adds to the coziness. But when you come back from work to a messed up house, it adds to the fatigue. We dug out 10 interesting and extremely useful hacks to keep one of the most important areas of your home - Kitchen, sorted.

1. Put those shower caps to a creative use

Though shower caps are useful as a hair hack but their usefulness cannot be limited to those four walls. Cover leftovers (in the dish) with a fresh

shower cap to protect your food from bugs and other unwanted particles.

Bonus : They are reusable and much easy to use than other foils or cling sheets.

2. Containers. Throw that guesswork out

It's all in a name! Even if your storage boxes are transparent, don't you think it will be easier to find something when it is labeled. Guess why brands label their products anyway. While in a rush through a grocery store, you are able to identify your product easily only because it is properly labeled. So, take out time this weekend and label those storage boxes smartly and keep your rush week ahead sorted.

Bonus : In your absence, no one will call and bug you to know what is kept where.



3. Clip that sponge up

A damp sponge can house bad odour, mold and dirt around the kitchen counter. This 'Clip-able' idea is going to sort the issue forever. Get that binder clip you use in office to clip your sponge from becoming gross and unusable.

Bonus : Place the sponge upright which will prevent it from sitting in water as well as help it air dry fast.

kitchen odor free

A foul-smelling kitchen can make you lose your appetite. Vanilla extract can help you keep the foul odor in your kitchen at bay. Put two caps of vanilla extract into an oven proof dish and then place it in your oven for an hour at 300 degrees. The smell will spread and fade away the foul odors.

Bonus : The vanilla fragrance will spread to other parts of your home too for about a day. You can also experiment with other essential oils like lemon.

5. Prevent clogs in kitchen sink

To prevent clogs from forming in your kitchen sink, make sure to periodically pour boiling water down the drain. This will ensure that the oils in food products run down the drain as opposed to building up on the interior surface of pipes which is what leads to clogged drains.

Bonus : Pour some baking soda down the drain prior to using the boiling water. Baking soda is a great cleaning agent and helps in absorb any odors.

6. Make the floor shine

Maintain your stainless steel equipments by applying some dry flour onto a microfiber cloth. Rinse the flour off and the surface will shine like new. Be it you appliance, sink or counter, this trick will do wonders.

Bonus : You can apply this practical trick to other stainless steel equipments in your home too.

7. Clean your silverware
Silverware definitely leaves a lasting impression on the guests and thus it becomes important to maintain it. Sounds strenuous? We give you an easy solution. Clean these exclusive dinnerware items with a dash of lemon juice.

Bonus : Lemon also eradicate foul odor thus keeping your silverware odor free.

garbage can like a pro Baking soda needs to be at a hands distance in your kitchen.

With so many hacks that this ingredient provides, one should never run out of it ever. Hose down your garbage can, dry it, and then sprinkle a few tablespoons of baking soda on the bottom to keep it stink free.

Bonus : Apart from extricating the dirt perfectly, baking soda will also keep the bin stink free.

9. Clean Blender in 30 secs

After your morning shakes are done, fill your blender halfway with warm or hot water, and add a few drops of dishwashing liquid. Put the lid on, and run the blender for about 10 seconds—the lather will build up quickly! Pour out the soapy water and rinse well.

Bonus : It is as easy as preparing a milkshake.

10. Used aluminum foil has an interesting use

While throwing the used aluminum foil, do you also feel that it is such a waste? Do not worry. We have a solution. Crumple it up, add a drop of dish washing liquid and use it to scrub your glass baking dishes! This will work wonders.

Bonus : Reusing any material also makes you feel like a responsible citizen to the ecosystem.



Go ahead, create a brighter home this monsoon!



It's the rainy season and there's every reason to add cheer to your home in order to cut into the dull, grey weather. Here are tips on how to get brightness into every room, so go ahead and keep these tips in mind when you go shopping next...

Hall

Cushions: Bright cushions do wonders to jazz up a sofa. Pick up a few in tangerine orange, yellow or just go with ones that have tassels.

Mirrors and walls: A hall must have a mirror which can add dimension and space to the room. You can also have a painted wall in shades like blue or green.

Flowers: Flowers are a cheerful addition to any home. Buy fresh ones for your hall centerpiece or vase or just place artificial ones in a holder in a corner of the room.

Bedroom

Bed: An integral part of the room, a bed must be of an adequate size and pleasant to look at. While you can't go too bright, try pretty powder blue or pink bed sheets, which can adequately brighten up the place.

Rug: Carpets and rugs in vivid colours can

transform any room space. Go with bright spring shades of green or high energy blue to make a statement. A good idea is to let your patterned wallpaper match the rug.

Curtains: How about pop colour curtains in sheer silk or thicker fabric for the bedroom? For some cheer, you can also sew together different fabrics for a cutting edge vibe.

Kitchen

Shelves: Forget the usual shelves. Instead, go with shelves that are diagonally placed on the wall for an edgy, yet bright look. Not only is this functional and saves space, but guests are sure to love it, too.

Wall Hangings: You get so many plaques and sayings for the Kitchen such as, 'The cook is the best' or 'The family that eats together, stays together'. You can also have a few hooks for your planters and knick-knacks.

Cutlery: Agreed, Cutlery is utilitarian, but why not have ones that are stylish? From carved spoons to ones in polka dots and solid colours, there's a lot you can do with this aspect of dining. We suggest you also place bright earthen bowls around the kitchen area, to add cheer to the decor.

Bathroom

Considering this is a place folks love to spend their time in, there's more reason why it should never be gloomy or dark. How about doing the bathroom up in canary yellow or even fuchsia pink? Have bright lights by the mirror, too.

Candles: Aromatic spa candles are a must-have in the bathroom. They smell terrific and are visually appealing. Set the candles by themselves or in copper holders that are filed with lavender and hibiscus flowers. Light up some tea lights near the candles at night.

Towels: Arrange bright towels in various shades around the place for a vivacious look. Go with red and blue for a nautical theme or try citrus shades for the monsoon.

Ways to decorate your Room with old bottles

You have decked up your room with fairy lights, and even pinned up pictures of your family and friends over the wires. But apart from just this, you have a whole lot of ideas to do up your room. If you have stocked up all those old glass bottles in your attic, it is time to use them for a better purpose. Did you know that old bottles can be tweaked into interesting pieces of decor? They not only look appealing, but add charm to your room, too. Try these...

Bottle Art

Plain bottles are meant to be painted. Pick an art form of your choice — Madhubani, or any contemporary design. Clean the bottle, and start painting. If something goes wrong, you can wipe it off and there won't be any trace. A glass painting kit or even acrylic paints work. Patience and passion for art is all you need!

Fairy lights in your bottle

If you are bored of letting those fairy lights hanging on the curtain rods or across a wall, put them inside a bottle instead! This, again, is an easy process. Take colourful bottles, or paint an old bottle. Gather your fairy light together and put them inside the bottle. You can either cut the base of your bottle or insert them through the opening itself. Plug it to a nearby switch and your fairy lights bottle is ready and glowing!

Beaded with love

Beaded chains and anklets are not in fashion today. But you can use them for a different purpose now, if you still have them in your jewellery box — to decorate a bottle. You can even buy coloured beads and create a pattern of your own. Slide the beads onto a thread, and wind them around the bottle. You can mix-and-match sizes and colours to create a textural wonder for your study table.

colourful ball of yarn, glue and some patience. Take an old bottle. Draw out sections mental sections on it, and apply glue to one part, say the neck. Spin woollen threads evenly around it, making sure it is sticking to the bottle. Repeat for each section. You can even change the colour of the yarn, or create a separate section in the middle of your bottle to give it a gay look. Allow it to dry completely, secure the ends, and there you are!

cumbersome for you, keep a bottle vase in your room. All you have to do is to pick some fresh



flowers everyday and fill the vase. Ensure you fill it with a little water, so that it's fresh. But remember that flower arrangement is an art.

Cut the stem of all the flowers to a similar length, bunch them up artistically, and there you go... holders

Empty bottles make for good holders, too. You can keep them on your tables and in the kitchen to stock pens, brushes and other stationery items. If you don't like it plain, paint them or wrap colourful tapes around them.

thought of making lights with old wine bottles? Bottle chandeliers are not just fancy, but create an ambience, too. You can create a bottle chandelier according to the size of your room. But it is a tedious process. Clean the bottles (create the design beforehand, and count the number of bottles needed), get the base cut by a glass cutter. For each bottle, you will need sockets, to which you have to fix a bulb, and adjust the wire accordingly. Once all the bottles are ready, get a wooden plank (again according to the size). Drill holes as per the bottle size (let them upside down to check). Create a junction box on top, and fix all the wires to it tightly. Switch on, and hola!

Bottle plants

If you fancy plants inside your room but wouldn't want to make it messy, then here's an idea. Take an old bottle which isn't coloured, fill it with some soil, and bung in some seeds. Keep it near a window or a well-lit space, so that there is enough sunlight. One day, you will wake to find that you have a plant growing inside the bottle. Nice, no?

NEWS BOX

Heinrich Klaasen unbothered by strike-rate critics after crucial win vs CSK

Ahmedabad. (Agency)

Retired South African-batter Heinrich Klaasen has shut down his critics over his slow strike rate after Sunrisers Hyderabad secured a 10-run victory over Chennai Super Kings at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Uppal on Saturday. The former South African batter, leading the charts with his bat, brought up his 10th fifty in the Indian Premier League, helping SRH post a respectable total to defend. With 283 runs under his belt in six games, Klaasen has come under consistent scrutiny for his strike rate. In IPL 2026, Klaasen has been scoring at a strike rate of 144.39, far lower than his previous season highs of over 170. "I know there's been a lot said about my strike rate this season, but I've been putting the team in good positions, and I'm just doing my job," Klaasen told reporters after the game on Saturday. Against CSK, Klaasen brought up his fifty in 31 balls before Anshul Khambhoj got the better of him. His innings included six fours and two sixes at a strike rate of 151.28. "I've been in difficult situations, and you have to take responsibility and be mature about it. You can't just deal with it like that—that's not



how the game works. We get paid to do the job, and I don't care about strike rate. You just have to be mature about it and find different ways of scoring 10 runs an over and making sure that you still get a good score on the board," he added. EYE GYM FOR REFLEXES?

The South African batter explained how going to an 'eye gym' back in Cape Town during the off-season had helped him sharpen his reflexes. "It's all a personal programme for yourself, and it's just a big tool to make decisions under pressure. It's about a 10-minute session a day, and you make about four to five hundred decisions in that time under pressure, within a certain timeframe and reaction work," Klaasen explained. "I'm still keeping up with the pace of the game, and that's kept me at ease—not to play more cricket because 150 doesn't feel like 150 when you're seeing the ball nicely. When you feel out of sync, 135 feels like 150, and that's not happening."

Made Ayush Mhatre run when limping! Ashwin slams CSK's shocking injury management

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

In a scathing critique, veteran spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has launched a blistering attack on Chennai Super Kings' (CSK) medical and management protocols. The flashpoint? The visible physical distress of rising star Ayush Mhatre during Chennai Super Kings' defeat to SunRisers Hyderabad on Saturday - a scene Ashwin described as nothing short of "shocking."

Ayush Mhatre has been one of the breakout stories of the season, but his meteoric rise hit a harrowing roadblock. Despite being utilized as an Impact Player to shield him from fielding duties, Mhatre appeared for his knock with a heavy strap on his knee. The situation turned from concerning to controversial when Mhatre began visibly limping between the wickets in the powerplay in CSK's unsuccessful chase of 195. Despite physios checking on him, CSK



took the call to let him continue batting in the fifth over. To make matters worse, Ruturaj Gaikwad, their captain, called Mhatre for a quick single, knowing Mhatre was in serious discomfort.

The teenager started limping across the 22 yards and was in danger of getting run-out at the striker's end as he completed the single. However, in the very next delivery, Mhatre was caught at mid-off when he tried to clear Nitish Kumar Reddy's full-length delivery over the in-field. The young batter was on 30 off 17, but the unfortunate injury led to his early dismissal. Ashwin, never one to mince words, was appalled by the decision to keep the youngster on the field. "Ayush Mhatre's injury: I hope he is back, but by the look of it, I fear he will be out for a while," Ashwin said in his YouTube show.

Full-time doctor, full-time marathon runner: Kartik Karkera eyes Asian Games gold

Kartik Karkera has emerged as a wildcard in the Indian marathon scene. The Orthopedic doctor has won the Mumbai and Delhi marathons, at a pace that makes him one of India's fastest marathoners of all time. Currently in Nashik, Kartik speaks to India Today about his dream of winning Asian Games gold and representing India at the Olympics.

STUTT GART. (Agency)

Kartik Karkera was 15 when the question was hurled towards him for the first time: do you want to focus on your studies, or do you want to become a runner? Hailing from a middle-class family in Mumbai, Kartik knew that the question was rhetorical. In India, what is often presented as a choice usually has a very clear answer. Studies, said the bright 15-year-old Kartik, shelving the multiple medals that he had won in school competitions in Mumbai. Like most middle-class children, he chose certainty. He put his head down, cleared his exams, and left for Russia in 2016 to study MBBS. Kartik lived in Russia for seven years, completing his MBBS and a

post-graduation in orthopaedics and traumatology. He passed his Foreign Medical Graduate Exam in January 2024 to be eligible for practice in India, when the same question returned for the second time in his life. What did he actually want? Did he want to become a doctor, or did he want to pursue his passion of becoming a runner?

Only this time, the answer was not already decided for him. While working as a resident at the Dr Vasantrao Pawar Medical College and Hospital in Nashik, he started pursuing his old dream of becoming a professional athlete. The work was unforgiving. Hospital shifts stretched endlessly, training sessions had to be squeezed into the cracks of the day, and sleep often became negotiable. But despite the impossible grind, results soon followed.

INDIAN MARATHON WAKES UP FROM SLUMBER

Running only in his third competition ever, the 28-year-old beat Olympian T Gopi and 2024 Asian Marathon winner Man Singh to clinch the Delhi Marathon in April. More importantly, Kartik recorded his personal

best, 2:13:10, faster than the Athletics Federation of India's (AFI) qualification standard of 2:15:04 for the Asian



Games. What Kartik had done was sudden, almost disruptive. From someone unknown in Indian athletics circles, Kartik had suddenly become one of the fastest marathon runners in the history of India. Only days after his Delhi Marathon win, Sawan Barwal broke the 48-year-old national record of Shivnath Singh, clocking 2:11:58 in Rotterdam. This meant that in a space of just a few days, T Gopi and Man Singh were no longer the automatic favourites for the Asian

Games. Kartik and Sawan had entered the conversation. The stagnant Indian marathon scene had been woken from its slumber once again. Speaking to India Today from Nashik, Kartik laughed at the idea that he had become an overnight sensation after his exploits in Delhi. "People are calling me an overnight success. They do not see the 10 years of hard work that I have put behind this," Kartik said. He does not see the days that I used to cry and call my father that, OK, I think I need to leave one thing. I need to stop. Maybe I need to become a doctor or a runner."

RUNNING AFTER 36-HOUR HOSPITAL SHIFTS

Kartik Karkera is an anomaly. And it does not take long to understand that. In a demanding ecosystem like India, it is difficult enough to sustain a career in medicine. Doing so while training as a professional marathon runner is something else entirely, especially in a sport that offers very little financial certainty. If balancing the two was hard enough, Karkera says that when he returned to India and started working in the hospital, many of his fellow senior doctors were not sympathetic.

BCCI to extend Ajit Agarkar's tenure as Chief Selector with 2027 World Cup in focus

Ajit Agarkar is set for an extension as chief selector, with BCCI backing his tenure after India's ICC success, despite Test setbacks, ahead of the 2027 ODI World Cup.

Mumbai. (Agency)

Ajit Agarkar is set to receive an extension as India's chief selector, with the Board of Control for Cricket in India keen to maintain continuity ahead of the 2027 ODI World Cup. Agarkar's current tenure is due to expire in June 2026, but sources indicate that the board has been impressed by both the results and the transition overseen during his stint. India's recent success in white-ball cricket has been a key factor in the decision, with the team securing multiple ICC titles under his watch. "Under Agarkar's tenure, the team had a seamless transition and was fearless in taking bold decisions and that's the reason board felt he should continue Agarkar's contract. It will be renewed which is expiring in June 26," sources told India Today. India won the T20 World Cup in 2024 and successfully defended it in 2026, in addition to lifting the Champions Trophy in 2025. The side also reached the final of the 2023 ODI World

Cup at home, reinforcing the perception of sustained excellence in limited-overs cricket. One of the standout achievements



during Agarkar's tenure has been the evolution of India's T20I setup. The team has embraced a fearless, flexible approach, with bold selection calls playing a defining role. The squad composition for the 2026 T20 World Cup, in particular, drew attention for prioritising balance and form over reputation, even leaving out high-profile names such as Shubman Gill.

While the white-ball sides have largely

thrived, India's Test performances have raised concerns. The team endured rare home series defeats against New Zealand in October 2025 and South Africa in November 2025, marking a break from their long-standing dominance in familiar conditions. However, there were mitigating factors. India competed strongly in challenging circumstances, including a hard-fought 2-2 series draw despite the retirement of key players like Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and limited availability of Jasprit Bumrah.

The overall body of work, particularly in white-ball cricket, has convinced the BCCI that Agarkar's leadership has brought clarity and direction to the selection process. His willingness to make tough calls and back a new generation of players is seen as central to India's recent success. With the ODI World Cup cycle now underway, the board is keen to avoid disruption and ensure stability in team-building, making Agarkar's extension a logical step as India look to build on their recent momentum.

Manchester City vs Arsenal preview: Guardiola's final chance to win Premier League

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

One of my colleagues in the press box was saying to me that this match is not a title decider. I suppose he is right however this is arguably the most important match of the season which will influence what happens next and who might win the title. The fact is City have six more fixtures left and Arsenal have five, there are six points separating the two clubs so if City win this one and also their game in hand, the difference is zero points between them. Fortunately for Arsenal they have a superior goal difference but it is only three which could easily be eroded. My research points to City being favourites to narrowly win this match however with such a lot at stake it would not surprise me if it ended in a draw. On paper these two teams are absolutely top level. City have Matheus Nunes, Abdoukodie



Khusanov, Marc Guehi and Nico O'Reilly in front of world class goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma. O'Reilly has been the outstanding player of the year for City. Can they contain Gabriel Martinelli and Noni

Madueke on the wings? Guardiola believes his players will halt the Arsenal front line. Viktor Gyokeres and Kai Havertz could play well but are they good enough to get past such a strong defence? In midfield are definitely two of the best in the world. City's Ballon d'Or winner Rodri takes on the Gunner's captain Declan Rice. What a match up this should be and Arteta knows how important commanding the centre of the pitch will be and he has spent all available time with Declan marshalling the training sessions, organising and instructing as they take on a very strong City midfield. At the back Gabriel Magalhaes and William Saliba will attempt to stop the runs of Antoine Semenyo, Rayan Cherki, captain Bernardo Silva and Jeremy Doku. The Belgian's runs down the left hand side of the field.

Man Utd captain Bruno Fernandes in a rush to seal Champions League qualification

Manchester United boosted their Champions League hopes with a 1-0 win over Chelsea FC, extending the hosts' losing streak to four matches. Captain Bruno Fernandes starred with an assist as Chelsea's top-five ambitions continued to fade amid a prolonged goal drought.

Mumbai. (Agency)

With Champions League qualification on the line, it was Michael Carrick's Manchester United who came out as 1-0 victors against a struggling Chelsea side on Saturday night at Stamford Bridge. This was Chelsea's fourth straight loss, further dimming their chances of securing an automatic qualification spot for next season's Champions League. With

just five games left in the season, the race for a top-five finish is intensifying as teams battle for the remaining Champions League places. Captain Bruno Fernandes, who provided the assist for Matheus Cunha's winner late in the first half, wants the team to get the job done swiftly and efficiently. "It's an amazing feeling for us. We had to bounce back after two games that we didn't win," Fernandes told TNT Sports post-match. "I feel three points closer now, but we have another game that we have to win. We know we need points to get that place secured, and we will do everything possible to be as quick as possible. We knew we had to put in a great performance because Chelsea are a good side. It's important for us because our aim is to finish in the top four, so creating some distance is perfect for us." Fernandes has Premier League history in his sights, as his assist for Cunha was his 18th of the season. This puts him behind only Manchester City's Kevin De Bruyne with 20 (2019-20),

Thierry Henry with 20 (2002-03), and Mesut zil with 19 (2015-16)—the players with the most recorded assists in a single season.



United, who lined up with a depleted defence for the all-important game, remained third on the league table with 58 points, 10 clear of sixth-placed Chelsea with five games left to

play. **UNITED EDGE CLOSER, CHELSEA RUN OUT OF TIME**

On the other hand, Chelsea, who were boosted by the return of their star midfielder Enzo Fernandez, previously suspended for his comments over a potential move to Madrid, fell short of scoring despite hitting the bar twice and the post once.

"In terms of the game tonight, it's a really, really difficult one to take because people don't want to hear me say how well we played and didn't win the game. We're here to win," Chelsea head coach Liam Rosenior said post-match, as quoted by The Guardian. "It doesn't look like it at the moment, but the reality is Manchester United have come in, had one shot, scored, and won the game 1-0, which should be pretty much impossible."

Raashii Khanna's

Team Reacts to Rs 50,000 Theft Report, Denies Actor Was Targeted

Raashii Khanna has reportedly been at the centre of an unusual incident on a film set, where a member associated with her vanity van team was allegedly caught stealing money. However, conflicting claims have left the situation unclear.

Alleged Theft on Set Sparks Confusion

According to reports, a person was caught stealing ₹50,000 from Raashii Khanna's vanity van, leading to a tense situation on set. The incident reportedly caused shock among those present, with security personnel intervening soon after.

It has been claimed that the accused individual was confronted and subsequently removed from the set. However, details around the incident remain uncertain, with multiple versions of events emerging.

Team Denies Claims, Offers Different Version

While the report suggested the money belonged to the actor, Raashii Khanna has not issued an official statement on the matter. Her team, however, has denied the claims, stating that the cash in question belonged to her manager, not the actor herself. The differing accounts have added to the confusion, and it remains unclear



what exactly transpired.

Recent Work and Streaming Update

On the work front, Raashii Khanna was last seen in the Telugu film Ustaaad Bhagat Singh, alongside Pawan Kalyan and Sreeleela. While not the primary female lead, her role was described as significant within the narrative.

The film reportedly earned over ₹96 crore worldwide and is now available for streaming on Netflix.

What's Next for Raashii Khanna

The actor is currently working on her next project, which will be directed by Aneez Bazmee. The film is expected to star Akshay Kumar and Vidya Balan, and is reportedly titled Ram Aur Shyam, though an official confirmation is still awaited.

As of now, the alleged theft incident remains unverified, with no clear confirmation from Raashii Khanna or her team, leaving more questions than answers.



Suniel Shetty Pens Emotional Birthday Note For His 'Sun' KL Rahul: 'Always With You'



Bollywood actor Suniel Shetty has penned a birthday note for her son-in-law KL Rahul, whom he lovingly calls his "sun" and said that in a "world chasing attention, he stays grounded." Suniel took to Instagram, where he shared a photograph with his cricketer and son-in-law KL Rahul.

"In a world chasing attention, you stay grounded. That says more than anything else ever could. Happy Birthday My Sun. Stay solid. Stay smiling. Always with you," Suniel wrote as the caption.

After dating for several years, Suniel's daughter Athiya Shetty and Rahul tied the knot in 2023. Their wedding took place at the actor's farmhouse in Khandala. They welcomed their daughter last year and named her Evaarah, which means "Gift of God". Athiya and Rahul in a collaborative post on Instagram, revealed the name of their daughter. They also shared a beautiful picture of the cricketer holding the baby while Athiya looked at her lovingly.

"Our baby girl, our everything. Evaarah ~ Gift of God." The two revealed the name of their daughter on Rahul's 33rd birthday on Friday. The couple took to their Instagram story section and shared that their daughter has been named Evaarah, V.R. (Evaarah Vipula Rahul)."

The post further read: "Evaarah, meaning Gift of God. Vipula, in honour of her great nani and protector. Rahul, her papa."

Suniel, fondly called as Anna, has appeared in over 100 films, in a career spanning over three decades.

Rising to prominence in the 1990s as a leading action hero with films like Balwaan, Mohra, Dilwale and Border. He later showcased his versatility in comedies such as Hera Pheri, Phir Hera Pheri and Dhadkan.

He will next be seen in Ahmed Khan's upcoming comedy film titled "Welcome To The Jungle". The film has a huge star cast including names such as Akshay Kumar, Sanjay Dutt, Suniel Shetty, Arshad Warsi, Paresh Rawal, Raveena Tandon, Disha Patani, Lara Dutta, Jacqueline Fernandez, Shreyas Talpade, Aftab Shivdasani, Mika Singh, Mukesh Tiwari, Zakir Hussain, Yashpal Sharma, Johnny Lever, Rajpal Yadav, Krushna Abhishek, Kiku Sharda, Daler Mehndi, Tusshar Kapoor, and Sayaji Shinde.

Boney Kapoor Shares Emotional Post As Daughter Anshula Gears Up To Marry Beau Rohan Thakkar



Bollywood filmmaker Boney Kapoor seems to have become emotional as his daughter Anshula Kapoor is all set to get married.

The filmmaker took to his social media account to share a picture of his daughter, in her candid moment and wrote, "My darling Anshula is getting sweeter before her marriage."

The picture shared by Boney Kapoor on his social media account, shows Anshula seen sitting at a cafe, and clicking a picture of her dessert.

For the uninitiated, Anshula is all set to get married to longtime boyfriend, Rohan Thakkar. In October, the Kapoor family had gathered together for the 'Gor Dhana' ceremony of Anshula Kapoor. The social media influencer, a few weeks ago, was seen to be soaking in her pre-wedding festivities as she geared up for her bachelorette with her cousins in Seoul, South Korea.

Taking to her social media account, Anshula had shared a carousel of pictures from Seoul, giving a glimpse into her fun-filled and happening celebrations.

She had captioned the post as, "Seoulsters for life Bachelorette behavior with my OGs."

On her most special day at the Gor Dhana ceremony, Anshula had paid an emotional tribute to her late mother, Mona Kapoor, during the most important moments of her life.

Anshula had ensured her mother's presence was felt in a special way by weaving her most used words, 'Rab Rakha', into her bridal choli. The phrase was something that Mona Kapoor would often say to bless her children.

Sharing a post on her social media, Anshula wrote, 'She always said Rab Rakha, so I've carried it with me in this new chapter, stitched gently on my back, tucked safely in my heart, a reminder that she's still here, still watching, still my forever protector, my Ma.' Thank you, Arpita Mehta, for making sure these weren't just words on fabric but feelings woven into every thread, a promise, a prayer, a piece of her with me.' For the uninitiated, Anshula is the daughter of Boney Kapoor and his first wife, the late Mona Kapoor. She is the younger sister of actor Arjun Kapoor.

'Therapy Helped Me Heal':

Hansika Motwani

On Coping After Divorce From Sohael Khatriya

Hansika Motwani has opened up about navigating one of the most difficult phases of her life following her separation from Sohael Khatriya. The actor was granted a divorce by mutual consent on March 11 this year by a Mumbai family court, nearly three years after their wedding.

Hansika Motwani on Family Support During Separation

In a recent conversation with Hauterrfly, Hansika spoke about the emotional toll of the separation and how her family stood by her through it. Reflecting on her bond with her brother, she shared, "My brother and I are very close. He supported me throughout; he was rock solid. Both my mother and brother told me, 'If you are not comfortable, don't go through it.' They have seen me in a very dark space. I am usually a very happy person, so for them to see me like that was alarming. They told me, whatever you decide, we are with you."

How Therapy Helped Her Heal

The actor also spoke candidly about prioritising her mental health over the past two years and how therapy played a crucial role in her healing journey. "I was in a very dark space and didn't understand mental health. A friend picked me up during my dark phase and said let's try therapy. After that, it's been two years and it has helped me, guided me, showed me how to be a better person. Taught me how to handle situations that I didn't know how to," she said.

Hansika added that therapy also helped her manage anxiety and better cope with emotional challenges.

'I Have No Regrets'

Despite the public curiosity around her personal life, Hansika made it clear that she has no intention of discussing the reasons behind the separation. She said that no one truly knows what happened between her and her ex-husband and emphasised that she has no regrets about her decision, choosing instead to move forward without revisiting the past.



NEWS BOX

Iran 'victorious' in war with US, says speaker

TEHRAN. (Agency) Iran had been "victorious in the field" during weeks of war and had only agreed to a temporary truce with the United States because its demands had been met, the Iranian parliamentary speaker said on Saturday. The two-week ceasefire is set to end Wednesday unless it is renewed, with a permanent deal that mediators including Pakistan are pushing to get over the line still not finalised and progress on key sticking points uncertain. "We were victorious in the field," Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said in a national televised address, adding the United States had not achieved its goals and Iran controlled the strategic Strait of Hormuz maritime transit route. "If we accepted the ceasefire, it was because they accepted our demands," he said, referring to the United States. "The enemy's every effort was to impose its demands on us and it is important that we register our rights, so this is where negotiation is a method of struggle." Ghalibaf and his delegation held closed door talks in Islamabad with US Vice President JD Vance on April 11, in the highest level Iran-US contacts since before the 1979 Islamic revolution. The talks did not result in a final deal and officials have signalled negotiations are continuing, though Iran's deputy foreign minister said on Saturday no date had been set for a new round of talks.

'Relationship very strong': Iran reacts after India summons envoy over firing on its vessels in Hormuz

World.(Agency) Iran on Sunday responded to the shooting incident involving India-flagged vessels in the Strait of Hormuz amid escalating regional tensions, with its top envoy in India highlighting strong bilateral ties and calling restraint and peace. "The relationship between Iran and India is very strong and I don't know anything about this event which you mentioned and we hope that it will be okay and it will be solved," said representative of Iran's Supreme Leader in India Abdul Majid Hakeem Ilahi. He further called for peace adding, "We don't want this war. We want peace, and we hope that the other side will also follow peace so that we can have a peaceful area." "The Strait of Hormuz was open, and due to the imposed war against Iran, it was closed, because of the security issues, and we hope that very soon it will be open...Yes, it was open for some time, but as there are some problems and crises around Iran, they wanted to be sure that the problems would be solved and it would be open very soon," he said. Iranian representative's statement comes after India lodged a strong protest after two India-flagged ships, Sanmar Herald and Jag Arnav, were fired upon while transiting the Strait of Hormuz, forcing them to turn back mid-journey. The vessels, carrying around 2 million barrels of Iraqi crude, were reported safe, but the incident heightened tensions between the two countries. The Ministry of External Affairs summoned Iranian envoy Mohammad Fathali and pressed Tehran to ensure the safe passage of India-bound ships. Meanwhile, reports said several vessels, including Greek tankers, were forced to turn back following gunfire as Iran announced the complete closure of the Strait of Hormuz less than 24 hours after announcing it to be open, citing a US blockade as the reason.

Crisis-hit Bulgaria votes in eighth election in five years, with pro-Russian Radev seen as favourite

SOFIA.(Agency) Bulgarians began heading to the polls in the eighth election in five years on Sunday with ex-president Rumen Radev's grouping expected to win on a pledge to fight corruption. The European Union's poorest member has been mired in a political crisis since 2021 when large anti-corruption rallies toppled the conservative government of long-time leader Boyko Borissov. Radev, a former airforce general who has advocated for renewing ties with Russia and slammed sending military aid to Ukraine, was president for nine years in the Balkan nation. He stepped down in January to lead newly formed centre-left grouping Progressive Bulgaria, with opinion polls before Sunday's vote suggesting the bloc could gain 35 percent of the vote. Radev has said he wants to rid the country of its "oligarchic governance model" and backed anti-corruption protests in late 2025 that brought down the conservative-backed government. "Radev's cause is for Bulgaria to have a future. We have reached a point where we are questioning the very future of our own country," Lazar Lazarov, a 28-year-old philosophy teacher, told AFP at Radev's final campaign rally in Sofia earlier this week. "Radev has proven himself as president and as a statesman. He's the one who is most acceptable for the EU, the United States, Russia and, if you like, even for China." Borissov's pro-European GERB party, which also led the last government, is likely to come second, according to opinion polls, with around 20 percent, ahead of the liberal PP-DB. Polling stations opened at 7 a.m. local time (0400 GMT), according to AFP journalists. They will close at 1700 GMT. Radev has slammed the EU's green energy policy, which he considers naive "in a world without rules", as well as any Bulgarian efforts to send arms to Ukraine battling a Russian invasion since 2022 though he has said he would not use his country's veto to block Brussels' decisions. Pushing for renewed ties with Russia, Radev denounced a 10-year defence agreement between Sofia and Kyiv that was signed last month, which earned him fresh accusations from his opponents of being too soft on Moscow. The ex-president also stoked dismay by screening images at his rally on Thursday of his meetings with world leaders including Russia's Vladimir Putin.

Trump-backed voting act could hurt women, minorities the most in US national elections

House Republicans have already passed a version of the SAVE America Act, but it faces steep obstacles in the Senate, where it appears Democratic opposition will be too strong to overcome.

WASHINGTON. (Agency) Millions of married women and transgender Americans could find their ability to vote more complicated than ever if the "SAVE America Act" promoted by US President Donald Trump, currently being debated in the Senate, were to pass. The draft law would require Americans to prove their citizenship when registering to vote in federal elections and present identification materials when casting a ballot, such as a

passport, driver's license or birth certificate. But many women change their names when they get married, meaning the names on their birth certificates no longer match what they currently use -- forcing them to provide additional documentation to justify the discrepancy. The same issue would affect transgender voters, whose documentation may not consistently reflect their current identity. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, a public policy institute at New York University, "more than 21 million Americans lack ready access to those documents. Roughly half of Americans don't even have a passport." For Rick Hasen, an expert on election law at the University of California, Los Angeles, "women and transgender people are the ones who are most likely to be affected," along with low-income and working class Americans who do not have passports. Republicans in the House of Representatives have already passed a version of the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) America Act, but it

faces steep obstacles in the Senate, where it appears Democratic opposition will be too strong to overcome. Name changes Letitia



Harmon, the policy and research director at the grassroots voting activist group Florida Rising, was married and then divorced in Washington state, she told AFP. She changed her name twice. "So the problem is I don't know which name is in the database records," Harmon said, making it difficult to know which set of documents she would need to take to her polling place. Harmon said she will likely need to order proof of divorce from Washington state -- a costly

and time-consuming process. The White House argues that the SAVE America Act is necessary to combat voter fraud, and prevent non-citizens from voting -- though current US law already forbids that. As for the issue of married women, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said last month: "They just have to go through their state processes to update that documentation."

Voting gender gap

The prospect of millions of women struggling to vote matters because historically, men tend to skew Republican. According to the Pew Research Center, 52 percent of men surveyed said they identified with or leaned toward the Republican Party in 2024, while only 44 percent of women said the same. "There has been a trend over the last decade and a half of mostly Republican states passing laws that make it harder to register or to vote, and mostly Democratic states passing laws that make it easier to register," Hasen explained.

Life jacket worn by a passenger who survived the Titanic auctioned off for over \$900,000

LONDON.(Agency) A life jacket worn by a passenger on RMS Titanic as she escaped the sinking steamship on a lifeboat sold at auction on Saturday for 670,000 pounds (\$906,000). The flotation device was worn by Laura Mabel Francatelli, a first-class passenger on the doomed ocean liner, and is signed by her and other survivors from the same lifeboat. It was the star among items in a sale of Titanic memorabilia by Henry Aldridge & Son auctioneers in Deves, western England, and sold to an unidentified telephone bidder for well over the presale estimate of between 250,000 and 350,000 pounds. A seat cushion from one of the Titanic lifeboats sold at the same auction for 390,000 pounds (\$527,000) to the owners of two Titanic museums in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, and Branson, Missouri. The prices include an auction-house fee known as the



buyer's premium. "These record-breaking prices illustrate the continuing interest in the Titanic story, and the respect for the passengers and crew whose stories are immortalized by these items of memorabilia," auctioneer Andrew Aldridge said. Billed as the world's most luxurious ocean liner and described as "practically unsinkable," the Titanic hit an iceberg off Newfoundland

during its maiden voyage from England to New York. It sank within hours on April 15, 1912. Some 1,500 of the 2,200 passengers and crew died. The Titanic is still a subject of worldwide fascination, in part because of the range of passengers aboard the ship, from paupers to plutocrats. Francatelli was traveling with her employer, fashion designer Lucy Duff Gordon, and Lucy's husband Cosmo Duff Gordon. All three survived in the ship's lifeboat No. 1, which was launched carrying 12 people despite having capacity for 40. Its failure to pick up survivors from the frigid water became a source of controversy. The record auction price for a piece of Titanic memorabilia is 1.56 million pounds (almost \$2 million at the time) paid in 2024 for a gold pocket watch given to the captain of RMS Carpathia, the ship that rescued 700 Titanic survivors.

What travelers can do as Iran war drives up flight costs and cuts availability

YANGON.(Agency)

As the U.S. and Israel's war with Iran squeezes global oil supplies, travelers have valid reasons to worry about the cost and availability of flights as they plan their late spring and summer trips. The head of the International Energy Agency has warned that European countries could run low on jet fuel within weeks, forcing the continent's airlines and carriers that fly to Europe to significantly reduce flights. Many airlines have already raised checked bag fees or added fuel surcharges as the global price of jet fuel increased from about \$99 per barrel at the end of February to as high as \$209 a barrel at the beginning of April. In a sign of the conflict's ongoing repercussions for travel, Air Canada said Friday it planned to suspend its service to New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport from June 1 until Oct. 25 to lower its fuel costs. Other airlines, ranging from U.S. carriers like United and Delta to Air France-KLM, SAS, Philippine Airlines and Cathay Pacific in Europe and Asia, have reduced routes and either increased ticket prices or said they would hike them if the war keeps oil from passing through the Strait of Hormuz. "It's very hard for the airlines to make predictions in this environment, so they're going to be conservative, and that's why it's likely that their prices will remain elevated for some time until things really stabilize," said Shye Gilad, a former airline captain who now teaches at Georgetown University's business school. With airfares and fees on the rise, consumers still can make choices that determine how much of their travel budgets will get taken up by paying to get to and from their destinations. While consumers may be tempted to see if the war ends before buying airline tickets, the "wait-and-see" approach to booking flights is riskier this year, travel experts say, especially the longer the war goes on and the closer to summer and other peak travel periods it gets. Presuming there is a lasting ceasefire -- or better yet, peace agreement -- it will take a few months for normal levels of jet fuel production and delivery to resume," airline industry analyst Henry Hartevelt, president of Atmosphere Research Group, said. Iran's reversal on Saturday of its decision to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and President Donald Trump's insistence on maintaining a U.S. blockade of Iranian ports illustrated the shakiness of prospects for oil flowing reliably again from the Persian Gulf and with it, an easing of the price pressure on airlines and their customers. "My advice to travelers is this: If you find a flight whose schedule fits yours, with a fare you can afford, and on an airline you can at least tolerate, book it," Hartevelt said. "But -- and I cannot emphasize this enough -- do not book a Basic Economy fare," the cheapest but also the most restrictive airline ticket class.

North Korea launches ballistic missiles toward sea: Seoul

SEOUL.(Agency) North Korea launched multiple ballistic missiles toward the sea on Sunday, its neighbors said, days after the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog warned that North Korea was making "very serious" advances in efforts to build nuclear weapons. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the launches happened on Sunday morning from the Sinpo area, an eastern coastal site where North Korea has a major shipyard use for building submarines. South Korea's military said it has bolstered its surveillance posture and is closely exchanging information with the U.S. and Japan. South Korea's presidential office said its National Security Council plans to hold an emergency meeting to discuss the launches. Japan's Defense Ministry also detected the launches, saying the weapons were believed to have landed in the waters off North Korea's east coast. It said Tokyo strongly protested to Pyongyang, saying Sunday's launches threaten regional and international peace and violated U.N. Security Council resolutions that bans any ballistic activities by North Korea.

The launches were the latest in North Korea's run of weapons testing activities this year. Last week, North Korea said leader Kim Jong Un supervised missile tests from the country's destroyer. In the previous week, North Korea said it had three



days of testing activities to examine ballistic missiles armed with cluster-bomb warheads and other new weapons systems. Last month, it said it tested an upgraded solid-fuel engine for missiles capable of reaching the U.S. mainland. Kim has focused on enlarging his nuclear and missile arsenals since his high-stakes nuclear diplomacy with U.S. President Donald

Trump collapsed in 2019. Trump has repeatedly expressed his desire to restore diplomacy with Kim, and the North Korean leader has recently left open the door for dialogue with Trump but urged Washington to drop demands for the North's nuclear disarmament as a precondition for talks. On Wednesday, International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Grossi said that his agency has confirmed "a rapid increase" in activities at nuclear manufacturing facilities in North Korea. Grossi told reporters in Seoul that activities in North Korea point to "a very serious increase" in its nuclear weapons production capabilities. His comments echoed a view by many outside observers that North Korea has taken steps to expand its main Yongbyon nuclear complex and build additional uranium-enrichment sites in recent years. Last September, South Korea's Unification Minister Chung Dong-young said that North Korea was operating four uranium enrichment facilities and that they were running everyday.

While Trump lashes out at Spain, US Democrats join progressive world leaders' rally in Barcelona

Sen. Murphy, a Democrat from Connecticut, spoke at the progressive rally and didn't shy away from blasting Trump while celebrating the loss of power of Trump's ally Viktor Orbán in Hungary last week.

BARCELONA.(Agency) Progressive leaders from around the globe gathered in Barcelona on Saturday to try and galvanize their forces and defend a rules-based world order. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, an outspoken critic of U.S. President Donald Trump and the US-Israeli war against Iran, hosted two overlapping events about democracy and progressive politics in Spain's second-largest city. Democrats US Sen. Chris Murphy and Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz were present alongside the leaders of Brazil, South Africa and high-ranking officials from other left-leaning governments. While no foreign leader criticized Trump by name in public, the staunchly unilateral position of the American president that breaks with decades of US foreign policy, including his derision of NATO and the United Nations, hung over the meetings. "We all see the

attacks against the multilateral system, the repeated attempts to undermine international law and the dangerous normalization of the use of force," Sánchez said. Trump again lashed out on Saturday on social media at Sánchez, who has faced Trump's scorn for not allowing the US to use jointly operated military bases in Spain for operations related to the Iran war and for refusing to raise military spending from 2% to 5% of GDP. "Has anybody looked at how badly the country of Spain is doing. Their financial numbers, despite contributing almost nothing to NATO and their military defense, are absolutely horrendous. Sad to watch!!!" Trump posted on Truth Social. Sánchez says the right's time is running out in Spain, like the US and other developed countries, is in debt, but it has one of the world's leading economies under Sánchez. Sánchez told

the rally of progressive politicians and party members held later on Saturday that the populist right "screams and shouts not



because they are winning but because they know their time is running out." They know their vision of how the world should be ordered is falling apart due to the tariffs and wars," he said. "Their embrace of climate change denial, of xenophobia, or sexism is their greatest error." They have tried again and again to make us embarrassed of our

beliefs. That ends now. From now on they can be the ones who feel ashamed." Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and Colombian President Gustavo Petro, and other leaders and officials, including Cabinet members from the United Kingdom and Germany, were in attendance at the IV Meeting in Defense of Democracy that kicked off Saturday's double-header of political events at the Barcelona convention center. Later in the day, Sánchez, Lula and Ramaphosa stayed put to attend the inaugural Global Progressive Mobilization, where some 6,000 left-leaning elected officials, policy analysts and activists exchanged ideas. "The far right is international, so we must be too," German Vice Chancellor and Finance Minister Lars Klingbeil told a crowd of activists.

