

MAHANAGAR METRO

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Amit Shah says India will ensure zero casualty during heat waves with proactive disaster strategy

The Ministry of Home Affairs has prepared a plan to better combat the "serious challenge" of heat waves and will be able to ensure "zero casualty" in this context over the next few years, Shah said.

New Delhi.(Agency)
Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said the ministry has prepared a strategy to ensure zero human casualty during heat waves in the coming years, stressing the need for a "proactive" rather than "reactive" approach to disaster management.
The minister spoke after he presented the President's Colour to the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) at the campus of its 8th battalion here.
The President's Colour flag is awarded to a military or police unit for rendering exceptional service. The honour came to the force in the 20th year of its establishment after it was raised in 2006 as a federal contingency force to undertake relief and rescue operations during natural and man-made disasters.
The President's Colour is not just a

"recognition" for the excellent services of the NDRF but also of all the state disaster response forces, the state machinery, the NCC (National Cadet Corps), NSS (National Service Scheme), 'Apda Seva Mitras' (volunteers) among others, Shah said. He added that the NDRF has earned the "admiration and trust" of the people of the country and even abroad through its operations. The minister said the aim of the Modi government was to ensure "zero casualty and minimum property

damage" during tragedies and calamities, including cyclones, earthquakes and floods.
The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has prepared a plan to better combat the "serious challenge" of heat waves in the country and we will be able to ensure "zero casualty" in this context over the next few years, Shah said. Our approach and policy has been "proactive" against disasters rather than being just "reactive", he said. Shah said India has made its name as a "global leader" in disaster management and being the "first responder" during calamities as he asked the NDRF to prepare itself in the face of global warming and climate change.
The NDRF has 16 operational battalions deployed across the country with an overall strength of about 18,000 personnel.



VD Satheesan: 6-time MLA and grassroots worker who predicted 100+ seats for UDF

VD Satheesan was chosen as the Chief Minister of Kerala by the party high command after 10 days of discussions. The Congress was the single largest party in the elections with 63 seats.

Thiruvananthapuram.(Agency)
After days of hectic political discussions and deliberations by the Congress's top leadership, VD Satheesan was chosen as the Chief Minister of Kerala on Thursday after the party won the recently-concluded Assembly elections. Satheesan picked party veterans KC Venugopal and Ramesh Chennithala, who were also under consideration, as the person who was eventually entrusted by the party high-command to lead the government in Kerala for the next five years. Satheesan had predicted that the Congress-led UDF alliance would win over 100 seats in the 2026 Kerala elections, and he got it right. Out of the 102 seats, the Congress accounted for 63, emerging as the largest party. The Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) secured 22 seats, while Kerala Congress (Joseph) won seven. The Revolutionary Socialist Party took three seats, and Kerala Congress (Jacob) won one.



WHO IS VD SATHEESAN?

VD Satheesan emerged as one of the defining political figures of Kerala's contemporary politics, and his elevation as Chief Minister marked the culmination of a long public career built on electoral consistency, organisational leadership and an assertive opposition role. Chosen after 10 days of intense consultations within the Congress following the UDF's Assembly victory, Satheesan's selection signals the party's decision to reward the leader who rebuilt its political fortunes in the state.

Major Exposé: "Butchers" of Faith... White-Collared Brothers! The Bloody Conspiracy to Destroy a Jain Monk Unmasked

A poisonous extortion syndicate worth crores exposed; will those accused of smearing the monk's reputation now face prison bars ?

Mahanagar Metro Desk / Pawan Mekan
Ahmedabad: A shocking controversy unfolding on the sacred soil of Gujarat has triggered outrage within sections of the Jain community. What is being described by supporters of Jain monk Rajatilak Sagarji Maharaj as a "honeytrap conspiracy" is being portrayed not merely as an allegation, but as a calculated attempt to destroy the image and spiritual standing of the monk. According to claims made by individuals close to the monk, the case is less about justice and more about an alleged extortion racket that revolved around demands for massive sums of money. The controversy has intensified as accusations of blackmail, defamation, and organized character assassination continue to surface. Alleged "Death Warrant" Against Reputation: Supporters of the monk allege that the controversy was carefully scripted to damage years of religious service and spiritual influence within hours. They

claim that the alleged conspiracy operated on multiple fronts: Organized Blackmail: Allegations suggest that a vulnerable woman was allegedly used as a shield in an attempt to pressure and extort money from the monk and his supporters. Character Assassination Campaign: When the monk reportedly refused to bow to pressure tactics, a co-ordinated effort was allegedly launched through social media narratives and legal mechanisms to tarnish his public image. Names Under Scrutiny: Several individuals, including Hardik Hudiya, Jagat Parekh, Vikram Singhvi, and Vikram Bafna, have been named by those defending the monk. Critics within the religious community accuse these men of betraying the very values they publicly claim to represent. Supporters argue that individuals who outwardly appear as devoted followers of religion are, in reality, acting against the interests of the faith itself. The allegations have sparked heated debate within community circles,



with calls for accountability growing louder. Questions Raising Pressure: The controversy has now led to several serious questions: Who is the alleged mastermind? Community members are asking whether influential figures operating behind the scenes encouraged or financed the alleged conspiracy. Will law enforcement act? Questions are also being raised about whether authorities in Gujarat will take strict action if evidence supporting the allegations emerges. Will the community respond? Some voices within the Jain community are demanding social accountability and stricter

scrutiny of those accused of exploiting religion for personal gain. A Battle Far From Over: Supporters of the monk insist that the matter is not over and claim more revelations may emerge in the coming days. They argue that the controversy has exposed deeper fractures involving power, influence, and alleged exploitation within religious circles. At the same time, it is important to note that these remain allegations and accusations from one side of the dispute. Any determination of guilt or criminal liability can only be established through a lawful investigation and court proceedings.

SIR gets kicking: Bengal, Bihar to bar deleted names from social welfare schemes

The Election Commission-led SIR exercise has now expanded beyond polls to plugging holes in direct benefit transfers. West Bengal and Bihar, two BJP-led states, will be using SIR data to identify duplicate, deceased and ineligible beneficiaries to plug leakages in welfare delivery systems.

New Delhi. (Agency)
The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, an Election Commission-led exercise to clean up voter lists by removing dead, duplicate or ineligible names, has now expanded beyond polls, and into plugging of leakages in welfare schemes in West Bengal and Bihar.

Days after the BJP formed its first government in West Bengal under CM Suvendu Adhikari, the administration signalled that those whose names were deleted during the SIR process would not be eligible for several government welfare schemes. Similar measures are underway in Bihar, where the BJP-led NDA government has begun removing beneficiaries from ration lists after SIR deletions.



Simultaneously, Bihar CM Samrat Choudhary said people whose names were deleted from the state's electoral rolls would not be entitled to government benefits, including ration and welfare schemes, according to a report in The Indian Express.

By linking the databases of welfare schemes with the revised electoral rolls, the SIR exercise is now the basis of the two state governments' identification of duplicate, deceased and allegedly ineligible beneficiaries to plug leakages in welfare delivery systems.

The Election Commission's SIR was launched ahead of the 2025 Assembly elections in Bihar and 2026 West Bengal Vidhan Sabha polls to purify electoral rolls and remove allegedly ineligible names. While the SIR removed around 65 lakh names in Bihar, around 91 lakh names were deleted in West Bengal. Out of the 91 lakh removed in West Bengal, over 27 lakh people remained on the list of "logical discrepancies", and could not vote.

Must address unilateral coercive measures, sanctions inconsistent with law: Jaishankar

● **He said these developments are not isolated events but interconnected challenges that are straining multilateral institutions and worsening vulnerabilities for developing**

New Delhi.(Agency)
In an indirect reference to sweeping US tariffs on Indian imports, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday called for addressing unilateral sanctions that he said violate international law, as foreign ministers of the BRICS bloc met in New Delhi against the backdrop of rising geopolitical tensions and divisions over conflicts in West Asia.

In his opening remarks at the BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting, Jaishankar said the global system is under pressure from multiple crises, including armed conflicts, climate disruptions and the after-effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.
"We must also address the increasing resort to unilateral coercive measures and sanctions inconsistent with international law and the UN Charter. Such measures disproportionately affect developing



cannot substitute dialogue, nor can pressure replace diplomacy," Jaishankar said. For the uninitiated, US President Donald Trump levied 25 percent reciprocal tariffs on Indian imports and another 25 percent over New Delhi's purchase of Russian oil. He warned of further sanctions if India did not stop the Russian oil imports.

However, a US International Trade tariff ruling in February 2026 pushed the levies back toward standard WTO most-favoured-nation

facing a 10% duty, which is a temporary import surcharge on goods exported to the US.

He said these developments are not isolated events but interconnected challenges that are straining multilateral institutions and worsening vulnerabilities for developing nations. The EAM's remarks come as the BRICS meeting has been overshadowed by divisions within the expanded bloc over the ongoing US-Israeli military campaign against Iran.

Diplomats said differing positions between Iran and the UAE have complicated efforts to issue a joint closing statement.

The two-day meeting in New Delhi brought together foreign ministers from most member states, including Abbas Araqchi and Khalifa Shaheen Al Marar. India holds the BRICS chairmanship for 2026.

Jaishankar said "peace and security remain central to the global order," adding that recent

diplomacy. He said emerging economies were increasingly looking to the BRICS as a stabilising force amid global uncertainty.

"There is a growing expectation, particularly from emerging markets and developing countries, that BRICS will play a constructive and stabilising role," he said.

Jaishankar said the impact of regional conflicts extends well beyond their immediate geography, creating stress on energy supplies, food and fertiliser security, supply chains and inflation. He said these pressures are particularly severe for emerging markets, where economic resilience remains fragile.

ON GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS

Referring to the situation in West Asia, Jaishankar said continued instability has raised concerns over maritime security and energy infrastructure. He stressed that uninterrupted movement through key waterways such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea remains critical for the global

News box

BSF constable killed in hit-and-run near Bhondsi campus

GURGAON.(Agency)

A border security force (BSF) constable was killed after being hit by an unidentified vehicle while crossing the road near the BSF campus in Bhondsi late on Monday night. The deceased, Ravinder, was a constable with the 31 Battalion BSF and a resident of Najafgarh in southwest Delhi. According to a complaint submitted by the commandant of 95 Battalion BSF to Bhondsi police, Ravinder had arrived at the battalion's transit camp on May 11 after completing 28 days of earned leave. He was scheduled to travel to Srinagar via air courier service from Delhi. Police said the accident took place around 10.40pm on May 12, nearly 200 metres from Gate No. 1 of the BSF campus, when Ravinder was crossing the road. A passerby informed the gate sentry about the incident, following which BSF personnel, including the quick reaction team, officers, medical staff and an ambulance, rushed to the spot. By then, local police had already reached the site. BSF medical officer Sushil Bishnoi examined Ravinder and found no pulse or blood pressure. He had suffered severe chest and head injuries. Ravinder was taken to Civil Hospital in Sector 10, where doctors declared him brought dead. Police registered an FIR against an unidentified driver under relevant sections of the BNS and launched an investigation.

4 held after violent clash, firing over garbage collection in Gurgaon

Ghaziabad.(Agency)

Four men were arrested after a violent clash involving firing broke out between two groups over a garbage collection dispute at Tulip Chowk in Sector 70 on May 8. Police said the clash took place around 11.30am on SPR Road between rival groups from Kadarpur and Rithoj villages. The groups allegedly attacked each other with sticks and lathis following an argument over garbage collection in the area. Several vehicles parked nearby were vandalised during the violence. Four cars sustained heavy damage, with their windows smashed. Gunshots were also fired during the altercation, police said. A team from Badshahpur police station rushed to the spot after receiving information about the clash. Both sides later filed complaints accusing each other of assault, firing and issuing death threats. Two FIRs were registered under relevant sections of the BNS and the Arms Act on the complaints of Pradeep and Navdeep alias Golu. Police said Pradeep suffered a gunshot injury during the clash, while Navdeep alias Golu sustained injuries in the assault. During the investigation, police arrested Navdeep alias Golu, a resident of Kadarpur, on May 12 in one of the FIRs. In the second case, Sandeep of Tigra village, Monu of Rithoj village and Pradeep of Rithoj village were arrested between May 9 and May 12. Police recovered a pistol allegedly used in the firing from Navdeep's possession. Police said four criminal cases are already registered against him in Gurgaon.

Noida cops slap NSA on 2 activists held for labour protest violence

NOIDA.(Agency)

Police invoked National Security Act against a writer and activist and a Delhi-based PhD scholar accused of orchestrating violence during a workers' protest for higher minimum wages on April 13, drawing sharp criticism from civil rights groups, who called it a ploy to keep them behind bars. Satyam Verma (62) who had a long stint as a journalist in Lucknow and Delhi, wrote for the monthly labour magazine Mazdoor Bigul, after which the organisation Mazdoor Bigul Dasta that police claim is behind the April 13 violence is named. Verma was arrested from Lucknow on April 17. Aakriti Choudhary, a student activist and theatre artist, is a member of Mazdoor Bigul Dasta. Police maintained that Satyam and Aakriti encouraged crowds to turn aggressive, leading to widespread arson, vandalism and attacks on public property. A senior officer said CCTV footage, social media posts and intelligence reports established their involvement in mobilising crowds and circulating provocative messages. Charges under NSA, which allows preventive detention in cases that are deemed a threat to public order and national security, were recommended on the basis of this evidence, the officer said. Investigators alleged inflammatory messages and rumours were spread through social media platforms to incite workers against govt, and that certain elements sought to exploit the labour movement to disturb law and order. Police said they were identifying other individuals who may have encouraged violence or spread misinformation during the protests. Mazdoor Bigul Dasta rejected the charges as politically motivated, saying lawyers of Satyam and Aakriti highlighted the "emptiness of the charges and the illegality of the arrests, while the public prosecutor failed to produce any substantial evidence". The organisation said it believed NSA provisions could also be invoked against other arrested activists, including Aditya Anand, Rupesh Roy, Manisha Chauhan, Srishti Gupta and Himanshu Thakur. Campaign for Release of Workers and Activists of Noida (CaRWAN), a coalition of civil rights activists, student organisations and lawyers, said NSA was slapped on the two to keep them in detention indefinitely. The cops, they claimed, so far found nothing against them that would hold up their charges in court. CaRWAN members said Satyam, who worked with news agency Univarta and is associated with Janchetna Books in Lucknow and Jagaruk Nagrik Manch, was not present in Noida during the protest and last visited the city 12 years ago. "Yet the UP Police is painting him as a main conspirator, claiming he was present and inciting violence," a press communique issued by them said. Known for his Hindi translations of English works in different genres, Satyam is the son of noted historian, author and academic Lal Bahadur Verma. Aakriti, who completed her master's in history from Daulat Ram College at DU's north campus and is preparing for a PhD, was detained by plainclothes officers at Botanical Garden Metro Station on April 11, two days before the protest, after she had attended a previous demonstration to extend solidarity with workers and advocate for a peaceful strike. A resident of Model Town in Delhi, she has now been in custody for over a month.

Truck rams bike taxi near Sati Chowk in Gurgaon, 2 die

GURGAON.(Agency)

A bike taxi driver and a private company employee died after a speeding truck hit them from behind near Dada Sati Chowk on Tuesday morning. The truck involved in the accident has been seized but the driver is on the run, an officer said. Police said the incident occurred around 11am. The bike taxi was being driven by Jaipal (24) while Rohit Kumar Gupta (32) was riding pillion. They were both natives of UP. According to a complaint filed by Gupta's father, Vinod, Rohit was living in Shanti Vihar, Sector 95, for the past five years. On Tuesday, Gupta had booked a bike taxi to reach his office in Okhla. "At approximately 11am after crossing Sati Chowk and proceeding a short distance ahead, a truck being driven recklessly by an unidentified person, struck the motorcycle from behind," the complaint read. According to police investigation, both the occupants fell from the motorcycle due to the impact and sustained serious injuries. Passers-by took both the injured persons to a nearby hospital, where

Gupta was declared brought dead while Jaipal died during treatment. An officer involved in the investigation said a case has been registered under sections 106 (death by negligence) and 281 (rash driving) at Kherki Daula police station. Teams have been formed to nab the truck driver. "We will send a notice to the owner of the truck and take necessary action. Meanwhile, teams are trying to establish the identity of the truck driver and apprehend him as soon as possible," he said. Meanwhile, in another accident, a 28-year-old man died during treatment at AIIMS Delhi more than a week after he sustained severe head injuries in a road accident near Feroz Gandhi Colony.

The deceased was identified as Dasrath, a resident of Ambedkar Nagar in Sector 9. Police registered an FIR against an unidentified vehicle at Sector 9A police station under relevant sections of the BNS. According to the complaint filed by Lakshman Kumar, the victim's uncle, the accident took place on



May 4 when he was travelling from Sector 9 towards Feroz Gandhi Colony. He saw a man lying injured near a motorcycle on the roadside and when he went to check, he found it was his nephew, the complaint stated. Lakshman, along with some passers-by, shifted

Dasrath to Civil Hospital in Sector 10 by ambulance. Due to the seriousness of his condition, doctors referred him to AIIMS Delhi for further treatment. Dasrath succumbed to his injuries at around 2.30am on Tuesday, police said. A team from Sector 9A police station reached the hospital and collected the medico-legal report. An officer said, "A team later visited AIIMS Delhi on May 7 to record the victim's statement, but doctors declared him unfit for statement. Subsequently, the statement of the victim's maternal aunt was recorded. The family later approached the police station with a written complaint after Dasrath's death." In a separate accident, a man was found dead in Sector 78, suspectedly because he was hit by a speeding vehicle. Police said they received information about the incident at around 10 pm. "We are checking CCTV footage from nearby areas to ascertain the vehicle involved in the incident," an officer said.

CBSE Class 12 boards: Gurgaon region records 88.4% pass rate

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Wednesday announced the Class 12 results, with the Gurgaon region recording an overall pass percentage of 88.4%. Of the 94,255 students who appeared for the exams in the region — spanning 12 districts including Gurgaon, Faridabad, Palwal and Sonapat — 82,979 cleared them. Gurgaon regional office was established in 2025 after southern districts were carved out from the Panchkula regional office.

Across Haryana, 1,55,150 students appeared for the exams, of which 1,34,488 passed, resulting in an overall state pass percentage of 86.6% — down from 91% in 2025. Girls outperformed boys both in the region and across the state. In the Gurgaon region, 37,232 of the 40,530 girls who appeared passed, registering a pass percentage of 91.8%, compared to 85.8% among boys, of whom

45,747 of 53,285 cleared the exams. At the state level, 60,867 of the 67,293 girls who appeared passed, recording a pass percentage of 90.4%, down from 94.7% in 2025. Among boys, 73,621 of the 87,138 who appeared cleared the exams, with a pass percentage of 84.4%, compared to 88.5% in 2025. Educationists said the drop in pass percentage in the state reflected a shift towards stricter and more transparent evaluation standards. "While the numbers are lower, such reforms ultimately strengthen academic credibility and encourage students to focus on conceptual understanding rather than rote learning," said a teacher from a private school in the city. Naysa Singh of DPS Sector 45 topped the science stream with 99.2%, having also scored 98.9% in Class 10. She secured perfect scores in biology, chemistry and psychology, and 99 in English and 97 in physical education. Naysa, who had appeared for the NEET

exam, is keen on pursuing MBBS but the exam was cancelled following an alleged paper leak, leaving her next steps uncertain. In the commerce stream, Daksh Gupta of DAV School Sector 39 scored 99%, with perfect 100 in mathematics and 99 each in economics, accountancy and business studies, and 98 in English. He aspires to become a chartered accountant and eventually start his own practice.

In the children with special needs category, 273 students appeared from the Gurgaon region. Among them, Harsh, a humanities student from Amity International School Sector 46, scored 86% despite having dyslexia — a learning disability identified after he failed Class 11. Studying three to four hours daily, and supported by his family and teachers, he gradually rebuilt his confidence and his grasp of subjects. His mother Kavita is a homemaker and his father Lalit works as a transport in-charge at a school.

Trade unions protest labour codes, accuse govt of repression

Noida.(Agency)

Trade unions — representing industrial workers, municipal staff and sanitation employees — staged a demonstration outside the district commissioner's office on Wednesday. Warning of intensifying their agitation, the protesters — on their 'Demand Day' — decried "growing police repression" of labour movements across the country and pressed for withdrawal of the four labour codes and acceptance of long-pending demands of workers in Haryana. The four codes — the Code on Wages, 2019; Industrial Relations Code, 2020; Code on Social Security, 2020; and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 — came into force on Nov 21, 2025. Throughout the dharna, workers, employees and union leaders from various central trade unions and associations — under the banner of All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) —

raised slogans against the Centre and state govts' "anti-labour" policies and burned copies of the four labour codes, calling them a direct assault on hard-won labour rights. State secretary of AITUC Anil Pawar alleged that the new labour codes would dismantle job security, expand



contract labour, increase working hours and restrict the rights to unionise and protest, while giving "unrestricted freedom" to employers. "The govts are responding to labour unrest with

suppression instead of solutions. See the cases registered against protesting workers and union leaders in several states," Pawar said. District secretary and state vice-president of All India United Trade Union Centre (AIUTUC) Sarwan Kumar, state vice-president of Centre of Indian Trade Unions Satbir Singh, Mukesh Sharma of Indian National Trade Union Congress and Jaspal Rana of Hind Mazdoor Sabha expressed solidarity with striking sanitation workers, municipal employees and fire department staff in Haryana. "These workers have been agitating for permanent jobs, equal pay for equal work, scrapping of contractual employment, regular recruitment and social security, but instead of resolving their issues, authorities are trying to crush the agitation," Satbir said. "If the anti-worker policies and repressive measures continue, the labour movement would be intensified in the coming days," Mukesh said.

Gurgaon civic body to track pickup fleet amid garbage van shortfall

NOIDA.(Agency)

MCG will conduct a physical verification of all door-to-door garbage collection vehicles on May 15. The move follows concerns over discrepancies in the number of sanitation vehicles deployed across the city. MCG commissioner Pradeep Dahiya issued the directions during a review meeting with civic officials on Wednesday, where sanitation operations, public complaints and other civic issues were discussed. Officials informed the meeting that 343 vehicles were currently operational for door-to-door waste collection. Dahiya said, "During the recently held MCG House meeting, directions were issued to verify the actual number of these vehicles. Therefore, vehicles from all zones will be assembled at designated locations at 8am on May 15 for verification." The move comes days after TOI reported on May 6 that only 313 of the 400 vehicles mandated under MCG's temporary waste collection contracts were available on the ground, leaving a shortfall of 87 vehicles. According to the report, four agencies were engaged by MCG earlier this year for six months to deploy 400 vehicles for door-to-door garbage collection from Jan 9 to July 8. Zone 1 had 90 vehicles available against the required 115, while



Zone 4 had deployed 70 against the mandated 98 vehicles. During Wednesday's meeting, Dahiya also directed officials to remove encroachments from public toilets and improve cleanliness, lighting and other basic amenities at such facilities. To improve monitoring of sanitation operations, Dahiya instructed officials to develop an online monitoring system for

mechanised road-sweeping machines. Officials were asked to make information related to the functioning and live location of the machines available in the public domain to improve transparency and citizen oversight. A zone-wise review of the sanitation security force was also conducted, and officials were directed to strengthen monitoring by the field teams. The progress of the "Nayi Soch-Naya

Shahar, Swachh Haryana Abhiyan" campaign was also reviewed. Dahiya further directed officials to ensure time-bound disposal of complaints received through Samadhan Shivirs and warned against negligence in resolving public grievances. He said the civic body was working towards making the city cleaner and better equipped with civic amenities, and stressed.

High Court calls felling of khejri trees for solar projects a 'breathhtaking irony'

The Rajasthan High Court has questioned the proposed felling of Khejri trees for solar projects and directed that no tree be cut without prior approval. It said the state panel must examine every alternative to protect the species and ecological balance.

Jodhpur. (Agency)

Expressing concern over the proposed cutting of Khejri trees for solar power projects, the Rajasthan High Court has described the move as a "stark example" of environmental destruction in the name of technological progress and urged the state-appointed panel on tree protection to explore every possible alternative to save "even a single tree". A bench of Justices Arun Monga and Sandeep Shah made the observations while disposing of a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by NGO Shri Jambheshwar Paryavaran and Jeev Raksha Pradesh Sanstha, which sought protection of Khejri trees across Rajasthan. The court directed that no trees should be felled without prior approval in accordance with

the law. It also ordered that the committee constituted by the state government to examine the issue and recommend protective measures, including possible legislation, must be informed before any such action is taken.

Highlighting the ecological importance of the Khejri tree (*Prosopis cineraria*), the bench noted that the species grows sparsely in Rajasthan's arid desert regions and yet faces the threat of being cut down to facilitate solar energy projects. "The irony is breathtaking," the court observed, questioning whether society was sacrificing nature in the name of technological advancement. The bench also recalled the historic 1730 sacrifice by



members of the Bishnoi community, who gave their lives while trying to protect Khejri trees from being felled. Drawing a parallel with the present situation, the court remarked that perhaps the time had come once again for rulers to issue a "farmaan" for the protection of trees and

ecological balance. The PIL had sought directions to stop the alleged illegal cutting of trees, particularly Khejri trees, without following due legal procedure.

The petitioner organisation also urged the state government to enact a dedicated Tree Protection Act on the lines of laws in other states or frame specific guidelines for the conservation of Khejri trees.

Additionally, the plea sought promotion of agroforestry on private and non-forest land across Rajasthan, along with a mechanism for compensatory plantation. Appearing for the petitioner, advocate Vijay Bishnoi argued that under the guise of implementing the state's solar power policy, existing green cover was being indiscriminately cleared. He submitted that

much of the affected land was infertile and that Khejri trees were among the few species naturally adapted to survive the harsh desert climate. He also highlighted the emotional and religious significance attached to the tree by local communities.

During the hearing, the state government informed the court that it had already taken cognisance of the issue and constituted a special committee through an order dated March 9, 2026. The committee has been tasked with conducting a comparative study of tree protection laws in various states, consulting stakeholders, and examining judicial decisions and existing legal provisions related to tree conservation before preparing a draft proposal within a month.

Short news

Kerala student pursuing PhD at BITS Pilani Goa dies by suicide

Panaji. (Agency)

A 26-year-old student hailing from Kerala and doing PhD in BITS Pilani K K Birla Goa Campus in Vasco allegedly died by suicide at his rented flat located behind the institute, police said on Wednesday. In the last one-and-a-half years, this is the seventh case of a student of a BITS Pilani Vasco campus committing suicide, sources said, adding that in earlier six incidents, the students had ended life within the campus. Arjun Sabu, a second-year PhD student at the institute, was found hanging late Tuesday night, they said.

A purported suicide note was recovered from the site, though its contents have not yet been officially disclosed yet, the police said.

The police have launched an investigation and are trying to find out the circumstances leading to his death.

His body has been sent for a post-mortem examination, they said. The latest incident comes amid growing concern over incidents of suicide by students reported at the BITS Pilani Goa campus over the past two years.

In March this year, the Goa legislative assembly was told that since December 2024, six students committed suicide at different points of time on the BITS Pilani campus in Vasco, triggering a debate over academic pressure and mental health support.

Polavaram canal repairs begin after flood damage

ELURU. (Agency)

The retaining wall and ramp near the Polavaram Right Canal bridge in Lakshimpuram village, Pedavegi mandal, were severely damaged during last November's cyclone, raising concern among residents.

Strong floodwaters eroded large portions of soil along the canal embankment, making the bridge surroundings unsafe for commuters and farmers. After repeated



complaints from villagers and farmers, authorities initiated repair works. Officials are reconstructing the retaining wall with reinforced concrete and strengthening the ramp to prevent erosion.

Additional protective measures are being taken to fortify the canal bund and safeguard the structure against future floods. Residents said similar erosion problems occur at several points along the Polavaram Right Canal, especially during the rainy season when embankments weaken. They urged officials to identify vulnerable stretches and implement permanent protective measures before the monsoon.

Villagers also raised concerns about construction quality, noting that the earlier retaining wall failed to withstand floodwaters. They demanded durable, high-quality works this time and called for completion before the rainy season.

Mangal Newton School's Avishi Baldwa Brings Glory to Beawar

Beawar: Students of Mangal Newton Senior Secondary School, Beawar, delivered an outstanding performance in the Class 12 Board Examination Session 2025-26, bringing pride to both the school and the city. School student Avishi Baldwa secured 95 percent marks in the Commerce stream and earned the title of City Topper. Avishi showcased exceptional talent by scoring 99 marks each in Accountancy and Business Studies. Her remarkable achievement has created a wave of pride among the school staff and parents. Other students of the school also achieved excellent results. Riddhima Bansal scored 91.6%, Himanshi Kaushik secured 90.4%, Vrinda Asnani achieved 90.2%, while Lakshita Sanwalani



scored 89% in the Science stream. Students of the school performed brilliantly across various subjects, reflecting their hard work and dedication. School Principal Rachel Little and Director Yash Mangal congratulated all students, parents, and teachers on this grand

success. They said that continuous hard work, discipline, and positive guidance are the keys to achieving such excellent results. The school management extended best wishes to all successful students for a bright and prosperous future.

Kheda: A Dangerous Cocktail of Crime and Administrative Collapse

Nadiad | Bureau Chief

Serious allegations of growing criminal influence, illegal liquor trade, gambling operations, and alleged police inaction are raising concern across parts of Kheda District. Local residents and activists claim that sections of the district are witnessing a dangerous erosion of law enforcement authority, with organized illegal networks allegedly operating openly.

According to allegations circulating in local circles, the district's

policing system is under pressure from both political influence and

corruption. Critics claim that illegal liquor trade, gambling rackets, and extortion networks are thriving while ordinary citizens increasingly feel unsafe. One of the most discussed

names in local conversations is a man reportedly known by the alias "Meliyo," who, according to allegations, continues to operate freely

despite previously facing restrictions in other areas. Critics allege



that certain politically connected individuals provide protection to influential criminal elements, making enforcement difficult. Local voices further

claim that individuals with criminal backgrounds are allegedly being used to intimidate journalists and suppress criticism.

At least 89 killed as powerful storm, heavy rain sweep through UP districts

Prayagraj reported the highest toll with 21 deaths, followed by Sant Ravidas Nagar (14) and Fatehpur (11), as storm fatalities rose across seven districts in Uttar Pradesh.

Lucknow. (Agency)

At least 89 people have died across multiple districts of Uttar Pradesh after a powerful storm accompanied by heavy rain, dust and strong winds caused widespread destruction on Wednesday evening, officials said. The storm uprooted trees, damaged houses, disrupted traffic movement and affected electricity and communication networks in several areas, with authorities continuing relief and restoration work.

According to official district-wise figures, the death toll has risen overnight from 27 to 89. The highest number of fatalities was reported from Prayagraj, where 21 people died, followed by Sant Ravidas Nagar with 14 deaths, Fatehpur with 11 deaths and Mirzapur with 10 deaths. Six deaths were reported in Unnao while five

others died in Badaun. Bareilly and Pratapgarh saw four deaths each, while Hardoi, Kanpur Dehat, Sonbhadra and Sambhal reported two deaths each. Three people died in Sitapur.

Additionally, Basti, Rae Bareilly, and Shahjahanpur reported one death each, taking the toll to 89. At least 53 others are said to be injured. In Prayagraj, at least 21 people died after a severe dust storm and strong winds lashed several parts of the district.

Officials said seven people died in Handia, four in Phulpur, three in Soraon and two in Meja. The storm caused extensive damage in Handia, Soraon, Phulpur and Meja areas. Strong winds uprooted several large trees across Prayagraj, while old trees collapsed



on roads amid the dust storm, disrupting traffic movement.

Municipal Corporation Junior Engineer Vinod Patel said authorities received reports of fallen trees from areas including Patthar Girjagarh, Ashok Nagar, Kachahari Road and Mahatma Gandhi Marg. A

dilapidated tree also collapsed in the Kalyani Devi locality.

The storm disrupted electricity supply in several localities of Prayagraj. Municipal Corporation teams reached affected areas and started clearing fallen trees from roads. Officials said traffic movement would be restored soon.

The sudden dust storm also caused damage in the Triveni Sangam area, where huts erected by pilgrimage priests were uprooted and collapsed. Officials described the destruction as one of the biggest storm-related incidents reported in the area so far, while administrative teams continued assessing the damage and collecting casualty figures.

How BRICS can provide mortar for a new world order

India's foreign policy finds itself at a historical and strategic crossroads, navigating a geopolitical landscape far more complex than the binary choices of the 20th century. On one hand, New Delhi is a linchpin of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad, deeply entwined with a Western-aligned security architecture intended to ensure a "free and open Indo-Pacific". On the other hand, India currently holds the 2026 BRICS presidency. This bloc has spent two decades evolving from a Wall Street acronym into the most formidable institutional voice of the Global South. This dual identity—strategic partner to the West and champion of the developing world—is being tested like never before. As the 2026 BRICS presidency unfolds, the friction between these two roles is no longer a matter of abstract diplomatic theory; it is manifesting in missed joint statements, aggressive tariff threats from Washington and a fundamental disagreement over the future of the global financial order. For India, the challenge is no longer just about 'multi-alignment'; it is about whether it can lead a fractured Global South. The journey to this moment began on November 30, 2001. In the sombre immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Jim O'Neill of Goldman Sachs published a seminal paper titled 'Building better global economic BRICS'. He argued that the G7 structure was an anachronism that failed to account for tectonic shifts in global productivity. O'Neill pointed out that, in terms of purchasing power parity, Brazil, Russia, India and China accounted for almost a quarter of global GDP. His thesis was simple: the world's economic governance was incomplete without these emerging giants. O'Neill was a banker, not a diplomat, and he viewed these nations through the lens of growth potential. Interestingly, he predicted India's initial hesitation, noting it might be the "least eager" to join a formal club. He sensed that New Delhi might view collective obligations as an unwelcome constraint on its domestic policy or its ability to provide independent advice based on its unique developmental trajectory. The transition from an economic concept to a political reality occurred in September 2006 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. India was represented by Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee standing in for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The resulting joint statement was a shot across the bow of the post-WWII order, asserting that in a shifting global scenario, "economic weight must equal political power". While Brazil and China were eager to frame the group as a counter-hegemonic force, India's approach was more nuanced. New Delhi stressed that this new formation was "complementary" to existing structures, and did not envisage it as a replacement. This middle path has been the hallmark of Indian diplomacy for decades. Yet, the 2008 global financial crisis eventually forced a more assertive stance. By the first formal summit in Russia's Yekaterinburg on June 16, 2009, the tone had shifted. The 'Great Recession' had exposed the fragility of Western financial dominance and the risks of a unipolar economic world. Prime Minister Singh, usually a soft-spoken economist, firmly advocated a multipolar vision and an end to G7-centric governance. He famously remarked that the global economic crisis had shown that the existing structures of international governance needed reform to ensure that the developing world's voice was heard.

Punjab's railway transformation is creating opportunities, boosting connectivity

The tracks being laid are not merely lines on the ground — they are pathways towards economic growth

Railways have always been more than a mode of transport for India. Wherever rail connectivity reaches, development follows. Industries grow, trade expands, tourism flourishes and the quality of life of ordinary citizens improves. Punjab is now witnessing exactly such a transformation — a railway renaissance that is reshaping the economic and social landscape of the state. For decades, Punjab suffered because several crucial railway projects remained trapped in files, delayed by bureaucratic hurdles, lack of coordination and absence of sustained political will. Many projects that were sanctioned years ago eventually entered a "freeze" stage and remained in cold storage for decades. Important regions such as Malwa, border districts, industrial belts and religious centres remained deprived of modern rail infrastructure despite repeated demands by the people. One of the biggest ironies was that Chandigarh, the capital city of Punjab, was not directly connected to the entire Malwa region through a modern rail corridor. The Rajpura-Mohali rail link, first envisioned in the 1970s, remained pending for decades despite continuous follow-ups by several leaders and public representatives over different periods. The Qadian-Beas line, another long-pending demand, also remained frozen because of land acquisition issues and administrative delays. The situation began to change under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Guided by the PM's vision of infrastructure-led growth and regional balance, Punjab's railway development received unprecedented attention. I was fortunate to receive constant support and encouragement from Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, whose proactive approach ensured that Punjab's pending railway aspirations were converted into executable projects. When I assumed responsibility as Minister of State for Railways, I reviewed every major pending project related to Punjab — from the divisional level to Railway Board headquarters. I found that many projects had effectively stalled because of issues related to state cost-sharing commitments, land acquisition disputes and prolonged procedural delays. Understanding Punjab's financial situation, I strongly advocated that the Railways should move ahead by bearing the project costs to ensure that development did not suffer. After extensive discussions, continuous follow-ups and coordination between divisions, zonal railways and the Railway Board, several projects that were once frozen were finally revived and fast-tracked. Punjab is witnessing railway development at a scale never seen before. The railway budget allocation for the state has increased to Rs 5,673 crore in 2026-27, nearly 25 times higher than the annual average

allocation during 2009-14. Projects worth over Rs 26,000 crore are currently under execution across the state. Major projects that were revived and accelerated include the Rs 13,770-crore Bhanupalli-Beri New Line project, the Rs 842-crore Qadian-Beas New Line, the Rs 443-crore Rajpura-Mohali rail line, the Rs 300-crore Ferozepur-Patti New Line and the Rs 449-crore Raman-Maur line. Important doubling projects such as Ludhiana-Kila Raipur and Ludhiana-Mullanpur are also progressing rapidly. The Nangal Dam-Talwara project, involving an investment of Rs 2,312 crore, is another landmark initiative that will strengthen connectivity in the region. One of the most historic achievements has been the sanctioning and advancement of railway connectivity to Talwandi Sabo, home to Takht Sri Damdama Sahib. For decades, there was a long-standing aspiration to connect all five Takhts of Sikhism through rail connectivity. Leaders across party lines raised this



issue over the years, but progress remained limited. Today, this dream is finally moving towards reality. This is not merely an infrastructure project; it is an emotional, cultural and spiritual milestone for millions of devotees worldwide. Punjab is also witnessing rapid modernisation of passenger facilities. Under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme, 30 railway stations are being redeveloped with world-class amenities. Among them are the holy city of Amritsar in Majha and Bathinda in Malwa. Major stations such as Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Mohali, Anandpur Sahib and Sri Muktsar Sahib are undergoing extensive modernisation. The redevelopment of Chandigarh Railway Station at a cost of Rs 462 crore is one of the flagship projects being executed by the Rail Land Development Authority. The station is being transformed into a modern transport hub with dual station buildings, a massive air concourse, foot overbridges, modern passenger lounges, retail areas, lifts, escalators and enhanced parking facilities. The project has already achieved substantial progress and will redefine the travel experience for the Chandigarh Tricity region. At the same time, Punjab's rail

connectivity has entered a new era with the introduction of premium train services. Today, six pairs of Vande Bharat Express trains and one pair of Amrit Bharat Express are operational in the state. The Ferozepur-New Delhi Vande Bharat Express was especially important for the Malwa region. I pursued the project to ensure that border districts and the Malwa belt received direct high-speed connectivity to the national capital. The train, inaugurated by the Prime Minister with great enthusiasm, has become a symbol of modern rail connectivity and a precious gift for Punjab.

The transformation is visible not only in passenger services but also in core infrastructure. Punjab has achieved 100% railway electrification. Hundreds of kilometres of new tracks have been laid, while over 400 ROB (railway overbridges), RUBs (railway underbridges) and underpasses are being constructed or sanctioned to reduce congestion and improve safety. I intervened in several pending projects, including the Doraha and Dhuri ROB, where procedural bottlenecks had delayed public convenience for years. Similarly, in Pathankot, we took immediate steps to reduce severe traffic congestion caused by multiple level crossings by reorganising rake movement and operational patterns. I have always believed that development should rise above political lines. Every proposal related to ROB, RUB or passenger facilities brought forward by leaders from any political party was taken seriously and pursued with equal commitment because the priority must always remain public welfare. Punjab's railway transformation is not merely about tracks and stations. It is about creating opportunities. Improved rail infrastructure will reduce logistics costs for industries, strengthen border-area connectivity, encourage tourism and pilgrimage, support agricultural trade and generate employment. Industrial centres such as Bathinda, Ludhiana, Patiala, Batala, Jalandhar and border districts will benefit immensely from enhanced freight and passenger movement. Better connectivity will also strengthen Punjab's role in national economic growth. The journey from frozen files to fast-tracked execution demonstrates what determined leadership, coordinated governance and continuous follow-up can achieve. I express my heartfelt gratitude to PM Narendra Modi for his visionary leadership, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw for his constant guidance and support, and all railway officials and engineers who worked tirelessly to turn these long-pending dreams into reality. Punjab's railway renaissance has begun. The tracks being laid today are not merely lines on the ground — they are pathways towards economic growth, social progress, regional connectivity and a stronger future for every citizen of Punjab.

BJP's game plan : Opposition parties need to close ranks

It seems that the Modi government is preparing the people for a crisis that it failed to anticipate

SUVENDU Adhikari has taken oath as West Bengal's first BJP chief minister — less than six years after he switched over from the Trinamool Congress (TMC). He has been rewarded for defeating TMC supremo and three-term CM Mamata Banerjee in her bastion, Bhabanipur (Adhikari also won the Nandigram battle against her in the 2021 Assembly elections, even though the BJP had finished a distant second). His elevation is in sync with the BJP's strategy of promoting turncoats to make inroads into states where its traditional cadre base has been weak. From Himanta Biswa Sarma in Assam to Samrat Choudhary in Bihar, the party has repaid faith in leaders known for their grassroots influence. Adhikari now joins this club of powerful converts who have become central to the BJP's expansion mission. In



Punjab, which will go to the polls in barely 10 months, the party has former Congress leaders Sunil Jakhar and

Ravneet Bittu among its ranks, besides AAP's Rajya Sabha MPs who defected recently. The BJP's growing dominance is prompting its vanquished rivals to rethink their go-solo policy. Mamata Banerjee has called for a "joint platform" of Opposition parties, student unions and NGOs to resist the saffron surge. She seems to have finally realised that a fragmented INDIA bloc cannot match the BJP's might. The Congress-DMK rupture in Tamil Nadu has laid bare the conflict between regional and national priorities. The dual challenge for Opposition parties is to keep their flock together and present a united front. The BJP's relentless efforts to weaken regional forces are already putting the national alliance under great strain. The trend is set to gain momentum if there is little or no pushback from parties whose very survival is at stake.

Black economy stifles Punjab's growth

■ Persistent ills such as drug menace and tax evasion are eroding the state's fiscal capacity

THE public policy shift in July 1991 promised that deregulation would eliminate the black economy. A decade ago, demonetisation raised similar hopes. However, the black economy is quietly thriving, particularly in Punjab, where it is creating a multidimensional crisis and severely impacting development. Punjab's woes are often discussed through the prism of familiar issues like the drug menace, debt burden, unemployment, tax evasion, illegal sand mining, illicit liquor and agrarian distress. These are not separate crises, but elements of a shadow/black economy that drains revenue, undermines governance, harms public health and hits economic activity. Punjab does not yet have a reliable official estimate of its underground economy. That absence is itself significant. Estimates of India's shadow economy vary widely, from around 14 per cent to more than 50 per cent of the GDP. More recent estimates tend to place it closer to 20-30 per cent. But the problem in Punjab cannot be understood only through the national average. The state's shadow economy is shaped by its geographical location, agrarian economy, real-estate practices, fiscal stress, GST leakages, illicit liquor networks and illegal sand mining. The most visible and socially devastating face of Punjab's shadow economy is the narcotic trade. The state shares a 553-km international border with Pakistan, making it vulnerable to cross-border trafficking. Official seizure data shows that narcotic trafficking has remained high. Total seizures stood at 49,422 kg in 2022 and 47,609 kg in 2023. The crisis is also reflected in cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, with Punjab accounting for more than one-tenth of all such cases registered in India in recent years. These figures capture only intercepted narcotics, not the full volume of the trade.

A drug economy of this magnitude generates cash flows, informal credit, patronage and laundering channels that can spill into real estate, consumption, small businesses and local politics. The scale of substance use shows how the narcotic trade feeds Punjab's wider shadow economy. The 2019 national report of the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment estimated that Punjab accounted for 7.2 lakh opioid-dependent people, 2.1 lakh sedative-dependent people, 27,000 cocaine users and nearly 88,000 who injected drugs. A 2022 survey by the PGI, Chandigarh, reported substance use among 15.4 per cent of the population. Addiction turns the narcotic trade into a deeper economic crisis by weakening the labour force, raising household costs, increasing informal borrowing and embedding shadow networks in everyday life. The fiscal cost of this hidden activity becomes visible in revenue leakages, especially through GST evasion, real-estate undervaluation, illicit liquor and under-regulated extraction from natural resources. GST evasion illustrates this revenue-side pressure. GST was expected to reduce evasion, formalise transactions and widen the tax base. However, between July 2017 and December 2024, Central tax agencies registered 1,386 GST evasion cases in Punjab involving around Rs 6,454 crore, with 72 arrests linked to these cases. This indicates that tax evasion is not confined to non-compliance; it is an organised channel through which public revenue is hit hard. The persistence of such leakages shows how informal and fraudulent practices continue to erode Punjab's fiscal capacity even within a formal tax framework.

Real estate is a major channel through which the shadow economy enters the formal economy. The gap between collector rates and actual market prices allows property transactions to be recorded at lower official values, while

part of the payment is settled in cash. This enables unreported income to be converted into property assets, while reducing stamp duty, registration revenue, capital gains visibility and income tax trails. Punjab's 2024 revision of collector rates was not merely a revenue



measure, but an attempt to reduce the space for undervaluation, cash settlement and informal wealth accumulation in property markets. The scale of the gap is visible in sharp local revisions. For instance, in Kheri Gujran (Patiala), residential collector rates have reportedly risen from Rs 3,445 to Rs 22,750 per square yard (560 per cent increase). Thus, real estate absorbs hidden income, weakens revenue collection and gives informal wealth the form of a durable asset. Agriculture adds a more complex layer to this pattern due to the uneven visibility of the agrarian economy. Procurement is formally recorded, but labour arrangements and income reporting often remain outside regular scrutiny. The exemption of agricultural income under Section 10(1) of the Income Tax Act, 1961, is necessary to protect small and marginal farmers. Yet it can also create space for large agricultural income, and sometimes non-agricultural income, to avoid a

closer examination. The same informality is visible in farm labour. A large share of agricultural workers reportedly works without written contracts. This keeps wages, working conditions and social security obligations inadequately recorded. Agriculture thus remains a grey zone, formally visible in procurement but ineffectively monitored in income reporting and labour relations. Illicit liquor and illegal sand mining show how unlawful activities can acquire an organised economic form. Private networks make gains outside formal regulation, while the state loses revenue and society bears the cost. The 2020 hooch tragedy in the Majha region flagged the human cost of illegal liquor — deaths, medical expenses, household distress and loss of productive labour. Illegal sand mining creates a parallel concern by weakening public revenue, distorting construction material markets and damaging riverbeds as well as groundwater systems.

With Punjab reportedly earning only around Rs 250 crore annually from mining, continued illegal extraction points to weak revenue capture, environmental harm and erosion of local regulatory authority.

Across sectors, the outcome is evident in terms of revenue loss, governance problems and rising social cost. The policy response must therefore move beyond raids, seizures and arrests. Existing measures have improved detection, but have not addressed the conditions that allow these illegal activities to persist. Punjab needs more than leakage mapping. It requires a data-driven governance strategy that combines a state-level shadow economy estimate, AI-based GST risk profiling, real-time property valuation linked to market transactions, digital tracking of mining permits and transport, targeted scrutiny of high-value agricultural income claims, financial tracing of narcotics-linked assets.

Pros and cons of Working abroad

Working in a foreign country is a unique experience filled with new learnings, four professionals from diverse fields, who took up stints abroad before moving back to India, share their experience of working overseas



Aasit Shah

I don't consider any of my experiences in the US particularly appalling. In fact, the US proved to be a great training ground for me. I was working in the Silicon Valley and that favoured me in terms of weather since we had a good number of sunshine days. Dignity of labour is extremely high in the US. Even though there is hierarchy in terms of designations, I loved the personal connect one can have with their seniors. You can walk in and out of your senior's cabin any time. Work-life balance is excellent so much so that sending professional emails on a weekend is frowned upon. Organisations are extremely flexible. There were days when I could work from home. Since the US is considered to be the melting-pot of the world, I got the opportunity to work with people from different migrant communities there. And that was a great learning experience. I didn't miss India much because there are too many Indians around in the valley. So, for me, it was a home away from home!

Pankaj Khot

Working in the UAE had its own upside and downside. The biggest benefit for me was to receive a tax-free salary, which is very rare. Companies in Dubai ensure that their employees have a perfect work-life balance. A major benefit of working in Dubai is that a number of

international organisations have their offices there. So apart from helping you mingle with professionals from different cultures, it also enables you to understand the working styles of different countries.

The city is strategically located and has great infrastructure. Restaurants in Dubai offer cuisines from all over the world making the place a gastronomic delight. On the flip side, house rents are too steep. Furthermore, if you don't have any family or friends, it can get boring and difficult.

Kavita Gupta

When I think about my working stint in the UK, I am filled with mixed feelings. First, I worked for Nokia. The environment there was professional, yet friendly. Flexibility was granted, when required. What I particularly liked was the blurring of hierarchy in terms of accessibility. One could approach one's bosses anytime. Being able to interact with people from different countries was a great advantage too. Work-life balance was perfect and working beyond clocking hours was not appreciated. However, when I moved to another company and got pregnant six months into the job, it

didn't go well down with my boss. My profile was changed and I didn't find that fair.

Guatam Parekh

The first thing that really impressed me about Singapore was the minimalistic bureaucracy. Be it taxes of work permit or anything, government authorities are very co-operative.

Every job or labour is treated with respect and this takes professionalism in the country to another level. Singapore being a first world country, infrastructure and connectivity are highly developed; both railways and roadways are well connected making travel hassle-free. I was part of the event industry there and the best thing was that clients treated me as their associate and not merely a vendor. It was a ritual for us to take our clients out for dinners post events. Professionally, it was a great bonding exercise. Technology is highly evolved in Singapore, so during events, each department knew their job to the T and that made our work easy. Since the country had professionals from all over the world, I got to learn a lot from people from varied cultures. Finally, Singapore is a welcoming country and doesn't let you feel homesick. My stint there was amazing.



The struggles of a

Single mother

Mirror writer and single mom Anjana Vaswani chats with three others of her tribe on raising kids alone with one eye on blood pressure.



Two months ago, just days before the final round of admissions to kindergarten and Grade 1 under the Right to Education quota, panicking single mothers flocked to BMC help centres. Their applications had been rejected because the fathers' income certificates were missing. The mothers' certificates weren't acceptable as substitutes.

It made newspaper copy, but ask a single mother, and she'll tell you niggles like these are a regular part of her life. Official paperwork that can be a nightmare in our patriarchal system is just the garnish on a

gateaux of stress, guilt, feelings of isolation, stigma and self-doubt. Is her health likely to be impacted negatively in the long run?

The answer though obvious is now confirmed by a study published in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health which assessed over 25,000 women across 15 countries. It focused on women who had children before the age of 18 and also examined, "whether doing it alone is worse in countries with relatively weak social and safety nets."

Vital point, because our social structure may

just be our redeemer. Not only does it alleviate the guilt when you leave your child with a grandparent, it allows us time for a fitness routine which, together, may render studies such as these altogether inapposite. This means you don't get to write us off yet. As I see friends, many, a lot younger than me, negotiating around the rose garden of marriage with aching backs and knees, and thyroid problems (frequently also treating the headaches of family politics), I feel confident that we have at least as good a shot at health and longevity as any of them.

'Suddenly, health became top priority'

Anita Khiara, stay-at-home mum

My daughters are now 14 and 11, but when I separated, they were nine and six. Since we had lived abroad for a while, moving to Mumbai postdivorce made it more challenging. We were grappling with a whole different culture, for one. I didn't even realise my health was headed downward. At the time, it appeared like a bout of illness. In the first three months, I lost enough weight to drop to an unhealthy size zero. It was only when I ended up fracturing my arm that I realised my health was crying out for attention. The consistent aches and pains, I realised, arose partly due to the stress that accompanies moving home, and of course, separating from someone you've been with for 12 years; 14 in my case if I count the courtship. No matter what anyone says, it's scary to be on your own after all those years. You wonder, will I be able to provide for us? Will my children be all right? Seeing my father cry, I remember, was very hard for me - the hurt that the divorce had caused him.

That I returned to a city where my siblings lived meant I could blend easily into their social circle. I found comfort in pouring my heart out to old friends. I sought out self-help literature. Carolyn Myss' Why People Don't Heal and How They Can helped me. There's a comprehensive table in the book that connects ailments to emotional issues. Interestingly, after the split, since I was aware that I was the only one around for my kids, I began taking my health very seriously. I never missed an annual check-up and exercised regularly.

That's a habit that has stayed with me. 'I made a career out of the split' Nivedita Rawal, behavioural psychotherapist Twenty six and pregnant with my second child when my husband sought divorce in 1991, I had hoped then for a reconciliation. It wasn't until 2004 that I finally gathered the courage to confide in extended family and friends about my single status. Single parenting is the toughest thing I have known, more so in the absence of family support. It was tough being mum and dad. The children's education, wellbeing, happiness. These became priority.

Although I had worked in corporate jobs in Singapore, I was uncomfortable with the idea of leaving the kids in the care of a maid. I was petrified of child molestation and other possibilities. So, I decided to pursue psychology and set up a private practice after acquiring a Master's degree and then a Doctorate while the children were still in senior school. I'd be driving them back and forth from tuitions, I'd supervise their homework, and put up with the occasional last minute requests: 'Mommy, I need

20 buttons for art work. Now.' I remember running to JW Marriott at 9 pm once to ask if I could buy the needle-and-thread home-kits they offer in guestrooms. I got 10 packets. The rest of the buttons the kids needed came off my shirts.

At one point, I supplemented my income by offering therapy to call centre employees during the graveyard shift. Social life was naturally sacrificed. In the last 23 years, I'd estimate that I must have attended about 10 social events. I did get into a relationship but ended it when I realised that he was not father material. Diwali, Christmas and Easter holidays were spent alone since the kids holidayed with their father.

But, having worked with single mothers who tend to develop acute depression, insomnia, even cancers and metabolic syndrome illnesses linked to diabetes, high blood pressure and heart conditions, I recognised my loneliness. I knew that I had to make a concerted effort to stay fit. I pursued Mallakhambh, yoga and swimming with dedication. It set the tone for the challenges that every day would bring.

Yes, I still continue to combat insomnia and some food intolerances. Today, I'm a step-parent too, blessed with four children and two puppies, and have a successful practice that boasts celebrity clientele.

'It's tough to stay fit as a sandwich generation member' Ragashree Porecha, sales professional I kicked off my career with a monthly pay cheque of Rs 3,500 when I got divorced in 1995. It was a huge support to know that my family was there for my daughter. Still, there were heartbreaking moments

when she'd complain that, unlike her, other kids always had mommy around. But by the time she got to the third grade, she began to feel pride in the fact that her mother was a successful professional.

Working had other advantages too. My first boss, with whom I worked for 15 years, was a bit of a health nut. She'd insist that I walk to work and back. Having been a juvenile diabetic, this helped me because otherwise, health would not have been priority. I know that, back then, I avoided visiting the doctor as far as possible. Health check-ups were erratic, but the walking kept my blood pressure and cholesterol levels in check.

Over the last two years, however, after the demise of my mother, I'm now responsible not just for my daughter but my father too. And with that, my fitness has taken a beating. My blood pressure shot up over the last nine months, and sugar levels were erratic. I've developed hypothyroidism and my shoulders freeze up sometimes. But I know this is temporary. With years of work experience at luxury brands, I hope to have a job waiting for me when I'm able to take it, and I am working on rebuilding my immunity.



• **Unlike most cultures, in India, children continue to live with their parents well into adulthood, meaning that the parenting doesn't really end.**

• **Parents should stand down and let their adult children make their own life decisions.**

The parents of a young woman recently committed suicide after she eloped with a man from a different caste. The man was arrested by the police and charged with abetting the suicides, despite the woman telling the cops that she was under no duress. What's worse, her family members have blamed her for her parents' deaths, and debates on local TV channels have all so placed the blame on her. While this case stands out because of the extreme measures taken by the parents, it is not uncommon for young adults to feel pressured when it comes to making important choices, such as choosing a life partner. Unlike most cultures, in India, children continue to live with their parents well into adulthood, meaning that the parenting doesn't really end.

But shouldn't parents stand down and let their adult children make their own life decisions? And how fair is it to impose your decisions and choices on your children? Psychosocial therapist Dr Shreedevi feels that differs from person to person, but adds that if parents are supportive of their children leaving town to pursue studies or a job, then why be so stringent when it comes to decisions dealing with their personal lives? "Children today are sent to hostels to study and even go to different cities on work. Parents are OK with this, but the support doesn't continue when it comes to very personal choices, like picking a life partner. One needs to take a step back and let their kids learn independence when

Should parents go easy on their Children

once they become adults?



parents had handled the situation in a mature manner. They wanted to teach their child a lesson, and that's not fair. Parents must be accepting, accommodating and forgiving."



their child is old enough to get a job." She adds that a child elopes when he/she is unable to reach out to their parents or is scared of their reaction, and that support is all that any child wants. Dr Shreedevi adds, "I feel that in this case, the parents chose the family's status over the

happiness of their child, which is not right. The young lady's actions are a reflection of how her parents brought her up, so you can't blame her."

Chandni Daulatramani, a 27-year-old fashion blogger, says that she can understand parents' emotions, but they must also understand that they cannot put emotional pressure on their kids. "People in India, especially, put a lot of emotional pressure on their children; they want them to be a certain way, and forget that their kids are individuals. Parents need to start realizing that their children, after a certain age, are adults and have the free will to make their own decisions. Emotional blackmail is not acceptable because it becomes very difficult for children to say no. I am from Kolkata and my parents want me to go back there and be with them, but I want to stay back in Bengaluru. I feel selfish for doing this, but I have to do this for myself. Parents

can't impose their opinions on their kids. Perhaps, our parents didn't have too many choices and were forced to do certain things, but that doesn't mean that they have to push that onto their kids. I get where they are coming from, but times are changing."

Echoing a similar sentiment, fitness expert Wanitha Ashok, who has a 28-year-old son and a 25-year-old daughter, feels that it is about time that parents started accepting change and stopped fearing society. She says, "I was aghast when I saw the news. It's a culture shock for parents, but they have to accept that things will change, and they have to go with the flow. Back in the day, love marriages were taboo, but that is not the case anymore. Indians have a wrong notion that their kids have to fulfill their dreams. They should stop caring about society and should think about their children's happiness instead. What if the girl had married a boy of their choosing and was unhappy? I wish the

Everyday changes in your routine can 'save the sparrow'



The dwindling numbers of sparrows have been a cause of concern for environmentalists in the city. Fondly referred to as 'chhiu tai' in Maharashtra, on account of World Sparrow Day, here's looking at small changes you can make around that will help save them...

They love mud. With all the cement and concrete around us, societies need to encourage on having more of gardens where most sparrows find their livelihood. With worms, insects and seeds around, it's a healthy habitat for them.

Have you witnessed sparrows fluttering their wings up and down, tossing mud on their bodies? Well, that's because house sparrows love mud bathing. This is a technique to dust off ticks, parasites and other worms from their bodies and maintain hygiene. Remember, more the mud, more the number of sparrows.

Associate professor and vice-principal of a suburban college, Dr Parvish Pandya, a naturalist says, "Remember the good old days when women of the house would sit on the parapet cleaning grains - getting rid of stones and bad quality of grains? This was a healthy practise considering this is exactly what sparrows needed. The stomach lining and the stones (kankad, as we know it) helps in pulverising the grains." Due to improved quality of grains available in the market, this practise has gone down drastically. However, you can still do your bit by keeping some grains and water in a bowl on your window.

You can also build an artificial nest for them. Sujit Narwade, project scientist with Bombay Natural History Society says, "One can use a cardboard box (with lid, please affix it firmly onto the box), cut a hole of about 5-8 cm diameter on the side. Else, you can take a wide (about 15-20 cm diameter) PVC pipe and cut it to a length of about 50 cm and make a hole on its side. You can suspend this homemade nest box from the ceiling of your porch or balcony, but ensure that the nest box is not accessible for predators like crows or domestic cats and protect it from rainfall."

Healthy bathroom

habits that parents must teach their kids



If your child is one, it's time you started telling him/her how important it is to be clean and hygienic. Healthy bathroom practices are as important as eating the right food and going to bed on time. Here are three habits kids need to cultivate...

Wash hands

Did you know that not washing hands before eating can lead to infections, and at times, even diarrhoea? Get your kids to wash their hands with soap or a hand wash for at least 30 seconds. Rinsing well and dabbing the hands on a clean towel are also equally important. Washing after using the bathroom, before eating and after playing will help prevent children from contracting



infections. Brush regularly. Babies start teething when they are six months and by the time they are one, their dental system is almost developed. Dr Mrinalini Iyer, child specialist, says, "Teach them why it's important to brush their teeth after every meal. Start by using your index finger and pressing their gums to aid circulation. As they grow older, educate them on the right way to brush — clean the outer surfaces of upper and lower teeth, then the inner surface. Move to the chewing part and then the tongue. Brushing for two minutes after every meal will keep oral problems at bay."

Flush and then clean

If you have already potty trained your child, teach them how to flush as well. Gauri Ambekar, a kindergarten teacher and mother of a three year old, says, "We must teach kids how to wash after relieving themselves, especially their private parts. The routine should also include wiping water off the toilet seat, tossing the used tissue in the bin and washing hands and feet before coming out."

Your child more likely to wet bed if you did as a kid

The chances of bed-wetting by a child increases by 50-75 per cent if their parents had the same problem in their childhood, leading paediatricians said. The likelihood of a child exhibiting nocturnal enuresis (bed-wetting) is about 50 per cent if one parent had the same problem in the early years. That probability jumps to 75 per cent if both parents could not control their bladder while sleeping during their childhood.



If none of the parents had wet the bed as a child, the chances that their child will wet the bed drops to 15 per cent.

"Parents have to understand that bed-wetting is mostly genetic apart from many other reasons," said Kanav Anand, a paediatric nephrologist at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital here.

"In bed-wetting children, the level of arginine vasopressin, a hormone that decreases the production of urine by the kidneys, goes down during sleep, causing the bladder to fill slowly," Anand said.

About 85 per cent of children develop complete bladder control by five years of age. More boys tend to wet bed than girls up to the age of 12 years.

Many a times the children either have a smaller urinary bladder or do not

realise that their bladder is full, Anand said, adding that consulting a paediatrician in such situations is helpful.

The health experts also said that constipation and some symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may be linked to bed-wetting in children, so it is

important for the parents to check with a paediatrician.

P.K. Pruthi, a Delhi-based paediatric nephrologist, said sometimes mental stress, such as caused by sexual abuse or death in the family, becomes the cause of bed-wetting among children.

Get your dog a manicure!



what it is

People giving their dogs nails a manicure and getting nail art done on them.

How it started

The trend picked up in Japan a couple of years ago and is now sweeping social media timelines.

How it's done

It's best to take your pooch to a nail artist who specializes in working with pets as they don't stay still for long and their nails are much longer and narrower than a human's. You can get pretty much anything basic done for your dog, like different patterns or glitter. Make sure that the nail polish used is safe for dogs

India Bans Sugar Exports Till September 2026 Amid Domestic Supply Concerns

The order specifies that the ban applies to raw, white and refined sugar. It also marks a shift in policy from "restricted" to "prohibited".

New Delhi.(Agency)

India has banned the export of sugar with immediate effect until September 30 (or until further orders), the government said on Wednesday. The move to tighten overseas shipments comes amid domestic supply considerations.

The order, issued by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, specifies that the ban applies to raw, white and refined sugar. It also marks a shift in policy from "restricted" to "prohibited". This is a major policy reversal as the government had earlier allowed limited sugar exports on expectations of surplus production. The notification adds that shipments

would be permitted if loading had commenced before May 13 or if consignments had already been handed over to customs authorities before the order took effect. "The export of sugar shall be allowed on the basis of permission granted by the Government of India to other countries to meet their food security needs and based on the request of their governments," the order read.

Last month, the Indian Sugar & Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association projected India's gross sugar production at 32 million tonnes in the season ending September 30. This was revised from an earlier estimate of 32.4 million tonnes. Therefore, experts

see this export ban as a move to contain inflation risks amid mounting



uncertainty triggered by the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. Significantly, the ban will not apply to sugar exports to the European Union and

the United States under existing tariff-rate quota and arrangements, the government said.

Inflation, Supply Risk Trigger Sugar Export Ban?

India is expected to produce about 275 lakh tonnes of sugar in the 2025-26 season, which runs from October to September. Add to that around 50 lakh tonnes of opening stock, and total supply comes to nearly 325 lakh tonnes. Meanwhile, the demand at home is likely to touch about 280 lakh tonnes. That leaves closing stocks at just 45 lakh tonnes. This is the lowest level since 2016-17, when stocks had dropped to around 39.4 lakh tonnes. The government is also worried about the

next season. Production in 2026-27 could fall. This is because rains may turn weaker due to El Niño. There are also concerns about fertiliser shortages linked to the Middle East crisis.

Notably, the sudden change in policy could hurt traders and sugar mills. Many had already signed export deals, and now face uncertainty.

Global markets reacted quickly. Raw sugar futures in New York rose more than 2 per cent. In London, white sugar futures jumped by around 3 per cent. India is the world's second-biggest sugar producer after Brazil. It is also a major exporter. When India tightens supply, global availability shrinks, especially for buyers in Asia and Africa.

Delhi HC okays relocation of three slum clusters near PM's residence

New Delhi.(Agency)

A woman was allegedly gang-raped inside a sleeper bus in Delhi by the vehicle's driver and conductor, police sources said on Thursday. The two accused have been arrested in connection with the incident that took place on the night of May 11, the sources said. Delhi Police has not yet issued an official statement on the incident.

The opposition AAP likened the incident to the 2012 Nirbhaya gangrape-murder case and said it was a "big shame". Based on the woman's statement, an FIR was registered under sections 64(1) (rape), 70(1) (gang rape) and 3(5) (common intention) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) at Rani Bagh police station on May 12, the sources said.

"The accused have been arrested and further investigation is underway," a police source said, adding that the bus has been seized. According to the police sources, the woman was returning home after working at a factory.

When she reached near the B-Block bus stand in Saraswati Vihar, she saw one of the accused standing near the bus door and asked him the time.

The accused then allegedly dragged her inside the bus and raped her. In a post on X, Delhi AAP chief Saurabh Bharadwaj condemned the incident. "Big Shame - Nirbhaya repeated. A 30-year-old woman was picked up in the bus at night on pretext of asking time. Then she was raped by multiple people in the moving bus for around two hours. Bus kept moving in Rani Bagh area of Delhi covering 7 km," he said.

Delhi's Asola Bhatti gets 10-year plan to fight forest fires

New Delhi.(Agency)

A 10-year management plan for Delhi's Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary has proposed setting up three specialised fire response units, creating fire lines and deploying GPS-equipped teams, as forest fires have been flagged as one of the biggest ecological threats to the protected area. Prepared with the help of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), the 2024-25 to 2034-35 management plan, which was cleared back in December, has now been released, officials said.

According to the plan, "there is no official record documenting fire-prone areas or past fire incidents, which makes effective management and preventive



action challenging."

It also stated that the "absence of adequately equipped and dedicated fire management units further limits the sanctuary's ability to respond promptly and efficiently to fire outbreaks." The document noted that the semi-arid stretches of Bhatti and Asola along the sanctuary's fringes are the most vulnerable to fires, as vegetation becomes "highly flammable during the dry season."

The plan proposes maintaining 'beat boundary patrolling trails' as fire lines during the fire season. These cleared pathways act as barriers to prevent the spread of fire while also helping staff monitor vulnerable zones. "These will be used for surveillance and will also act as fire breaks to control and prevent the spread of forest fires," it said.

The plan highlights that human habitation, grazing, fuelwood collection, and accidental fires along the fringes increase wildfire risk, threatening biodiversity and habitat stability in the sanctuary.

ABVP protests against testing agency, NSUI seeks firm action in NEET leak

New Delhi.(Agency)

A day after the NEET-UG 2026 exam held on May 3 was cancelled on Tuesday amid allegations of paper leak, student and youth bodies from across the national capital continued protests on Wednesday.

Members of the National Students' Union of India (NSUI) held a demonstration outside the residence of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, saying that the cancellation triggered by the paper leak had jeopardised the future of more than 22 lakh medical aspirants across the country.

Calling for the minister's resignation, the protesters raised slogans like "Paper chor gaddi chhod" and "Dharmendra Pradhan istifa do." Leading the protest, NSUI

national chief Vinod Jakhar said, "This is not just a paper leak. This is the murder of 22 lakh students' dreams. Dharmendra Pradhan has completely failed as the Education



Minister. He must resign immediately." Jakhar warned that the NSUI would step up protests across states until Pradhan steps down. He also sought strict action against those involved in the NEET paper leak. Further, the students' union demanded restructuring of the National Testing Agency

(NTA), which conducts the exam. It also called for a Supreme Court-monitored investigation into the leak.

Meanwhile, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) also organised a massive protest outside the NTA headquarters, as they expressed frustration with irregularities in the examination process. Personnel of the Delhi Police had to resort to the use of force against ABVP activists & students and take them into custody.

Sarthak Sharma, state secretary of ABVP Delhi, said, "It is regrettable that despite being a national agency, the NTA remains dependent on private companies. We demand an impartial probe into this matter and strict punitive action against the culprits."

RWAs, NGOs got Rs 13 crore for upkeep of 1,643 parks in Delhi last financial year

New Delhi.(Agency)

The Delhi government released over Rs 13 crore in 2025-26 for the maintenance of 1,643 parks through resident welfare associations (RWAs) and non-government organisations (NGOs), marking the highest financial assistance since 2008-09, official data revealed.

According to data by the Delhi Parks and Gardens Society, Rs 13.36 crore was released in the year for maintenance of parks spread across 484.37 acres through 364 RWAs and NGOs.

In comparison, about Rs 7.5 crore was released in 2024-25 for the maintenance of 1,483 parks covering 435.57 acres through 329 RWAs and NGOs under

the 'Delhi Parks and Garden Society' scheme.

The data further revealed that in 2025-26, the number of associations



and organisations covered under the scheme increased by 35, while 160 more parks and an additional 48.8 acres were brought under

maintenance support compared to the previous financial year.

Additionally, the financial assistance released also rose by '6.31 crore, an increase of nearly 89.6' over 2024-25. The data also revealed that '13.36 crore released in 2025-26 is the highest relief recorded under the scheme since 2008-09.

The highest number of parks covered under the scheme was recorded in 2012-13 and again in 2022-23, when 1,877 parks were maintained. Notably, in the 2025-26 budget, the Delhi government had allocated Rs 20 crore under the scheme to increase financial assistance for RWAs, NGOs and societies, and improve greenery in parks and gardens across the national capital.

On the run since 2023, drug kingpin brought back from Azerbaijan

New Delhi.(Agency)

According to investigators, Prabhdeep allegedly managed operations in India for abroad-based drug kingpin Navpreet Singh alias Nav, whose last known location was Turkey.

Delhi Police's Special Cell, in coordination with the Central Bureau of Investigation, has extradited fugitive Prabhdeep Singh from Azerbaijan in connection with a major narcotics case involving the recovery of 358 kg of heroin, officials said on Wednesday.

Prabhdeep, who had been absconding since 2023, was brought back to India from Baku by a three-member Special Cell team after completion of extradition formalities, police said. According to investigators, Prabhdeep allegedly managed operations in India for abroad-based drug kingpin Navpreet Singh alias Nav, whose last known location was Turkey.

Police said he acted as a key conduit between Navpreet and other accused, including



Gurpreet Singh and Gurjot Singh, from whom 333 kg of heroin was recovered during the investigation. DCP (Special Cell) Pankaj Kumar Tripathi said the case first surfaced in 2021 after police received inputs about Rizwan Ahmed alias Rizwan Kashmiri allegedly running a drug network across Delhi, Punjab, Haryana and MP.

On July 5, 2021, Rizwan was arrested in Delhi's Ghitorni area while allegedly delivering one kilogram of heroin. During interrogation, he

revealed that he worked under the directions of Afghan national Isha Khan, who was allegedly operating from Afghanistan.

Based on Rizwan's disclosures, police raided hideouts in Faridabad and arrested Gurpreet Singh and Gurjot Singh, recovering 236 kg of heroin. Later, another Afghan national, Hazrat Ali, was arrested from Gurugram with two kilograms of heroin and nearly 100 kg of chemicals allegedly used in heroin processing. Investigators further found that Gurpreet had met Navpreet in Kapurthala Jail in Punjab while both were lodged in separate NDPS cases. So far, 11 accused have been arrested in the case, including Rizwan Ahmed, Gurpreet Singh, Gurjot Singh, Hazrat Ali, Ramandeep Singh, Hardev Singh, Manjit Singh, Prabhjit Singh, Lovejit Singh alias Labba, Manjeet Singh alias Manna and Prabhdeep Singh alias Harry.

Bharti Airtel Q4 profit falls 33.5% to Rs 7,325 crore; ARPU rises to Rs 257

New Delhi..(Agency)

Telecom service provider Bharti Airtel reported a 33.5% decline in consolidated net profit to Rs 7,325 crore for the January-March quarter of FY26, compared to Rs 11,021 crore in the year-ago period. Last quarter, the company had a one-time net tax gain of Rs 2,892 crore. On a sequential basis, however, the company reported a 10.4% rise in profit and a 2.5% increase in revenue. The company's revenue from operations surged 15.6% year-on-year to Rs 55,383.2 crore in Q4 FY26 from Rs 47,876.2 crore in the corresponding quarter last year. Airtel's India revenue grew 7.7% year-on-year to Rs 39,566 crore.

Consolidated EBITDA increased 16.9% year-on-year to Rs 32,038 crore in Q4 FY26, while the consolidated EBITDA margin stood at 57.8%. India EBITDA margin came in at 60.6%.

For the full FY26, Airtel's consolidated profit declined 20.4% to Rs 26,695 crore from Rs 33,556 crore in FY25. However, its annual revenue rose 21.9% to Rs 2,10,972.8 crore. The company reported strong growth in Average Revenue Per User (ARPU), which rose to Rs 257 in Q4 FY26 from Rs 245 in Q4 FY25. Airtel's postpaid segment added 0.8 million customers during the quarter, taking the total postpaid customer base to 29 million. The number of smartphone data customers increased by 20 million over the past year, registering a 7.2% year-on-year growth. Airtel said that during Q4 FY26, it deployed 2,426 towers and 16,746 mobile broadband base stations. Over the past year, the company added 7,883 towers and deployed 43,290 kilometres of fibre to strengthen its digital infrastructure. Capital expenditure during the quarter stood at Rs 16,066 crore, driven by investments in 5G densification, accelerated fibre deployment, connected homes expansion, Airtel Business and data centres. The consolidated net debt-to-EBITDA ratio improved to 1.29 times from 1.86 times as of March 31, 2025. The consolidated net debt (excluding leases) to EBITDA ratio stood at 0.79. "We ended FY26 on a strong note, demonstrating the power of our diversified portfolio. FY26 was an important year in our journey—we crossed the 650 million customer mark... We will continue to accelerate our investments towards building world class digital networks, future proof Airtel by putting AI at the heart and sharpen our portfolio for long-term growth."

Wholesale inflation soars to 8.3% amid spike in oil prices



New Delhi..(Agency)

India's wholesale price inflation accelerated sharply to 8.30 per cent in April from 3.88 per cent in March, driven largely by a steep rise in fuel, power and crude petroleum prices. According to data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry, inflation in the fuel and power category surged to 24.71 per cent in April, up from 1.05 per cent a month earlier. Inflation in crude petroleum and natural gas rose to 88.06 per cent, compared with 51.5 per cent in March.

The spike in wholesale inflation reflects the fallout of the ongoing West Asia crisis and disruptions in crude oil supplies through the Strait of Hormuz, a key route for India's oil imports. Food article inflation remained relatively stable at 1.98 per cent in April against 1.90 per cent in March. However, inflation in non-food articles climbed to 12.18 per cent from 11.5 per cent during the same period.

"Positive rate of inflation in April 2026 is primarily due to increase in prices of mineral oils, crude petroleum and natural gas, basic metals, other manufacturing and non-food articles," the ministry said in a statement.

Govt approves Rs 37,500 crore coal gasification scheme to reduce LNG, fertiliser import dependence

New Delhi..(Agency)

In a bid to cut down dependence on Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and fertiliser imports, the government on Wednesday has approved a coal gasification scheme with a financial outlay of Rs. 37,500 crore. The incentive will be provided for the production of syngas and its downstream products, targeting the gasification of nearly 75 million tonne of coal/lignite. India holds one of the world's largest coal reserves (around 401 billion tonne) and lignite reserves (around 47 billion tonne). Coal accounts for over 55% of the country's energy mix. Gasification converts coal/lignite into 'synthesis gas' (syngas), a versatile feedstock for producing fuels and chemicals domestically, enabling India to substitute high-value imports and insulate itself from global supply disruptions and price volatility. According to the government scheme, the financial incentive will be provided at a maximum of 20% of the cost of plant and machinery. The financial incentive for any single project will be capped at Rs. 5,000 crore; for any single product (except Synthetic Natural Gas and Urea), it will be capped at Rs. 9,000 crore; and for any single entity group, it will be capped at Rs. 12,000 crore across all projects.

India seeks extension of US waiver on Russian oil amid Iran conflict: Report

The waiver, initially approved by the US in March and later expanded through an authorisation valid until May 16, allowed Indian refiners to continue receiving already-loaded Russian cargoes.

New Delhi..(Agency)

India has approached the US seeking an extension of the current waiver that permits certain imports of Russian crude oil, according to a Bloomberg report.

The request comes as the US-Iran continues to rattle global energy markets and raise concerns over fuel supply stability. The waiver, initially approved by the US in March and later expanded

through an authorisation valid until May 16, allowed Indian refiners to continue receiving already-loaded Russian cargoes. The arrangement was aimed in part at easing pressure on international oil prices by keeping additional crude supplies in circulation.

According to the Bloomberg report, Indian officials have conveyed to their US counterparts that ensuring uninterrupted energy access remains critical as the conflict in West Asia shows no signs of easing. Although Russian oil exports are not under a blanket US ban, Washington has previously encouraged India to gradually reduce purchases of discounted Russian crude as part of broader pressure on Moscow over the Ukraine war. Indian refiners, meanwhile, have significantly increased imports from Russia ahead of the current waiver deadline. Data from commodity tracking firm Kpler showed that Indian purchases

of Russian crude in May have reached record levels, with inflows averaging more than two million barrels per day so far this month. There has been no official



confirmation of the report from either the Indian or US governments.

In April, when the US extended the waiver, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said the decision came after direct requests made during last week's global finance meetings. "I was approached by more

than 10 of the most vulnerable and poorest countries in terms of energy, and they asked us to extend that sanction (waiver)," he had said at the time, adding that the extension was valid for only 30 days. As of late April, India's Russian crude imports remained elevated despite sanctions pressure and Gulf supply disruptions. Data shows that Indian refiners significantly increased purchases in recent months, with Russian oil shipments reaching record levels earlier this year. In March, imports surged to around 2.25 million barrels per day, nearly double the levels seen in February. Russian crude has accounted for roughly half of India's total oil imports during this period. India has emerged as one of the largest buyers of Russian crude since 2022 and is currently the second-largest importer after China.

Damage is now evident: Market strategist Akshay Chinchalkar on oil, gold, rupee

In an interaction with India Today.in, Akshay Chinchalkar, Managing Partner and Head of Markets Strategy at The Wealth Company, explains rising market stress, rupee weakness, soaring gold prices and investor fears.

New Delhi..(Agency)

Rising crude oil prices, record weakness in the rupee, soaring gold prices and growing uncertainty around the West Asia crisis have triggered sharp volatility across Indian markets in recent sessions. In an interaction with India Today.in, Akshay Chinchalkar, Managing Partner and Head of Markets Strategy at The Wealth Company, the wealth and asset management arm of the Pantomath Group, spoke about the broader macro risks facing India, why markets are suddenly nervous about inflation and growth together, the sharp

selloff in IT stocks, the outlook for gold and what retail investors should avoid doing during periods of volatility. Q. What do you make of the current market setup where crude oil prices, gold prices and the dollar are all rising



together while equities remain under pressure? Is this beginning to look like a broader macro stress cycle for India?

Crude prices continue to hold up because talks of a lasting deal between the US and Iran have hit a wall. At the same time, the physical market is not as tight as it was maybe a month ago, because buyers don't want to risk buying at high prices and then see prices plunge if some sort of a deal is agreed upon —

this is specifically the reason why gold prices are gaining. Then, you have the dollar index which has been unable to make any upside headway despite the crisis. The story for the rupee though is different — it continues to plumb new lows every day on fears of three things happening at the same time: slowing growth, tighter monetary and financial conditions, and worsening external balances. Is it a full-blown crisis? Not yet at least, but with the PM's appeal on the weekend, it is obvious that the damage is now evident. Q. The rupee has slipped to record lows against the US dollar. How worried should retail investors be about the rupee weakness at this stage, and what parts of the market usually feel the pressure first? Retail investors must be concerned because a falling rupee makes imports even more expensive. This is the classic problem of high imported inflation. A falling rupee in itself is not a problem, but when the drop is accompanied by rising yields and rising oil prices, it can become a self-serving loop.

Honda records its first-ever annual loss on a costly EV strategy

TOKYO..(Agency)

Honda racked up a 423.9 billion yen (\$2.7 billion) loss Thursday, the first-ever full year loss for the Japanese automaker, acknowledging heavy costs for its electric-vehicle plans, stemming from President Donald Trump's pro-US policies. The Japanese automaker said losses related to its EV operations are estimated to total 2.5 trillion yen (\$16 billion), incurred mostly in the fiscal year just ended and the current fiscal year. Analysts say Honda Motor Co. might have been too ambitious too fast, when many markets weren't ready. As a result, Honda abandoned many of its plans for EV models, including those in the works in a joint venture with Sony Corp.

"EV demand has declined considerably, due to the rollback of environmental regulations in the US and other

factors," Honda said in a statement.

The Trump administration has pulled back on incentive programs for EVs and withheld money to states wanting to add more EV charging stations, even as gas prices have soared over the war in Iran. Trump also blocked California's stringent electric vehicle mandates last year, backpedaling on the shift to environmental models. Trump's tariffs on imported autos and auto parts, although lowered to 15% from the initial 25%, also worked to dent Honda's profitability.

Tokyo-based Honda's bottom line got a lift from its healthy motorcycle business, helping Honda's overall sales for the fiscal year through March to rise 0.5% to 21.8 trillion yen (\$138 billion).

Honda, which makes the Accord sedan and Super Cub motorcycles, sold 3.4

million vehicles around the world in the fiscal year through March, down from 3.7 million the previous year.

It sold 22.1 million motorcycles, up from 20 million a year before. Honda dominates some markets in motorcycles, including India. Honda forecast a return to profit for the fiscal year through March 2027, at 260 billion yen (\$1.7 billion).

Chief Executive Toshihiro Mibe outlined a new growth strategy that included a continued pursuit of carbon neutrality. But he acknowledged the need to work on hybrids and regular gasoline-engine models as well, not just electric vehicles. When asked by a reporter whether he was considering stepping down to take responsibility for the dire results, a common response in Japan, Mibe said he wanted to carry out the revival plan first.

Why did India ban sugar exports? Here's what's happening

New Delhi..(Agency)

India has banned sugar exports with immediate effect until September 30, 2026, as the government moves to control domestic prices, protect local supplies and prepare for growing uncertainty around production and global commodity markets. The decision marks a major policy reversal because India had earlier allowed sugar mills to export up to 1.59 million metric tonnes this season, betting that domestic production would remain comfortably above demand. The biggest concern is falling sugar production. India, the world's second-largest sugar producer after Brazil, is now expected to produce less sugar than it consumes for the second straight year as cane yields weaken in key producing states such as Maharashtra and Karnataka.

There are also growing fears that El Nino-linked weather disruptions and monsoon uncertainty could hit the next sugar season as well.

Rising sugar prices



At the same time, domestic sugar prices have been rising steadily, increasing concerns around food inflation at a time when India is already battling record rupee weakness, rising crude oil prices and broader imported inflation pressures. That is why the government appears to have shifted priority from exports to domestic supply protection. The ban applies to exports of raw, white and refined sugar, although shipments already in the export pipeline under specific conditions will still be allowed. Certain quota-based exports to the US and European Union remain exempt. Ethanol blending push also a factor?

The sugar export ban is also linked to India's ethanol-blending push. Over the past few years, India has increasingly diverted sugarcane towards ethanol production as part of its strategy to reduce dependence on imported crude oil and increase ethanol blending in petrol.

Why PM is asking Indians to cut spending: NITI Aayog explains austerity message

As tensions in West Asia continue to rise, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged Indians to be careful with spending and avoid unnecessary expenses. But why now? Is this simply a precautionary step or a sign of deeper economic worries? NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Ashok Lahiri explains what the Prime Minister's austerity message really means.

New Delhi..(Agency)

Amid the West Asia crisis, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has appealed to Indians to watch their expenditure and cut down on discretionary spending. But what does this really mean, and is it a sign of concern for the economy? To understand this better, India Today spoke to NITI Aayog Vice

Chairman Ashok Lahiri, who decoded the idea of "national austerity" and what it could mean for households and the wider economy.

WHAT DOES "WATCH YOUR SPENDING" REALLY MEAN?

The Prime Minister's message is mainly about reducing non-essential spending. This includes things like luxury purchases, unnecessary foreign travel, gold imports, and big-ticket celebrations such as expensive destination weddings.

According to Lahiri, this is not about stopping spending altogether. Instead, it is about encouraging people to save more during a period of global uncertainty, especially when oil prices and geopolitical risks are high.

AUSTERITY IS ACTUALLY ABOUT HIGHER SAVINGS

"National austerity is another term for national savings," Lahiri said. He said savings are important because they directly support investment in the economy. Countries like China and several East Asian economies have grown rapidly by saving a large share of their

income and investing it back into development. India, he pointed out, saves less compared to these economies, which means there is room to improve financial discipline at a national level.

WHY GOLD AND LUXURY SPENDING ARE BEING



HIGHLIGHTED

One of the key points raised was India's heavy gold imports. Lahiri said India already holds a large amount of gold, much of it imported over time, and continued imports put pressure on foreign exchange reserves. He suggested that gold is not always the best store of value when compared to other financial assets like

mutual funds, stocks, or bank savings. He also mentioned that reducing spending on items like gold and luxury events can help ease import pressure, especially in uncertain global conditions.

WILL LOWER SPENDING HURT THE ECONOMY?

A common concern is whether reduced consumption could slow down the economy. Lahiri said the economy depends on two main drivers, i.e., consumption and investment. If people consume less but investment increases, the system remains balanced. However, if both consumption and investment slow down, it can become a problem. He added that India is not currently facing a strong "under-consumption" issue. Instead, the focus should be on ensuring that savings are properly converted into productive investment.

OIL PRICES REMAIN THE BIGGEST RISK

Lahiri warned that the biggest uncertainty right now is oil prices, which have been rising due to tensions in West Asia.

Short news

Rajkot builder's son 'rams SUV' into several vehicles, beaten up by public

Ahmedabad.(Agency)
THE RAJKOT City Police on Wednesday afternoon admitted to hospital an unconscious man, who was “beaten up” by the public after he allegedly caused a multi-vehicle crash, with his luxury SUV ramming into five-six cars and a two-wheeler, resulting in injuries to a couple travelling on the bike. A portion of a BRTS fence was also damaged after one of the cars went through it, police said on Wednesday.

The incident took place on the 150-foot ring road around 1 pm. Dhaval Mahesh Pipaliya, the son of a prominent builder in Rajkot, was allegedly behind the wheel of the vehicle, police said.

Pipaliya, who is in his 30s, was allegedly beaten up by some members of the public, who suspected that he was inebriated at the time of the incident. A police team reached the spot and took him to a hospital for treatment. Pipaliya was likely to be arrested after he was discharged from there, police said. A blood test report would determine whether the incident was linked to drink driving, police said.

Inspector J M Kaila of Malaviyanagar police station said, “The accused Dhaval Mahesh Pipaliya, with his SUV, hit five to six cars and a couple on a bike. The public assaulted Pipaliya. He was found in an unconscious state and so he was admitted to a hospital.” An FIR was registered at Malaviyanagar police station on the basis of a complaint by Ashwin Vishnu Kathrecha, who was injured in the incident along with his wife Daksha.

New Bengal government bans public slaughter of cows, makes fit certificate mandatory

Kolkata.(Agency)
The newly elected BJP government in West Bengal has issued a modified notification under the West Bengal Animal Slaughter Control Act 1950, banning the slaughter of bovines at public places. The animals can be slaughtered only at municipal slaughterhouses or at those designated by the local administration. The notice also states that no cattle or buffalo can be slaughtered without official certification, which declares the animal fit for slaughter.

According to the notification, a bovine can only be slaughtered if the municipality chairman or a Panchayat samiti president, and a Government Veterinary Surgeon, jointly issue a certificate stating that the animal is fit for slaughter. This would mean they should both agree in writing that the animal is over 14 years of age for work and breeding purposes, or that the animal is permanently incapacitated due to old age, injury, deformity, or any other incurable disease.

In case of refusal of such a certificate, the aggrieved person may appeal to the state government within 15 days from the date on which the certificate was rejected. Anybody violating the specified rules may be punished with a six-month jail, or a fine of up to Rs 1,000, or both. “All offences committed under the 1950 Act shall be treated as cognisable offenses,” read the notice.

Kolkata's Orange Metro Line push, here are the road diversions at crucial Chingrighata crossing

Kolkata.(Agency)
The work on the long-pending Chingrighata section of Kolkata Metro's Orange Line will commence along the busy Eastern Metropolitan Bypass from May 15. Kolkata Police have announced major traffic diversion plans around Chingrighata for two consecutive weekends this month, a senior Metro official said on Wednesday.

Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL), the executing agency for the corridor, will undertake segment launching over piers P-317, P-318 and P-319 at Chingrighata as part of the elevated viaduct construction between Kavi Subhas and the airport, he said.

In the first phase a closure will be enforced from 8 pm on May 15 to 8 am on May 18 for launching segments between piers P-317 and P-318 across the western flank of the EM Bypass, the official said.

In the second phase, the closure will be enforced from 8 pm on May 22 to 8 am on May 25, for segment launching between P-318 and P-319 across the eastern flank, he added. The restrictions will remain in force for 60 hours at a stretch in each phase.

Kharat used divine power claims, fear of death to sexually exploit women: SIT

Nashik.(Agency)
Threats of death, claims of “divine powers” and warnings of curses were allegedly used by self-styled godman Ashokkumar Kharat alias “Captain” to sexually exploit women, according to over 2,000 pages of chargesheets filed by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) in two cases before a Nashik court.

The chargesheets filed before a Nashik Sessions Court within the mandatory 60-day period under provisions relating to crimes against women, detail statements from more than 105 witnesses and allege that Kharat used superstition, fear and psychological coercion to control followers and abuse women over several years.

The SIT has filed more than 2,000 pages of chargesheets in the first two cases registered with Nashik Police on March 17 and March 21, respectively. Police have recorded statements of over 105 witnesses

and collected oral, physical, documentary, circumstantial and electronic evidence, officials said.

The Maharashtra Director General of Police (DGP) had ordered an SIT probe into the



matter on March 20. Since then, the 24-member team comprising two deputy superintendents of police, three police inspectors, three assistant police inspectors,

10 sub-inspectors and six police personnel has been investigating 11 cases linked to Kharat.

The team includes SP Tejaswi Satpute, DySPs Amol Bharti and Kirankumar Suryavanshi, and senior police inspector Tripti Sonawane, among others.

According to investigators, Kharat exploited the religious faith of women and their families through rituals involving stones, rudraksha beads, pujas and other practices while claiming to possess supernatural powers. Statements recorded by the SIT allegedly reveal that women were threatened with death, divine punishment or severe misfortune befalling their families if they refused him or disclosed his actions. Police said he also allegedly threatened victims with defamation and social humiliation while sexually exploiting them.

Karnataka to host mega Yoga Day event in Vidhana Soudha on June 21

BENGALURU.(Agency)
Karnataka will celebrate the 12th International Yoga Day on June 21 with a large-scale state-level programme at Vidhana Soudha, Health and Family Welfare Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao announced on Wednesday.

Addressing a press conference, the minister said this year's Yoga Day theme is ‘Yoga for Health, Knowledge and World Peace’, and the State Government aims to take yoga “from every home to everyone” through extensive awareness programmes across Karnataka.

The main Yoga Day event will be held from 6 am to 8 am on the premises of Vidhana Soudha with participation from nearly 5,000 yoga enthusiasts, AYUSH colleges, Yoga organisations and volunteers. A 45-minute Yoga protocol demonstration prescribed by the Union Ministry of



AYUSH will also be conducted. Karnataka Governor Thawarchand Gehlot will inaugurate the event. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Deputy CM DK Shivakumar, ministers, legislators and several dignitaries are expected to participate. Yoga gurus, international sportspersons and film personalities will also be invited. The minister said that the State Government is planning programmes

at the state, district and taluk levels, especially in rural areas, to spread awareness about yoga and promote the vision of ‘health for all’.

The Karnataka AYUSH Department has already issued guidelines and grants for various activities under the Yoga Day campaign. As part of the preparations, the department has launched several innovative programmes across the state, including activities in 100 taluk administrative centres and 360 Ayushman Health Centres. In collaboration with the Government Ayurveda Research Centre, Mysuru, the department has also organised 12 national-level yoga competitions. To create public awareness, posters for the Yoga Day celebrations were unveiled at Arogya Soudha. The department has also planned a national symposium titled “Science Yoga” at Indian Institute of Science.

Andhra CM to inaugurate Rs 98 crore Kakinada GGH new block on June 18

MCH will provide quality maternal and child healthcare services

VIJAYAWADA.(Agency)
A state-of-the-art Mother and Child Health (MCH) block has been completed at the Government General Hospital (GGH), Kakinada, thanks to the generosity of Rangaraya Medical College alumni in North America and government support.

The five-storey facility, built at a cost of Rs 98 crore, will be inaugurated on June 18, with Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu confirming his participation.

Chairman of the MCH Building Committee of Rangaraya Medical College Alumni of North America, Dr Achanta Subbaraya Choudhary, said the project was made possible through alumni contributions

and government funding. He discussed the inauguration and related arrangements with Health Minister Y Satya Kumar Yadav on Wednesday. Of



the total expenditure, Rs 70 crore was spent on construction, with alumni contributing Rs 60 crore in donations. Around 125 former medical students, who graduated between 1958 and

2002, pooled resources to make the project a reality.

The government provided an additional Rs 11 crore for construction and Rs 27

crore for equipment. The new block houses 465 beds and advanced facilities, including a dedicated floor for neonatal wards equipped with laminar flow systems. Officials said the building will deliver high-quality maternal and child healthcare services free of cost, significantly benefiting poor and middle-class families.

Authorities emphasised that the initiative reflects the enduring commitment of alumni to public health and the government's resolve to strengthen healthcare infrastructure in Andhra Pradesh, und opposition-run state schemes.

Railways nod to Puri-Koraput direct Express train ahead of Rath Yatra

BHUBANESWAR.(Agency)
The Ministry of Railways on Wednesday approved a direct express train connecting Puri and Koraput, linking 10 coastal, central, western and southern districts of the state. The announcement of the train ahead of the Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath has brought huge cheer, as it will be the first direct train connecting Puri and Koraput, fulfilling a long-pending demand of people from southern Odisha.

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Railway minister Ashwini Vaishnaw for approving the new train, which, he said, will enable more pilgrims from the Koraput and Sambalpur regions to travel comfortably to Puri. The new train, Puri-

Koraput-Puri Express (18407/18408), will connect coastal, western and southern Odisha with improved passenger convenience and regional accessibility. The train is expected to reduce travel time. Between Puri and Koraput, the train will take an estimated 16 hours and 30 minutes to cover 835.38 km. On the return journey, it will take 17 hours and 20 minutes.

So far, the date of commencement of the train has not been announced. The train will depart from Puri at 7 am on Monday, Thursday and Saturday and reach Koraput at around 1.30 pm the next day. On the return route, it will depart from Koraput at 5 am on Tuesday, Friday and Sunday and arrive in Puri at 10.20 pm. The train will



have 19 stoppages at Khurda Road, Bhubaneswar, Naraj Marthapur, Dhenkanal, Talcher Road, Angul, Boinda, Rairakhol, Sambalpur, Bargarh Road, Balangir, Titilagarh, Kesinga, Muniguda, Rayagada, Tikiri, Laxmipur Road, Kakeriguma and Damanjodi.

The Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said the new train is expected to boost tourism, particularly religious tourism, and enhance economic and social connectivity between key regions of the state.

The Railway Ministry said the introduction of the train fulfils a long-standing aspiration of people from several underserved regions of Odisha for a direct rail link between Puri, Bhubaneswar and the tribal-dominated districts of southern Odisha.

The new train is also expected to significantly enhance regional integration and socio-economic development by improving mobility between coastal Odisha and the interior districts of western and southern Odisha.

Dealers must deliver LPG cylinders within 5 days of booking: Minister Nadendla

VIJAYAWADA.(Agency)
State Food and Civil Supplies Minister Nadendla Manohar on Wednesday held a teleconference with district civil supplies officials to review LPG backlog clearance, prevention of PDS rice diversion, and daily monitoring of petrol bunks. He issued firm instructions to ensure accountability and warned of stringent action against violators.

The minister directed that all LPG backlogs must be cleared by May 16, with oil companies coordinating closely with district machinery. He stressed that distributors should deliver cylinders within four to five days of booking, and officials must conduct field inspections to verify supply chains.

Manohar cautioned that distributors with excessive pending backlogs—some exceeding 5,000 connections in districts like West Godavari, Eluru, Anakapalli, Visakhapatnam, and Guntur—would face suspension. He emphasised strict enforcement of the OTP system to prevent diversion of cylinders. On fuel supply, Manohar instructed officials to maintain daily surveillance of petrol bunks to prevent shortages and bulk sales irregularities.

He asked that flex boards be displayed at outlets, reassuring consumers of adequate stocks, and warned that any malpractice such as unauthorised nozzle transactions would invite criminal cases.

He also directed police coordination to curb misinformation on social media that could trigger panic buying. Turning to PDS rice, the minister ordered the immediate formation of special task forces in every district to stop illegal transport from godowns and ration shops. He said errant dealers and MLS point-in-charges must be booked, and in serious cases, PD Act provisions should be invoked against organised rackets.

NEWS BOX

If you drop Virat Kohli in a chase, bound to get difficult: Abhishek Nayar

New Delhi. (Agency)

Kolkata Knight Riders head coach Abhishek Nayar pointed to two decisive moments in his side's defeat to Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Wednesday: Virat Kohli's dropped catch and the absence of Varun Chakravarthi.

Nayar admitted KKR paid heavily for giving Kohli an early lifeline during RCB's chase of 193, with the former India captain making them suffer with an unbeaten 105 off 60 balls to seal a six-wicket win. "When you drop Virat Kohli, especially in a chase, it becomes very difficult," Nayar said after the match. However, Nayar did not pin the defeat entirely on that missed chance, saying several small moments combined to shift the contest in RCB's favour. "As I said earlier, the score was fine on this pitch. There are a lot of things that could have been better. Virat's catch was a very tough one. The Angkrish catch, you would expect him to take."

Varun's absence hurt KKR's bowling plans

The KKR coach also highlighted the absence of Varun Chakravarthi, who missed the match with a toe injury, as a significant setback for the side. At the end of the day, cricket works like that. If we had another 10-15 runs, maybe



the game changes. If those catches are taken, maybe the game changes. If Varun Chakravarthi plays, maybe the game changes." Nayar acknowledged how heavily KKR rely on the spin partnership of Chakravarthi and Sunil Narine.

"It is an open secret that we have done really well with the Sunny-Varun combination. It is unfortunate that we have missed him a lot this season." "This is the second time he has had a fracture, which is unfortunate for him. You will always miss a Varun Chakravarthi."

Despite the defeat, Nayar maintained that KKR's total of 192/4 was competitive and credited youngster Angkrish Raghuvanshi for helping the side recover after early trouble. "Midway through the innings, we felt anywhere between 180 and 200 would be a good score. There was no dew as well, so that was not a factor." Nayar was particularly impressed with Raghuvanshi's composure against a high-quality RCB pace attack, with the youngster's unbeaten 71 emerging as one of the few positives for KKR from an otherwise frustrating night.

CSK's playoff-push at risk after Jamie Overton flies back to UK due to injury



NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Chennai Super Kings have suffered another massive setback in IPL 2026 after star all-rounder Jamie Overton was forced to return to the United Kingdom because of a thigh injury. With the playoff race entering its final phase, CSK's already difficult road to qualification has suddenly become even more complicated. The franchise confirmed on Thursday that Overton had sustained a right thigh injury and would head back to England for further assessment and treatment. CSK, however, did not provide any clarity regarding how long the England all-rounder could remain unavailable. "Jamie Overton has a right thigh injury and will be returning to the UK for further assessment and management," CSK said in an official statement.

The timing could hardly have been worse for Chennai. Overton had just delivered one of his best performances of the season against Lucknow Super Giants on May 11, picking up 3 for 36 and playing a major role in CSK's important five-wicket win at Chepauk. At a stage where Chennai needed experienced players to step up under pressure, Overton had increasingly become one of the side's most reliable match-winners.

Now, CSK suddenly find themselves dealing with yet another injury problem in a season that has already felt brutally unforgiving physically.

HOW GOOD WAS JAMIE OVERTON FOR CSK IN IPL 2026?

Overton arrived at Chennai Super Kings earlier this season as an injury replacement for Nathan Ellis. But what initially looked like a temporary fix soon turned into one of CSK's smartest moves of the campaign. The England all-rounder became a crucial figure in both departments for Chennai. In 10 matches this season, Overton scored 136 runs while also picking up 14 wickets, making him CSK's second-highest wicket-

Manchester City smash Palace to keep pressure on Arsenal in Premier League title race

Manchester City breezed past Crystal Palace at home to keep pressure on Arsenal in the Premier League title race on Wednesday, May 13. City cut the gap to Arsenal to two points.

New Delhi. (Agency)

Manchester City kept their Premier League title hopes alive with a commanding 3-0 victory over Crystal Palace on Wednesday, cutting the gap to league leaders Arsenal to just two points with two matches left in the season.

PREMIER LEAGUE: FULL COVERAGE

Pep Guardiola's side moved to 77 points, while Arsenal remain on 79, ensuring the title race will go down to the wire. Although City still require Arsenal to slip up in one of their remaining fixtures, the defending champions showed complete focus and composure in a dominant display at home. The breakthrough arrived in the 32nd minute when Antoine Semenyo finished calmly into the bottom



corner after a clever backheel assist from Phil Foden opened up the Palace defence. City doubled their advantage eight minutes later through Omar Marmoush, who reacted quickly inside the box after another Foden involvement and curled his effort into the far corner. Foden's two assists marked the first occasion in his Premier League career that he had created multiple goals before half-time

in a single match. The third goal came late in the game when Savinho collected a precise through ball from Rayan Cherki and slotted home from close range to seal a comfortable victory. City knew anything less than a win would have handed Arsenal the opportunity to secure their first league crown in over two decades with victory against relegated Burnley on Monday. Instead, Guardiola's

men ensured the pressure remains firmly on the leaders. With Saturday's FA Cup final against Chelsea looming, Guardiola rotated heavily and made six changes to his starting lineup, including leaving top scorer Erling Haaland out of the side. Despite the changes, City controlled proceedings throughout and rarely looked troubled.

The home side dominated possession with 72 percent of the ball and registered 15 shots compared to Palace's six. Defender Josko Gvardiol, making his first start since recovering from a tibial fracture suffered in January, nearly added another goal before halftime, but Palace goalkeeper Dean Henderson produced an excellent save to deny his header. The win also extended City's unbeaten run in the league to mid-January, adding further drama to a title race that had appeared destined for Arsenal for much of the campaign. City next travel to face AFC Bournemouth before ending their season at home against Aston Villa on May 24. If Arsenal defeat Burnley, City will need another victory against a Bournemouth side currently enjoying a 16-match unbeaten streak to keep their hopes alive.

Madonna, Shakira, BTS to headline FIFA World Cup final half-time show

NEW YORK. (Agency)

Madonna, Shakira and K-pop megastars BTS will headline a Super Bowl-style half-time show at the World Cup final on July 19 at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, organizers said Thursday. Coldplay's Chris Martin is curating the show, which is a first for a football World Cup final. The biggest-ever World Cup, with 48 teams, kicks off on June 11 in the United States, Canada and Mexico. FIFA president Gianni Infantino announced in March last year that there would be "the first-ever half-time show at a FIFA World Cup final". He did not say at the time who would be performing or how long the show and half-time would take.

"This will be a historic moment for the FIFA World Cup and a show befitting the biggest sporting event in the world," he said on Instagram. The move mirrors the show held during the final of the 2024 Copa America in Miami, when Colombian star

Shakira performed at half-time at the Hard Rock Stadium. There was also a half-time show at last year's FIFA Club World Cup final, also at MetLife Stadium, which stretched the break in excess of the



regulation 15 minutes. Infantino added that FIFA also planned to "take over" New York's Times Square on the final weekend of the World Cup. Shakira last week teased the new official song for the 2026 World Cup,

releasing a brief video of the track filmed at Brazil's iconic Maracana Stadium. The singer -- who also created the 2010 World Cup anthem "Waka Waka" -- announced the song, titled "Dai Dai" in a post on her Instagram account. In the 67-second video, Shakira appears on the pitch at the Maracana in Rio de Janeiro, where she performed in a free concert at the city's Copacabana Beach last Saturday before two million people.

Holding the "Trionda", the official match ball of the 2026 World Cup, Shakira performed excerpts of the song in English, joined by dancers dressed in the colours of teams including the United States and Colombia.

The song was produced with Nigerian artist Burna Boy and is set for official release on Thursday. The clip, also shared by the FIFA World Cup account, ends with the message: "We're ready"

In-form Messi hits brace as Miami win 5-3 at Cincinnati in MLS

LOS ANGELES. (Agency)

Lionel Messi scored twice and had a hand in two others as Inter Miami fought back to beat FC Cincinnati 5-3 away in the MLS on Wednesday. In the World Cup in North America less than a month away, Argentina captain Messi is in excellent form. He has 11 goals in 12 MLS matches this season, Miami's latest victory boosting them into second place in the Eastern Conference with 25 points. Messi opened the scoring in the 24th minute with a fortuitous rebound off a poor clearance by Matt Miazga. It was 1-1 at half-time after Kevin Denkey's 41st-minute penalty, then Pavel Bucha scored from close range to put the hosts 2-1 up soon after the break. Messi struck again in the 55th minute, finishing off a flowing Miami attack with a left-footed shot from a cross by Rodrigo De Paul. Cincinnati's Brazilian playmaker Evander put the hosts back in front again with a blast from outside the box in the 64th minute, his seventh goal in six matches.



But Messi set up a goal for young fellow Argentine Mateo Silvetti in the 79th minute, with Mexico international German Berterame scoring again for 4-3. Messi forced the final goal in the 89th minute.

The 38-year-old launched himself at a cross from Silvetti and struck it with his right foot, the ball crashing off the post and deflecting in off goalkeeper Roman Celentano for an own goal. Miami coach

Guillermo Hoyos was full of praise for his side. "What they did today was brilliant, against a tough team and on a difficult pitch," he said. "It's very hard to play here. It's clear they're not here to stroll around MLS. They're here to play, to give everything, and to show the world that football is played here too." He added: "We're leaving very happy. We were able to play football at a very high level."

PBKS vs MI Preview: Punjab Kings can't stop the rumours. They seek to stop the rot

Dharamsala. (Agency)

It's been a tough two weeks for Punjab Kings. They were sitting on the throne, racing towards the playoffs. But as they prepare for a high-voltage clash against Mumbai Indians at the high altitude of Dharamsala, last season's finalists are looking shaky.

Four losses on the bounce have dragged them to fourth on the points table, which is increasingly crowded in the middle. They have three games and their fate is in their own hands. Win all three and they are assured of a top-two finish. Slip, and they might not even make the playoffs — a disaster, considering how commanding they looked after seven matches, unbeaten in all of them. And nothing keeps critics quiet like success. Punjab Kings have witnessed that first-hand. As they spiralled into the losing streak, the chatter on social media began.



"Bloggers," as assistant bowling coach Trevor Gonsalves put it, have been speculating about a rift in the camp and players not on the same page with the captain. They have alleged that Prabhsimran Singh, for whom runs have dried up in recent games, has gained 10 kg during the course of the season. Add to that the chatter around how certain Punjab Kings players have used social media, leading to controversies the BCCI wanted to clamp down upon. Punjab Kings are heading into their second game of the season in Dharamsala, this time against Mumbai Indians, who are already out of the playoffs race and playing for pride. On Monday, their bowling and fielding — which has been a big concern this season — let them down once again as they failed to defend 211 against Delhi Capitals. The franchise has had enough. Preity Zinta took to X, drawing a line between criticism and "calculated misinformation." The official Punjab Kings account followed. Gonsalves, arriving at the pre-match press conference with a straight back and no apparent interest in being wounded, put it plainly

PBKS vs MI, Dharamsala weather report: Will rain spoil Punjab's playoff chances?

Punjab Kings and Mumbai Indians head to Dharamsala with both sides short on momentum. For Punjab, the bigger concern is not just rain but a campaign wobbling at the wrong time.

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Punjab Kings and Mumbai Indians are the two out-of-form teams in the IPL at the moment and they will be coming to Dharamsala hoping for a cracker of a game. The match is of greater importance to PBKS, who are currently struggling to secure a win.

PBKS vs MI: Preview

Punjab looked like the team to beat a few weeks ago, and the story has completely flipped on its head since then. After winning six out of their first seven games and remaining unbeaten, PBKS have lost their



last four matches, leaving the team management sweating. On top of this, the outside noise hasn't helped them at all and the morale does seem to be at a low. For Mumbai, the season is over, and they have been eliminated after losing to RCB in their last game. For the five-time champions, it is all

about playing for pride and building towards the new season. They will be without Hardik Pandya, who seems to be working towards full fitness. The stakes will be high in this one for the home side as they cannot afford to have another loss to their name. So will the weather play spoilsport in Dharamsala?

PBKS vs MI: DHARAMSALA WEATHER REPORT

Our man Akshay Ramesh was present at Dharamsala to observe both teams' training session before the match and make some keynotes. Sadly, the weather on eve of the game wasn't kind to anyone at the HPCA stadium as everyone was forced to take cover and the teams hardly got 15 minutes to train. According to the Indian Meteorological Department, thunderstorms accompanied by rain are expected in Dharamsala on matchday. However, the likelihood of showers during the evening remains fairly low, with only a small chance of interruption around game time.

Unlike several parts of the country currently experiencing intense heat, Dharamsala is expected to offer much cooler conditions due to its hill-station climate. Temperatures during the match are likely to hover around 17°C, setting up a pleasant evening with overcast skies.



Chitrangada Singh

Reveals She Almost Collaborated With Aditya Dhar For A Film: 'But It Didn't Happen'

The success of Dhurandhar has made Aditya Dhar one of the most lauded filmmakers, with everyone wishing to share screen space with him. Chitrangada Singh, who is awaiting the release of her upcoming film with Salman Khan, Maatrubhumi, shared how she almost did a movie with Dhar, but the project never materialised. Speaking to Variety India, the actress shared that she wishes to work with Aditya Dhar and said, "Who doesn't want to work with him? I'd love to, obviously, because he's brilliant and has changed the whole system. How many people are going to go back, rewrite and introspect? Just to see that kind of passion in filmmaking is so inspiring."

Further revealing her almost-collaboration with Aditya Dhar, Singh shared, "I was going to do a film with Aditya Dhar, called 'Sufi'. Around 2012, he and I were constantly in touch and trying very hard to get this film made. And there was a lot of back and forth. He'd written this amazing character for me. It was almost getting done, and we were going to announce the film. But it didn't happen." The actress further continued and shared, "So recently, when I messaged him [about Dhurandhar], I didn't know whether he'd even be on the same number. And then I realized, [with] the whole chat and everything, 'Oh my God, we really worked hard on that one!'"

Heaping praise on Dhar's recent directorial, starring Ranveer Singh and Sara Arjun in the lead roles, the actress shared, "I can't speak of anything else right now. I think Dhurandhar was fantastic. I think Sara Arjun has done an amazing job in it. She was brilliant in those scenes."

About Maatrubhumi

Maatrubhumi is an upcoming drama inspired by real events connected to the Galwan Valley clash. Directed by Apoorva Lakhia, the film is produced by Salma Khan under the banner of Salman Khan Films.

In the film, Salman Khan plays an Indian Army Colonel, while Chitrangada Singh will be seen as his wife. The project is expected to present a story rooted in courage, sacrifice, and patriotism. The makers say the film is now positioned as a story that explores courage, sacrifice and resilience, while also weaving in themes of personal relationships and emotional conflict.



'She Knows Me So Well': Priyanka Chopra Shares Glimpse Of A Sweet Note By Daughter Malti Marie



Priyanka Chopra recently melted hearts on social media after sharing a sweet glimpse of a note by Malti Marie Chopra Jonas. The actress posted the adorable moment on her social media, leaving fans emotional over the mother-daughter bond. The actress often shares adorable snippets from family vacations, playtime moments, and celebrations, giving fans a peek into her life beyond films and global projects. Taking to her Instagram stories, Priyanka Chopra shared a note reading about her favourites. The note was mentioned Malti Marie name and it instantly grabbed attention. Priyanka reacted saying, "She knows me so well." On Mother's day, Nick Jonas shared a lovely tribute to his wife Priyanka Chopra Jonas, sharing her beautiful unseen photos with Malti Marie. The first photo shared by Nick shows him in the swimming pool with Priyanka and Malti. While the mother-daughter duo is seen sharing a happy, candid moment, Nick captures the picture. The next photo shows Priyanka holding their daughter, Malti Marie Jonas, with both mother and daughter styled in matching braided hairstyles with pink extensions. Another image captured a warm family moment, with Priyanka leaning on Nick's shoulder while he held their little girl close.

Priyanka Chopra recently opened up about parenting with Nick Jonas and how Malti is taught the importance of both their cultures. Speaking about being the mother of a four-year-old, Priyanka told Vogue Arabia, "My whole existence revolves around her, what time she has to go to school... She is the best thing I've accomplished in my life and represents the best of Nick and me."

The actress further added, "My husband is very hands-on, and even today, because I had to jump on this interview, he was the one preparing her for silly hair day at school. He did the cutest lopsided pigtails on her. Our baby is like a magnet to us, and we run to her wherever we are in the world." Nick and Priyanka got married in December 2018 in a grand ceremony at the Umaid Bhawan Palace in Jodhpur. In January 2022, the couple welcomed their daughter, Malti Marie Chopra Jonas, through surrogacy.

Salman Khan And Kareena Kapoor NOT Collaborating For Raj & DK's Next; Casting Begins In June: Report



Salman Khan is all set to unite with Raj Nidimoru and Krishna D.K. for a superhero film, and reports had earlier suggested that the director duo were planning to cast Kareena Kapoor Khan as the female lead, with talks already underway. However, a new update now claims that this news isn't true. A fresh report suggests that no discussions have happened as of now. As per Bollywood Hungama, "Kareena has not even met Raj and DK or Salman Khan. The script is still being written, and the makers will proceed to casting only towards the end of June. Right now, the only actor locked for the film is Salman Khan, and there has been no conversation around the female lead."

The source further added, "A call will be taken in June. It's a good suggestion out of someone's imagination to cast Kareena in the film, but unfortunately, there is no truth to the report." Kareena Kapoor has worked with the three Khans in films across different genres. With Shah Rukh Khan, Kareena starred in Asoka (2001) and later in Ra.One (2011). The actress collaborated with Aamir Khan in the 2009 superhit film 3 Idiots and later in Laal Singh Chaddha. Her pairing with Salman Khan has been more frequent. In Bodyguard (2011), she played the strong-willed Divya, and their on-screen bond contributed to the film's massive commercial success. They also co-starred in Kyon Ki (2005) and Main Aurr Mrs Khanna (2009), showcasing a mix of romance and drama.

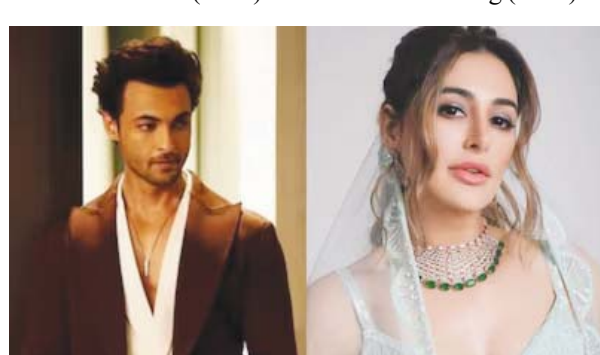
What We Know About The Project So Far

Produced by Atul Agnihotri and Mythri Movie Makers, the film will feature Salman as an aging superhero who is drawn back into action by unforeseen circumstances, eventually finding himself entangled in a much larger conflict. This will also mark Raj and DK's return to theatrical films following their 2017 release A Gentleman, after a successful run in the streaming world with The Family Man, Farzi, Citadel: Honey Bunny, and Guns And Gulaabs. Salman Khan is expected to begin shooting the film around October-November 2026, after completing his work on Vamshi Paidipally's film. The movie is scheduled for release during Eid 2027. Meanwhile, Salman also awaits the release of his much-anticipated film Maatrubhumi, co-starring Chitrangada Singh.

Nargis Fakhri

To Romance Aayush Sharma In Ektaa Kapoor's Supernatural Thriller Ragini 3: Report

Ektaa Kapoor's supernatural thriller Ragini 3 has been grabbing headlines. And now the recent report suggests that Tamannaah Bhatia will not star opposite Aayush Sharma. But Nargis Fakhri will romance Aayush Sharma in the latest installment of the popular Ragini franchise. Hindustan Times has now quoted a source saying that Nargis has been onboarded opposite Aayush, not Tamannaah. The portal also reported that the makers are reportedly aiming to create a "date night horror" experience for audiences. Shashanka Ghosh has been onboarded to take over the director's chair. He is best known for Khoobsurat (2014) and Veere Di Wedding (2018). The project is set to go on floors in July this year and is slated for a release in 2027.



"date-night horror" blending elements of suspense, humour, and scares. The film also signals a shift for the Ragini MMS franchise, which was earlier known for its erotic-horror themes. This new instalment is expected to move away from that space and focus more on supernatural storytelling.

Currently in pre-production, the film is slated to begin shooting in July 2026. It was earlier delayed after director Sahir Raza exited due to scheduling conflicts with a Netflix project. Shashanka Ghosh later stepped in, and the project is back on track. The makers are aiming for a theatrical release later this year. Aayush Sharma, who debuted with Love Yatri (2018), was later seen in Antim: The Final Truth alongside Salman Khan in a cameo, and most recently appeared in Ruslaan (2024).



NEWS BOX

Doctor on ship who helped care for passengers with hantavirus leaves medical isolation unit

BEIJING. (Agency)

An oncologist traveling on the cruise ship at the center of a hantavirus outbreak has been cleared to leave a special biocontainment unit in Nebraska, where he was the lone American placed in isolation after he helped care for fellow passengers who became sick on board. Dr. Stephen Kornfeld of Bend, Oregon, was among more than 120 passengers and crew evacuated from the ship and flown to different countries to enter quarantine. Kornfeld was brought to the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha with 15 other Americans, but he was the only one taken to an isolated biocontainment unit after a nasal swab he took on the ship produced inconclusive results about whether he had the virus. On Wednesday, the hospital announced that Kornfeld will now join the 15 other Americans who were taken for monitoring at the National Quarantine Unit, instead of the biocontainment unit, according to hospital spokesperson Kayla Thomas.

Kornfeld appeared on CNN's "Erin Burnett OutFront" on a video call from his hospital room Tuesday, saying, "I feel wonderful, 100%."

He said there was a period on the ship when he came down with flu-like symptoms including night sweats, chills and fatigue but he said he has no symptoms now. The World Health Organization said Wednesday that a total of 11 hantavirus cases linked to the cruise have been reported worldwide, including three deaths. Eight cases have been confirmed by laboratory tests.

Kornfeld said a nasal swab he took on the ship was later tested twice in the Netherlands. One result came back negative, the other positive. Earlier this week, he was awaiting results from a new test taken when he returned to the U.S. "The initial test that we received was from abroad and it was inconclusive in its results," Dr. David Fitter of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told reporters Wednesday. In addition to the passengers taken to Nebraska, two other Americans are being monitored at the serious communicable disease unit at Emory University Hospital in Atlanta. Health authorities say it is the first hantavirus outbreak on a cruise ship. While there is no cure or vaccine for hantavirus, the WHO says early detection and treatment improves survival rates.

Oklahoma man set to be executed for killing his ex-girlfriend and her 7-month-old daughter

McALESTER, Okla. (Agency)

An Oklahoma man convicted of killing his ex-girlfriend and her 7-month-old daughter after setting their home on fire nearly 20 years ago was set to be executed on Thursday. Raymond Johnson, 52, was scheduled to receive a lethal injection at the Oklahoma State Penitentiary. He was condemned for the June 2007 death of 24-year-old Brooke Whitaker and her 7-month-old daughter, Kya. Prosecutors said that after Johnson and Whitaker got into an early morning argument at her home in Tulsa, he repeatedly hit her over the head with a metal claw hammer. Whitaker's skull was fractured and she had more than 20 lacerations on her face and scalp. But she was still conscious and begged Johnson to spare her and Kya, who was sleeping in a bedroom, prosecutors said in documents prepared for Johnson's clemency hearing in April.

"She begged him to call 911. She begged him to let her mom come get baby Kya. She begged him to think of her children," the Oklahoma Attorney General's Office said. Whitaker had three other children.

Johnson retrieved a gas can from a tool shed in the backyard, doused Whitaker and the house with gasoline, lit a dish towel on fire, threw it at Whitaker and left, the attorney general's office said. Whitaker died from head injuries and smoke inhalation while her daughter died from severe burns.

Visionary, Icon, Villain: What China Thinks About Tesla CEO Elon Musk

World. (Agency)

In China, Elon Musk has been the object of love - and occasional loathing. The Tesla boss has been both lauded as a visionary and criticised by Chinese regulators and the public for the alleged bungling of customer complaints. In addition, the dominance of SpaceX and its Starlink satellite unit has raised the ire of the People's Liberation Army. And as the gap between Tesla and its Chinese EV rivals narrows, Musk is at risk of losing prestige and influence. Musk is now among a group of more than a dozen CEOs and top executives accompanying US President Donald Trump to Beijing for a summit with Xi Jinping, along with Apple's Tim Cook and Nvidia boss Jensen Huang. The delegation largely consists of executives seeking to resolve issues with Beijing and the world's richest man is no stranger to the ups and downs of doing business with China. Responding to reporters on his way out of the Great Hall of the People on Thursday, Musk said he wants to accomplish "many good things" in China. While Tesla is being hit by local electric vehicle makers on technology and price, the company - and Musk - remain influential in China. That is in part because Musk's interests align with those of Beijing, said Kyle Chan, a fellow in Chinese technology at the Brookings Institution. When you look at Beijing's tech priorities, many of them line up almost perfectly with Elon Musk's," Chan said, pointing to EVs, autonomous vehicles, AI and humanoid robots, as well as brain-computer interfaces and satellites.

Israel hammers Lebanon with strikes, killing 22 despite ceasefire

The fresh raids came on the eve of a new round of direct negotiations between Lebanon and Israel in Washington brokered by the United States.

BEIRUT. (Agency)

Lebanon's health ministry said 22 people including eight children were killed on Wednesday as Israel intensified strikes on the country, with several deadly raids hitting south of Beirut. The state-run National News Agency (NNA) said Israeli airstrikes had pounded around 40 locations in Lebanon's south and east. The fresh raids came on the eve of a new round of direct negotiations between Lebanon and Israel in Washington brokered by the United States, as Iran-backed group Hezbollah remains strongly opposed to the move.

The health ministry said late Wednesday that 10 people including six children had been killed in strikes on three south Lebanon villages. Earlier, it reported that three strikes on cars along or near the coastal highway around 20 to 30 kilometres (12 to 19 miles) from Beirut had "resulted in eight martyrs, including two children". The NNA said two strikes had hit cars on the busy highway linking the capital to the country's south, while a third struck nearby. An AFP photographer saw a burnt-out car and rescuers carrying a body at one of the sites, near the town of Jiyeh. The ministry also reported four more people killed in strikes on four cars in south Lebanon's Tyre district and in Sidon, located around 40 kilometres south of Beirut. Drone attacks Since US President Donald Trump announced on April 16 that the leaders of Israel and Lebanon had agreed to a ceasefire, Israeli strikes have killed more than 400 people in Lebanon, according to an AFP tally of health ministry figures. The head of Lebanon's National Council for



Scientific Research (CNRS), Chadi Abdallah, said more than 10,000 homes had been damaged or destroyed since the truce began. Under the terms of the ceasefire released by Washington, Israel reserves the right to act against "planned, imminent or ongoing attacks". In addition to launching heavy airstrikes, Israeli soldiers are operating inside an Israeli-declared "yellow line", which runs around 10 kilometres north of the Israel-Lebanon border, carrying out broad demolition operations there. Israel's army said it had struck Hezbollah infrastructure, weapons

storage facilities and rocket launchers in south Lebanon on Wednesday. An AFP correspondent saw thick smoke from Burj al-Shemali, one of nine areas where Israel's army issued evacuation warnings. Hezbollah claimed several attacks on Israeli troops in south Lebanon, including with drones, and said its fighters had "ambushed" and clashed with Israeli forces in one area. The United Nations Interim Force in

Lebanon (UNIFIL) said it was "increasingly concerned" about the activities of Hezbollah fighters and Israeli soldiers near UN positions in south Lebanon. That includes "the increased use of drones, which has resulted in explosions in and around our bases and put peacekeepers at risk", a UNIFIL statement said. It noted several recent incidents in which drones presumed to belong to Hezbollah detonated in or near UN positions, including the force's Naqura headquarters.

Lebanon, Israel to hold new talks in US as ceasefire nears end

WASHINGTON. (Agency)

Lebanon and Israel are to hold new peace talks in Washington starting Thursday, as their latest ceasefire, considered to still be in place despite hundreds of deaths in Israeli strikes -- nears its end. The two countries last met on April 23 at the White House, where US President Donald Trump announced a three-week ceasefire extension and voiced optimism for a historic agreement. Trump at the time made the bold prediction that within the latest ceasefire period, he would welcome Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Lebanese President Joseph Aoun to Washington for a historic first summit between the countries. The summit did not happen, with Aoun saying a security deal needed to be in place and Israeli attacks needed to end before such a landmark symbolic meeting. The ceasefire had been extended through Sunday. Since it first went into effect

on April 17, Israeli strikes have killed more than 400 people, according to an AFP tally based on figures from Lebanese authorities. Israel has vowed to keep pursuing attacks against



Hezbollah, the Shia armed group and political movement backed by Iran's ruling clerics, despite the ceasefire.

Hezbollah began a campaign of firing into Israel in retaliation for the killing of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, at the start of the US-Israeli war on February 28. "Anyone who threatens the State of Israel will die

because of his actions," Netanyahu said last week after an Israeli strike in the heart of Beirut killed a senior Hezbollah commander. A Lebanese official told AFP that the country would seek "the consolidation of the ceasefire" during the talks in Washington. "The first thing is to put an end to the death and destruction," the official told AFP on custom of anonymity. Iran has demanded a lasting ceasefire in Lebanon before any agreement to end the wider war, as it frustrates Trump by refusing his appeals for an accord on his terms. Pressure on Hezbollah

More than 2,800 people have died since Israel launched the strikes in early March, including at least 200 children, according to Lebanese authorities.

Hezbollah says that toll includes its fighters. Israel has pounded areas of Lebanon with large Shia populations including Beirut's southern suburbs and has invaded.

Somalia is in a deadly drought again. Most humanitarian aid isn't there this time

WORLD. (Agency)

Somalia: Most of Abdi Ahmed Farah's hundreds of goats have died. It has not rained steadily in this part of Somalia for three years, something the 70-year-old never thought possible.

He is in debt from buying water. The reservoir outside his tent is nearly empty. His family is down to one meal a day: rice with sugar and oil. The youngest of his 22 children was born three weeks ago and his wife produces only occasional drops of breast milk.

"I have considered abandoning my family because I cannot provide for them," said Farah, sitting in front of dwindling food supplies, as if on guard. Yet another drought is affecting millions of people across Somalia, one of the world's most vulnerable countries to climate shocks. Some rivers are dry. Crops have withered. Experts say the drought could be among the worst in Somali history. The crisis is

compounded by aid cuts, most dramatically by the Trump administration, and rising prices from the Iran war. Somalia buys most of its fuel from the Middle East, and 70% of



its food is imported. Production of staple crops of maize and sorghum in the October-December rainy season was the lowest on record in Somalia, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. Food security experts warn that nearly a half-million children might face severe acute malnutrition, the harshest kind.

That would be higher than the number of children requiring treatment for it during droughts in 2011 and 2022, according to UNICEF. It's a repeated climate shock. "2026 is the worst year on record for Somalia in terms of drought," said Hameed Nuru, the U.N. World Food Program director for Somalia. "Children have started dying." The Somali government and United Nations estimate that 6.5 million people face crisis levels of hunger, representing a third of the country's population and a 25% increase since January. Aid agencies are trying to maximize resources and the Somali diaspora is sending money to help, but humanitarian workers warn it is not enough. "This drought is not just another cycle of dry season. It's a repeated climate shock with shrinking humanitarian support," said Mohamed Assairi, a manager with Save the Children in Puntland,

Russia fires 800 drones at Ukraine despite recent talk by Putin and Trump of possible peace

KYIV. (Agency)

Russia fired at least 800 drones in a massive daytime barrage on about 20 regions of Ukraine on Wednesday, killing at least six people and wounding dozens, including children, in one of the longest attacks by Moscow in the 4-year-old war, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said. The attack began in midmorning and lasted for hours in the capital of Kyiv, the western city of Lviv near Poland, and the port of Odesa on the Black Sea, among other population centers, Zelenskyy said on the Telegram messaging app.

"Our soldiers are defending Ukraine, but Russia's obvious goal is to overload air defenses," Zelenskyy said, as the bombardment stretched into the late afternoon. He cautioned that a cruise and ballistic missile attack could follow the drone barrage.

It was "one of the longest, massive Russian attacks against Ukraine," he said on social media.

It also rattled neighbors. Hungarian Prime Minister Péter Magyar said his new government has summoned the Russian ambassador over a drone attack near Hungary's border, in a significant shift from his predecessor Viktor Orbán's friendly relations with Moscow. "The Hungarian government strongly condemns the Russian attack on Transcarpathia," Magyar told journalists, adding that Foreign Minister Anita Orbán will speak with the ambassador Thursday morning. The foreign minister will ask "when Russia and Vladimir Putin plan to finally end this bloody war," Magyar added. "Thank you for your compassion and strong position!" Zelenskyy said on X after Magyar's comments. Three people are killed in a region near Kyiv. Drone debris fell in an open area in Kyiv's Obolonskyi district with no casualties, city officials said, as air defense systems engaged Russian drones over the capital. Mayor Vitali Klitschko said emergency services responded to the scene. Explosions were heard across the city earlier Wednesday. Three people were killed in a drone attack in the Rivne region west of Kyiv, according to Oleksandr Koval, head of the regional military administration. Moscow's attacks are unrelenting, even as Ukraine is emboldened by its recent military accomplishments and as U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin said — without providing evidence — that the war could be approaching an end. On Tuesday, Zelenskyy said, 14 Ukrainian regions came under attack, followed by overnight strikes on Ukraine's residential, energy and railway infrastructure. "It is important to support Ukraine and not remain silent about Russia's war. Every time the war disappears from the top of the news, it encourages Russia to become even more savage," Zelenskyy said, apparently referring to the world's attention being focused on the Iran war.

We should be partners, not rivals': Xi calls for cooperation in talks with US president Trump

World. (Agency)

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Thursday called for greater cooperation between China and the United States and urged both countries to avoid confrontation, as he held bilateral talks with US President Donald Trump during the latter's visit to Beijing.

Addressing the meeting at the Great Hall of the People, Xi said the world was undergoing "a transformation not seen in a century" and stressed the importance of stable ties between the world's two largest economies amid growing global uncertainty. "The whole world is watching our meeting. Currently, a transformation not seen in a century is accelerating across the globe, and the international situation is fluid and turbulent. The world has come to a new crossroads," the Chinese President said. Xi also raised broader questions about whether Beijing and Washington could move beyond strategic rivalry and build a new framework for bilateral relations.

"Can China and the United States overcome the Thucydides trap and create a new paradigm of major country relations? Can

we meet global challenges together and provide more stability for the world? Can we, in the interests of the well-being of our two peoples and the future of humanity, build a brighter future together for our bilateral relations?" Xi said.

"These are the questions vital to history, to the world, and to the people. They are the questions of our times that you and I need to answer as leaders of major countries," he added. Xi's reference to the "Thucydides trap" invoked a concept popularised by Harvard scholar Graham T. Allison, which describes the heightened risk of conflict when a rising power challenges an established global power.

Xi said that both nations would benefit from cooperation and suffer from confrontation.

"I always believe that our two countries have more common interests than differences. Success in one is an opportunity for the

other. And a stable bilateral relationship is good for the world. China and the United States both stand to gain from cooperation and lose from confrontation," he stated.



"We should be partners, not rivals. We should help each other succeed and prosper together and find the right way for major countries to get along well with each other in the new era," Xi added. Welcoming Trump back to China after nine years, Xi

also congratulated the United States ahead of the 250th anniversary of American Independence. "I am very pleased to meet you in Beijing. Welcome back to China after nine years... This year is the 250th anniversary of American Independence. Congratulations to you and to the American people," he said.

The Chinese President further expressed hope that the two leaders could work together to shape a new phase in bilateral ties. "Mr President, I look forward to our discussions on major issues important to our two countries and the world. And working together with you to set the course for and steer the giant ship of China-US relations so as to make 2026 a historic landmark year that opens up a new chapter in China-US relations," Xi said.