



## "Ganga Flows Through Soul Of Bengal": PM Modi's Boat Ride On Hooghly River

New Delhi.(Agency)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday spent time on the banks of the Hooghly river in Kolkata amid the ongoing Assembly elections in West Bengal and reiterated his commitment to the development and prosperity of the people of the state.

The Prime Minister shared pictures from his visit on social media platform X, describing the Hooghly as linked to West Bengal's culture. He said the Ganga holds a special place in the lives of Bengalis and that its waters carry the spirit of an ancient civilisation.

"For every Bengali, the Ganga occupies a very special place. One can say that the Ganga flows through the soul of Bengal," PM Modi wrote. He said he spent time on the banks of the Hooghly to express his gratitude to Maa Ganga.

During the visit, the Prime Minister also interacted with boatmen and morning walkers along the river. He praised the hardworking nature of the boatmen and said the interaction gave him another opportunity to reaffirm the Centre's commitment to West Bengal's development.

"Also had the opportunity to meet boatmen, whose hardworking nature is admirable and morning walkers. On the Hooghly, reiterated our

commitment to work towards the development of West Bengal and the prosperity of the great Bengali people," he said. In another post, PM Modi shared more pictures from the visit, saying he tried his hand at photographing the river. He



also noted getting a close view of the iconic Vidyasagar Setu and Howrah Bridge, calling it a "very special morning" on the banks of the Hooghly.

"Some more glimpses from the banks of the Hooghly. Tried my hand at photographing this great river. Also caught a close glimpse of the Vidyasagar Setu and Howrah Bridge," PM Modi said. The Prime Minister's visit comes as the state

goes through the Assembly election process. Following the first phase, PM Modi has begun campaigning for the next round of polls. At the Krishnanagar rally, PM Modi said, "I have heard that even 'jhalhuri' has given certain individuals a thunderous jolt. I had 'jhalhuri', but it seems that the TMC leaders are feeling heat of the chillies." Replying to the PM, Banerjee said "we are used to jhalhuri's spiciness."

The first phase of polling for the 294-member West Bengal Assembly took place on Thursday, while the second phase is scheduled for April 29. The counting of votes will be held on May 4.

According to the Election Commission of India, West Bengal recorded a high voter turnout of 91.91% in the first phase. The figures indicate active participation by voters amid tight security arrangements across constituencies.

Several districts recorded turnout above 90%. Dakshin Dinajpur reported the highest turnout at 94.85%, followed by Cooch Behar at 94.54%, Birbhum at 93.70%, Jalpaiguri at 93.23%, and Murshidabad at 92.93%. Overall, all major districts crossed the 90% mark, reflecting strong voter participation in the opening phase of polling.

## "I Will Take Over Delhi After Winning Bengal": Mamata Banerjee's Big Remark

Mamata Banerjee said she will "dismantle" the BJP in the Centre by bring together the Opposition parties.



Kolkata.(Agency)

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has launched an attack on the BJP as a part of the state went to polls on Thursday, asserting that she will turn her focus to Delhi after winning the assembly polls. Speaking at a rally in Kolkata's Chowringhee area, the chief minister -- who has been at the helm for 15 years -- said she will "dismantle" the BJP in the Centre by bring together the Opposition parties. "Remember this, you cannot defeat us. We fight against injustice; we fight for our rights. I was born in Bengal, and I shall breathe my last in this very Bengal. I will take over Delhi once I have secured victory in Bengal. I will do so by rallying all the political parties together. I won't want the seat (of power); I want the complete dismantling of the BJP in Delhi. While their destruction in Bengal is inevitable, the BJP must be ousted from Delhi as well," the chief minister said.

Banerjee was campaigning for her party's candidate and two-time sitting MLA Nayna Bandopadhyay, who is contesting her BJP rival Santosh Pathak. Targeting the BJP, she said she has noted down the names of everyone who are working for the BJP. "You think you can keep tabs on us? Every single person you have inducted, you brought them into the BJP fold only after scrutinising their family backgrounds, and you have appointed officers based on that very same criterion," the chief minister said in her speech.

While Banerjee campaigned in Chowringhee, about 3.35 crore cast their votes in 152 seats elsewhere in the state. The Chowringhee seat, held by the Trinamool since 2011, will vote in the second phase on April 29, along with other seats in Kolkata. In the first phase of polling yesterday, Bengal saw a 92.8 per cent voter turnout, marking a record participation of the electorate after a 90-lakh purge during voter roll revision earlier this year.

## BJP finished Nitish Kumar: Tejashwi Yadav while congratulating CM Samrat Choudhary

Tejashwi Yadav said his party had foreseen the shift, noting JD(U)'s claims about Nitish Kumar continuing till 2030, but asserting the BJP ensured he would not remain chief minister.

New Delhi.(Agency)

In a sharp attack on the ruling alliance in Bihar, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav on Friday alleged that the BJP had effectively "finished off" former chief minister Nitish Kumar politically by forcing him to relinquish a post he held for nearly two decades. Yadav made the remarks in the state Assembly during a special session convened for the floor test of the new government led by BJP's Samrat Choudhary.

Speaking as Leader of the Opposition, Yadav, deputy chief minister in the previous Nitish Kumar government, congratulated Choudhary on assuming the CM's office but laced his remarks with criticism of both the BJP and its ally, the Janata Dal (United) [JD(U)]. "We knew that the BJP would not let Nitish Kumar remain the CM.



The BJP kept saying that Nitish would be the NDA's leader till 2030. But now they have finished him off," he said. He added that Bihar's political landscape had become unstable, noting, "Any state needs political stability. But Bihar is peculiar. It has seen five governments in five years".

Yadav reiterated that his party had anticipated the transition. "During the elections, we saw JD(U) leaders saying Nitish Kumar will be elected again in the 2025-2030 term. But we had already said that the BJP would not allow Nitish Kumar to remain in the chief minister's chair, and that is what happened. Nitish Kumar has now been finished," he said.

The RJD leader also took a swipe at the manner in which leadership changed hands. "An elected chief minister was removed by a selected chief minister". Tejashwi Yadav also reminded the House of the days when Samrat Choudhary was with the RJD. "I am glad for Samrat Choudhary, who is a pupil of (RJD supremo) Lalu Prasad. But he must beware of those with deep roots in the BJP and the RSS who resent his rise," alleged Yadav.

## Hardik Hudiya's Threats Fail to Silence Mahanagar Metro

# Strong Opposition to Alleged Plot Targeting Jain Temple; Community United, 'Extortion Racket' to Be Exposed

Pawan Makan (Group Editor)

**Surat:** Resorting to threats to suppress the voice of truth has always been the tactic of the weak. The recent legal threats allegedly issued by Hardik Hudiya and his gang to the Group Editor of Mahanagar Metro News reflect the same desperation. However, Mahanagar Metro makes it clear that it has never been intimidated by such hollow warnings—and never will be. The publication now vows to expose every dark deed of this alleged extortion network before the public. Community Will Not Stay Silent If Temples Are Targeted. Abhay Chopra, Convenor of the All India Hindu Jain Sadhu-Sant Protection Committee, has taken a strong stand regarding the alleged conspiracy targeting Jain temples. Issuing a stern warning, he said: "The Jain community is peace-loving, but any attack on our places of faith will not be tolerated. We will respond within the framework of law in a way that leaves no place for the conspirators to hide." Law Will Catch Up With the Accused. The community has sent a clear message that law and order under the state administration remains strong. A demand has been made to the authorities to identify anti-social elements targeting religious institutions and ensure strict legal action against them. Direct Strike by Mahanagar Metro: Unafraid of Threats: Those attempting to intimidate through legal warnings must remember—journalism's duty is to reveal the truth. Exposed in Progress: Mahanagar Metro will bring

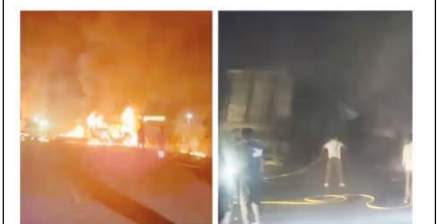


forward victims allegedly targeted by this gang's extortion activities. United Front: The Jain community and sections of the media have come together to launch a constitutional and legal fight against such elements. "We have full faith in the

Constitution and the judiciary. Those like Hardik Hudiya who are trying to intimidate the press must understand—this is just the beginning of the end of their empire. Mahanagar Metro News will neither stop, nor bow, nor be sold."

## 3 killed, 5 critical after car collides with truck, catch fire on Rajasthan highway

Three occupants of the car died after being trapped and burned in the crash, while five others suffered serious injuries and were rescued from the wreckage by locals and responding police teams.



Churu, Rajasthan.(Agency)

At least three people died, and five others were critically injured after a sports utility vehicle (SUV) collided head-on with a dumper truck and caught fire on a highway in Rajasthan's Churu district on Thursday night. The victims were on their way to a wedding ceremony in the nearby town of Pilani when the accident occurred, turning a celebratory occasion into tragedy. According to police, the collision took place around 10 pm on the Pilani-Sadulpur road in Churu.

The impact was so severe that caused both vehicles to catch fire almost immediately. Three occupants of the SUV were trapped inside and were burnt to death on the spot. Five others sustained serious burn and impact injuries and were pulled out with the help of local residents and police personnel who rushed to the scene.

The injured were initially taken to Pilani's Birla Public Hospital for first aid. Given the seriousness of their condition, they were referred to BDK Hospital in Jhunjhunu and later shifted to SMS Hospital in Jaipur for advanced treatment. Officials said the condition of some of the injured remains critical.

Police teams from Hamirwas station, along with senior officers, reached the site soon after receiving information. Fire brigade personnel were called in and managed to bring the blaze under control after sustained efforts. The accident led to temporary traffic disruption on the route, with authorities

## News box

## Woman files false rape complaint in Gurgaon, cops register an FIR against her

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Gurgaon: An FIR has been registered against a woman for filing a false rape complaint after a police investigation revealed no assault had taken place. On April 20, the woman, Radhika Kumari, called the police control room at Sadar police station and claimed that she had been raped at a house in Sector 47. A police team and emergency response vehicle reached the location and contacted her. Kumari told police that she is from epal and currently lives on rent in Sector 37. She works with an online platform on which people can be hired for daily cooking. On Monday, she had been hired by two men living at the Sector 47 house to cook for them for a couple of days. However, she argued with one of them over a monetary issue. Following this, she dialled 112 (police control room) and lodged the complaint. A police inquiry, however, revealed that no rape occurred and that the woman made the call to settle a score with the men. A case has been registered against her under Section 217 (giving false information to a public servant to cause them to use their lawful power to harm or annoy another person) of BNS for providing false information, leading to misuse of police resources and time. Police spokesperson Sandeep Turan said, "Such false calls not only divert emergency services but can also delay help to people in genuine distress. Citizens should refrain from sharing misleading information, as that can lead to a one-year jail term too." Police said the woman has not been arrested. "As the lady only made a fake call at 112, she was not arrested but an FIR was registered. Now a report will be submitted regarding the same in the court," another police officer said.

## Black water flows from taps at homes, Noida blames 'temp-induced' changes

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Thousands of residents across multiple sectors in Noida woke up on Thursday to a rude shock — dirty, pale yellow to black-coloured water flowing from their taps, triggering a wave of health concerns and anger. Noida Authority attributed the brackish supply to temperature-induced scaling in water distribution lines.

Over 25,000 residents across Sectors 19, 40, and 20, among others, complained following the contaminated water supply on Thursday morning, saying it was unusable even for basic household chores. The problem, however, had begun a day earlier — BB Majumdar, a resident of C Block, Sector 19, said the water had been brackish since Wednesday. "We could not use it for daily chores, and no tankers were supplied by the authority either," he said. RC Gupta, president of the Sector 19 RWA, said videos of the discoloured water were circulated to authority officials and community groups, but drew no response. "At 8.40 am on Thursday, we got dirty, black-coloured water from taps in the kitchens and washrooms of households in A, B, and C blocks of Sector 19," he said. "It is very shameful that they are supplying such gutter water for drinking purposes. Who is responsible? Despite repeated complaints and regular payment of water bills, no action is being taken."

The problem was not limited to taps — Gupta confirmed that overhead tanks were also filled with the contaminated water, warning that the health impact on residents could linger for months. The foul supply persisted into the evening. Mohinder Singh of the Sector 40 RWA echoed the frustration. "How often should residents clean their overhead tanks, which keep getting contaminated with this dirty, untreated water?" he asked. Yogendra Sharma, president of the Federation of Noida Residents Welfare Associations, said he raised the matter with the concerned officials, who assured him the issue would be resolved shortly.

## Court grants police remand of 3 women held over Noida protest violence, but allows lawyer presence

Noida.(Agency)

A city court on Thursday allowed conditional police remand of three women — Aakriti Chaudhary, Manisha Chauhan and Srishti Gupta — accused of inciting violence during the industrial workers' protest on April 13. The court also allowed their lawyers to be present during investigation proceedings.

The court of additional civil judicial magistrate (ACJM) Virek Aggrawal ruled that the police custody period would start at 9 am on April 24 and last till 6 pm on April 26. "During custody, the investigating officer will ensure that the accused undergo a medical examination at the time of taking them into police custody from the jail and at the time of their admission to the prison after police custody. The IO will not subject the accused to mental or physical harassment, and the learned counsel for the accused may observe the investigation proceedings while maintaining a reasonable distance and without obstructing the investigation," the judge ruled, directing a copy of the order to be sent to the superintendent of the district jail and the investigating officer of the case. Rajnish Yadav, the defence counsel, urged the court during proceedings to also allow a woman family member to observe the investigation from a distance besides the counsel. Earlier, on Wednesday, the counsel for Srishti Gupta objected to police custody, stating that there was no evidence to support it and no new evidence emerged against her either. The judge, however, observed that evidence collected by the investigating officer and statements given by the accused indicated they prima facie possessed the items (mobile phones, etc.) used in the incident under investigation. "Therefore, in such circumstances, granting the accused's police custody remand appears justified," the judge said.

Aakriti and Srishti are both from Delhi and in their 20s. Aakriti has a masters in history from Daulat Ram College. Manisha is a worker with an industrial unit in Noida. In the application for custody, police contended that there was "full possibility of getting important evidence from the place of residence of the accused". "There is a strong possibility that significant evidence related to the incident will be found.

# Quick-restore push tested as Gurgaon Sector 37D condominiums face 30-hour outage

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Two days after the state directed faster transformer replacement to curb outages, a fault in a power cable left more than 10,000 residents of Ramprastha City and Signature Global Millennia in Sector 37D without electricity for over 30 hours. The disruption began around 1.30pm on Wednesday after a 33kV cable was damaged near Dwarka Expressway. While power backup generators initially supported supply, diesel ran out early Thursday morning at Ramprastha City, resulting in a complete blackout between 4am and 6.30am. Even by 7.30pm, normal supply had not been restored, with both societies largely dependent on diesel generators. Officials of DHBVN said the outage was traced to a fault in a 33kV cable drawing supply from the 220/33kV substation in Sector 85. "There was a fault in the 33kV line near Elan Miracle mall. This falls within the developers' scope, and their team is working to rectify it. We are providing technical support as required," said

Manish Wadhwa, sub-divisional officer, Sector 37, DHBVN. At Ramprastha City, residents said the prolonged outage severely disrupted daily life, especially in the sweltering heat. They said they were forced to rely entirely on gensets, paying as much as Rs 30 per unit. This, they said, added financial strain along with noise and air pollution. "This is highly negligent. Residents are being charged up to five times higher rates, yet diesel was not arranged on time," said Dinesh Raina, president of the RWA of The Atrium in Ramprastha City. "With summer beginning, this will only worsen unless urgent intervention is made." According to residents, such outages have become frequent due to repeated faults in the power line supplying electricity from a substation in Sector 85. They also pointed out that the absence of a dedicated 33kV substation has left the area vulnerable. While a substation has been planned, the responsibility lies with the builder, and there is no clarity on its completion



timeline. "The builder had assured 24x7 power supply, but outages like this keep happening. Generators are meant for emergencies, not for prolonged use," said Saurabh Mittal, RWA president of The View in Ramprastha City. Residents

of Signature Global Millennia said the issue has persisted for the past two years. They alleged that the society depends on old, shared cabling with neighbouring society Ramprastha instead of having an independent connection, despite residents having paid for it. "We are operating on barely 700kW against a sanctioned load of around 8,000kW — less than 10% of the requirement. The outdated cabling is the root cause of repeated failures, especially during peak summer," said Sumit Rastogi, a resident of Signature Global Millennia. Neither developer responded to repeated requests for comment. The state power department on Tuesday had directed discoms to replace faulty transformers within two hours in urban areas and four hours in rural areas. The move aims to ensure quicker restoration of supply in case of faults or breakdowns. Currently, transformer replacement often takes several hours and sometimes even days in rural areas, causing prolonged outages.

## Fake Mounjaro probe expands beyond NCR after seized stock traced to Hyderabad

Gurgaon.(Agency)

The drugs control department has widened its probe into distribution of fake Mounjaro injections after confirming that some of them had already been sent out of NCR before the seizure last week.

According to officials, six injections from the batch were supplied to a dealer in Hyderabad. The dealer has been warned not to sell or use the stock. District drug controller Amandeep Chauhan said on Thursday that the department is now checking if more consignments were sent to other cities, including through e-commerce platforms. The case follows last week's Rs 70-lakh seizure, in which 262 vials of suspected counterfeit Mounjaro injections were recovered during a raid near Super Mart-1. Two men, Mujammil Khan and supplier Avi Sharma, were arrested. "We are examining if

supplies went beyond this batch and identifying all possible recipients. We have issued a notice to IndiaMart to share all details with us. They have requested some time to submit details," Chauhan said. Authorities have sent samples for detailed laboratory testing, including sterility analysis, which requires a 14-day incubation period. Till the results are confirmed, circulation of the seized batch has been stopped. Chauhan said Sharma is now in five days' judicial custody. Investigators said he operated from a flat in Gurgaon's Sector 62, which was used solely for assembling and packaging the fake injections. Officials said the accused procured raw materials, including peptides and injection components, from China through an e-commerce platform. The products were then assembled at the flat, where investigators believe that

online sources were used to imitate the original drug. According to the investigation, Sharma allegedly used 3D printing to create packaging cartons, labels, and instruction leaflets designed to resemble the genuine product. Officials said the peptides and injection pens were assembled into injectable units at the flat, where refrigeration facilities were used to store the materials. The counterfeit products were identified during inspection after several discrepancies were noticed. Officials found differences in shades of blue and red on the packaging compared with the original product. They also noted variations in typography and text alignment, while the illustration of the injection pen appeared darker and less sharp. "These visible discrepancies clearly indicated the product was not genuine," Chauhan said.

## MCG floats Rs 606 crore tender to overhaul door-to-door waste collection

Gurgaon.(Agency)

MCG on Thursday initiated the process to hire two firms to manage the city's door-to-door waste collection, floating a tender estimated at Rs 606 crore and dividing the city into two operational clusters.

Cluster 1 (zones 1 and 2) spans 138.4 sq km, covers a population of 9.4 lakh, generates around 519 tonnes of waste per day, and comprises 3.1 lakh establishments across 18 wards. Cluster 2 (zones 3 and 4) is larger — 159.2 sq km, population 10.39 lakh, 571.9 tonnes of daily waste, 2.7 lakh establishments and 18 wards.

Specific penalties have been prescribed for failure in door-to-door collection — contractors will be fined Rs 50 per residential establishment per day for each instance where waste is not collected. For non-residential establishments, the penalty will be Rs 100 per establishment per day, calculated based on the number of units and the number of days of non-collection. The scope of work includes door-to-door collection of segregated waste and its transportation to the

Bandhwari landfill site, which serves as the processing location for both clusters. MCG has identified four transfer stations for secondary collection in each cluster;



land for these facilities has been demarcated and is free from encroachments. Despite segregation at source being mandated, however, all waste streams are ultimately processed at the same site.

Vehicles must be compartmentalised for separate collection of wet and dry waste; if waste is found mixed due to non-

compliant transport, a penalty of 1.5 times the quoted rate per tonne will be charged on the mixed quantity. The civic body has introduced a graded penalty system linked to collection efficiency, kicking in after the first 30 days of operations. No penalty applies at 98% efficiency or above. Below that, deductions from the monthly bill are graduated: 1% for 90%-97%, 2% for 80%-89%, 3% for 70%-79%, 4% for 60%-69%, and 5% for 50%-59%. Efficiency below 50% attracts a steep 10% penalty. For missed collections, contractors face Rs 50 per residential unit per day and Rs 100 per non-residential establishment per day. Ward-level monitoring committees constituted by MCG will oversee agency performance on the ground. The move follows repeated delays in awarding the contract, which left the city's waste management system under strain. "The tendering process is expected to take at least another month to conclude," a senior MCG official told TOI.

## 7.6k house extensions cleared from roads in 5 days, Gurgaon DLF phases top violations

Ghaziabad.(Agency)

Over 7,600 extensions of houses that affected right of way (ROW) at licensed colonies in the city have been razed by the department of district town and country planning (DTCP) in five days. The action was carried out in compliance with govt directions issued on April 16, 2026. Officials said the drive covered 17 major licensed colonies. DLF 1 and 2 recorded the highest number of violations. Together, the two colonies accounted for more than 2,700 encroachments, underscoring the extent of unauthorised extensions in some of the city's oldest and most premium residential areas. According to the data, DLF 1 recorded 1,393 violations, while DLF 2 had 1,384. Palam Vihar followed with more than 1,100 violations. Sushant Lok 3 reported 536 violations, South City 1 had 523, Ardee City and part of Sushant Lok-1 together accounted for 434 cases, and Sushant Lok 2 recorded 290 violations. Urban planners associated with the operation said the widespread nature of these violations points to a long-standing pattern of gradual encroachment on public land, particularly along internal colony roads intended for free movement and emergency access. Fencing, ramps and guard rooms were among the most common violations. The largest category

comprised fencing and extended ramps, steps and platforms. Guard rooms and cabins were also built on public land outside houses. Other frequent violations included boundary walls and gates extending into the right of way, hoardings, tin sheds, parking sheds and illegal commercial kiosks. In DLF 1 and 2 alone, more than 1,500 cases of fencing, ramps and platforms were recorded. Guard rooms accounted for over 450 cases across the two colonies. In Palam Vihar, the pattern differed, with large-scale encroachments involving boundary walls and gates in 220 cases, along with more than 1,100 instances of grilles and fencing, besides platforms and sheds built in front of houses. In Sushant Lok 2 and 3, ramps and boundary wall extensions emerged as major violations, along with encroachments on green areas and landscape zones. In Sushant Lok 3 alone, 174 cases of fencing and green area encroachment were recorded, indicating growing pressure on planned open spaces. Mid-sized and smaller colonies such as Rosewood City, Mayfield Gardens, Nirvana Country and Uppal Southend also reported a range of violations, though in lower numbers. These included porta cabins, storage



units, temporary sheds, kiosks and footpath encroachments, often linked to commercial use of residential properties. In sectors 47 and 48, including Malibu Towne and Vipul World, officials removed metal barricading, illegal steps and ramps, reflecting a recurring trend of altering house fronts for private access. Officials said removal of encroachments has improved road usability, with around 216km of internal roads reclaimed across colonies. In many areas, residents had gradually extended private boundaries into public space, narrowing roads, blocking footpaths and restricting emergency access. "The objective is to restore original road width and ensure smooth movement within colonies.

Encroachments not only inconvenience residents but also pose safety risks," a senior official said. Alongside removal of encroachments, authorities have also initiated action against unauthorised use of stilt floors, which are often converted into commercial or residential spaces in violation of building norms. Officials said enforcement on this front will continue alongside the ongoing removal of illegal structures. Authorities said reclaimed spaces would be maintained in coordination with RWAs to prevent encroachments. They also warned that repeat violations would face stricter legal action. Urban experts said while enforcement drives are necessary, sustained monitoring and community participation will be essential for long-term compliance. "Encroachment is often gradual and normalised over time. Without consistent vigilance, the situation can revert," an urban planner said. With this large-scale operation, the city has seen one of its most extensive efforts to reclaim public space within licensed colonies, though officials acknowledged that it marks the start of a longer enforcement cycle.

# Delhi-Dehradun Expressway: Bikes, autos, tractors banned; strict speed limits for car and heavy vehicles

The newly opened Delhi-Dehradun Expressway has reduced travel time between the two cities to just a few hours. Authorities have banned bikes, autos, and tractors on the high-speed corridor, while strict speed limits and advanced surveillance systems ensure safety and prevent accidents.

## Dehradun. (Agency)

The long-awaited Delhi-Dehradun Expressway has officially opened, marking a major milestone in India's modern road infrastructure. Built at an estimated cost of Rs 12,000 crore, the expressway was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on April 14, 2026. It promises faster, safer, and more efficient travel between Delhi and Uttarakhand.

## Strict bans for safety

Authorities have announced that two-wheelers (bikes), three-wheelers (autos), and tractors are completely banned on the expressway. Police personnel have been deployed at the Badgaon interchange in Saharanpur to stop such vehicles from entering the high-speed corridor. Officials explained that slow-moving vehicles pose a

serious risk of accidents when mixed with fast-moving traffic. While some local commuters expressed disappointment over the restrictions, the administration emphasized that the ban is necessary to prevent collisions and ensure smooth traffic flow.

## Speed limits defined

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has set clear speed limits for different vehicles:

Cars: Maximum speed of 100 km/h

Heavy vehicles (buses and trucks): Maximum speed of 80 km/h

These limits are designed to balance efficiency with safety, ensuring that



vehicles can travel quickly without increasing accident risks.

The expressway is equipped with modern technology to monitor traffic. Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR)

cameras and Vehicle Speed Detection Systems (VSDD) have been installed along the route. These systems automatically detect vehicles exceeding speed limits and issue digital e-challans.

CCTV cameras are also monitoring other violations, including not wearing seat belts and underage driving. Officials have warned that violators will face heavy fines, and in some cases, vehicles may even be seized.

## Focus on accident prevention

NHAI engineer Sonu Singh explained that the primary goal of these measures is to prevent accidents. He said that tractors, autos, and other slow-moving vehicles can cause dangerous situations on high-speed

roads, making strict enforcement essential. Authorities have assured that strict action will be taken against violators, including the seizure of banned vehicles found on the expressway.

## Toll operations soon

Toll booths along the expressway are expected to become fully operational in the coming weeks. Once in place, toll collection will further streamline traffic management and ensure proper maintenance of the corridor.

By banning unsafe vehicles, enforcing speed limits, and using advanced surveillance, authorities aim to make travel faster and safer. For commuters, the expressway offers a new era of connectivity between Delhi and Uttarakhand, cutting travel time and boosting regional development.

## Short news

### Angered over sister's elopement, 3 Gujarat men beat her lover to death



## Gandhinagar. (Agency)

A young man was brutally killed in Gujarat's Rajula allegedly by three brothers seeking revenge over a past relationship, police said.

The incident stems from a love affair that began a year ago between the victim, Dinesh, and a woman named Sonal. During that time, Dinesh had eloped with Sonal and taken her to Morbi. Although Sonal returned to her father's home after two months, tensions between the two families persisted, with the accused allegedly threatening to kill Dinesh over the matter. On April 18, Dinesh arrived from Morbi with farm labourers and went to his friend's farm. Around 8:30 pm, while he was sitting in the field with his friend, the three accused arrived on a motorcycle. They took Dinesh a short distance away and confronted him, saying that by abducting their sister, he had ruined their honour.

The accused then began assaulting him. Rajesh, also known as Rakesh, removed his belt and started beating Dinesh. Sursingh struck him on the head with a rope, while Kewal also assaulted him repeatedly with a belt. The three men took turns beating Dinesh with belts and ropes for nearly two hours, inflicting multiple serious injuries.

### Odisha sizzles as 24 places cross 40 degree celsius; heatwave alert till April 25

## TIRUPATI. (Agency)

Odisha remained in the grip of intense heat on Thursday with 24 places in the state recording 40 degree Celsius or more. The Bhubaneswar met centre has forecast hot and humid weather as well as warm nights in parts of the state till Saturday.

On the day, Jharsuguda and Talcher recorded the highest maximum day temperature of 44 deg C each.

They were followed by Titilagarh which logged 43.8 deg C, Dhenkanal and Angul 43.5 deg C each, Hirakud 43.4 deg C, and Sambalpur and Paralakhemundi 43 deg C each.

Twin City, meanwhile, also recorded a surge in mercury with Bhubaneswar reading 42.1 deg C and Cuttack 41.8 deg C, the highest in both so far this season.

The regional met office has forecast possibility of heatwave at isolated places in Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Balangir, Keonjhar, Angul and Khurda districts on Friday. The hot and humid weather may prevail at a few places in Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Puri, Khurda, Nayagarh, Ganjam and Gajapati districts during the period.

People in the coastal regions can, however, expect some respite from the punishing heat Saturday onwards as the weather body has forecast a dip in mercury in these areas.

In its extended range outlook issued on the day, the met office said the maximum temperature is likely to be normal to above normal over most parts of the state from April 24 to 30 and normal to above normal over interior districts between May 1 and 7.

## BJP Spreading Confusion on Women's Reservation, Congress Presents Factual Response

### Mahanagar Metro Beuro

Beawar. In a press conference organized by the District Congress Committee Beawar, the Bharatiya Janata Party was accused of spreading misinformation and creating confusion over women's reservation for political gains. Congress leaders said the party has played a historic and decisive role in women's empowerment and ensuring political representation for women, while the BJP is trying to use the issue for electoral benefit. During the press conference, Congress stated that the credit for initiating women's reservation goes to the Congress. The first Women's Reservation Bill was introduced in Parliament in 1996 during the H.D. Deve Gowda government with Congress support. Later, in 2010, the UPA government got the Women's Reservation Bill passed in the Rajya Sabha. Congress also highlighted that through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, it ensured 33 percent reservation for women in Panchayati Raj and Urban Local Bodies, giving a new direction to women's empowerment. Congress leaders said that while the party supported the Nari Shakti Vandan Act passed in 2023 and demanded its immediate implementation, the Central Government linked it to census and

delimitation, depriving women of immediate benefits. Congress alleged that despite receiving Presidential assent in 2023, the BJP government issued the notification only on the night of April 16, 2026,



implementing it after three years, raising serious questions over its intent. The Congress said the BJP is making baseless allegations against Congress and opposition parties on women's reservation, even though Prime Minister Narendra Modi had sought political mileage when the bill was passed in 2023. It alleged that BJP convened a special Parliament session amid elections in three states and attempted to link women's reservation with delimitation despite delimitation not being necessary for implementing reservation. Congress leaders further alleged that through delimitation, BJP wants to redraw the political map of the country for its own benefit. Citing arbitrary delimitation in Rajasthan's urban local bodies and Panchayati Raj institutions, as well

as examples from Assam and Jammu & Kashmir, Congress claimed BJP is misusing delimitation for political gains. The press conference also questioned using the 2011 Census as the basis for women's reservation and delimitation while delaying caste census, stating it compromises the interests of OBC communities. Congress reiterated that linking women's reservation to delimitation is misleading, as reservation has been implemented in Panchayats and Urban Bodies even without delimitation in the past. Congress demanded that the Women's Reservation law passed in 2023 be implemented immediately on the existing 543 Lok Sabha seats and not be linked to delimitation. It also called for timely completion of caste census to ensure adequate representation for OBC women. Targeting BJP's claims on women's empowerment, Congress said BJP does not provide adequate representation to women in its organization or election tickets. It pointed out that BJP has never had a woman national president, while Congress elected a woman national president over 110 years ago. Examples such as Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, Indira Gandhi

and Sonia Gandhi were cited as proof of Congress' commitment. Congress also said India's first woman Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, first woman President Pratibha Patil and first woman Lok Sabha Speaker Meira Kumar were all Congress contributions. In contrast, it alleged BJP is turning women's reservation into another political slogan while diverting attention from inflation, unemployment and farmers' issues. Congress leaders asserted that women's reservation is a right of women, not a political favor, and said the party would continue raising the issue from the streets to Parliament until it is implemented immediately. Those present at the press conference included District In-charge and State General Secretary Pratishta Yadav, District President Kishore Chaudhary, former MLA Rakesh Parik, Beawar candidate Parsmal Jain, State President of Mining Cell Ashishpal Padawat, former Chairperson Shanti Dabla, former Chairperson Parvati Jagrat, Mahila Congress State General Secretary Advocate Sulakshana Sharma, Women District President Ishika Jain, former candidate Manoj Chauhan, Block President Advocate Ajay Sharma along with several senior Congress leaders and workers.

## One dies of suspected sunstroke, three suffer sunburns in Kerala

The Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA) said it is awaiting Sanalkumar's autopsy report to confirm the cause of death.

### KOCHI. (Agency)

One person died of suspected sunstroke, while three others suffered sunburns as the state continued to record high summer temperatures on Thursday. The ultraviolet index (UVI) was between 8 and 9 – indicating high level of UV radiation – in some places.

Sanalkumar M V, 37, of Pallipoyil in Kannur, who collapsed while working in the sun and admitted to a private hospital on Wednesday, died on Thursday morning. The Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA) said it is awaiting Sanalkumar's autopsy report to confirm the cause of death.

In Nadapuram, Kozhikode,

anganwadi teacher Anila suffered sunburn on her hands, while in Malappuram's Wandoor, four-year-old Isa John suffered sunburn while playing at her home.

In Ernakulam, Pandava Baira, a 27-year-old migrant worker from Odisha, was admitted to the Koothattukulam Community Health Centre with burns on his hands and neck following a sunburn he suffered while working at a timber mill at Thamarakkadu. He was later shifted to Muvattupuzha General Hospital. With mercury



continuing to hover in the 37-40 degrees Celsius range in the state, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued heatwave warning in Palakkad, Thrissur and Kollam on Friday.

For the second consecutive day, Palakkad was the hottest at 40.2 degrees Celsius, while Thrissur and Kottayam followed with

maximum temperature of 37.7 and 37.6 degrees Celsius, respectively. Maximum temperature in Palakkad was 41.1 degrees Celsius on Wednesday, the highest in the state this season.

Confirming the heatwave conditions, the IMD issued an alert cautioning that maximum temperature will remain above normal till April 26.

"Hot and humid weather will continue in Kerala due to high temperature and humidity. The prevailing weather can cause health risk to vulnerable people like infants, elderly and people with chronic diseases," said the IMD.

### Hot & humid weather on April 25 & 26: IMD

"People exposed to the sun for prolonged periods or doing heavy work should not work under open sky during peak hours from 11am to 3pm as the chances of heat cramp and heat rashes are high," said the IMD. Meanwhile, Konni in Pathanamthitta district reported the highest UVI of 9, while Kottarakkara in Kollam, Chengannur in Alappuzha, Changanassery in Kottayam and Munnar in Idukki each recorded UVI of 8.

The KSDMA issued an orange alert in these areas, as there is high-to-extreme risk of skin damage and heat-related issues for people exposed to direct sun.

## Constitutional clocks that just start ticking

The failure of the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill to garner the requisite two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha, and the consequential withdrawal of the Delimitation Bill and Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, are being celebrated in some quarters as a victory for fairer federalism. It is nothing of the sort. On careful constitutional reading, it is the beginning of a process far more disruptive than the passage of the Bills would have been. The public debate has been charged with rhetoric. What will actually unfold has found little mention. Some constitutional history is essential. The current Lok Sabha seat allocation—39 for Tamil Nadu, 20 for Kerala, 28 for Karnataka, 25 each for Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan, 80 for Uttar Pradesh—is derived from the 1971 census. The Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976 froze the allocation of Lok Sabha seats on the basis of 1971 population figures. The Constitution (84th Amendment) Act, 2001 extended that freeze—keeping every state's proportional share as it was in 1971—until the relevant figures for the first census taken after the year 2026 are published. The Kuldip Singh Delimitation Commission, constituted in 2002, worked entirely within this mandate. It redrew the internal boundaries of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha constituencies using 2001 census figures, but was constitutionally prohibited from altering a state's seat total. That freeze is now imminently approaching its constitutionally mandated expiry. It lifts automatically—without any further parliamentary action, without any constitutional amendment—upon the publication of the relevant figures for the first census taken after 2026. Once the figures of the ongoing census are published—realistically, between 2029 and 2031—the freeze expires of its own terms under Article 82. The Delimitation Commission then constituted will work on pure population proportionality under the unamended Article 81(2)(a). Every state's Lok Sabha allocation will reflect its share of the national population as recorded in the post-2026 census.

This is where the arithmetic becomes uncomfortable. Between 1971 and the present, the demographic divergence between the north and the south has been profound. States that invested in family planning and human development—Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana—controlled their population growth. States that did not—UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan—grew substantially faster. Under strict population proportionality, the political consequence is a structural shift in representation to the north that no political protest can reverse without a constitutional amendment. To illustrate: on current population estimates, one Lok Sabha seat in UP represents approximately 30 lakh people; in Tamil Nadu, approximately 20 to 21 lakh; in Kerala, approximately 19 lakh. Under post-2026 proportionality, that differential disappears and, with it, the south's representational advantage. Now consider what the 131st Amendment Bill, had it passed, would have delivered. It locked in the 2011 census—not the post-2026 one—as the operative basis for delimitation through a specific definitional mechanism in the Delimitation Bill, 2026. On 2011 figures, Tamil Nadu would have received approximately 57 Lok Sabha seats, an increase of 18 from its current 39. Kerala would have gone from 20 to approximately 29 and Karnataka from 28 to approximately 41. Not one southern state would have lost a single seat. Their proportional share would have declined negligibly as the overall House expanded, but their absolute representation would have grown substantially. Additionally, a constitutional provision prescribing minimum and maximum seat ranges for every state could have given the southern states a guaranteed floor written into the Constitution itself, immune to future census arithmetic. That protection is now not in place.

## Why J&K wetlands are at a tipping point

Their degradation is fast leading to a crisis of water security, livelihoods and survival

The Shallabugh wetland crisis has taken an unsettling form. Though water is still visible, life within it is disappearing. Fish populations have dwindled to alarming levels, and with them, the birds that once thrived here. Cormorants and other fish-eating species are no longer frequent visitors. What remains is a quiet, stagnant expanse that appears alive but is ecologically hollow. At a time when heatwaves are growing more intense, and weather patterns are increasingly unpredictable, the degradation of wetlands is no longer a distant environmental concern. It is fast becoming a crisis of water security, livelihoods and survival. A recent report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) casts light on the declining wetlands of Jammu and Kashmir, presenting not just an audit of governance but also a troubling portrait of ecological decline. What emerges is a story of neglect, fragmented policies and mounting climate stress that together threaten one of the Himalayan region's most vital natural systems.

The scale of loss is staggering. Of the 697 lakes recorded in 1967, nearly three-quarters have either vanished or shrunk significantly. This is more than a numerical decline. It represents the steady erasure of Kashmir's hydrological identity, where lakes and wetlands have long shaped culture, ecology and daily life.

These water bodies are not isolated features. Wetlands such as Shallabugh, Hokersar and Anchar form an intricate network linked to rivers, floodplains and underground aquifers. Their decline signals a deeper disruption in the natural processes that sustain the region. Experts point to pollution, nutrient overload and habitat disruption as the likely causes behind the collapse of aquatic life. When fish vanish, the ripple effect moves upward through the food chain, leaving birds without sustenance and breaking ecological links that once held the system together. Plus, rapid development has introduced new pressures. The expansion of roads, tunnels, hotels and resorts across Jammu and Kashmir is reshaping the landscape at an unprecedented pace. While tourism is often promoted as an economic lifeline, its unregulated growth has placed immense strain on fragile water systems.

Construction disrupts natural drainage channels and increases sediment flow into wetlands. Waste generated by tourists often finds its way into lakes and marshes. In a region where water defines both environment and economy, such patterns raise serious questions about sustainability. The transformation of land use has also sidelined traditional communities. Indigenous pastoralists, who have historically managed rangelands through sustainable practices, are facing increasing restrictions. These rangelands contribute significantly to

the local economy and play a vital ecological role by regulating water flow, conserving soil and supporting biodiversity. Yet, many landscapes are being repurposed for tourism. This shift not only disrupts livelihoods but also weakens the ecological balance that supports wetland health. Changes in grazing patterns and land cover can alter runoff and reduce groundwater recharge, compounding the stress on already shrinking wetlands. The report also underscores institutional failure. Despite national wetland regulations requiring the establishment of dedicated conservation authorities, J&K's response has been limited. The absence of a strong wetlands authority has left conservation efforts fragmented and ineffective. Multiple government departments share responsibility for wetlands, but coordination among them remains weak. Irrigation, tourism, urban development and environmental

agencies often operate with conflicting priorities. In some cases, conservation measures are undermined by parallel approvals for construction in sensitive areas. The result is a governance vacuum where ecological concerns are repeatedly pushed aside. Even within existing conservation structures, priorities appear uneven. The Lakes Conservation and Management Authority has focussed on high-profile water bodies such as the Dal Lake. Lakes like Anchar, despite their ecological and economic importance, have suffered severe degradation. This selective attention overlooks the interconnected nature of the water systems. The decline of one lake affects others, making isolated interventions insufficient. A broader, landscape-level approach is essential to restore balance. Overlaying these human-driven challenges is the accelerating force of climate change. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall and more frequent heatwaves are amplifying the vulnerability of wetlands. These ecosystems play a

crucial role in moderating climate by storing water, recharging aquifers and acting as buffers against floods. As wetlands disappear, so does their ability to regulate temperature and absorb excess water. Urban areas like Srinagar are experiencing increased heat retention linked to the loss of natural water bodies and spread of concrete surfaces. Civil society groups have stepped in to document and raise awareness. The School for Rural Development and Environment has surveyed more than 50 wetlands across the region, highlighting patterns of degradation through fieldwork and community engagement. Their findings, shared with the auditing process, have helped bring local realities into the national spotlight. Voices such as journalist Fayaz Bukhari and others have drawn attention to the issue, ensuring that the decline of wetlands is not overlooked in policy discussions. The audit report reflects this convergence of

institutional review and grassroots

observation, lending weight to its

conclusions. The consequences of

wetland loss extend beyond

environmental concerns.

Groundwater levels are falling as

recharge systems weaken. Flood risks

are rising in the absence of natural

buffers. Biodiversity is declining,

with species losing critical habitats.

Communities dependent on fishing,

farming and tourism are facing

economic uncertainty. The reduction

in carbon storage further contributes

to global warming.

Wetlands, often dismissed as

wastelands, are in fact essential life-

support systems. Their degradation is a direct threat to

human well-being. The report calls for urgent and

coordinated action. Establishing a fully functional

Wetlands Authority, enforcing regulations and adopting

integrated management approaches are critical first

steps. Equally important is the need to regulate tourism,

protect rangelands and support indigenous communities,

whose knowledge and practices have long sustained these

ecosystems. Improved waste management, pollution

control and community-led conservation efforts could

help reverse some of the damage. However, time is

crucial. Delayed action risks pushing these ecosystems

beyond recovery. The wetlands of Jammu and Kashmir

stand at a tipping point. Their decline reflects a broader

crisis where environmental stewardship has struggled to

keep pace with development and climate change. What is

at stake is not only the health of ecosystems but also the

future of communities that depend on them.



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## VIP arrogance: Influence too often trumps law & fairness

The reported taunt — “If your daddy has guts...” — is a chilling reminder of how casually some in public life treat the institutions meant to uphold the law

THE ugly episode in Madhya Pradesh, where BJP MLA Pritam Lodhi allegedly threatened police officers after his son was accused of injuring five people on the road with his speedily driven SUV, is more than a local controversy. The reported taunt — “If your daddy has guts...” — is a chilling reminder of how casually some in public life treat the institutions meant to uphold the law. What should have remained a straightforward road accident investigation has exposed a deeper malaise of the belief that political power can browbeat the police and bend accountability. Rather than allowing the law to take its course, the police were publicly challenged, warned and mocked. Such behaviour sends a dangerous signal — that rules apply only to the powerless. Sadly, this is not an isolated incident, as some similar cases of high-handedness from last year show. In Rajasthan, an MLA was reported threatening civic officials with violence from



inside a police station itself. In Bihar, a legislator faced allegations of abusing and intimidating a panchayat

official over the phone. In Uttar Pradesh, the son of a political figure was seen arguing with traffic police after being asked to move a vehicle blocking the road. Different states, different parties, same entitlement.

The damage extends beyond bureaucracy. Citizens watching such scenes conclude that justice is negotiable, that connections matter more than conduct and that public institutions can be bullied into submission. Democracy then becomes hollow theatre. Political parties cannot escape blame. Too often, they condemn arrogance in rivals while protecting it in their own ranks. Real accountability requires more than embarrassment after a viral video. It demands swift legal action, internal discipline, and visible support for officers performing lawful duty. The rule of law is tested not when the weak are prosecuted, but when the powerful are restrained.

## Strong headwinds test India

Where traditional politicians trade in credibility (fragile or fluctuating), Trump deals in defiance. He pre-bunks every critique, pre-labels every attack, and also pre-loads every scandal into a persecution playlist

INDIA is in the middle of yet another electoral cycle. States are going in for Assembly elections and the issues raised are both state-level and national. Amid the polls, the Union government hastily tried to push through contentious Bills on the women's quota in Parliament and delimitation of parliamentary constituencies. Whatever be the outcome of these efforts, the point I wish to make is that these are major distractions from the important national issues of the day. We are today confronted with a situation where international crises are threatening our economy. We are being warned of gas shortages leading to the closure (full or partial) of industrial units ranging from chemicals, fertilisers, ceramics, glass and textiles to the humble restaurants. The effect of the spike in oil prices is already apparent in airfares and industrial diesel, with the country holding its breath on what will happen at the fuel pumps once the elections are done. Inflation is further creeping into most household items, with traders increasing prices as supply-side disruptions work their way into the system. Trading houses with large exposure to the Middle East are petitioning the government for relief. Our self-sufficiency in food itself is threatened by the large-scale disruption to fertiliser production and imports. The Gulf countries are now an integral part of the global food economy. Adam Hanieh, Director of the SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) Middle East

Institute, University of London, writes in the Financial Times: “They now shape the production and circulation of food directly, supply key chemical inputs, exporting large volumes of finished fertilisers and controlling the



logistical corridors through which food and agricultural commodities move across much of the Middle East, Central and East Asia, and Africa... Famine and widening food insecurity are the foreseeable consequences of military aggression in the Gulf. That reality ought to weigh heavily on a world that has largely

understood this war through the narrow lens of oil price instability.” Do remember that all this comes in the wake of a disruptive US tariff regime from which the industry is still recovering. The Indian crude basket's average price was \$125 in March, hitting \$150 at times due to the war in the Middle East. It is liable to stay elevated even if the ceasefire holds as Gulf nations have suffered major damage to their production and distribution infrastructure. In this scenario, inflation is almost a given, unless drastic measures are taken to develop new supply lines and restore some old ones (the Russian). This calls for a diplomatic resurgence on a war footing, failing which the future looks bleak. A surge in our energy prices invariably produces a chain reaction in prices of most other commodities and services as production and transport get greatly affected. The war-related disruptions are leading to unit closures, thereby increasing unemployment. This can be seen in the recent events in Noida, where disenchanted employees are protesting and getting violent. This is a situation which can be easily used and manipulated by forces inimical to us as our economy is threatened; added to this is a diplomatic morass that we find ourselves in.

The 1999 Kargil war was decisively won by India and the mountains were cleared of foreign belligerents. India also had tremendous diplomatic support and a parallel win in foreign affairs and diplomatic relations, which I wish to highlight: During the Cologne summit in June

that year, G8 — the group of eight countries — condemned Pakistan's violation of the Line of Control (LoC) and expressed support for India. The European Union opposed the LoC violation and backed India's efforts to maintain territorial integrity. China maintained a neutral stance and urged both sides to respect the LoC. Under then President Bill Clinton, the US took a firm stance against Pakistan and demanded the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Pakistan's troops to its side of the LoC. Russia, India's long-standing ally, stood with it diplomatically and by providing military hardware. The point is that India received widespread support and Pakistan was gradually isolated and reduced almost to a sponsor of terrorism with various sanctions. Today, it is a different world. When America wants to hold talks with Iran, it co-opts Pakistan and its Field Marshal. Iran also agrees and accepts them. They are wined and dined at the White House and suitably given a place at the high table. The Saudis have tied up with Pakistan in a mutual security and defence pact. Pakistan hosted the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in October 2024 and continues to be a strategic hub for the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul rail link is also being revitalised; along with the BRI, it will lead to further integration of Pakistan with China, Turkey and Central Asian countries (we, on the other hand, have lost the Chabahar port, our potential link to Iran and Central Asia). Pakistan has re-established diplomatic relations with Bangladesh and is moving fast on economic and strategic fronts with them. The Pakistanis have also been given a seat on the UNSC as a non-permanent member.

Astana is a fascinating city in the midst of an enormous transformation. The capital city of Kazakhstan, Astana (formerly known as Akmola) took on its new role in 1997 and has been changing rapidly ever since. Founded in 1830, it was once a defensive fortification against the invading Siberian Cossacks. During the 1960s, Astana became the centre of the Virgin Lands Campaign, an attempt by the USSR to rapidly develop agricultural production to feed their expanding empire. Now, this city is distinctly modern, all thanks to the pet project of President Nursultan Abishuly Nazarbayev to make Kazakhstan the cultural forefront of Central Asia. The city has been spending billion dollars on international architects, making Astana an interesting site with its unique mix of futuristic architecture and Kazakh flair. It is home to many impressive government buildings, such as the Presidential Palace, Parliament House and Supreme Court. Kazakhstani officials mean to make Astana the capital not only of the country, but also of Central Asia. Follow our guide to know about some of the popular places to visit in Astana.

#### Bayterek

Bayterek (meaning tall poplar tree in Kazakh) is a 97-metre high monument and observation tower completed in 1997. It is meant to embody a Kazakh folk tale about a mythical tree of life and a magic bird of happiness, named Samruk, which is believed to have laid its egg between the branches of this mythic tree. The 97-metre height of the tower is meant to represent the fact that Astana became the nation's capital in 1997. The building, somewhat irreverently, has been named the 'Chupa Chups' by the locals after the lollipop brand. If you buy a ticket you can go to the observation deck and get a 360-degree view of the surrounding city. At the top lies a gilded handprint of the president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Abishuly Nazarbayev, which is actually mounted on a pedestal. The plaque beside the hand invites all visitors to place their hand upon the imprint of Nazarbayev's and make a wish. President Nazarbayev is ever-humble!

# Popular places to visit in Astana

#### Museum of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan

President Nazarbayev chose to house his own personal museum at the former seat of presidential power. The building contains displays that outline the struggle for independence as well as gifts and awards given to the president (such as a machine gun from the Saudis). Each stateroom is preserved as it was at the time when the president was working there. On the top floor lies an interesting display of Yeltsin, seeming to imply that Nazarbayev is an admirer of the former Russian president. It's a great site for those interested in the history of state diplomacy as well as shameless propaganda! Entry is free, and if you ask the people at the front, you can obtain an English guide book. You may or may not have to cover your shoes before entering the building, and will be scanned for any metal on your person.

#### National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan

With its blue glass and white marble, the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan is a striking display on Independence Square. It is centrally located, and stands next to the Independence Palace, the Palace of Peace and Harmony, and the Hazrat Sultan Mosque. Its displays cover the entire history of Kazakhstan, ranging from a full-sized yurt in the Hall of Ethnography to the Hall of Astana where there lies a chronicle of the capital's modern history. Most notable is the Hall of Gold, filled to the brim with ornaments from the Bronze Age, including the nation's symbol 'Golden Man'. The building is nothing but grand, featuring at its entrance a giant golden eagle with flapping wings, behind which an interactive screen describes the magnificent history of Kazakhstan. Subtlety is not the Kazakh way. Definitely worth a visit.

#### Hazrat Sultan Mosque

Turns out that the largest mosque in Central Asia, Hazrat Sultan Mosque, is surprisingly new. It took three years to build and was inaugurated in 2012. Considered to be one of the main landmarks in Central Asia, its construction engaged around 1,500 builders and masters. The building is built in a classic oriental style with breathtakingly beautiful interiors and ornate details reminiscent of the craft of the bygone era. 'Hazrat Sultan' means 'Apostolic Sultan'. The mosque was named in the honour of the Sufi saint Khoja Ahmed Yassawi, a poet, philosopher and sheikh. The mosque can house up to 10,000 people, and has rooms for tabernacles, wedding ceremonies, Quran reading and seminary lessons, and ablution.

#### Khan Shatyr

The Khan Shatyr is basically a giant, glowing tent. Built in the neofuturist style, it was unveiled in 2006. The 150 metres tall tent itself is enormous with 140,000 square metre base. Underneath it lies a park which is large enough to fit ten football stadiums. This space is full of shopping and entertainment venues, with everything from a boating river to a mini golf course. Designed by UK architect Norman Foster, this is the highest tent structure in the world. During the day, it is entirely flooded with sunlight; while at night, the Khan Shatyr is a site to see, lit up by bright lights that change colours.

#### Nur-Astana Mosque

Another enormous mosque, the Nur-Astana was built in 2005 to commemorate an agreement between President Nazarbayev and the former Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani. It can hold up to 5,000 worshippers. The 40-metre height of the mosque symbolises the age of Prophet Muhammad when he received his first divine revelation. The 63-metre high minarets symbolise the prophet's age when he passed away. One of the rarities of this mosque is the stone of Ka'aba from Mecca, along with the holy Quran from Saudi Arabia. Only men may enter the prayer hall, so women must use the upper gallery. Besides, the gardens are beautiful and provide a tranquil environment for a pleasant walk.

#### Atameken

Atameken is actually a huge map of Kazakhstan! It is a 200-metre long miniature version of the entire country. With over two hundred pieces of recreations of Kazakh cities and historical sites, one can easily walk around the map of the country. Make sure to visit the exhibition underneath the covered map of Astana. There you will find dioramas of Kazakh culture, industry and sports. During the summer months, there are usually English speaking guides available if you want to have a tour of the area. Make sure you keep your camera in your bag until you're well past the ticket office.

#### Assumption Russian Orthodox Cathedral

The enormous and newly-built Assumption Russian Orthodox Cathedral is simply magnificent. This all white cathedral with gold guild and sky-blue details towers over all surrounding buildings. Inside, it is nothing less than immaculate, with gold leaf murals from floor to ceiling. The altar is absolutely stunning, representing a mass of colours and a paragon of Russian Orthodox style. On the second floor, you'll find the area where the choir usually sings, while in the basement you will see the former place of worship (used when Christianity could not be practised in the open). Most of the brothers speak little English, so there are chances that you won't be able to take a tour around the church unless you know some Russian/Kazakh.

#### The State Theatre of Opera and Ballet

The State Theatre of Opera and Ballet is yet another lavish construction, made of marble and gold trimmings. The tickets can get very expensive, but if you want to see a good Kazakh, Russian or Italian opera this is the place to be. You might not think of Kazakhstan as a prime place to experience such European culture, but the productions at the State Theatre of Opera and Ballet are as good as any you'll find in the old cities of Europe. This opera house can easily rival those of Vienna and Budapest. Apart from shows, the building in itself is worth the visit—filled to the brim with interesting pieces of art. The staff is very polite and helpful.



## SHALIMAR BAGH



The Shalimar Bagh in Sanskrit means the abode of love. It is the largest Mughal garden in Kashmir. The Shalimar Bagh was built in the reign of Pravarasena II who founded the city of Srinagar and ruled Kashmir from 79 AD to 139 AD. In 1619, Emperor Jahangir enlarged and beautified

the garden for Nur Jahan and named it Farah Baksh, which means The Delightful.

The Shalimar Bagh is located on the right bank of the Dal and is dotted with old Chinar trees and exotic wild flowers. The greenery, gentle sound of flowing water, delightful view of the Dal Lake and the mountains here will soothe your senses and calm your nerves. In the winter months, the garden looks dry and bare and wears a tired look, but even that is charming to look at. If you're in the mood for a romantic walk or you enjoy landscape and nature photography, this is the perfect place to visit. Scenes from several Bollywood movies including Saat Khoon Maaf and Dil Kya Kare have been shot at the Shalimar Bagh.

Although a part of the Dal Lake wetlands, it is considered a separate lake in itself because of its size. Nageen is deeper, cleaner than Dal and you will find a number of adventurous people swimming in the lake. If you are planning to swim here, do keep an eye out for shikaras, motor boats and other such distractions. I am often asked by travelers which lake is better for a houseboat stay. I recommend Nageen over Dal as I find Nageen a lot more peaceful and cleaner. The views of Zabarwan range, Shankracharya Hill and Hari Parbat from here are beautiful and I enjoy taking

pictures from the houseboat and shikara. Couples prefer shikara ride here over Dal because of its tranquil atmosphere. Birding enthusiasts too have a field day here, especially during winters when a number of migratory birds like waders make this lake their home. The lake is home to

## NAGEEN LAKE

a number of resident species too. Keep a look out for the pied kingfishers as they put on an amazing display while fishing.



**Interlaken is a quiet resort town located in the stunning country of Switzerland. A rising tourist destination among its European counterparts, Interlaken is a hub of myriad places to visit. Sightseeing options in the city are aplenty and you will need to plan your days according to your preference. Take a day out to go on a train ride along the valleys of Mount Jungfrauoch or drive down to Lake Brienz and Lake Thun for a soothing stroll. Be adventurous in the St Beatus Caves while you try to spot any remains of a dragon from folklores or just pay a visit to the Interlaken Monastery and Castle.**

## Places to visit in Interlaken that will charm you

### Mount Jungfrauoch

Famously known as the Top of Europe, Mount Jungfrauoch is beyond doubt the prime tourist attraction in Interlaken. The entire Jungfrauoch region is a paradise set in snow and lush green vegetation where a

traveller can definitely find solace and peace. At over 11000 ft, the summit of this range can be reached by a train ride, an experience that is going to be etched in your memory. Thanks to the staggering altitude, on a clear day you can see as far as Italy, Germany and France! The Ice Palace situated in the heart of the mountain is home to a rich and colourful collection of ice sculptures. You can also stand witness to the mind-numbing view of Europe's longest remaining glacier Great Aletsch from Jungfrauoch.

### Lake Thun

Situated on the western side of Interlaken, Lake Thun is an Alpine lake in the Bernese Oberland region of Switzerland. Named after the city of Thun, on its northern shore, this lake was created after the last glacial period. Earlier it was a part of Lake Brienz but after 10th century it split

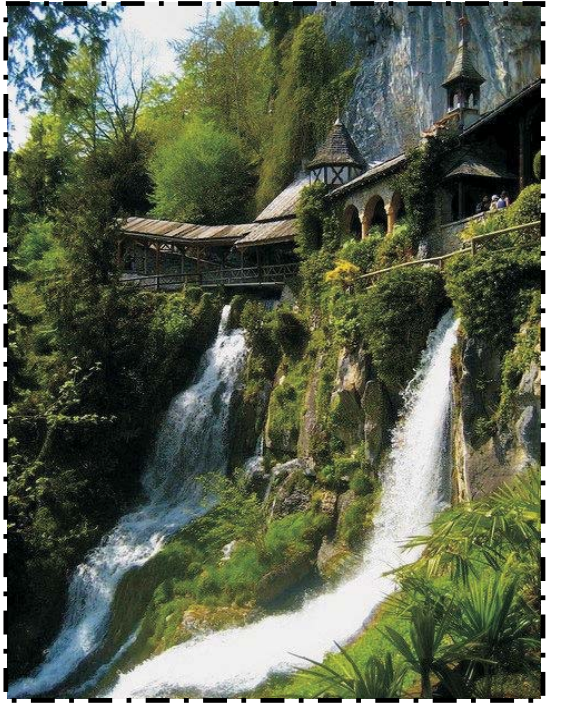


from it and now is an independent water body. Surrounded by amazing landscapes in all sides, Lake Thun is a treat for the ones who find peace in nature's grandeur. This lake offers wonderful boating experience and there are different boat trips to be made here. The main trip starts from Interlaken itself and takes about 2 hours to complete. A boat trip over the waters of Lake Thun is the best way to enjoy the beautiful region at a slow pace.

### St Beatus Caves

A collection of caves located on the northeastern shore of Lake Thun near Interlaken, St Beatus Caves are a part of the local folklore. Legend has it that thousands of years ago, there lived a ferocious dragon in those caves that let no one near them. Meanwhile wandering Irish monk St Beatus chose the cave for hermitage and came face to face with the tyrant dragon. After an epic face-off, he drove it away to the depths of Lake Thun and made it human-friendly. Folklores apart, St. Beatus Caves are a marvellous work of nature that leads deep into the interior of the immense Niederhorn Massif. A pre-historic settlement as well as the cell of St Beatus can also be viewed in the caves. Take a cave tour that includes visiting stalactites and stalagmites crisscrossed by underground waterfalls.

Drive down to this beautiful lake from Interlaken for a day spent amid nature and its myriad marvels. Located just north of the Alps, Lake Brienz is about 14 km in length and 2.8 km in width and all these at an elevation of 1850 ft above sea level! The lake gets its name from a nearby village called Brienz. Before the 10th century, this lake was even bigger as Lake Thun was not yet divided by a tongue of land called Bodeli. Passenger ships have been plying over the waters of Lake Brienz since 1839 and you can enjoy a ride on one of them even today.



## A sneak peek into the prominent places to visit in Kalimpong

Kalimpong is one of the most frequented hill stations in the Northeast, around 50 km from Darjeeling. The place, apart from being applauded for its beautiful natural sights and Buddhist monasteries is also known for its ginger production in huge amount. Among various beautiful places to visit in Kalimpong, Dr. Graham's Home, Mangal Dham, Deolo Hill and Hanuman Tok are the most significant ones. For those with a religious bend, there are splendid monasteries such as Zang Dhok Palri Phodang (Durpin Dara) and Tharpa Choling Monastery. Apart from all these religious buildings and temples, Kalimpong is cactus and flower nurseries that are quite a charmer here. Overlooking the great Himalayas, Kalimpong makes for a perfect tourist holiday destination. Here is a list of some unmissable sights of Kalimpong!

### Dr. Graham's Home

Dr. Graham's Home is one of the prime places of attractions situated on lower steep of Deolo Hills in Kalimpong. Founded by Sir Anderson in 1900s, this place is an important education hub here. The place is spread across a huge 550 acres land and a number of vocational courses are practiced here such as medication, poultry, farming, dairy management and baking, among others. Moreover, this international institution gets loads of funds from not only national but myriad prominent international NGOs. Tourists visiting Kalimpong make sure to pay a visit to this famous institute that has earned fame for itself!

### Mangal Dham

Mangal Dham is one of the most significant religious centres in the beautiful hill station of Kalimpong. The place was built in the memory of Guruji Shir Mangaldasji Maharaj who in 1940 arrived at Kalimpong and made it his home. He got several orphanages, schools and temples constructed here to serve God and humans. Spreading over an area of about two acres, the temple features a prayer hall on the top floor where idol of Raj Shyamji is placed. So make sure to visit this pure and pious spots whenever in Kalimpong.

### Tharpa Choling Monastery

Tharpa Choling Monastery, founded in the year 1912 by Domo Geshe Rinpoche, is counted amongst the oldest Gelugpa monasteries in the country. Perched on a hilltop in Kalimpong, this beautiful gompa with its colourful

idols of the presiding deity creates a perfect peaceful ambience. You can see magnificent Himalayas from topmost floor of the monastery. Later, several changes and additions have made to the monastery. It has now become an unmissable tourist spot of Kalimpong.

### Zang Dhok Palri Phodang

A sense of calmness and quietness prevails as you enter Zang Dhok Palri Phodang, which is also known as Durpin Monastery and Lava Monastery. Consecrated in 1976 by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, this largest monastery of Kalimpong houses the rare Kangyur text in 108 volumes which he brought from Tibet. The monastery is quite popular for its three-dimensional appearance, majestic architecture and beautiful paintings.

Perched at 1372 m on the peak of Durpin Hill, Zang Dhok Palri Phodang is also a wonderful place to enjoy spectacular views of the town and the surrounding forest with rich flora and fauna. If you are there on a clear day, spend time enjoying the beautiful sight of Mt Kanchenjunga.

### Deolo Hill

Deolo, at an altitude of around 5500 feet, is Kalimpong's

highest point that offers most spectacular views of the region. On one side, you will see the buzzing town, nearby villages, the mighty Kanchenjunga and the vast Relli Valley while on the other, you will see the Teesta River meandering its way beautifully. On a clear day, you can also see the snow-clad mountains of west Sikkim from here. It won't be wrong to say that Deolo Hill offers a 360-degree view of Kalimpong and the neighbouring region.

There is a well-maintained tourist guesthouse atop the hill which is run by the government. You need to make bookings in advance to avoid inconvenience as this property is quite famous because of its outstanding location. Besides, the gardens are well manicured and full of exotic varieties of flowers. No wonder, the parks are a popular picnic spot for tourists as well as locals.

### Hanuman Tok

When you go to Deolo Hill, you cannot miss Hanuman Tok which is located very close. As the name suggests, there is a huge 30 feet high statue of Lord Hanuman. There is also a small and clean Durga Temple situated in

the same premises near the entrance.

Be prepared to climb up a fleet of stairs if you want to reach Lord Hanuman's statue. It is worth the effort as the hilltop offers a spectacular view of the Kanchenjunga peak on a clear day. You can also see the neighbouring Sikkim and the beautiful Lava and Kafer hills on a bright sunny day.

Hanuman Tok is about 5 km from Kalimpong town and the drive is hassle-free. Taxi drivers are well versed with this area hence they know where to park the car and let you enjoy the views and click pictures.

### Lepcha Museum

For art and culture enthusiasts, a visit to Lepcha Museum is a must. Historically, Lepcha community is indigenous to this region and presently, they reside mainly in Kalimpong, Darjeeling, Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan. The museum is an effort to preserve and illustrate their culture and tradition. Located close to the main town, the museum displays various articles of worship, original Lepcha musical instruments, handicraft items and manuscripts. Every piece reflects and illustrates the life, culture and tradition of the community. For those who have interest in studying heritage and old collections, Lepcha Museum is one of the essential places to visit in Kalimpong.

You are lucky if you meet the 90-year-old Padmashree Sonam Tshering Lepcha who single-handedly runs the Lepcha school and the museum, one of its kind in whole of Asia. He is a wonderful musician himself and plays various wind instruments.

### Explore cactus and flower nurseries

Considered as one of the finest cactus nurseries in Asia, Kalimpong is a must visit for plant lovers. It is fascinating to see almost 2000 varieties of cacti, ranging from the simple to the most exotic ones at one place. The collection is spellbinding. Depending on the variety, the price ranges from as low as Rs. 50 to a few lacs! It has been developed and maintained as a private venture; hence, the nursery is well maintained.

Did you know that Kalimpong produces 80% of India's gladiolas and is an important orchid growing area? I guess not, just like me! Sri Ganesh Moni Pradhan Nursery and Udai Mani Pradhan Nursery are worth visiting.



# Heatwave May Melt 4% Of GDP, Raise Medical Bills, Dent Productivity

**Extreme heat has already accounted for around \$159 billion in lost productivity, roughly 5.4 per cent of India's income.**

**New Delhi.(Agency)**  
As the India Meteorological Department (IMD) issues widespread heatwave alerts across Haryana-Chandigarh-Delhi, Punjab, East Rajasthan, Bihar, Vidarbha (Maharashtra), Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, economists and health experts are warning that the blistering heat will do more than sizzle temperatures -- it will squeeze economic growth, cut productivity and balloon medical costs. "Heatwaves in India are no longer just a health problem; they're a major economic crisis," says Dr Sujit Paul, Zota Healthcare Ltd. He points to analyses showing that extreme heat has already accounted for around \$159 billion in lost productivity, roughly 5.4 per cent of India's income, with over 160 billion work hours lost annually because workers are unable to operate at peak output. He adds, "By the end of the decade, heatwaves

could hurt India's economy much more than anticipated, costing up to around 2.5-4.5 per cent of the country's GDP." Some estimates even suggest heat stress could cost India 8.7 per cent of GDP by mid-century without policy action.

Heat exposed sectors such as agriculture, construction and informal urban labour face the brunt. Outdoor workers, in particular, earn substantially less as they are forced to stop work during peak heat hours.

**The Hidden Cost Of Heat**

According to Dr Rashmi Ardey, Director Programme (Health), Smile Foundation, heat stress is now "imposing a substantial socio-economic burden through reduced labour productivity and income losses." She notes that a 1-degree Celsius rise in temperature can lower daily wages by



around 16 per cent, and in severe conditions, earnings can fall by 40 per cent or more. That's a direct hit to millions of households that rely on daily wages.

Ardey's observations resonate with global estimates suggesting heat stress could reduce total working hours by 2-3 per cent by 2030. This would be a significant dent in a labour-intensive economy such as India's, where a

large share of workers are employed outdoors.

Back in 2021-22, India lost an estimated 160-191 billion labour hours. This was equivalent to roughly 5.4-6.3 per cent of GDP -- translating into hundreds of billions of dollars in lost output. According to studies, informal workers are up to 17 times more likely to suffer productivity losses due to heat exposure.

**Medical Bills Add Fuel To The Fire**

Heat-related illnesses -- from dehydration and heat exhaustion to severe heatstroke -- lead to a rise in medical expenditure during peak summers. Dr Nitin Jagasia, Regional Director Emergency Services, Western Region, Apollo Hospitals, underscores the financial shock: treatment of severe heatstroke can cost between Rs 1 lakh and Rs 2 lakh per patient, enough to wipe out a working family's savings.

## 2.5 yrs, 20 hearings and another extension: Delhi HC plea flags delay in DCPCR chairperson appointment

**New Delhi.(Agency)**  
Nearly two years, over 20 hearings, and repeated rebukes from the Delhi High Court later, the city government continues to delay the appointment of a chairperson to the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights -- a post lying vacant since July 2023. In its latest move, the government has sought yet another extension, drawing sharp criticism in court. Following this, a fresh application was moved before the Delhi High Court on Thursday seeking an urgent hearing in a long-pending case concerning the functioning of the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR), alleging continued delays by the Delhi government in appointing its Chairperson and members. Filed by an advocate, the application flagged that despite repeated directions from the court, the process of filling vacancies in the statutory body remains incomplete. The matter, pending since 2018, is now currently listed for July 3, 2026, but the intervenor has urged the court to take it up earlier, citing its "urgent and crucial" nature involving children in need of care and protection. The petition stemmed from compliance with directions issued by the Supreme Court of India in the landmark Sampurna Behura v. Union of India case, which mandates proper functioning of child protection mechanisms across states. In its February 18, 2026 order, the HC had pulled up the GNCTD for its "lackadaisical approach" in operationalising the commission, noting that it had remained non-functional since July 2023. The court had expressed concern that such delays undermine key child welfare legislation, including the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, and the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act.

## BJP, Congress file nominations for MCD mayor, deputy posts

**New Delhi.(Agency)**  
The Bharatiya Janata Party and Indian National Congress on Thursday filed nominations for the posts of mayor, deputy mayor and members of the Standing Committee of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, while the Aam Aadmi Party chose not to participate in the mayoral contest. The BJP fielded Parvesh Wahi for mayor and Monika Pant for deputy mayor. Wahi, councillor from Ward No. 53 (Rohini-East) and former Leader of the House, filed his nomination on the last day, April 23. Pant, councillor from Ward No. 206 (Anand Vihar), also submitted her papers. From the Congress, councillor Zarif (Ward No. 234) filed nomination for Mayor, while Rajesh Kumar Gupta (Ward No. 39) filed for Deputy Mayor. The AAP, however, did not field candidates for the two top posts, stating that it wanted to give the BJP "another opportunity" to govern Delhi and be held fully accountable. For vacant Standing Committee seats, the BJP nominated Jai Bhagwan Yadav (Ward No. 27, Begampur) and Manish Chaddha (Ward No. 82), while AAP's Jalaj Kumar (Ward No. 55) filed nomination for one seat. After filing his nomination, Wahi said clearing garbage and improving civic infrastructure would be top priorities. The elections for Mayor and Deputy Mayor will be held during the MCD House meeting scheduled on April 29. The electoral college comprises 273 voters, and a candidate requires 137 votes to win. **AAP's Ankush Narang reappointed LoP in civic body** The AAP has reappointed Ankush Narang as Leader of Opposition in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. Narang said the role reflects people's trust and pledged to raise civic issues with dedication. He claimed the House functioned smoothly over the past year with AAP in opposition, unlike earlier disruptions. He said the party raised concerns over monsoon preparedness, waterlogging, pollution and vector-borne diseases. Narang alleged the BJP failed to deliver in the MCD.

## 'Enticement, Intimidation By Trinamool': Adhir Chowdhury On Women's Turnout

**New Delhi.(Agency)**  
91 lakh voters deleted from its electoral rolls, West Bengal recorded a 91 per cent turnout in the first phase of Assembly polls today. But more than the overall turnout, it is the presence of women that's key to this election, veteran Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury indicated today. Women have always been the core supporters of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. But their overwhelming presence at the hustings has been interpreted positively this time by both Trinamool Congress and the BJP. While Trinamool leaders said they were there show support for the party, the BJP declared that it was their anger that they had come to project through the ballot box following events like the RG Kar rape case and the Sandeshkhali sex abuse.

**"The Trinamool has both enticed and intimidated female voters, warning them that if they did not vote for the party, the 'Lakshmir Bhandar' scheme would be discontinued," said Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury**



In an exclusive interview with , Adhir Chowdhury gave a completely different spin to the matter. "The Trinamool has both enticed and

intimidated female voters, warning them that if they did not vote for the party, the 'Lakshmir Bhandar' scheme would be discontinued," said the 70-year-old.

He, however, added that a high voter turnout among women is, "in itself, a very positive development for our society". Asked if the 'Lakshmir Bhandar' scheme -- a financial assistance scheme for the poor -- has had an impact, he answered in the affirmative. There is the "fear that if Mamata Banerjee does not return to power, the scheme will be shut down," he said.

When pointed out that the BJP also promised a scheme that would provide more financial assistance, he said there is a fundamental difference between a party that is currently providing money and another that is just promising to do so in future.

## Delhi begins online regularisation of unauthorised colonies from April 24

**New Delhi.(Agency)**  
The process for regularisation of properties in unauthorised colonies in Delhi will begin from April 24, allowing residents to apply online through the SWAGAM portal of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), officials said. The move follows the Centre's rollout of a new policy earlier this month to regularise such colonies on an "as is where is" basis. According to officials, property owners in 1,521 identified unauthorised colonies can log on to the SWAGAM portal to apply for registration. Applicants who already possess conveyance deeds (for properties on government land) or authorisation slips (for properties on private land), earlier issued by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), can directly apply for regularisation.

Those lacking these documents will be redirected to the PM-UDAY portal to obtain them before proceeding further.

Under the revised framework, the authority to issue conveyance deeds and authorisation slips has been transferred from the DDA to the Revenue Department of the Delhi government. Dedicated cells under Additional District Magistrates (ADMs) are being set up in all 13 districts, with ADMs acting as nodal officers.



The initiative is expected to benefit over 10 lakh households. Once documents are issued, the MCD will grant regularisation certificates via the SWAGAM portal. Officials said the entire process will be conducted online through an integrated digital system.

## Delhi murder accused scored 90% in Class 12, pawned marksheet for betting

**Once a promising student, Rahul Meena's descent into online gambling and mounting debt culminated in the brutal murder of the IRS officer in Delhi.**

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

A year ago, when 26 civilians were brutally killed in Pahalgam's Baisaran Valley, the Pakistani terrorists who carried out the massacre emerged from the tree line of the meadow. Baisaran, located above Pahalgam town, is surrounded by forested slopes. Imagine it as a hidden bowl in the mountains, among the most treacherous in India. This mountain range, called the Pir Panjal range, shapes the mountain zone close to Baisaran Valley. Pir Panjal has a history, quite a long one, when it comes to terrorism. Back in the 2000s, when it was not fenced, it allowed cross-border terrorism and deodar, form a canopy stretching for kilometres across the Line of Control (LoC), making it difficult for surveillance drones to do their job efficiently. However, there are also stretches of open, rocky ground, along with terrain that remains snow-covered for much of the year. This is terrain where there is heavy deployment of the Indian Army, and where special forces units operate in full force. A serving Lt Colonel says ambushes are set up in these forests depending on intelligence that comes from the ground.

The family said Meena's father had previously worked in Delhi, including in houses of Income Tax officers. Through these contacts, Meena later secured work at the home of the IRS officer whose daughter was killed. He had been employed there for about eight months and was familiar with the house layout.

Police said his gambling continued during his time in Delhi, with Meena allegedly losing large sums and borrowing money from shopkeepers and locals. He is also accused of cheating the family while running errands, including taking money for medicines but failing to pay shopkeepers and instead purchasing items on credit. After complaints about his conduct reached the officer's family, he was dismissed from the job. Meena returned to his village around one-and-a-half months ago, telling his family he was on leave and had arranged a replacement. Even then, he continued gambling online. His family claimed that days before the Delhi incident, he had won Rs 5 lakh, after which friends encouraged him to play using their accounts.

## IRS officer's daughter's killer showed psychopathic traits with violent past: Probe

**A 23-year-old accused in the IRS officer's daughter murder case has been described as psychopathic, with a history of violence and a gambling addiction, investigators said.**

**New Delhi.(Agency)**  
Investigators in the Delhi IRS officer's daughter murder case have described the accused, 23-year-old Rahul Meena, as having psychopathic tendencies and a history of violent behaviour, according to sources. They said Meena was already infamous in his village for his aggression and addicted to Teen Patti card games and also used to bet on other apps as well.

Delhi Police have recovered more than Rs 1 lakh in cash and stolen jewellery from Meena. The recovery was made from a hotel room in Dwarka, where he had been staying after the crime. Police said he paid the hotel rent using money stolen from the victim's house. During interrogation, Meena admitted to two rape cases so far. Investigators are also identifying people who



had lent him money, as he was addicted to online betting and frequently borrowed funds to gamble.

**2 RAPES WITHIN 12 HOURS**

The case involves a chilling sequence of crimes committed within a span of less than 12 hours. On Tuesday night around 10:30 pm, Meena allegedly entered a neighbour's house in

Rajasthan's Alwar, assaulted her, and raped her. He allegedly strangled and threatened her before fleeing around 11 pm, warning her against reporting the crime. An FIR was later registered based on the survivor's complaint.

The next morning, Meena travelled nearly 200 km to Delhi and entered a residential society in south-east Delhi's Kailash Hills at around 6:30 am. He proceeded to the flat of his former employer, an IRS officer, where he had worked as a house help until a few months ago.

Police said Meena used his familiarity with the house layout, access codes, and spare key locations to enter the flat. He went to the rooftop study room, where the 22-year-old victim, an engineering graduate and UPSC aspirant, was studying. He allegedly attacked her with a lamp and a heavy object, causing severe injuries. When she resisted, he strangled her until she lost consciousness.

## HCLTech, TCS, Infosys: Why are IT stocks falling again?

New Delhi.(Agency)

Major information technology (IT) stocks came under fresh pressure on Friday, with heavyweight names such as HCLTech, TCS, Infosys and Tech Mahindra trading lower as investors turned cautious over global growth concerns, weak management commentary and renewed foreign fund selling. At around 1:01 pm on the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), Infosys was down 6.20% at Rs 1,165.50, emerging as one of the biggest losers in the pack. HCLTech fell 5.70% to Rs 1,204.40, while TCS slipped 4.78% to Rs 2,402.05. Tech Mahindra was down 4.71% at Rs 1,353.55. The latest decline reflects a sector that is still struggling to regain investor confidence.

### WHY IT STOCKS ARE UNDER PRESSURE

The biggest concern remains slowing demand in key overseas markets such as the US and Europe, where most Indian IT companies earn a large share of their revenue. When global companies become uncertain about growth, they often delay technology spending, reduce discretionary projects or renegotiate contracts.

That has a direct impact on Indian software exporters. Recent earnings commentary from several IT majors has also done little to calm nerves. Management teams have spoken about cautious client behaviour, slower decision-making and an uneven recovery in deal conversion. While large contracts continue to come in, investors are worried that revenue growth may stay muted for longer than expected.

Another factor hurting sentiment is foreign investor activity. IT stocks are among the most widely owned sectors by overseas funds. When foreign portfolio investors trim exposure to emerging markets or move money into safer assets, frontline IT names often face selling pressure.

## Businesses dole out up to \$4 million to cross Panama Canal during Strait of Hormuz chokehold

PANAMA CITY.(Agency)

Businesses have doled out up to as much as USD 4 million to move boats through the Panama Canal with the Strait of Hormuz effectively closed, according to the Panama Canal Authority, in a move that has created a seismic shift in global trade flows.

While passage through the waterway usually comes at a flat rate via reservations, companies without reservations can cross by paying an additional fee in an auction for slots, which are awarded to the highest bidder rather than waiting for days off the coast of Panama City. That price has ballooned in recent weeks as Iran and the United States have bottlenecked the key shipping route, the Strait of Hormuz, and demand for those slots has skyrocketed. Ships have increasingly travelled through the Panama Canal as shipments are rerouted and buyers purchase from other countries to avoid commerce through the now-treacherous West Asia waterway. "With all the bombings, the missiles, the drones ... companies are saying it's safer and less expensive to cross through the Panama Canal," said Rodrigo Noriega, said lawyer and analyst in Panama City. "All of this is affecting global supply chains."

Meanwhile, Noriega said Panama's government is "maximizing what it can earn from the Panama Canal." The average price to cross through the canal ranges between USD 300,000 and USD 400,000 depending on the vessel. Previously, to get an earlier crossing, businesses would pay an additional USD 250,000 to USD 300,000. In recent weeks, the average additional cost has jumped to around USD 425,000. Ricaurte Vásquez, the canal's administrator, said another company that he would not name paid an extra USD 4 million when its fuel vessel had to change its destination because of ongoing geopolitical tensions. "It was a ship carrying fuel to Europe, and they redirected it to Singapore, and it needed to get there because Singapore is running out of fuel," he said.

## Rupee slips 24 paise to 94.25 against US dollar in early trade

New Delhi.(Agency)

The rupee stayed on a downward track for the fifth straight day, losing 24 paise to 94.25 against the US dollar in early trade on Friday, weighed by volatile crude oil prices and an elevated US dollar, with prospects of West Asia peace talks turning hazier.

Analysts said that despite a ceasefire in place between the United States and Iran, ship movement through the Strait of Hormuz remained uncertain after the US military on Thursday seized another Iranian oil tanker, intensifying the standoff and unsettling the fuel prices worldwide. President Donald Trump has also ordered the US military to "shoot and kill" small Iranian boats that deploy mines to choke traffic through the Strait of Hormuz. Unabated withdrawal of foreign funds from domestic stock markets also added to investors' worries, triggering a massive sell-off in equities and further dragging down the local currency, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 94.25 and stayed at the same level in early deals, registering a loss of 24 paise from the previous closing level. Extended its losing streak for the fourth consecutive session on Thursday, the rupee settled 23 paise lower at 94.01. In the past four sessions, the domestic unit has lost nearly 1.4 per cent, since the closing level of 92.91 recorded on April 17. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was 0.12 per cent higher at 98.71. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading 0.86 per cent higher at USD 105.97 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity markets the 30-share Sensex was trading 547.02 points or 0.70 per cent down at 77,116.98 in early trade, while the Nifty lost 159.75 points or 0.66 per cent to 24,013.30.

# Will petrol, diesel prices rise after elections? Here's what we know

**The government has dismissed rumours of a petrol and diesel price hike, but elevated crude prices and pressure on oil retailers have kept the debate firmly alive.**

New Delhi.(Agency)

Fresh reports suggesting a possible petrol and diesel price hike after the ongoing elections have triggered concern among consumers, but the government has said no such proposal is currently under consideration. The speculation began after a report citing Kotak Institutional Equities said petrol and diesel prices may need to rise by Rs 25-28 per litre if global crude oil prices remain elevated and domestic

retail fuel prices continue to stay unchanged. The estimate was linked to higher crude costs and the pressure on state-run oil marketing companies (OMCs) that sell fuel in the domestic market. The report quickly gained traction because petrol and diesel prices in India have remained largely unchanged for an extended period despite fluctuations in international crude oil markets.

However, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has rejected claims of any imminent increase. In an official clarification, the ministry said there is no proposal under consideration by the government to raise petrol or diesel prices, and described such reports as misleading. "There are some news reports suggesting a price hike of petrol and diesel. It is hereby clarified that there is no such proposal under consideration by the Government. Such news items are designed to create fear and panic amongst

the citizens and are mischievous and misleading," the ministry said. Following the ministry's clarification, it



would be fair to say that no immediate increase in petrol and diesel prices appears likely after the elections.

While that comes as a relief for consumers, it also keeps the spotlight on state-run oil marketing companies, which may have to continue absorbing pressure if global crude prices remain above \$100 per

barrel. When crude oil prices rise internationally, but domestic pump prices stay unchanged, companies such as Indian Oil Corporation, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited can see their marketing margins shrink, since part of the higher cost cannot be passed on immediately to consumers. Market analysts have also said the current pricing structure can be maintained in the short term if crude remains within a manageable range, but sustained high oil prices would increase pressure on company earnings and balance sheets.

There are signs consumers are watching closely. Recent media reports have indicated that fuel sales rose this month, suggesting some buyers may be filling tanks early amid fears of a possible hike. For now, the government has drawn a line under hike rumours. Whether that holds will depend largely on where crude prices head next.

## 8th Pay Commission: Key meetings to begin in Delhi from April 28, more rounds planned

New Delhi.(Agency)

The 8th Pay Commission process is slowly picking up pace, with meetings set to begin in Delhi. At the same time, a widely discussed Rs 72,000 salary figure is creating confusion among central government employees.

### MEETINGS TO BE HELD FROM APRIL 28 IN DELHI

In a notice dated April 24, 2026, the Commission said it has received a large number of requests from employee unions and associations for meetings scheduled between April 28 and April 30 in Delhi. Due to time constraints, not all requests can be accommodated during these dates. However, the Commission has assured that more meetings will be held in Delhi as well as in different states and Union Territories in the coming months. It also advised stakeholders outside Delhi-NCR to wait for future schedules when the Commission visits their respective states or nearby regions.

Earlier, as per a separate notice, a team of the Commission was scheduled to visit

Dehradun, Uttarakhand, on April 24.

### RS 72,000 FIGURE IS NOT AN OFFICIAL DEMAND

Amid these developments, a figure of Rs



72,000 as the expected minimum salary has been widely circulating online and in reports. In fact, the Rs 72,000 figure appears to be based on estimates and projections rather than any official submission. It is likely linked to different salary calculations under various fitment factor scenarios, which some analysts and reports have been discussing as possible outcomes.

Moreover, available records suggest that this is not an official demand submitted

to the Commission. WHAT IS THE ACTUAL DEMAND?

The formal proposal comes from the National Council-Joint Consultative Machinery (NC-JCM), Staff Side, which represents central government employees.

According to its memorandum, the body has demanded a minimum basic pay of Rs 69,000 along with a fitment factor of 3.83. This proposal has been reported by several mainstream publications as part of the ongoing consultation process. WHAT SHOULD EMPLOYEES EXPECT NOW?

At this stage, the Pay Commission is in the consultation phase, where it gathers inputs from employee groups and stakeholders. Final recommendations on salaries, allowances and fitment factors will only come later, after detailed discussions and review.

For now, employees may need to wait for official updates rather than rely on circulating figures.

## Microsoft offers buyouts to staff: What does employee buyout mean?

HONG KONG.(Agency)

Microsoft will offer voluntary buyouts to some US employees, a first for the 51-year-old software giant, as the tech industry grapples with major changes sparked by the artificial intelligence boom. About 7% of US employees are eligible, reported CNBC. The one-time retirement program, announced in a memo on Thursday, will be available to US workers at the senior director level and below whose years of employment and age add up to 70 or higher. The move has brought attention to a term that many employees hear but may not fully understand — buyouts. The development raises a broader question: what exactly is a buyout, and how does it affect employees?

**WHAT IS AN EMPLOYEE BUYOUT?** An employee buyout is a voluntary exit option offered by a company, where workers are given financial incentives



to leave their jobs. Unlike layoffs, where employees are asked to leave, a buyout gives workers a choice. Companies usually offer: A lump sum payment

Extended benefits

**Early retirement options**

The idea is simple. Instead of forcing job cuts, companies try to reduce staff strength by encouraging employees to leave on their own terms. WHY COMPANIES OFFER BUYOUTS

Buyouts are often used when companies

want to cut costs, restructure teams, or shift focus without resorting to layoffs. They are common during: Business slowdowns Industry transitions

### Organisational restructuring

In Microsoft's case, the move comes at a time when the tech industry is going through a major shift driven by artificial intelligence. The company is investing heavily in data centres and AI infrastructure, while also adjusting its workforce needs.

### HOW MICROSOFT'S BUYOUT WILL WORK

Microsoft's programme will be available to US employees at the senior director level and below, whose age and years of service add up to 70 or more. Eligible employees and managers will receive details on May 7. However, those in sales roles with incentive-based pay will not be part of the programme.

# AI security risk for banks? Why has Nirmala Sitharaman raised concerns

**At the centre of the issue is Anthropic's new AI model, known as Claude Mythos Preview, capable of identifying and exploiting vulnerabilities across major operating systems and web browsers when prompted.**

New Delhi.(Agency)

A high-level meeting called by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman with top bank officials on Thursday has brought a new concern into focus: whether rapidly advancing artificial intelligence tools could pose a risk to the country's banking system. The discussion centred around the potential cybersecurity threats linked to Anthropic's Claude Mythos model, a powerful AI system that has recently come under scrutiny after reports of

unauthorised access. The development has added urgency to discussions within the government and financial sector, especially as banks increasingly rely on digital systems and AI tools. The company itself has described the model as highly advanced, capable of identifying and exploiting vulnerabilities across major operating systems and web browsers when prompted.

The model is not meant for public use. It is being tested in a controlled environment under a programme called Project Glasswing, with access limited to a handful of companies such as Nvidia, Google, Amazon Web Services, Apple and Microsoft. However, according to a Bloomberg report, a small group of users managed to gain access to the model through a third-party vendor environment on the same day it was introduced for limited testing.

Anthropic has confirmed that it is investigating the claim of unauthorised access. "We're investigating a report claiming unauthorised access to Claude Mythos Preview through one of our third-

party vendor environments," an Anthropic spokesperson said. WHY THIS MATTERS FOR BANKS

This incident has raised a key concern. If a restricted and highly powerful AI system



can be accessed without permission, it raises the risk of misuse in sectors that rely heavily on digital infrastructure, including banking.

The Claude Mythos model is designed to detect security flaws. But in the wrong hands, such capabilities could potentially be used to exploit weaknesses in financial systems. This is where the government's concern comes in. Sitharaman's warning highlights the risk that AI tools could

move from being a defence mechanism to a possible threat if not properly controlled.

**WHY A MEETING WAS CALLED**

The concern over such risks has led to discussions at the highest levels. The government is understood to be assessing how emerging AI tools could impact financial stability, cybersecurity, and data protection. The unauthorised access incident appears to have acted as a trigger, showing that even controlled AI deployments may not be fully secure. This has pushed regulators to take a closer look at how banks are using AI and what safeguards are in place. The issue is not just about one AI model. It reflects a broader shift in how powerful AI systems are becoming. As banks adopt AI for fraud detection, customer service, and operations, the same technology could be used to identify gaps in systems if misused.

This creates a new kind of risk where the threat is not just hackers, but advanced tools that can automate and scale attacks.

## Short news

## Beware! Imposters send messages as GBA chiefs, seek cash from babus

BENGALURU.(Agency)

Imposters have now begun to target the Chief Commissioner of Greater Bengaluru Authority M Maheshwar Rao and city corporation commissioners, seeking financial favours from subordinates.

As per officials, the imposters have used a foreign phone contact number and the image of Maheshwar Rao, East City Commissioner DS Ramesh, North City Commissioner Pommala Sunil Kumar, South City Commissioner KN Ramesh and Central City Commissioner Rajendra Cholan in the DP and circulated messages to officials in their contacts, seeking financial assistance.

On suspicion, officials who received the message filed a police complaint, and investigation is under way. Meanwhile, communication has been sent across the GBA to remain vigilant and report the matter to the police.

Officials in the GBA head office said unknown persons have sent messages in the name of the GBA Chief Commissioner from an Indian mobile number +91 7631678095 and an international number +62 815580651 to subordinates.

"For the past few days, it has been noticed that fraudsters have been sending messages to officials in various ways through WhatsApp accounts with photographs of the GBA Chief Commissioner and corporation commissioners, asking for financial assistance. Steps have been taken to immediately file a complaint with cyber crime police stations and register an FIR. In connection with the GBA chief commissioner case, complaints were registered on April 15 and 17.

## Parched Bengaluru lakes leave fauna high and dry

Chandigarh.(Agency)

A harsh cloudless summer is taking its toll of the city's water bodies, which give life to urban flora and fauna.

Ullal Lake in Kengeri, spread across 29 acres, has an island which is a habitat for peafowl and mongoose. The lake has gone completely dry, except for a few patches where sewage from a diversion line has leaked. Similarly, Uttarhalli Lake has also gone dry due to summer. In West Bengaluru, the iconic man-made Sankey Tank is also drying up.

DS Gowda, president of Sir M Visvesvaraya Layout Welfare Association, stated that this has been the condition for the past year. Ullal Lake is connected with a Sewage Treatment Plant (STP), but during summer, there is no water. "We have written to officials to fix the issue of STP and release water to keep the lake filled with water, as dozens of peafowl here are dependent on the lake," said Gowda.

Similarly, the 37-acre Sankey Tank is almost dry, and this has caused concern among regular walkers and residents in the surrounding area.

Geetha, Executive Engineer, Lakes, Bengaluru West City Corporation, stated that Ullal Lake gets water from the STP in Mallahalli, but due to upgradation, the lake is dry. "The STP is of 5MLD capacity, and in six months, the capacity will be upgraded to 10MLD. Once this is done, the lake will have sufficient water round the year," she said.

On Sankey Tank, she said, "Two big trees located near the waste weir and their roots must have caused damage and resulted in leakage.

## Bhubaneswar's 'worst traffic jam in history' catches police unprepared, apathetic

BHUBANESWAR.(Agency)

In one of the biggest purges it has The horrific traffic congestion on NH-16 that crippled vehicular movement, leaving thousands of commuters stranded on the road for hours on a sweltering Wednesday has drawn widespread criticism for the pathetic management by Commissionerate Police.

The incident along one of the busiest national highways exposed the sheer lack of preparedness by the police and NH administration. The painful congestion, caused by a truck that went up in flames on Palasuni overbridge, was so badly managed that it spiraled into a nightmare and spilled over to Thursday morning, drawing outrage from people.

Apart from thousands of commuters, ambulance and Ama Buses were caught in the jam, struggling to find their way out. "It is the worst traffic jam in the history of Bhubaneswar," a commuter posted on his Instagram handle while scores of people poured out their ire over how badly the massive gridlock on 14-km stretch of the NH was handled.

The police was found wanting on multiple counts. It did not anticipate the problem and was late to effect diversion of vehicular traffic either from Khurda and Cuttack side, leading to building up of the commuters on the route. Though alternate exit routes for diversion were available from Khurda, Puri and Cuttack sides, no information on the situation was shared.

## Odisha villagers demand postponement of public hearing for Kodingamali expansion

President of Kodingamali Surakhya Samiti Kashinath Minyaka warned that expansion of mining activities could lead to rapid depletion of natural resources.

KORAPUT/JEYPORE.(Agency)

Hundreds of villagers from Laxmipur and adjoining areas took out a protest rally on Thursday, opposing the proposed expansion of the Kodingamali bauxite mining project.

The agitators, under the banner of Kodingamali Surakhya Samiti, also submitted a memorandum to Koraput collector Manoj Satyawan Mahajan, urging the district administration to halt the expansion plan and conduct a thorough inquiry into its environmental implications.

In the memorandum, president of Kodingamali Surakhya Samiti Kashinath Minyaka urged the administration to postpone the public hearing on the expansion of Kodingamali bauxite mine, which is scheduled to be held on May 16. The appeal comes in response to the recent Odisha State Pollution Control Board



(OSPCB) notification, which proposes an increase in mining capacity from 3.6 MTPA to 6 MTPA.

Minyaka raised concerns over the long-term environmental and socio-economic impacts of the proposed expansion. He warned that expansion of mining activities could lead to rapid depletion of natural resources, leaving future generations with a barren and ecologically degraded landscape.

"The proposed expansion may bring short-term industrial benefits, but it will exhaust the region's natural wealth at an alarming rate.

The increased mining capacity would severely affect forests, water sources and agricultural activities. Our children may inherit nothing but wasteland," he said.

The memorandum highlighted that mining and transportation activities are already contributing to environmental pollution, posing a threat to the traditional rural economy that depends heavily on forests, hills, and water resources. Villagers fear that large-scale mining without adequate safeguards could lead to long-term environmental damage and health hazards. Once the mineral reserves are exhausted, the region could face economic collapse and irreversible ecological damage, it stated.

## Three agencies, three failed probes: How the 2006 Malegaon blasts case hit a 'dead end'

Courts have systematically flagged gaps in investigations by the ATS, CBI and NIA and 31 victims' families are still waiting for justice

Mumbai.(Agency)

WITH THE last of the four accused in the 2006 Malegaon blasts case discharged by the Bombay High Court Wednesday, probes carried out between 2006 and 2013 by three key agencies — first the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS), followed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and now the National Investigation Agency (NIA) — have virtually fallen apart, halting the case, which has not even reach the trial stage, 20 years later. On Wednesday, the high court found gaps in the NIA probe; in 2016, it was the special court which discharged the nine men booked by the ATS and the CBI.

What have courts said over the years and why has the case reached a "dead end", leaving the families of the 31 who died in the blasts, and the 312 injured, still looking for justice?



The ATS arrested nine Muslim men, most of them Malegaon residents, after taking over the probe over a month after the blast on October 23, 2006. The agency claimed that the men were members of the banned Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and also invoked the stringent Maharashtra Control of Organised

Crime Act (MCOCA) against them. The ATS recorded their confessions of seven of the nine men under the Act. The men challenged the invocation of the Act, which was dismissed by the Supreme Court.

The men remained in jail from 2006, maintaining that they were innocent and were framed on the absurd allegations that they killed their fellow town residents to disrupt communal harmony. They were granted bail in 2011 after the NIA took over the probe, based on an alleged confession of

Swami Aseemanand, arrested in Hyderabad in connection with the Mecca Masjid blasts. The NIA probed the case in 2013 and said that the nine men had not committed the offence, arresting four others instead. The nine then filed for discharge.

## BJD, BJP lock horns over Ratna Bhandar inventory

BHUBANESWAR.(Agency)

A political confrontation has erupted with senior BJD leader Pranab Prakash Das and Law minister Prithviraj Harichandan exchanging barbs over the Ratna Bhandar inventory, accusing each other of misleading the public.

As the ongoing verification of the temple treasury revealed that items in the Ratna Bhandar have so far matched the 1978 inventory, in a strongly worded social media post, Das alleged that a "deliberate misinformation campaign" was unleashed during the last elections. He termed the claims about missing ornaments as "unfortunate" and a "cruel mockery" of the sentiments of the people of the state.

Targeting top political leaders of the BJP including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Das said political leaders used rumours to create fear and confusion among people for electoral gains. After a detailed verification process, the temple's chief administrator, Arabinda Padhee clarified that all jewellery were safe and secure, Das said and accused

BJP leaders - from the state unit to national figures - of making baseless allegations claiming that valuables had been shifted outside the state.

"The truth, buried under a mountain of lies, has now come to light," he said calling the episode a "black chapter in



Harichandan rejected Das' claims and said that the state government possesses 'ample evidence' to expose irregularities during the previous BJD regime, particularly the missing keys of the Ratna Bhandar. He pointed out that the so-called 'duplicate key' recovered from the district treasury had failed to open the Ratna Bhandar lock.

"If it was indeed a valid duplicate, why did it not work?" he asked, adding that authorities were ultimately forced to break open the lock using a saw.

He challenged the BJD leadership to come clean on the missing key controversy and warned that revealing the full facts could politically damage them. Harichandan said the government is not interested in politicising religious matters, especially while the ongoing inventory and verification of ornaments in the temple's Bhitara Ratna Bhandar (inner chamber) continues. He said political parties must refrain from 'petty politics' involving Lord Jagannath which can hurt religious sentiments of millions.

## Stray violence marks polling: BJP candidate chased away, Kabir's men clash with TMC

Kolkata.(Agency)

Despite the Election Commission deploying 2,407 companies of the Central Armed Police Force, 152 general observers, and 58 police observers along with state police personnel across 152 constituencies in West Bengal on Thursday, the first phase of polling was not free of violence and skirmishes as the poll panel had hoped for.

There were reports of clashes, stray violence, and voter intimidation in several parts of the state.

State Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Agarwal said the voting was "largely peaceful" and "none of those were major in nature in terms of law and order".

"We have plans to undertake additional measures to increase voters' confidence in the second phase," he said.

In the Kumarganj constituency in Dakshin Dinajpur district, BJP candidate Suwendu Sarkar was assaulted and chased away by suspected TMC workers while he was on his way to a polling booth following reports of disturbances. A mob forced Sarkar to get out of his car and started to beat him. Sarkar had to run with a lone security personnel to save himself. He, later, told reporters that he was surrounded by goons and beaten up. "I did not see any central force personnel during the incident," he said. Union Minister and BJP MP from Balurghat, Sukanta Majumdar, condemned the incident, asserting that "those responsible will be duly punished after the BJP forms a government in the state".

## Days before FIRs were filed in TCS Nashik case, 2 women complainants had quit BPO

Nashik/mumbai.(Agency)

At least two complainants in the case related to alleged workplace harassment at TCS's BPO office in Nashik resigned from their jobs less than a week before FIRs based on their complaints were filed, The Indian Express has learnt.

On April 17, TCS CEO K Krithivasan had said in a statement that the company had not received any complaints through its ethics or POSH (prevention of sexual harassment) committees. Asked about the resignations and whether they would have any bearing on the internal investigation ordered by TCS, a TCS spokesperson told The Indian Express, "We wish to reiterate the statement issued concerning the matter on April 17, 2025. We are constrained on offering comments on specific queries as these are matters of present investigation."



TCS has engaged Deloitte and law firm Trilegal as independent counsel for its internal investigation, which is being led by COO Aarthi Subramanian. An oversight committee chaired by independent director Keki Mistry has been constituted to review the findings.

The case first came to light in February, when a local political party worker in Nashik approached the city police alleging

that a Hindu woman in her early twenties working at the BPO was observing fasts during Ramzan and had been influenced to follow "Islamic teachings" at her workplace. When police contacted her family, her parents said they had stopped her from going to work after she started observing fasts and living "in an Islamic manner".

Police then deployed constables as housekeeping staff inside the 147-employee BPO to observe what was happening. This operation, which ran for several days, provided the grounds for formal legal action, police said. The first FIR was registered on March 26 against employee Danish Sheikh, who allegedly hid the fact that he was already married while establishing physical relations with the woman on the pretext of marriage.

Between March 26 and April 3, Nashik city police registered nine FIRs against eight accused — Danish, Shafi Shaikh, Asif Ansari, Tausif Attar, Shahrukh Qureshi, Raza Memon, Ashwini Chainani and Nida Khan — on charges ranging from sexual harassment to hurting religious sentiments. All but Nida Khan have been arrested; her counsel had moved an anticipatory bail application before a Nashik sessions court. The lawyer has also sought interim protection from arrest which was denied by the court. Meanwhile, family members and friends of some of the complainants — there are nine in total — told The Indian Express that some of the women complainants are battling depression, anxiety and social isolation. "She quit her job last month. She is young and feels her life is ruined," said one relative.



## NEWS BOX

## A poem for Sanju Samson: Shashi Tharoor celebrates CSK star's century vs MI in verse



Mumbai. (Agency)

After Chennai Super Kings' clinical victory over the Mumbai Indians at the Wankhede Stadium on Thursday, the most resonant tribute to Sanju Samson's match-winning century came not from the commentary box, but from the literary world. Shashi Tharoor, Member of Parliament and a long-standing advocate for the Kerala-born wicketkeeper-batter, took to social media to celebrate the milestone with a specially composed poem. The tribute was crafted in a classic lyric style, utilising AABB rhyming couplets to mirror the rhythmic, balanced nature of Samson's batting. The structure—where the first line rhymes with the second, and the third with the fourth—provides a melodic pace that reflects the effortless flight Tharoor describes in his verses. It was Samson's second century for CSK in IPL 2026 as the new wicketkeeper-batter, traded from Rajasthan Royals, has made an instant impact for the Super Kings. He became only the second CSK batter after Shane Watson in 2018 to hit two hundreds in an IPL season. The poem is certainly an ode to the technical purity that has defined Samson's 2026 season, particularly his ability to maintain stylish command without resorting to slogging.

Sanju Samson's unbeaten 101 off 54 balls was the cornerstone of Chennai Super Kings' authoritative performance against the Mumbai Indians. Entering the fray early, Samson anchored the innings with a blend of traditional stroke-play and modern power-hitting, striking 10 boundaries and six maximums to propel CSK to a formidable total. It was Samson's game awareness that stood out. Taking on the onus of batting through 20 overs, Samson held one end even when wickets were falling at the other. In the death overs, Samson ensured he did not take risks against Jasprit Bumrah, Mumbai Indians' lead pacer and went after rookie Krish Bhagat in the last over, plundering 15 runs and pushing the total beyond 200. Despite the hosts' attempt to bolster their line-up with a controversial concussion substitute, they were blindsided by CSK's tactical masterstroke: the introduction of Akeal Hosein as an Impact Player.

## Concussion Sub for shoulder injury? MI explain debatable Mitchell Santner call

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Mumbai Indians' decision to replace Mitchell Santner with Shardul Thakur under the concussion substitute rule sparked debate after their defeat to Chennai Super Kings at the Wankhede Stadium on Thursday. The change was approved by match officials during the second innings after Santner suffered a fall while fielding late in the CSK innings. MI vs CSK: HIGHLIGHTS | SCORECARD

The point of dispute was not only the medical basis for the substitution, but also whether Thakur met the requirement of being a like-for-like replacement for Santner. The flashpoint occurred in the 17th over when Santner completed a diving catch to dismiss Kartik Sharma. While the New Zealand international was immediately seen clutching his left shoulder and subsequently received treatment in the dugout with an ice pack and a sling, the formal request for a substitute was made on the grounds of a suspected concussion. Under IPL playing



conditions, a concussion substitute is allowed if a player has suffered a head or neck injury, provided the Match Referee is satisfied with the medical diagnosis. The debate arose because the visible injury appeared to be to Santner's shoulder, while the substitute request was made on the basis of neurological symptoms.

### MI COACH DEFENDS CONCUSSION SUB CALL

Speaking after the match, Mumbai Indians head coach Mahela Jayawardene explained the team's medical position. "He hit his head first and neck. Obviously, the shoulder as well," Jayawardene said. "He went for a scan. Once he got back, he felt dizziness. So, he was lying down. Yes, the ice was there for the shoulder. But, he felt he wasn't stable. So, we took him for a scan." The choice of Thakur as the replacement also came under scrutiny because Santner is a left-arm orthodox spinner, while Thakur is a right-arm medium-pacer. Jayaward

# BCB revokes Mustafizur Rahman's NOC for PSL 2026 after medical assessment

**In an official statement, the BCB confirmed that Mustafizur will undergo an immediate scan to determine the extent of his condition.**

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has revoked the No Objection Certificate (NOC) granted to pacer Mustafizur Rahman for Pakistan Super League 2026 after a medical assessment following the third ODI against New Zealand. In an official statement, the BCB confirmed that Mustafizur will undergo an immediate scan to determine the extent of his condition. He will then begin a rehabilitation programme under the supervision of the board's medical team, ruling him out for the rest of the ongoing PSL season.

"The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB)



wishes to inform that, following the conclusion of the 3rd ODI against New Zealand, the team's medical staff has reviewed the condition of national team pace bowler Mustafizur Rahman," the BCB

said on Thursday in a statement. "It has been decided that the player will undergo an immediate scan to further assess his condition, after which he will commence a rehabilitation programme

under the supervision of the BCB Medical Team." In this regard, the Board has withdrawn the No Objection Certificate (NOC) previously issued to Mustafizur. He will therefore not be available to participate in the remainder of PSL 2026," it added.

Mustafizur, who was forced to exit the IPL 2026 season after the BCCI directed the Kolkata Knight Riders to release him from their squad, was playing for Lahore Qalandars and had taken six wickets in five matches this PSL season. In a separate decision, the BCB confirmed that fellow fast bowler Nahid Rana will not be released for PSL 2026. The move is aimed at allowing the young pacer adequate time to prepare for Bangladesh's upcoming Test series against Pakistan next month. The decisions underline the board's focus on player fitness and national commitments ahead of a busy international schedule. Bangladesh won the third ODI against New Zealand by 55 runs, clinching the series 2-1 on Thursday.

## IPL 2026: Called it? Akeal Hosein's Jadeja-like performance resurfaces old tweet

IPL 2026: Akeal Hosein's four-wicket haul for CSK against MI at the Wankhede brought back an old tweet where he had expressed admiration for Ravindra Jadeja, drawing striking comparisons. His powerplay impact and all-round consistency once again underlined his abilities as a match-winner.

Mumbai. (Agency)

Back in 2013, when a boy from Trinidad and Tobago made public his admiration for India's legendary all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, hardly anyone noticed. But when Akeal Hosein bagged a four-wicket haul for Chennai Super Kings at the iconic Wankhede against fellow five-time champions Mumbai Indians, that 13-year-old manifestation resurfaced. Back then, Hosein was just a 20-year-old, yet to make his List A or T20 debut, letting the world know about his role model via a tweet. Although Hosein has produced starring performances against India, his display against MI on Thursday night is what truly brought the resemblance out. The West Indian spinner was bought by CSK for Rs 2 crore during the 2026 IPL Auction. A left-arm orthodox spinner himself, Akeal struck gold in the very first over, getting the better of rookie batter Danish Malewar and sending him back for a golden duck. The impact substitute, Hosein then dismissed in-form Naman

Dhir, ending with a wicket- maiden over. He later returned in the middle overs to wrap up MI's chase by removing Tilak Varma and Suryakumar Yadav. The West Indian finished with figures of 4-17, a performance



truly replicating the impact Jadeja had during his time with the yellow jersey. "I think one thing that sticks with me is what Dwayne Bravo said. He said as bowlers, and as spinners and guys who operate in the powerplay, you're going to get hit. So as long as you can get that out of your mind and

just focus on your plans—what are the batter's strengths and weaknesses, and what are your strengths and weaknesses—and as long as you focus on what you're going to execute and forget about being scared of getting hit, I think you're fine," Hosein said about his game after the match against MI. And social media was quick to bring that old tweet back, with users agreeing that he had indeed done what Jadeja used to do. However, this was not the first time Hosein had pulled off a moment of brilliance. In a T20I against England in January 2022, Hosein hit a hat-trick of sixes and two fours in the last over and nearly won West Indies the match when they needed 30 runs off six balls. West Indies fell one run short of the target. Then in 2023, against India in a T20I, he delivered an all-round performance, picking up two important wickets while scoring a match-winning 16 off 10 balls to take West Indies over the line.

## Mumbai's El Clasico nightmare, Chennai's delight at Wankhede: In Stats

New Delhi. (Agency)

Chennai Super Kings produced a dominant display on April 23 at the Wankhede Stadium, defeating Mumbai Indians by 103 runs in IPL 2026 El Clasico. With the win in one of the tournament's marquee clashes, CSK, who had started the season with three losses on the trot, moved up to fifth in the table. Asked to bat first, CSK posted a commanding 207, powered by a superb unbeaten century from Sanju Samson. He anchored the innings from start to finish, ensuring stability through the middle overs before accelerating in the death phase to give CSK a strong finish. In reply, MI never recovered from early setbacks and were



bowled out for 104 in 19 overs. The turning point came through CSK's spin attack, led by Akeal Hosein, who delivered a four-wicket haul to dismantle the batting line-up. Noor Ahmad also played a key supporting role with two wickets. MI kept losing

wickets in clusters and failed to build any significant partnerships. Suryakumar Yadav and Tilak Varma showed brief resistance, but the required rate kept spiralling as CSK's bowlers maintained relentless pressure with disciplined lines, clever variations, and effective use of slower deliveries on a gripping Wankhede surface. After the win, CSK return to Chepauk, where they will face Gujarat Titans on April 26. MI, on the other hand, will look to bounce back when they take on Sunrisers Hyderabad on April 29 at the Wankhede Stadium. The win was CSK's biggest margin of victory by runs in IPL history. It was also the first time they had won an IPL match by 100 or more runs.

## RCB vs GT Preview: RCB look to reclaim fortress Chinnaswamy, prey on wounded Gujarat Titans

**IPL 2026: The Gujarat Titans face Royal Challengers Bengaluru at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in a high-stakes clash between Shubman Gill's side with struggling middle order and Rajat Patidar's side with vulnerable death bowling. With the head-to-head record at this venue favoring the Titans, both teams are seeking a crucial batting resurgence in their final home league game of the season.**

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

It is the ultimate "King vs. Prince" narrative as Virat Kohli's Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) prepare to host Shubman Gill's Gujarat Titans (GT) at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium. With both teams seeking a vital win, the "Prince" will be looking to rally his

wounded Titans and breach the "King's" fortress in what promises to be a high-octane encounter. Despite their recent struggles, the Titans will look to remain confident. However, form is not currently on their side. GT enters this fixture reeling from a crushing 99-run defeat against the Mumbai Indians, a loss that exposed significant cracks in their lower middle order. RCB, on the other hand, find themselves in a slightly better position on the table, having won four of their last six matches. Nevertheless, they also come into this game following a frustrating home defeat to the Delhi Capitals. In that match, victory slipped through their fingers in the final over when David Miller's clinical counterattack against Romario Shepherd halted RCB's momentum. However, more than batting, it might prove to be a battle of bowlers when the likes of Kagiso Rabada, Mohammed Siraj, and Prasidh Krishna take on



Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Josh Hazlewood, and possibly Rasikh Salam Dhar. If there's any zip or movement in the pitch, it could be a riveting contest, with elite operators either hitting top gear or using subtle variation to outthink some of the game's best batters. Meanwhile, Krunal Pandya and Rashid Khan might try to turn and bounce things in their teams' favour during the middle over phase. As this will be the final league game of the season at the Chinnaswamy, RCB will be

keen to fully utilise the loyal Bengaluru faithfuls on a track famously conducive to high scores.

### VULNERABILITIES

The core of GT's batting remains largely unchanged from 2025, featuring the formidable top three of Shubman Gill, B. Sai Sudharsan, and Jos Buttler. While Glenn Phillips is a new addition, the departure of Sherfane Rutherford has left a void.

The issue? While Gill and Buttler have been scoring, the top order hasn't been as prolific as it was last year. With Sai Sudharsan struggling for rhythm at the top, the middle order has been forced into the game too early. "The middle order was undoubtedly exposed," noted GT batting coach Matthew Hayden after the MI defeat. "We shouldn't be allowing players like Rahul Tewatia or Shikhar Khan to face a high volume of deliveries. That's not their role; that's not what they train for."



"We plan with aggressive tactics as our preference. But Rajat has to make his own decisions out there, and he's very good at that. One of Rajat's biggest strengths is that he's incredibly calm," Bobat added. Bobat believes Patidar has stuck to the team's line of thinking while still making bold decisions on the field. "When it gets a little bit chaotic, he's quite good at just remaining calm and sticking to the things that he thought he wanted to do. With the bat, that means he's quite good at leading from the front. In the field, he's always trying to take wickets, which is great. That is part of our identity and the way we want to play, and he's a good fit for that," he continued.



'Shooting Has Just Started': Anurag Basu Reveals Kartik Aaryan And

# Sreeleela's

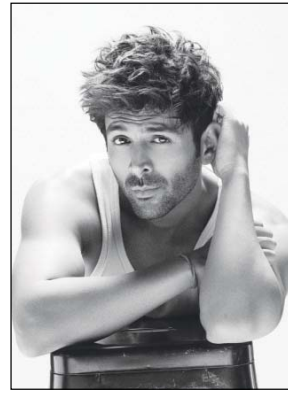
Film Still In Early Phase

Anurag Basu has addressed ongoing speculation surrounding his upcoming project starring Kartik Aaryan and Sreeleela, firmly debunking reports that suggested the film is already in production. The filmmaker revealed that the shoot is still in its early stages and far from completion.

In a conversation with Variety India, Anurag Basu opened up about the shoot and revealed that it is still in the early stages. He confirmed, "I've not shot more than 45 days for this film. The shooting has just started." The film is getting delayed because of various reasons too.

### Kartik Aaryan And Sreeleela Shoot For Anurag Basu's Film In Srinagar

Kartik Aaryan and Sreeleela are currently in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, busy shooting for their upcoming film directed by Anurag Basu. The project has generated a lot of buzz ever since it was officially announced in February last year. It is reportedly titled 'Tu Meri Zindagi Hai'. Recently, several pictures from the Kashmir schedule were recently leaked online. In one viral picture from the shoot, Kartik Aaryan, Sreeleela and Anurag Basu are seen having a conversation between takes. In another photo, the actress is seen wearing a blue top with matching ripped jeans and a red beanie. Kartik is also seen standing nearby with his hands in his pockets. He is seen sporting a rugged look with long hair and a full beard.



### First Look Of Kartik Aaryan and Sreeleela's Film

The first look video of Anurag Basu's romantic musical was shared by Kartik Aaryan in February 2025. It opens with the crowd cheering, while the actor plays guitar and performs on stage. He is seen singing 'Tu Meri Zindagi Hai', sporting a brooding lover's look with a heavy beard and rugged long hair.

Aryan Khan Fights To Keep Groom's Shoes, Nearly Falls In Viral Clip From BFF's Wedding



Aryan Khan was recently seen at a friend's wedding, where a video of him taking part in the traditional joota churai ritual has gone viral. The clip is being widely shared for the way the playful custom turned into a spirited moment during the ceremony. The video shows Aryan holding on to the groom's shoe and refusing to give it up, even as guests try to take it from him.

### What is joota churai?

Joota churai is a common wedding tradition in many North Indian ceremonies. During the ritual, the bride's side tries to steal the groom's shoes while he is busy with wedding rituals. The groom's friends and family, on the other hand, try to protect the shoes. The game usually ends with a negotiation, where the groom's side pays money to get the shoes back. It is meant to be light-hearted and adds a playful break during the wedding.

### What happened at the wedding

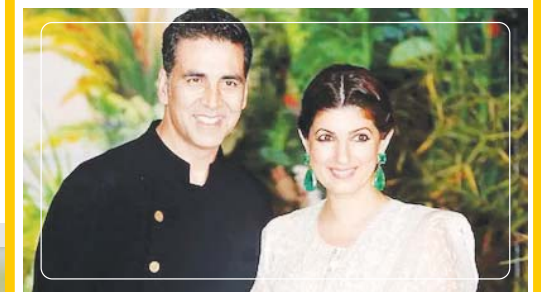
The video was shared by Zesst Events from the wedding of Rhea Nadkarni and Maahir Mehta. The planners mentioned that Maahir is Aryan Khan's best friend. They wrote, "When the Groom's best friend is the BA\*\*\*S of Bollywood. Between sneaky steals, dramatic negotiations, and laughter echoing through every corner — this wasn't just joota churai, it was a total dhamaal."

Text on the video read: "Joota churai turned into a full-blown mini war!" In the clip, Aryan is seen in a casual outfit, holding the groom's shoe as others try to take it from him. At one point, he almost loses balance but still doesn't let go. He pulls back when people try to grab it and eventually runs off with the shoe.

### Aryan Khan's recent work

Aryan Khan recently made his debut as a director with the Netflix series The Ba\*\*\*ds of Bollywood. He served as the creator, writer, director, and showrunner for the project. The series starred a bouquet of stars including, Bobby Deol, Lakshya, Raghav Juyal, Mona Singh, and Sahher Bamba. It also included star cameo appearances by Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Aamir Khan, Ranbir Kapoor, Ranveer Singh, and Diljit Dosanjh.

'Mat Kar': Twinkle Khanna Jokes About Akshay Kumar's 'Biggest' Contribution To Her writing Career



Twinkle Khanna spoke about her writing process and reading habits on the occasion of World Book Day. The actress-turned-author reflected on how her ideas take shape and how her personal experiences influence what she writes. During the interaction, she also mentioned how her husband Akshay Kumar reacts to her work. She recalled, "This morning, I was discussing the topics I plan to touch upon in my next column, and he told me, 'Mat karna...do not get into that issue'. Mat kar is basically his only and biggest contribution to my writing career," she said.

Twinkle added that while her work may sometimes make people uncomfortable, her intention is not to provoke but to explore ideas. "My job is to make people reflect on the things that are visible. But our own conditioning blinds us to those factors. It might make people uncomfortable and they might call it offensive... (But) I think about how I will unravel the layers of conditioning not just around them but also around me because I also find my way through life as I write." She also spoke about her shift from acting to writing, noting that books have always been a constant in her life. "It is what I was able to give that medium, and books have always been my life and actually so has cinema," she said, adding that her experiences as a young actor also shaped her perspective.

Talking about her interest in language and literature, she said, "It comes a little bit from perhaps, my father (late veteran actor Rajesh Khanna), because I have a distinct memory when I was very young and I said, 'Will you pick me up from school? And he said, 'Are you a pickup? I will fetch you from school.

That kind of just set my parameters of what language can do. And I grew up in a family of readers. My sister (Rinkle Khanna) reads more than I do,"

Khanna also shared that she used to read more in her younger years. "Just keep doing what you're doing and finish the book you started when you were 18. I'm 52, and that one book I haven't been able to finish yet," she said, speaking about what she would tell her younger self.

# Yami Gautam

Learnt Quran For Haq, Reveals Director; Avinash Tiwary Says Marriage Deadline Is 2026-End

Filmmaker Suparn Verma has opened up about the preparation they did for his movie, Haq. Released in November 2025, the film stars Yami Gautam and Emraan Hashmi in the lead. It follows the story of Shazia Bano (played by Yami), the wife of a lawyer in 1970s India whose husband marries another woman. When he refuses to pay her maintenance, she drags him to court. After O'Romeo, Avinash Tiwary is gearing up for the release of Ginny Weds Sunny 2 co-starring Medha Shankr. The film revolves around two individuals — a peppy Delhi girl and a shy small-town simpleton — and their families navigating the complexities of an arranged marriage. But is Avinash open to an arranged marriage?



Lokesh Kanagaraj's much-anticipated collaboration with Allu Arjun, tentatively titled AA23, is gaining momentum. Offering a fresh update on the project, the film's co-writer Rathna Kumar shared an update. He revealed that the groundwork for the film is progressing, with the team

gearing up to begin shooting soon.

Anurag Basu has put all delay rumours to rest, confirming that his upcoming untitled film starring Kartik Aaryan and Sreeleela is progressing smoothly and remains on schedule for a theatrical release later this year.

Anne Hathaway is in the spotlight again after a new video from The Devil Wears Prada 2 promotions surfaced online. The clip is being discussed as it shows the actor accepting a Quran from a fan shortly after her recent "Inshallah" remark. This comes days after her use of the phrase during an interview had already sparked conversation.



NEWS BOX

### Iran hits back at Trump's 'hellhole' remark on India, China; calls them 'cradles of civilisation'

World. (Agency)

Iran has come down heavily on US President Donald Trump for sharing a video calling India and China "hellholes" amid the birthright citizenship debate in a post on X. Iran's Consulate General in Hyderabad defended India and China as historic civilisations. "China and India are the cradles of Civilization. In fact, the hellhole is where its war-criminal president threatened to decimate the civilization in Iran," the post read. Similarly, Iran's Consulate General in Mumbai shared a video on Maharashtra's cultural and geographical heritage, and said Trump should visit the state for a "cultural detox". The post added, "Kabhi India aa ke dekho, phir bolna".

The reactions came after Trump shared a video featuring conservative author and radio host Michael Savage, in which Savage sharply criticizes the concept of birthright citizenship. In the podcast, Savage referred to India, China and some other countries as "hell-holes" and called for changes in the US' birthright citizenship law. He also termed Indian and Chinese immigrants as "gangsters with laptops" who have "stepped on our flag. The clip, originally broadcast on Savage's Newsmax program The Savage Nation, was reposted by a Truth Social account that amplifies the president's online activity. In the video, Savage argues that current interpretations of birthright citizenship laws allow immigrants to exploit the system by entering the United States late in pregnancy so their children are born as citizens.

In the clip, Savage claimed that the practice creates a loophole in which a child born in the United States automatically gains citizenship, after which extended family members can later immigrate. He referred to India, China and other nations as "hell-holes" from where people bring their entire family to the US.

### Ukraine's Remote-Controlled Drones Can Hit Targets At Great Distance, Says Minister

Kyiv. (Agency)

Ukraine has developed interceptor drones that can be directed from a distance and are capable of hitting targets hundreds or thousands of kilometres away, Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov said on Thursday. Ukraine was virtually without any capacity to build drones when Russia launched its full-scale invasion in 2022, but now has a thriving industry. Emphasis has been placed on interceptor drones as a more effective - and more economical - means to defend against drone attacks. "We are launching a new level of 'small' air defence. Now, control of interceptors is possible at a distance of thousands of kilometres," Fedorov wrote on the Telegram messaging app. "Today we have a confirmed result -- downing a target at a distance of hundreds and thousands of kilometres. Ukraine is the first in the world to systematically scale remote control of interceptor drones." Fedorov said the system "increases the efficiency of interception, minimises risks for operators and allows scaling capabilities without being tied to the front line". Ukrainian officials estimated domestic drone production last year at about 4.5 million and capacity has since increased. Ukraine still faces large barrages of Russian drone and missile attacks more than four years into its war with Russia. In this year's largest attack last week, in which 17 people died, Ukraine said its air force units had shot down or neutralised 31 missiles and 636 drones, but 12 missiles and 20 drones struck targets.

Ukraine has established joint arms production with several European countries, and Kyiv has offered help to Middle East countries countering Iranian drones, concluding accords with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

### Massive Ice Chunk Blocks Mount Everest Route As Climbing Season Begins

WASHINGTON. (Agency)

A massive and unstable block of glacier ice has disrupted the main climbing route to Mount Everest from Base Camp in Nepal. Serac, a towering 100-foot-high chunk of ice, is preventing teams from moving beyond a key section of the route near Camp 1, BBC reported. The obstruction came close on the heels of a busy spring climbing season getting underway. Specialist Sherpa teams, commonly referred to as "icefall doctors," are responsible for setting up ropes and ladders along the dangerous Khumbu icefall section of the climb. But they have been unable to find a safe path around serac.

With no viable alternative route, the teams say they have no option but to wait for the ice to naturally melt or collapse. This delay has already pushed back preparations by several weeks. Typically, by this time in April, route-fixing work would have progressed as far as Camp 3. But this year, teams remain stuck nearly 600 metres below Camp 1 due to the obstruction. The icefall doctors are employed by the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPCC), which is tasked with preparing and securing the climbing route up to Camp 2. The team arrived at Base Camp about three weeks ago but has since been unable to advance further. SPCC base camp coordinator Tshering Tenzing Sherpa said that attempts to deal with the blockage have not been successful so far. "We haven't found artificial ways to melt it so far, so we don't have any options other than to wait for it to melt and crumble itself," he told the BBC. Ang Sarki Sherpa, who has years of experience working as an icefall doctor, said there are signs that the base of the ice block is getting weaker. He explained that crevasse beneath the serac is already melting and that it could collapse soon. Despite assessing multiple possible paths, teams have concluded that climbing over or around the ice structure would be too dangerous.

# Why the European Union's wartime loan is a vital lifeline for cash-strapped Ukraine

## Approval had been held up for months amid political friction inside the 27-nation EU, including resistance from outgoing Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán, widely seen as Russia's closest ally in the bloc.

KYIV. (Agency)

Cash-strapped Ukraine has secured a crucial European Union loan that will provide a vital lifeline to sustain its wartime efforts this year. The 90 billion-euro (\$106 billion) package was formally approved on Thursday, days after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced that the Ukrainian section of the Druzhba pipeline had been repaired and the flow of oil would

resume to Slovakia and Hungary, conditions linked to the release of the funds.

Approval had been held up for months amid political friction inside the 27-nation EU, including resistance from outgoing Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, widely seen as the Kremlin's closest ally in the bloc. Orbán was defeated in an election earlier this month, clearing the way for a breakthrough in negotiations.

Here's the importance of the EU package: Why Kyiv needs the loan The funding arrives at a critical moment. The International Monetary Fund estimates that Ukraine faces a financing gap of roughly 136 billion euros (\$158 billion) over the next two years.

The EU loan is expected to cover about two-thirds of Ukraine's funding needs in 2026 and 2027. Without it, officials warn that Kyiv could have run out of resources to sustain basic state functions and its war effort as early as this spring. The first



tranche of funding is expected to be released in the coming months. Ukraine will have access to 45 billion euros (\$53 billion) for the remainder of this year, and 45 billion euros (\$53 billion) for all of 2027. Under the agreement, roughly a third of the funds will go toward budgetary support for Ukraine's government, while the remainder will be directed to defense, covering weapons procurement and expanding domestic arms production. Why

it took so long EU leaders agreed to the loan in December 2025, but implementation stalled for months amid a dispute over the Ukraine-linked section of the Druzhba oil pipeline. In December, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia agreed not to stop their EU partners from borrowing the money on international markets as long as the three countries didn't have to take part. The pipeline, which carries Russian oil to Slovakia and Hungary, went offline in late January after Ukrainian officials said it was damaged in a Russian attack. The Hungarian and Slovakian governments accused Ukraine of deliberately cutting off supplies, turning the issue into a broader political standoff inside the EU. The loan was finally unblocked after Hungary and Slovakia said that Ukraine had restored transit this week. Zelenskyy said that repairs had been completed, removing the final obstacle to approval.

## Pakistan military kills 22 militants in northwest clashes, child dead in

### A ten-year-old child was killed during the exchange of fire, which took place in Khyber district near the border with Afghanistan.

PESHAWAR. (Agency)

Pakistani security personnel shot dead 22 alleged militants in clashes in the northwest this week, the military said on Friday, with a child also killed in the crossfire. On Tuesday "a joint military operation was conducted by security forces and law enforcement agencies" that resulted in "intense exchange of fire" in which the militants were killed, a military media

wing statement said.

A ten-year-old child was killed during the exchange of fire, which took place in Khyber district near the border with Afghanistan. Prime Minister Shehbaz



Sharif "expressed sorrow at the martyrdom of a 10-year-old child in the unprovoked firing by the terrorists", according to a statement from his

office. Attacks, many claimed by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) armed group, have escalated in recent years, especially in the provinces bordering Afghanistan.

Pakistan has accused Afghanistan of providing a safe haven to militants since the Afghan Taliban returned to governing the country in 2021, which Kabul has repeatedly denied.

The assertions have frayed the relationship between the neighbours and led to regular border clashes.

Pakistan's military this year launched a wave of strikes in Afghanistan following a string of deadly suicide bombings.

## Exchange of gunfire inside Mall of Louisiana leaves one person dead, 5 wounded

### The shooting began around 1:30 p.m. when the two groups argued inside the food court and started shooting at each other, Police Chief TJ Morse said.

BATON ROUGE. (Agency)

An exchange of gunfire at a food court inside a Louisiana mall on Thursday killed one person and wounded five others and sent workers and shoppers scrambling for safety, police and witnesses said. Authorities described the shooting inside the Mall of Louisiana in Baton Rouge as a confrontation between two groups of people and not a random attack. Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill said some innocent bystanders were struck by gunfire. Police Chief TJ Morse said five people were in custody and there was no ongoing threat to the public.

Three high school seniors from

Ascension Episcopal School were among the victims of the shooting, according to a Facebook post from Lafayette Parish President Monique Blanco Boulet. We are heartbroken by the senseless violence that happened today at the Mall of Louisiana in Baton Rouge," she said, adding that



she was asking her community to "join us in holding all of these families close in prayer."

Rachel Delcambre, a spokesperson for the school, said in an email that the school would not be giving additional information at this time "out of deep respect for the families and the sensitivity of this situation."

Authorities initially said as many as 10 people had been injured but later

revised that number. Morse did not immediately say what set off the shooting at the mall in the Louisiana capital. Alex Theriot, a commercial electrician, was working on a construction project in the mall a few hundred feet from the food court when gunfire erupted and he heard what sounded like plates of glass shattering. Thinking a shooter might be going store to store, he quickly screwed the door shut of his work site and hunkered down with two other workers. They waited and hoped for the best. "Everybody was running and screaming," Theriot told The Associated Press. "I thought it could have been a terrorist attack."

Desire Batton, who works at a clothing store, said she and other workers dashed inside a breakroom to protect themselves.

"We hid in there until cops came and got us," Batton said. The shooting began around 1:30 p.m. when the two groups argued inside the food court and started shooting at each other, Morse said. The chief made public appeals for witnesses to come forward with any video of the shooting.

## Over 1.2 million travelled from region as India issues fresh Iran advisory

DALLAS. (Agency)

The Indian Embassy in Iran has issued a renewed advisory urging Indian nationals to avoid travelling to the country amid ongoing regional tensions and continued disruptions to international flight operations. In a post on X, the mission strongly cautioned citizens against visiting Iran "by any mode," citing persistent airspace restrictions and operational uncertainties affecting flights to and from the country. The Embassy also advised Indians currently in Iran to leave at the earliest, but only in close coordination with officials.

"Indian citizens are strongly advised not to travel to Iran, whether by air or land. Airspace restrictions and operational uncertainties due to regional tensions



continue to affect international flight operations," the statement said. The Embassy further emphasized that those already in Iran should exit through designated land border routes, strictly under its guidance. It warned against independently approaching border crossings without prior consultation. Emergency contact numbers and a consular email have been provided to assist citizens in coordinating their departure. This advisory follows an earlier notice issued on April 8, which similarly urged Indian nationals to leave Iran "expeditiously" in view of evolving regional developments. Officials have reiterated that all exits must be planned and executed in consultation with the mission to ensure safety. Meanwhile, speaking at an inter-ministerial briefing on developments in West Asia, Aseem R Mahajan, Additional Secretary (Gulf) at the Ministry of External Affairs, said that flight operations in the region are gradually stabilising despite ongoing challenges. He noted that since February 28, approximately 1.21 million passengers have travelled from the region to India.

# Pope urges US and Iran to return to peace talks, condemns capital punishment

ABOARD THE PAPAL PLANE. (Agency)

Pope Leo XIV urged the United States and Iran to return to talks to end the war Thursday and condemned capital punishment, in a wide-ranging press conference en route home from his trip to Africa. Leo also asserted that countries have the right to control their borders but mustn't treat migrants worse than "animals," and lamented that the church's morality teaching is often reduced to sexual issues. On Iran, capital punishment and peace

After a trip that was dominated by the very public back and forth between Leo and US President Donald Trump over the war, Leo urged the United States and Iran to return to negotiations. He called for a new "culture of peace" to replace the recourse to violence whenever conflicts arise. He said the question wasn't whether the Iran regime should change or not. "The question should be about how to promote the values we believe in without the deaths of so many innocents." He revealed that he carries with him the photo of a Muslim Lebanese boy

who had been killed in Israel's recent war with Hezbollah. The boy had been photographed holding a sign welcoming the pope when he visited Lebanon last year. "As a pastor I cannot be in favor of war," he told reporters aboard his plane. "I would like to encourage everyone to find responses that come from a culture of peace and not hatred and division."

Asked if he condemned Iran's recent executions, Leo said he condemned "all actions that are unjust" and included capital punishment in the list. "I condemn the taking of people's lives. I condemn capital punishment. I believe human life is to be respected and that all people from conception to natural (death), their lives should be respected and protected." So when a regime, when a country takes decisions which take away the lives of other people unjustly, then obviously that is something that should be condemned," he said. Pope Francis changed the church's social teaching to declare capital punishment immoral in all cases.

**On migration and the rights of states** Leo affirmed the right of countries to impose immigration controls on their borders and acknowledged that uncontrolled migration had created situations "that are sometimes

in poorer countries' to provide opportunities so that people aren't compelled to leave?" Regardless, he said migrants are human beings and deserve to be respected in their human dignity and not be treated "worse than house pets, animals."

**On LGBTQ+ blessings and morality**

Leo was asked about the recent invitation by Cardinal Reinhard Marx, archbishop of Munich, for the priests and pastoral workers in his archdioceses to adopt a set of guidelines formalizing and ritualizing blessings of same-sex couples.

The guidelines were approved last year by a controversial German church governing body made up of the German bishops' conference and a Catholic lay group that has been working to have a greater say in church decision-making. The Vatican in 2023 allowed for such blessings, but it made clear that they were not to be formalized or ritualized.



more unjust in the place where they arrive than from where they left." "I personally believe that a state has the right to impose rules for its frontiers," he said. "But saying this, I ask: 'What are we doing in the wealthier countries to change the situation